

# Village Institutions and Rituals of the Mamanwas and its Development Implications

**Retsy T. Malong**

Surigao del Sur State University - Tandag City, Philippines

*retsy.malong@yahoo.com*

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**Abstract** - *Exploring the indigenous local governance among the Indigenous Peoples (IP) or communities in the Philippines would provide ample lessons and best practices which can be integrated into the Philippines' local government structure. This is due to the fact that their leadership system had been older than the existence of the Philippines state. This work ventured on the discussion of the indigenous leadership system, institutions, and rituals in the Mamanwa community of Bantayanan, Surigao del Sur. The study focused on its discussion on the Mamanwa Village Institutions as a valuable part of the Filipino nation's heritage. The ethnographic method was used in the study, it employed both the participant and non-participant observations. The qualitative interview was also utilized with the key cultural informants or cultural expert. The free, prior and informed consent was secured from the key informant's which employed the proper protocol. This study presented a detailed discussion on the significant Mamanwa institutions such the Dakula, Baylanon, Grupo nan Malasser, Grupo nan Marigon and Bagani. It is important because the Mamawas were able to preserve their institutions despite speedy acculturation of other indigenous communities in Mindanao. Further, illustrated the reverence of the community belief system for this reason the Mamanwas are very pious or religious people as manifested with their great reverence to Magbabaja, the supreme being. There is dearth of studies conducted on the ethnography of the Mamanwas in this view the present inquiry provided a detailed discussion on the Mamanwas village institutions and rituals which are vital for policy makers. Along this line or in this end serve as guide post and indeed provided important information for policy planners on the area of ethno-development. A factor for the success of future development interventions to be provided to the community.*

**Keywords:** *Mamanwa, Baylanon, Dakula, Tandag, Malaser, Kahimunan*

## INTRODUCTION

The Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao comprises the communities with a very colourful and best-preserved culture in the country. They are rich repositories of art, value system and Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) and Indigenous institutions. Its call for preservation is timely for they comprise a rich cultural heritage and artistic wealth of this country.

The Mamanwas is one of the IP Community in Caraga region, the other includes the Manobo, Talaandig, Banwaon, Higaanon and among others. Moreover, the Mamanwas are lesser in population than the latter and in particular, had been the vanguard of their indigenous knowledge system, institutions leadership practices. They have actively work for the preservation of its arts and crafts for posterity as part of Filipino cultural heritage. The well preserved Mamanwa indigenous leadership system illustrated their desire to protect these institutions as community priceless knowledge and heritage. Various researchers in the likes of Maceda [1], Almeda [2], Bauzon [3],

Omoto [4], Tomaquin [5], and Trinidad [6] called them as the first Surigaonon. On the other hand, the research findings of Prof. Keiiche Omoto found out that their history dates back 50,000 years ago. Omoto [7] revealed that the Mamanwas is the oldest existing IP community in the Philippines.

It is in their reason that Bauzon [8] considered them as Philippines national treasure and truly the first Caraganon. In Caraga region, the Mamanwa dwells in Toyatoya, Daging, Baoy, Mangganlo and the villages of Kalanggaman, Mam-on Punta Naga and also in Lake Mainit in Surigao del Norte. In Tandag in the villages of Bantayanan, Hitaob, Mahawan and in the village of Lubcon in Cortes, Surigao del Sur respectively.

The primary occupation of the Mamanwas includes rattan gathering, honey harvesting, planting upland Palay, Copra, Falcata, Abaca farming, and others indulged in basketry weaving, and root crops farming. The Mamanwas are very industrious and hardworking people. But most of their occupation is centered or focused on upland farming.

The paper is a study on the Mamanwas tribal governance and its best practices which are worthy to be emulated due to the values it enshrined such respect for elders, respect for indigenous knowledge, and respect for the environment for considering the environment as mutually revered and as a source of livelihood or income. Understanding the tribal practices of the Mamanwas would be then a means in promoting the culture of tolerance, co-existence, and mutual respect and would be very significant for it provides alternative modalities in local governance using the indigenous knowledge system (IKS). As Felix [9] wrote: "Through people's immersion in governance system and practices of Indigenous Peoples, the important tradition and values that can put them on track again and pick up as a nation can be rediscovered. There is no perfect formula for governance. What is important is the openness to learn from various disciplines and experiences and a commitment to tread paths less travelled or even marginalized."

