

**Mira Lee Manickam. *Just Enough: A Journey into Thailand's Troubled South*.
Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2013.**

Since the southernmost provinces of Thailand have grabbed news headlines as a violent conflict area for more than a decade, a comprehensive understanding of the situations and lives of the civilians needs to be presented with explicit descriptions. The representation of the unrest affected current research trajectories and the stages of recognizing the locals in society, including alternative explanations in the academic realm. When we review the literature on social, political, and cultural research of the Muslim-dominated area in the country, we find few detailed studies using a narrative style to provide insight into the lives of locals. Instead most of the studies are engaged in situational analysis. They are found in edited volumes of articles, especially tracking ties of peace and conflict studies. Several studies are limited to the treatment of understanding context of the society at large and the complexities of conflict.

Silkworm Books has produced a few books on southern Thailand, such as *Dynamic Diversity in Southern Thailand* (2005), and related topics before and during the rise of the current conflict in the region. Furthermore, the publisher has published 11 books on Islam in its Southeast Asia Series which provided not only a sense of where southern Thailand studies in domestic academia originated but also linked the boundaries of the studies that dealt with the Malay and Muslim Worlds. In the promising research on area studies, new empirical research on conflict on the sub-national scale represents a way of unpacking Thailand's southern conflict with a valid understanding of the confrontation between separatist movement and the Thai authorities. The underlying causes of the conflict stemming from socio-economic sources of violence have received more in-depth attention from the researchers.

Just Enough: A Journey into Thailand's Troubled South is a significant piece of ethnographic study of an ongoing conflict centered in Thailand's southernmost provinces. This book is the type of fieldnote writing which uses a situated knowledge approach (Haraway, 1988) produced by the roles of the dynamic "fieldworker" and empirical "fieldwork" according to the standard of anthropology (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 12). Mira Lee Manickam depicts the "field" which is located in Pattani Province through personal experiences and observations, with form a large part of her social research. Meanwhile, secondary sources of theoretical research into other historical texts form a lesser part of the book. The author references 10 additional published sources for historical and political backgrounds of southern Thailand. Manickam provides the background knowledge for understanding the context of current violent conflict in the area. In this study, the culture, customs and conflicts of southern Thailand are the focus of research. Interaction with the residents of a small fishing village is the primary method of research, resulting in a more intimate understanding than the author could have found merely by studying other published texts.

Manickam lays the groundwork for her investigation by referring to the history of the ancient Malay kingdom of Patani, which features aspects of Islam, as well as Malay culture and language. She describes Patani during the golden era of the fifteenth century as Mecca's Verandah, which has been highlighted and recognized as a place of Islamic scholarship in several studies about Thailand's southern border and northern Malaysian states. The author brings attention to a significant political era at the end of the nineteenth century when this region had consolidated its territories into the modern Thai nation by the Siamese kings. Manickam explains the process of building the relationships and trust required to conduct field research in the village. Detailed description paints a picture of life for villagers since the

new wave of violent conflict in the beginning of 2004 under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra.

Political and historical knowledge related to the context of the field site are explained carefully with regard to the most important source for the subsequent Patani historiographical tradition, which is essentially a narrative about Patani sultanate. Meanwhile, the author draws attention to indigenous inhabitants and local history that have not been given enough of attention, for example, Dato's ancient mosque most commonly has traced with the episodes of the Arab trader and the grave of ancient saints. Manickam relates these stories to her knowledge of modern experiences in southern Thailand. She states that:

... in the south you can see the history of coastal trade and cross-oceanic migration in the faces of the fishermen who could pass as easily on the shores of Andhra Pradesh in southern India as in the streets of southern Thai cities of Hat Yai, Songkla, Trang, and Krabi. But the Hindu and Buddhist faiths brought over from India were taken in the late thirteenth century by that of the Muslim traders from Persia, Arabia, India and China, who saw in the Malay Peninsula ideal ports to connect the markets of the Middle East to those of China. (p. 13).

The scene in the south surprised Manickam, who had a different image of the country. Her interest lies in the rethinking of the dynamics of collective identification among the villagers. The ethnographer shows not only a deep sense of alienation between people of different religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds within the modern Thai nation-state as seen by efforts to enhance security in southern border area (pp. 136-139, 160-163), but also social problems associated with economic modernization (pp. 87-91, 146-153).

