

THE ITAWES WEDDING STAGES AND RITUALS: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract— The Itawes of Isabela have a unique culture which defines them as a people. Their marriage manifests their cosmology. This study was conducted to document the different wedding rituals of the Itawes and analyze their cultural significance. Data were gathered through observation, community immersion and non-formal interview among the elders. These were interpreted and presented to the elders for validation, after which, a revision was made to include their feedback. The study revealed that the Itawes have several marriage rituals and stages like tubad, mangatatawa, gumina or landay, entrega, boda (wedding ceremony), gala-gala, and dallut. However, tubad and mangatatawa are no longer practiced due to some practical reasons.

The study further revealed that these wedding rituals manifest the communal characteristics of the Itawes as a group of people. All members of the community are encouraged to participate in the conduct of the rituals. Further, it was also found out that female Itawes are given high regard with regards to preparing them for married life. The parents of the female ensures that their daughter will be given a better life after the wedding by their soon to be husband. It is the reason why the parents are testing the determination of their suitors through the conduct of mangatatawa and other related rituals.

It is highly recommended that the Local Government Unit (LGU), the Department of Education (DepEd) and the academe must have an intervention for the promotion, conservation and preservation of these rituals for better understanding the Itawes unique culture.

Keywords— *culture, wedding rituals, Itawes*

INTRODUCTION

Article XIV Sec. 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states that the State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development. Further, Section 2 of the same article states that marriage, as an inviolable social institution, is the foundation of the family and shall be protected by the State.

Marriage is a special contract of permanent union between a man and a woman entered into in accordance with law for the establishment of conjugal and family life. It is the foundation of the family and an inviolable social institution whose nature,

consequences, and incidents are governed by law and not subject to stipulation (Article 1, Executive Order No. 209-Family Code of the Philippines).

Marriage as stipulated in the Philippine Constitution, is a legal contract between two parties who are about to create a family as the basic foundation of the nation. Although marriage is governed by the Constitution, the Philippines being an archipelagic nation have different cosmology in terms of marriage.

The province of Isabela being the second largest province of the country next to Palawan, is home for several ethnolinguistic groups like Itawes, Ibanag, Yogad, Gaddang, Ilocano, Paranan, etc. The Itawes as a unique ethnolinguistic group of the province has a unique culture which defines them as people. This culture shapes their perspective about the world they live in.

Among the Itawes, marriage or wedding is not just a union of two individuals. Instead, it is a union of two families. It is a tedious process especially among the traditional Itawes family. Further, certain beliefs and practices are observed and practiced to ensure a prosperous celebration and to avoid any disturbance from the *carangat* or unseen spirit during the celebration and especially after the event and during the family life of the married couple.

The Itawes move from one place to another due to several reasons. Despite this, they preserve their traditional way of living (Quilang and Manzolim, 2012). The *Itawes* during the ancient time were from the province of Cagayan. They lived in the territory drained by the Chico and Matalag rivers as well as all of Southern Cagayan from Nasiping to the Village of Cayug, now the town of Enrile. The term *Itawes* was derived from the prefix “I” which means “people” and root word “tawid” which means “across the river.” *Itawes* therefore are the people living across the river. They are also called *Itawit*, *Tawis*, *Itavi*, *Itaves* and *Kaggi*. When the Spaniards came to the valley, the *Itawes* resisted them. To avoid further conflict, they left their land in Cagayan and found settlement in Isabela.

The culture of the original ethnic group of Isabela is in danger of extinction due to influence of the formal education that is not supportive to their culture, and their exposure to media and the dominant culture in town, cities and even abroad

(Toquero, 2008). In response to this problem, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) urged its member countries to preserve and protect their cultural heritage. In the Philippines, the passage of Republic Act (RA) 8371 created the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) and Republic Act 7356 created the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). It paved the way for a national agency whose main function is to promote, protect, conserve and develop the different ethnolinguistic groups of the country together with their traditional arts, history, culture and heritage. The aim of these agencies is to develop national identity using the diverse cultural uniqueness of the Filipino people.