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study focused on its discussion on the Mamanwa village institutions as a valuable part of the Filipino nation's heritage. It also endeavours to narrate the said institutions and its relevance to the Mamanwa way of life. It also covered some rituals associated with the said institutions such as kahimunan, Magdiwata, and Tiphage. It further aimed to document or records the said rituals as part of Filipino heritage for cultural preservation for being part of the cultural wealth or inheritance of the Filipino nation.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The ethnographic method was used in the study, it employed both the participant and non-participant observations aided by an audio recorder, camera, and field diary or notes. The qualitative interview was also utilized with the key cultural informants otherwise known as cultural experts. The purpose of employing ethnography as a research approach is to have a closer gaze in the cultural practices being studied in the site. It is noteworthy that before the start of the research, a permit from the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) was secured. Then followed by a courtesy appearance to the Punong Barangay of Sotel, Tandag, Surigao Del Sur for the latter approval in the study. Then the researcher proceeded to the Mamanwa village of Bantayanan to see the village head or the

Dakula for his permission in the study. The free, prior and informed consent was secured from the key informants which it used proper protocol. The key informants then were informed on the intent of the study and after which followed the field work or ethnographic research. I conducted the said field for work for six months using community immersion or field method and the techniques or strategies of ethnographic design.

Okamura cited Bulmer [10] and he wrote " The relevance of securing informed consent to the community as the consent for the human subject is essential in the conduct of scientific research. And it is the responsibility of the researcher to communicate sufficiently the purposes of research to the subjects". In this view I lived with the Mamanwas during the entire duration of the research and participated in their day to day activities with utmost respect with their cultural practices. Information with the key informants had been very successful in obtaining the important findings of the study. I considered the said key informants as cultural bearers or cultural specialist.

Okamura [11] narrated " That ethnographic method make enquiries on cultural practices and beliefs systems in a particular field site. It includes the use of participant observation, non-participant observation, qualitative interview for specialized or key cultural informant. As well as a collection of genealogies, including life histories, such life cycle and parts of oral literatures and folklore. Including recording and drawing ethnographic analysis of cultures, practices and its relevance to the community being studied".

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The Mamanwa Indigenous Institution**

The Dakula is the chieftain or the village chief in the Mamanwa land and not a hereditary title. In order for one to become a Dakula, one should be highly respected by the community, usually , the most moral person in the village or community has a huge chance to become one. His knowledge of the Tud-em or the tribal lore is excellent including the tribal taboos and expected to master the Tud-em of Maayong Pamatasan (Peacemaking chant). He should be acceptable to the government officials and to the other IP communities.

I observed the following measures in selecting a Dakula or the village chief was widely observed. In the event that there is a vacancy of the Dakula, the

Baylanon or shaman was the in charge of information dissemination concerning the vacancy. He announced by sounding the Gimbar (drum made of iguana) six times in early dawn regarding the matter, which means that the Dakula office had been vacant. Either he died, resigned or incapacitated for this reason election of the new Dakula will start.

This time I observed that an Oyagdok or altar was built which was used by the Baylanon or shaman in his prayer before a new Dakula will be selected. In the election, the Malaaser or the most senior member of the council of elders (kahogpungan nan mga Malaasers) presided the election. I noticed that before the election, the Baylanon prayed the Tud-em for the institution of the Dakula and Below was part of the Tud-em (chant) as I translated.

Dear supreme being *Magbabaja*;  
You have accompanied the Mamanwa across  
generations;  
You have granted wisdom to the *Dakula* across  
generations;  
Mababaja dear one I offered in this *Oyagdok*;  
And the materials in the *Mam-on* ritual;  
With this wild Boar which signifies the purity of my  
intentions and aspirations;  
Supreme being *Magbabaja* as I invoke your divine  
guidance;  
In this ceremony of the installation of the new *Dakula*;  
May this spear or sinagdan grant prowess and *vitality* to  
the new *Dakula*.  
And Vigor to lead the community in times of crisis;  
As I danced this *Baylanon* dance I invoke your divine  
guidance;  
May this young coconut leave which I carry;  
Maybe a symbol of the beautiful wisdom you will grant  
to the new *Dakula*;  
May this sap of young coconut tree be a symbol  
Of wit and wisdom of the *Baylanon* which we dearly  
love;  
May the *Baylanon* be strong as the *Molave* tree;  
May he be productive as the rattan tree;  
May the *Baylanon* wisdom towers like a *Toog* tree;  
As I invoked your divine presence dear *Magbabaja*;  
The community is my witness of your kindness;  
  
And your generous love to the community;  
May you continue to shower all your bounties,  
I give thanks to you *Magbabaja* for the blessings you  
will give to the new *Dakula*.

