

# Unveiling the Mystical Lucban Pahiyas Festival

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Rufina C. Rosaroso (PhD)<sup>1</sup>, Nelson A. Rosaroso (PhD)<sup>2</sup>  
Cebu Normal University<sup>1</sup>, University of San Carlos<sup>2</sup>, Cebu City, Philippines  
raffycoronel@yahoo.com<sup>1</sup>, nelson\_rosaroso@yahoo.com<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract** –*This is an ethnographic study which described the local knowledge of the Lucbanin on Pahiyas. The generation of information on the local knowledge as described by the Lucbanin unfolded the natives' meanings in celebrating Philippine festivities such as Pahiyas Festival. Further, their cultural practices and beliefs, handed down from generation to generation served as contributory factors in the acquisition of local knowledge on Pahiyas, revealing its priceless and transcendent beauty. Triangulation was used in the study to analyze and interpret field notes based on participant observations, interviews and document/s analyses. Theme analysis was conducted concurrently with data gathering. Coding was used to classify and identify emerging themes/categories which provided extensive analysis of the data. Results revealed that oral traditions played significant contributions in the acquisition of local knowledge of the Lucbanins in the preparations and celebration of Pahiyas Festival. Oral traditions coupled with direct and participants' observations, formal and informal education as well as folklore served as mystical instruments in the preservation and promotion of Lucbanins' cultural and spiritual values and beliefs, keeping Pahiyas Festival as a moving and dynamic legacy throughout the years. The role of oral traditions as rooted in Lucbanins' local history is a symbol of a true and genuine Lucbanin, entirely different from other locals in the country.*

**Keywords** –*Pahiyas Festival, ethnography, triangulation, participant observations, theme analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Christianity among Filipinos redirected the existing local beliefs and practices into festivities commemorating the lives of saints. Christianity served as a catalyst in enculturation that was Westernized in nature. The festivities that emerged from the neo-religious orientation reflected the pagan characteristics and symbols of the natives' practices.

The religious practices were late integrated in the evolution of Philippine culture. They have implicated expression of thanksgiving to perceived sources of blessings and goodwill. Over the years, such practices have become integral components of Filipino religiosity and community involvement. The historical meanings have adopted with the evolving civilization.

The Pahiyas Festival is an offshoot of a religious belief in Lucban, Quezon. Others believe that this was practiced during the historical moment of Lucban's Christianization. When the colonizers came, they witnessed the aborigines' way of showing thanksgiving to their anitos (gods). The friars, whose principal intention was to convert as much aborigines

as possible, took the practice as an entry point of Christianization. Thus, the Spaniards have successfully converted a lot of Lucban natives commonly called the Lucbanins.

According to Tayao, Pahiyas Festival is a way of giving thanks for a bountiful harvest [1] and a religious celebration in honor of San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of farmers. Further, Baldemor posited that Pahiyas Festival transforms the small town of Lucban from ordinary to exquisite sight [2].

For Ocampo, Pahiyas Festival is an amazing visual display where Lucbanins' houses come alive with magnificent decorations of colorful *kiping* (rice wafers) arranged in layered chandeliers called *aranga* [3]. In addition, Mallari reiterated that Pahiyas Festival is the farmers' appreciation of the farms' yield and an even better production for the incoming years with its lavish display of multicolored "kiping," fresh harvest and other native products showcased in every house façade along the procession route [4].

During the festival, Tayao disclosed that a procession passes through the assigned route with the

image of San Isidro Labrador being carried by his devotees. Houses along the route are decorated with *kiping* and agricultural and non-agricultural harvest. The procession serves as the highlight of the festival. The festive mood continues with street dancing, a showcase of Lucban's delicacies along the streets and moments of reckoning on which decorated house looks the best as a winning entry for an annual "pagpapahiyas" competition [1].

The Pahiyas has evolved through the years depicting the Lucbanins' creativity and ingenuity. Due to economic reasons, the people decided that every year only assigned houses around the town would participate in the festival. Facades of these houses are decorated with agricultural and non-agricultural produce such as vegetables, fruits, rice stalks, rice grains, hats, baskets, paper mache and *kipings*. These produce are to be blessed by the parish priest during the procession. According to Rosero, the procession route is changed every year to give the residents an equal opportunity to participate in the preparation and celebration of Pahiyas Festival [5].

