

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ligao City's Folklore: A Repertoire of Culture and Tradition, An Anthology of Indigenous Healing

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Abstract

The study is centered on the narratives on indigenous healing practices of Ligao City, Albay province, Philippines. It gathered genres, documented repertoire, validated text authenticity, translated texts into vernacular, and classified the typology of indigenous healing practices in the area. The research is descriptive ethno-literary in nature, employing ethnographic methods such as community immersion, participant observation, unstructured interviews, and digital documentation. The collected texts were transcribed from the dialect/vernacular and translated into the English language; they were then anthologized and classified according to their respective genres; and the research process and data were captured through a coffee table book and ethnovideography. The study found eighty-one (81) narratives on indigenous healing practices. Ligao's indigenous healing practices are more difficult to translate into other Bicol dialects and into the English language due to its unique syllabication, sound, and spelling. Plenty of words spoken and written in the dialect do not have an exact translation or counterpart in the English language; they need lengthy elaboration to contextualize their meanings. Narratives on Indigenous Healing Practices in Ligao City are present in the culture and tradition of an older generation that in their dawn realized this repertoire of various lore showcasing valuable historical and cultural information could be eventually lost. As the different practices of indigenous healing continue to decrease in number significantly every year, abandoned by the generations who used to embrace them, preservation of the lore for posterity must be a priority.

KEYWORDS:

narratives, typology, genres, healing practices, repertoire

1 | INTRODUCTION

Every nation is preserving and protecting its own cultural heritage. According to Kutty (2002), respect and admiration for the products of human creativity, ingenuity, and talent have always been a part of the culture of human civilization. "Even the world body, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is leading the loud call for all nations of the world to protect and preserve even intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The Philippines is one nation that strives to protect its own cultural heritage. Agencies are created to ensure preservation and protection of these cultural treasures. These include the

National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP). The country's cultural heritage includes folklore.

In Bicol, Ligao City in Albay possesses varied locations within its villages. The agriculture-based city is surrounded by the municipalities of Camalig, Guinobatan, Pioduran, and Oas. It is composed of fifty-five barangays clustered into five units, namely, upland, lowland, poblacion, mayon and coastal. The varied topographical contours and geographical locations of these barangays serve as a rich breeding ground for the different types of folklore.

The Eti-Anglo Saxon word "folc" which means peoples and "lar" which means "learning" (Kutty (2002) citing William Thoms) are the derivatives of the word folklore. Folklore comprises a vast range of traditional oral literature that include indigenous healing, folk poetry, myths, legends, folktales, riddles, etc., that are transferred from one generation up to the next, mostly by word of mouth. Kutty (2002) concludes that "based on the characteristics that have been associated with it, folklore can be defined as the sum total of human creativity. It encompasses the customs, games, beliefs, festivals, and practices which human societies have owned through tradition from generation to generation."

One of the popular genres of folklore is indigenous healing. Indigenous healing practices are being resorted to by both urban and rural folks using herbal or medicinal plants available in the community, where medical doctors are not easily or readily available. As Marks (2006) puts it, "the indigenous healing process rarely limits itself to the prescription of herbal remedies, but invariably includes a ritualised ceremony in order to address the spiritual and communal imbalances in the person."

Indigenous healing continues to prevail in Ligao. Proof of this is the variety of its types that emanate from the common folk of the five units of the locale. And these narratives on indigenous healing practices belong to the older generation and are being transmitted to the younger generation. But there is a danger that these healing practices will no longer draw attention from our current 21st century generation of millennials who are now goading toward a new direction that seems oblivious to the past. As Olfson and Uy (1989) posit, "the younger generations are now interested in more modern media of expressive culture."

2 | METHODOLOGY

2.1 | Research Design

The study used qualitative research design. It included the collection, validation, recording, documentation, and translation of different indigenous healing practices in Ligao City. Immersion, participant-observation, unstructured interviews, and small group discussions were used in the study in the artificial context of folklore research. The artificial context took place when the researcher arranged for a meeting with specific informants, drawing out data from their repertoire of folklore material.

2.2 | Research Locale

The study was conducted in Ligao City, in the Third District of Albay in the Bicol Region. This agricultural city is made up of 55 barangays that have been divided into five units based on their location and contour or elevation. These units are named Upland, Lowland, Mayon, Coastal, and Poblacion. The varied topographical contours and geographical locations of these barangays serve as a rich breeding ground for the different types of folklore.

