

Panudlak

Agricultural Rituals

HANUNOO MANGYAN, MINDORO ISLAND PROVINCE, CENTRAL PHILIPPINES. *The people inhabiting the highland interiors of the island have an intricate belief system based on a wide range of spirits that affect every aspect of life, at times even requiring the possession of talismans (batu tudlak). The kalag paray is the rice spirit.*

THE PANUDLAN, the first planting of rice ritual, is held on the day of the crescent moon. It is performed by the *panudlakan* in April. The ritual is composed of three stages:

Pagpa-uya – This is the blood pouring on the sacred stone (*batu tudlak*) and rice seeds with an invocation by the *panudlakan* inside the house. Ritual paraphernalia include the ritual stone, the *taya* (coconut shell cup), a handful of unhusked rice and one domestic hen of *maragang*, i.e. red in color.

Panudlak – The ritual rice planting at a termite mound. The paraphernalia are a *kudus* (cross) made of *bagakay* (bamboo variety), a stick of the *alimas* tree and several branches of *tanglad* leaves and a piece of ginger. Then, agricultural crops are prepared such as a banana, a piece of taro, one piece of yam, three pieces of sweet potato, one short piece of sugarcane, three corn grains and three pieces of pigeon peas. These are put in a basket together with the cross, *tanglad* leaves and ginger.

The ritual starts in the early morning. People gather at the house of the *panudlakan* to wait for the start of the *pagpa-uya*. Inside the

house is the *panudlakan*, alone, sitting near the fireplace. She places the sacred stone (soft ball-sized round, black), usually kept secretly, in a coconut shell bowl. Inside the stone is the spirit, *tudlak*, who is female, called *Binayi*, who controls the spirits of the rice. Then the rice is also placed in the bowl. She cuts the hen's throat with a small knife, drips several drops of blood on the stone and rice seeds and says an incantation (*pagpa-uya*):

“*Pagpa-uya di tanan tayon.*”
(May all the people enjoy good harvest.)

“*Danga makuri ti ilammun.*”
(May the weeding be not difficult.)

When done, she goes out with the stone and ritual paraphernalia and goes toward the *pongso* or termite mound. No one follows her. At the mound, she plants the cross on the top and central spot of the mound with the cross piece oriented north-south (*balitan sa init*), similar to the ridge pole of a house. She makes seven holes on the ground around the cross and plants the rice seeds in the holes. Then the *aliwas*, *tanglad* and ginger are placed beside the cross. Afterwards, all the crops are planted beside the cross – the termite mound becomes

a miniature swidden field. Then she goes home. Feasting follows. The taboos observed in this period include: for all – shaking trees and digging holes; for the *panudlan* – shaking trees, digging holes, eating food other than rice and sweet potatoes as main staple and sexual intercourse for seven days.

Karan-an – feasting takes place.

Rites of actual rice planting

Actual planting begins usually in early May when the rainy season starts and the initial rice planting rites are finished. This is also the time when the *panudlakan* ends the period of taboo. The sequence of the rites is as follows: gathering at the swidden owner's house; rite of rice planting, planting; and feast.

Those who will participate gather in the early morning at the house. Rice and other ritual plants are prepared in a small basket. In many areas, a red domestic hen is killed then drops of its blood are trickled onto the rice seeds. Even a domestic pig can be killed.

The owner gets an *aliwas* stick (50 centimeters long) and two pieces of *bagakay* (20 centimeters and 100 centimeters long). He peels the *aliwas* and stakes it on the ground near the house. He makes a *kudus* with the *bagakay* sticks and places it near the *aliwas*. He gets a few branches of *darawan* leaves (used as medicine for stomach ache) and places these between the *aliwas* and *bagakay*. These objects should not topple down. He also gets *tanglad* leaves (used as medicine for snake bite). When all is ready, everyone proceeds to the swidden.

