

## MARANAO LITERATURE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Societies emerging from the bonds of tradition usually break out into the world of modernity with the best of their culture. As such, therefore, this emergence, while it may be painful for the society itself, is marked with symbols, these being considered unique in the whole cultural and historical perspectives of that society. These symbols are sometimes called "cultural identities," which in the period immediately after that emergence become the identifying label. In some aspects of cultural orientations, it is the logo, the sign by which for instance the art can be identified.

When the Maranao emerged from the isolation which was imposed by the accidents of history, the first evidence of advance culture was the proffering of her literature to the world outside the confines of the lake region. But it was not the whole literary tradition. It was one type which had become the symbol of that culture. The *darangen* indeed had become such symbol, the cultural identity that the Maranao could well be identified with throughout the country.

Before I discuss the portion of Maranao literature and cultural identity I would like to bring you to the Lanao Region where the literature was nurtured, and later present to you a brief survey of Maranao literature. This will give us an idea of the region and how this priceless cultural property had developed.

## Maranao Literature

Maranao literature may be classified as both oral and written. This literature remained orally transmitted antecedent to the introduction of writing, that is, the coming of Islam which introduced the Arabic system of writing, modified to suit the phonetic characteristics of the Maranao language. With the introduction of the Arabic-oriented writing system, much of these oral traditions/literatures were reduced to writing. This new tool of cultural preservation has rendered every *bayok*, every *tutul* or every episode of the *darangen* or a few of those very popular *bayoks* or *tutuls* or *darangen* episodes transmittable by means of the written word.

Another type of classification of Maranao literature would more or less show the distinction between what has been introduced and what is indigenous. That which are indigenous are identified as the *bayoks*, the *tutuls*, the folk wisdom (composed primarily of *tigum-tigum* or *antoka*, meaning riddles; the *daman* or *tubad-tubad*, meaning love lyrics, *masaalla* or proverbs) and the *darangen*. With the exception of the *salsila* (genealogy) which is relatively secular in nature, the type of literature that had been introduced into Maranao literature are the *Koran*, *salat* (prayers that are islamic in orientation), the *hadiths* (traditions about the life of the prophet Mohammad), the *khutba*, the sermon delivered during prayer-time and during special Muslim festivities, and the religious songs (rather late in introduction, and relatively new in the whole context of Islamic traditions). This latter type is classified as *religious literature*. Examples of both these types of literature are to be found in Francisco (1970), AbdMadale (1966), McAmis (1965) and NMadale (1972, 1974).

One of the most interesting developments in Maranao literature is the infusion of Islamic elements in the secular type of literary pieces. In the *tutuls*, for instance, the *Radia Indarapatra*, much of the recognizable religious elements there are Islamic in orientation. Similarly, in the narrative (*tutul*) *Maharadia Lawana*, Lawana becomes a Muslim ascetic propitiating the Archangel Gabriel, and the birth of the sons of heroes is attended by *hajis*, *imams*, and *khatibs*. The prayers, in some

cases Maranao prayers, show very much Islamic orientations and in many instances corrupted Arabic. This development is understandable, in the context of the new orientations, considering that the new faith gave meaning to the Maranao's world view, his affinity outside his own self-imposed, if inevitable, isolation for hundreds of years and which made him a brother to all men in the Muslim world. His religious identity is indeed broadened by such a transformation—from the pagan lake dweller to the Muslim faithful, believing “in just One God, and He is Allah, and Muhammad His Prophet.” This is just one level.

In spite of this religious identity, after one has purged Maranao indigenous literature of the infusion of Islam, he would still find the literature very much like the literatures of the other ethnic communities in the Philippines. The Maranao is still “Filipino,” to use a very late terminology to name the peoples of these islands, if their culture and literature were also purged of all the Christian elements. Both are united in the oneness of their orientations in the literary traditions.

Emerging from the bonds of traditions, the Maranao brings with him the best of his culture, that is, his literature. For the *locus classicus* of this literature, which is the basis of his cultural identity, I shall use the *Maharadia Lawana* and the *Darangen*. I feel diffident to include *Radia Indarapatra* because it seems just a summarization of the Magindanao *Radia Indarapatra*, which identifies the latter of his literary tradition.

