

Courtship and Marriage Practices of the Higaunons in Barangay Lubilan, Naawan Misamis Oriental: Continuity and Change

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Abstract

Barangay Lubilan is peopled with an ethnic group called Higaunons whose cultural heritage is threatened by change. This study described and analyzed the cultural practices of the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan. It focused on the courtship and marriage practices – whether these practices are still preserved and/or are changed. The study also included the economic and political background of these people. It looked into the factors that may have influenced the continuity and change of their courtship and marriage practices.

In exploring these practices, fieldwork was undertaken to gather the data from the respondents. A focus group discussion was conducted followed by interviews. The key informants or the respondents were the elders of the tribe consisting of *datus*, *baes*, and also the barangay captain of Lubilan. The data gathered from the secondary sources were also taken into consideration.

The study revealed that there are changes in the courtship and marriage practices of the Higaunons. These changes were influenced by contact and interaction with the lowland settlers and other factors. On the other hand, traditional marriage practices continue to be observed although this is followed by church wedding.

Keywords: Higaunon, Barangay Lubilan, courtship and marriage practices, continuity, change

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Introduction

Little it seems, is known about the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan in Naawan, Misamis Oriental. The Higaunons are one of the indigenous peoples of the Philippines.

The term Higaunon refers to a large and diverse group of people living today in the variably forested interior plains and mountains of northern Mindanao. Paredes (1997) contends that the Higaunons can be separated linguistically, culturally, historically, and genealogically from coastal and other residents of northern Mindanao who are relatively recent arrivals to the region. For this reason they, along with other non-Muslim groups, are called the indigenous peoples or *Lumad* of Mindanao.

The Higaunons along with other indigenous peoples are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country at the time of conquest or colonization or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries who retain some or all their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains (IPRA, Chapter II, Section 3h).

Majority of the indigenous peoples today live in the hinterlands. Rodil (1994) reasons that in the old days many of them lived in the plains. But as a result of population pressures and resettlement programs from among the majority migrants or settlers, they have moved to the forest areas. Now their forests are devastated and their cultures are threatened so they have learned to fight for survival. Majority of them now are poor and landless.

These indigenous peoples who are also referred to as cultural minorities show a special relationship with their ancestral lands and conservation of their language, traditional, social, political, and economic institutions, and religious practices to some extent, despite their diverse cultures and intrusion of modernity (Bracamonte, et al., 1998). About three million non-Christian Filipinos, now identified as

cultural minorities make up ten percent (10 %) of the total national population. Representing different degrees of cultural development, they have maintained their culture in their clothes, art, religion and other superficial differences. They include the Muslim groups and other ethno-linguistic groups found in the mountain regions of Northern Luzon and other marginal areas of Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao (Panopio, et al., 1994).

Like the other indigenous peoples or cultural minorities, the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan are culturally and geographically isolated for many years and have lived in close kinship with nature. They have more or less preserved vital aspects of their culture and to a lesser extent language, and are identified closely with a territory or homeland. They have thus maintained their unique cultural identity although some have literally shed off this identity by assimilation to the mainstream culture of Christianized Filipinos due to intermarriage, education and trade.

According to Gloria (1987), the indigenous peoples which include the non-Christian and non-Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao and other parts of the Philippines are the true repositories of indigenous Filipino culture. As such these peoples deserve the interest and concern of those who profess to value the cultural roots of the Filipino people. These peoples are governed by customary laws and their indigenous way of life made them unique. They prided themselves with a culture that is different from others (Alan et al., 2001).

But as time passed cultural changes occurred. It has been observed that the indigenous people's way of life has changed overtime. Contact and interaction with other people particularly the Visayan settlers are cited as one of the reasons for this change. Alan (2001) claims that external influences and the emergence of a dominant culture or the mainstream of society have made the present day indigenous peoples live a life that is no longer authentic. Among the indigenous peoples whose ancestral way of life has been affected by contact and interaction are the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan in Naawan, Misamis Oriental.

These people have settled in Barangay Lubilan after they were dispersed by the lowland settlers from their original domain. However, some of their kin managed to remain in their homeland situated by

some four hour walk away to entitle them to customary rights over their territory.

Their settlement in Barangay Lubilan has brought them a little closer to the lowlanders especially after logging companies started logging activities in the area.

This paper looked into the cultural practices of the Higaunons particularly their courtship and marriage practices. This paper also determined whether these practices have changed or if these have remained unchanged despite contact with the lowlanders or Christian settlers.

