

# Pupuwa Ritual

**TAGALOG, MARINDUQUE ISLAND PROVINCE, CENTRAL PHILIPPINES.**

*During the Lenten season, usually in mid-summer, Catholics all over the Philippines observe different rites in commemoration of the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. The pupuwa is an observance by women of Marinduque in central Philippines.*



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IF THE MEN of Gasán have the *antipo* or the *Morionan* as their form of penance during Holy Week, the women have the *pupuwa* or the *pagsusumong ng pupuwa*, as the ritual is more commonly known in Gasán. Participants of the ritual wear long black gowns with a crown of pupuwa (leaves) on their head, which, together with a black veil, completely hide their faces. They go barefoot throughout the ritual. The black gown and veil symbolizes death; to do the pupuwa is one way of facing one's mortality.

Although pupuwa leaves are common in other parts of the Tagalog region, it is only in Marinduque that it is used as an herbal plant. The leaves are boiled and then used for bathing by women who have recently given birth. This, according to the locals, restores the health of the mother.

Aside from its curative power, the shape of the pupuwa is perhaps one of the reasons why the womenfolk use it in their penitence. The pointed leaves are believed to represent the thorns in the crown of the crucified Christ. Their participation in the ritual is a form of sacrifice; they are offering all their heartaches and agony to the Lord. Those who vow to participate in the pupuwa have personal reasons for doing so.

The penitents go to the St. Joseph Parish in Gasán to register at around eight in the morning on Good Friday. They are required to attend the sermons on the Seven Last Words at the parish at around one in the afternoon. Then they receive the Holy Communion after the mass, kiss the Holy Cross and later, attend a recollection. The recollection is given by the Church to teach the participants of the significance of the ritual as their penitence

and sacrifice. A procession is held around five o'clock in the afternoon where all the penitents – antipo and pupuwa – participate, walking behind all the religious images owned by the people of Gasán. The procession lasts well into early evening, after passing through the major streets of Gasán.

All throughout the procession, the ladies pray the fifteen mysteries of the rosary while holding a lighted candle. Like the men of the antipo, they too, walk barefoot throughout the procession. Their crown of pupuwa and the veil on their face make them totally unrecognizable, which they believe is the proper way of doing real penance. Some even carry a cross during the procession. Those who do, carry the extra load for additional supplications or for prayers for other people. The women may take turns in carrying the cross, one person for each block.

When the afternoon procession returns to the church, the women approach the altar on their knees. They lift their supplications before the altar, after which they light a candle to end the ritual. It is only then that they remove their crowns and throw it away in the nearby cemetery. The old devotees say that this signifies that they are burying their pains. The younger ones, however, simply place their crowns at the side of the church.

The pupuwa is observed not only by Catholics. The Aglipay Church or the Philippine Independent Church, a Protestant denomination that has a strong following in Marinduque, also observes the same tradition. Given that the Aglipay Church has been in Gasán for more than a hundred years, this makes the pupuwa a part of the Gasán culture for over a century now.

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(opposite page) Crowned with avowed leaves and clad in solemnity, the women of Marinduque, hold lit candles in a procession of penitence.