

## TAMPAT AND PAGKAJA: TWO TAUSOG FOLK BELIEFS CONCERNING LIFE AND DEATH

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Among the number of folk ritualistic beliefs of the Tausogs of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, the *Tampat* and the *Pagkaja* are two of the more interesting and popular ones. However, these two are actually very delicate and serious folk beliefs that call for great sincerity and strong faith, because they could bring the person either life and its rewards or much suffering and death.

These two will be discussed one after the other as follows:

### I. Tampat

*Tampat* is a Tausog word which refers to a special grave (*kubul*). Believers consider the grave to be that of a Makdumin, a first disciple and follower of Tuan Makdum or that of a Tuan-Tuan, someone who was most holy and spiritually powerful. Makdum, of course, was accepted by the people as a Tuan-Tuan. According to folk history, he brought with him selected disciples to many places in the south to preach Islam. At these places these disciples had finally died and their holy bodies buried. The burial grounds of these Makdumins or Tuan-Tuan are now called *Tampats*.

Tausogs have told this writer of a most powerful Tampat called "Tampat Dacula" or the Great Tampat in Languyan Island, Tawi-Tawi. However, there are also Tampat Tuan Abdulgafur and Tampat Tuan Anajautal that are venerated and adored by the inhabitants of Simunul and Tubig Indangan, respectively. In Basilan Province, there is also Tampat Bud Daunan. Others are Tampat Alawi in Tapul Island and Tampat Alawi in the mountain of Jolo. There is also said to be another Tampat Alawi in Tawi-Tawi Province. An explanation given for the presence of the same Tampat in three places is that Tuan-Tuan spirit simply travels places.

The Great Tampat or Tampat Dacula in Languyan Island, Tawi-

Tawi Province, has special powers and characteristics. It is reputed to be guarded by two huge man-eating monkeys. One of the monkeys is white and the other is black. A wild rooster is said to also sit regularly on top of a tree nearest the Tampat's head to guard the spirit of this holy grave from being robbed of its coins, chickens, and fruit trees. When this rooster sees insincere visitors coming, it loudly cackles to inform the sleeping holy spirit.

The two huge monkeys are said to have smaller monkeys for their followers. They are so discerning that they can detect the degrees of sincerity and good faith in a visitor. It is also said that Tampat robbers and insincere believers are never spared by these monkeys from serious illness or death and other curses. Many travelers in boats had been gulped down by angry waves because they did not pay respect to the Tampat when they passed by. This is the reason why travelers from other places are warned by Imams against temptation to make ill conversation when they sail by Tampat places.

Tampats are sometimes discovered through dreams. The Tampat's spirit appears to an individual in a dream so that the grave can be located and venerated. Folk reports have it that a certain farmer once dreamed of a Tampat near his rice farm. The dream was circulated in the neighborhood and an Imam was consulted. The latter and the farmer proceeded to the rice farm where they found under the tree, a mound the size and shape of which was identical with that of a man's grave. In a short while the Imam chanted a few prayers and pronounced the find as a real Tampat.

Thereafter, he advised everyone in the neighborhood not to cut the vines and trees near the Tampat. People visited the place, planted white flags there, and brought food items to offer to the spirit. It was said that sick children and dying adults who visited the place were relieved of suffering and were permanently restored to health because of the Tampat's *barakat*.

Although *barakat* is an Arabic word which means "radiance," to the Tausogs it means, moreover, power, luck, reward and freedom from harm. *Barakat* is a characteristic power of the Tampat. It is said to be a source of peace, prosperity and bountiful harvest to the rural farmers. It also means protection from family tragedies, natural disaster or

calamity. All the Tampats cited in this article possess strong *barakat*, according to informants. Let me now present cases of the Tapat's *barakat* in relation to business, farming, and in relation to the Tausog's social norms and conduct.

### Barakat Cases

A successful trader-businessman was cited as never having been caught in smuggling by the government or having had any accident on the way because he had always fulfilled his commitments to offer a portion of his gains to the spirit of the Tapat. He had offered prayers, coins, and food items to express his sincere gratitude and strong faith in the Tapat. The Tapat referred to here is that of Tuan Alawi in Tawi-Tawi province.

Also, it was told that the late Sultan Ombra and Hadji Butu stayed in the House of Congress and House of Senate, respectively, until the end of their lives because of the Tapat's *barakat*. The late Sultan Ombra was believed to have frequented Tapat Alawi when at home with his people in the south.

