

“Paminug Tu: Oral Literature from the Voices of the Agusanon Manobo”

Joanna Mae Notarte Briñas

Abstract— This study demonstrates, and describes the spoken literature of the Manobo people of Agusan del Sur, showing its relevance in maintaining their culture and identity in the face of globalization and modernization. The qualitative ethnographic method was utilized in conducting the fieldwork in selected Manobo villages in Trento, Agusan del Sur. Through purposive sampling, the “hawudon” elders or “manigaon” were chosen as the main participants. Data collection was done through interviews, observations, documentation, recording, and translation. The results indicate the existence of literature such as legends, fables, poems, and bulong like “San Isidro”, “Manat Ya an!”, “Sikan mgo Suba”, “Sinapai”, “Hipanuw”, and “Pasak”. The literature represents Manobo way of life, beliefs, politics, thoughts on nature, and traditions. A significant presence of moralistic, cultural, and feminist perspectives is present in the analysis of the studied literature.

Keywords— Cultural identity, ethnography, Manobo, oral literature, preservation, Trento.

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of culture is critical in determining people's identities as well as values and social consciousness. The ongoing processes of globalization and rapid technological progress contribute to changes in communities which might affect cultural traditions. Thus, the need for studying and investigating specific cultural practices, which serve as the basis for social identity of various communities, has its significance especially in the case of Indigenous communities.

In-depth analysis is one of the useful means of knowing culture. Ethnography studies community perspectives, practices, and life experiences. It is especially important in the studying and understanding the culture of indigenous people, as it gives a deeper understanding of their life, beliefs, and cultural system. Currently, she proposes to pay attention to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, such as oral tradition, since it is significant for the community's memory and identity.

There are many groups in the Philippines that have rich cultural traditions and one prominent example is the Manobos. This ethnic group is mostly settled in Mindanao provinces with Agusan del Sur being the prominent area. Because of the traditional language and cultural practices, the Manobos have been able to create their own oral literature which includes tales,

myths, legends, riddles, and bulongs. However, these traditions are handed down orally which raises the issue of the continuity of indigenous literature traditions due to modernization.

The investigation about the Manobo language and culture has been performed, but there is insufficient research that dealt with documenting, translating, and analyzing their oral literary traditions, especially with regard to the Manobong Agusanon group found in Agusan del Sur.

This situation hinders the more comprehensive acknowledgment of their role in Philippine literature and the use of their indigenous literary traditions for educational purposes.

In this regard, the study is designed to capture the oral literature of the Manobong Agusanon employing the ethnography method. It aims to make a contribution to the conservation of their cultural values, the promotion of their identity, and extension of their cultural knowledge.

Moreover, the output of the research may serve as a reference for the production of appropriate and region-specific teaching materials and for the enhancement of research and education related to Indigenous literature in the Philippines.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The qualitative ethnographic research is used in this research to provide an understanding of the oral traditions and culture of the Manobo. Ethnography is a type of research which focuses on comprehensive understanding of a culture, beliefs, behaviors and experiences of a group in its natural environment (Creswell, 2012). Ethnography seeks to understand the life of the subjects in their own manner (Harding, 2013).

In this study, information was collected through observations and in-depth interviews with informants who belonged to the following groups from the Manobo tribe: Hawudon, Baylan, and Manigaon. Various forms of oral literature were recorded, translated, and interpreted as a result of this research. The researchers also used a descriptive technique to understand how Manobo culture and other aspects, including beliefs, values, livelihood and ways of life, described in their oral literature are connected.

B. Data Collection Procedures

The researcher relied on actual observation and exhaustive interviews for data collection. By way of direct observation, the researcher looked at the daily life and cultural practices of the Manobo people in their natural setting. In-depth interviews were administered to selected participants in order to gather data on their oral literature, beliefs, way of living, source of livelihood, and social organization.

During the data collection process, the researcher used a logbook for making the observations, and an audio recorder to record the interviews and oral performances, and a digital camera to take relevant pictures regarding the Manobo culture. Before starting the data collection process, the researcher received the necessary permissions from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), local governmental authorities, and Manobo community leaders for carrying out the research in an ethical manner.

C. Data Analysis

After the data was collected, the interviews and recorded oral literature were transcribed, translated, and analyzed, with the first step being to get a

professional Manobo translator to translate the Manobo language into Cebuano. The Cebuano texts were then translated into Filipino to make sure that the translation captures the meaning of the original texts as faithfully as possible. The next step of the research is thematic analysis, which helps in identifying and coding the key ideas and significant themes reflecting the life of Manobo people.