As practiced, the Pahiyas decorations are highlighted with *kiping* of different colors, arranged to create exquisite designs such as giant flowers with leaves, a chandelier in monochromatic or contrasting colors. These chandeliers or "arangya" are decorated with green vegetables which served as background making the design artistically unique and extraordinarily attractive. *Kipings* are displayed from the window top extending to the lowest part of the house facade, transforming the whole frontage uniquely different from others as it is covered with astonishing decors [6].

Since rice is the main ingredient for *kiping* making, it is edible. Some *kiping* are fried and roasted while others are served as palatable desserts.

Pahiyas Festival which is held annually every 15<sup>th</sup> day of May in honor of San Isidro Labrador is not apart from the redefinition of meanings and symbols of other festivities celebrated in the Philippines. Literature was written regarding the history of these celebrations but few reflected the challenge of unraveling the acquisition of local knowledge on Pahiyas, the cultural roles portrayed by the Lucbanins in the preparation of the festival and the meanings of the festival itself based from the natives' perspectives. In light of this, the study attempted to unveil the relevance of Pahiyas not only to the Lucbanin, but to

all people from all walks of life, regardless of status and color.

Pahiyas Festival, as described by the Lucbanins is a "mystical" celebration because of the natives' beliefs that abundance of produce will always remain a blessing from their patron saint, San Isidro Labrador. Aside from agricultural produce, other small scale industries such as buri hat, longganisa business and others where the natives engage in become income generating and sources of livelihood. Thus, the mystical beliefs of the Lucbanins coupled with an overflowing of blessings remain indescribable.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study described the local knowledge of the Lucbanins on Pahiyas Festival preparations and celebration. Further, it identified how the acquisition of local knowledge on "pagpapahiyas" was generated by the Lucbanins.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This is an ethnographic research investigating the Lucbanins' culture. According to Rossman and Rallis, ethnography looks into the appreciation of people's culture and setting, geared towards face to face interactions and discovers how these interactions shape and construct meaning [7]. Further, Fetterman defined ethnography as the key informants' way of narrating a true to life story which provides an avenue for hearing the natives' voices with their own meanings and interpretations [8].

Data gathering was done two weeks before the festival and during the celebration itself. Interview responses from seven selected knowledgeable key informants served as primary source of data. A predetermined set of criteria was used in selecting the identified key informants which includes knowledgeable locals in Lucban who were considered as authorities and still engaged in the nitty gritty aspects in line with the preparations and celebration of Pahiyas Festival.

Aside from verbatim accounts of the selected key informants, participant observations were utilized as another source of pertinent data. From day one until the last day, the researchers "lived with" the selected key informants for immersion purposes. This was done to be with the key informants, immersing with their daily lives and be one of them.

For Gobo, participant observations create a direct relationship with the key informants through immersion [9]. Aside from participant observations, documentary method was used in the study which includes newspaper clips, municipal records and reports. Documentary method as posited by Mogalakwe [10] is document/s analyses and a reflexive process which involved recording facts [11].

Interviews, participant observations and document/s analyses were validated through triangulation. Olsen posited that triangulation is the combination of methods and/or data combination for clear understanding of varied insights and viewpoints [12]. For Creswell & Miller, triangulation involves validation of combined and varied data sources which help the researchers in the identification of emerging patterns or themes [11] and the act of combining several research methods to study one thing [12]. In addition, Hussein reiterated that multiple methods are necessary in triangulation procedures in studying the same phenomenon for validity purpose [12].

In this study, triangulation was used to validate the data sources such as interviews, participant observations and document/s analyses. This procedure provided the researchers insights and viewpoints on the key informants' similarities and differences in terms of their responses to the queries of the study. These served as significant indicators in identifying the emerging patterns and themes which were coded for data analyses and interpretations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Acquisition of knowledge is rooted in the core families and secondary environment such as the community, school and the church. The historical information is orally transmitted to them by their great grandparents, grandparents and parents.

Based on the gathered data, the emerging themes which depict the acquisition patterns of local knowledge on Pahiyas are the following:

### A. Direct Observations

As posited by Mills, Durepos and Webe [13], direct observations provide opportunities for the researchers to observe directly what is happening in the social setting such as home, interact with family members and participate in household chores. It gives the researcher direct experience on the phenomenon being studied.

