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Research Article

FOLKDANCES IN THE PROVINCE OF CAMARINES SUR, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

The study looked into the different folkdances in Camarines Sur. Specifically, it documented the origin, costumes, music and most importantly the movements and figures. Bicolano traits depicted in the head, hands, hip and foot movement were also considered.

Descriptive-qualitative methods were used in the study. Descriptive method was used in describing the various folk dances and practices of key informants in the demonstration and presentation. Qualitative method was employed to uncover the details and cultural underpinnings of folkdances. It employed documentary analysis, unstructured interview, actual observation and video recording/photo coverage.

Findings revealed five folkdances in Camarines Sur such as lagaylay, pastora, flores de Mayo, Sta Clara and Sta Elena. Lagaylay is a re-enactment of the discovery of the holy cross by Sta. Elena done in two-hour song and dance performance. Pastora is Bicolanos beautiful commemoration of Christmas. Sta Clara is a thanksgiving for the good harvest and good health of the people. Flores de Mayo is a celebration of the beneficial rains by giving praise to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sta. Elena is a religious and war dance in the search of Saint Helena for the cross on which Jesus died. Movement of the head, hands, hip and foot during the dance depicted Bicolano traits.

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INTRODUCTION

All the art forms, the coordination of poetry, music and dance make humans exist, share human experiences, express and harmonize with the different languages of the art. Dance has been described as the poetry of the feet. The image it created paints a thousand words [1].

Dance is an indispensable part of the social and religious life of the Filipinos [2]. Folk dancing is an expression of an art through movement and action. It symbolizes culture and an expression of feeling. It pertains to dances which are to a significant degree bounded by tradition and originated in the times when the distinction existed between the dances of "common folk" and the dances of the "high society". The terms "ethnic" and "traditional" are used when it is required to emphasize the cultural roots of the dance. In this sense, nearly all folkdances are ethnic ones though not all ethnic dances are folkdances [4].

Philippine folkdance is one of the Philippine cultures that incorporate influences from immigrants and conquerors while at the same time maintaining their own national identity. The dances of the Philippines were developed while Filipinos were

working in the fields, celebrating feasts, harvests, births and weddings[5].

Bicol is one of the regions in the Philippines with rich culture and history [6]. Bicol dances are often associated with ritual. The "tarok" step was originally a movement that belonged to the ancient ritual "atang", quick marching step were executed by the priest or priestess before the god of good; "gugurang" by the tribal women before the moon goddess, Haliya; "sinakiki" (literally "feet") step of Albay is another typical dance movement. Most of these rituals depict the people's way of life [7]. "Pabirik" (means to turn) dance of Camarines Norte is named after the turning motion of the gold panners' container.

Amidst the many recorded dances, there is no sole documentation of folkdances in the Bicol Region particularly in Camarines Sur. Because of the rapid cultural changes accelerated by globalization, traditional art forms are nearly dying[8]. The study looked into the different folkdances of selected towns in Camarines Sur such as Canaman, Bombon, Calabanga, Tigaon and Bula. Specifically, it documented the origin, costumes, music and most importantly the movements and figures. Bicolano traits depicted in the head, hands, hip and foot movement were also considered.

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METHODS

Research Design

Descriptive-qualitative methods were used in the research. Descriptive method was used in describing the various folk dances and practices of key informants in the demonstration and presentation. Qualitative method was employed to uncover the details and cultural underpinnings of folkdances in Camarines Sur. The research makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of study.

Locale of the Study

The research was conducted in five municipalities in Camarines Sur such as Canaman, Bombon, Calabanga, Tigaon and Sta. Elena, Bula which were purposely chosen because of its rich culture and tradition [9].

Canaman is a landlocked third class municipality centrally located in the province of Camarines Sur. It is bounded on the north by Magarao, on the south by Camaligan, on the east by Naga City, and on the southwest by the broad Bicol River. From north to south it is 6 kilometers (3.7 mi) long, and 14 kilometers (8.7 mi) wide from east to west. According to the 2010 census, it has a population of 32,390 people.

Bombon is a fourth class municipality in the province of Camarines Sur with an approximate population of 15,437 people. Like any other municipality in the province, the town of Bombon also started as a mere barrio or “visita”. It was dependent on the town of the ancient Quipayo for nearly 240 years, now a mere barangay of Calabanga town. It finally gained its independence during the arrival of Americans of February 11, 1900.