To ensure the accuracy and quality of the gathered data, the transcriptions as well as Cebuano and Filipino translations were double-checked and endorsed by Manobo experts. They also had to make sure that the content keeps its original meaning. After this stage, the researcher followed up with the participants to ensure that the interpretation of the data provides an accurate representation of the Manobo beliefs and way of life.

III. RESULTS

The ethnographic study documented ten (10) unpublished oral literary works of the Manobong Agusanon, consisting of three legends (San Isidro, Manat Ya An, and Ang mga Suba), one folktale (Sinapai), two poems (Hipunaw and Pasak), and four bulong (Saad, Baed, Banda, and Taphag). These works were recorded, translated, and analyzed as significant sources of cultural and social knowledge within the Manobo community.

The legends reflect the community's collective memory regarding the origins of places, rivers, and other important locations within their ancestral domain. San Isidro recounts how the former name Pagsabangan was changed to San Isidro after the place became associated with the image of San Isidro Labrador. Manat Ya An explains the origin of the name Barangay Manat from the Manobo misunderstanding of the Kamayo expression "manat ya an." Meanwhile, Ang mga Suba presents the history and significance of the Miaga, Guibangon, Camanon, and Simulao rivers in the community's way of life.

The folktale Sinapai portrays the life of a Manobo woman who demonstrated exceptional courage and later became the first Bae, or female tribal leader. The narrative illustrates the recognition of women's

capacity for leadership and for defending the community.

The poems Hipunaw and Pasak reflect Manobo ways of life and cultural values. Hipunaw depicts their former nomadic lifestyle and dependence on farming, while Pasak expresses deep attachment to and appreciation for ancestral land as an inheritance from their ancestors and a foundation of cultural identity.

The bulong reveal the Manobo's profound relationship with the spiritual world. Saad involves a promise made to the spirits in seeking an abundant harvest; Baed is a request for permission before undertaking activities in the forest; Banda forms part of a healing ritual; and Taphag is a thanksgiving ritual for blessings received and a bountiful harvest. Collectively, these oral traditions demonstrate how Manobo literature preserves cultural memory, values, spirituality, and communal identity.

The analysis revealed six major themes that reflect Manobo culture: simple living, attachment to ancestral land, faith and beliefs, social values and behavior, livelihood, and tribal governance.

a. Simple Living

The legends and poems indicate that Manobo people are dependent upon nature for their survival. The forests and rivers are main sources of food, water, and other essentials in their lives. The Manobo myths Manat Ya An and Ang mga Suba describe food availability in the forest and the contribution of rivers as sources of food, and places for washing.

The poem Hipunaw depicts how Manobo people used to lead a nomadic life when they grew crops, then harvested them and moved to another place in order to find fertile soil, thus demonstrating a simple yet active lifestyle.

b. Love and Appreciation for Ancestral Land

One of the most prominent themes identified in the study is the Manobo's deep attachment to their ancestral land. This is evident in the poem Pasak, which portrays the land as a valuable gift from Magbabaja and an inheritance from their ancestors.

Ancestral land is not merely a place of residence but also a source of unity, livelihood, and cultural identity.

This attachment is further reflected in participants' accounts of their struggle to reclaim their lands during the expansion of corporate operations within their territory. These narratives demonstrate their willingness to defend their ancestral domain because it remains central to their culture and existence as an Indigenous community.

c. Faith and Beliefs

The bulong reveal the Manobo's deep belief in diwata, spirits, and unseen forces. They believe that trees, rivers, forests, and other elements of nature are inhabited or protected by spirits that must be respected and honored.

Baed reflects the practice of seeking permission before cutting a tree to avoid disturbing the spirits. Saad expresses the belief that offerings and promises made to the diwata can help bring about an abundant harvest. Banda reflects the belief in the ability of spirits and ancestors to assist in healing through rituals led by the Baylan. Meanwhile, Taphag emphasizes thanksgiving as an important expression of faith and gratitude.

d. Social Values and Behavior

The oral literary works reflect positive Manobo values, including respect for nature, courage, generosity, concern for others, and care for the family.