In this study, the child, as early as five years old is given the opportunity to directly observe other members of the family in their preparations and celebration of the fiesta in honor of San Isidro Labrador, their patron saint.

One key informant narrated:

*At the age of five, I started appreciating and valuing the celebration. Every May 15, I am excited and look forward to different giants, beautiful princess and queen of the night, native chandelier and others. I even observe how busy my family is as everybody prepares for the fiesta (KI-1).*

*(Limangtaon pa lang ako ay natuto na akong magpahalaga sa Pagpapahiyas. Tuwing Mayo 15, Masaya kong inaabangan ang mga anak o higante, sagala, arangya at iba pa. Pati ang pamilya ko, masyadong abala sa pyesta ay na obserbahan ko).*

Another excited key informant narrated:

*We are playmates. Both of us experienced and observed how our families really prepared for the Pahiyas (KI-3).*

*(Magkababata kami, magkalaro. Pareho naming naranasan at naobserbahan kung paano naghahanda ang aming mga pamilya para sa Pahiyas).*

Everybody in Lucban is a witness in terms of preparations of Pahiyas Festival. The inherent artistic talent of the people of Lucban is exemplified in the unique designs reflected in their Pahiyas. Although the people get ideas from past Pahiyas designs and artworks, their originality and creativity blend successfully in a creation or masterpiece that is unique, colorful, attractive and unimaginable. Acquisition of knowledge from the environment and culture cannot be clearly established in this area of inquiry since artistic and uniqueness of the festivity dominates the manifestations of learning acquired in time.

Direct observations among the selected key informants basically started at home. Engagement in kiping making, which serves as the family's source of livelihood is evident in every home. As experienced by the key informants, their exposure to the business

at an early age provided significant memories and insights on the essentials of kiping in arangya designing. Age played an important role in molding their minds in terms of social responsibility and active involvement in the preparations and celebration of Pahiyas Festival. As the key informants grow older, their skills and participation really matter. The older the key informant is, the more creative and artistic he is.

Through direct observations, the key informants' artistic inclinations were developed. With the advent of time, creativity and ingenuity were enhanced within themselves. Thus, the meaning of Pahiyas was instilled among them with the showcase of original artistry as manifested with their religious beliefs.

### **B. Participant Observations**

Kawulich underscored that participant observation is a data gathering process which enables the researchers to learn and understand peoples' activities under study in the natural setting through observation and active participation in those activities [14]. This is the essence of immersion.

In this study, children at a very young age are allowed to participate in the preparations of the Pahiyas Festival. Older siblings start to take roles in the preparation procedures. By doing so, they eventually learn about the festival.

Another key informant disclosed:

*Everybody in the house is busy. I always assist until I learned the why's and how's of the preparations. Until today, I always join the contest (KI-4). (Sa bahay, lahat ay abala. Kaya tumutulong ako sa kanila hanggang sa malaman ko kung paano at bakit nagpapahiyas. Hanggang ngayon, lagi akong sumasali sa Pahiyas lalo nasa contest).*

Further, one key informant shared:

*I learned arangya designing from my parents. Later on, almost all of us siblings are adept in the task (KI-2). (Natuto akong pagdesign ng arangya sa mga magulang ko. Nang magtagal, halos lahat kami ay marunong na at dalubhasa sa gawaing ito).*

Arangya (local chandelier) designing is acquired through children's participation in the preparations happening in their homes. Such knowledge is acquired through observations, involvement and experiential learning. Through time, roles are acquired and they become complex as the child matures and refines the artistry.

Arangya designing becomes a way of life for the Lucbanins because it symbolizes their identity. Since it is a routinary activity among the people, creativity using their produce and indigenous materials is manifested in their artistry. Further, ingenuity involving originality and creative imagination is reflected in their quest not only for individuality, but as a true Filipino inherently different from other races.

### **C. Formal Education**

Formal education, according to Eaton, is classroom-based, organized and guided by a formal curriculum where trained teachers facilitate [15].