Statement of the Problem

This research study dealt with the continuity and change in courtship and marriage practices among the Higaunons. Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the system of courtship among the Higaunons?
2. What are the types of marriage or marital practices of the Higaunons?
3. What is their traditional wedding ritual in terms of:
 - a. Wedding arrangement
 - b. Wedding ceremony
4. What are the changes in their courtship and marriage practices?
5. What are the factors that influenced continuity and change?
 - a. Socio-cultural
 - b. Economic
 - c. Political/Legal

Conceptual Framework

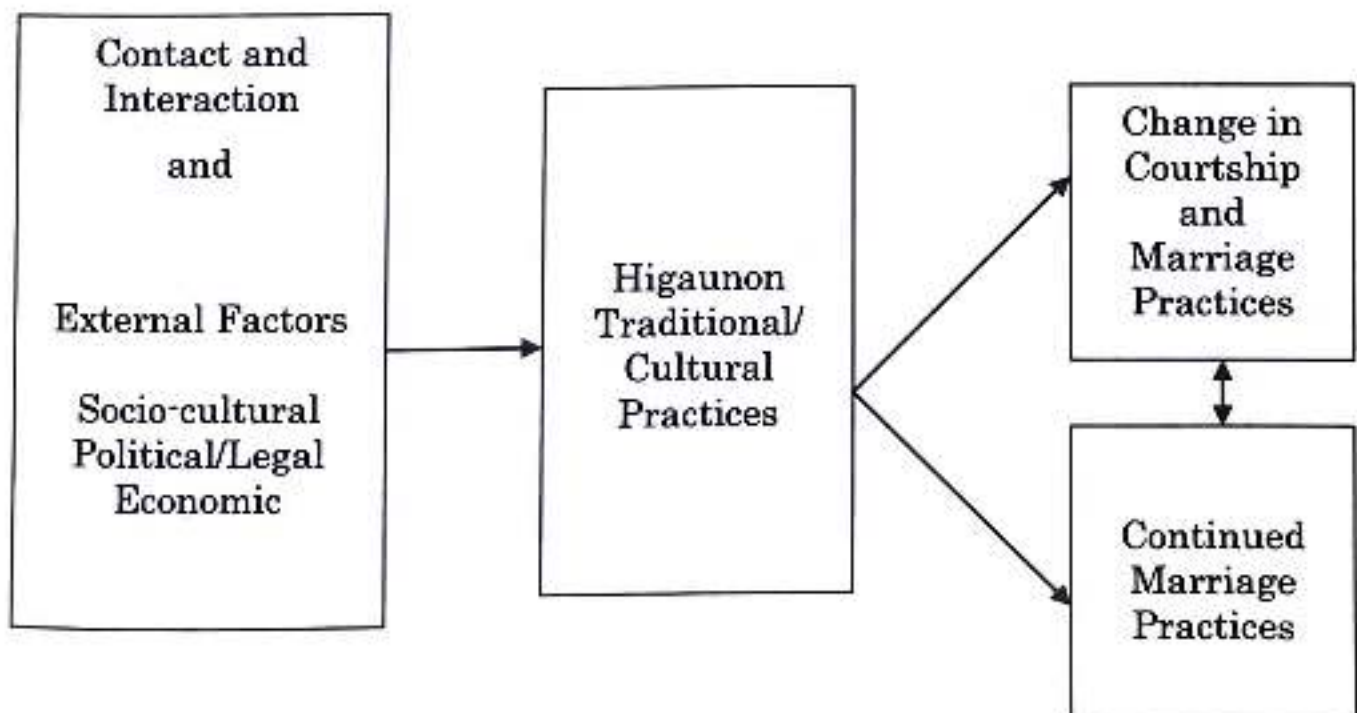
Human beings are unique among all the creatures of the animal kingdom in their capacity to create and sustain culture. Haviland (as cited by Lobos, 2001) stresses that humans shape their culture as much as culture molds human.

This study is guided by the theory that no culture stands still; all cultures always are in the process of changing – courtship and marriage practices (being part of culture) included. Changes in culture normally have their origins in some significant alterations in the life conditions of a society. According to Gloria (1987), any event which changes the situations under which collective behavior occurs so that habitual actions are discouraged and new responses favored, may lead to cultural innovations.

This study assumes that change in cultural practices are brought about by interaction and contact with other people. Contact and interaction are agents of change (Panopio, et al., 1994). Tangian (2001) identifies interaction between the natives of Rogongon and the lowlanders as a factor to the changes in the Higaonon traditional beliefs.

This study further assumes that change in courtship and marriage practices are also influenced by socio-cultural, economic, political, religious factors. All cultures change. That is a phenomenon universal to all societies. Montalvan II (2002) however counters that the opposite is also true – where there is change, there is also persistence or continuity. Gloria (1987) adds that culture change has history.

