



PHILIPPINE FOLKLORE: ENKANTO BELIEFS

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Philippine mythology is derived from Philippine folk literature, which is the traditional oral literature of the Filipino people. This refers to a wide range of material due to the ethnic mix of the Philippines. Each unique ethnic group has its own stories and myths to tell. While the *oral* and thus *changeable* aspect of folk literature is an important defining characteristic, much of this oral tradition had been written into a print format. University of the Philippines professor, Damiana Eugenio, classified Philippines Folk Literature into three major groups: folk narratives, folk speech, and folk songs. Folk narratives can either be in prose: the myth, the *alamat* (legend), and the *kuwentong bayan* (folktale), or in verse, as in the case of the folk epic. Folk speech includes the *bugtong* (riddle) and the *salawikain* (proverbs). Folk songs that can be sub-classified into those that tell a story (folk ballads) are a relative rarity in Philippine folk literature.^{1[1]}

Before the coming of Christianity, the people of these lands had some kind of religion. For no people however primitive is ever devoid of religion. This religion might have been animism. Like any other religion, this one was a complex of religious phenomena. It consisted of myths, legends, rituals and sacrifices, beliefs in the high gods as well as low; noble concepts and practices as well as degenerate ones; worship and adoration as well as magic and control. But these religious phenomena supplied the early peoples of this land what religion has always meant to supply: satisfaction of their existential needs. These needs were both material needs and psychic needs; the longing for a fuller life, for a deeper and more satisfying communion with one another, the desire to surpass the human condition, to break out the bounds of space and time; and to contact the deity.^{2[2]}

INDIAN INFLUENCE

The Philippines had cultural ties with India through the other Indianized kingdoms of Southeast Asia for a considerable amount of time prior to the 16th century. Ancient Filipino literature and folklore show the impress of India. The Agusan legend of a man named *Manubo Ango*, who was turned into stone, resembles the story of *Ahalya* in the Hindu epic Ramayana. The tale of the Ifugao legendary hero *Balituk*, who obtained water from the rock with his arrow, is similar to *Arjuna's* adventure in Mahabharata, another Hindu epic. The Ramayana have different versions among the many Philippine ethnic groups. The Ilocanos have the story of Lam-Ang. The *Maharadia Lawana* is the Maranao version of the Ramayana. A lot of indigenous beliefs and mythology were either influenced by Sanskrit terms used in Hinduism (whether superimposed onto similar indigenous beliefs or imported into the belief system), or indirectly influenced by Hinduism via neighboring Southeast Asian kingdoms.^{3[3]}

Among the Philippine folk literature, I would like to focus my research on the belief system involving the *Engkanto/ Engkantado or Engkantada*. *Diwatas/Engkantada* (from Spanish: **encantada**, "enchantress, charmed") or *engkanto* (from Spanish: **encanto**, "spell, incantation, charm") are fairies, nymphs, goddesses or enchanted persons who are believed to guard natural creations such as forests, seas, mountains, land and air. *Diwata's* are said to reside in large trees, such as acacia and balete. They are the guardian spirits of nature, bringing blessings or curses upon those who do well or harm to the forests and mountains. *Engkanto* (sometimes spelled *Encanto*) is an umbrella term for most supernatural beings. The common connotation is that they are fairies who reside primarily in the forests and the sea. They can also be called *encantado* (male) or *encantada* (female).^{4[4]} Throughout the time of my research, I have found out that there are very few persons who tried to study, write a book, or did a field research on this topic. This research will focus on the existing resources as well as the interviews that I have conducted with the Filipino sisters of my present community and my Filipino classmates at the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia. The main source of this paper is taken from the work of Fr. Francisco Demetrio, S.J, "Engkanto Belief: An Essay of Interpretation" of his book, *Myths and Symbols: Philippines*.