Both public and private school teachers in Lucban integrate discussions of the phenomenon in their lessons. As another key informant said:

*During my elementary years, we used to have a lesson on history of Lucban, San Isidro Labrador and Pahiyas which was integrated in our Social Studies and Art subjects. We learned the value of generosity from the story of San Isidro Labrador (KI-3).*

*(Noong elementary pa ako, may leksyon kami sa Araling Panlipunan at Art tungkol sa kasaysayan ng Lucban, San Isidro Labrador at Pahiyas. Doon naming natutunan ang pagiging mapagbigay sa kapwa, ang maganda at natatanging katangian ni San Isidro Labrador).*

The school as a social institution serves as a source of the Lucbanin's acquisition of local knowledge on Pahiyas. The integration of local history in Social Studies and Art subjects provide avenues for instilling nationalism among the people of Lucban. Moreover, the value of preserving their cultural heritage and promoting the festival is visible among the natives.

Instructional delivery via preservation and promotion of Pahiyas Festival is imbibed among the Lucbanins particularly in the classrooms. Developments and innovations with regard to annual's festivity were provided to all students from primary to tertiary levels. National and international recognitions

are likewise institutionalized by the classroom teachers through the use of print and non-print media. Aside from the prescribed instructional materials required by the Department of Education (DepEd) for basic education and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for the tertiary level, these additional insights exhibit deeper meanings on the relevance of Pahiyas Festival as observed in formal education. These best practices make the Lucbaninis proud of their cultural heritage and identity.

#### **D. Informal Education**

Informal education happens outside the classroom where instruction is facilitated by significant others such as parents, community elders and others. As explained by Jeffs & Smith, informal education is a spontaneous process of cultivating learning which can take place in any setting, and is well facilitated through conversation, exploration and enlargement of experience [16]. In this study, some children and teenagers receive a step-by-step instructions regarding kiping-making, lacing the arangya and creating unique designs from elders outside the premises of the school, particularly at home.

As one key informant reiterated:

*I grew up in a family whose source of livelihood is kiping making and designing of the arangya. I learned different designs from my parents. Until now, I am still engaged in the same business (KI-2).*

*(Lumaki ako na ang hanapbuhay ng mga magulang ko ay paggawa ng kiping at paglalagay ng palamuti sa mga arangya. Natuto akong gumawa ng mga disenyo mula sa aking mga magulang. Hanggang ngayon, ito pa rin ang hanap buhay ko).*

For the respondent, it was easy for her to provide a background of the business. This is because at a tender age of her adolescent life, she began assisting her mother in the operation of their business. She learned the ins and outs of the trade as she grew older. When she got married, the managing of the business was passed on to her.

Kiping making has become a seasonal livelihood to some families in Lucban. The business venture is consistently passed on to at least 1 to 3 kins belonging to the younger generation of the manufacturers.

The designs in kiping-making have become complex over time. Trial and error and inherent artistic tendency comprise a system that manufacturers engage into. This is how the manufacturers create and re-create their commodity. The variety of colors of the kiping evolved together with the said system. Today, the kiping manufacturers can make kiping of different colors.

The children's early exposure and active involvement in kiping making contributed a lot in their appreciation of the task as part of household chores and at the same time helping the family earn a living. Unity and sense of responsibility inculcated a deeper meaning on the children's experiences. As they grow older, these wonderful experiences were uncovered making them appreciate the value of hardwork, one of the important traits they inherited from their parents and the people themselves consider it as a Lucbanin's pride.

#### **E. Folklore**

Folklore as described by Eugenio is usually transmitted by word of mouth [17]. Stories that are continuously narrated by elders to the young serve as good source of information about the history of Pahiyas Festival, kiping-making, symbolisms, conduct of celebrating the festival and others.

As the interview continued, one excited key informant shared:

*When I was still young, I learned the story of Pahiyas from my great grandparent. Then, my grandmother and mother shared the same story (KI-5).*

*(Noong maliit pa ako, nalaman ko ang kwento ng Lucban at Pahiyas mula sa aking lola sa tuhod. Tapos ang lola ko rin at si Inay, pareho ang kwento tungkol sa Pahiyas).*

Another key informant exclaimed:

*The story of Pahiyas Festival was passed on to me by my grandparents. My mother also told me the same story (KI-4).*

*(Ang kwento ng Pahiyas Festival ay nalaman ko mula sa aking mga lolo at lola. Pati ang inay ko, pareho sila ng kwento).*

The history of Lucban and Pahiyas Festival was shared to the children by the next generation. The same story was narrated by the next generation without any changes at all. Moreover, the school teachers and parish priest play important roles in the transmission of local knowledge.

