



# Manang – The Iban Medicine

## Man

*Manang: a medicine man or woman, a witch doctor or wizard. There are both terrestrial and celestial Manang.*

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# Introduction

The terrestrial Manang exorcises evil spirits, which are supposed to be the cause of illness among the Ibans. He generally possesses some little knowledge of the medicinal effects of certain roots and herbs, but he depends for his cures on his incantations in which he calls upon the gods of the hills. He is not above using deceit to catch his soul (*semengat*) which is just leaving the body, and to put it back into the man and thus prevent his death.

The Manang can only undertake one case of sickness at a time and he takes care always to settle about his fee (*sabang*) before attending to the patient. This fee is paid whether the sick man recovers or not. A Manang is a very influential man in Iban community, being the medium by which help may be obtained from the spirits.

A man becomes a Manang in obedience to the command of the spirits conveyed to him in a dream. To disregard such a command would mean the punishment of death or madness inflicted by the enraged spirits.

There are three grades of Manang known as: -

1. Manang Bali
2. Manang Mansau (second grade)
3. Manang Mata (third stage)

# Manang Bali

This is the highest rank to which a Manang can attain. The word '*bali*' means changed, and the Manang Bali is supposed to be a man who has changed his sex and becomes a woman. Even to the Iban mind, such a process is unnatural, and it is only undergone because of the command of the spirits who must be obeyed.

The ceremony of initiation is as follows: -

An offering is made to the gods of seven of each of the following: - pigs, fowls, eggs, jars of native liquor (*tuak*) and other inferior viands. Several other Manang are paid to initiate the candidate into the mysteries of his office. A portion of the public part of the Iban house (*ruai*) is screened off with the Iban sheets (*pua*) and the public is not allowed to see what goes on. It is said that a coconut is split open near the head of the man and a little gold dust put into it. The coconut is supposed to represent the man's head and the gold dust in some mysterious way is supposed to increase his understanding.

The Manang is then invested with a female garment by the wife of the chief man present and is introduced to the assembly under a new name. The Iban instruments of music - the '*tetawak*', the '*engkerumong*' and the drums - strike up and a feast ends the ceremony.

Henceforth the Manang Bali apes the manners of a woman. He does all the work usually done by women. He sometimes even takes a 'husband' who is looked down upon by the community and whose sole desire is to inherit his 'wife's' property as soon as possible.

The Manang Bali may be said to have almost ceased to exist among the down-river Ibans, but the up-river folks possess several recently made specimens!

# Manang Mansau

The word '*mansau*' means ripe, and the name Manang Mansau is given in distinction to the Manang Mata - '*matá*' means unripe. The Manang Mansau is one who has gone through all the required ceremony necessary to make him a perfect Manang.

The ceremony of initiation begins with a sacrifice to the gods of the Manang. This sacrifice varies in different districts. Sometimes it consists of one pig, one fowl, one egg, etc., sometimes more. Several Manang Mansau are paid to attend. These walk round the candidate holding pinang blossoms in their hands. With these, they rub the man's head and he then lies down on a mat in a pretended unconscious state. He is surrounded with raw rice, and a camphor wood stake is placed across him. They pretend to put gold dust on his eyelids and to insert fishhooks in his fingertips. The gold dust is to enable him to see the spirits, and the fishhooks to grapple and restrain the souls of his future patients from escaping from their earthly tenements. A feast is held in the house and all the Manangs walk round and intone a prayer to the gods begging them to help the newly made Manang in his cures. Then the man rises from the mat and shows some charm, a boar's tusk or stone, which he holds in his hand and which he declares he obtained from the spirits in Hades during his trance when he travelled in spirit to the infernal regions. His brother Manang now present him with various charms, which the man puts in his box (*lupong*) and which are to assist him in working his cures, and he is then ready to be called in to attend cases of illness.

# Manang Matá

The word ' *matá*' means unripe, and the Manang Mata is one who, though he assists in curing the sick, has not yet been initiated into all the mysteries of the Manang's profession. He has not yet undergone the process necessary to the Manang Mansau. He can repeat many of the incantations used and he assists others in their cures. This is generally the first stage leading to a man becoming a Manang Mansau.

The following list gives some of the titles of Manang and the derivations of their names as they are invoked by the Manang in their Pelian.

1. Rasau, from Landau, Libau, Rebah, ngelambang (spacious).
2. Jarah, from Kerapa Palah Jalai Apai Jugah mintas nyerang Engkrabang.
3. Jelapi, from Ai Lileh Nunggang.
4. Mampu, from Mengkudu Repok Batang.
5. Matai, from Rembai Murai Ngentupang.
6. Bidu, from Ulu Langgai Skrang.
7. Jaban, from Belayan Madang Lalang.
8. Jarai, from Rembai Murai Ngentupang.
9. Megit, from Bukit Tudong Orang.
10. Mengkau, from Nanga Angau Jalai Penyemberang.
11. Mengu, from Tau Betanjai Tebu di Tisir Tiang.
12. Enchangan, from Tisak Nanak Dalam Ngelemang.
13. Likop, from Rumput Ruding Embawang.
14. Kanchu, from Tuki Bundong Nunggang.
15. Begair, from Akar Jawa Ngelantang.
16. Sanjoh, from Nyelitak Luloh Nansang Kenyalang.
17. Apai Rimbu Layu Panjah Kuah Ikan Semilang.

The celestials Manang are the sister (*menyadi*) of Sengalang Burong called Ini Manang, and the sister of Kumang called Sindun. Besides there are Manang (Petara) who through their superior wisdom were translated to the heavens.

Their names and titles are: -

1. Manang Petara at Bukit Raya Renjong.
2. Matai Selilai, Manang Janang who lives in the middle of the heavens.

3. Jaban, Burong Dindang Burak Tukang Ujong Bulu.

This celestial beings hold much the same position in the heavens as the terrestrial Manang do on earth.