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The Tinguians and Their Old Form of Worship

FLORENCIO D. MILLARE

ABOUT half a century ago, an American ethnologist, Mr. Fay Cooper Cole, came to the Philippines to make a study of the non-Christian Filipinos. He scoured the rugged region of northern Luzon and in the northernmost vicinity of the Cordillera Mountain range—what is now the province of Abra—he came upon a free peace-loving race generally known as the Tinguians, a term derived from the word *tingue* which means mountaineers. Mr. Cole penetrated into the heart of the Tinguian territory and after several months of painstaking work he returned to America and published an interesting account of this tribe, treating the various aspects of their life, customs and literature.

Habitat

Descendants of a pre-historic people from the western coast of Borneo, the Tinguians belong to the first group of the three waves of the last Asian immigrants to the Philippines—the pagan Malays who came to the country about 300 to 200 years B.C. They are regarded by most authorities as the most civilized non-Christian Filipinos, a peaceful and well-disposed race, living in comparatively well-organized communities and displaying an aptitude to follow the path of progress. In the locality they are better known as Itnegs (sometimes pronounced *Isneg*), a name which also designates their dialect.

Little known to most Filipinos, they are often mistaken for the wild head-hunter Igorots—the *alsados*—of the neighboring areas.

Estimated at about 27,600 in 1916 and perhaps a few thousands more today, this people are mostly concentrated in the province of Abra. The census of 1948 reveals that there are approximately 22,000 in that province and the remainder scattered in the surrounding provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur and in the sub-provinces of Apayao, Kalinga, Lepanto, Bontoc and Amburayan.

Driven out from the fertile valleys and plains during the early days by the frontier-pushing and more highly cultured Ilocanos, irritated by the Spanish method of evangelization, they took to their heels leaving their homes behind, and sought haven in the interior fastnesses. There they continued their life of freedom. In that dark seclusion, they fortified themselves with their ancestral traditions and customs, many of which still permeate their mode of thinking and living notwithstanding their significant advancement.

Fifty years ago Mr. Cole found this tribe in the G-string stage of civilization, timid and illiterate and pagan worshipers. After the lapse of half a century, they have made noteworthy advance in their social, moral and cultural life.

A Tinguian of today is of average Filipino height, generally five feet four inches, with a well-built athletic figure. Both sexes possess impressive sturdy features. The hair is glossy-dark, slightly wavy at times, but generally straight; the forehead is high and vaulted; the nose is aquiline, revealing Hindu strain; the cheekbones are prominent; and the complexion varies from light to dark reddish-brown.

Completely abandoning the G-string and the bare-breasted costume, they now dress like any ordinary lowlander, so that one hardly notices the difference, except that when they speak (those from the hinterland), the Itneg accent and the absence of the letter "r" are conspicuous.

The typical Tinguian family today is entirely different from its forebears of fifty years ago. As a race they are fast

disappearing, being gradually assimilated into the Ilocano way of life. Their children are baptized; they go to school and seek higher educational opportunities; they hold responsible public positions; they go to church regularly and fervently; they freely associate and intermarry with the lowlanders, a condition which was hardly possible before because of the latter's prejudice against them.

Missionary Work

Religious work was started among them by the Augustinian friars as far back as the early days of the Spanish rule, but showed no encouraging gains for many years. It was only in the later part of the Spanish regime that their pagan faith cracked, and since then they have gradually imbibed Christianity.

The author has visited every place Cole visited and even far beyond. The people have become predominantly Christian. Based on the census report of 1948, a little less than one-fifth of the Tinguian populace have remained pagans or without religion. They are predominantly Catholics in faith, but a few are Aglipayans, Protestants and Iglesia ni Cristo. Those who refuse to be baptized are the elder folk; yet even these live according to Christian ways and with Christian families. One old man, when asked why he refused to be baptized, philosophically answered that he did not wish to sin by converting himself into somebody else when God had already created him an Itneg.

From the religious point of view, Christian natives are amazingly pious. But in spite of religion, and of the education and cultural influence given them, they have not totally set aside their pagan beliefs and practices. If for some reason or other a certain favor can not be obtained or a sickness be cured, after every human remedy and petition to our Lord has proved futile, an Itneg considers that he has still one fighting hope—namely to revert to the ancestral paganism and to direct his appeal to its deities. Not that he wants to go back to pagan worship, but he does so because he feels, as

a result of the pressure of the *cadauyan* (old customary practices), and of the old folk whose advice must always be respected, that he is being punished for not remembering the venerable spirits who gave him life and protection through all the years.

