

THE ANIMAL IN THE DEITY: VISAYAN GODS AND GODDESSES AND THEIR ANIMALS

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the unconscious connection between the Visayan gods and goddesses and their sacred animals based on the archives of Felipe Landa Jocano's Outline of Philippine Mythology, Francisco Demeterio's Towards a Survey of Philippine Folklore and Mythology, and Luzviminda's blog Visayan Mythologies of the Philippines. The psychoanalytical frameworks of totemism and the collective unconscious drew connections that delineated the cultural symbolism of the animal to its respective deity and linked it further to the values and spheres each deity imparts on the communities that worship it. Through the lens of this theoretical approach, a deep, direct nature of association was extracted between the gods and their sacred animals. Thus, the pre-colonial Visayan communities viewed their animal neighbors as manifestations or totems of divine power that in turn, governs their affairs. An animal that was defined as sacred formed a very essential component of a deity's identity, and, in consequence, the identity of his or her mortal believers.

Keywords: *deity, mythology, totemism, psychoanalytical, hierophany*

1. Introduction

Anyone who grows up learning and reading Greek Mythology could not avoid asking and searching for his own myth since what he studied is too distant from his native lore. Confronted with limited write-ups and profound interest in the Visayan myth led to the investigation of finding out the unconscious connection between the Visayan gods and goddesses and their sacred animals. Exploring Visayan myth today is still relevant since the search for one's identity is a never-ending process much more to rekindle one's deep connection in his place of origin. The researchers aimed to investigate the connection between the Visayan gods and goddesses and their sacred animals based on the archives of Felipe Landa Jocano's *Outline of Philippine Mythology*, Francisco Demeterio's *Towards a Survey of Philippine Folklore and Mythology*, and Luzviminda's blog *Visayan Mythologies of the Philippines* served as the most significant references. Furthermore, this study sought to describe the cultural symbolism of the animal in relation to the deity and to identify the values and spheres of influence connoted by each deity to the community. This study is significant and beneficial to literature students, writers and researchers who may apply key points concerning other mythologies in comparison to the more popular and well-established pantheons, the didactic constitutions that may be derived from the virtues and cultural relevance of the gods, and the similarities and influences by other Asian cultures and traditions. This may also engender the readers a deeper sense of awareness for the bestiary of monsters and divine profiles that are so prolific throughout the archipelago.

Instilling awareness in the profiles of certain Visayan deities in the pre-colonial Visayan era remains an integral part in shaping one's identity. In the context of mythology, animals in the mythic narrative were in close contact with pre-colonial man due to his heavy dependence

on the provisions of nature *Animals in Mythology*(2009). The pre-colonial Visayans were also subject to this relationship with the endemic fauna, shaping and ascribing them meaning and purpose that transcended ecological definition and concluded that both god and beast in the context of mythology were interconnectedly shaped and transformed by the minds of the very people who pay homage to them, and thus the key to understanding them lay in their affiliation to each other and their over all importance to the culture and community of the pre-colonial Visayans.

Mythology by definition is a collection of mythic stories belonging to a group of people addressing their own origin, history, deities and heroes. It is a collection of ancient tales associated with an event, individual or institution. It is a way for our ancestors to tell and explain the origins of the world, the people and the flora and fauna of their landscape through stories about supernatural beings known as gods, spirits, and mythical heroes and heroines. (“An Introduction to the Mythological World of the Visayas”2013).

To speak of mythology was to speak of the gods-entities that transcend human limits and comprehension. The situation was no different in analytic handling of the gods of the Visayas region (An Introduction to the Mythological World of Visayas”2013) These entities, with their phenomenal strength and influence were often portrayed of as an ethereal immaterial grandeur or an abstract concept personified in attendance; a presence which cannot be seen, merely felt (Demetrio, 1968). Although, myth in a Philippine circumstance was, as stated before, far from centralized according to Zialcita (Chikiamco, 2014), certain motifs among tribal lore were generally unchanged. It is for this reason that a clear and precise definition of what comprised Visayan myth is difficult to produce.

