

## Religious Rituals of the Mamanuas of Agusan del Norte

The Mamanuas are an ethnic group who live in several places of Agusan del Norte and Surigao. Generally, they are dark with kinky hair much like the Aetas in Panay or Zambales. They have their own customs and traditions. They have a system of religious beliefs around which they have built certain practices and rituals. This short essay will describe some of their rituals, particular those that express their gratitude for blessings received from their god and spirits.

One very old thanksgiving ritual is known as the *pagsangkalan*. For several months, the Mamanuas hunt wild pigs and store their meat in a *sag-ob* (bamboo internode). When they have stored enough, they mix the meat with *unaw* (a kind of despoisoned root) and cook it. While the food is being cooked, the Mamanuas dance around and create much noise. The term they give to the dance is *binanguzo*. The dance involves stooping down, with the performers swaying their heads successively from left to right. After the dance, a *tungkayan* wood, about four meters in length, is beaten with pieces of sticks. The headman of the village or the *baylan* (native priest) leads a thanksgiving prayer for *Tahaw* (the Supreme God). Then the feast commences. Wild barks of the *sarawag* tree are used as food containers from which everybody can eat together.

Another old religious ritual is known as *garong*, which is the feast of honey. This is done once a year, anytime as soon as the flowers in the forest are in full bloom. This is a group activity during which the Mamanuas gather *seg-ed* (honey) for several weeks and place them in long bamboo internodes. After collecting a substantial amount of honey, they start the festivity. The *baylan* leads a prayer to thank their god for having made the flowers bloom so that the bees can sip nectars and produce honey. The priest kindles the sap from the *parina* tree over charcoal in a coconut shell, after which the drinking of the honey follows. Small cut bamboos serve as glasses. Each Mamanua drinks two or more glasses of honey. For some, the quantity is enough to make them feel warm and drunk. Then they relieve themselves by taking a quick dip in a nearby river. Merriment prevails during the period.

The *kahimunan* or full moon ceremony is another thanksgiving activity. This ritual is performed to fulfill a promise of thanksgiving for bounties received or sickness healed. The ceremony generally requires a substantial amount of food, since relatives and friends from nearby places are expected to attend the event. The *kahimunan* is usually done during full moon when a big pig is offered. A pig is tied in a structure made of round timbers and beside it is a heart-shaped structure of palms where the *buyo*, cut into several pieces, and wine, in small containers, are placed. After some chanting by the *sukdan* (performers), seven plates of uncooked rice decorated with *buyo* fruits on top, are offered. Dancing follows until late in the evening.

On the following morning, a pig is killed with a spear and the blood is drunk by the performers, if it is not directly sucked from the animal. Then the formal offering, which is done with a dance by the performers, follows. The offering begins with seven plates of uncooked rice with cooked sliced meat on top without salt and spices. This is followed by the pig's skin which is uncooked and stretched every now and then, the image of a crocodile from the pig's skin, *buyo* fruits, and pig's blood. The blood is placed on the palms of the spectators as a symbol of rebirth.

Then the uncooked head and feet of the pig are carried around seven times. Lastly, water is sprinkled to the spectators to cleanse them from evil spirits. After these ceremonies, a banquet follows.

During the *kahimuan*, salt is never used. It is always kept away. One informant said that there was one occasion, a long time ago, when it was her task to carry the salt more than a kilometer away from the place of the ceremony. She did this because when the Mamanuas had a *kahimuan* once and used salt, lightning struck her house and set it on fire.