In response to the need to understand the different cultural perspective, this study was conducted to document, describe the different wedding rituals of the Itawes of Barangay San Vicente, Jones, Isabela. Further, the study also aimed to analyze the socio-cultural significance of the different wedding rituals of the Itawes of Barangay San Vicente, Jones, Isabela.

METHODS

A descriptive method of research was utilized to document the different wedding rituals of the Itawes and analyze their socio-cultural significance. Community immersion, observation and non-formal interview among the elders were utilized to ensure the validity of data gathered. The respondents or key informants of the study were the *Itawes* whose age is 60 and above. This is to ensure that the data and information gathered were valid and pure *Itawes* only. The study was conducted at Barangay San Vicente, Jones, Isabela because it is the home of *Itawes* in town.

The following procedures were employed to fulfill the objectives of this study:

1. Secured letter of approval from the Barangay Officials of Barangay San Vicente, Jones, Isabela.
2. Joined some *Itawes* family in the preparation of different rituals and wedding paraphernalia.
3. Conducted observations and non-formal interview among the elders of the community. A tape recorder was used to record the interview.
4. Transcribed the interview and analyzed the data.
5. Conducted validation of the findings.
6. Revised the findings based from the feedback of the elders.
7. Finalized the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Wedding is a tedious processes among the Itawes especially the traditional ones. It goes through a series of stages and rituals, each taking a significant period of time depending on the progress of each stage. This is because the wedding is a

serious decision among the couple and their family and it is considered as a community affair and everybody is expected to participate during the preparation until it ends. During the olden times, arranged marriage was practiced but such cases are gone nowadays.

The Itawes Wedding Rituals

There are seven stages in the Itawes wedding. Its stages has its own importance. The following are marriage rituals of the Itawes:

Tubad. It is the first stage of an Itawes wedding. It happens when the *baguitolay* (unmarried man) decides to marry his *noby*a (fiancée). The parent of the *baguitolay* will send a letter containing the wish and desire of their son to the parents of the *maginganay* (unmarried woman). The letter will be given to the parents of the *maginganay* by a representative of the family. Within a week, the parents of the *maginganay* is expected to give their reply, otherwise, it is understood that they rejected the proposal. At present, this is no longer practiced.

Mangatatawa. When the parents of the *maginganay* approved the letter of the parents of the *baguitolay*, the *mangatatawa* will follow. In this stage, the *baguitolay* will stay at the house to serve the whole family especially the parents of the *maginganay*. On the other hand, the *maginganay* will no longer accept suitors. This stage may last for several days, weeks, months or even years. The parents of the *maginganay* will signify when to stop this level based on their satisfaction on the services of the *baguitolay*. At present, this is no longer practiced.

Gumina or Landay. After *mangatatawa*, *gumina* or *landay* will follow immediately. This is a big celebration for both families. The two families who consist of the *manak* (parents), *wawwahi* (siblings), *kakot en kakay* (grandparents), *tiyya en tiyyu* (uncles and aunts) and other distant relatives will attend the feast. The family of the *baguitolay* will bring three cases of soft drinks, *momma* (betel nut, gawad and apug), *binarayan* (liquor), *dinuntuan* (cooked glutinous rice) and other food to be served after all the discussion. This is the time where all matters regarding the *boda* (wedding ceremony) especially the dates, kinds of animals to be slaughtered, the dishes to be cooked and dress to be used are discussed and settled. Problems that will be encountered for the entire preparation and celebration are also discussed in this stage. Furthermore, dowry is also settled in this stage. Itawes usual dowry consists of land titles, animals like cow and carabao, money and jewelries. The discussion is led by a family representative of both parties who are usually the *mannakam* (elders) because they are considered experienced, knowledgeable and wise on the matter.