Lesser creatures in myth in a local context, pre-colonial Filipinos were recognized to incorporate animals, wild or domestic, into their worship. Birds were the most used as symbols of divine missives as mentioned in *Towards a Survey of Philippine Mythology and Folklore*, a prominent, manifold example of animals in worship was a kind of wild dove known as the *limokon* or *alimukon*. Generally recognized as a bird of omen, its cultural symbolism varies with ethnicity. For the Mandayas, the bird was seen as the origin of man for the Aetas, it was a primitive clock, with the bird’s call as a sign not to resume a journey, and for the Bagobos, Tagalogs, and Visayans, it was said to presage danger, especially for Bagobos (Demeterio , 1968).

With livestock, the liver and gall-sack of the pig were both used in auguries, moving cattle on the eve of New Year was an insurance of a bountiful crop and the crackling of hens at night was an omen of sickness or elopement. A species of praying mantis was said not only to be the soul of the palay but also its guardian, cicadas sang to tell of fair, sunny weather and spiders that drop-in front of the person may either warn of death or marriage in the family (Demetrio,1968).

This plethora of animals and their cultural representations were proof that the pre-colonial traditions of the archipelago were heavily reliant on symbolisms to construe and construct a world around them on the basis of their beliefs. But Demeterio observed a common model of veneration of the native fauna: that ancient Filipinos, notwithstanding their ethnic positions, did not see an animal as divine in itself, but rather as a “hierophany,” agent, vehicle, or familiar of some other worldly entity (1968). With the onset of Christianity however, *animism* had long since retreated to a few surviving tribes who managed to avoid Spanish influence, and in many aspects of religion before the white men were lost to memory.

In pre-colonial Philippines *Totem and Taboo* also gave psychoanalytic pertinence to the practice of animism which is defined as man’s projection of psychic structures onto objects in his immediate environment contextualized in the totem animal as a doctrine of superstition

formulated around it. This is closely related to Freud's concept of tribal man's worship of totems in his book *Totem and Taboo* (1918). Beliefs revolved around a prescientific concept identified by Freud as taboo; an abstract border that set boundaries between conformity and crime in a culture and some of these examples are; tribes take the names of their respective animals as their own, the form of a totem animal is paid homage to as a decoration such as those on weapons or tattoo designs, and totem animals are the guides of those who are faithful to them and impart counsel of future events to them. There also exists in taboo a concept of ambivalence in which an individual harbors desires for the pleasure of transgression but at the same time bears fear for the punishment implicit of said transgression, inherited from generation to generation.

2. Research Method

This study is primarily descriptive and psychoanalytic with the principal materials that concern the Visayan deities. The gods and goddesses that were analyzed are of a select group who were affirmed through the aforementioned reference materials are associated with a specific animal. These animals were endemic to the archipelago and were extant of living status, meaning that extinct or mythical fauna were excluded in this study. The gods and goddesses were strictly limited to the ethnic communities from the Visayas region. The sources included the following; *Outline of Philippine Mythology* by Felipe Landa Jocano and *Towards a Survey of Philippine Folklore and Mythology* by Francisco Demeterio from the archives of the Filipiniana Section at the Learning Resource Center at the University of San Carlos. Other materials were sourced online from the blog of Luzviminda Philippines, *Mythologies of the Philippines*.

The psychoanalytic framework of Sigmund Freud's concept of totemism and Carl Jung's theory of symbolism in the unconscious as well as the concept of Logos or Katwiran by Florentino Hornedo were applied in the analysis. Furthermore, the study concentrated on both the animal and god in terms of their cultural significance, and their relationship to humans was demonstrated through binaries. With the deities, the study focused on their spheres of influence and the values that they instilled on the communities that venerated them. As to the animals, the symbolism was centered on their importance to the culture.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 The Cultural Symbolism of the Sacred Animals in Relation to the Visayan Gods and Goddesses

Dalikmata is symbolized with the butterfly which is a manifestation of her omniscience, represented by the eye-like patterns on its wings which were said to allow her to see the affairs of men in slumber. In accordance with the tenet of psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1918; Jung, 1964) which stated that man is capable of linking physical objects to psychic structures and the idea that the gods are entities that manifest this capacity of thought. Dalikmata's slumber as a state of vulnerability that alludes to the loss of sight experienced by those who sleep, for they could not perceive their surroundings just as Dalikmata could not perceive the theft of the flower she was supposed to watch over. It is at the resolution that a pivotal point of divergence- the deification of Dalikmata that enabled her to ascend beyond mortal limits- is observed, and that is her placement of the eyes on the moth and butterfly wings, their functions as conduits for her sight highlighting their cultural symbolism as an agent of the eyes that are all -seeing.

