

The Economic Aspects of the Tausug Traditional Beliefs, Rituals and Practices

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Introduction

The organizer's choice of Jolo as the venue for this Seminar-Workshop is timely and appropriate in the light of the emerging climate of peace and development in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan regions. After more than two decades of dealing with war and conflict, we are now talking of cultural awareness and economic development. Our being here in Jolo also highlight the significance of the cultural practices and heritages of the Bangsamoro people in general and the Tausug in particular, in the development of a Filipino national culture that is truly representative of the various ethnic groups in the country.

The topic assigned to me is supposedly the "Economic Aspect of Culture or Culture as an Economic Activity". Since that is too broad to cover in just less than half-an-hour, I have decided to focus mainly on the economic aspect of the Tausug traditional beliefs, rituals and practices which form part of the Tausug culture.

In order to understand the traditional beliefs, rituals and practices of the Tausug in the Southern Philippines, let us first take the following theoretical and conceptual perspectives into consideration:

1. The traditional beliefs, rituals and practices of the Tausug are the blending of native (Pre-Islamic) and Islamic practices which some historians (Gowing, 1979) and Tan, 1984) anthropologist (Jocano,

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- 1978) describe as folk-Islamic practices.
2. The traditional beliefs, rituals and practices of the Tausug, which from part of the Philippines culture, by all indications can be considered as very strong culture because they have survived despite the onslaught of the various exogenous cultures, like Islam and Christianity.
3. The existence of elaborate beliefs, rituals and practices among the Tausug indicate that they had already attained advanced socio-economic development before the coming of Islam.
4. The traditional beliefs, rituals and practices of the Tausug have significant implications on the economy and economic relations in the community.
5. The Tausug's traditional beliefs, rituals and practices designed primarily to honor and entertain family members, friends and relatives have tremendous implications on the strengthening of family ties and kinship relationships among the natives of Sulu.

A Brief Ethnographic Analysis of the Tausug

The Tausugs are the ethnic and linguistic group concentrated in Sulu Archipelago and the island provinces of Basilan and Tawi-Tawi. They are one of the four dominant Bangsamoro groups (Maranao, Maguindanao, Samal and Tausug) in the Southern Philippines. The large settlements of the Tausug are found in the province of Sulu. Several other scattered and minor settlements are found in Zamboanga, Cotabato, Davao and Palawan provinces (Gowing, 1979).

The name Tausug seems to be derive from "tau" which means person or people and "sug" meaning current. The Tausugs are therefore popularly referred to as the "people of the current"

They can be loosely classified into three major groups: a) the *tau-higad* (coastal dwellers) b) the *tau-guimba* (hinterland populations); and c) the *tau-pu* (island settlers). The *tau-higad* are those living in the coastal areas and mostly fishermen. The *tauguimba* are those living in the hinterland of Jolo island and are mostly farmers. The *taupu* either farmers or fishermen are those living in the island nearby like Saisi, Tapul, Pata, Pangutara, Tongkil, and others. (Abbahil, 1984).

Before the coming of Islam, the religious of the Tausugs could be characterized as both polytheistic and animistic in nature. The religious beliefs, ritual and practices of the Tausugs shared similar character not only with the rest of Filipino communities also with the neighboring Malaysian and Indonesian people. The objects of the pre-Islamic workshop of the Tausugs were gods in the form of unseen beings, plants and animals, fetishes and spirits of

the dead. In particular they regarded trees, caves and large stones as being inhabited by spirits. These natural phenomena were venerated and sacrifices in the form of animals were offered to them (Esmula, 1982).

Today, despite the influence of Islamic religion and Islamic way of life, a good number of Tausugs continue to perform these traditional beliefs, ritual and practices. What are practiced therefore seem to be a blend of the traditional and the Islamic beliefs, rituals and practices.

The Economic Implications of the Traditional Beliefs, Rituals and Practices of the Tausug

As earlier pointed out, the main concern of this paper is to show the economic implications of the traditional beliefs, rituals and practices of the Tausugs. However, before doing so, let me first clarify what are these beliefs, rituals and practices. Basically these are beliefs, rituals and practices observed and performed by the Tausugs whenever they undertake *parakala dakula* (undertaking big or important socio-cultural and religious events). It specifically refers to the Tausugs customary practice of celebrating social activities and performing religious rites in a grandiose fashion with accompanying colorful festivity.

