

## The Creation of Man in Philippine Myths

Those of the coast, called Yligueynes, are of the opinion that heaven and earth had no beginning and that there were two gods, one of these called Captan and the other Maguayen and that the land breeze and he sea breeze were married and that the land breeze brought forth a reed and that reed was planted by the god Captan and when it was frown, broke, and there were made from itself two sections which became a man and a woman the man was called Sicalac from which they call all men lalac and the woman they called Sicavay from which they afterward called the woman Babayes. The man told the woman that they should get married because there were no other people in the world; she said that she did not want to because they were brother and sister born of the same reed and there had not been more than one knot between them and that she did not want to marry him for being her brother. Finally they agreed to go and ask advice of the tunas (*toninas*) of the sea and the doves (*palomas*) in the air and lastly they went to seek the advice of the shaker of the earth (*temblor de la tierra*), who said that it was necessary that they marry so that the world might be peopled and they got married and the first son they had was called Sibon and then a daughter named Samar and these two children had a daughter called Lupluban and this married a son of the first couple called Pandaguan...(who) was the first to invent fish corrals for fishing in the sea and the first time, he caught a shark and brought it ashore thinking that it would not die and when brought ashore it died and upon seeing it dead Pandaguan stared to lament and cry over the shark and to complain to the gods about the death of one when up to that time no one had died...

...The mountaineers, who called Tinggian ...believe that in the beginning were only the sea and the sky; and that one day a kite, having no place where to alight, determined to set the sea against the sky. Accordingly, the sea declared war against the sky, and threw her waters upward. The sky, seeing this, made a treaty of peace with the sea. Afterward, to avenge himself upon her for having dared to assert herself, they say that he showered upon the sea all the islands of the archipelago, in order to subdue her; and that the sea ran to and fro without being able to rise again... Then they relate also the story of the reed; but they say that the kite pecked the reed, and the aforesaid man and woman came out...

—Miguel de Loarca, trans. A.B., Llopis Repotente.

The first striking motif of many Philippine creation myths is their attribution of the origin of mankind to a reed. In the Hiligaynon myth, parts of the primeval reed itself become a man and a woman, and in the highland version, the first human couple break out of the reed. Francisco Alzina wrote a history of the East Visayas (1668) and reported that the Bisaya ascribed "a very contemptible beginning to the first man and woman, since they were two coconuts or two stalks of bamboo." Juan de Plasencia, in his *Los Costumbres de los Tagalogs* (1589), earlier observed: "There is one story that the first man and the first woman came from the knot of a cane which burst off from its plant"—i.e. from the same bamboo. A paper by Catalina Villaruz written about 1920 and now in the H. Otley Beyer manuscript collection reports that the Southern Luzon Tagalog

believed that the first man started his life inside a bamboo pole. He grew, the bamboo cracked, and out he came. The same story is told of the first woman, and once out of the cane they looked at each other, fell in love, and married. A current Tagalog euphemism for a natural-born child is *putok sa buho*, “one who burst out of a/the bamboo”—an evident carryover from the times when the myth was held as gospel truth.

The Bukidnon of Mindanao say that during a severe drought Mampolompon, perhaps a deity who had come down from the skyworld, could grow nothing on his clearing but a bamboo. This broke during a high wind and out came a dog and a woman, the ancestors of mankind. From Sulu comes a Tausug myth about how, before the Sulu islands were peopled, five men had fled from a nearby country ravaged by war. Three of them were tall and had long noses, and the two others were stocky and had short noses. They landed at one end of Jolo and settled there, living on food they could gather. Later the same nearby country was raked by another war and five women likewise fled to Jolo, where they met the five earlier refugees. The ten paired off in marriage and had children and in time their offspring populated the island. One day one of the tall, long-nosed men and one of the short-nosed men set out paddling on a small boat to explore the sea for new land. They were gone for months and had run out of food. Then they lost their paddles and their boat ran aground. One of them landed, carrying his axe to look for wood to hew into paddles. The trees were too small, but walking deeper into the bush, he came to a grove where stood a bamboo clump with one cane large enough for the purpose. He started cutting the cane down with his axe and heard a voice say, “Hey, don’t hit me!” He felled the bamboo with care and wedged it open with a piece of wood, and out came a beautiful woman. She identified herself as *Tuwan Putli Indal Sunga* and said that she had hidden in the bamboo from a false prophet. The three settled down, the long-nosed man took her for his wife—his second—and they had seven children, all boys, among whom the land of Jolo was later divided.

