

THE MARANAO AND NATURE *

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If a Maranao would be asked to give one word that would best describe Maranao identity, chances are that he would say **Darangen**. It means "song," the classical epic of the Maranao which relates in beautiful language their customs and traditions. It is a key to the culture of the Maranao.

According to Dr. Mamitua Saber, sociologist, quintessential Maranao, the Maranao ancestors were hardy and adventurous, classified among the Malays who crossed the landbridges and came to the Philippines centuries ago. Conquering all human and natural adversaries, they came to settle in what is today the Lanao region endowed with rich natural resources. Here they built and nourished their indigenous civilization which they defended against all foreign invasions. Indeed, one had to be strong to remain in such a homeland so attractive to external invaders.

Reputed as brave warriors, the past and recent Maranao ancestors were either defenders or invaders during struggles often retold through oral traditions as well as through historical accounts of foreign writers. As sea voyagers, they were known in other parts of the Malay archipelago as the Ilanun, a name derived from *ranao* or *lanao* which means "lake" as they used to start their trips overland from Lake Lanao and cross the open sea from Illana Bay thence to distant lands.

Using an efficient seacraft called the *padau* (corrupted to *parau* or *prau*), they traversed the high seas for trade or raids. The efficiency of their boats (not as big as the Spanish galleon) is attested to by the fact that their extensive voyages were reaching the coasts of Luzon in the North as proven by the presence of Moro watch towers in the Ilocos provinces, southeast to New Guinea and west-

* As culled from the Darangen and some folk beliefs.

ward to Burma.¹ The sailors were guided not by the compass but by the stars.

Today, in one of the districts of Sabah called Tampasuk, there is a sizeable community of Ilanun who maintain their ethnolinguistic and cultural traits akin to the Maranao of Lake Lanao and the Iranon of the Moro Gulf. According to Dr. Saber, all three belong to one tribe, the Maranao, People of the Lake (Ma = people + Ranao = Lake).

The Maranao once constituted an independent nation from their immediate neighbors, as well as from the Spanish regime. Their gradual subjugation came only during the early inception of the American regime; but not without offering ferocious resistance to such foreign rule. They once claimed as ancestral or traditional property a wide territory over which the present-day provinces of the two Lanaos and a part of Misamis Oriental have been superimposed by the modern government. If the Darangen were the basis of their claim, it would include all of Mindanao and a part of the Visayas.

They considered this territory as the ancestral jurisdiction of the *Pat a Pangampong* or Four Principalities (states) of Lanao. These are: Bayabao, Masiu, Unayan, and Baloi. Each principality (*pangampong*) is subdivided into districts (*soko*), townships (*inged*) and smaller villages (*agama*). These four principalities are not rigidly tied together by a central authority, of which they have none. They are, however, connected by their common adherence to native laws, their blood and kinship ties, and, today, their consciousness of the universal brotherhood under Islam which was introduced in the 14th century. Any foreign invasion upon their land would cause a war of defense. Maranaos, already good fighters, become fierce in defense against external invaders, which they consider a natural right, basing their belief on the "example" of the ecological system where nature has provided some plants with thorns and poisons as their defensive armor against any aggressor: another plant, animal, or man.

¹ Mednick, "Some Problems of Moro History and Political Organization," *Philippine Sociological Review*, (January, 1967).

The Maranao fought off the Spaniards and were nearly subdued had not the Americans come to assert their sovereignty and finally subdued them. They also fought off the Japanese, and, until now, some of them are still fighting the government as members of the MNLF, MILF, BMA, or the Lost Command, a euphemism for bandits.

Among the Muslim minorities, three great tribes shine out: The Taosug, the Maranao and the Maguindanao. Actually the last two are close and so the rivalry is between the Taosug and the Maranao. Because of their introduction to the American educational system they hold education in high esteem and today, there are more Maranaos holding high office in government: in the judiciary, and in Congress, or in the ARMM. One also finds Maranaos as peddlers in many parts of the Philippines, in particular in Manila, where they have their stores in Quiapo.

The Maranaos are sticklers to tradition so that change comes slowly. Added to the fact that they are living in a naturally enclosed region, they were faithful to their customs and traditions until the Americans came and opened the door to change. Today, the present-day Maranao is either highly westernized or easternized. Most of the religious leaders have studied in Arab universities and are being supported by whatever embassy sponsored their theological studies. Even if they have no supreme religious leader, they are united by the kind of Islam they practise. The majority of Maranaos are Shiite Muslims.