Parakala Dakula is usually undertaken when the Tausugs celebrate and observed the following socio-cultural and religious rituals: a) *Pagtiyaun* (wedding celebration); b) *Paggunting* (baptismal rites); c) *Pagislam* (circumcision rituals); d) *Pagtammat* (graduation from an informal Koran reading school); e) *Pagduwaa pa taas* (indigenous healing rituals); f) *Pagkamattayan* (death anniversary rites); and many others.

In my earlier study (Kamlian, 1993) I found out that the observance of these socio-cultural activities and religious rituals have tremendous implications on the economy and economic relations of the Tausug society, for these need huge financial outlay. The host family would try very hard to make the celebration as elaborate and as colorful as possible in order to avoid criticisms, save family from embarrassment and to appease supernatural beings.

I also mentioned in my study that Tausug family who fails to perform and observe these beliefs, rituals and practices with their corresponding grand celebration and colorful festivity is considered *waysipug* (shameless) and *baldusa* (sinner), and will be forever subjected to social ostracism and humiliation.

Let us now show the economic aspect of the Tausug traditional beliefs, rituals and practices by considering the following important socio-cultural and religious events, and their corresponding financial requirements.

- 1) *PAGTIYAUN* (wedding celebration) the Tausug marriage practices and

its rituals are very expensive. These expenses mostly include the payment of a very high dowry and financing of a grand wedding celebration. The dowry usually includes: a) *pilak* (cash); b) *sapi* (cow); c) *bugas* (rice); d) *bulawan* (gold); e) *sigá* (cigarette); f) *tamungun sin pangantin* (bridal gown); g) *Sinapang* (firearm), and others.

Meanwhile, funds for grand wedding celebration are used to purchase the following: a) *sapi*; b) *bugas*; c) *ista* (fish); d) *sigá*, and e) *mussak massik* (miscellaneous expenses). All of these items are necessary to serve and entertain guests and visitors during the wedding day.

The average total expenses of a Tausug family to finance *pagtiyau* ranges from P50,000.00 to 250,000.00 in cash. This expenses can reach as high as P500,000.00 among the well-to-do family. This amount is inclusive of the dowry and wedding celebration expenses. The celebration is usually a whole day affair but preliminary preparations take place several days before.

Visitors and guests include *pangdaig* (neighbors), *bagay* (friends), and *ushawaris* (both affinal relatives) of the host family. In most cases, the entire community is in attendance during the wedding celebration.

- 2) *PAGGUNTING* (baptismal) is an indigenous rituals which the Tausug undertake for every additional new born baby. They celebrate the occasion with *parakala dakula*. The celebration takes place usually when the baby reaches the age of one week or two weeks old. The occasion is celebrated with elaborate rituals and colorful whole-day long festivity.

A Tausug family can spend P10,000.00 or more depending on the economic status of the host. This amount will be utilized to purchase and finance the following items necessary for such affairs: a) *sapi*; to be slaughtered and cooked into different natives recipes; b) *bugas*; c) *ista*-to be prepared in different native dishes; d) *tirigu* (flour) - to be baked into different native delicacies; e) *kahawa* (native coffee) to be brewed; f) *sukal* (sugar); g) *sarakka* (cash offering) to the *Imam or Pakil* (native priest) who usually performs the rituals and *panghulugu or panggagabbang* (native singer) and h) *mussak massik*.

- 3) *PAGISLAM* (circumcision) is one of the most important rituals in the Tausug rites of passage. Literary it means initiation to Islam. As practiced by the Tausug, *pagislam* is done to a male individual by the time he reaches the age of *akkilbalig* (adolescence). The female version of *pagislam* is called *pagsumnat*. This event is also celebrated in almost similar manner with other important Tausug socio-cultural and religious occasions, in terms of its expenses and lav-

ishness. For instance, in Parang, Sulu a family needed about P20,000.00 for the celebration of *pagislam* of their eldest son sometimes in 1978. This amount was specifically used to buy and finance the following requirements for the celebration: a) four (4) *sapi*; b) 20 sacks of *bugas*; c) several kilos of *ista*; d) *sigá*; e) *sarakka*; and f) *mussak massik*.