### **Lovely Goddess**

A Magindanao myth reported by Najeeb M. Saleeby (1905) states that *Sitli Paramisuli*, a lovely goddess of the skyworld, married an obscure god and they had two children—*Tabunaway* and *Mamalu*. She died, and three days after her burial, they found a slender plant, a bamboo, growing on her grave. In time a thick clump of the reed grew there and *Mamalu* cleared the grave, leaving but one cane, growing at the center. At his brother’s insistence he felled this too, split it, and found a girl inside. They thought she was their mother back to life and called her *Putri Tunina*. A mortal named *Kabungsuwan* came to live in Mindanao, was charmed by the maiden’s beauty, and married her. Out of their union came the Magindanao and eventually the rest of mankind.

An Igorot myth narrates that there were no people on earth until *Lumawig*, the chief god, descended from the skyworld and cut many reeds. He divided these into pairs, placed them in different parts of the world, and told them: “You must speak.” The reeds became people and in each place was a man and woman who could talk, but the language each couple spoke differed from the others’ languages. *Mabel Cook Cole* who reported this myth in her book “*Philippine Folk Tales*” (1916) observed that: “A common fancy

in Malay languages is the supernatural origin of a child in some vegetable, usually a bamboo.”

### Blades of Grass

Variants of the myth crediting the reed with the incubation of the first couple occur in the myths of the Ata, Batak, and Mamanwa, in Mindanao. Here Manama, the greatest of all spirits, is said to have made the first people from blades of grass, weaving them into human form. This way he made eight people, male and female, who were to be the ancestors of the Ata and all neighboring ethnic groups.

A Tiruray creation myth says that the god Sualla made the first man by touching one of eight engraved posts standing at the eastern horizon. A Mansaka myth has it that the god Taganlag made the first man out of *kasili* wood and the first woman out of *bangay* wood.

Thus the belief in mankind's originating from a reed or a similar plant may well have been nationwide in the past. And it, too, has many analogues all over Oceania. A Solomon Islands myth says that two knots began to grow on a stalk of sugar cane. The cane below each sprout burst and from one issued a man and from the other a woman, these becoming mankind's parents. Similarly, the Yami of Taiwan, just above Luzon, believe that in the beginning, a being planted a staff in the ground. It took root and became a bamboo on which two shoots developed, a man issuing from one and a woman from the other.

### The Bird in the Myth of Creation

The next salient motif in the Panay creation myth showing an appreciable degree of anatomical resemblance to the major Philippine creation myths concerns the agency of a bird in the creation of man and woman. In his version of the myth from the Panay hill folk, Loarca used the Spanish *milano*, defined as “kite, glede, a bird of prey *Falco milvus*.” Another bird performing this creative function is the *limokon* of the Mandaya. A study of the country's preternatural fabular beings shows that the early Filipinos regarded certain large fish (e.g. the tuna and the shark in the Panay myth), certain birds, and crocodiles and snakes as dragons and therefore deities. These were much feared but often propitiated and thought to bring good fortune.

### Bird-Worship

Bathala, the chief god of the Tagalog, was identified with the *tigmamanukin*, a small bird. In his *Relacion*, Fr. Pedro Chirino wrote: “The Tagalogs adored a blue bird as large as a thrush, and called it *Bathala*, which was among them a term of divinity”; to which Blair and Robertson added in a note: “The Tagals also called this bird *tigmamanukin*; its scientific name is *Irene cyanogastra* Meyer.” The bird that opened the bamboo was called *manaul* by the Bisayan, and the Ilokano of Zambales still call a mysterious nocturnal bird *manaul*.

### River Genesis

The Mandaya believe that the *limokon* bird was once able to talk like a man. It laid two eggs, one at the mouth of the river Mayo and the other at its source. A woman was hatched out of the latter and a man out of the former. The two lived without

knowing that the other existed, but one day, while he was crossing the river, a strand of long hair was caught against his legs and gripped them so tight he almost drowned. He then walked upstream in search of the woman who had made her existence known through the long strand of hair. They met, married, and became the ancestors of the mandaya. The Mandaya explain that because of their descent from the *limokon*, they consider it an omen bird.

### **Dominant Female**

Another notable point about Philippine creation myths is the dominance of the women in them. They are quite headstrong, particularly in their aversion to incest. Sicavay objected to Sicalac's proposal that they marry because they were siblings. Upon his insistence, she relented on condition that they first ask the tunas, the doves, and the maker of earthquakes. Several Mindanao creation myths have gods and goddesses sharing in the job of creating the first human family, and the judgment of the goddess, in case of a disagreement, generally prevails. A Bagobo myth states that Tuglay and Tuglibon, divine husband and wife, created the world. Tuglay then made a man and a woman by moistening corn meal and shaping them into human figures. Then he covered them with scales and gave them life. When they stood, however, they looked stiff and ungainly because Tuglay had neglected to put joints in their bodies. Tuglibon said she did not like them covered with scaled and their eyes, ears, and noses were too small. He insisted that his creations were all right as they were. The two argued back and forth and then she cast a handful of corn meal into his eyes, quickly moistened the rest of the meal, and made two other figures according to her specifications, putting only one tiny scale each at the tips of the figures' fingers and toes. Then she washed the corn meal out of Tuglay's eyes. He saw that her creations were superior, and these became the first man and woman.