There is also the case of a certain boy who had badgered his mother and father to send him to Manila to finish a college degree. Since his father and mother were believers of the power of Tapat, they offered a visit and made commitments with the spirit. They offered to the spirit some prayers, a few coins and some food items including a white chicken and a piece of white cloth. Years later this boy became very successful in the government service. However, after his graduation from college, he sent an Imam to visit the Tapat to offer a white piece of cloth, a white chicken, and some coins, as proofs of his gratitude and strong faith in its *barakat*.

There is also the case of a gravely sick man whom doctors in the hospital have given no hope to survive. However, a certain Pakir interceded and asked this dying man's family to make commitments (*tungga*) to a Tapat. The family did as told and the dying man recovered. He and his family have become a strong believers in the Tapat since.

On the other hand, there is the case of a certain man who was shot dead. His death was said to have been caused by the neighborhood's incessant prayer that the Tapat would put him to death. This man

was cursed by the Tapat's spirit, the neighborhood claimed.

Also, there was a certain couple with five children who separated. According to the informants, the separation was caused by some personal or family differences involving the husband's father. The wife sent words of prayers written on a piece of paper to Tapat Alawi to have her father-in-law punished. The letter was intercepted and, until today, she had not been forgiven. However, she herself has been cursed by the Tapat, because her father and mother died years afterwards.

The following behavior and acts are subject to the curse of Tapat:

1. (*Mamuno*) killing;
2. (*Mangjina*) coveting or cohabiting with a neighbor;
3. (*Manakaw*) stealing;
4. (*Manghupit*) sundering other people's marriage;
5. (*Mangngutang*) borrowing money with no intention to pay; and
6. (*Magtung-gah*) making commitment to visit a Tapat without fulfilling it.

To the Tausogs, these acts predispose people to go to hell or *narka* after death. However, Tapat blesses everyone who behaves and acts in accordance with society's norms and conduct. Still, prayers and offering for Tapat are necessary for more *barakat*.

### **Pagtapat Ritual**

To perform the Tapat ritual the Imam generally requires a white piece of cloth, a white chicken or rooster, a few coins or some peso bills, some food items and fruits, sugarcane, and others. The peso bills are generally given to the Imam for services rendered. He sets the date of visit to the Tapat by the believers.

It would be worth mentioning that in the case of the Tapat Tuan Alawi in Tawi-Tawi Province, believers from Jolo and Basilan Province had to experience the rigors of three or more days travel to reach the place by small vinta or kumpit during those days when modern sea transportation was unavailable. Somehow the commitment of an encounter with the highest spirits had to be fulfilled. Somehow the trip had to be made in order to ward themselves off from the (*sukot*) or

curse of Tampat. Somehow the trip had to be made in order to avenge the evildoers that had caused them misfortunes, deaths and suffering.

As soon as the believers arrive in this Tampat, the Imam warns them not to utter words that may hurt the spirit and to be on the lookout for the black and white monkeys to which they must offer food items such as coconut meat, sugarcane, fruits. Sincere expression of intention is to be demonstrated at all times, otherwise these two monkeys would not spare them from punishment.

The Imam gives the prayer, usually in words that are incomprehensible to the believers. For purposes of this article, only the substance of the prayers, as interpreted by Pakirs, is given below:

Bismilla hir rahman nir rahim. On, most holy spirit (stating the name of the Tampat), I come to thee to offer prayer, to offer food, chicken, and a white piece of cloth that you might listen to our wishes. If thou art most powerful, oh, heavenly spirit, spare not the life of this man (stating the name) from death for he was an evildoer. He has killed an honest man (stating the name), the husband of this woman (stating the name of the believer). That he was an evil man, wish upon this man his sufferings and ultimate death at the earliest possible time, etc.

The ritual is performed against an evildoer, who has killed a fellowman. For someone who has exhibited acts of coveteousness, the prayer is made in the following manner:

Bismillah hir rahman nir rahim. A-ujubilla hi minassaitan nir rajim. Oh holy spirit of Tampat (giving the name), subject this man (stating the man's name) to punishment and curse here on earth and in the heaven above for having committed *jina* or fornication with his neighbor's wife (stating the name). May you wish upon them (referring to the family for fornicators) perpetual misery, hunger, illness and death afterwards, etc.

The term *jina* may imply acts of fornication, coveteousness, or lasciviousness among the Tausogs. To kill the fornicators on the act, even if it involved one's own daughter, is forgivable in the eyes of Tam-

pat's holy spirit, according to the old folks.