The Conceptual Paradigm



The paradigm shows that contact and interaction with the lowland settlers plus the external factors such as socio-cultural, political/legal, economic have influenced the Higaunon culture. This influence led to changes in the courtship and marriage practices. The analytical framework also shows that traditional marriage practices continue to be observed.



Significance of the Study

The Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan have settled and lived in isolation for many years. Hardly had there been contact between them and the outside world until the area was opened to logging activities. Like the other indigenous peoples, the Higaunons in this area have a cultural heritage that is unique and distinct.

This study explores the cultural heritage of these people particularly their courtship and marriage practices. There is a need to capture and document their cultural practices which are threatened by change due to their interaction and interrelation with lowlanders and/or migrants who have settled in Barangay Lubilan. Change may have either enriched or destroyed their cultural heritage.

This study also shows the political and economic development of the Higaunons as a group of people and shares insights about the

changes in their cultural heritage. As Gloria (1987) points out, the indigenous peoples are the true repositories of Filipino culture. This study will give the present and future generations a glimpse of the culture of our ancestors, so that the next generations may better understand and appreciate their cultural past and take pride in the culture of their forefathers.

This paper may serve as a frame of reference to those who would like to conduct a more comprehensive study about the Higaunons in Barangay Lubilan.

Lastly this study hopes to bring to the attention of people – government officials, scholars and those interested in preserving cultural heritage that in a remote barangay in Naawan there exists an ethnic group whose cultural heritage is threatened by change.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study described and analyzed the cultural practices of the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan. The researcher considered only the Higaunons who settled in Lubilan - which is a four hour walk away from their ancestral domain. The study focused on the courtship and marriage practices -whether these practices are still preserved or are changed. The study also included the economic and political background of these people. It looked into the factors that may have influenced the continuity and change of their courtship and marriage practices.

The key informants are the *datus*, *baes*, *baylan*, and barangay captain. The data gathered from secondary sources were also taken into consideration.

Methodology

In order to capture the cultural heritage of the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan, the researcher focused on the courtship and marriage practices. In exploring these practices, fieldwork was undertaken to gather the data from the respondents. The researcher had to undergo a "ritual" before permission was given for her to conduct the research. A focus group discussion was conducted among

the elders. Interviews were also conducted to elicit more information. Guide questions were used and translated into the vernacular to facilitate the informants' understanding. The key informants or the respondents were the elders of the tribe consisting of *datus*, *baes*, and also the barangay captain of Lubilan.

The data gathered from the tribal chieftain were also examined and taken into consideration. Library research was also undertaken.

Cultural Setting

Locale of the Study

Barangay Lubilan is the interior-most barangay of the municipality of Naawan, Misamis Oriental. Naawan is located in the western part of the Province of Misamis Oriental (Naawan Municipal Profile, 2006).

Lubilan is the farthest barangay which is 15 kilometers from the Poblacion of Naawan with an area of 1,931.44 hectares. It has the second largest land area among the ten (10) barangays of Naawan municipality. However, its total population as of 2006 is only 1,023, in which the Higaunons constitute more than sixty percent (60%) or more than six hundred (Naawan Municipal Profile, 2006). At present, there are one hundred five (105) households in Barangay Lubilan.

The place is passable by a four-wheel drive vehicle and motorcycles, in which the latter are the means of transportation locally called *habal-habal* carrying at least three persons for fifty pesos per person. Due to the rugged road which was a former logging road, it takes almost an hour to reach it. But there is difficulty in reaching the place on rainy days as the road becomes slippery.

In going to Lubilan, mountain ranges can be seen on both sides. Barangay Lubilan is bounded on the north by the mountain of Alubijid municipality, on the east by the mountain of Opol municipality, on the south by the mountain of Manticao municipality and on the west by the mountains of Mat-i and Tagbalogo, part of Naawan municipality.

Lubilan is a valley, surrounded by mountain ranges namely: Mt. Andelan, Mt. Kalisahon, and Mt. Malindawag. It is crossed by the Tinamparan creek and Lubilan river. It has waterfalls that supply water to the area and a water system that serves the needs of the residents. Electric power is now installed and available in the barangay.

Barangay Lubilan comprises Lubilan Proper (I-A) and (I-B) (Centro), and the sitios of Andelan, Inlubo, Kalisahon, Kilablab, Mahanggub, Malindawag, Mambuntan, and Suwa. Lubilan is a developing rural community. It has an elementary school, two (2) daycare centers, barangay hall, barangay health center, multi-purpose hall, basketball court, small stores, and Christian chapels such as Catholic, Aglipay, and Born Again. It has also a KATRIBU multi-purpose center called *Talugan*, where the Higaunon activities are usually held.