- **REALITY**

ENKANTO BELIEFS IN THE RURAL AREAS

“Rural peoples of the Philippines believe in the existence of, as well as the influence exercised in the human lives by, superhuman beings called engkantos. The belief is found in Luzon quite common in Bisayas and in Mindanao.”^{5[5]} I could say that in my hometown, the idea about these beings is so prevalent that almost everyone has something to say about them. “Though engkantos are said to have male and female sexes, though there are children, young people, adults, and aged among them, though they get sick and even die, yet they are a class of beings quite removed, different from ordinary humans. Their name suggests this; Engkantado from which Engkanto seems to be derived is the preterite perfect of the Spanish verb “encantar” and it means “bewitched”, spell-bound” or “enchanted”. Though the native names may not especially stress their mysteriousness, still the further characterization given them by the Bisayans, give justice to their identity. For them, the engkantos are said to be “dili ingon nato” or *dili ta parehas* which means “people who are not like us or similar to us.”^{6[6]} Our elders used to tell us that we are not alone in this world. In every tree, river or mountains, there are unseen beings that are not like us but have a great influence in our daily living. “Their dwelling places to the naked eye are mere boulders, large rocks or holes in the ground, or mounds on the earth, or trees like the Balete but to their human friends who are empowered to see them, these are magnificent places and mansions.”^{7[7]} Great awareness is planted in our consciousness by our parents with regard to the habitat of the engkantos. We were not allowed to play near a mound of earth or do anything bad with it. We believe that if we kick the mound, the engkantos will punish us with a swollen foot. There are certain times of the day when we are restricted to go out and play. This also applies with particular places. We were not allowed to play and swim in the bodies of water at 12:00 noon and at six o’clock because these are the hours of the day that the engkantos take their bath. We might get a skin disease if we insist. We cannot play outside in the night even during a full moon because the engkantos are out and if we accidentally hit them, they might slap us or cause us unusual pain.

Origin

According to popular beliefs of rural folks, *Engkantos* are said to be angels who revolted with Lucifer against the Lord. When the angels of God drove them out of heaven, some fell on earth. Those who fell in the forest or thick woods and lived in trees are the *engkantos*. Hence, they possess some extraordinary powers but are limited.

Courtney says that “the modern belief in pixies, or in fairies, arose from a very ancient Celtic or pre-Celtic belief in spirits. Just as among some savage tribes there is belief in gods and totems; here there was belief in little spirits good and bad, who were able to help or to hinder man. Belief in the supernatural, in my opinion, is the root of it all.” 8[8]

ENKANTOS AS SUBJECT OF TREPIDATION

We have many restrictions with regard to our dealings with these beings. Primarily because they are unseen and that they interfere with our everyday affair, we need to watch out on our every action so that no one will be hurt. “Engkantos are sometimes associated with the dead ancestors and are therefore objects of dread. They are unpredictable, amoral and capricious that is why people are careful not to disturb them.”9[9] There were many stories of human beings who were taken by the *engkantos*. They disappear for many days; others suffer from delirium and fits of madness. My grandmother told us about her brother who was believed to have suffered from the hands of these beings. She said that when her brother was possessed, he could do amazing things like climbing the tallest tree in their place, run swiftly and overcome a number of men with his unusual strength. I used to tell my grandma that her brother must have skipped meals and his hunger affected his head, but the belief of *engkantos* was deeply written in her so it was useless for me to insist. I might be wrong and my grandma was right. There are things that can be explained by science but there are still many things that are difficult to explain. I grew up with such an orientation so it was also difficult for me to reconcile science and intuition.

ENKANTOS AS SUBJECT OF ENTHRALLMENT

The *engkantos* to the Filipinos are “fascinating beings”. Whoever sees them reports of their beauty that exemplifies the Spaniards in the past and the Americans in the present.10[10] As a kid, I used to imagine them as characters in the popular fairytales that I see in the television. Their world is so brilliant and attractive. They are princes and princesses in a beautiful kingdom.

However, I could not avoid thinking of the horror that is present in that virtual place because of the bad engkantos that also co-exist with the good ones. There is one thing that is also special in their situation; the kind of food they eat. It is first class but contains no salt.”¹¹[11] This is a crucial thing because aside from having an unlikely taste, it is also used as a trap to the human beings. The local folk said that when a person is invited to a banquet with the engkantos, he/she should not ask for salt if he/ she find the food blunt because the host will get angry and that’s the end of the visitor. The engkantos will not allow the person to return to his/ her home. The relatives could only regain that person if they do a ritual with the faith healer who will command them to make a lot of noise outside the suspected habitat of the engkantos. When the engkantos can no longer withstand the noise, they will return the prisoner back to his/her relatives.

