

Kulam

Kulam is a kind of witchcraft practiced in the Philippines. Witches who use kulam are called *mangkukulam* and are often feared for their use of black magic. Nowadays however, there has been a move to revamp the image of kulam and present it under a more flattering light. A few locally published books, such as Tony Perez's *Mga Panibagong Kulam* (Modern Spells), hope to achieve this by bringing their case to a younger, more open-minded market.

Be that as it may, many still hold the traditional view of kulam as a dark, evil form of sorcery. Superstitious Filipinos intimate that *mangkukulam* are often from the islands of Siquijor and Samar, and the province of Sorsogon. Even in this day and age, residents of these places are often regarded with suspicion by neighboring communities. Incidentally, these areas are also known for their many "faith healers."

Kulam is heavily influenced by voodoo, and the foremost image of kulam in the public imagination involves kulam practitioners using a rag doll to injure their intended victims. Something belonging to the victim must be obtained by the practitioner in order for the curse to work, and it's often said that the closer the object is to the intended victim, the stronger the spell will be. Thus, things like a strand of hair, spit, or drops of blood are highly recommended for maximum effect.

The *mangkukulam* starts the curse by tying a string around the body of a black rag doll. She then utters an incantation - often in Pig Latin - invoking various spirits and elementals. The string around the doll symbolizes the witch's power over the victim, and at this point, anything she does to the doll will be also be felt by the victim. She may prick his arms with a needle, submerge his head under water, set his limbs on fire, and so forth. Believers insist that the curse can only be lifted by two methods: removing the string tied around the doll, or killing the witch herself.

Kulam, however, exists in a wider context, and is not simply about sticking needles into dolls. Most people see the *mangkukulam* as a kind of village witch, and often go to her for things such as love spells, spells to catch a cheating husband, etc. Sometimes the *mangkukulam* will maintain a rivalry with a village *arbularyo* or medicine man. Other times, the *mangkukulam* herself doubles as the village's witch doctor, or faith healer, "curing" sicknesses inflicted upon them by the local versions of dwarves, wood nymphs, and other spirits.

Interestingly enough, Philippine witchcraft often co-exists harmoniously with Catholicism, especially in the country's rural areas. Good witches invoke the name of saints, whisper Latin prayers, and even wear scapulars to ward off the machinations of their evil counterparts. Black witches, on the other hand, are said to be in league with the devil himself.

Ref.: <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-kulam.htm>