At the farm, the owner goes to one corner of the field, usually to the higher part. He puts down the basket with the *aliwas*, *bagakay* and other paraphernalia then he stabs the ground around the cross with the *aliwas* five to seven times. He grasps a handful of ritual rice grains and pours them into the holes in the ground. Afterwards, he plants the *aliwas* stick

on the ground near the cross. Next, he makes several holes with a bamboo stick obtained near the farm. The *darawan* and *tanglad* leaves are placed in these holes. He then assembles several symbolic items and places them in a small rice seed container. These items include:

- Bunga* – areca nut, so that rice will be abundant like areca nuts;
- Li-a* – ginger, protects the rice;
- Sambariba* (American origin) – a strong tree and medicine for fever, a piece of which is included so that the plants will be strong;
- Tagbak* (tree species) – so that the rice will be strong and not die; and
- Sudlay* – comb, so that the rice stalks will become beautiful like combed hair.

The long handle of the rice container is tied to the cross then the big basket containing the rice seeds is left beside the standing *aliwas* stick, its handle tied to the *aliwas*. In many cases, the direction of the cross piece has a north-south orientation, while the basket (*binbian*) is in an east-west orientation. The holes for the ritual leaves are made around the cross clockwise. The *bagakay* cross is said to be a gift to the *apo paray* (owner-spirit of the rice) or the *kalag paray*.

When the rites are finished, they start to plant. After planting, all the dibbles are placed in a circle around the cross and ritual plants. They return to the owner's house and are served food.

Rites of harvesting

Binding rice stalks is done before and after harvest. The following are the rituals involved:

Magbugkos (to tie) – Harvesting usually begins in October-November. The rite is done

in every swidden field and performed by a *manugbugkos*, the techniques of which differ from individual to individual. When the rice is ripe, the rite is held usually in the evening of the day the tide is high.

There are several omens (*patabian*) associated and observed in this rite. For instance, it is prohibited for a *manugbugkos* to perform the rite when he hears a *suksuk* (house lizard), *tiki* (gecko) or *kudkuro* (a species of bird) crying when he is about to leave for the swidden field. The *manugbugkos* leaves the house at about five in the morning, when the dawn is neither dark nor bright. He must not bring anything related to fire, a *bilao* (winnowing tray), water, *amak* (mat) or a chicken. He must not shout nor whistle, which will enable him to catch the spirits. No one follows him except an offspring under training or the one who asked him to perform the rite. He then looks for bamboo or bagakay with which to make a cross (35-40 centimeters long). After he makes one, he goes to the field directly. He cautiously and gently enters the field. First, he lifts his right foot forward and places it down, heel first, beyond the toes of the left foot. Then, he takes the second step in the same manner. When the seventh step has been made with the right foot, the left foot is laid deep under the right foot, and he slowly kneels down in front of a small cut and burnt stump prepared beforehand. He sets up the cross on the ground beside the stump, holds a rice stalk nearest the trunk and the cross and uses it to bind them. Then, he does the same thing to six other stalks, one by one, in a clockwise fashion. There is a specific way of binding. He uses a single bow-knot as tying them in two knots without a loop prevents the owner from catching the rice spirits. He holds his breath and prays:

"Madakop ti kalag halaman."
(I caught the spirit of the plants.)

"Pagyamo kita no mabu-ol kanta halaman."
(May our plants yield more when we harvest them.)

After the binding, the *manugbugkos* steps back (seven steps) starting with the right foot slowly to the corner of the field.

The following day, the owner harvests alone, cutting the rice with his hands in the ritual spot, clockwise. He does this for a short time and continues for five days (it can be cut down to one day). About a meter radius is harvested which can be done in one day, usually on the following morning of the ritual. Afterwards, others can join him.

After the harvest is completed, the owner goes to the ritual spot and unties the seven stalks and places them on top of a heap of rice in a basket then brought home. The seven stalks are kept high on the wall of the house. Some of the stalks are cooked with other rice during the *pamag-uhan* feast and the rest used for the next planting ritual as part of the ritual seeds.

Pamag-uhan (special after-harvest feast) – The people gather at a house in the settlement where the feast will be held, carrying part of the newly harvested rice. They pound the rice, usually late at night. Then, rice is cooked outside the house in a pot. A miniature bow and arrow is placed at the bottom of the pot which is covered with banana leaves. The newly harvested rice and water are then placed inside. After this, other rice is cooked. Before they eat, offerings are made to souls of the dead and the rice spirits. The rice is placed in basket trays and served to the people. One must not blow on the hot rice. People can now eat new rice in their own homes.

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