I observed after the supplications of the Baylanon. He danced facing the Oyagdok (altar) accompanied by

the Gimbar (drum). This time he is assisted by his wife who also joined the dance. As I noticed the community eagerly or enthusiastically witnessed the ritual performed by the Baylanon. This time I witnessed the formal installation of the Dakula by the Baylanon. The text below was the supplication of the Baylanon as he installed the latter as I translated.

"The community in attendance please is informed that our new Dakula is hereby installed into his work. As I give this Sinagdan (Spear) to him which is a symbol of his authority and the Gimbar(drum) for him as a unifying figure in the village. May the wise and good God Magbabaja will grant him wisdom to carry this task."

After which follows the celebration of the kahimunan, the long and festive celebration or feast. The kahimunan was celebrated for the successful installation of the new Dakula. The first part of the kahimunan is the preparation phase, this part of the ritual is the preparation of the materials needed in the celebration which includes the offerings by the community including the boar as the main offering. The invitation of the local government unit officials to witness the activity was also instituted and gathering of young coconut leaves to be used in the ritual (butay) was also conducted. The second part of the kahimunan is the sounding of the Guimbar (drum) by the Baylanon which means that the kahimunan is to be celebrated in honor of the new Dakula. Then, the third part of the ritual proper and the fourth part one is the distribution of the cooked starch of the Edyok palm tree to the community in attendance which symbolized peace and abundance.

After the distribution of the cooked starch of the Edyok palm, the community chanting follows. The young coconut leaves (butay) was placed in the Oyagdok together with the boar to be offered in the kahimunan. The symbol of the young coconut leaves is the expectations to promote village unity. This time the boar is slaughtered and the cup of blood is offered to Magbabaja by the Baylanon in order to ask for the stamina of the new Dakula as he carries his new duty. Then I noticed after the offering of the cup of blood the boar was sliced and roasted this time male members of the community actively participated in roasting the boar. After it was roasted the community joined together in a meal and all the prepared foods were consumed including the roasted sliced boar. This was

followed by a community tribal dance and merrymaking. The concluding part of the kahimunan was presentation of the offering to the Baylanon for the service rendered. I observed, that the new Dakula lead the offering and after the kahimunan ceremony, the new Dakula expressed his gratitude for the community participation in the kahimunan.

The Bagani, is one of the tribal institutions of the Mamanwas and in my observation, the Bagani serves as the protector of the village in case of conflict with the neighbouring communities. An individual or young Mamanwa man can be a Bagani by tutorship or training of an old, seasoned, expert or elder Bagani. I noticed that there is an informal training to be conducted for those young Mamanwa to become a Bagani (protector of the village). There are two types of Bagani which I observed, first the Bagani na Maabiabihon and the Bagani na Malinawon. The Bagani Maabiabihon is the in-charge in announcing to the village of the community activities, schedule visit of the dignitaries coming from the national government agencies notably from the NCIP (National Commission of Indigenous Peoples), including from the LGU (Local Government Unit) officials and from the other national agencies and other visitors or dignitaries. The Bagani Maabiabihon is also in charge of youth activities in the village. The Bagani position both the Bagani Maabiabihon and Malinawon are reserved to the young male population. Further, the Bagani Malinawon is the village guard or protector, he is skilled in the use of sinagdan (spear), has vast knowledge in the use of poisonous plants and animals and skilled in using the bow and arrow. Usually, he is well-built and has muscular strength.

Specifically, the Bagani Malinawon is also a peacemaker in charge of tribal peacemaking with other villages or communities. Both the Bagani Malinawon and Bagani Maabiabihon is expert in the Tud-em of Maayong Pamantasan, which is the code of honor of the Baganiship. Below is part of the text which I translated part of the Tud-em of Maayong Pamantasan or the heraldic code of the Bagani Malinawon.

As Bagani I swear to be the protector of the village from intimidation of other communities,

As a Bagani I swear to offer my life for village protection.

As a Bagani I hereby swear to be obedient to local, national authorities, the police, and the army

As a Bagani I believe it's my prime duty to

cooperate of the said authorities for the village peace and harmony.

As a Bagani I swear to protect the burial grounds, community prayer area and the ancestral domain from the encroachment of other communities.

