

KASHAWING: RICE RITUAL OF THE MARANAOS

Nagasura T. Madale

The Maranaos, Muslims of southern Philippines, still practice today rituals that may be considered un-Islamic. These rituals are actually vestiges of pre-Islamic times, when epic heroes reigned supreme.

One of these rituals is the **kashawing**¹ or the rice ritual which a Maranao farmer performs before he clears the field.

According to informants, the **kashawing** dates back to the time of Radia Indarapatra, the Maranao epic hero, who married Potri Rainalaut, a **karibang** (water nymph). Of this union were born two children. One child, considered the **apo** (ancestor) of the Maranaos, was named Nomonao as Ragirai and was visible or seen. The other child, considered the **apo** of all **tonong**² was called Aia Linamon ko Ig.³ He was invisible and unseen. The two brothers forged a pact which set thus that before a Maranao farmer clears his field, he must call for the **tonong** he considers his benefactor. In return, the **tonong** will protect the Maranao's crops from pests and other destructive animals, especially unseen creatures. The rice ritual is thus essentially a renewal of the covenant between the two **apos** and serves to strengthen the ties between the Maranao and the **tonongs** that share a common ancestry.

The **kashawing** is the first of nine rituals to be performed during the rice planting season. It gives the farmer hope for a bountiful harvest. If the harvest turns out to be poor, it is interpreted to be due to the poor performance of the ritual or to the **tonong's** displeasure at the offering.

Today there are only a few places around Lake Lanao where the **kashawing** is still practiced. The town of Taraka³ is one of them.

Midway between Taraka river and Lake Lanao lies the traditional ritual site. In this site, there used to be a **nonok** (balete) tree, believed to be the abode of the **tonong**.

Before a farmer starts out for the ritual, he prepares a **lipet** — which heads of families must prepare in accordance to tradition. A **lipet** (literally, “to wrap”) is the offering of food — rice, vegetables, fish and cakes — wrapped in banana leaves for the **tonong**.

In the Taraka rice ritual, three men stood on the ricefield dike (**tambak**). The first man, an elderly one, was the gong-beater, who before sunrise had started to beat the gong called **pong** to assemble the farmer-participants of the ritual. The gong was also sounded to signal the start of the ritual. The second man, about as old as the first man, carried a rolled mat, a **dempas**,⁴ while the third man bore a red flag flown on a pole about four fathoms long. The red flag (**dopo a mariaga**) was about a square yard in size. It symbolizes the living and seen beings; in particular, the Maranaos.

When the farmers were gathered, the flag bearer planted the red flag at the ritual site while the second man spread the mat near it, saying:

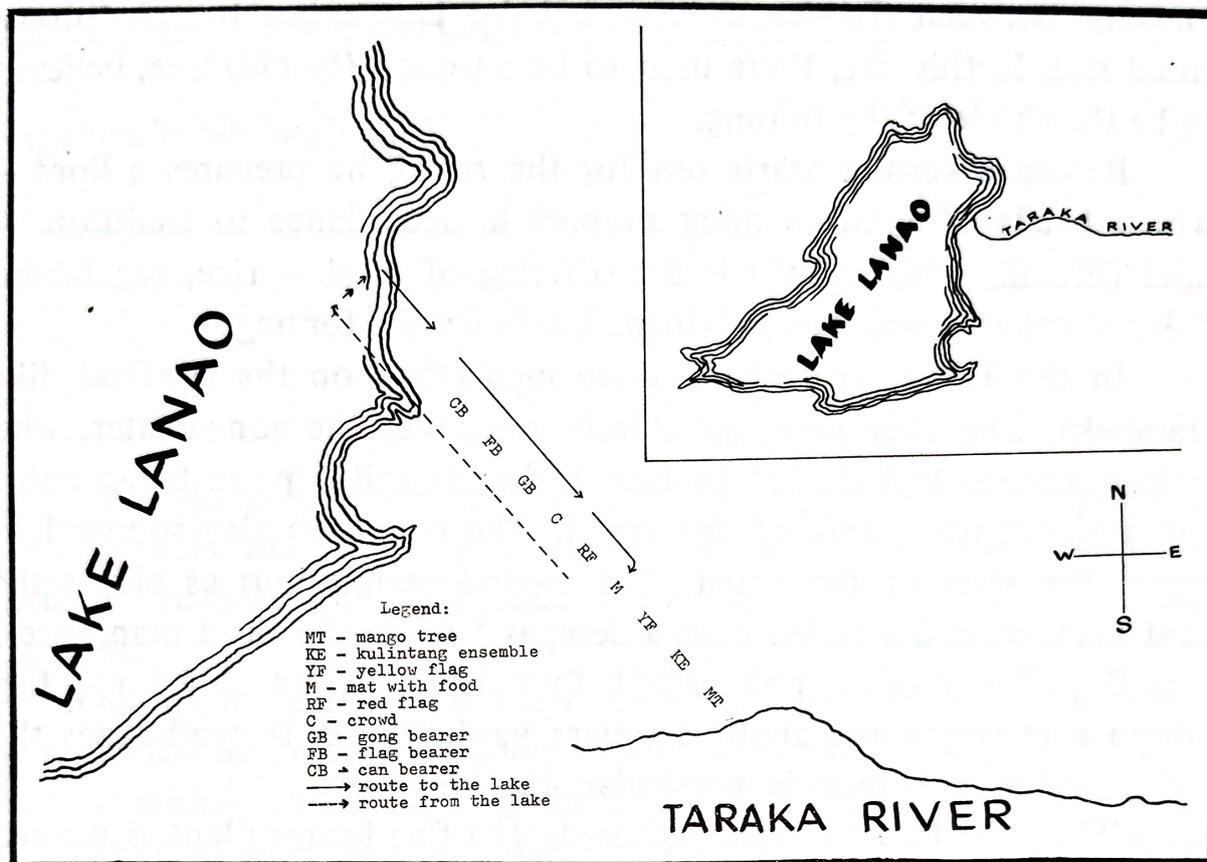
*Kati-i so ipegana ami rekano a manga apo ami. Pepegipata kami nio go so manga wata ami. Go kami nio pepenendegi sa riski.*⁵

(Here is the food that your descendants are offering you. Safeguard us and our children from illness. Bring us good fortunes.)

One by one, the farmers placed their **lipets** on the mat and very softly said that they had come to offer food to the **tonong** to assure a bountiful harvest.

A can-bearer, a gong-bearer and a flag-bearer led a crowd composed mostly of farmers and children to the lake. In the Taraka ritual, the can-bearer held an aluminum can about four inches in circumference and eight inches high. A yellow-green cloth, about one and a half feet long, hangs from the can. The significance of the use of aluminum was not explained.

The can-bearer waded in the lake and waved the yellow-green cloth — a gesture of invitation for all the **tonong** of the lake to come to the ritual. He intoned, “**aodobillahi . . . ashado anna . . .**,” a prelude to the invitation to the ritual:



Praises to Allah! Pray that we will not commit sin in invoking the *tonong* of the lake. He created the *tonong* who are invoked when the farmer clears the field. We wish to invite *apo* Taraka, his children and children's children; *apo* Babowa, *apo* Mipesandalan of Masiu, his descendants from here to Maguindanao and Sulu; the *tonong* of the Four Sultanates of Lanao. All the *tonong* of Masiu we wish to invite today, Allah willing.

Come today, Saturday, we will entertain you. The *tonong* of Lembak a Basak, *apo* Mipela-as, *apo* Mimbalantan, *apo* Mipeker, *apo* Mipenga, *apo* Tolodan,⁶ *apo* Mikolambo, *apo* Mitorogan, *apo* Kalogologod, *apo* Angangkat, and all of you, come to the festivity⁷ today. Come to the ricefields. Your descendants will serve you food and entertain you. Pray to Allah that all farmers will have a bountiful harvest. Safeguard our crops from all calamities. Safeguard all the populace of Balindong from illness and other calamities. May all of us be assured of a good harvest, good health and a prosperous life so that we can invoke you anytime, like today. Give us signs of your sincerity to help us reap a good harvest.

