

THE BELIEFS OF THE MANOBOS OF MAGULING

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Introduction

Maguling, one of the farthest barangays of the Municipality of Maitum, province of South Cotabato was the area of this study. This barangay is fourteen kilometers away from the poblacion and is accessible by land and water transportation. It is composed of nine sitios namely: Sebeng, Modan, Mantolan, Takal, Fenayong, Tungoan, Lihik, Luan and Batel. The Manobos occupy the first seven sitios while the Christians and Muslims occupy Luan and Batel respectively.

The origin of the name Maguling may be traced back to the name of the big trees which grew abundantly in the place when it was still uncultivated. The first occupants of the place, the Muslims and the Manobos, called the said trees, Maguling. Maguling trees have pointed leaves about 7-8 inches long and 4 inches wide. They make good firewood for, even when newly-cut they burn long and brightly.

The boundaries of barangay Maguling are the Luan river on the east, barangay Pinol on the west, the Celebes Sea on the south and barangay Ticulab on the north.

Maguling is inhabited predominantly by Ilocanos for whom farming is the chief means of livelihood. Other ethnic groups which reside in this barangay include the Ilonggos, Cebuanos, Maguindanaoans, Joloanos and Sangils. The cultural groups do menial jobs for the landed Ilocanos for their living. Some, like the Muslims who live near the sea, engage in fishing while other tribal groups, like the Manobos, plant corn and other root crops.

Maitum was formerly a part of the municipality of Kiamba. In 1928, homesteaders streamed into the place. During this time, Maitum was a virgin hinterland plagued by malaria. Nevertheless, migrants continued to settle in Maitum. Eventually, the people led by Francisco Gacal petitioned for an independent and separated municipality. By virtue of Republic Act No. 2189 enacted on May 7, 1959, the municipality of Maitum was created.

Beliefs About Marriage

The location of a *sunem* (mole) on a Manobo woman's body plays a vital role in determining her future, i.e., whether she will live in poverty and misery, or be rich and live happily. One of the reasons why a Manobo male is heavily indebted to others until he dies is the dowry that he gives to the woman he marries.

Having seen signs of good luck, as in the presence of a mole, a Manobo male will no longer work hard to earn a living for his family, for he firmly believes something good awaits his family. This is one reason why a Manobo man will carefully look for a woman with *sunem* in lucky places in the body, no matter what the circumstances may be.

Manobo society recognizes polygamous marriages. Any Manobo male with sufficient wealth to pay for the bride all at one time or by installment, may have more than one wife. While the Manobos practice polygamy, they cling to and practice the following beliefs on marriages gathered from them through oral testimonies.

The Manobo belief that going out of the house before the wedding day will make one sick means that the betrothed couple must stay inside the house most of the time. The woman is not to help in weeding the rice and cornfields. She is only allowed to do ordinary household chores such as cooking, washing dishes and occasionally cleaning the house. This practice makes the Manobos idle. From early in the morning till late in the afternoon, the betrothed Manobo male or female simply sleeps or plays cards.

Agadong bulan (full moon) is always the best time for marriage

to take place. The size of the moon and its round shape signify good health for the prospective couple's future children. The Manobos believe that wedding rites and rituals should be done very early in the morning (*magtosimag*) so that the couple will always understand each other and will seldom quarrel. This is related to the fact that early in the morning, atmosphere is still cool and refreshing hence, the newly-married couple will tend to have "cool heads". If wedding rites are performed at *kabusang* (noon time), the couple will always quarrel. They believe this is so because the sun's heat at noontime will make the couple hot-tempered.