The Baylanon, the community diviner or shaman in the Mamanwa land, he is endowed with mastery of the Mamanwa Tud-em or chant. Besides being as a diviner he is also a healer and expert in the village community practices, rituals, and customary norms or laws. In some cases, this is an inherited position from father to son. But others become a Baylanon by a dream, or by a desire of an individual to become one, the Baylanon is expert in Baylanon song, rituals, and dances and it is believed that he was selected by the Diwata (divine being) to provide spiritual curing or divine healing to the village.

The Baylanon then is both a diviner or shaman and an herbalist, as a diviner, he is expert in Mamanwa healing rituals such as Tuman, Bakayayage, Hongodgode and Para ka tamama. Let me discuss as I witnessed in Bantayanan in Tandag, Surigao del Sur concerning the said rituals.

Tuman is a ceremony performed by the Baylanon as a renewal of his duty as an herbalist, as a diviner, as keepers of traditions and cultural master. I observed that it started in the early dawn when the wife of the Baylanon sounded the guimbar (drum made by a dried skin of iguana), which means that the Baylanon will renew his vow. After which the singing of the Baylanon on the Tud-em sa pagtuman (chant in renewing his vow) which lasted for one hour, after the chant, he proceeded or approached the Oyardok a constructed altar decorated with young coconut leaves. He danced facing the constructed altar and continued his supplications for thirty minutes, after which his wife gives him the Sinagdan or spear and the betel nut chew. This symbolizes of his desire to renew his vow as Baylanon. Then followed by releasing of chicken to the village which is an offering to the Magbabaja, the lord almighty or can be equated to the supreme deity. It is believed that the Baylanon will be endowed by more wisdom (kinaadman). The ceremony ended by sounding again the Gimbar (drum) seven times.

Hongodgode. A farming ritual headed by the Baylanon, in this ritual the Baylanon is being assisted by a nursing mother. The ritual is very simple the nursing mother will carry the child or infant and circle

seven times the farming area. This means that the acts of the nursing mother symbolize a productive harvest of crops, this ritual was performed before planting in the dumahan (root crops farm).

Para Kantamama. This ritual is done by releasing a wild duck called Pato de lamar to the river. It is believed that releasing the wild duck will increase the fish harvest. When it is in a forest area, a wild deer was used. It is believed that releasing a wild deer will increase catch in hunting or in the game expedition. And when it is a farm area, releasing a white chicken will result to fertility of the soil, it is believed that this will increase the harvest.

Bakakayage. A ritual performed when one is very sick, the ritual started by the chant sa panambal (healing chant) of the Baylanon. After the chant, the wife of the Baylanon informed the latter of the intention of the person to be healed. This time I witnessed the Baylanon performed the Baylanon dance facing the Oyagdok (constructed altar) and continued the chanting of supplication. After which follows the offering of wild boar of which was pierced by the Baylanon using the Sinagdan (wooden spear). The blood was sprinkled in the soil which was believed can cure the sick person, the boar was butchered, and the village dines together. This time the sick person went home to have his/her rest, the ritual was finished within one hour and a half.

Other Mamanwa institutions include the Malaas, the Marigone and the Kalumonan. The Malaas, it is the council of elders in the Mamanwa land. The council of elders advises the Dakula on matters in day to day governance of the village. In the event when there is an agreement with the neighbouring IP (Indigenous People), the advice of the council of elders (Hugpong nan Malasser) is widely sought. The council of elders (kahugpongan nan mga Malaser) is composed both by male and female elders of the village. The said council of elders is headed by a chairperson who served as the leader of the group. This is a very influential institution in the Mamanwa land for I observed it has an authority to work for a replacement of the Dakula by calling the kalumonan or the general assembly.

The Marigone or Marigon is the association of the women sector in the Mamanwa land, the primary function of the organization is to assist the Mamanwa men to the different activities in the village like attending the community farm, community forest and in hunting and fishing expeditions. The Marigone or

Marigon is headed by the wife of the Baylanon, together with her are the wives of other Mamanwa men. Moreover, non-married Mamanwa women, widows were also a member of the said association.

The kalumonan is the general assembly in the Mamanwa land, it is summoned or called when there are important decisions to be made by the community. Such but not limited to the date of the Kahimonan and Magdiwata rituals, when there special visitors like the mayor and governor, schedule of collective harvesting and farming and the date for the institution of the new Dakula. The kalumonan is usually called three times a year but again when there are a special concern and occasions for the community the Kalumonan can be convened anytime. The kalumonan is somewhat similar to Barangay general assembly for the non-Mamanwas.