To give a good picture of the Maranaos, and how they relate to nature, I thought it best to base this study on the Darangen for here we encounter the traditional Maranaos. Thus it would be easy to see the difference in today's modern Maranaos.

Judging by the words used and the descriptions found in the epic, Dr. Saber concurs with the findings of Dr. Frank Laubach, the American Protestant missionary who first translated a part of the epic, that it dates from the 10th century. It certainly antedates the arrival of Islam because the end of the story tells about how Bembaran was burned and the people petrified, having been cursed by the first Sharief who came because they rejected Islam.

The epic is made up of several books belonging to one cycle. There are Darangens meant to be sung by men, Darangen a Mama and those for women singers, Darangen a Babay. The Darangen translated by the Folklore Division of the Mamitua Saber Research Center of the Mindanao State University is the second one. It is made up of 26 books published in 8 volumes. As of today, six volumes have been published through the sponsorship of the Toyota Foundation who provided a five-year-grant.

Geography and Genealogy

The setting of the epic is not just Lanao but all of Mindanao and the Visayas. The main characters, made up of five brothers and one sister, settled all over Mindanao, e.g. Iliyan, a Bembaran, is in the East, as its name implies, where the eldest brother, Diwata Ndaw Givon, settled. The Visayas is mentioned due to the so-called "Moro raids" where the king and his men went all around conquering territories because it was a question of who could capture which kingdom first. After Volume One had been published, a letter dated April 25, 1986, came all the way from Aklan, from Mr. Jose V. Macavinta, who informed us that his province has several towns carrying the names of some of the important characters of the epic, like Panay (from Paganay), Lawan, Achaeani Gibongon (Asalan i Gibonen - descendants of Gibon), Iliyan, Gibong, Odiongan (from Ka Adiongan), and Nalupa (the full name is Aya Diwata Mokom sa Kaddiyong a Lopa) - ancestor of the clan of Bembaran. Mr. Macavinta's name itself is the name of the cousin of Bantogen, Madali, Macabengkas, and he thinks that Bembaran is Aklan. I think that Aklan is probably the place of the first wife of Gibon, Aya Paganay Bai of Minangoaw a Rogong, whom he met as he went sailing around looking for beautiful rich princesses to marry.

Other places in Mindanao pointed to are Agusan, the Rio Grande, Davao, Cotabato, and Jolo. Lanao is not mentioned but at the end, when the place was burned, only three people were saved because they were out hunting: the first was a prince, Batuanen Kalinan, a cousin of Bantogen and two of his men: Domalandelan Lena and Milidilid Pamaloy. Kalinan reached the Gamat River in Panalawan, now known as Bobong, Lanao del Sur, where he settled

and became the ancestor of the royal house of Mala a Bayabao. Domalandelan Lena reached Cotabato but nothing is known about the third man.

Today, whenever I go to Balabagan and take the banca from Karomatan, I always look at the top of some mountains in Karomatan full of white stone figures of people, animals and houses. Even the big *lamin* (princess tower) of Minoyod is claimed to be there. These stone figures are found all over the place. In fact, it is said that one of the big stones near the Maria Cristina Falls is supposed to be the big magic boat of Bembaran, the Rinamentaw Mapalaw.

Cosmology

Heaven is called Daridayan a Langit, which literally means "flower or child of the sky." The *langit* is a vast place called the Skyworld and has several regions. Immediately below it is Antar a Langit, which is just above the clouds. Next is the Aloyanan a Gabon, which is a movable place, being made up of clouds, where Walain sa Lekepam takes care that no one may enter except those allowed by the *tonong*. She is one of the five sisters in the Skyworld: Walain Katolosan, Walain sa Lekpan, Walain sa Poregan, Magaraay Anonen, and Mataragandang Oray. There are also places between the earth and the sky. One is Oraonan a Lantoy, a garden of flowers and vegetables with a *lamin* for the princess and her ladies when they come to visit. Another is Magoyeda Selegen where the *lamin* of Walain sa Letingan (princess of the sky), the sole meeting place of Walain sa Letingan and Walain sa Doniya (princess of the earth) can be found. In the *lamin* are kept some of the royal heirlooms of Bembaran like the magic *kampilan*, etc.