If the intention of a couple is for more harvest in the farms, a prayer for such results is made. However, particular stress is given to the sharing of the bountiful product with the very poor and the very needy, and to the sharing with the spirit of a small portion of their next bountiful harvest.

In this case, the Imam prays:

Bismillah hir rahman nir rahim. A-ujubilla hi minassaitan nir rahim. Oh, holy spirit of Tampat (name of Tampat mentioned aloud) we come upon thee to offer these humble food, chicken, coins, etc. that you might wish upon (name of believers mentioned) bountiful harvest. Ward them off from dry season, from drought and from sickness that again they will come to share with you a small portion of their harvest, to share their harvest with the other poor and needy.

Against thieves and robbers, prayers are similarly made to curse them with illness, suffering or death.

Behind the word Tampat lies the Tausog's inner self and personality. Tampat involves a culture that believes in love and compassion, humility, forgiveness, charity, and moral conduct. In Tampat appears to lie the roots of beginnings of the foundation upon which Islam, upon entering the islands, built itself.

We come now to the next Tausog folk belief which in many ways resemble also the Tampat. This is the Pagkaja.

## II. Pagkaja

Pagkaja is a Tausog folk belief related to the power of the spirits over the life of common mortals—especially the family. It is an encounter with and commitment to these spirits via the offering of prayers and food items, through the intercession of the local priest (*Imam*), who is supposed to be conversant in these spirits' language.

Its reference to family life and affairs is fairly consistent and specific. Indeed it is a family tradition that is believed to affect every mem-

ber in every generation, although it may be performed only once in a lifetime by a couple.. As the rural folks would say, every newly married couple must perform Pagkaja to save itself and its future children from prolonged illness and the clutch of death, and every generation thereafter must faithfully observe Pagkaja to escape its *sukut* upon every member of the family.

The Tausog word *sukut* means curse or punishment. Pagkaja's *sukut* is rendered in several ways, although death is considered the ultimate form. For *sukut* may come in the forms of their being born physically deformed (*ku-il*), mentally or emotionally abnormal (*dupang-dupang*), blind or deaf and dumb. For adults, it may come in the form of impotence or sterility and other afflictions.

Perhaps because Pagkaja is a family transaction with the spirits, as a ritual it is invariably performed in the family's hometown or barrio. Tausogs who, by nature of job-call, find themselves away from home in other places, but whose ancestral lines are faithful believers of the pagkaja, generally take leaves of absence from their places of work to go home to observe the ritual.

Folk belief has it that Pagkaja came among the Tausogs with Tuan Makdum, as first Arabian Muslim missionary who landed in Tapul Island, Province of Sulu. As part of his teaching of Islam, he obliged all his disciples and followers to observe Pagkaja. According to history, Tuan Makdum was noted for his magic and medical powers.

Some cases of the Pakaja's benefits and *sukut* are told, some of them by Tausog informants studying, at the time of this writing, at Mindanao State University, Marawi City. In Tapul Island, for example, a certain couple who remained childless for more than 10 years performed Pagkaja and succeeded in having a baby boy. This couple and the neighbors claimed that the medical doctor's treatment in Zamboanga City had failed them.

On the other hand, in the barrio of Siondo, Siasi, Sulu, a known couple lost eight children, who died successively within a period of two years. However, after the couple heeded the advice of the local Imam to perform Pagkaja, they were blessed with three more children, who have continued to live successfully. The first child is now a teacher, the second is a successful business woman, and the third is a government

employee in his own province.

In another neighboring island, Lugus municipality, Province of Sulu, a certain *guro* failed to perform the Pagkaja and even went to the extent of making it a part of his preaching to disregard Pagkaja. A few years later, three of his children successively died. The neighborhood attributed this family tragedies to the curse of Pagkaja.

Other informants, Tausog professional from Basilan, revealed that a certain *guro* there almost caused his son to become permanently insane because of his insistence to ignore the practice of Pagkaja. These informants said that the son returned to his normal state of mind only after the *guro* observed Pagkaja on the advice of his elders and the local Imam.

### Performing Pagkaja

In the performance of Pagkaja, the following items are needed: 11 mature coconuts (*lahing*), freshly picked from the tree and not having been allowed to fall down (these are grated); 11 chickens, 11 gantas of rice, and 11 bamboo tubes (*dagtung*), each about a meter long and filled with fresh drinking water. In the absence of 11 chickens, 1 goat may serve as a substitute. The number is changed to five for the family's second child and remains so for every succeeding child thereafter. Incense (*kamanian*) with a bowl of charcoal is also required by the Pakir. In addition, the celebrants voluntarily give the Pakir a few pesos after the ritual for services rendered as a manifestation of strong faith in Pagkaja.