These engkantos though “beautiful and fair-skinned, are said to be romantically attracted to a brown-skinned girl or boy.”¹²[12] When the engkantos fall in love, they are extra generous. They use to give precious gifts to their beloved and make him or her prosperous but if the object of their affection refuses to love them in return, they will punish him or her terribly or even think of taking them by force. There are persons in our locality which common folk considers as offspring of an Engkanto and a human parent. The elders used to remind us not to sleep alone in the hut especially during noontime. The local folk believe that malevolent engkantos used to room around at noon and rape the sleeping girls whom they are attracted to. This union usually results in a mysterious pregnancy and an unusual offspring. The mestiza Engkanto doesn’t appear as expected. I mean, not as beautiful as we imagine them to be. They are usually very fair- skinned and filled with prickles, blonde hair including the eyelashes and they have a difficulty of seeing things at day time. When I was in high school, I learned that this kind of persons has abnormality in their genes and this condition is called **albinism**. It is a condition in which a person is experiencing a “congenital absence of pigment in the skin, eyes and hair.” ¹³[13] Modern Science describes this condition as a deficiency but local folks believe that this is a living proof that Engkanto’s exist.

A classmate of mine, Sr. Antonieta Sitoy shared with me the story of her mother and her first husband. An engkantada fell in love for the man who happened to be her childhood friend. This beautiful nymph appeared to him several times from childhood. When the man got married and had his own family, the Engkantada showed herself to his wife. She offered to her a pot of gold

in exchange of her husband. The wife refused because of her love for her husband but the Engkantada warned her that by all means she will take away the love of her life. After a month, the first husband of Sr. Antonieta's mom died while the Engkantada never showed herself to the wife again. Her mother taught that the Engkantada took her husband away from her.

THE WELL-KNOWN ENKANTOS

- **MARIA MAKILING**

Descriptions of Maria Makiling are fairly consistent. She is a breathtakingly beautiful young woman who never ages. Lanuza describes her as having "light olive skin, long shining black hair, and twinkling eyes." It is said that the abundance and serenity of the enchanted mountain complements Maria's own persona. She is also closely associated with the white mist that often surrounds the mountain. While in just a few stories either her skin or hair is white, in most tales, it is her radiant clothing which makes people who have seen her think that perhaps they just saw a wisp of cloud through the trees and mistook it for Maria. Unlike Maria Sinukuan and Maria Cacao who live in caves in their respective mountains, Makiling is often described as living in a humble hut. In some stories, this hut is situated in the village, amongst the people, where Maria Makiling lived before she fled to the mountains after having been offended for some reason. In other stories, the hut is up in the mountain, and can only be found if one is allowed by Maria to find it. Because stories about Maria Makiling were part of oral tradition long before they were documented, there are numerous versions of the Maria Makiling legend. Some of these are not stories per se, but superstitions. One superstition is that every so often, men would disappear into the forests of the mountain. It is said that Makiling has fallen in love with that particular man, and has taken him to her house to be her husband, there to spend his days in matrimonial bliss. Another superstition says that one can go into the forests and pick and eat any fruits one might like, but never carry any of them home. In doing so, one runs the risk of angering Maria Makiling. One would get lost, and be beset by insect stings and thorn pricks. The only solution is to throw away the fruit, and then to reverse one's clothing as evidence to Maria that one is no longer carrying any of her fruit.¹⁴[14] As far as I am concerned she is the only Engkantada that I have known and heard about. She is very famous because she is often a subject of Philippine fairytale books and even Engkanto tales in the Philippine movies. I admire her for her great love and dedication for the earth. We consider her not only as the guardian of the forest but even more as the Mother Earth herself.