The people who live in the Skyworld look like human beings; they can go up and down by using the rainbow. This rainbow is also used as a passageway of royalty, although it is more often the jinns, who live in the space between the sky and the earth, who use it. The jinn or genii (apparently of Arabian origin) are a sub-celestial category of creatures, created of fire and credited with superhuman powers. They punish men who do wrong either by bringing sickness or by beating them. Jinns cannot be seen but

they see men. It is said that they eat the bones and skin of animals and like to eat the palay from the fields. They also sometimes marry human beings, hence some of the descendants of Gibon are half-jinns, having had jinns for fathers. These descendants have the privilege of going up and down the Skyworld, stay there for a while, and learn all the arts and skills of the *tonong*. This privilege is granted to all those who have been bathed in the Dimalapang Dimasar, the river in the sky.

God is called Kadenan a Da Paeyag, literally, "Lord who has not been seen or felt," uncreated, unseen, unrevealed, almighty, creator. The story of the creation is taken from the Makesod, the Book of Beginnings, but I question its authenticity because of some Islamic beliefs inserted. God is presented as a lamp whose uniqueness is due to his wholeness. He decided to create because He was alone and as such no one would know about him. The first being was called Nur or light. For him, God first created Ho, a spirit or his soul, and taking his sacred sweat he joined it to Ho and made Nur. Then, on the great night of power (Islamic Lailatul Kadir), he created the angels, specifically Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Nur died after seven days and his body perspired profusely. From the sweat on his head came the sky and all it contains. The sweat from his two feet brought about the earth and all it contains. The sweat from his five senses made him aware again and the resurrected Nur was told by God to go to the earth but he refused because it would mean separation from God. But God promised him that they would always be united, especially through prayers because God would always be present in his soul as his body would not be able to contain him. Nur then went down and lived on earth.

Tonongs are spirits created to serve, guard, and protect man. There are several kinds: 1) those who live in the waters are called *diwatas*; 2) each person has a twin spirit called *inikadowa* who guards his ward from danger and gives advice and instructions to him; 3) those who stay in the sky. Man, however, is free to obey his guardian or not.

The devils, *saytan*, are male and female who live by the sphere, or inhabit the *balete* tree. The *balete* tree is called *nonok* locally and is believed to be the favorite abode of the spirits, good or bad.

According to the grandfather of H. Lawa Cali, our primary resource person, as soon as the *balete* tree, still small, has six leaves, it should be uprooted because when it has seven leaves, the spirits come to live in it. He also said that this tree was first identified by Radiya Indarapatra whose boat was stopped by something in the middle of the sea. Upon investigation, he found that the sudden stop was caused by a tree growing from under the sea. He then sent a diver to get some of its leaves which he brought along with him in his journey until, upon reaching Constantinople, he found a tree whose leaves resembled the one growing in the sea. This was the *balete* or *nonok* tree, which is a killer tree, since it is parasitic and chokes the host plant or tree as it grows.

The devils are bad spirits sent to punish men or to tempt them, sometimes to play jokes on them. They are used to test a man's character.

The earth and all in it have been made for man. As such, man is responsible for all creatures.

Animals are treated with respect as shown in the special relationships related in the epic. Even today, when an animal is slaughtered for food, its pardon is asked. A story told about Bantogen relates about his way of taming animals. He would fight them — lions, tigers, eagles — and as soon as he would see them weakening, he would stop fighting and give them a drink of water. Thus he would earn their gratitude and they would serve him always.

The *nori*, a species of the parrot family, has a *tonong* because this bird is kept as a pet of the royal family who sends her on errands and whose advice is asked when problems come. The *nori* appears in all the books of the *Darangen*.

The *bolawan datomanong*, or the golden two-headed lizard, is a treasure of the Skyworld, given as one of the *posaka* or heirlooms of Gibon. Its two heads are found, one at the usual place but the other at the end, and its tail so that it moves only in circles, like the *sagayan* dance. Hence it is also called *Somagayan a Oray*. It can assume other shapes, such as that of a snake, a golden living doll about a foot long. Whoever keeps this treasure will become rich because gold is attracted to it. It can also foretell the future. This

treasure cannot be kept long on earth for its proper place is the Skyworld where it is kept by Magaraay Anonen. Whoever needs it may just call on her and she would come down to bring it. As soon as it is no longer needed, it just disappears. This is always part of the dowry asked of the Asalan i Gibonen to prove that they are really Gibonen.