When all the required items are ready, the Pakir is called upon by the family to appoint the date most appropriate for the ritual. Six o'clock in the evening or sunset is generally preferred. The choice is based on the notion that the *malaikat* or the angel spirit from heaven above would come down to play and to hunt for food at sunset.

The designated place for the performance of the ritual is usually in the midst of an uncleared forest area near a river bed or a creek. Here the Imam requires the celebrants to put up a small hut where food items could be set for the spirits.

An elderly lady (*pang-gilan*) of good repute and a believer in *Pagkaja* is usually chosen to prepare the necessary food items in the hut, to

serve the spirit and the couple, together with the members of the family.

### **Pagkaja Ritual**

Before the prayer is given, the Imam warns the participants to remain silent so as to insure that no words that may hurt the good spirits shall be uttered. Then he lights the bowl of fire and drops small particles of incense in it, so as to produce a regular flow of smoke. According to old folks, the smoke of this incense is like heavenly perfume to the spirits above. This is the reason why incense is always required by the Pakir in all types of folk ritual.

The Imam begins the call of prayer and says:

*A-Uju billah hi minas-saitan nir rajim. Bismilla hir rahman nir rahim. Ya Gibrel, Ya Is-rafil, Ya Michael.* Oh, good spirits from above, I and your slaves and creations, [followed by naming the couple] come upon thee to offer prayer and to Bless this young couple and their children with longer life. We have come upon thee to fulfill what you wish us to do on earth, etc.

This prayer is intended for a newly married couple. In the case of a childless couple the prayer is as follows:

*A-Uju billa hi rahman nir rahim, Bismilla hir rahman nir rajim. Ya Gibrael, Ya Israfil, Ya Michael.* I and your slaves and creations [followed by naming the childless couple], come upon thee that you may grant this couple forgiveness for having failed to meet their obligation. We come upon thee that you might accept our prayer and offerings, that you might deliver them from curse, etc., Grant them deliverance oh, holy spirits. Grant them children, etc.

In the above case, the Imam prays, in behalf of the childless couple, to the highest spirits such as Gibrael, Israfil, etc. to forgive the couple and to deliver them from the curse of Pagkaja (*sukut*).

For children afflicted with serious illness, physical deformities, or mental or emotional abnormalities, the Pakir also asks for the forgiveness of the spirits and prays for these children's deliverance. He names

the children loudly and invokes the high spirits to restore them to normalcy and to grant them longer life.

Of course, the most serious Pagkaja's curse is successive death in the family. For a family's deliverance from its curse, the Imam usually goes to the extent of shedding tears. He shakes, trembles and, in the utterance of prayers, mumbles unknown words that are incomprehensible to the believers. He is supposed to be in conversation with several powerful spirits, among whom are those that belong to the couple's great ancestors. Their forgiveness (*ampon*) are sought, because they, too, can curse unfaithful daughters that may have had carnal relationship with a man before marriage.

The Pagkaja ritual is not attended by many people. Usually, only members of the celebrant family are allowed to be present. This way the solemnity of the ritual is maintained. Subsequently, a participant generally feels that he is in perfect spiritual communication with the high spirits.

After his prayers, the Imam turns to the family seated around him and warns them not to touch any of the food items until after about five or seven minutes, when the good spirits could be through with eating. The the elderly lady (*pang-gilan*) would stand up and serve everybody.

Tausog folks say that when the Pagkaja is celebrated sincerely and correctly, the spirits' fingers would be seen to leave significant marks on the cooked rice placed inside the nutshells.

As said earlier, Pagkaja is a must for every couple. However, some couples who have performed it have been reported to have observed no improvements in their conditions. Their children have remained insane, or have died anyway from serious illness and so on.

Among Pagkaja believers, these are cases that call for further and more intensified rituals connected with Pagkaja, and these are the Tiparat and the Pagdua Pataas rituals. The observance of Tiparat (washing away of mortal sins) can cleanse performers of all human guilts, sins and ignominies here on earth. The Pagdua Pataas is a more intense encounter with the highest spirits. It is practiced by inhabitants of Parang, Jolo, Lugus and Tapul Island. Informants from Tawi-Tawi province also confirmed that it is also observed by local inhabitants there. However, due to space limitations, a more detailed discussion of these two other rituals has to be made in some other occasion in the future.