Calabanga is a first class municipality in the province of Camarines Sur with approximate population of 78,119 people and land area of 16,380 hectares. It is bounded on the west by the Bicol River and beyond the municipality of Cabusao; on the south by the municipality of Bombon and Naga City; on the east by the forest of Mount Isarog, the Tigman River and each tributary forming the natural boundary and beyond the municipality of Tinambac; on the north by the fishing grounds of San Miguel Bay, and beyond, the municipalities of Sipocot, Basud and Mercedes.

Tigaon is a first class municipality in the province of Camarines Sur. Its population was reported as 48,611 people. It is located between Mount Isarog and the Lagonoy Gulf. The economy is based on agricultural products like rice, corn, sugar cane, abaca fiber, fish and pork. Tigaon is also known for its cottage industry, especially high quality ships-in-bottles. The main tourist attractions are the Mt. Isarog Jungle Park at Barangay Concocep and several beach resorts.

Bula is a first class municipality in the province of Camarines Sur consist of 68,011 people. The town of Bula is historically considered as one of the first four towns of Camarines Sur founded by the Spanish conquistadores when they set foot on the Bicol soil coming from the Visayas in 1576. It is bounded on the north by the municipalities of Pili and Ocampo, on the east by the municipality of Baao, on the southeast by the municipality of Nabua, on the south it is bounded by the municipality of Balatan, on the southwest by Ragay Gulf, and

on the west by the municipality of Minalabac. It is approximately 25 kilometers southwest of Naga City.

Respondents and Data Gathering Procedure

The research employed documentary analysis, unstructured interview, actual observation and video recording/photo coverage. Key informants' identity was withheld due to ethical considerations.

Interview with dance trainers and facilitators was employed focusing on the choreography, costumes, props, music, origin, movements and figures of the folkdances. Inquiries on how the oral folk traditions along folk dances were handed down to the next generation and to the trainers of the present time was also significantly looked into. The origin, the costumes, and historical backgrounds of the unpublished folkdances were transcribed and meticulously noted down. Several days of visit to each locale was made to see performances and presentation of the unpublished folkdances.

Observation and mechanical recordings of the processes in the places where the folkdances are performed were done following Francisca Reyes Aquino's format [10]. Old folks were also interviewed on how the folk dances were handed down to their generation, to the next. Notations and actual observation while the performers were dancing with the accompaniment of their indigenous musical instruments were made. Dance movements were taken through video, and interviews conducted were recorded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Folkances in Selected towns of Camarines Sur, Philippines

There are five documented folkdances in Camarines Sur identified by this study. It includes “Lagaylay” in Canaman; “Pastora” in Bombon; “Flores de Mayo” in Calabanga; “Sta Clara” of Tigaon and “Sta Elena” in Bula.

Lagaylay in Canaman

Lagaylay is a devotion to the holy cross consisting of a series of prayers written in verses. It is a re-enactment of the discovery of the holy cross by Sta. Elena done in two-hour song and dance performance that exalts the Holy Cross. It is performed by young girls/women usually around the age of 9 to 19 playing different roles of Reyna Elena, responde, paraduyag, and panampan.

The key informants of the study presumed that Canaman Lagaylay must have been started as early as 1858 when the symbolic cross still found at the patio was constructed. It is performed for nine consecutive nights with a novena to the holy cross. The novena and Lagaylay starts on the third day of May which is believed to be the day of the finding of the holy cross and ends on the eleventh day. It is presented in the patio in front of the symbolic cross erected in 1858 and is preceded by a procession of the cross.

Maestro Gaspar Avincola was the earliest known trainer of Lagaylay with some assistants. Its original version had more emphasis on the lyrics of the song than on the expression of the movements. Maestro Hugo Gomez succeeded and made some revision of the lyrics and musical arrangements. Interpretation was more on body language.

New trainers came up like Mr. Geronimo Nunez, Mr. Ignacio Alano, and Mr. Melecio Porcincula. They were succeeded by Mr. Carlos Salcedo Sr. who introduced modern concepts in the performance by adding more grace to the dancer and giving more meaning and expression to the lyrics of the verses. At present, Lagaygay has evolved from simplicity to refinement that makes it as beautiful as its religiosity.

Parts of Lagaylay

Lagaylay is characterized by parts that includes timbaco, duyag, offering of the cross, passion, coronation of Sta. Elena and danza.

In *timbaco*, the participants sing in chorus to invite all to praise and honor the cross with each pair singing their part glorifying the cross. It is in this part where Sta Elena gives petitions and ask for favors from the cross through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary which was followed by "*alavacion*" of honors and praises to the cross.