Entrega. A day before the *boda*, all wedding materials and paraphernalia, animals to be slaughtered, dowry and other things that have been promised during the conduct of the *Gumina* or *Landay* will be given by the family of the male. To ensure that all things are settled according to the agreement, the

representative of the two families will check all the materials and discuss whether it is complete or not.

Boda. This is the highlight of the wedding process. It includes the church ceremony, *bayle* (community dances) and *gala-gala*. The *boda* takes two nights and one day celebration. All members of the community are expected to come and help in the whole preparation and join the family in their celebration. During the *bisperas* (a night before the wedding), the *pabayle* will start. All *kasadus* (*married men and women*) will participate in the different dances, usually *balse*. All females will sit around the *damara*, a wide and spacious open area using *lona* as roof. Male *kasadus* will approach and ask the female *kasadus* to dance with them when the music starts to play. On the wedding day, *bayle* is for everybody, *kasadus* or not. Families and relatives are expected to join the community during the *pabayle*. The emcee, who is usually an elder of the community or the Barangay Captain will decide the chronology of the *bayle*. On the night of the wedding, the *baguitolay* and *maguinganay* are given the chance to participate in the *bayle*. Just like the female *kasadu*, the *maguinganay* will sit around the *damara* and the *baguitolay* just like the male *kasadu*, will approach and ask if the *maguinganay* can dance with them when the music starts to play. Social etiquette dictates that the *maguinganay* should not refuse any *baguitolay* who wishes to dance with her. Usually, the *bayle* starts at 7:00pm at night and ends until around 4:00am the following day.

Gala-gala. It is one of the highlights of the *boda*. It is where the newlywed couple receives the *regalu* (gifts) and monetary contributions from their family, relatives, principal and secondary sponsors and the community in general. It happens three (3) times during the entire *boda* and it has two forms. It happens at around 10:00pm during the *bisperas* and the night after the wedding and during the wedding day. The first form of the *gala-gala* is through the use of *iyyaw* (woven tray). The two *iyyaw* will be placed on the table in front of the groom and the bride. Music will be played and the all attendees will approach the newlywed couple and give their *regalu* or put their monetary contribution in the *iyyaw* after which, they will congratulate the newlywed couple. On the other hand, the emcee will announce the names of the people who gave their gifts and contributions. The second form of the *gala-gala* is through dancing. The newlywed couple will dance to a sweet music. While they are dancing, all the attendees will come to them and pin their monetary contributions. The couple is not allowed to pick money that falls on the ground because it brings bad luck to them. Anyone from the attendees can pick the money and pin it again to the dress of the couple. During the last night of the *bayle*, the emcee will announce the total amount collected during the conduct of the *gala-gala*.

Dallut. This is the last stage and final ritual of the wedding. It is believed that if this ritual is ignored, the couple and their future sons and daughters may encounter sickness and difficulty in life. It is also believed that the conduct of the *dallut* may cure unexplainable illness among the family members. There is no specific time for the *dallut*. It may be conducted during the dawn, daylight or sunset. It may also be

performed after several days, weeks or even years after the church wedding ceremony. It is a song and dance ritual. The couple will prepare *dinuntuan*, *momma*, *binarayan* (liquor), *tabaku* (cigar) to be offered for the *carangat* (unseen spirits), and for the souls of the departed members of the family. Further, *abak* (mat), *ulat* (kumot), *fungan* (pillow) will also be prepared for the conduct of the ritual. When interpreted, the *dallut* is an advice from the elders for the newlywed couple.

The groom with a *baguitolay* on his sides faces the bride with a lady on each side and the party hold hands tightly as they dance while the elders sing the *dallut*, bracing their feet alternately sideways to the left and to the right. As the singing and the dancing continues, the newlywed is showered with rice and the liquor is poured on their feet. Towards the end of the singing and dancing the group of male and female will kneel while the other continues to brace their feet alternately. This signifies that each of them should be under one another. No one is superior and inferior to another. After this, the couple will face each other with a pillow between their feet. The couple must be at the center and jointly kneel on the pillow at the center of the mat. While in this position, the elder will cover them with the *ulat* (blanket/bedspread) that signifies their being one in body and mind. The ritual ends with the removal of the mat by the elders and the group of *baguitolay* and *maguingay* raise their hands and shout a loud. To date, *dallut* text is written in the Ibanag language.