What we are doing is a fulfillment of the agreement made between our *apo* and your *apo* in the past; that is, whenever we clear the field, you are invoked. We are inviting you all to come to the festivities.

We are calling all the *tonong* of the Four Sultanates of Lanao: Bayabao, Masiu, Unayan and Balo-i. All of you must come: your in-laws and children's children; the descendants of the Sultan of Masiu, the Cabugatan of Masiu, as well as the *lokes*⁸ of Balindong. All of us are inviting you to come today. Pray to Allah that all farmers will have a good harvest. Safeguard us from sickness and other calamities. There is Datu Ada fetching water and all of you must come. There is a seaweed which will be your boat. Ride on it and come with us. All of you must come with us now.⁹

The can bearer then filled the can with water and seaweed (*linamon*). The water in the can symbolizes the lake, home of the *tonong*. The fetching of the water therefore is a symbolic invitation to the *tonong* to come to the ritual. The seaweed, as said in the recitation, is used as a boat (*awang*) of the *tonong*.

Meanwhile, a person was asked to return ahead of the group so he could unwrap the *lipet*. The can-bearer, the gong-bearer and flag-bearer, that carried a yellow flag, in that order led back the crowd to the ricefield, the ritual site. As they returned, nobody was allowed to cross the can-bearer's path because the *tonong* were now believed to be with the group. According to belief, if a person accidentally bumps against the *tonong*, he would get sick. He might even die if he would not give an offering to appease them.

When the group reached the ricefield, the flag bearer planted the yellow flag (*dopo a binaning*)¹⁰ near the mat. Because the yellow flag symbolizes the dead and unseen beings — the *tonong*, the *apo*, etc., the planting of the yellow flag indicated the *tonong* from the lake had arrived. The yellow flag was bigger than the red flag. It was about two square yards and was flown on a pole about four fathoms long.

The red and yellow flags near the mat signified the reunion of the Maranaos and the *tonong*, as well as the renewal of the ancient agreement between the *apo* of the Maranaos and the *apo* of the *tonong*. The can-bearer then invited the *tonong* to partake of the food offering:

Pray to Allah that we will not commit sin for invoking the *tonong* and for the things we say here. He created all *tonong* and gave them power. Pray to Allah that our offering will be materialized.

Let us call *apo* Babowa, *apo* Mipesandalan of Masiu, *apo* Taraka, who made the river Taraka and who later became a *tonong*, *apo* Mipela-as. *apo* Bawa, *apo* Mimbalantan, *apo* Mipeker, *apo* Mipenga and *apo* Mikolambo. Here is the food prepared for you by your descendants. *Apo* Kalogo-logod, *apo* Angangkat, *apo* Radia Keter and *apo* Bekong,¹¹ all of us are inviting you all to partake of the food.

We are calling you, *tonong* of Masiu, and all *tonong* of the Four Sultanates of Lanao, as well as the in-laws of the *tonong* of Masiu. We are inviting you today, Saturday, and offering you the food prepared by your descendants. In return, we ask you to pray to Allah so that all farmers will have a bountiful harvest. May the fishermen have a bountiful catch. Give blessings to all your descendants and the farmers. We ask you to pray to Allah so that our crops will be safe from rats, worms and others.¹²

After he said the invitation, the can-bearer sprinkled the **lipet** with water — signifying that the **tonong** have already partaken of the food offering. He soon enjoined the crowd to eat the food which is considered medicinal. The water used in the ritual is also considered medicinal.

After everybody had eaten, the **kolintang** was played. The **kolintang** is a percussion instrument that consists of eight graduated and bossed brass gongs which are horizontally laid on a wooden frame. The **kolintang** music was accented by the rhythmic beating of a **debaken** (drum) and a small gong called **babendir**. The playing of the **kolintang** signalled the end of the ritual.