The wedding day is postponed if there is *udan lafos* (heavy rain), *fumulow* (reddish sky in the afternoon), *inog* (earthquake), *nilafay kayo* (fallen tree); *mifasa binangga* (broken pot), and *dumo agogfa* (death in the neighborhood). To them, rain signifies tears so that a scheduled wedding day should be postponed if rain falls. The reddish color of the sky means sickness to the Manobos as this color suggests boldness and war. Earthquake means that a deity holding the universe got mad, hence the movement. So, the couple will get sick if they go on with the scheduled wedding because the wrath of the god will be upon them. A big fallen tree is a sign of bad luck for it stands for the groom as he is the stronger sex while a small tree that falls stands for the woman as she is smaller and weaker. A broken pot means that the prospective bride and groom will separate.

The Manobo wedding rites and rituals, no matter how simple they may be, entail significant expenses since the groom's parents have to prepare a feast to entertain visitors. The postponement of it due to the occurrence of rain, earthquake, reddish sky, fallen tree, broken pot, or death in the neighborhood would therefore mean many more expenses on the groom's part since he would have to prepare the same things all over again. It is because of this that the Manobos would at times resort to carabao-rustling or stealing to meet wedding expenses. The rampant carabao-rustling and hold-ups in Maguling have been attributed to Manobos.

On Conception and Pregnancy

The conceiving or pregnant Manobo woman does not sleep during the day for fear that the placenta will stick to the uterus and she will have a difficult delivery. This because when one sleeps, one's body seems to be glued to the floor or bed. Cassava tubers which have not uniformly developed and in which the middle part has bulged may result to difficult delivery; therefore these should not be eaten by pregnant women. It is believed bad for Manobo women to be sitting or tarrying on stairs or in doorways because the baby will also tarry during childbirth. Rubbing things, like the first egg of a hen or leaves wet with dewdrops, on the belly of a pregnant woman insures easy delivery. Eggs and stones roll; so when they are rubbed on the belly of a pregnant Manobo woman, this is taken to mean that the baby inside the womb will also be induced to roll or move smoothly during childbirth. The dewdrops on leaves signify lubrication, or again, an easy childbirth.

Rain, according to the Manobos are tears from God, so that if a pregnant woman gets wet with it, the baby inside the womb will get sick. The spider has a sticky saliva. If a pregnant woman happens to touch one she will have a difficult delivery as the baby will stick to the uterus during childbirth. A black fish signifies death, therefore a pregnant woman should not eat it as she and her baby will die. The Manobos believe that contact with a deer causes harelip because deers have cloven feet so pregnant women should not eat venison. A pregnant Manobo woman is not allowed to lie down on her back, for this will cause her to bear twins. The Manobos believe that there is a force inside the pregnant woman's womb which could divide the baby into two. So pregnant women always have to lie down on their sides to prevent its occurrence. Because of the many beliefs of Manobos about pregnancy, pregnant women do not undergo prenatal check-up which accounts for the high mortality rate among them.

A Manobo husband with a pregnant wife is not allowed to cut trees for building a home. For them, the tree signifies life, therefore cutting it down will bring a curse. (Husbands of expectant mothers tend to be idle as building a house is taboo for them. They just stay with their in-laws or with relatives and be dependent on them.)

Childbirth

The umbilical cord of a newborn child determines its future. It is in the umbilical cord that life begins therefore the Manobos give meaning to its position and appearance. The Manobos believe that venison, tuna fish, eggs, *bongolan* (a banana specie), salmon, and eel contain powerful substances which can cause a relapse if eaten by a mother who has just given birth. On the other hand, the monkey's meat is good for the mother who has just given birth because the female monkey recovers strength immediately after it has given birth.

When drunk, the water which dripped from the hair of Manobo woman after her first bath is believed to stop bleeding because it is considered sacred. The placenta of a newborn baby is to be buried where rain falls heavily. During heavy rains the buried placenta is released by the soft earth. This is like releasing the spirit of the child so that it will always be near its parents.

Death and Burial

When a Manobo who has killed someone dies, a bolo is place in his coffin so that he will have a weapon to defend himself when he meets the person he killed in *baya* (heaven). This implies that the physical body will still be present after death.