Duyag is a noise created out of joy [11]. It is manifested in the holding of the flag high by the "*paraduyag*" and "*Sta. Elena*" and wave them to show victory and joy for having found the cross.

search for the cross and was given the privilege to find it. Last part of lagaylay is the danza.

Danza includes the offering of flowers, singing and dancing, a symbol of great joy and happiness and an expression to the cross, which is believed to liberate mankind from sickness, sin, evil, and death and the triumph of the reign of goodness of the Kingdom of God.

Costumes

Different kinds of formal dresses for girls of any color; made of satin to be worn for nine consecutive days in the performance of lagaylay.

Movements and Figures

The dance has seven figures which consist of combination of waltz, sway balance with a waltz, step close step hop points, change step, cross step, and the saludo. It has the following movements: sway balance, sway arms over head right and left, sway arms downward right and left, and kadena.



Figure 1 Plates showing the parts of Lagaylay

Offering of the cross is a manifestation of humility, reverence and love for the cross. Sta. Elena offers her crown as her willingness to surrender their wealth, honor and fame for the greater glory of God (12) – a model of the true Christian Faith. In *passion* the "*responde*" sings the sacrifices of Christ which reminds us of our redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Coronation of Sta. Elena emphasizes honor to Sta. Elena as queen for being faithful to her devotion in the mysterious

Rhythm

Lagaylay is performed in a combination of triple meter with a counting of 1, 2, 3 and duple meter with a counting of 1, 2, 1 and 2. Music is composed of 9 parts. It has a combination of slow and fast rhythm.

Pastora

Long before Christmas trees and Santa Claus became part of our holiday celebrations, the Pastores Bicol was the Bicolanos'

beautiful commemoration of Christmas. *Pastores* is a musical re-enactment of the age-old nativity story. Colorful costumes are worn by singers, in honor of the biblical shepherds who sang the first Christmas carols. The performance is done with an entourage of traditional *musikeros*, lots of dancing to the tune of *Pastores a Belen*, and a generous dose of Christmas cheer. It is caroling, Bicol style.

Taken from the Spanish word, *Pastoras* which means shepherdess, it applies to both males and females. These are small groups from four to twelve girls with an occasional male or two. All-male groups can be found in Tabaco Albay but in Camarines Sur, these is a “dancing girls of Christmas” dressed in colorful festive costumes. They appear on Christmas Day up to the Epiphany, 13 days of house to house singing and dancing -commemorative of shepherds proclaiming glad tidings. It is the follow-up to *Kagharong*, the re-enactment of Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary’s plight as they looked for a place to stay in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve.

Pastoras was once part of *Pasko*. The songs and dances were preserved and inherited by the family and relatives of the *parabalo* or trainer. Young girls are usually selected for their good looks, voice and talent or being *marhay magkumpas*. In the past, it is an honor to be visited by the *Pastoras* because they usually go to the prominent members of the community.

According to the informant, she started dancing the Pastora when she was 7 years old. Now, that she’s 67 years old, she is the kapitana of Pastora in Bombon, Camarines Sur. Akapitana is the dancer dancing in front and at the back of the group. Pastoras are the shepherd of the Lord, they looked for Jesus so it was called Pastora. They are the ones praising and looking for the Belen. Rita Alto, now more than 90 years old, a native of San Francisco, Bombon was the first trainer of Pastora and at the same time the musician who used a guitar as instrument.

It is more than five years since the last *Pastores* in Bombon, Camarines Sur took place. Since Rita Alto retired in teaching the Pastora, today, dancers are old folk women of Bombon and they dance the Pastora from house to house and in the church during Christmas season.

Costume

Spanish Costume which were made of satin, silk and organza with ruffles and balloon skirt, pop sleeves blouse and hat as their accessories is the costume of the dancers of Pastores.



Figure 2 Plates showing the costume and dance movement of pastores.

Movements and Figures

Pastora has seven figures consist of combination of step: change step, step close step point, cross step, cross change step, pointclose and turn. Its movements of include the arms in

fourth position with kumintang inward, arm in lateral upward right and left, hayonhayon, arms upward sideward with kumintang.

Rhythm

Pastora is performed in duple meter with the counting of 1, 2, 1 and 2 to a measure. It is with a fast rhythm.

