

The Stories and Meanings Behind the Higaunon Traditional Dance: Dinugsu/Dugsu

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal the stories and meanings behind the selected Higaunon traditional dance known as Dinugsu/Dugsu, so as to save and preserve the dance history and its forms of this particular tribe, and its cultural tradition and heritage in general. It aims to identify themes behind the selected traditional dance as a way of saving and preserving its history and forms. This is in pursuant to UNESCO's standpoint of maintaining, safeguarding, and preserving intangible heritage. This study utilizes a descriptive evaluative research design. The stories and meanings behind the selected Higaunon traditional dance are revealed. Also, a semi-structured interviews are done with the practitioners or the performers of the traditional dance in focused. this assisted in the giving of meanings behind each of the stories of the dance. Interviewees are selected based on their level of mastery and expertise within their traditional dances. These experts are selected out from their indigenous community. Results of this study present four relevant themes on the selected traditional dance. The themes are namely: prayer, unity, thanksgiving, and offering for blessing.

Keywords:

1. Introduction

Traditional dances are one of the bearers of cultural tradition and lifeways of indigenous people. This is essential to cultural heritage that need to be passed from one generation to generation. The stories and meaning behind each of these traditional dances contribute substantially to one's cultural identity, and it plays a crucial role in the preservation of traditional practices in which each of these dances features. This is mentioned by Alejandro (1976) mentioned that stories and meanings are embedded in traditional dances.

However, with the rapid changes of the society brought by new trends in the economic, social and technological advancements, traditional dances are challenged. This situation is supported by Dimas (2010) stating that as the occurrence of various changes in social and political aspects in the society, traditional dances may possibly be cut if not given a means in which its stories and meanings be transmitted from one generation to the other. United nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) noted traditional dances as one of the intangible heritage to be safeguarded. Hence, documenting the meaning and stories of traditional dances is a contribution of global awareness of cultural heritage. This is a foundation of working towards the recordation and preservation of dance history and forms.

The Higaunon tribe, one of the seven tribes of the province of Bukidnon, is situated in Bukidnon Philippines, but many of them are residing at Impasug-ong Bukidnon. Their traditional dances reveal stories of ritual observances, communal observances, faith, healing, courtship, work and labor, as well as love and war. The tribe usually perform these dances during the annually celebrated festival known as "Kaamulan" in the province of Bukidnon. However, they also perform these dances during the various cultural ceremonies and banquets their tribe have been practicing. Hence, traditional dances of Higaunon encapsulate the various dimensions of their social life.

Moreover, the conceptualization of the themes, stories and meanings behind each of their traditional dances are guided by their tribal law, known as "Bungkatol ha Bulawan" (The Law of Bungkatol and Bulawan). This law also governs the norms and conduct of the members of the tribe. Accordingly, living a life in accordance with this law will help one achieves life's ultimate goal. Also, the mentioned law guides them to live harmoniously and peacefully as they traverse life. The heart and ways of living of the Higaunon tribe are revealed through their traditional practices and rituals, as mentioned by Fernandez (1982) and Reyes (1984). Dancing are their way of presenting their cultural identity, grounded as well with the understanding that their traditional dances symbolize their ancestor's values and traditions. Thus, performing such dances is a way of safeguarding their cultural tradition and life's values as well. It provides various stories and expressions of people during their times. Participants of these traditional dances are able to developed within themselves interpersonal relationships, communication and collaboration not just with the other dance performers but to their social environment in general.

Additionally, the interpretation on the meanings and stories behind these selected traditional dance is also anchored on the concept Communication Triangle of Bratopoulou (1994).

Communication Triangle is a communication means in traditional dance. It serves various purposes and functions that could be ranked according to the Communication Triangle. This communication triangle includes three parts, namely: Transmitter-Message- and Recipient. The transmitter refers the dancers, the Message are the dance act, and the Recipient are the viewers. In here, the conveying of the message starts when the dancers wish to pass on information to the viewers. This information is conveyed using a code of movements which then form a message. The viewer then decodes the message, interprets it, and ultimately recognizes, perceives, understands, and feels what the dancers wish to carry forward. As the communication process goes on, the viewers' knowledge, thoughts, feelings and behavior are affected with the so called aesthetic aspect of dance. In this manner, the dancer and the viewer have already a direct communication with each other and identify themselves with the message. The dancers are eager to transmit the dance message through their dance movements. This is through dance graces, pleasure and dance ability. On the other hand, the viewers as well respond actively once receiving the message. This response is expressed in a form of applause, exclamation and gestures. This is the kind of communication that is developed by the performers of the dance to their social environment.

