

Agricultural Rites

TUWALI IFUGAO, IFUGAO PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *The ethno-linguistic group known as Ifugao is actually composed of a number of subgroups, with its two major ones the Tawali and Ayanagan. Depending on the subgroups, there are variations in the conduct of agricultural rites. Described in this article is that of the Tawali.*



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THE RITE, in the language of the Tawali, is *bonga'n page*. Its stages are as follows:

Lukya (literally, opening) – This is performed by the *mumbaki* (ritual specialist) at the granary for a family before the start of the first working season of the year. This marks the first time that the *palay* (rice) may be taken out of the granary. The *mumbaki* invokes the deities and ancestral spirits to bless the palay and to increase it. The closing prayer is a recited agricultural myth. Three chickens are sacrificed. The day immediately after, the *ubaya*, a supportive ritual, is performed in the village, preferably in the house of the family where the first ceremony of the *lukya* in the village was performed. A *tungo*, a ceremonial day of idleness, is observed the following day. After the *tungo*, other families may now perform the *lukya* in their own granaries.

Hipngat – This is performed at the granary with four chickens, done after the general field cleaning when the fields are robust with vegetables planted on the *pungol* (mounds). The purpose is to invoke the gods to bless the rice so that it will not be easily consumed, and to give strength and prosperity to the owner-users.

Panal (sowing) – This is third rice ritual of the year. Performed at the granary with four chickens, it is done to ask the gods to bless the rice seeds so that they will sprout and grow into robust seedlings. A *tungo* follows. After the *tungo*, bundles of rice seeds (*binong-o*) are *nibopnak*, carefully stuck by the stem by hand on the seedbed paddy called *panopnakan*. Each stem of the seed grain is stuck into the mud four or six inches apart with the tip almost

(opposite page) Wielding a pangwagay or a bundle of ritual objects, a *mumbaki*, blesses the forest, the hills, and the terraces, everything in sight.

touching the stem of the preceding one in line. The first seed-laying must be at a rich man's field. Others follow afterwards.

Bolnat – This is performed immediately prior to the transplanting of the seedlings. Three to four chickens are offered to the gods and ancestors for blessing so that the plants will not wilt or die, but instead grow and bear plenty of grain. It is performed at the granary.

Kulpi – When the planting season is over, the *kulpi* is performed from house to house in the village or adjacent villages. It ends in the richest man's granary where the *humul* or general feasting takes place. Villages contribute chicken for the ritual, which is the mark-off point commencing the lay-off from work in the rice fields. Men and women can now do other kinds of work. The men start clearing fields for their *babal* (kaingin) while women weave.

Hagophop – A month after the *kulpi*, the *hagophop* is done at the granary to open the weeding season (*abikagoko*). The rice fields are weeded of grasses while dead or stunted rice plants are replaced with seedlings taken from the *inhuj-un* or reserve seedlings.



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Bundles of newly-harvested rice.



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A mumbaki drains the blood of the sacrificed chicken into a bowl during the performance of a harvest ritual in Barangay Hapao, municipality of Hungduan.

Bodad – This is performed at the granary with three chickens and done during the *abidalu* or wall-cleaning season when the rice plants are about to bear grains. It is a petition to the gods to make the plants bear abundant grains.

Pa’ad – This is performed at the granary when the rice grains are maturing. Three chickens are sacrificed. This is to bind the people to a promise to the deities not to eat fish, shells, snails and any other aquatic animal until the *kahiw*, a minor ritual done after harvest. They ask the gods for a plentiful yield during the *pa’ad*.

Ngilin – This is performed on the eve of the harvest and resumed early the following morning before dawn. A chicken is offered to the *umamo*, the gods of covetousness. The chicken’s carcass is stuck or skewered on a spit and fastened on a *bilau* which in turn is implanted on the dike of the main paddy of the rice field. This is done early in the morning before the harvesters come to start reaping. The purpose is to ask the *umamo* not to covet the rice harvest and to invoke the other gods and ancestral spirits to give their blessings on the harvest.

Ani – This means harvest. On the harvest day, the ritual centers on the granary. While the harvesters work in the field, the menfolk

gather at the granary where they drink, discuss and argue in between the various phases of the ceremony. The priests and priestesses perform all the various steps of the ritual, *ani*, and narrate the myth of Balituk and Kabigat up to the point where they first harvested their rice crop at Imbiday. If the rice field owner is rich, or if he is the *manon-ak* (agriculture leader or chief) of the sitio or village, a pig is added to the chickens offered. The feasting comes only in the mid-afternoon. The harvesters, however, are fed earlier than those in the *alang* (granary).

Upin – This simple ritual is done after the harvest season. Gods are invoked to bless the rice, the granaries and the houses in the village. The *mumbaki* asks the gods to protect the people from sickness, famine, pestilence and to help the community to be prosperous, healthy and peaceful. The following day is a *tungo*. People may not go to the rice field for any reason.

Kahiw – This is performed in the house. The purpose is to release the people from their promise to the gods that they made during the *pa’ad*. The people may eat fish, shells, snails, etc. afterwards. The ritual ends the Ifugao calendar which coincides with the end of the agricultural season.