Lidagat is associated with two animals, the dolphin and the shark. First is the dolphin, which is a symbol of good omen and her graces. The dolphins were seen travelling adjacent to

the vessel playing about in the whitecaps was a “sign of good luck and safe voyage’ whereas the other carried a more negative connotation which forbade the unpermitted slaughter of these cetaceans, as it was a certainty that the goddess’ ire would be effectuated (“Lidagat,” 2013). In Freud’s theory of totemism to kill a totem animal under normal circumstances is a high degree of taboo in a community such as that of the pre-colonial Visayans, and so supported the conclusion that the dolphin is simultaneously a totem and a cultural symbol of Lidagat’s sphere of power and her role in the pantheon as the divine embodiment of the sea’s duality as both giver and destroyer of fortune, which was determined by the compliance of the person to the stipulations presented by the totem, which in this case the hierophany (Demetrio, 1968) of the dolphin-Lidagat. The second animal is the shark however, illumined only a negative status that entailed the fish as a creature to be feared. In the story of Lidagat, a mermaid chaperone of the goddess, Bagwiyan, was smitten with Lihangin, Lidagat’s lover. Angered by her audacity, the goddess punished Bagwiyan by taking away her beauty and transforming her into a shark, so as to broadcast her betrayal to all. This etiological metamorphosis served to further underscore the less savory dimension of Lidagat’s power, and that while she may provide fishermen with abundant catches (“Lidagat,” 2013), she may also be capable of depriving them of such bounty.

Suklang Malayon is represented with a Maya bird. In the epic poem, she warned her sister Alunsina and Datu Paubari of an impending flood and later on, informed them that it was safe to venture back into their land and rebuild their house either by relaying the news to a maya- a trusted confidante of this goddess’ divine will- or by assuming the avian’s form herself. (“Suklang Malayon,” 2013). Other tales of the bird’s relation to the goddess are of how it was considered good luck in pre-colonial Visayan communities to find flocks in the purlieus of their homesteads, interpreting their presence as a blessing of happiness directly from the goddess herself. In addition, the maya was also connected to the goddess’ designation as a deity of the household, of family, and of happiness as it is described in relation to her as “birds make home themselves in the form of nests and usually near human settlements and sing happy melodies especially during mating season.” (“Suklang Malayon,” 2013). The Maya’s cultural symbolism to Suklang Malayon was one of borderline wholeness; an epitome of hierophany in the ancient Visayan system of religion.

Libulan is raised by sea turtles and they are his symbol. A crest of Libulan’s feminine aspect. The god was also closely affiliated with the lunar phases of the moon as these were projections of her mood as predominantly timid or shy and that he seldom assumed his “full glory” for long periods of time. Patronage to him was manifested through the shamans of the pre-colonial Visayan communities, who practiced code dressing in homage to enigmatic nature by the demureness of this lunar divinity. Jung’s concepts relating to the otherness in the unconscious, the persona and the anima or animus applied to the rituals exhibited by the shamans in tribute to the god. The ancient Visayan belief that Libulan oversaw the sea turtles who lumber onto beaches to lay eggs symbolized the protuberance of this female aspect through a scenario in which a female of a species of animal-traditionally sacred to a supernatural entity nonetheless-performs the labors of birth under the haloes of a feminine celestial entity.

Lalohon is symbolized with a locust, she is also known as the goddess of harvest. A prominent feature of hers is that she would employ locust swarms as a mode of punishment. Locusts were always loathed by those who cultivate a crop, and the ancient Negrenese were no exception to such plagues. But rather than regard them with the abhorrence reserved for pests, they interpreted these insects, the patron animal of the goddesses (Demetrio, 1968), as incantations of the goddess’ wrath; a deliverance of punishment from her (“Lalohon,”

2013). As with Lidagat, who was respected for her benevolence and feared for her anger, the same was true with Lalahon's role as a deity of the harvests-that she was capable of blessing or cursing her worshippers should they wrong her in any way. The locust's cultural symbolism to Lalahon was thus analogous to the shark of Lidagat. Their presence signified conflict, while their absences signified concord, which was parallel to how Lalahon, as an inhuman inhabitant of volcanoes, could make herself known to the people both through the landform's activity or dormancy. To sum it all, the locusts represented her sway over the harvest season and how her temperament mirrored the quality of the annual crop yield. On another level, they also represented the ancient Negrenese belief of the duality in a woman's character, specifically aspects of rage and passion.