- **KAPRE**

Kapre is a filthy, dark giant who likes to smoke huge rolls of cigars, and hide within and atop large trees, particularly the balete and old acacia or mango trees. A Filipino Bigfoot, it scares away little children who play at night. If you're stuck in a place and you keep going around in circles, you're said to be played around by a Kapre. To escape its control, you must remove your t-shirt, and wear it inside-out.^{15[15]} I remember of a story about my father as a young boy. He and his friends used to play hide and seek at night during the full moon. My father decided to climb unto a coconut tree beside their house because it was the most convenient place to hide and at the same time a favorable look out for the “it” of their game. He was so amazed with his idea only to realize that the tree he is holding into does not seem to be a coconut tree because it was so hairy. Then, he realized that the only coconut tree they had beside their house is no longer one but three. With this realization, he ran for his life and told his friends and mother about what had happened. After that incident, my father was no longer allowed by my grandmother to play outside even during full moon. As an aftermath, I and my brother and sister was also forbidden to play outside in the night. Was it really true or only a make-believe story made by my father in order to explain his restrictions? I don't know the answer. However, I understand that my father want us to be away from all the dangers and uncertainties that the darkness bring.

- **Tikbalang**

Tikbalang* or *tigbalang (demon horse) is a half-man and half-horse creature. It has a horse's head, the body of a human but with the feet of the horse. It travels at night to rape female mortals. The raped women will then give birth to more *tikbalang*. They are also believed to cause travelers to lose their way particularly in mountainous or forest areas. Tikbalangs are very playful with people, and they usually make a person imagine things that aren't real. Sometimes a Tikbalang will drive a person crazy. Legends say that when rain falls while the sun is shining, a pair of Tikbalangs is being wed. Since horses only arrived in the Philippine archipelago during the Spanish colonization (thus, the borrowed term 'kabayo'), there is a theory that the image of a half-horse, half-man creature was propagated by the conquistadors to keep the natives afraid of the night. There

are stories claiming that the *Tikbalang* are actually half-bird, half-man creatures, much like the Japanese *tengu*.¹⁶[16]

- ***Sirena***

Sirena is a mermaid, a sea creature with a human upper body and a fish tail instead of lower extremities. They attract fishermen and tourists. Sirenas are reportedly often seen ashore by fishermen, especially in the towns bordering the Pacific Ocean. *Siyokoy* are mermen, sea creatures that have a human form and scaled bodies. The *Siyokoy* is the male counterpart of the Sirena. The lower extremities of a Philippine merman can either be a fishtail or scaled legs and webbed feet. They could also have long, green tentacles. They drown mortals for food. *Siyokoys* have gill slits, are colored brown or green, and have scaly skin, comparable to that of a fish.¹⁷[17] Stories about them are very common especially in the local television series. People enjoy watching them and are very much interested in their kind of life. We believe that these creatures in the sea are kindred spirit. They love the sea and all that is within it. They will do everything to protect its beauty and life. There were several stories about sinking boats and people who were drowned because of using dynamites for fishing and they attributed this phenomenon to the mermaids who disagree of the greed and insensitivity of the fishermen.

- ***Duwende***

Duwende are goblins, hobgoblins, elves or dwarfs (*Spanish: duende "goblin, elf, charm" < "duen de (casa)", owner of the house*). They are little creatures who can provide good fortune or bad fate to humans. They frequently live in houses, in trees, underground, termite like mound or hill, and in rural areas. They are known to be either good or mischievous, depending on how homeowners treat them. They usually come out at 12 noon for an hour and during the night. Filipinos always mutter words ("tabi-tabi po" or "bari-bari apo ma ka ilabas kami apo") asking them to excuse themselves for bothering the *Duwendes*. Filipinos would leave food on the floor, so that the *Duwende* residing (or guarding) the house would not be angry with them. They also take your things, and laugh at you when you try to find it. They give it back when they feel like it, or when you tell them to please give it back.¹⁸[18] *Duwende* in the houses are the primary reason why there is a ritual done before the owner of a newly built house settles down. It is believed that in order to

avoid bad luck and diseases, the owner must first ask permission from the unseen dwellers of that house and land by offering some cooked food as well as blood sacrifices of animals before the whole family can move in.