2.3 | Sampling Design

The study employed the purposive sampling technique. Informants were selected based on their age (60 to 94 years old), family composition (passing the three-generation vertical in-depth test of Dr. Arsenio Manuel as validation) and repertoire of indigenous healing practices. The clarity of their narratives was also used in selecting the informants. One informant was chosen in every barangay out of the 55 barangays of Ligao City.

2.4 | Data Gathering

The narratives on indigenous healing practices were collected by means of immersion into the fifty-five (55) different barangays of Ligao City, where the researcher obtained his data through participant-observation by means of the artificial context of folklore, which is the rendering of folklore through an agreement between the researcher and informant for a recitation of the latter's repertoire. The documentation process included a pencil and paper method of data recording. Still pictures and video

clips were also taken to document the data gathering. Recorded materials were played back and reviewed in the presence of the informants to clarify or explain inaudible sounds or unintelligible words, including archaic expressions and terminologies no longer used in the present vernacular that needed clarification.

2.5 | Data Analysis

The gathered and validated narratives on indigenous healing practices were classified according to types. Each narrative on indigenous healing practices was transcribed and then translated into English, employing extra care not to distort the original meaning of the text used in the dialect. After proper documentation and translation, the narratives on indigenous healing practices were included as part of the anthology of Ligao City's folklore.

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Folklore is mirrored in the indigenous healing practices spread out across the different villages of Ligao City. The indigenous healing practices, as narrated by the informants, were loaded with creative rituals and chants. Kutty (2002) puts it aptly, "based on the characteristics that have been associated with it, folklore can be defined as the sum total of human creativity." The healing practices were narrated by the older generation, with an age range of 60–94 years old. The narratives, all told orally and in the local dialect, were translated into English. The informants agreed that the practices were effective in curing or healing illnesses. This corroborates the findings of Berdon et al. that found that "twelve out of thirteen patients interviewed believe in traditional healing. Because of financial matters, they see traditional healing as an alternative to medical practice. The types of rituals or chants vary depending on the sickness that is being cured, although they use the same herbal ingredients. For example, guava leaves are chewed raw by the patient, then wrapped around the wound to stop bleeding. But the same guava leaves are boiled when used as an antiseptic in washing wounds. Healers used different healing techniques such as rituals, chants, reciting prayers and/or whispering "orasyon" (mystical prayers), aside from applying herbal plants. The leaves are the most common part of the plant used for treatment. These findings coincide with the study of Pizon et al. (2016). Fiscal (2017), Agapin (2019) and Molina et al. (2020) documented three traditional healing methods in Zamboanga City, namely, subada (hilot), herbalism, and sahuma (mangtatawas). They conclude that "the common method of preparing these plants to treat the identified illnesses is decoction." Berdon et al. (2010) listed the following Cebuano traditional healing practices or "panambal": "himolso" (pulse-checking), "palakaw" (petition), "pasubay" (determining what causes the sickness and its possible means of healing), "pangalap" (searching) of medicinal plants for "palina" (fumigation), "tayhop" (gentle-blowing), "tutho" (saliva-blowing), "tutho" (saliva-blowing), "tuob" (boiling), "orasyon" (mystical prayers), "hilot" (massage), and "barang" (sorcery).

This documentation of the different indigenous healing practices would preserve them for the information and benefit of the new generation in Ligao City, as the narrators of these practices are now at the dusk of their existence. To be preserved in the form of a coffee table book and video ethnography, the Bicol region would have ready reference to these healing practices for educational and other academic purposes. Planners and policy makers in the country could use this anthology of indigenous healing practices as a resource for their preservation and protection as part of the nation's heritage. As Kutty (2002) posits, "folklore is probably the most important and well-acclaimed component of the cultural heritage of a nation."