Paiburong as a deity is represented by a crocodile. He was the supreme sovereign over the *Pagtung-an* or Middleworld, which was the realm that divides the living and the dead. Ruling over the majority of it together with his wife Bulawanon and their five children (Jocano, 1969). Offerings of meat were fed to crocodiles in order to appease this god and grant ancient Visayans safe passage across anybody, but it was Paiburong's ability to transform into this animal that disclosed the cultural symbolism of the crocodile itself- it was the hierophany for the fearsome nature of Paiburong himself, and a connection present only in one other instance- Suklang Malayon and the Maya bird. Thus, it was concluded that the crocodile was a reflection of Paiburong's savagery. A second symbolism may be how the Middleworld was the boundary line between the dead and the living. From a national scope, crocodiles were revered as those who escort their victims to the underworld on their backs (Demeterio, 1968). Taking in account Paiburong's predilection for turning into a crocodile, the animal therefore also represented the divide between the underworld and the domain of life.

Makaako as a supreme being boasted shapeshifting capacities, often appearing in the form of a small black cat (Demeterio, 1968). Cats as a symbol of Makaako, were strongly associated with thunder and lightning in the sense that lightning bore a soul in the shape of a black cat, thus the cultural symbolism of the cat to the god was analogous to that of Paiburong and the crocodile-- a direct manifestation of the divine being's power. In this case, their very souls that found vessel within the flashes of the firebolts.

With each deity and their respective animal, there existed a link that is cogent, and the medium for this link was a prominent aspect of the deity, or what object or phenomena their divine potency came to embody. In other words, the relationship between these sacred animals to their gods was lucid. There was no ostentation of any sort, just a direct inextricable connection to the god or goddess.

3.2 The Values and Spheres of Influence of Each Deity

Dalikhmata's role was defined as that of health goddess that specializes in eye ailments, and that, while benevolent, may strike down any malicious people- a particular dislike of hers- in an ancient Visayan community with eye problems such as blindness, which was related to her relationship with the butterflies and moths. Through the eyes on the insect's wings, she could watch over the affairs of humanity, and to the people, these same eyes ensured that they always adhered to the laws of their society and performed deeds for the greater good as well as maintained piety and practice repentance. If the pre-colonial Visayans believed that their gods governed their moral and ethical doctrines (Hornedo, 2001), then Dalikhmata represented a virtue of truth, as evidenced by her family history as drinking from a spring that rendered the consumer incapable of fabricating falsehood ("Dalikhmat," 2013) and her importance in the court as the entity who ensured that "truth shall always prevail and any criminal who

escapes will be brought to justice quickly” (“Dalikmata,” 2013). With Dalikmata, this truth was entrenched through the belief that the eyes on the wings of the moths and butterflies are the windows through which her omniscience penetrates the businesses of man and instilled in them a responsibility for their actions, for with the existence of one as aware as Dalikmata, no place could conceal what they committed. Her general dislike for wrongdoers conceived a majority of the laws of the people who believed in her power.

Lidagat the goddess of the sea was defined as a deity whose personality bore capacity for both kindness and cholera. Reviewing her cultural symbolism with the dolphin, these creatures may be killed on the condition that they ask for the goddess’ consent beforehand, and that to do otherwise would incur her fury (“Lidagat,” 2013). However, over which she holds jurisdiction to provide offerings and honor her charity, lest they brought a disastrous fate upon themselves (“Lidagat,” 2013). Thus, Lidagat’s contract with her human worshippers was a doctrine of beliefs that emphasized the essential value of piety, and that those who practiced the necessary rituals and gave appropriate tribute were rewarded generously (Hornedo, 2001).