While the *Maharadia Lawana* has been shown to be the Indian Ramayana in miniature and as such a recent borrowing through the Malay versions of the epic, it becomes significant because it is only among the Maranao that such a very important literature tradition is found. Nowhere else in the Philippines is it found. In my earlier studies on the influence of Indian culture in the Philippines (1964, 1971), I have not mentioned the *Maharadia Lawana*, for it was a very recent discovery. Its being found among the Maranao makes it doubly significant, in the sense that the Indian epic is in the form that it now has in Maranao, and because together with the *Darangen* to a very large extent and with the *Radia Indarapatra* to a lesser extent, it belongs to the classical period of Maranao literature.

To understand the *Maharadia Lawana* in the whole context of its presence in the Philippine literature tradition, or in more specific terms, in Maranao literary tradition, let us look at it in terms of the influence of the Rama story in the literatures of Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia. It has been also the source of much aesthetic inspiration, apart from the inspiration it has created in literature. Its influence upon the art of the region is too famous to need any reference here just as its pervasive spirit has permeated human imagination among the peoples of Southeast Asia.

In Malay literature, the Rama story is the main theme of the famous *Hikayat Seri Rama* and the *Hikayat Majaraja Ravana*. It is the source, too, of a fairy tale from central Malaya. In Thai literature, it is known as *Ramakien*, which is not only the basis of Thai art; it is also the theme of Thai dance/drama and music. Legends of undoubtedly *Ramayana* origin are found in Annam (North Vietnam) as well as in Cambodia. There are also references to the Rama story in Laotian literature and life.

The Rama story as seen in the *Maharadia Lawana* is a process of miniaturization par excellence. In it the major episodes of the original Rama story are found, e.g., the winning of Sita, the abduction of Sita, the search for Sita and the return of Sita. The birth and boyhood of Rama and his brother, Laksamana, are only implied in the story. The later episodes in the Rama story, e.g., the banishment of Sita after Rama had been told that he could not keep his wife for having been in the home of his rival, Ravana, and the return of Sita to her mother earth (her name Sita meaning furrow, for she was found in the furrow by her adoptive father), are not found in the Maranao story. (For more details of this work and the discussions relative to this problem and other points relevant to the development of the story in Maranao literature, see Francisco's work on the piece [1969].)

The crowning point of Maranao cultural identity lies in the *Darangen*. Apart from the story it presents in many episodic cantos (18 songs so far collected and collated, translated, and soon to be analyzed), it contains a body of traditions which has functioned in the past

and still functions in the present as a bond that stabilizes Maranao society even through the turmoils that it had undergone in its history. It served as a "bible" on which they anchored their faith in their own continuity, for it was and still is respected and recognized as a record of what they call in Maranao language, *andang sa muna*, meaning the ways of the ancestors. At present it stands side by side with the Kor'an as the rock foundation of their culture. Before the introduction of Islam, hence the *Kor'an*, it was the primary source of wisdom, an article of faith which validated all actions of the society. In other words, it functions as a social control. At the same time it is a record of all that is to be emulated by the people. Again, the Maranao call it *anunen a rawaten*, meaning that which is to be introduced. However, it should not be construed that when the *Kor'an* was introduced as the foundation of their new faith, the *Darangen* and the other *anunen a rawaten* no longer formed the source of wisdom and emulation. Rather they function as they were for they are still *andang sa muna*. In more ways than one the *Kor'an* lent further vitality to these charters of faith, for it was considered both *anunen a rawaten* and *andang sa muna*.

As an epic literature, apart from being the longest of all folk epics in the Philippines, the *Darangen* is one that inspires the listener, nay even the narrator, for the narrator himself internalizes the characters of the main and lesser dramatis personae. On the part of the listener, he seems to be transposed into the characters of the epic as he visualizes them in their heroic exploits. To the men, they feel like Bantugen the hero or his brothers in their constant pursuit of love and battle, while the women become Paramata Lawanen or Paramata Gandingan as they are brought into the realms of romance and life with their heroic loved ones. Heroic deeds like rescuing a whole kingdom singlehandedly from being devastated in the hands of superior enemies, visualized as representatives of evil, as well as rescuing their heroines from abduction by fierce rivals are stock events in the epic, which every Maranao likes to listen to during evenings after a day's work in the fields, or at the loom, or at the forge, or after coming from his itinerant work as a merchantman. When at gathering of all oc-