- 4) *PAGTAMMAT* (graduation from an informal Koran reading school) is celebrated individually by the parents of students. Every parent of a successful *mulid* (student) celebrates the occasion. The nature of the celebration, however, varies according to financial capability of the parents. The common practice is to hold *parakala dakula* in celebrating the occasion. Like many other important celebrations, the whole community is invited to witness the rituals and festivities. *Bagay*, *pangdaig*, and *usbawaris* of the host family usually grace the occasion bringing along with them the whole family.

Pagtammat is a big and an important event in the Tausug society. To the Tausug parents, having their children master the reading of the Holy Koran is a great accomplishment of their religious obligations toward their family, and so there is no better way to manifest it in society than through a grand celebration. The importance of this occasion is reflected on the expenses spent by Tausug family. For instance host family will spend about P10,000.00 or more in celebrating the occasion.

- 5) *PAGDUWAA PA TAAS* is an indigenous religious rituals performed by a newly married couple. The general objective of this ritual is to ask the blessing of the Almighty God. This is done in order to start with a good life free from problems, sickness and other difficulties as the newly wed couple venture into matrimony. It is believed that failure to perform this particular rituals will cause some mysterious sickness that can befall on the couple-which even the modern medical practitioners cannot possibly cure. This kind of sickness will affect the couple if not their children generation after generation.

This ritual, though basically indigenous in origin is now being Islamized because the prayers which are read and chanted during its performance are verses taken from the Holy Koran.

A Tausug family will spend from P5,000.00 for the performance of this ritual. This amount will be utilized to buy and finance the following requirements: a) *mamuk* (native chicken); b) *bugas*; c) *anglit* (clay pot); d) *ligo* (bamboo winnower); e) *kabasi* (squash); f) *lahing* (coconut); g) *tubo* (sugar cane); h) *asin* (salt); and i) *sarakka*.

- 6) *PAGKAMATTIYAN* (death anniversary) is celebrated in a grand manner among the Tausugs. Host family will spend from lower of P25,000.00 to a higher of P50,000 for the occasion. This huge amount will be necessary to finance and procure the following: a) *sapi*; b) *bugas*; c) *ista*; d) *mamuk*; e) *sigá*; f) *sarakka*; g) *mussak massik*.

A unique and interesting feature in practically all these celebrations is that the financial obligations is not only on the hosts but also on the guests. Tausugs who attend these celebrations are expected to bring certain amount for the hosts, again depending on the capability of the person, as a form of *tutulongan* or assistance. The guests do not mind because when their turn as hosts come, their guests are also expected to return the favor.

There are still several other Tausug beliefs, rituals and practices with an economic implications. However, the six above mentioned rituals and practices are enough to highlight discourse on the economic aspects of Tausug traditional cultural practices and heritages.

Some Concluding Remarks

This study point us to the three (3) equally important aspects of the Tausugs culture.

Firstly, the Tausugs have a very rich and colorful traditional beliefs, rituals and practices which are blending of pre-Islamic (indigenous) and Islamic cultures.

Secondly, the Tausugs traditional beliefs, rituals and practices which form part of their culture, are very functional in the day to day life of the people. The performnace and observance of these beliefs, rituals and practices are very significant to the Tausugs since these allow them not only satisfy their socio-cultural and religious obligations but also help maintain and strengthen family ties and kinship relationship. It can also serves as form of socialization among friends and neighbors.

Thirdly, the Tausugs traditional beliefs, ritual and practices have tremendous implications on the economy and economic relations in the community. The Tausugs spend significant amount of money which of no doubt it could spur the economic activities in the community.

The issue of who will directly benefit from the business aspects of the Tausug culture is reality which needs for a very creative appraoch in social engineering. This is of course, a challenge for all of us.

Finally, although it is laudable to attract tourist and consequently increased

the country's inflow of dollar, but it should not be encouraged when it is at the expense of commercializing culture. Our heritage of the past which instead needs proper national protection for effective identity purposes and future ready reference into an integration study of Philippine national culture and the rest of Asia.

Assalamu alaykum... peace and prosperity be upon all.

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