The narratives of the informants who belonged to the age range of 60 to 94 years old are feared to be totally lost if not transferred to the next generation. As Olfson and Uy (1989) posit, "the younger generations are now interested in more modern media of expressive culture." As Chan (2017) views it in her review of the Marinduque Moriones in the same vein, she comments, "if the self-identity of Marinduque locals to the Moriones festival and the artisanship of making morion masks cannot be realized and transmitted, the soul of the Moriones and the heart of Marinduque can only be unconsciously lost and forgotten." Berdon et al. (2016), conclude, "as time passes by, the belief in folk medicine and its practice is already slowly diminishing. Because of new inventions in medicine brought about by modernity, many people rely more on professional medical practitioners who use science or modern medicine to cure diseases. Another threat to folklore is the massive commercialization going on in the Philippines. As Kutty (2002) succinctly comments, "as a result of the advancement in technology, especially in the field of communication, the sacred forms of folk art, craft, music, and folk technologies of the Philippines are subjected to commercial exploitation." He observes that bio-prospecting and bio-piracy have been taking place for years and "multinational pharmaceutical firms have secured patents for commercial distribution of medicines derived from indigenous knowledge systems."

4 | CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The researcher's interest in gathering important data from the key informants, who are mostly in the dusk of their journey, yielded to a hefty number of eighty-one (81) narratives on indigenous healing practices still prevailing in the different barangays of Ligao City. They are personally doing it or have been taught or told to them by their family members, relatives, friends, or elder members in their villages. As narrated, the most common part of the plant being used for treatment is the leaves. This is the same result in the studies of Pizon et al. (2016), Fiscal (2017), and Agapin (2019). While some of the informants were eager to share what they knew about indigenous healing, others were hesitant to share their experiences. Consistency in their narration of the healing practices was also observed during the conduct of unstructured interviews in the sense that, although they described different processes in indigenous healing, they agreed on the potency of a particular herbal medicine. For example, they agreed that guava leaves are potent as antiseptics and antibiotics, though one says they are more effective if boiled and imbibed, while the other insists they are more potent when merely chewed while raw. With the abundance of the continuously patronized indigenous healing practices regardless of the topographical locations of the barangays and the status in life of the residents, it is a good idea on the part of the local authorities to formally keep them in a repository where both the generations of the old and young can readily access them. This academic intervention of coming up with the typology of these narratives on indigenous healing practices could be a good starting point.

The study yielded eighteen (18) types of narratives on indigenous healing practices, ranging from herbal-based healing processes to combinations of herbal medicine and prayers, chants, or "orasyon." The herbal-based treatments include curing pain or ache in the stomach and head; cough, cold, tambal, dizziness, high blood pressure, wounds, arthritis, inflammation, and paghimotbot. Combinations of herbal medicine and other rituals include santigwar, paghinibang, paghilot, luaw, and pasma. Some of these narrated healing practices are also found in some parts of the country. Some of these healing practices were also being practiced in other parts of the country, though with variations and different names. Molina et al. (2020) documented three traditional healing methods in Zamboanga City, namely, subada (hilot), herbalism, and sahuma (mangtatawas); concluding that the common method for preparing these plants to treat the identified illnesses is "decoction." Berdon et al. (2016) listed 10 Cebuano traditional healing practices such as "panambal": "himolso", "palakaw", "pasubay", "pangalap", "tayhop", "tutho", "tuob", "orasyon", "hilot," and "barang." Although the different genres of narratives on indigenous healing practices remain patronized, local authorities' intervention to preserve them must be seriously considered. Nas (2002) supported this call for intervention to preserve when he says succinctly, "outstanding traditional cultural expressions, if preserved, may prove to be not only an object of pride but also a source of inspiration for the development of new identities in a changing world." The still prevailing narratives on indigenous healing practices must stay in the traditions being shared in perpetuity by both the young and the old generations.

For further study, the researcher recommends creating and publishing reading, research, and reference materials out of the collected anthology of indigenous healing practices, which could enhance the city and barangay community libraries as well as other local and institutional libraries by way of folklore awareness and appreciation; and, producing instructional materials out of existing verbal lore for different grade levels in the city and community schools of the locale where such verbal lore was generated, for more familiar and relatable texts. Batari et al. (2015) conclude that "the test results from the scale field trials are in terms of practicability material, and effectiveness material has been met." So learning materials based on folklore in Gowa District were declared eligible to serve as learning materials for Bahasa Indonesia for third grade in primary school. "In their study in Malaysia, Dikul and Kiting conclude that "the use of folklore as a teaching material for educational entertainment can help students increase their interest and focus in the classroom."

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