Suklang Malayon was the Visayan deity who graced homes with happiness and to whom many household events were dedicated. She was defined as a deity who tended to the womenfolk of a community, and that those who solicited for care from their fellow females were under the patronage of this goddess (“Suklang Malayon,” 2013). Revisiting the cultural symbolism of her sacred animal, the Maya bird as a representation of her kindness. Suklang Malayon’s didactic role in the pre-colonial Visayan communities was one which upheld the very social bonds that sustained them, especially with regards to those who sought solace from their neighbors. The Maya bird’s social nature symbolized this value. Moreover, the goddess also dislikes noises specifically loud ones like “banging of pot with a ladle” (“Suklang Malayon,” 2013). Given that birds in general are particularly skittish and tend to retreat from such clamorous disturbances, there was a taboo engendered around this action on the basis that if such din was allowed to persist, then Suklang Malayon would depart from the vicinity, and in her place evil spirits would emerge (“Suklang Malayon,” 2013). In a sense, the goddess existence through the totem of the Maya bird instilled a logos imperative of peace in the abodes of the pre-colonial natives; a domestic harmony that was punctuated by quietude.

Libulan the lunar god was strongly associated with the image of an effeminate man, but Luzviminda’s article led to a more controversial depiction of the deity as an entity capable of sustaining dual gender, which was corroborated by the custom of native shaman’s crossdressing or garbing themselves in female raiment (“Libulan,” 2013). Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory was notable for its concept of the Oedipus complex, wherein a child harbors a deep sexual attraction to the parent of the opposite sex. Libulan embraced the female aspect without any repercussion whatsoever, which was derived from his inception as a lunar deity and the cultural symbolism connoted by his sacred animal, the sea turtle. Libulan’s effeminate persona is an example of cultural acceptance of female accents on a male constitution, prevalent and exclusive to the shamans of the ancient Visayan community, which credited their roots to Libulan in a story wherein he saved an outcast from committing suicide and taught him the mystic ways (“Libulan,” 2013). By his patronage, the shaman’s profession as a bridge between god and man flourished, and because of Libulan, the value and tenure of religion and belief to the pre-colonial Visayan community was consolidated to a more substantial and comprehensible echelon.

Lalahan’s power both as a volcano goddess and harvest deity earned her both great fear and great respect from the ancient Visayans that occupied Negros, and the latter designation

of hers as well as her totem animal of the locust (Demetrio, 1968) was where her importance to the people was most palpable. Her control over the growth of crops that the pre-colonial farmers so heavily depended implied that she controlled the prosperity in those communities that looked to agriculture as a source of livelihood. In addition, she was also seen as a just arbitrator who meted out punishment to evil yet provides bounty to the virtuous ("Lalahon," 2013), thus she and her dominion over the harvest promoted the value of righteousness over the community. As with many of the other deities, her character was responsible for their system of taboos, such as the sacrifice of a virgin to her for a bountiful supply of crops, attributed to her palate for their flesh as well as her dislike for a surplus of noise ("Lalahon," 2013). In some accounts, she was said to be a bisection of Kanlaon, the supreme deity among the Negrenese, and was even equated with him ("Lalahon," 2013). However, she is also seen as the goddess who lives in Kanlaon and graces the people with her presence, time and time again, especially during harvest season ready to grant abundance to the righteous and punish the selfish and the wicked ("Lalahon," 2013). In this context, Lalahon was therefore seen as a public, female projection of Kanlaon. A simultaneity of persona and anima who would communicate to the mortals of the human world, again through agriculture, further indicating her place in the divine pantheon and as the paragon of a woman's dual character. In fact, an important note that was extracted from this data was that the entity of Lalahon was not just portrayed as feminine, but human.

Paiburong's role as a guardian of the middle world was defined as an embodiment of strength as symbolized by his sacred animal, the crocodile. To the pre-colonial Visayans, the danger he posed was as patent as the reptiles that were his totem, and to pass safely across the waters where the massive reptiles dwelled, required that they be satiated with offerings of meats, sometimes bordering on human ("Paiburong" 2013), and thus the human fear for this god established this rule that essentially rendered the humans as caretakers of the beasts, and to the extent of their prescientific comprehension, Paiburong himself, whose security of what was in function a gateway between the realms of the dead and the living constructs him as the abstract, indomitable barrier between life and death. Thus, the strength that pertained to the god is more than physical resilience; it was the eternal, impassable fortitude that divides the underworld and the plane of life.