Through her immersive research into local perspectives, Manickam's distinctive approach sets her work apart from others. By getting in touch deeply with the Malay Muslim traditions, the author combines a micro-level approach with ethnographic methodology which demands particular skills and management. Doing ethnographic study in another country requires obtaining empirical evidence to obtain cross-cultural understanding. Manickam delves deep into the lives of the locals in a fishing village, Dato Village on Pattani Coast, where she lives and gains an insider perspective, a tale she shares in this piece of "storytelling." She shares her journey through a detailed description of the natives and the different activities that fill their days. She gives readers an insight into the people left behind by Thailand's modernization. The book describes the lives of Malay Muslim villagers with humor, warmth, and depth. The author charts the southern Thai conflict through the stories of her journey with the villagers. The gang of wild-haired teenage boys who observe conservative religious protocol by day and listen to heavy metal in back-street teashops by night; a group of young women who educated to find husbands in the village but too traditional to go beyond the norm that dominates their entire lives to leave are not easily to find documentation of these diverse experiences. These stories illustrate the tension between the values of a traditional Malay Muslim community and the demands of an increasingly modern Thai society. During her time there, the author became charmed with the area. We found this to be an important current archive offering an insightful study of southern Thailand.

Manickam has been a regular visitor to Thailand for over 10 years. As an intern since 2001 in Bangkok, life brought the author to work and to become accustomed to the feeling of "flash cooking upon her bones." However, as a researcher with a grant from ecological conservation at "home"—higher educational American institute, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and the Yale School of Forestry—exploring an exotic site in southern Thailand's small coastal enclaves known to be part of a violent conflict zone,

Manickam reveals feeling terrified in the first chapter, "Shadows in the forest." The element of southernmost Thai people's culture mostly based on traditional Malay Muslim ethnicity.

Researchers who do ethnographic studies encounter the phenomenology of being the 'other.' The studies by non-native anthropologists and social scientists who apply immersive methods of research in the southernmost provinces of Thailand point to the subjectivity of otherness and social isolation. Saroja Dorairajoo has reflected her view as clearly stated in her work which is focused on the Pattani coast (*No Fish in the Sea: Thai Malay Tactics of Negotiation in a Time of Scarcity*, 2002). The state of otherness is not only central to fieldwork by the white Westerner, non-native anthropologists who do not speak the language of the locals are also faced with this idea. In this case, the partially white subject of the researcher shaped Manickam's politics of getting access to the community as a foreign researcher Young people in Dato came and talked to her out of curiosity. On the other hand, it is also fascinating to see several chapters in the book encourage readers not to ignore the facet of the researcher feeling an alienated sense of otherness among the locals while at the same time they themselves experienced a feeling of otherness due to the Malay Muslims being a minority among the Thai citizens. It can be traced from the chapters "The horrors of Kru Se and Tak Bai" and "Inside the walls of Pono Pummiwittaya" where Manickam strives to interpret and observe the socially derived identity of the minority group.

Reflecting on Manickam's experiences of alienation because she not fully immersed in the village in the beginning, she utilized an applied hybrid methodology to set up the initial positioning with the natives. The privileged access to a Malay Muslim village with the assistance of a respected gatekeeper—Lamai, the Buddhist environmental activist whom the Muslim villagers in Dato have known and trusted for about two decades—assists the author in building an extensive engagement with the community. To respect the privacy of participants, the author changed the name of all characters in her book, except Lamai. She forged a connection between herself as a researcher and the villagers in a community social space where her alienation gradually dissipated through eventually being accepted by the locals. The author discusses highlights of her research gathered after villagers eventually hosted their foreign visitor at the *tadika* (an abbreviation of the standard Malay word, *taman didikan kanak-kanak*), or Islamic kindergarten, in the middle of the village. *Tadika* is essentially designed by Muslim communities in Southeast Asia to socialize youth into Malay Islamic culture with traditional teachings. It is the epicenter of village activity to which children stream from all directions.

Each chapter in this book is connected with the epistemological origins by the ethnographer as she gets under the surface of traditional Malay Muslim culture in Pattani Province. The forms of Pattanian lives that have elaborated provide a number of conceptual issues that underline narrative explanation, for example, the narrator's gender enables her to evoke respect for the women's ideas and works. Hannah Arendt argues that storytelling is a strategy for transforming private into public meanings (Jackson 2002: 14-15). In this regard, the private aspects of her narration was described in this partly autobiographical work derived from Manickam's knowledge and experiences in Pattani. In the light which the readers can learn from the narratives, Manickam reconstitutes the sense of agency of people in Dato in the face of violence circumstances.