Factors Influencing Continuity and Change in Courtship and Marriage

The changes in the cultural practices of the Higaunons in Barangay Lubilan could not have occurred had it not been for the entry of the Visayan migrants/non-native settlers and the intrusion of loggers in the area.

When Barangay Lubilan was opened to commercial logging activities, the *Dumagats* or Visayans occupied the area bringing with them their culture. Through contact and interaction with the settlers, the Higaunons learned and adopted their ways. The more they were exposed to them, the more they forgot their ancestral way of living and embraced the culture of the dominant group.

The changes in the Higaunon culture are reflected in the modern clothing they wear everyday, the Visayan language they use in communication, the presence of Christian chapels in the area, the Christian marriages, the kind of television shows they watch and the modern music that they listen to.

One significant change in the traditional practices of the Higaunons is intermarriage or the marriage of Higaunons with

Christian settlers. Intermarriage or mixed marriage is facilitated by contact and interaction with the Visayan or lowland settlers.

Today, the courtship and marriage practices among the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan have changed. The Higaunons no longer observe the traditional courtship practices. Most of the males now court a girl anywhere and together they would attend community activities. Nowadays, only a few young Higaunons observe the practice of serving in the household of the girl's parents. Furthermore, no longer is the *panuyo* or the agreement between the girl's and the boy's parents practiced. The choice of mate falls on the individual although the consent of the family is still sought. Usually, the parents just abide by the decision of their son.

The *lilay* or sum of money demanded by the bride's party now depends on the financial capacity of the groom's family. The bride's parents no longer demand from the groom's family the *batang o manggad* which includes a cow or a carabao and other expensive things. This is in consideration of the financial capacity of the groom's parents. At present, the traditional marriage rituals are still observed but only if the marriage is endogamous.

Those who intermarried were married again in church after the traditional Higaunon wedding rites. This development has been influenced by the introduction of Christianity in the area. The coming of Christian missionaries in Barangay Lubilan facilitated the natives' conversion to Christianity. Eventually the natives submitted themselves to church wedding rites so that today, both the traditional native rites and church rites are practiced and observed.

Contact and interaction with the Visayan settlers have also influenced the Higaunons' courtship practices. No longer do parents arrange their children's betrothal but boys or the males today are left to decide on their own choice of partner.

Another factor that may have influenced their courtship and marriage practices is exposure to the mass media. There are sixteen (16) Higaunon households in Barangay Lubilan proper who have television sets. Mendoza (as cited by Baena, 1993) cites that the mass media is instrumental in moulding the views, modifying the opinions and developing the tastes of people.

Despite the changes in the courtship and marriage practices of the Higaunons, traditional marriage rituals are still observed. In some

cases, the traditional marriage rite prevails and others observe both the traditional and church wedding ceremony. Arsenio Panuncillo, one of the key informants elaborates, that a Higaunon and Christian couple undergo both rites when they marry, with the traditional rite being performed first followed by church wedding. This is corroborated by Alfredo Abellanosa or Datu Sagyawan, whose wife a Christian adopted the Higaunon culture. A Higaunon woman, Teodora Tinangkuran who married a Muslim said that they were married in Higaunon marriage rites only.

According to *Bae Keram*, the tribal chieftain, to them marriage does not need a piece of paper to make it binding but today they recognize the importance of a marriage license. This is one aspect of Christian culture that invades the native culture. So, Higaunons submit to a church wedding not only because they are converted to Christianity but also in order for them to have a marriage license and birth certificate. These are necessary requirements when their children go to school and other purposes.

However, at present, the local civil registrar allows the *baylan* (after attending a seminar) to officiate a wedding and to have the marriage contract of the wedded parties registered and reported to their office.

While the older Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan have maintained their traditional ways, present-day Higaunons embraced the practices of the settlers.

Implications

Just as the Philippines is undergoing many changes, the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan are also experiencing changes particularly cultural change.

Through contact and interaction with the Visayans the Higaunons learned and adopted their ways resulting in the change of their traditional lifestyle. They embraced the culture of the Visayan settlers and adopted the norms, values, and ways of the dominant culture, thereby altering their indigenous way of life. With the advent of modern ways, the Higaunons were assimilated into mainstream society. As Alan (2001) said the more one was exposed to an outside

force or with other societies, the more one gained from them and the more rapidly one changed as compared to those who have less contact with outside forces.