The aim of this present study is to reveal the narratives and meanings behind the selected Higaunon traditional dance, so as to save and preserve the dance history and its forms of this particular tribe, and its cultural tradition and heritage in general. Specifically, this study records the dance history of the traditional dance known as DINUGSU or DUGSU

2. Methodology

By utilizing the descriptive evaluative research design, the meanings and stories behind the selected Higaunon traditional dances are revealed. Also, a semi-structured interviews with the practitioners or the performers of the traditional dances has assisted in the giving of meanings behind each of the stories of these dances. Interviewees are selected based on their level of mastery and expertise within their traditional dances. These experts are selected out from their indigenous community. Moreover, descriptive analysis is done in analyzing the content of the stories behind each dance in order to delineate the themes presented in the story. The specific dance is chosen because its significance to next generation is so evident. Its stories and meanings could be the next generation's mainstream in their needs to live a peaceful life.

3. Results and Discussion

The Dinugsu Dance Story and its Meaning

Dugsu or Dinugsu is a traditional dance. It is a way of offering a prayer. The dancers in this particular dance are women. They use a cloth colored red and white as they dance for a purpose. This is a ritual dance and is danced during the "Kaligaon" and other rituals with a specific purpose. The Kaligaon is a series of rituals. It possesses many titles depending on what occasion is being celebrated. The Kaligaon for planting and harvesting is called "Dagingon" and is celebrated by the Bukidnon farmers. While there is also a Kaligaon known as "Tagulabung". This is a ritual done by people of royal blood, the bagani and those who are occupying offices. The Dagingon is the most common ritual and is performed in full for nine nights even today. All of these Kaligaons are transmitted from one generation to another and accordingly whoever tries to stop their celebration will receive a curse over his head.

Moreover, the Dinugsu or Dugsu dance is performed by twenty Higaunon women. But this is lead by a Baylan (equivalent to a priest) but could either be a man or a woman. These women are gathered together to perform a ritual known as "Kaligaon". The dancers start their dance performance by the bowing of their heads while hands holding each other. The bowing of their heads indicates high respect and humbling themselves to their Magbabaya (Almighty one from up above). This act is followed by stamping of their feet slowly but as to create sounds while holding each other's hands. Having this position, they all together call Magbabaya as they start to stamp their feet. This continues as they listen to a "Baylan" who makes a conversation to the spirit to ask for a healing of an illness for the member of their tribe for instance. The Baylan also serves as the mediator between the people and to the spirit of Magbabaya. This dance presents a prayer for healing.

This Dinugsu or Dugsu dance is being described in this manner. The dancers surround the fire as they stamp their right foot while heads bow down. Their heads are adorned with "salulung" which is comparable to a fan. The holding of hands while dancing together represents unity. While the slightly leaning with each other's shoulders as they offer their prayer still signifies unity. The circle formation of the dancers surrounding the fire represents stronghold of the indigenous tribe specially in the preservation of the mother nature which represents pharmacy. The bending of their knees as they stamp to the ground in order to produce a sound means their determination and strong faith to their Magbabaya. The dance continues having their left foot advances in a sliding or brush weight manner while the right foot hit the ground. The dance goes on having a light speed in response to the music. The light speed in relation to the music signifies sacredness of the dance.

Furthermore, the Dinugsu or Dugsu dance is also performed for Kaligaon known as “Tagulambung”. A dance performed for planting and harvesting. The actions are same as when they are performing a prayer for healing dance, but this time the speed and rhythm are faster compared to when offering a prayer for healing. The fast speed and rhythm signify thanksgiving and happiness for the abundant harvest which they received from Magbabaya. This could also be a dance performed when two conflicting parties are peacefully negotiated.

The story behind the stamping of feet of the Dinugsu Dance

There was somebody from heaven who had a skin ailment. The fortune teller and the doctor in heaven said that it was enchanted by the bulalakaw. And the only hope that the patient will be healed is for him to go down to earth and look for a fish to eat. The family of the patient followed the advice of the fortune teller doctor. Those who came down to earth were Agyu, Banlak and Bataay. They were the three ginats who had extraordinary strength and power. Agyu could fly using his shield and spear. Banlak his fiery steel and Bataay who could change his forms to crab, cat dog and others.