casions, the main fare of stories is the many episodes of the epic, whether or not they are narrated chronologically. Sometimes the famous episodes of the abduction of Paramata Lawanen is narrated with all the women in the audience internalizing all the feelings of the unfortunate woman, and one can feel the atmosphere of apprehension and concern for the safety of the heroine, one can see their faces all signs of sadness at the fate of the unfortunate Lawanen, but later on signs of relief and a smile appear in their faces as the heroine is rescued by her hero, whose exploits are transcended into the lives of the Maranao men among the audience.

To give an idea of the entire *Darangen*, as we now have it in our records, I would like to present a brief description/synopsis of each episode or song. Song I. *Diwatanda o Gibon* (the reign of D.G.). This song tells of D.G., who first ruled Bembaran as its founder. Before he passed away, he advised his sons on how to rule effectively. The song presents also the genealogy of the first four sultans of Lanao. Song II. *Sandalinaian Sirig* (When Bantugen abducted S.S.). Paramata Bantugen charmed the princess S.S. to become his wife. The whole *lamin* (penthouse) of the princess was miraculously transferred to another kingdom without her knowledge. Song III. *Minirigi A Rogong* (The Loves and Adventures of Prince Lumna). This is a sequel of the song, *Kaplumna*, which deals on how Bantugen had instructed Lumna not to leave their kingdom while he B. was away. He did not wish to leave Lumna alone for fear that the people of Kadaraan, enemies of Bembaran, would launch an attack. His fears were correct. Thus, a *nori* bird was sent to notify Bantugen of the impending attack. B. returned to dispatch the enemies forthwith.

Song IV. *Kaplumbaioan Lena* (The Abduction of Princess Minoiod a Damoao). Princess M.D., one of B's sweethearts was abducted by another hero. She was rescued, and her tormentors punished. Song V. *Paramata Gandingan* (the Abduction of Princess P.G.). There were festivities in Bogabong a Komara. Princess P.G. was dressed for the occasion when the *diwata* from Bembaran arrived. Immediately there was darkness, which was pierced intermittently by lightning.

When these stopped she found herself sitting on a rock, *lakongan tomianong*. Bantugen, ever on his quest for adventure, saw her. He brought her to Bembaran and presented her to his father for marriage. His consent was not given. Thus, B. again left on his journeys and adventures. Song VI. *Kambabalaian Anonen (B. courts Walain a Maginar)*. This is part I of the Song *Kapnatangkopan a Ragat*. Inaionan o Kampong, "Master of the Camp," knew that B. was away with a princess, Walain a Maginar of Babalaian Anonen. Upon knowing where B. went, he ordered all the datu of the kingdom Bembaran to refrain from talking with B. when he returned.

Song VII. *Kapminangoao a Rogong* (The adventures of P.B. in Minangoao a Rogong). The hero, B., dreamt of a beautiful princess, Alongan Labimombao of Minangoao a Rogong, who attended the festivity in Bembaran. In his dream, he did not allow her to leave; the princess also had a similar dream. Bantugen, on waking up called the *diwata* to bring him to the princess' kingdom. There, he disguised himself as a black man, *a madem*, and befriended Daridai Mairindo. D.M., son of the datu of the kingdom, later joined his father in battle, leaving Bantugen in his form as the *madem* to defend the kingdom from the invaders. This song does not seem to have an ending. It contains about 3,877 lines.

Song VIII. *Kaplumna* (Prince L.'s marriage proposal in behalf of his father B.). Lumna proposed marriage of his father with the daughter of the sultan, who demanded proof of his (L.) seriousness. L. proved his sincerity by turning the whole kingdom into gold. Song IX. *Kiaprawa a ki paramat a Lawanen* (The Abduction of Princess Lawanen). The song is the most popular in the entire *Darangen*. It tells of the abduction of the princess of the realm, and whose rescue was most devastating in the whole perspective of the epic. It is almost in the dimensions of the abduction of Sita in the Rama Story, and her being searched for the most pathetic on the part of the hero. Song X. *Kailid a Dempas* (A treatise on the war dance, *sagayan*). This song describes the techniques of combat — the ways of holding the *kampilan*, the *klong* and the different movements in sword fight. This song is a sort of a treatise

on the *sagayan* war dance.