Changes in the courtship and marriage practices have also diminished the cultural value system of the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan. There seems to be a failure on the part of the elders to transmit their traditions to the young generation. *Bae Kadangilan* laments that some Higaunons who married Christian settlers are embarrassed to admit that they belonged to an ethnic group, or they are ashamed to claim that they are Higaunons. Barangay Captain Marcelo Z. Canion, whose mother is a Higaunon, claims that some Higaunons deny they are natives. A strong feeling of discrimination and prejudice prevails among some Higaunons thus the denial of their ancestry.

There is a need to raise their consciousness on the importance of their culture in order to promote and preserve their traditional ways so that the next generation may understand and appreciate their cultural past before their culture would completely disappear. Through education and the practice of their indigenous knowledge system the indigenous culture can be promoted and this may in turn lead to the appreciation of their culture.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The culture of a people or tribe is manifested in the courtship and marriage practices, thus, this study is conducted to establish if these practices are preserved and continued, declined or changed.

One of the ethnic groups in the Philippines are the Higaunons of Mindanao. In Barangay Lubilan, Naawan, Misamis Oriental, can be found a community of Higaunons who settled in the area long before Lubilan became a barangay. They were the original settlers in the place.

Like other indigenous peoples in the country, the Higaunons have a distinct culture. From their attire to their religion, to their courtship and marriage practices, their culture is distinctly theirs - a culture which has existed and survived for centuries until the logging

companies started penetrating the area. As a consequence, Christian settlers established their residences in the locality.

With the coming of the new settlers, acculturation was inevitable. As Lubilan developed and progressed into a barangay, roads were constructed making the place more accessible and bringing the once isolated people closer to the urban and Christian dominated areas.

Acculturation, brought on changes on the traditional courtship and marriage practices of the Higaunons. Without the presence of Christian settlers, the Higaunons practiced endogamy. This changed with the coming of Christian settlers because of logging concessions in the area. Through contact and interaction, the Higaunons adopted the ways of the Christian settlers.

Manifestations of these changes are reflected in the clothes they began to wear, the Visayan language they communicate with, the kind of television shows they watch and the modern music they listen to. But the most enduring change is the visibility of Christian chapels and the occurrence of Christian marriages.

One significant change in the traditional practices of the Higaunons is exogamy or the marriage of Higaunons with Christian settlers. Whereas before, Higaunons marry within their society, with the intrusion of Christian settlers, endogamy ceased as a marriage practice.

In cases of intermarriage, after the traditional Higaunon wedding rites, Christian church wedding follows. However, traditional marriage practice continue to be observed when both Higaunons marry.

The observance of Christian church wedding is also dictated by legal consideration. This is necessary for the issuance of a marriage license and a birth certificate.

Nowadays, the courtship and marriage practices among the Higaunons of Barangay Lubilan have changed. Gone are the ways of serving in the household of the girl's parents and the latter choosing the mate of their children. No longer demanded are dowries and festive wedding celebrations because of economic conditions. But it is pointed out that these are done away with in endogamous marriages but not in exogamous ones. The most effective change is the non-practice of polygamy. For practical reasons, monogamy is the

prevailing practice among the Higaunons. Separation and teen-age marriages are also being discouraged.

Change is inevitable and man adopts to his environment to better his life and to survive. The same is of the Higaunons of Lubilan, Naawan, Misamis Oriental. They adopted Christian courtship and marriage practices beneficial to them while at the same time preserving the traditional ones to remind them of a rich cultural heritage.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the courtship and marriage practices of the Higaunons in Barangay Lubilan, Naawan, Misamis Oriental are greatly affected by the Christian lowlanders who settled in the place as part of a logging concession in the area.

Some of their socio-cultural practices have changed thus, the continued threat to the Higaunon culture exists.

The researcher recognizes the need to preserve the diminishing culture of the Higaunons, hence, the following recommendations:

1. It is imperative for the elder Higaunons transmit their knowledge and practices/tradition to the younger generation;
2. Strengthen the Council of Elders because they are the ones transmitting the knowledge or tradition to the young;
3. Through the joint venture of the barangay or the local government and council of elders, a tribal school needs to be established to educate the young and raise the youth's awareness of their own cultural heritage;
4. Participation of the youth in tribal activities/festivities should be encouraged;
5. The Higaunons may adopt socio-cultural changes beneficial to them while at the same time observing their own traditional practices;
6. Documentation of an indigenous knowledge system or tradition and practices of the Higaunons of Lubilan is necessary to ensure continuity and posterity for the future generation of the Higaunons; and,

7. the Christian migrants/settlers should respect, understand and appreciate the Higaunons' cultural heritage because in diversity, unity can be fostered.

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