During a vigil for a dead person, *kasila*, (red pepper) *timos* (salt) and a bottle of water are carried by persons when they want to leave the house where the dead is lying in state because they believe that the *busaw* (evil spirits) is afraid of these.

Small pieces of mirror are placed in the coffins of Manobos to drive away *busaw* (evil spirits). Mirrors reflect light. The Manobos believe that the *busaw*, follower of Satan who walks in darkness, is afraid of the light which is reflected by the mirror. Rice is scattered right after the burial to prevent *blagblags* (nightmare). To the Manobos, rice serves as a magic charm that prevents nightmare. Placing the *kalowen* (stove) at the door after coming from the burial grounds prevents the occurrence of another death in that house. The Manobos believe that the stove is the "heart of the house", where food is cooked;

therefore, when placed at the door, it would prevent death. The Manobos also believe that there is life after death but they are not certain as to where one's soul goes after death.

They recognize a myriad of other spirits whose influence controls every aspect of their society. Serious illness is a state one gets into due to a broken taboo or to the desire of the spirit or soul of an ancestor to communicate a need to a living person. The Manobos have a group of religious specialists called *baylan*. The function of the *baylan* is to communicate with the unseen world by means of a familiar spirit in order to interpret the message intended. Animal sacrifice is the usual remedy for a serious illness as well as the means for obtaining favors from the gods, such as for planting and marriage.

Work Ethic

The practice of stretching oneself (*agfangalag*) very early in the morning shows that Manobos are aware that a person should be physically conditioned in order to be fit for work for the rest of the day. Tying a thread from the pith of a *tikos* (vine) around the knees of a child to make him sturdy on his first visit to a relative's house is supposed to enable him to do hard work later in life. The Manobos believe that going out of the house immediately after waking up in the morning makes one industrious while failure to go out of the house makes one lazy. This belief is the counterpart of the saying "early birds catch the worms". This suggests that the Manobos are also aware that an industrious man is time conscious.

Sowing and Harvest

The Manobos have a way of determining a fertile ground for planting corn and palay. They choose a site with many earthworm wastes and black soil. Having found one, they will start clearing it by cutting down big and small trees. The Manobos wait for the trees to dry before they are burned. This takes about two weeks. After they have been thoroughly burned, the site is readied for planting.

During the planting, all the Manobos in the community are present to help, as they deem it a responsibility to bear one another's burden. Before planting, an offering in the form of *mama*, composed of betel nut (*buyo*), betel leaves (*kawed*) and tobacco leaf is placed on a high pole at the planting site as offering to the god of the harvest.

Planting for the Manobos is fun. They do it in pairs. The Manobo man digs holes while standing using a long round piece of pointed wood while the female partner places about 3-4 grains of corn in the hole. If it is *palay* that is being planted, about 10-12 grains are placed in a hole. The pair who finishes their given parts first teases the slow ones who are left behind. There is shouting and boisterous laughter while this scene is taking place. In selecting ears of corn for planting, the Manobos select those with straight grains. As for the *palay*, they see to it that no chaff is mixed with the grains. The *palay* seedlings are preserved in containers made of barks of big trees whose ends have been sewed together.

Harvesting *palay* among the Manobos is a time of festivity as Manobos near and far gather to help one another, staying together until the work is over. After the harvest, only the *palay* for next year's seedling is left, because much of the harvest is allocated for the food of those who helped, so that little is left to the owner. This is one reason why there are no rich Manobos as they share what they have to others, especially food.

The Manobos believe that the physical aspects of the environment, as well as the weather, are controlled by the spirits. They believe that rains will fall after the planting of *palay* because they think that it is sent by the god of agriculture. Signs in the sky like arrow-like clouds, dark clouds and reddish sky are all interpreted by Manobos as bringing rains, earthquake or drought respectively. They believe that a powerful spirit is present in an earthquake which explains why they have to waken all those who are sleeping and stand up to give reverence to that spirit.