Pagan Worship

Tinguan pagan worship is a texture of beliefs and superstitions handed down from antiquity. The fact that their ancestors performed this or that is sufficient justification for their doing the same without any further explanation. They follow the beaten path blindly because of fear that something wrong may happen or the favor asked may not be granted should they do otherwise.

Tinguanians believe in a class of supernatural beings collectively called *anitos*, more often known as *sasailo*. An *anito* is any being possessing supernatural powers and intelligence equal or superior to the human faculties, but devoid of corporeal parts. These divinities are generally divided into three classes. (1) The first class are supernatural beings or divinities proper; these have existed through all times, and are more appropriately known as natural deities. The lesser spirits also fall under the category of natural divinity but because they are not endowed with superior attributes, we shall classify them next in rank. (2) The second group are the inferior or lesser spirits which are either beneficent or evil. (3) The last are the spirits of the ancestors or other deceased mortals.

The natural spirits are usually invisible but at times of ceremonies they enter the bodies of the spirit mediums, possess them and through them communicate with the living.

Many of the old people try to reconcile their faith with Christianity by alleging that they also believe in the existence of one supreme ruler who created the world and governs the activities of the living and the spirit world. It is their belief that the first people of the world were the *Itnegs*. The lower divinities, they claim, are similar to the different patron saints of the Catholics and like the saints owe their existence and power to the mighty Lord. In practice, however, the divini-

ties are worshiped and looked upon with the same measure of reverence without much regard to their rank.

Bagatulayan

According to information gathered from the old folk, the Tinguians recognize *Bagatulayan* (sometimes pronounced *bagaturayan*) as the supreme god. Often he is called *apo dios*, meaning "most reverent God," a title influenced by the Ilocano term for the Divine Lord. In their individual prayers, *apo dios* is more usually used than the name *Bagatulayan*, it being highly improper to call a reverential personage by his name.

His omnipotence extends to all the activities of all the living, the various classes of spirits and the spirits of the ancestors. Like a supreme commander, he has absolute control over the behavior of his subjects and punishes anyone who disregards his laws and commands. The celestial bodies like the moon, stars and the sun are his creation and to each of them he has assigned a spirit to direct its normal operations. These heavenly bodies are venerated in order that the divinities will always continue to provide the people with light, air, sunshine and life.

Under *Bagatulayan's* rule are his subordinates, themselves powerful deities, each one endowed with certain specific attributes. Second in rank is *Kadaklan* who is usually mistakenly considered the greatest Tinguian spirit. Thus even Cole makes no mention of *Bagatulayan*, but regards *Kadaklan* as the supreme being of the Tinguians. The third most powerful spirit is *Kabonian* (sometimes written *Kaboniyán*), the teacher-helper deity who seems to be closer to the hearts of the people because his sphere of influence is more sympathetic and nearer to their needs.

Other types of spirits equally respected and loved by the natives are the guardian spirits called *apadel* or *kabagaang* who dwell in peculiar-shaped stones.

Those spirits belonging to deceased mortals have their permanent residence in *maglawá*, a place midway between the

earth and the sky and, except a few who have joined the natural spirits, they are not worshiped in the manner in which the supernatural *anitos* are; their remains and memories are venerated, however.

The following outline will help illustrate the pagan concept of Tinguian divinities:

Bagatulayan or *Apo Dios*—Supreme Lord.

Kadaklan

Kabonian

Govern:—

I. The living.

II. *Anitos* or deities:

A. Supernatural deities or divinities proper, better known as natural spirits.

B. Inferior beings or lesser spirits (also falling under natural spirits).

1. Harmful spirits.

2. Beneficent spirits

C. Spirits of ancestors or deceased mortals in the kingdom of *maglawa*.

Kadaklan

Many have the mistaken notion that *Kadaklan* is the greatest of all spirits. The fact of the matter is that he is more feared than *Bagatulayan* himself. This may be because the supreme being has so delegated and clothed him with power that he practically arrogates unto himself all the functions of his maker. *Kadaklan* strikes terror into the hearts of men for he exacts reverence and obedience through his power. Very faithful subordinate that he is, he punishes anyone who disregards his master's decrees. He is usually identified as lightning and thunder which punish the wicked, and devour the earth to release *Kadaklan's* wife. For this reason, he is called the king of the *sal-it* (lightning). When *Kadaklan* gets angry, *apo dios* is appealed to to soften his dreadful manifestations, for the latter personifies love.