In the past, the informants said, there were elaborate post-ritual festivities held at the mouth of Taraka river. For instance, a carabao battle match was held. A banca race was also held. Its winner was awarded a carabao leg by the Sultan and the Cabugatan of Masiu. Food was served to the spectators and those who attended the ritual.

Today these post-ritual festivities are no longer held. This is understandable. The **ulamas** (religious leaders) consider the **kashawing** un-Islamic. Perhaps because of the ritual's un-Islamic taint, the **kashawing** in Taraka was not well attended. Only some 90 persons came for the ritual.

Still, the **kashawing** is regularly performed during planting seasons. And the second ritual — the **kategek** or choosing the right seedlings — was scheduled to be held four days after the **kashawing**.

NAGASURA T. MADALE is officer-in-charge of the History Department, Mindanao State University in Marawi City. He obtained his master's degree in Asian Studies (1973) at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City.

NOTES

1. Explanations on the ritual were drawn primarily from Maranao informants. These were given before and after the ritual was observed by the author in barrio Mangayao, Taraka, Lanao del Sur in March 1972. The author, together with Usopay Cadar, Samuel Briones and Marty Valilla of Mindanao State University, observed and participated in the ritual. There was no prepared questionnaire but the author had a general conceptual framework on which he based questions to elicit more information.

2. The **tonong** are non-hostile spirits, benefactors that Maranaos invoke from time to time — to ensure a bountiful harvest or catch, to ensure safe crossing, or in times of illness or crises.

Despite Islamization, many Maranaos keep their belief on the **tonong** which is of pre-Islamic origin. In some houses are usually found a **lamin**, a box where food offering for the **tonong** is placed at dusk. The **lamin** is wrapped in plain yellow cloth and is hung on roof beams. In other cases, a **lamin** is placed only during crises, or when a member of the family is ill.

Each **tonong** has a specific function to perform.

For example, **apo** Babowa, the ancestor of mothers, is invoked during baptism (**kaganat sa tantai**). **Apo** Bawa, the ancestor of fishes, is invoked by fishermen to ensure a bountiful catch.

The **tonong** are said to be playful at times. An anecdote tells of a fisherman, who without knowing it, caught an **Apo a bawa** and cooked it. When he and his wife were ready to eat it, they found to their amazement the pot empty. It was only later when he discovered that he had actually caught a **tonong**, not a fish.

In contrast to the **tonong**, there are also destructive and hostile spirits called **islam a din**.

3. Literal: water lily of the Lake Lanao.

4. Taraka is peopled mostly by farmers who are devout Muslims. It derived its name from an **apo**, Taraka, who later became a **tonong**. He is among those invoked in the **kashawing**.

5. A **dempas** is a large mat woven of local straw called **tikeg**.

6. From the author's interview with Hadji Carim Badio in Taraka, March 4, 1972.

7. **Apo** with golden scales and golden sari.

8. Festivity in Maranao is called **kalilang**. **Kalilang** also means "offering." Hence, in the rice ritual, the invitation to the **kalilang** means both an invitation to the festivity and to the offering.

9. It refers to the eight heads of families who constitute the Council of Elders, an advisory group of the sultan.

10. The original text of the recitation is in Maranao which the author translated into English.

11. It is interesting to note that red and yellow flags symbolize Maranao nobility. It may be because both the seen beings (the Maranaos) and the unseen beings (the **tonong**) traces their ancestry to a "noble", Radia Indaraptra. In the present Maranao society, only the datu class has the exclusive right to use and display the yellow color which represents "nobility".

12. As explained in fn. No. 2, each **tonong**, has a specific function to perform. This is why the **pendarpa-an** (medium) in invoking them is very careful not to omit any name. If the **tonong** are displeased, crops might be infested with rats or destroyed by a typhoon.

13. From the author's field notes. The invitation was said in Maranao. The translation is the author's.