Sta. Clara of Tigaon

In the municipality of Tigaon, Camarines Sur is the annual celebration of Sta. Clara Festival in honor of Sta. Clara de Assisi. It is an important practice of religion of the Tigaoenos. Sta. Clara de Assisi has an important significance because it contributes to the strengthening of the bonds among the people. After the Spaniards baptized the *Cimmarrones* (Aeta ethnic tribe) in 1794, they introduced Catholicism transforming them from pagan rituals to Christian ceremonies. The Franciscan missionaries headed by Fray Jose de Buensalida then introduced the image of Sta. Clara de Assisi to the ethnic tribe. Adept at living in the rainforest, the Aeta Cimmarrones believe in a Supreme Being, as well as in environmental spirits that inhabit the rivers, sky, mountains, and other natural environmental components. Their dances are generally mimetic because it imitates the motion of animals or occupations which is core inspiration of the dance. There are no symbolic hand gestures or body movements but plain and simple mimicry of an actual motion. One favorite subject of their dances is the monkey.

The dances of the Aeta Cimarrones converted to Christianity have changed after the introduction of Catholicism in Tigaon. Devotional dance was introduced by the Franciscan friars to replace the dance rituals by the Aeta Cimarrones. It centered on honoring Sta. Clara de Assisi, the large image brought by Fray Buensalida. In 2004 the celebration of the fiesta honoring the patron saint, Sta. Clara de Assisi was called Sta. Clara Festival.

Sta. Clara festival gives meaning, recognition and historical account of the town’s early beginnings. It is a simple act of the Tigaoenos to glorify the town’s rich heritage through religious activities. They have evolved a festival which conserved and preserved the local heritage.

In 2004, when Msgr. Juan R. Celso was assigned as parish priest of Tigaon, Camarines Sur, the Sta. Clara devotional dance was introduced. It was adopted from the Ubando, Bulacan Sta. Clara. Ubando dance however was for fertility while in Tigaon it is a thanksgiving for the good harvest and good health of the people. There is no prescribed step, it depends upon the dancers’ own creativity. Sta. Clara of Tigaon is generally danced during *despira*, a day before the day of the fiesta.

In -these days, the music used in dancing Sta. Clara of Tigaon is the original composition of Fr. Elizalde Zapian with the title “Clara” but the dance steps was composed by the researcher, a native of Camarines Sur.

Costume

Girls wear Maria Clara made of satin, silk and organza cloth with alampay(scarf). Boys wear Barong Tagalog made of juse or piña cloth with black trousers. White handkerchief is used

as their accessories. The costume of Sta. Clara of Tigaon performers generally reflects the traditional Filipino costume.

Movements and Figures

Movements are combination of waltz, waltz balance, step brush, and engano with a waltz. The movements include arms in lateral upward right and left, kumintang outward, racing arms upward in V position and forearm turn. It is composed of 7 parts.

Rhythm

Sta. Clara is danced in a slow rhythm, triple meter with a counting of 1, 2, 3 to a measure.



Figure 3 Plates showing the costume and dance movement of Sta. Clara of Tigaon

Flores De Mayo of Calabanga

Flores, is from Spanish flores meaning flowers. Flores de Mayo (flowers of May) may refer to the whole Flower Festival celebrated in the month of May as tribute to the Virgin Mary. It is being celebrated annually over the country especially in the summer month of April or May which is the season of colorful festivals and Flores de Mayo is one of these. Being predominantly Catholic, the Filipinos celebrate the beneficial rains by giving praise to the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Christ and of the whole Catholic Church. The tradition includes decorating churches and even the whole town. One of the highlights of the feast event is the parade of beautiful women in extravagant gowns.

In Calabanga, family Dumalasa started the “Flores de Mayo” as their “panata” and it is passed from generation to generation and up to this time it is still being done by the family members of the Dumalasa Clan.

Flores de Mayo is held on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays of May. Flowers are offered to the Virgen Mary. The rituals begin with the recitation of the rosary followed by the “kantadas”, or songs which is sang in Latin. During the “Katapusan” children ages 5-12, sing the “dulcicima” and “Oh Maria” while offering the flowers to the Virgen Mary. Flores de mayo of Calabanga features dance steps created by the researcher performed by the children offering flowers. After the ceremony, snacks are given to the children as “tandan” (rewards) for their participation.

Participants to the flores de mayo believed that the Blessed Virgen will make the family cohesive; very close to each other, and will sustain their togetherness, love and cooperation. For some bicolano families, flores de mayo is one way of having the family reunion every year.



Figure 4 Plates showing the costume and dance movement of Flores de Mayo

Costumes

The costume used in Flores de Mayo is a formal dress for girls of any color made of light colored materials of silk, satin and organza. They have a basket full of flowers as accessories.