Makaako as the embodiment of lightning (Demeterio, 1968) was equated with the cat, which also symbolized the natural force. Not much was said about his relationship with his worshippers otherwise, save for his position as a harbinger of justice that used his firebolts to smite evil. In conclusion, he was venerated as an arbitrator of righteousness, as with the rest of the Visayan deities.

Thus, the gods and their respective relationships to humans with the mind as medium were observed to necessitate some form or matter of boundaries that delineated a connection between the two entities, usually through tangible objects or organisms such as their sacred animals. Thus, the ancient Visayan communities, through the supernal projection of the gods, propagated their culture from these boundaries, these taboos as so meticulously described by Freud (1918). However, the god's influence to cultural norms is an exchange, for the cultural norms themselves also served to justify a fraction of --if not an aspect-- of a deity's character.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the spectrum of pre-colonial belief, the Visayan gods and their sacred animals shared an essentially profound connection with each other, and to the perception of the natives at the time when the worship of these deities was at its apex, the fauna with whom they shared the environment with came to embody, be it by portion or in entirely specific divine wills.

Thus, although they were not worshipped themselves, was exercise in their presence, as any harm inflicted upon them was interpreted as a transgression to the gods or goddess they were associated with. Thus, in summary was the pre-colonial definition of a sacred animal.

But these taboos were but a simple yet substantial chunk in the aggregate of the religiosity of the pre-colonial Visayans. The gods were the ultimatum of these taboos, defined as rules imposed on human behavior in order to delineate a complex cultural and social structure. Also manifested were the proximity of the god's personalities to humans. These entities of a higher, transcendental degree of existence were subjected to similar controversies to humans, which would justify their power over the people. They were garbed in characters very relatable to their worshippers, outclassing them only by the sheer power that accompanies the beliefs in them. This consolidated the notion that the ancient Visayans authored their very own religion with a creative fuel not unlike other polytheistic ethnicities.

Overall, in the history of piety within the Visayan context, the animistic people worshipped their gods as if they were projections of their own characters. What started out as a communal idiosyncrasy branched out into rituals and practices that defined the ancestral Visayans as religious. Moreover, it emphasized the depths of the intrinsic certitude that has come to govern the Visayan faith, that it is a very prevalent essence of the Visayan identity; a fundamental component of the Visayan pride that must be upheld even in the epoch of Christianity, for although the images that subsumed the word deity have changed significantly since the colonial era, the traditions of venerations observed by the locals have proven themselves resilient even as the likes of Dalikmata, Paiburong, and the rest have faded into obscurity—which should not be so, as these divine entities, in another dimension, are still very much relevant to the contemporary Visayan culture, not just as a stamp to what is a devout Visayan, but also as a symbol and pathways to a patented diversity of intellect and creative vision.

The following recommendations are provided to enrich more the study of Philippine Myth; a research on the deities of the 2013 telefantasya series *Indio*. This series features a special group of characters called the Diwatas, who were loosely inspired by the gods and goddesses of the Visayas pantheons. Such a study may help define the adaptation phenomenon from the literary province to the districts of cinema and provide a potential guide to other similar ventures, and may help to adjust the public to these deities through the lens of visual culture. Secondly, a research on Philippine monsters or creatures of the lower modes of mythology in modern adaptations such as *Trese* comics by Budjette Tan, the fantasy novel *Naermyth* authored by Karen Francisco, and the anthology *Alternative Alamat* edited by Paolo Chikiamco. Studying these works promote not only the movement of adaptation to more local facets of mythology, but also the understanding of the phenomenon as well as guide aspiring creativities on how to go about its application on their work. The next recommendation would be a research that aims to assess the relationship between humans and animals present in other genres of local literature, such as Cebuano folktales or fables. Such a focus can offer to the public a reflection of how those of their generation regard or treat the lesser creatures around them. Lastly, a study that will apply the scope and frameworks to other pantheons of Philippine myth. The phenomena of the sacred animal are not exclusive to the Visayas region, therefore, studies such as these may be centered on certain divinities of the Luzon and Mindanao regions.

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