Song XI. *Kangginasa-an a Orai* (B. divorces G.O.). In the fit of jealousy, B. divorced G.O. His jealous feeling stemmed from seeing his daughter wearing a necklace, which G.O. explained to belong to her mother. B. refused to believe G.O.'s explanations. Song XII. *Kapagondoga* (Misunderstanding). This song deals with misunderstanding, its causes and its solutions. Bantugen, through his recollections, explained why he divorced his wives. This song is mostly read by those who have had sweethearts and wives. Song XIII. *Kapranona* (Retrospect). The hero, when alone, would sit on the rock, *Lakongan Tomianong*. He would gaze at the horizon and reminisce over his love life. Song XIV. *Kasonggiringan a Dinar* (Misunderstanding between Bantugen and Parama ta Minoiod). P. Minoiod, B's wife, was not accepted by the Inaionan o Kampong, the hero's father. A misunderstanding ensued between B. and M., which led the former to leave the kingdom, thereby inducing Mindalano sa Tonong to attack Bembaran. Daridai Mairindo, the small boy, tried to defend the kingdom, but failed. Hence, the princess sent the *nori* bird to inform B., who forthwith returned and defeated the enemy.

Song XV. *Kapengensaian a Rogong* (The War of Misoiao). This is about war. It deals with the privations of Misoiao in defeat and in triumph, particularly in his wars against his enemies, Ikadara-nen.

Song XVI. *Kianggobat i Misoiao* (Misoiao declares war against all kingdoms). Misoiao, a young prince, declared war against all kingdoms to test his prowess in battle. He plundered all the kingdoms he conquered, sowing murder and death. It was only Bantugen who subdued him; he later recognized Bantugen to be his father.

Song XVII. *Natangkopan a Ragat* (The death of B. in the land between the seas). This is the second part of Kambabalaian Anonen. The datu ordered all the people of Bembaran to refrain from talking with B. when he arrived. B. was thus surprised and later horrified at the reception he received from his own people. He left Bembaran in sorrow and died in another kingdom. His soul was retrieved by Madali from heaven, and Bantugen came to life again. This song brings us to the most interesting scene — full of pathos and love — it is the scene when

Bantugen's wives and sweethearts gather to pay their last respects to him whom they loved. They may have disliked each other, but in the event of extreme sorrow, everyone came to share that sad event, only to rejoice at the revival of their hero. Song XVIII. *Darangen a Rinandang* (The Travels of Prince Rinandang). The first part of this song is a *salsila* (genealogy) of all the characters of the *Darangen* and traces them back to *Radia Indarapatra*. This is the reason for considering the two literary pieces to be related, with *R.I.* much older than the *Darangen*. The second part relates the travels of Princes Bantugen, Madali and Rinandang to *Kiranda a Langit*. This kingdom is almost equal to the splendor of Bembaran, the setting of the epic. These princes came to see the princess of unequal beauty and extreme charm.

The sequence as shown in the above brief descriptions of the songs does not necessarily give us the actual sequence as they should be related. Rather, it is arbitrary since the work is yet to be put into final form.

The brief synopsis of the epic shows the magnitude of the work that shall be done in the way of collection, editing, and analysis of the piece. With these, the preparation of the lexicon of archaic/classical Maranao as seen in the *Darangen* forms part of the work. But in the analysis of the epic, in the context of its ethnographic dimensions, its relations with extraneous literary traditions, the linguistic study is the most important. The ethnography of the Maranao according to the epic is most important, considering that we would like to see Maranao society in ancient times. It is only through the epic that perhaps the social, kinship, political and economic structures of the Maranao can be seen.

### Cultural Identity

The logo by which the Maranao has been identified has become almost a national symbol. This is the sarimanok, which became a symbol of an international happening in the Philippines. As such, therefore, it carried the country's image of artistry. At this point, such a

local symbol has become a national symbol of unique art.