Sinapai illustrates the value placed on courage and women's leadership. In Ang mga Suba, elderly Manobo are portrayed as generous individuals who willingly share their catch with others. The bulong likewise demonstrate the importance of respect and harmonious relationships not only among people but also with nature and the spiritual world.

e. Livelihood

The literary works show that the primary sources of livelihood among the Manobo include farming, fishing, hunting, and gathering forest resources. Hipunaw portrays the agricultural cycle from land preparation to harvesting. Ang mga Suba highlights fishing as an important source of food, while Manat

Ya An presents hunting as a significant activity that supports the family and the tribe.

f. Tribal Governance

The oral literary works also reveal the organized social and leadership system of the Manobo. The study identified important traditional roles, including the Hawudon (tribal leader), Bae (female leader), Manigaon (council of elders), Baylan (spiritual leader and healer), and Bagani (warrior and defender of the community).

The folktale Sinapai illustrates the recognition of leadership based on courage and capability. Meanwhile, the bulong Banda and Taphag demonstrate the significant role of the Baylan in maintaining the health and spiritual well-being of the tribe. Overall, the oral traditions indicate that effective leadership is regarded as essential to unity, social order, and the continuity of the Manobo community.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study found that the oral literature of the Manobong Agusanon serves as an important medium for transmitting the cultural, social, and spiritual knowledge of their community. Through the documented legends, folktale, poems, and bulong, the findings revealed that these works are not only forms of oral literature but also repositories of Manobo history, values, beliefs, and social systems.

The legends San Isidro, Manat Ya An, and Ang mga Suba emphasize the significance of places, forests, and rivers in the history and collective identity of the community. These narratives explain the origins of particular places and demonstrate the Manobo's deep relationship with their environment. They also reflect their simple way of life, dependence on natural resources, and the important role of the Bagani in maintaining the security and order of the tribe.

Meanwhile, the folktale Sinapai reflects the Manobo's distinctive recognition of women's capabilities. Through the character of Sinapai, the narrative shows that women are acknowledged for their ability to lead and defend the tribe. Her designation as the first Bae indicates that leadership in Manobo culture is based

not solely on gender, but on competence, courage, and the ability to serve the community.

The poems Hipunaw and Pasak highlight two significant aspects of Manobo culture. Hipunaw portrays their traditional agricultural cycle and former practice of moving from one settlement to another, while Pasak expresses their deep love and appreciation for ancestral land. For the Manobo, ancestral land is not merely a physical space but a living heritage that connects the past, present, and future generations of the tribe.

The bulong most clearly reflect the faith and beliefs of the Manobo. Saad, Baed, Banda, and Taphag reveal their belief in diwata, spirits, and the power of rituals in maintaining harmony within nature and the community. These practices demonstrate respect for the environment, faith in spiritual beings, and the belief that human well-being is closely connected to one's relationship with the natural and spiritual worlds.

Overall, the analysis identified six major cultural aspects embedded in Manobo oral literature: (1) simple living, (2) love and appreciation for ancestral land, (3) faith and beliefs, (4) social values, (5) livelihood, and (6) tribal governance. These findings affirm that oral literature serves as a reflection and repository of the broader culture and identity of the Manobong Agusanon.

Implications for Education

The results of the study reveal the necessity for the involved and better integration of Indigenous literature in the educational curricula. Manobo oral literature can serve as contextually-relevant teaching material in Filipino, Social Studies, and Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd). Students can achieve a better understanding of cultural diversity in the Philippines and a greater appreciation of Indigenous communities' contributions to the national culture and literature. In addition, regular documenting, translating, and publishing of Indigenous literature are vital in ensuring their preservation for the future and preventing the loss of precious historical knowledge.

Implications for the Preservation of Indigenous Culture

The results highlight how crucial it is for cultural organizations, universities, and Indigenous peoples to collaborate to be able to keep oral literature alive. Setting up documentation programs, online archives, and cultural centers can facilitate keeping the tradition, passing it on, and making Manobo culture more widely known.

Implications for Future Research

The study suggests that more research should be done in other Manobo communities as well as other ethnolinguistic groups in Agusan Del Sur so that more oral literature could be documented. Future research may look into Manobo youth's perceptions about their culture and literature in order to establish how much cultural knowledge is transmitted to the new generation. Research may also include more forms of Indigenous literature such as songs, epics, and ritual narratives.

V. CONCLUSION

The oral literature of the Manobong Agusanon is an essential source of history, culture, and a channel of their collective consciousness. They communicate their ideas about life, their relationship with nature, belief systems, governance, and values through legends, folktales, poems, and bulong. Besides their literary importance, oral traditions also help in the preservation of cultural identity from generation to generation. Thus, it is very important to keep documenting, studying, and utilizing oral literary traditions in education and scientific research in order to keep the cultural heritage of the Manobo

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