Socio-cultural Significance

The Itawes are a unique people of the province of Isabela because of their culture that shapes their cosmology. Their rituals related to wedding ceremony signify their communal relationship, their being religious and their connection to the unseen world and the world after death.

The importance of the religious beliefs and practices of the Itawes is present in the entire preparation of the Itawes marriage. Most of the Itawes family are members of the Roman Catholic faith, hence, most of the wedding beliefs and practices related to their Divine faith is in accordance with the Roman Catholic doctrines. To note, the highlight of the wedding stages and rituals is the *boda* or the church wedding ceremony. It is believed that God should give the highest form of blessing among the couple during this celebration. This blessing is through the matrimonial ceremony headed by a priest.

Family relationship is so important with the Itawes family. They are clannish and have an extended family. The importance of family is shown in the different stages and rituals of the wedding. In an activity like the Gumina or Landay, all members of the family, even the distant members, are expected to participate. Further, during the wedding celebration, all members of the community are expected to participate because the Itawes considers every member of the community as member of the family. Furthermore, being married does not mean that an Itawes unites with his husband or wife alone. The wedding process for the Itawes is not just a union of two individuals but a union of two families to create a larger and happy family. A daughter is not just a sibling but of high regard in the family. It is in this light that the parents

should know exactly if the man who wants to marry their daughter is a good man and capable of heading a family. This is the reason of having *mangatatawa* in the stages of marriage.

Their rituals related to wedding focus in making sure that the entire process is prosperous, memorable and successful. To achieve these, the help of the members of the community is expected whether it is monetary or in-kind. Further, the *carangat* and the soul of the departed member of the family, although they are not present in flesh in the entire preparation and celebration, is given respect and priority especially in the preparation of the foods. They believe that these activities are an attempt to include them in the normal flow of the environment and to maintain balance between the human world, the environment, and the unseen world, hence, the rituals are being conducted.

The long preparation, several activities, different rituals and stages of the wedding signifies the perception of the Itawes of family as an important social institution and therefore, if one decides to enter family life, they should be prepared financially and emotionally. The Itawes believe that entering a family life especially among the male is a serious decision and responsibility, hence, they should be prepared. This is the reason of a long, laborious and expensive preparations and celebration during the entire marriage process. The *magatatawa* tests the determination of the male in marrying his fiancée while the expensive preparations and dowries allows the family to decide whether they are really ready for the future of their son and future daughter in law. The long preparation allows both parties to reflect if they are determined and ready to enter the family life since it is not an easy journey for them.

CONCLUSION

The Itawes people have their own culture that defines them as a people. Further, this culture helps them understand their world and the things around them. Their rituals related to wedding are a manifestation of their colorful cultures. The study found out that wedding among the Itawes is a union not only of the couple but also of the two families where the couple came from. The study reveals also that the rituals of the Itawes people related to wedding manifest their communal relationship and family-orientation, religion, and their connection and/or relationship to the environment with the

carangat and the departed family members. Further, these rituals, are the Itawes means to ensure that the couple is really prepared to enter the married life. Furthermore, these are also strategies to ensure a prosperous, wonderful and memorable celebration for all of them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Conduct a comparative research on the different marriage rituals of the different ethnolinguistic groups in the province and/or the region to include wedding beliefs and practices.

The Culture and the Arts Council of the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Jones, Isabela should take an initiative in the promotion, conservation and preservation of this indigenous cosmology.

The Department of education (DepEd) in Isabela should take into consideration the possible inclusion of the Itawes marriage rituals into the mainstream of basic education for better understanding among the Itawes and non-Itawes students. Further, the Academe may include the Itawes culture in the curriculum especially for those focusing on the study of society, culture, language and anthropology.

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