Kadaklan lives in the sky and is married to *Agemem*, likewise powerful, who lives on earth. This union is blessed with

two sons who are always ready and quick to punish anyone who disobeys the command of their father.

Kabonian

The benevolent *Kabonian*, the friendly teacher-helper spirit, is apparently the most popular of all the gods because it was he who first taught the Tinguians how to pray, how to plant and harvest, how to overcome bad omens and ward off evil spirits and how to cure sickness. Some tribes call him a prophet sent by *apo dios* to protect the *Ifugao*, the name by which the divinities call the Tinguians. Whereas *Kadaklan* strikes fear and terror, *Kabonian* fosters gratitude and devotion.

Kabonian is married and lives in a cave in a beautiful mountain with luxuriant trees growing on rocks of agate from which the prized agate beads are made. In this wondrous cave the enchanted jar that talks and moves is found and from it the valuable *gansas* (bronze gongs) of the tribe come.

Lesser Spirits

Of the lesser spirits there are more than 150 known by name while many others are not so known. Every time a child is born it is believed that a spirit child is likewise born to one of the spirits. *Anitos* of lower rank live on earth. There are spirits of the well, forest, grove, field, cave, etc. Many of these spirits are benevolent and friendly, others are demons that bring nothing but sickness and mischief. Still others are neutral and unless hurt will neither do harm nor good. All kinds of sickness and human afflictions are attributed to the malign *anitos*, although the superior beings can also send these misfortunes as punishment.

Lesser beings are invisible, but the evil ones among them can assume unusual forms to frighten people. As to the benevolent spirits, the people attribute imaginative shapes to them, the most usual being that of a winged human with benign features.

The beneficent spirits are guardian angels that help the people in their daily activities. Every individual is supposed to be protected by a good spirit, but when the good spirit is overpowered by the wicked spirits, sickness and even death result.

In the course of time, people have learned to overcome the mischief of the evil spirits. Prayers and amulets are good counter-weapons, but if the harm is already done, the remedy is to make appeasement by sacrificial offerings or by invoking the aid of the spirit gods. Hence the performance of ceremonial rites and sacrificial offerings.

Spirits of the Ancestors

When a person dies, the soul departs from the body. During the ten-day period after the burial the spirit lingers on earth to wipe away all traces of its memory. During this period, the relatives must observe customary taboos, else the spirit will punish them by death or sickness. After the tenth day, the spirit joins its ancestors in the spirit kingdom at *maglawa*, midway between the earth and the sky. There it lives in the same way that it lived on earth. That explains why things loved by the deceased are placed on his grave, so that he may take them with him to his resting place. The spirit returns and mingles for the last time with the relatives during the celebration of the *lay-og* feast—the event celebrating the lifting of the mourning which takes place one year after death.

At *maglawa*, the spirit has intimate knowledge of all that transpires in the family. If serious family trouble arises, it may come back to earth by possessing the medium and through the medium giving counsel to the family. This counsel must be obeyed; otherwise the soul will be restless in the spirit world.

Tinguians believe in reward after death, and are very lenient in this regard. The proper burial rite, the holding of a successful *lay-og* and prayers help in the expiation of one's sins. Heaven is the peace that the soul enjoys in *maglawa*, while hell is the restlessness of the soul in that spirit kingdom.

If the deceased had been very bad on earth, his sins may be atoned for by subjecting the arms of the people joining the funeral to 150 lashes each from a rattan whip.

The Spirit Medium

The only person capable of communicating with the *anitos* and of securing their goodwill is the spirit medium called *agboboni* or *alopongan*. The mediums are persons through whom the superior beings talk to mortals. During ceremonies, the spirits possess their bodies and govern their language and actions. The shamans are generally women past middle age, although men are not barred from the profession.

Not everybody can be a medium. It is a matter of choice by the *anitos* that one becomes such. This rare privilege is bestowed when an individual has been forewarned in a dream that she is being called to the position, or has been informed by other mediums that she is desired by the spirits, or finally develops trembling fits when not cold. A woman may have lived for years without any idea of becoming a medium and then because of a sudden designation, labors hard to fit herself for the office.

The new medium is given several months of training, during which period she masters word by word the different rites and formulas, and studies the gift offerings that please each spirit. After undergoing this period of ordeal she applies to the spirits for their approval of her acceptance. This she does by sacrificing a pig. All marks found in the liver of the pig are read and translated by the applicant to determine whether she is accepted or not. If ominous marks appear the candidate is deemed rejected; she must prolong her training until she is fit. If she passes the pig-liver examination, the spirits are summoned into her body. The spirits are called by striking sea shells against an antique Chinese plate. While this is being done the candidate covers her face with her hand and chants the *diams* (ritualistic formulas). When she succeeds in luring the spirits into her body and is thus possessed, she ceases to be herself, but assumes the character, language and habits of the superior beings.