My classmate at ICLA told me of an interesting story about her grandmother and these cute but mischievous beings. One afternoon, her Lola was sweeping in their backyard when she felt a burning sensation in her stomach. They immediately brought her to the hospital because the pain was unbearable and it did not allow her to sleep. The hospital did all the necessary procedures including an ultra sound but they could not figure out what is really happening. The doctor diagnosed her as normal and healthy and she was sent home. As was expected, her pain still lingers on and disrupts her sleep so they have to consult a traditional doctor. After an hour of ritual, the *Mananambal* (traditional doctor) told them that her grandmother has incidentally hurt a Duwende while sweeping. In order to appease the Duwende, her Lola has to ask for forgiveness. She needs to keep 8 eggs in each corner of the backyard, and then walk around with a lighted candle while mumbling a prayer for forgiveness dictated by the Mananambal. After the ritual of asking forgiveness and a series of treatment using the coconut oil, (which was taken orally and was used as a massage ointment for her whole body) her grandmother was healed. 19[19] Based on her story, I understand that it cost them a lot for incidentally hurting a Duwende. However, the incident brought all her Aunts and Uncles together and gave them an opportunity to take care of their aged mother. Though they were not so sure of the authenticity of the traditional doctor, they were still grateful because their mother was healed.

- **REFLECTION**

A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF FOLKLORE:

Folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales and customs that are the traditions of that culture, subculture, or group. It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. The word 'folklore' was first used by the English antiquarian William Thoms in a letter published by the London Journal in 1846. Folklore can be divided into four areas of study: artifact (such as voodoo dolls), describable and transmissible entity (oral tradition), culture, and behavior (rituals). These areas do not stand alone; however, as often a particular item or element may fit into more than one of these areas.

Folklore can contain religious or mythic elements; it equally concerns itself with the sometimes mundane traditions of everyday life. Folklore frequently ties the practical and the esoteric into one narrative package. It has often been conflated with mythology, and vice versa, because it has been assumed that any figurative story that does not pertain to the dominant beliefs of the time is not of the same status as those dominant beliefs. Thus, Roman religion is called "myth" by today's dominant religions. In that way, both "myth" and "folklore" have become catch-all terms for all figurative narratives which do not correspond with the dominant belief structure.

"Folktales" is a general term for different varieties of traditional narrative. The telling of stories appears to be a cultural universal, common to basic and complex societies alike. Even the forms folktales take are certainly similar from culture to culture, and comparative studies of themes and narrative ways have been successful in showing these relationships. Also it is considered to be an oral tale to be told for everybody.

FOLKLORE AND PSYCHOLOGY

Folklore can be used to accurately describe a figurative narrative, which has no sacred or religious content. In the Jungian view, which is but one method of analysis, it may instead pertain to unconscious psychological patterns, instincts or archetypes of the mind. This may or may not have components of the fantastic (such as magic, ethereal beings or the personification of inanimate objects). These folktales may or may not emerge from a religious tradition, but nevertheless speak to deep psychological issues. The familiar folktale, "Hansel and Gretel", is an example of this fine line. The manifest purpose of the tale may primarily be one of mundane instruction regarding forest safety or secondarily a cautionary tale about the dangers of famine to large families, but its latent meaning may evoke a strong emotional response due to the widely understood themes and motifs such as "The Terrible Mother", "Death," and "Atonement with the Father."20[20] Indeed, Filipinos love stories and this is evident in the time we spend together just to listen about each others stories. As a kid, as I presume that most of the kids do, love to hear stories as well as create stories. We create stories in order to amuse or frighten others or even frighten our own selves. I even have interesting but untold stories in my in my dreams both at night time and in the day. I used to dream of having a special power to fight against the monsters in my dreams especially when the first part of my dream is really scary. As a teenager, handsome princes and pretty princesses are subjects of my fantastic adventures. I used to imagine myself as a beautiful lady who is an object of

affection for all the gentlemen in town. Part of my daydreaming is the hope that I could befriend a powerful Engkantanda so that she can turn me into someone I dreamt of becoming.