They went to Pigdiwatahan (now known as ManoloFortichBukidnon). In Pigdiwatahan, the Tagoloan river can be seen which meets with Amusig. This is called Pigdiwatahan because this was the first place which Agyu, Banlak and Bataay came into. This is also the place going to Tagoloan river where big rocks can be seen which are used to engulf the water so that the fish will be caught.

The current of the Tagoloan river is strong that they found it difficult to catch fish. Agyu and Banlak thought of stopping the flow of the water of Tagoloan river and they used rocks so that the water will dry up. Bataay saw the hard effort of Agyu and Banlak, so Bataay told them to rest because they cannot do anything to stop the flow of the water. Bataay then transformed himself to a crab. A big crab which swam into the water and made a hole under the soil and the water came out from there. At that moment, the water was dried up and they saw many fishes which almost died. They picked them up one by one and cooked the half of them and buried the rest. When the fishes were already cooked, they divided them among themselves. For every person got a share, but they were astonished for there were still many left. The sharing was repeated and repeated according to the number of family members, but still the same, there was still one share left. So, Bataay said that someone was observing them. They looked for it in the bushes, of the grasses and of the rocks which according to them were the observers. They saw a child who lived and was terribly afraid because they found his hiding place. Bataay said to the child “don’t be afraid, and this fish is yours.” The child came out and introduced himself as DilaylanonBalingueg (ligsek ha nguhugen) and they ate together the fish. After eating, Bataay told him “sit down on the rock beside.” The child was prayed over and blessed him, that if the rock that he sat upon will grow tall, he will become a healer and a ritualist. After the prayer, the child was astonished because the rock on which he sat grew much taller than the seat of Bataay.

Bataay asked the child of his route. The child narrated that he was often sold by his master Apo Inayao who took good care of him since birth until he grew up. But when he was sold again, he often went back to Apo Inayao, that is why he was sold again to another. For everyone who bought him, his name was printed. He reached the place where there was a wide sea where he stayed long. He walked along the seashore and thought of going back to Apo Inayao and when he was walking to the place where Apo Inayao lived, he passed by the Tagoloan river. He stopped walking because he saw the giants who did something at Tagoloan river. Here the child observed the things that they did.

After the listening of Bataay to the child’s story of experiences, he named him Baybayan. The families of Agyu, Banlak and Bataay went back to heaven after eating the fish and prayed that Baybayan will become a ritualist and healer and the one whom they took along with a skin ailment was healed. Baybayan was still a slave of Apo Inayao who lived at Pigtahiran of Tagoloan river and Amusig river. The rivers which came from Amusig and Tagoloan at MalukoManoloFortichBukidnon.

When Baybayan grew up his power become stronger to foretell events, heal those who got sick and gave advices to those who have problems. From then on, he was known as the famous ritualist. Many people came near him. By his being ritualist/healer he was able to organize an association. Baybayan and his members frequently went to the big white rock. This place is seen at the middle of Sayawan, Impasug-ongBukidnon, and Pinaan Can-ayan City of LamaybalayBukidnon. On the big white rock, the prayer and the pamuhat ritual were made to ask that the Salimbal (a big basket) brought down to heaven so that they can ride on it. The leader of the witches, Makaybakay has gone away and they might be devoured by it.

During their pamuhat ritual, they offered a special kind of rice. The rice that they offered was harvested from the Faron of Agbangala, a farmer who was transformed by Agyu from a lizard.

God pitied him because of a long time that he planted only Ganda was his plant. Oftentimes Palay fell from heaven but only Makaybakay caught it. One time, there were ten pieces of Palay which blown by the wind and went to Agbangulo and planted them. The rice lightened the body of anyone who ate it. The body might be light so it can jump to the Salimbal. They prepared animals to be butchered like pigs to be dressed like chicken and fish. The halves of the bodies of pigs, chicken and fishes were used for the pamuhat ritual. The other halves were buried.

In the ritual, Baybayin prayed that the Salimbal (a big basket) be lowered. The women started to form as one and were holding hands. In the prayer of Baybayan and his companions, the women closed their eyes and they listened to the prayer. They held tightly their hands and prayed together. Because of the vibration of their prayers, they did not notice that they already stamped their feet because of their plea to Magbabaya that the Salimbal be lowered. They did not also notice that they were already going around surrounding Baybayan and his companion. When they turned their heads from left to right those who were near to the left and right wanted to go to heaven. The feet which stamped together gave a thudding sound so that their plea be heard in heaven and used also Dagingong (a piece of wood that sound). After the Pamuhat ritual, they shared and ate together their foods. There were women and men who questioned why they only got a small share when there were plenty of fish and chickens that were cooked. Baybayan said, that “winnowing basket” is mine and transferred its content to the plate. The winnowing basket was filled with food and was given to the two persons who questioned who were Tapugak and Bahinan. The two said, wow! This is the exact sharing.