In the field of literature, the Maranao has become almost, if not entirely, identified with its *Darangen*. As the literary piece becomes available in its entirety as a work of art, it becomes more and more inevitable that it shall be equated with the people and culture that produced it. The magnitude of its bulk as a literary piece makes it more awesome to the reader; the themes, the romance that are exhibited throughout the length of the piece make it a formidable reading matter.

As the Maranao finally joins many other societies along the road to modernization, he shall certainly lose some of his cultural identities, those which he can easily shed, those which are easily absorbed into the full stream of uniformity, which he shall share with equal fervor with other communities undergoing change. It is in this situation where perhaps a new cultural identity may be developed among these communities, the Maranao not excluded.

However, the Maranao shall remain a Maranao for as long as he keeps the most important and most profound of his cultural heritage. This heritage, the basis of his cultural identity, is his charter for survival in the world of materialism which to a large extent becomes dominant in his life. This charter is the record of his survival over the centuries through which he has journeyed to the present, without which he could not have survived the onslaught of the pressure of change. This charter, the *Darangen*, is the record of the ways of the ancestors, *andang sa muna* as he calls it; a record that is the fountainhead of what is to be emulated, the *anunen a rawaten*, which we translate in another language as the height of emulation. Indeed, as the fountainhead of emulation it becomes the crowning point of his cultural identity. It is by this that he lives; and by his Maranaoness is preserved, without having to remain in cultural isolation in the face of the continuing onslaught of modernization. The *Darangen* is his staff in the wilderness of modern living. His cultural identity is held intact, preserved yet living!

Up to this point, we have seen Maranao literature only in the context of Maranao society. But as the *Darangen* transcends the barriers of

ethnicity, it becomes identified with the greater national literary tradition. In turn, it is also identified with these ethnic traditions. While these may be specifically identified as the symbols of their existence as individual societies, these are collectively the fundamental symbol of identity of the greater society, the national society.

To use the Indonesian phrase, *bhinneka tunggal eka*, meaning "united as one between and among many" or more rhetorically "unity in diversity," certainly the *Darangen* is one among the many diverse traditions which define the single unity of Philippine national literary cultural identity. To look at the Maranao *darangen* on the broader perspective of the homogeneity of Philippine culture is to look at it in terms only of this one aspect of culture. In other words, the *darangen* over a larger view constitutes one of the most important foundations upon which the unique character of Philippine national identity rests.

To expand this idea further, let us explore the broader features of this cultural identity in the folk-religious belief systems, customs and traditions, social organization and kinship structures. In an overview, these seem to be diverse in the context of the various Philippine ethnic societies. But on the most fundamental understanding of these, no one among these societies can claim uniqueness of its systems from the other; rather they are one of many varieties.

Moreover, these folk systems, and social and kinship structures, are also seen in the context of literature, which again ramify into the language and in the systems of writing which in ancient times the early Filipinos might have used as tools of communication. For the languages of the Philippines, albeit diverse in many significant ways, show homogeneity in the fundamental aspects of language, i.e., syntax and grammar, if not in vocabulary. Certainly these are intelligible over a large geographic area. The scripts in which both language and literature have been written doubtless were of the same paleographic tradition and, therefore, these bring us back to the transcendental nature of cultural traits. If at this stage of the history of the Philippines, the *darangen* is no longer written in a script that perhaps might have disappeared on account of the introduction of a new system, the *kirim*, the modi-

fied Arabic script to suit the phonology of Maranao, it still transcends all the diversities that may have been introduced over the centuries.

It rises above the confines of the Maranao locale; in spite of the forbidding barriers that the mountains around the lake area may have formed, through the many un-understandable means by which it may find its way outside these barriers, the *Darangen* shall form if it has not already become, part of that identity with the greater, and universal literature by which the Philippines shall be known. To give a more rhetorical analogy, the waters of the Lake confined by the highlands around seek their unity with the Universal Water through the intricate gullies and pathways, which are unified in and known as the Agus River. And as the waters return to the Lake by way of the rain to replenish it, the *Darangen* returns again and again to the Maranao in the course of its being enriched through its journey along the National Literary Highways.

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