I believe that the fantasy as well as the dreams and aspirations of every Filipino are one of the reasons of the existence of these supernatural beings. On those days of Spanish colonization, when a brown- skinned Filipina saw for the first time the Spanish women who are so regally dressed, beautiful in her long blonde hair and fair skin, she cannot help of dreaming to have the same as that Spanish lady had. Even in this present day, Filipina's spend a great amount of money to make their skin fair and smooth.

There can be both a moral and psychological scope to the work, as well as entertainment value, depending upon the nature of the teller, the style of the telling, the ages of the audience members, and the overall context of the performance. Folklorists generally resist universal interpretations of narratives and, wherever possible, analyze oral versions of tellings in specific contexts, rather than print sources, which often show the work or bias of the writer or editor.²¹[21]

Folklorist William Bascom states that folklore has many cultural aspects, such as allowing for escape from societal consequences. In addition, folklore can also serve to validate a culture (romantic nationalism), as well as transmit a culture's morals and values. Folklore can also be the root of many cultural types of music. It can also be used to assert social pressures, or relieve them, for example in the case of humor and carnival.²²[22] On those days of Japanese colonization, when fear and dread surround every town, my Grandmother told us that all they did was to hide. It was on those times that dreadful stories about monsters were prevalent in order to keep the kids from playing in the open. Until now, those stories of dread was preserved by the entertainment industries who continue to supply us with frightening movies based on those creatures of the dark.

- **CONCLUSION/RESPONSE:**

In the case of embracing the Catholic faith as was experienced by my family later in time, the first one to be banned in our lives was our beliefs of the supernatural beings around us. The church considers these beliefs as evil worship so it has to be cut off from us. If someone will ask me now if that belief has been completely banished in my consciousness I would certainly say not. It was planted deep within me that even if my catechism classes denounce this beliefs, my consciousness does not depart from it. Yes, with my mouth I denounce such a thing but when I am

confronted with the particular situations and places, it comes back automatically. When I throw water outside especially in the night, I still say: ‘*tabi, tabi po*’ (excuse me). I don’t consider it as an evil worship, what I am holding into is the values that is contained in that belief. Everyone on earth deserves to live happily and at peace. Everyone and every created reality deserve our respect. The nature, the humankind, the cosmos is interrelated. Every life has a spirit deep within. There may be a supernatural being in that particular tree or sea or any mound or there may be not, everything is worthy of our respect. “In our Filipino theology, the native supernatural beings are thought to be unconcerned with the moral affairs of the mortal folks. As the folklore shows us, what the *diwatas* (fairies), the *kapres* (ogre) and *nunos sa punsos* (old pixies) loathed were not the sinful man, but the reckless wanderer who, intentionally or unintentionally, had irritated them or who had raised some havoc in their sylvanian habitations.”²³[23] Many times in our recklessness and insensitivity of the co- existence of other creatures around us, we destroy or hurt others and in turn destroy or hurt ourselves. Jesus has given us the golden rule which says: Do not do unto others what you don’t want others do unto you. Whatever we throw unto others will come back to us. The important value that I learned from this research is to ‘respect’ everyone and everything as well as the awareness of our ‘interrelatedness’ in this earth

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/philippine_mythology#cite_note-anthropology-1

[2] Francisco R. Demetrio, *Myths and Symbols: Philippines* (Quezon City: National Bookstore Press, 1978), 104- 105.

[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/philippine_mythology#cite_note_-2

[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippine_mythical_creatures#cite_note-TE-0

[5] Demetrio, *Myths and Symbols: Philippines*, 101.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Demetrio, *Myths and Symbols: Philippines*, 101.

[8] Miss M. A. Courtney, *Cornish Feasts and folklore* (Penzance, 1890) in <http://oaks.nvg.org/fafacor.html>

[9] Demetrio, *Myths and Symbols: Philippines*, 103.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*, 102.

[12] Demetrio, *Myths and Symbols: Philippines*, 102.

[13] Elspeth Summers and Andrew Holmes, eds., *Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 4th Edition (Bishopbiggs, Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishing, 2006), 29.

[14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Makiling#cite_note-Eugenio-0

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- [19] Sr. Marie Karren Roquero, Personal Interview, ICLA, 5 March 2011.
- [20] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folklore#cite_note-0
- [21] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folklore#cite_note-1
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