The crocodile is described as mountain-high because it is really a *tonong*, guardian of the kingdom of Bembaran, guardian spirit of Diwata Ndaw Gibon. When Gibon was born, he received two gifts: this crocodile called Pinatola i Kilid, in the form of a lizard and the magic boat, the Rinamentaw Mapalaw, given as a small boat. Both gifts grew as Gibon grew. The word Pinatola means "many colors" because of a varicolored belt worn around his body. This *tonong* assumes many shapes: on sea it appears as a crocodile; in the air it becomes a garuda or eagle; on land it becomes a giant. He is the chief of the guardians of Bembaran.

The two major kingdoms of the epic have each a guardian spirit who both appear as crocodiles. The crocodile of the other kingdom, Kadaraan sa Ndaw, is Masagolaing a Ragatwhom Pinatola defeats when they fight.

The *patola kaorayan* means "belt which looks like gold." It is a magic belt embroidered by Magaraay Anonen and given to Gibon. Its wearer cannot be killed by a weapon and he can become invisible. The belt can fly by itself, can move in water and can multiply itself. When worn by any other person, it turns into a cobra and strangles him. When anyone in the family of Gibon needs this belt, he calls on Magaraay Anonen by turning to the left and makes his request soundlessly. A *tonong* is sent by Magaraay with the *ongkop*, a square brass container with four locks and its keys where the belt is kept, with the injunction to return the box and the keys after use.

Any abuse or disrespect shown to animals is severely punished. A legend of a mountain range in Lanao, which is called by modern Maranaos as the sleeping lady, a good example of folklore, tells that the people living in that place used to have lavish feasts. Tiring of their long festivals, they decided to hold a banquet where all of them would come dressed as animals. As soon

as they had all arrived, a big storm roiled the lake. There was rain, lightning and thunder and the waves rose to flood the whole place. After the storm, a huge mountain range was found in its place with all the people buried inside.

Respect is paid to plants, trees, mountains, and nature in general. Some places are deemed sacred, like the Sacred Mountain of Marawi, a virgin forest there where folklore has succeeded in frightening men to keep them away and thus save the mountain from illegal loggers. The caves in the mountains are used by the *tonongs* to keep the weapons for war for their respective royal families when not in use.

Plants are used for food and shelter. Some are used to identify rank and social status, e.g. the *kilala* plant, a beautiful ornamental plant with red-green leaves and bright pink ones on top is planted in front of a *torogan*, the royal palace, to identify the king.

One can plant crops anywhere because land, like air and water, is for all men as created by God. This is the crux of the problem of so-called land-grabbing in Mindanao where there used to be no fences, no titles, for everything was communal. Anyone may plant anywhere and everyone may enjoy one's harvest as long as it is for food, not commerce.

Nature is so bountiful because the soil is rich so that many a housewife can easily pick up tonight's supper by the roadside since there is for all. A note of warning: no one may take a stray chicken; but if the chicken comes to your place, it is yours.

The resin or fragrant gum oozing from a trunk is deemed sacred and it is used as witness to a pact or treaty between two kings. The two swear allegiance to each other over a piece of rattan cut into two to signify what would happen to the one who would go against his friend. To mark the solemnity of the promise, it is sworn while the sacred resin is burning.

The rainbow, as mentioned earlier, is used by the *tonongs* as a bridge. When it appears, it means something bad will happen to royalty. When it is used as a metaphor to describe the face of a person, he is usually so angry that he is ready to kill anyone.

Water is a very powerful agent of the *tonongs*. The waters from the Dimalapang Dimasar, the river in the sky, give magic powers to all who bathe in them. These magic powers include the ability to fly on one's shield; invisibility; the power never to be hit or wounded in battle; being blessed with a character that always demands respect; invulnerability to attack because of protection from the *tonongs*; the skill in speech and reason that cannot be challenged; the privilege to go up and down the Skyworld and stay in the Antar a Langit by using the rainbow; the power to bring the dead back to life by sprinkling the face with water from this same river; and the power to change one's appearance at will.

When the sea is calm and clear, it means everything is well and the clear water can be used to prophesy or foresee future events. When a spell is being intoned and an enchantment is coming, the waters are disturbed; waves are so high they reach the clouds and bring destruction. Another way of punishing is to flood the place by making the rivers run upstream or by changing the water into blood. When water changes color, it is being enchanted and anyone caught in it will remain there forever.