Heaven heard their prayers and KokaMalagunot lowered the Samilbal. Many wanted to ride on the Salimbal but only Baybayan and Daganluyan were able to do it because they had an agreement. The rest also wanted to be left on earth so that they can take good care of the “Payungpong ha ligsaan ha sagbet ha kasaysayan”. Payungpong, the grass of history or the history of the things and incidents created by God in the world. Apo Inayao got angry why Baybayan was the one who rode on the Salimbal and not him. Apo Inayao sworn that he won't be under Baybayan. Baybayan pitied the people who were left on the white rock, that is why he made the Betel nut (mamaen) a man, DiwataInpataapwagwas commanded to go to the men where they came from riding on this ring and was ordered to plant rice so that they will have something to eat. The man who was created by Baybayan did not know where to go or search for their roots. He went anywhere, that he even went to the Pacific to ask but nobody knew where to his master Baybayan came from. Those who did not know asked the ring where he rode on and answer of the ring was “its good that you were asking me and I will bring you to the place where my master came from. They passed by a blacksmith which made plow and other tools for farming.

The huge basket in the air of Baybayan and Daganluyan did not notice that Lisngaran chased them from hunting (war) riding on his spread and secretly positioned himself at their backs and watched. Lisngaran heard the conversation of Baybayan and Daganluyan even the plan of Baybayan and Daganluyan to be married to KokaMalagunot, which was his long awaited promise.

When they reached heaven, KokaMalagunot welcomed them and looked for the promised sibling to be married to him. KokaMalagunot came near Daganluyan and be married with her. Lisngaran was angry and opened what he liked. KokaMalagunot and Lisngaran quarreled. He drew his sword and hurt KokaMalagunot but was set apart by Baybayan. The men of KokaMalagunot were not able to snatch the sword of Lisngaran because he swallowed it and had it shown again if they came near his wife KokaMalagunot. Baybayan settled the quarrel of KokaMalagunot and Lisngaran. He came near Daganluyan his sibling and got one strand of her hair to be made into another Daganluyan, one woman whose face is the same as that of Daganluyan to be married to KokaMalagunot. KokaMalagunot got angry and did not agree. He did not accept that a woman to be wed to him came from the strand of hair.

Due to the anger of KokaMalagunot he only turned back and cut his hair and said, “as to how many strands of my hair were cut, that is also the number of years that the huge basket won't fall to earth”. No healer or ritualist can ascend to heaven from now on. But if one oldest woman will give birth to a boy, it can be that there be a healer/ritualist, said KokaMalagunot. After KokaMalagunot remarked, he tied the rope of the huge basket and slept.

Because of the fall of the big basket, the tribe of Makaybakay, the witches increased in number. Even the ugly cat, dog and rest of the ugly animals Agyu, Banak and Bataay agreed that they will descend to earth to seize Makaybakay and the rest of the witches. When they descended to earth to seize Makaybakay and the rest of the witches. When they descended, they easily located the place where the witches lived. The camp of the witches was Lindaban at the end of Dampilasan river above ManoloFortichBukidnon.

One day, Agyu saw the black cat which ran to Dumalaguingsug-ongBukidnon. Agyu was about to stone the cat at the cliff and its head was in between the two socks but all the while the bird Sagugsuk sounded which

was the reason that he slide and his butt thudded at the ravine of Dumalaguing. His butt including the private part made marks of Agyu's anger. He cursed the bird Kokkak said "you will rot." So, the rest of the Kokak cannot be eaten because its meat easily rot. The stone which Agyu held, one reached the Kulabugao river, which is now named Sinakumomo which has the marked of number seventy six (76). The other stone was thrown to Dumalaguing Impasug-ong Bukidnon, and was named Binitbit. Agyu threw away the cat which turned to a stone.

