

Early Philippine Literature

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- The early inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago had a native alphabet or syllabary which among the Tagalogs was called *baybayin*, an inscription akin to Sanskrit.
- It was through the *baybayin* that literary forms such as songs, riddles and proverbs, lyric and short poems as well as parts of epic poems were written.
- The bulk of these early literature however was just passed on through oral recitation and incantation and were transcribed into the Roman alphabet only centuries later by Spanish chroniclers and other scholars.
- It is believed that replacement of the *baybayin* by the Roman alphabet must have obliterated a significant aspect of indigenous Philippine literature.

- Among the early forms, it is the *awit* or the song that has endured. Most ethnolinguistic communities remember the native tunes and lyrics of their songs.
- Fathers Chirino and Colin noted that among the Tagalogs, there were some 16 song forms for various occasions. Among these are the ***uyayi*** or ***hele***, a lullaby for putting a child to sleep; the ***soliranin*** is a song for travelers while the ***talindaw*** is the seafarers song; the ***kumintang*** is a war song; the ***maluway*** is a song for collective labor while the ***kundiman*** is a melancholic love song.
- The ***dalit***, is a song-ritual usually sung to the rhythm of dance. The ***panambitan*** is a courtship song while the ***pamanhikan*** is a song-ritual of the would-be bridegroom to his would-be bride as he asks permission to marry her. The ***subli*** is another dance-ritual song of courtship and marriage.

- In the north, among the Ilocanos, the more popular song forms are the **dallot** and the **duayya**, both love songs, and the **dung-aw** which is a dirge or a wake song.
- The Bontoc of Mountain Province have the **bagbagto**, a song ritual for harvest, while the Ivatan up in the Batanes islands have three most popular folk song forms: the **laji**, the **kanta** and the **kalusan**.
- The **laji** is a lyric rendition of a song usually sung after a day's work when people gather together in their houses to chat and drink the native wine, palek and just find time to be merry. Dr. Florentino Hornedo's research of the Ivatan **laji** yielded this following sample :

• **MAPAW AKO NA KANU NAPNU DU VAKAG A
DINAHURIS** (*Sung by informant Juana Cataluna*)

*Mapaw ako na kanu napnu nu vakag
a nidutdut mo a dinahuri a machipaywayam
du nadpun a kadaisa mo a minaypanananud
nu mudag a inawa, inawa nu vatutuk,
paychalugisugitan nu pinatapatan
a vuhung nu tadina, a vuhung nu tadina;
nia pachiduwangi chu a nanaryo nu lasa
a inawa ko nu asi nu tugitngi
niladang ko nu mutin, ina nikarusan ko nu
pinsuan a tavayay duka di chu dulivan
ya mapaytanung sa huvid du putuhan
a nauri su madinay duyu kahenaken*

- **I HAVE BECOME LIGHTER**

I have become lighter than a basket
of beaten cotton in the presence
of so many relatives all heavily adorned
with double necklaces of gold and precious beads;
heavy earrings of gold hung
like leaves upon their ears;
but I sit in their midst with a necklace of lasa seeds
interspersed with the humble seed of the tugitugi
and cheap green beads of glass, adorned with a cross
made of squash shell because I know not
how to tie properly a string around my neck,
which is the proper and decorous thing for a young
woman

- Tagalog riddles are called ***bugtong***, while the Ilocanos call these ***burburtia***. Usually, riddles are made to rhyme and utilize the ***talinghaga***, a form of metaphor whose signification eventually conveys the meaning of the answer to the riddle. Riddles such as these for instance illustrate the use of the ***talinghaga***:

Hindi hari, hindi pari

Ang damit ay sari-sari

(Sagot: sampayan)

May puno, walang bunga

May dahon, walang sanga

(Sagot: sandok)

Neither king nor priest>

But has a variety of clothes

(Answer: clothesline)

It is a tree trunk but is without fruit

It has leaves but has no branches

(Answer: ladle)

Sometimes, the riddles are relayed through familiar indigenous forms of poetry such as the ***ambahan***, which is a monorhyming heptasyllabic poem attributed to the Hanunuu-Mangyan ethnic group in Mindoro. Apart from relaying riddles, *ambahans* are also used to narrate common folk experiences. Father Antoon Postma has collected a number of these *ambahans*, an example of which would be the following:

Ako mana manrigsan

I would like to take a bath

sa may panayo pinggan

scoop the water with a plate

sa may tupas balian

wash the hair with lemon juice;

ako ud nakarigsan

but I could not take a bath,

inambing bahayawan

because the river is dammed

sinag-uli batangan

with a lot of sturdy trunks

A poetic form similar to the *ambahan* is the *tanaga*. Unlike the *ambahan* whose length is indefinite, the *tanaga* is a compact seven-syllable quatrain. Poets test their skills at rhyme, meter and metaphor through the *tanaga* because not only is it rhymed and measured but also exacts skillful use of words to create a puzzle that demands some kind of an answer. Notice how this is used in the following

Katitibay ka, tulos
Sakaling datnang agos,
Ako'y mumunting lumot,
Sa iyo'y pupulupot

You may stand sturdy
But when the waters flow >
I, the humble moss
Can strangle you.

Mataas man ang bundok
>Pantay man sa bakod
Yamang mapagtaluktok
Sa pantay rin aanod.

The mountain may be high
It may reach the sky
Riches greedily accumulated
Will eventually be leveled

Tagalog proverbs are called ***salawikain*** or ***sawikain*** while they are termed ***sarsarita*** in Iloko. Like most proverbs the world over, Philippine proverbs contain sayings which prescribes norms, imparts a lesson or simply reflects standard norms, traditions and beliefs in the community. Professor Damiana Eugenio classifies Philippine proverbs into six groups according to subject matter. These are

1. proverbs expressing a general attitude towards life and the laws that govern life;
2. ethical proverbs recommending certain virtues and condemning certain vices;
3. proverbs expressing a system of values;
4. proverbs expressing general truths and observations about life and human nature;
5. humorous proverbs and
6. miscellaneous proverbs.