In all these trials/enchantments, all the characters in the Darangen ask the help of their personal/clan *tonong*. Prayers are always intoned before a big battle, a journey, an adventure and all throughout the incident, they pray. The relationship between *tonongs* and man is very close. In fact, the proper place of the *tonong* is said to be the left shoulder of a person, near the left ear, to make it easy to whisper advice, technique, skill, etc. What happens then is a royal battle between *tonongs*.

However, *tonongs* may be rendered powerless by the character of the one praying. For example, in Book 3, the young boy, Madali, completely defeats the queen of Danalima a Rogong, a powerful enchantress who had succeeded in imprisoning all the datus of Bembaran, including the king, in huge stones on the shore of her kingdom. The king and his princes were defeated by this queen because they were imprudent. But the queen, in turn, was defeated by a mere boy because, as the *tonongs* told her:

" O Walain sa Danangkap,
If you feel sad and tired of life,
Forget your anger and plans for
Revenge and put away bad thoughts.
Rather begin thinking of good
Things, make a new study, change your
Ways and be at peace with yourself,
For that is why you could never
Win in calling *tonongs* over
Prince Ladald a Madalil,
For you were ruthless in your ways,
You had no pity for others,
For Inayohan o Kampong
Of Iliyan a Bembaran.
Then, instead of negotiating,
You immediately imprisoned
Him, forgetting that all of us
Belong to the same family,
Yes, all of us, ourselves, indeed!"

Man, then, as the highest creature of the universe, is responsible for the earth. He is favored by *tonongs*, given an *inikadowa* i.e. special privileges, with special guardians for the family, the clan, the kingdom. On top of these privileges are duties and responsibilities and corresponding punishments. Man's biggest punishment is to be exiled from his family and dearest relatives and made to wander in a foreign place; the biggest shame is the loss of honor or fame by being defeated in battle, the kingdom burned and the tower of the princess captured. On top of all these is petrification or being turned into stone. Thus is man punished by becoming that which he has abused.

Death is the end of all men. When a man dies, he is at once brought to Dadalian Karegan, the abode of death, where a dark river is found. Here he is examined by two judges : Nakir and Mongkar. He is then assigned to be punished in hell for all his wrong deeds. After the last judgment, he goes to heaven. In the meantime, his soul is kept by Inirandang a Baya in a beautiful bottle placed on the shelves in his house. As long as the soul is kept there, he can still be brought back to life. Otherwise he remains there until sentence is served and he goes to heaven. Only

Kadenan Da Paeyag knows the time of death or where the soul will stay in the Skyworld. All his good works will be weighed against his bad deeds which will be the basis of the length of his stay in hell. Man thus is given this time on earth to do as much good as possible with the help of all the creatures God has made for him.

Today, what has man done to his environment? In Lanao, the mountains are bald, the lake heavily silted with all the good soil from the mountains running down into it, and the lake loses part of its waters yearly. Today, man is still punished in the same way by whatever it is he has abused. For cutting down trees, he is inundated with floods, the earth turns dry due to lack of rain, and what used to be described as enchantments are just natural calamities. However, in Lanao del Sur, the situation is not so bad because we still have some virgin forests. For the Maranao is understandably possessive of his natural resources, as witness the fight he put up to stop Agus 1 from being opened. His community spirit prevailed for the greater good of all.

With the entry of Islam, the Darangen has been forbidden, due to too much mention of spirits and superstitious beliefs. What a pity that this generation does not know the Darangen! They would have read about the special relations between man and nature and the respect owed to all creatures of God. They would have heard the beautiful stories of the great ancestors, not so much to bring back the pagan beliefs and practices but to remind them of their rich heritage: that once upon a time, they were men who cared for the creatures God had created for all their needs; that once they were very close to nature, exercising love and care for the beautiful world given to them; that they were a religious people, in the true meaning of the word, always relying on the help of the *tonongs* whom Kadenan Da Paeyag had given to them and on whom they were always calling for help.

In fact, one priest has remarked that it was a pity that the present religious leaders of Islam were committing the same mistakes as the early Christian missionaries who wiped away all that they thought were vestiges of pagan culture, including their songs and stories, thus destroying a rich culture instead of using the same as foundation to the building up of a truly dynamic Islamic

faith for it would have been based on what is truly their own.

This is one reason why we of the Folklore Division of the Mamtua Saber Research Center of the Mindanao State University have translated and published this great epic, because it is a beautiful way of looking back in order to reach our destination, gathering the jewels, the moral values, the fundamental characteristics that make up what is beautiful in a people. For what is literature but the rendering into language of what is held as true and precious by a people. Such is the Darangen.