Not later, Makaybakay went to the house of Apo Inayao, to attack Agyu. Banlak and Bataay went to the house of Apo Inayao. When they reach the house of Apo Inayao, they told him "you go with us in going back to heaven so that you cannot be devoured by Makaybakay. This was also the message of Baybayan, so that you can go again to heaven with them. But Apo Inayao did not agree and hoped for his strength and bravery. They were told by Agyu, Bataay and Banlak that they were worthy to fight against Makaybakay. The three tried the power of Apo Inayao that was also how fast he used his shield, as to how fast Agyu, Banlak and Bataay stoned Apo Inayao that is also how fast he used his shield. Bataay told Agyu to go to the air and get fine sand and saute it with a strong lightning and pour it to Apo Inayao so that he will turn into a stone and can't be devoured by Makaybakay. The fine sand from the air can be seen in a place until now so with the many stones which were thrown by Agyu, Banlak and Bataay to Apo Inayao. Nobody can remove and move this because the spirit of the deity will punish this offense. The chase for Agyu, Banlak and Bataay of Makaybakay continued. So that he won't be caught, he threw away the bugka, lanzones, that he took along now Barangay Bugcaon, Lantapan Bukidnon including his baon Durian near the boundary of Umayam of Agusan and Bukidnon until they reached Musuan, Maramag Bukidnon. They caught Makaybakay and tied him with a vine. Bataay told Makaybakay "if you exert effort the veins of your body will rupture", Makaybakay tried to untie the binds, but his veins and bones almost sounded that was why he stopped.

Bataay commanded Agyu to get a fruit of a balite tree which was at the third layer of heaven. Agyu gave to Bataay one fruit of Balite and placed it at the chest of Makaybakay. After placing the Balite fruit at the chest of Makaybakay, it grew fast and became big and big. Its roots slowly bound the body of Makaybakay. The rest of the roots went to the rocks beneath the earth. Now the big balite tree can be seen at Musuan Maramag Bukidnon.

Now that Makaybakay was bound with the roots of the balite, Agyu, Banlak and Bataay thought of going back to heaven. The men were left on earth led by Balisawsaw and Gandingan continued to perform the pamuhat, a ritual prayer and dance at the white rock and held hands raised them gazed at the heavens together with the stamping of their feet. That was the story behind the Dinugsu dance.

The Dinugsu Dance Movements and Rhythms

The Dinugsu dance has four series of movements and rhythms. But before the series of movements and rhythms be done, the dancers are to stand side by side while facing each other. The dancers at this formation hold hands while having the position of an inverted letter T. At the center of this formation, the fire is set, having a distance of at least 4 feet. The dancers surround the fire. The circle formation of the dancers symbolizes unity and cooperation. The bending of their knees indicates respect and sovereignty to their Magbabaya.

Series 1. This is described by the informants as their steps for meditation.

- a. The dancers' right foot is brushed backward. After which, it is stamp near the left foot.
- b. Then, one step to place the right foot in its place.



Series 2. This is described as their movements in preparation for prayer.

- a. The dancers step the right foot first, then they move their body to the right, then to the left. Then this is followed by a slide step to the right.
- b. The steps in A is repeated, but this time with the left foot.
- c. Then, repeat steps A and B with heads bowed in eight counts.



Series 3. This series of steps is described as their continued preparation for their prayer.

- a. In this series, the dancers are holding each other's hands, while forming the inverted letter T.
- b. The right foot step and brush twice. This step is also done with the left foot after.
- c. The dancers, do the cross step to the right and cross step to the left. They repeat the A to C, but this time in the count of four for both right and left foot.
- d. Repeat all the steps, until dancers will be able to form a circle.



Series 4. This series of steps are presenting the indigenous tribe especially the Higaunon's unity and cooperation.

- a. Starting with the right foot (step, close, step), forward, stop. Dancers hands are formed inverted letter T, in one count. And put hands down in the second count.
- b. Jumping backward in one count, then move forward the right foot in count one.
- c. Repeat A and B, but this time holding hands in four counts.
- d. Repeat A to C, in eight counts.



4. Conclusion

Preservation of traditional dances as bearers of cultural traditions and heritage of indigenous people is essential to society. It is their means of expressing and communicating their lives, their spiritual and intellectual and emotional well-being. It is true that today's new globalization makes traditions crucial, however, having a right direction of the society, for example not only concentrating to tangible heritage but also to the intangible ones which include traditional dances will be able to make a link of these new trends of social links in the creation of the preservation of culture. For one, traditional dance groups may as well constitute as registered associations or organizations in the local provinces. In this manner, traditional dances will be made known locally and might as well provide opportunities to perform at the regional or national or even international festivals. May this little short story behind this traditional dance may contribute to the traditional affluence to many.

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