Some mediums are possessed by bad, some by good spirits, or by both; while still others are possessed by the most powerful spirit, the crowning glory of a medium's career. When the spirits talk through the medium, the people lose no time in seeking advice, asking information or appealing for aid. Even the spirits of the ancestors may take possession of a medium and convey important messages to their families.

From that time on, the medium becomes a full-fledged spirit *agboboni* and the intermediary between the spirit world and the living. Mediums become healers of many kinds of human afflictions through their power to communicate with the divinities.

Ceremonial Rites

Tinguians seldom pray or appeal to the invisible *anitos*. These deities are only invoked with their proper ceremony when help is needed—in appealing for aid in time of distress, in the cure of sickness, in warding off epidemics and in protecting the village from danger.

Ceremonial rites are always performed in the *anito* temple. The natives have no permanent worship house but they build one whenever the occasion for its need arises. Every ceremony includes feasting and sacrificial offerings to the *anitos* to gain their goodwill. The offering usually consists of some of the liver and meat of a slaughtered pig placed together with other food and some drink inside the spirit house. To clinch the efficacy of the appeal the *diams* generally end with this phrase: "Not then, but now, not there, but here, if you please."

The ritualistic prayers are of two kinds, the direct appeal or the true prayers to the spirits, and the ritualistic formulas called *diam* which consist of narratives about the supreme divinities or ancient heroes, recounted with proper ceremony over the sacrifice. These formulas, mastered by heart by the medium, are not strictly prayers, but narratives telling how the superior deities performed certain acts and overcame certain obstacles successfully. It is believed that the recital of these events in connection with a sacrifice brings similar successes or

similar favors to those for whom the ceremony is being performed.

Ceremonies vary in length, form and degree of importance. Many ceremonies are held in connection with the healing of sickness and human afflictions.

The holding of a certain type of ceremony is a privilege transmitted by inheritance to a family. Families who are not entitled to such a privilege, but desire to hold this ceremony, must first start with the lesser ceremonies. The procedure is rather expensive and takes years to accomplish.

The Sayang Ceremony

The largest of all Tinguian ceremonies is the *sayang*, often called *balawa*. It is held in connection with the construction of a spirit shrine, the *balawa*, the largest *anito* temple, dedicated to the cure of a lingering sickness. The *sayang* is an inherited family function but because of its magnitude, it takes on the nature of a community affair.

The *balawa* is a small temporary structure built near the celebrant's premises, measuring about three by five feet on the sides and about nine feet in height. The thatched roof is a pyramid supported by four wooden posts but without walls. The bamboo floor is raised about three feet from the ground. Near the roof is another narrow flooring where the *day-day* (offerings) are placed. At the *balawa* the *agboboni* performs her semi-magical solemnities; but after its use, it ceases to be sacred and may be used for any other purpose.

The most dramatic climax of the ceremony is when the medium sets the offering and strokes it with oiled fingers, summoning the spirits to her body with the recital of her *diam*. This *diam* is an account of how the people of the "first time" celebrated their *sayang* ceremony erroneously. Whereupon the powerful spirit, *Kadaklan*, and his wife instructed them to go and watch a *sayang* ceremony at Sayau. The people did as bidden and after mastering all the details returned and performed the ceremony correctly. The superior spirits were

satisfied and sent the lesser spirits to attend the ceremony when summoned by the *agboboni*. The sick became well.

Once a family holds the *sayang* it must observe the same once every six or seven years. A *sayang* entails tremendous sacrifices. It not only drains the family earnings but subjects them to strict *cañao* (taboos). For instance, for a period of one month after the affair, every member is prohibited from wearing the native hat, from carrying a jar on the head, cutting bamboos, eating pork, beef, catfish, eel, *gabi* and pepper. For a period of one year also, no member can attend any social gathering or join the funeral of a relative.

Next to the *sayang*, with the same purpose but lower in importance, are the *sugayog*, *dawak*, *pala-an*, *callangan* and the *bawbaw-e* or *calcalapao*. Other minor rites which can be held without the aid of the *agboboni*, such as that for stopping the incessant crying of a child, for driving away evil spirits, for attracting the goodwill of certain *anitos*, etc, are called *sangasang* in general.

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