Movements and Figures

Flores the Mayo has four figures. These are a combination of steps such as step close, step brush, kneeling and waltz. Movements of the arms are swaying upwards with the basket showering the flowers, arms in lateral position with kumintang, and arms moving sideward and upward.

Rhythm

Flores de Mayo has a Triple meter with a counting of 1, 2, 3 to a measure. It has slow rhythm.

Sta. Elena of Bula

This is religious and war dance in the search of Saint Helena for the cross on which Jesus died. This popular tradition connected to the festival certainly originated from pagan traditions brought to Spain by the Roman Empire.

In Sta. Elena, Bula, Camarines Sur, the tradition is held on the last week of February. On the feast day of Sta. Elena, there is the re-enactment of the finding of the true cross by the two groups-- Reyna Elena and Reyna Emperadora, they do this in the form of Zarsuela. This is the story of how Sta. Elena found the cross, where a battle between the Christian and the Moros came about and the Moros being defeated helped to find the place where the Cross was buried. An old man pointed them the exact location where they could find the three (3) crosses. Not knowing which cross Jesus was nailed, an angel told them that the cross that could heal the sick and that could bring the dead to life is the true cross. When they found the true cross, they put it in the temple.

Ambrosio Lopez Sr. was the first trainer and at the same time the musician using violin as instrument. He is a native of Sta Elena, Bula.



Figure 5 Plates showing the costume and dance movement of Sta. Elena of Bula

Costume

The Reyna Elena wears a long white dress made of satin, silk and organza accented with a belt and cape. The Emperadora wears a warrior attire made of silk, satin and organza accented with a cape belt and crown.

Movements and Figures

The steps for the dance is consists of step close brush, step stepbrush, cross step, change step and kneeling. The movements are Saludo of the hands and striking of sword. It is composed of 5 figures.

Rhythm

The music for Sta. Elena is in Duple meter with a counting of 1, 2 1 and 2 to a measure. It has a fast rhythm

Bicolano traits depicted in the head, hands, hip, and feet movements of the folkdances

The natural characteristics of the dance can be gleaned on the movement of the head, hands, hip and feet movement.

Head Movement

The movement of the head is right and left, forward and backward in the dance “Flores de Mayo”, “Sta Clara” and “Lagaylay”. These movement depict the shyness, religiosity and confidence of the Bicolanos.

Hand Movement

Hand movements are characterized by those of the Bicolano movements in their dances like the kumintang-moving of the arms outward. These movements depict their being hospitable, generous and helpful. The forearm turn depicts the values of being respectful and the arms in lateral movement shows that Bicolanos are open minded people. The raising of arms upward in V-position depict their being religious.

Hip Movement

The hip movement in “Pastora” and other dances depicts the gracefulness of the Bicolanos. They are well-mannered and know how to behave in a crowd. They are cordial and conservative people and have deep sense of finesse

Feet Movement

The feet movement like change step, cross step, step brush, sway balance, waltz and cross waltz which are common in all dances depict the resourcefulness and honesty of the Bicolanos. They are adaptable to changing conditions and have deep sense of initiative to find options and alternatives when the resources they need are scarcely available. The Bicolanos are honest people. They are trustworthy and dependable. Their being religious and God-fearing make them honest and trustworthy. These are values which are unique among the Bicolanos.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There are five unpublished folkdances documented in selected municipalities in the province of Camarines Sur namely “Lagaylay” in Canaman, “Pastora” in Bombon, “Flores de Mayo” in Calabanga, “Sta. Clara” in Tigaon and “Sta. Elena” in Bula. The dances depict beauty and significance of Bicolano Culture. These dances are unique and distinct in said municipalities however, known to few other people within the province. The need to disseminate information for the promotion of these dances is imperative.

Each of the movements in every dance involving the head, hands, hips and feet depict specific values of the Bicolanos. Head movements depict shyness and confidence; hands movement signify benevolence, resourcefulness and religiosity. The hip movements signify gracefulness and cordiality while the feet movements signify the resourcefulness, honesty and trustworthiness of the Bicolanos.

These un published Bicol dances as part of the Bicolano heritage should be promoted, preserved and perpetuated because it reflected the Bicolano culture and traditions. It may also be introduced and taught to students in schools as well as in other communities in the country through IEC materials that can be developed to be used as tools in the promotion.

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Figure 5 Plates showing the movement of head, hands, hip and feet of the folkdances

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