Paramisuli, in the Magindanao myth, weds an unknown god. The husband of the Tausugs' ancestress, born of a bamboo node, is not even named though it was he who had set her free from the bamboo and yet all her four names survive.

### **From the Terrace-Builders**

A magnificent myth from the Ifugao states that the god Kabigat and his sister Bugan came down to earth and lived in separate sections of a house he had built, she in the upper and he in the lower, while they worked a piece of farmland. Suffering from loneliness and seeing the chickens mate though related, he had carnal knowledge of her in her sleep. In due time she grew aware that she had a baby in her womb and in shame decided to kill herself. She pretended to go out in search of food but instead followed the course of the river toward the east till she reached the ocean. She then saw that Kabigat had followed her and so she leaped into the water. He leaped after her, and they both fell onto a rice granary under the ocean. The underwater people comforted her, saying that she and her brother had done no wrong, for fowls, though brothers and sisters, freely mated. She gave birth to Balitok, a boy, and to Lingan, a girl. These in due course married and Lingan bore Tadona, a boy, and to Inuki, a girl, who when the time came, in turn, married and peopled the Ifugao country.

A Bontok myth recorded by Carl W. Seidenadel (1909) says that after a great deluge that wiped out the human race except a boy and a girl, Lumawig, the chief god of

the skyworld, came down to the earthworld and said to them: “You must marry, you brother and sister!” Replied the woman: “That is possible, but it is abominable, because we are brother and sister!” Lumawig prevailed on her and the world was repopulated by her reluctant union with her brother.

It is hard to conceive of Eve speaking like that in Genesis. Kannyon, in the Ilocano folk epic *Life of Lam-ang*, had a yard full of suitors at her door and she ordered even her parents around shamelessly. There is not a little trace of matriarchates in these myths. Similarly, the predominance of priestesses over priests in the pre-Hispanic Philippines is significant in this connection.

### The Earthquake-Maker

And lastly, the reference to an earthquake-maker in the Panay myth points to another common motif in Philippine creation mythology. Sicalac and Sicavay went to ask the maker of earthquakes to clear their marriage. Pavon’s version from Negros states that the first man and first woman “resolved to consult the genius of the earthquake, namely Macalinog,” who Manual said was his (Manual’s) grandfather. Macalinog had changed Manual into an eagle to punish him for misbehavior. Various early Philippine groups believed that the world was supported by a single or main pillar around which a god in the form of a python was coiled and caused earthquakes. The name *Macalinog* in Pavon’s version is interesting. A Monobo myth says that the first great Manobo was Makalidung and he erected the world on posts and then stayed at the center post in company with a python that shook the post each time he was displeased with mankind, thus causing earthquakes and hinting at his displeasure. There is a close resemblance of these two gods’ names (from *maka* “expert at” + *lidung* or *linog* “earthquake”) to the Tagalog *lindol* “earthquake,” the Bikolano, Hiligaynon, Maranao, Magindanao, Cebuano, and Samar-Leyte *linog*, the Ibanag *lunig*, the Bahasa Indonesian and Bahasa Melayu *lindu*, and the Tausug *linug*.

Dean C. Worcester, reporting about a myth of the Tagbanua in Palawan, wrote (1899) that the chief deity of the Tagbanwa underworld was Taliakud, a word whose stem, observed Beyer later, is *takud* or *tokud*, and *tukod* means “prop” in Bikolano, Hiligaynon, Ilokano, Cebuano, Pampango, and Samar-Leyte; *tukol* in Pangasinan; and *tuku* in Ibanag. “The Ifugao Atlas,” Beyer observed, “is *Tinukol* of the underworld, and I suspect that the Tagbanwa Taliakud of the underworld is a deity of the same character.”

An evidence of the spread, though not necessarily the ancestry, of this motif of a snake coiled around a center post is an Eighteenth Century Hindu miniature, now at the Musee Guimet, in Paris, showing *devas* and *asuras*—deities and demons—using the body of the huge snake Vasuki, coiled around a big post representing Mount Mandara, in order to churn the sea.

In their preface to Loarca’s *Relacion*, Blair and Robertson commented: “Many of these beliefs are, of course, childish, crude, and superstitious; yet some indicate considerable imagination.” These myths are neither childish nor crude nor superstitious. They are an integral part of the relatively sophisticated creation mythology of the archipelago before European contact. They just need a closer and perhaps more sympathetic reading.

—Maximo D. Ramos