Apart from the lives she interacted with at a corner of the *tadika* where the author can only assess her own epistemological space at times. Manickam was close to different groups of people, starting with a single *tadika*'s woman head teacher, Soraya, and other people around her. Soraya accompanied the author to different places. Manickam takes advantage of the chance for a closer look, but avoids complete closure as she was a newcomer with spatially bounded cultural issues. The religious leader of Dato, Che'gu Yusoh, illuminates a great mystery about Manickam by explaining to children in *tadika* that she had come to learn

about their village by way of inviting the researcher to address the children by herself before the *tadika* lesson started in Thai. The author revealed her feelings echoing the Indian culture in which she was brought up as a daughter of the Tamil Nadu family in southern India. This is where traders and conquerors of the ancient Chola Empire came to settle in the harbors of southern Thailand and northern Malaysia between the fifth and eleventh centuries. Manickam emphasized her Indian and European ancestry rather than American citizenship due to her concern about the poor reputation of America among the Muslim world. To play down her American citizenship was a vital strategy to be seen as a person of South Indian-European ethnicity in order to forge a connection with the villagers. This choice demonstrates how post-modern ethnography displays similarities in other areas of the world. Being of Indian ancestry, her skin was the same shade of brown as most village residents, forming another avenue of connection with them. Her reflexive and autobiographical strategies as well as 'workflow' methodology give a wealth of interpretational clues to the researcher's methods.

In the final chapter, "Just enough," we see Manickam take steps to become more known and accepted by the villagers. She spent time with the *wairun*, teenagers, at teashop behind the mosque near her sleeping quarters in the *tadika* at night, as well as playing soccer in the evening. People in the village called the researcher by her first name, Mira. She cultivated a boyish style, wearing a short haircut and jeans, as she engaged in these activities with the male teenagers. Her efforts forged a bond between herself and the young Muslim men of Dato. Manickam relates happy scenes of village life, whiling away the sunset hours playing games such as chasing each other (*takraw*) or the thrillingly acrobatic Southeast Asian relative to volleyball which uses a small wicker ball lobbed across a net using any body part except the hands. This immersive style of research is a central part of Manickam's ongoing ethnographic studies.

In familiarizing herself with people and the local cultures across her research area in the south of Thailand, she has been able to create a narrative that sheds light on different critical points associated with social, political and economic issues in this rural region. In the last part of this book, Manickam provides reflections of the field study, highlighting challenges confronted while interacting in male space. Her push for androgyny was a strategy to thwart gender constraints of Pattani village life (p. 128-131, 154). Her stories highlight men, women and the rules of engagement. She describes how the teenagers connect via phone, their musical preferences and the *dike hulu*, homegrown hand-jive, concert which takes place on the beach in humorous, honest, and moving terms. The description of the people and society in the southern Thai conflict zone that Manickam presents through her personal journey of becoming a friend is an insightful socio-cultural observation. The author elaborates on the narratives of the Malay Muslims in the context of the lived community.

This reflective postmodern approach to fieldwork writing helped to conceptualize anthropological fieldwork practices. It is a useful resource for anthropologists, students, professional social researchers and research trainees conducting a study of socio-cultural phenomena with the use of the ethnographic method. It enhances anthropological pedagogy in the southernmost provinces, where the story of life is dominated by media depiction as a troubled place. The Bangkok and mainstream portrayal of Malay-speaking Muslims in the Deep South paints them as disloyal and dangerous. However, Manickam shows in her descriptive book a side which is rarely seen by outsiders and which is obscured by the violence featured in headlines. She explores a forgotten side of the southern Thai conflict by offering another picture of the impact of the long-term conflict. It focuses on the lives of common people in the areas of education, economy, and religious development, and its effect on the present and the future of the country. Additionally, the book demonstrates how Manickam skillfully employs the process of interviews, combining ethnographic data with analysis, in order to exhibit, in detail, how ethnographic text is completed effectively.

References

- Dorairajoo, Saroja Devi. (2002). *No Fish in the Sea: Thai Malay Tactics of Negotiation in a Time of Scarcity*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University.
- Bajunid, O. F. (2005). Islam, nationalism and the Thai state. In Wattana Sugannasil (Ed.), *Dynamic diversity in southern Thailand* (pp.1-19). Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Haraway, Donna. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 575-599.
- Gupta, Akhil, and Ferguson, James. (1997). "Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, Method and Location in Anthropology" in Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (ed.) *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 1-46.
- Jackson, M. (2002). *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusulanum Press.

Amporn Marddent PhD
Walailak University, Thailand
mamporn@gmail.com

Thassanee Thasrabiab MA
Walailak University, Thailand
thassanee.thas@gmail.com