From her study, Eugenio observes that it is possible to formulate a fairly comprehensive philosophy of life of the Filipino. The following proverb for instance, which is one of the most popular, signifies the importance of looking back at one's roots and origins. In a way, this proverb also echoes the Filipino value of "*utang na loob*" or one's debt of gratitude to those who have contributed to his or her success.

Ang hindi lumilingon sa pinanggalingan	<i>A person who does not remember where he/she came from</i>
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Hindi makararating sa paroroonan	<i>Will never reach his/her destination</i>
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The most exciting poetic as well as narrative forms of early Philippine literature however are the Philippine epics or ethno-epics as critics and anthropologists call them. Almost all the major ethnic groups in the country have an epic that is chanted in a variety of rituals. Because chanting is the mode by which these epics have been produced, many of them still remain unwritten. The ASEAN-sponsored study of Filipino epics asserts that there are about one hundred (100) extant epics in the Philippines that have been discovered, most of these from the island of Palawan. The ASEAN anthology features only translations into English and Filipino on *Aliguyon(Hudhud)* of the Ifugao, translated by Amador Daguio, and edited by Josefina Mariano, *Biag ni Lam-ang* of the Ilocano, composite text by Leopoldo Yabes and translated by Jovita Ventura Castro, *Labaw Donggon*, the Sulod epic, the text by Dr. F. Landa Jocano and translated by Rosella Jean Makasian-Puno; *Agyu or Olahing* or *Ulahingan* of the Manobos, composite text by Patricia Melendres Cruz from transcriptions of E. Arsenio Manuel, Elena Maquiso, Carmen Ching Unabia, and Corazon Manuel and *Sandayo* of the Subanun, text and translation by Virgilio Resma.

The editor/translators of these epics cite five common characteristics of these Filipino epics. One, most of these epics are designated by names which means song, or chant, like the Ifugao *hudhud*, the Manobo *olagingor* or the Subanon's *guman*. Two, the epics are episodic and proceed through constructions that are *en palier*. There are repetitions of scenes at every episode the more familiar among these would be the chewing of the betel nut, battle chants, getting dressed for marriage, etc. Three, the epics abound with supernatural characters – the *diwatas*, *anitos*, and other benign spirits who come to the aid of the hero. Four, these epics are also reflective of the society where they originate. They portray ethnic society before the coming of the Muslims (1380) and the Christians (1521) and serve as vehicles for the transmission of ethnic customs and wisdom. Five, there are always several versions of these epics, as well as a proliferation of episodes, phenomenon that is explained by orality of the genre and its transmission through the ages to among the generations of the group.

- ***Aliguyon*** or the Hudhud of the Ifugaos tells of the exploits of Aliguyon as he battles his arch enemy, Pambukhayon among rice fields and terraces and instructs his people to be steadfast and learn the wisdom of warfare and of peacemaking during harvest seasons.
- ***Biag ni Lam-ang*** (Life of Lamang) tells of the adventures of the prodigious epic hero, Lam-ang who exhibits extraordinary powers at a very early age. At nine months he is able to go to war to look for his father's killers. Then while in search of lady love, Ines Kannyoyan, he is swallowed by a big fish, but his rooster and his friends bring him back to life.
- ***Labaw Donggon*** is about the amorous exploits of the son of a goddess Alunsina, by a mortal, Datu Paubari. The polygamous hero battles the huge monster Manaluntad for the hand of Abyang Ginbitinan; then he fights Sikay Padalogdog, the giant with a hundred arms to win Abyang Doronoon and confronts the lord of darkness, Saragnayan, to win Nagmalitong Yawa Sinagmaling Diwata.

- The ***Agyu or Olahing*** is a three part epic that starts with the *pahmara* (invocation) then the *kepu'unpuun* (a narration of the past) and the *sengedurog* (an episode complete in itself). All three parts narrate the exploits of the hero as he leads his people who have been driven out of their land to Nalandangan, a land of utopia where there are no landgrabbers and oppressors.
- ***Sandayo***, tells of the story of the hero with the same name, who is born through extraordinary circumstances as he fell out of the hair of his mother while she was combing it on the ninth stroke. Thence he leads his people in the fight against invaders of their land and waterways.
- Other known epics are ***Bantugan*** of the Maranao, the ***Darangan*** which is a Muslim epic, the ***Kudaman*** of Palawan which was transcribed by Dr. Nicole McDonald, the ***Alim*** of the Ifugao, the ***Hinilawod*** of Panay, the ***Ibalon*** of Bikol and ***Tuwaang*** of the Manobo, which was transcribed by anthropologist E. Arsenio Manuel.. The Tagalog have no known epic but it is generally believed that the story of Bernardo Carpio, the man who has been detained by the huge mountains of Montalban is their epic.

- Dr. Resil Mojares, literary scholar, asserts that the generic origins of the Filipino novel are found in the epic narratives .
- As for shorter narratives, there are stories that tell of the origins of the people, of the stars, the sky and the seas. A common story of the origin of man and woman is that of Sicalac (man) and Sicavay (woman) who came out of a bamboo after being pecked by a bird. This, and other stories of equal birthing of man and woman throughout the archipelago could actually assert woman's equality with man among indigenous settings.
- The eminent scholar and critic, Don Isabelo de los Reyes, had collected a good number of folk tales, legends and myths which he had exhibited in Madrid in 1887 and won a distinguished award of merit for it. These are now anthologized in a book ***El Folklore Filipino*** (1996).