Further, one respondent emphasized:

*Even in the homily, the priest always includes the story of San Isidro Labrador, our patron saint who used to share a portion of his harvest to the church. He is a generous farmer, that's why he always reaps bountiful harvest (KI-5). (Pati sa homily ng pari, kasama ang kwento ni San Isidro Labrador, ang aming patron dito sa Lucban. Isa siyang magsasaka na lagging nagbibigay ng kanyang ani sa simbahan. Mapagbigay siya kaya ang dami nyang ani).*

The value of generosity was learned and acquired by the Lucbanins from the history of San Isidro Labrador. The church serves as one source in the acquisition of local knowledge. Together with the government officials, the church is involved not only in preserving and reinforcing the Pahiyas Festival but also in promoting the phenomenon locally and globally. The festival has been featured several times in local television productions, a book was published by the Sangguniang Bayan of Lucban, and a good number of natives have brought the phenomenon in different parts of the world.

The story of San Isidro Labrador has been narrated into several versions and passed on to the younger generations by the elders. The story is also taught in school and church. The story teaches the people to be thankful for what is given to them, and that this must be shared with others. Because of this story, the people became more generous. Many parishioners in Lucban give part of their blessings to the church. Because of the support that they receive from the people, all sacraments are provided to the people for free.

With the passage of oral traditions, the selected key informants' counting of blessings serves as a mystical endeavor among them. Their religious beliefs are always integrated with abundance which is unveiled in their creativity and ingenuity as showcased in their active involvement in celebrating Pahiyas Festival.

#### F. The Meanings of Pahiyas Festival from the Natives' Perspectives

Pahiyas Festival, as interpreted by the Lucbanins is a thanksgiving in honor of San Isidro Labrador. Such interpretation is deeply rooted in the minds and beliefs of the natives.

One key informant shared:

*Pahiyas is the Lucbanins way of showcasing abundant produce in honor of our patron saint. These produce can be in the form of both agricultural and other products of some small scale industries which the Lucbanins are very proud of (KI-7). (Ang Pahiyas ay isang paraan ng pagpapakitang masagana ang ani, na parehong galing sa bukid at iba pang kabuhayang pinagkikitaan ng mga taga-Lucban. Ipinagmamalaki ito ng mga Lukbanin).*

Another key informant said:

*My personal meaning of Pahiyas Festival is the Lucbanins' personal connection with our patron saint, San Isidro Labrador. My religious beliefs will never be changed because this is part of my growing up (KI-6). (Ang personal kong kahulugan ng Pahiyas Festival ay ang aking koneksyon kay San Isidro Labrador, ang aming patron. Ang aking paniniwalang ito ay hindi mababago kasi bahagi ito ng kinalakhan ko).*

With these utterances, the cultural beliefs and practices guided the Lucbanins in putting significant meanings on Pahiyas Festival. Such meanings are handed down from generation to generation as they continue their quest to fully understand, preserve and promote the festivity locally and globally.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study described the generation of information on the local knowledge as described by the Lucbanins. The local knowledge was acquired from the elders, church and educational institutions through direct observations, participant observations, apprenticeships, formal and informal training and folklore. The younger generations learned about

history, kiping-making, pagpapahiyas, arangya-making, roles to perform and conduct of celebrating the festival.

Further, the local history played a significant role in the acquisition of local knowledge of the Lucbanins. The significance of oral traditions in the preservation and promotion of cultural and spiritual values and beliefs among the Lukbanins served as a mystical instrument in maintaining Pahiyas Festival as a moving and dynamic legacy. This only indicates that the role of oral traditions as embedded in local history is indicative of a true Lucbanin, entirely different from other locals in the country. Thus, their identity as a Lucbanin remains unique.

The passing on of these oral traditions from generation to generation, the religious beliefs and practices shaped in molding the people's minds are the Lucbanins' way of preserving the cultural heritage of Lucban, as manifested in the celebration of Pahiyas Festival.

Pahiyas is Lukbanin's religious praxis of thanksgiving for the bountiful harvest that they have received for the year. It involves adornment of the façade of houses with varied agricultural and non-agricultural produce of the specific occupations they engage in. The adornment features arangya, anok or higante, farm produce and animals.

It is recommended to have another study of the same topic needs to be conducted to have an in-depth analysis of the results. Additional key informants are highly recommended to solicit deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

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