### **The Mamanwa Rituals**

The kahimunan is the grand festivity in the Mamanwa land, it is offered when welcoming an important person in the town or province. There is a great feast of the celebration where more than two pigs were slaughtered. The ritual was performed by the main Baylanon with the assistance of an associate Baylanon, the altar or Oyagdok is well decorated with young coconut and anahaw leaves, the community was dressed in traditional costume, I observed that the community were very much excited in the said ritual. The kahimunan started with a prayer of the main Baylanon called panawag-tawag, after his supplication the three associates, the Baylanon chanted the "Tud-em kang daan malaaser inin Tribu" (Narration of the oral history of Mamanwa).

Then followed by a ritual dance of the main Baylanon, then later the associate Baylanon joined the dance, after which the main Baylanon rendered the long chant which lasted for half an hour. Following on that was the recitation of prayers for the offering by the associate Baylanon. After the prayer, the associate Baylanon pierced the three pigs using a wooden Sinagdan (spear) and was placed in Oyagdok (altar) as the major offering. Subsequent to the said activity the community dances with the gimbar (drum). After that the butchered pigs were cooked which was prepared by the women. I noticed that after a few minutes of resting the Baylanon announced the very important visitor, the local officials headed by the vice mayor. The community welcome the visitors by rendering the

community dance called "Pag-abi-abi sa Bisita" (welcoming the visitors). Then after the ritual dance, the speeches of the visitor were given. Afterward followed by the community partaking the prepared foods including the visitors. Then rendered a community chant called "Tud-em sa Pag-ambit", which is headed by the main Baylanon. The ceremony lasted for three hours starting from nine in the morning to twelve noon.

### **The Magdiwata Ritual**

The Magdiwata celebration of the Mamanwas was originally a full moon prayer (Maceda,) [12]. It has a rigid preparation by the community, it included gathering food preparation for the ceremony which included root crops, chicken, rice, young coconut fruits, honey, and vegetables. I further observed that the Magdiwata ritual is a worshipped ceremony to Magbabaja and most of the time it is conducted during the full moon as I noticed in Bantayakan. The ceremony then started early in the evening at seven, the community gathered in the community altar with an improvised lamp and there was a fire at the center. The Baylanon as the main celebrator officiated the ceremony, he enthusiastically announced the purpose of the ritual. Then after which follows the ritual dance of the main Baylanon in circling the fire, later he was joined by the three associate Baylanon and the dance lasted for one hour. Then I observed since the main Baylanon together with his associates were exhausted in their Baylanon dance, then later the wife of main Baylanon instructed the villagers to perform the ritual dance of "Pagdayeg kan Magbabaja" (Praise you dear Magbabaja). I observed that the community actively dance the said worship dance accompanied by the Guimbar (drum made from the dried shin of iguana). After the dance of the community, the main Baylanon instructed the community to prepare for the dinner or feast, followed by the community dining or enjoying the long feast. After the dinner, lengthy dancing continued using the young coconut leaves as props, the dance was very simple they just raise the props (the young coconut leaves) forming a circle or surrounding the built fire. It was again a lengthy community dance which consumed for two hours, following two hours of dancing, they dine again. Then followed by the prayers of the main Baylanon, after which the associate Baylanon performed the Baylanon dance, the ceremony ended at exactly one in the early dawn.

### **Tephage**

Is the harvest ritual of the Mamanwas, it was conducted to reveal the gratitude of the community /village for the bountiful harvest in the farm to the supreme creator Magbabaja, not only for the good harvest but also for the oneness of the village. Or the peace and tranquillity of the village, thus, Tephage ritual was offered and performed in this occasion.

I observed that the ritual started with scattering seven cups of rice on the rice farm, this was done by the wife of the Baylanon. Then afterwards the women carry a bamboo stick which they used in digging a hole enough for a coconut tree, the coconut tree symbolizes abundance, prosperity, and stamina. The third part is the community singing of the harvest song, the fourth part of the ritual is the Baylanon dance in the prayer area. After which the associate Baylanon released a white rooster to the farm area, which is an offering to Magbabaja with the hope of good harvest in the next farming season. I noticed that the last part of the ritual was the community prayer headed by the main Baylanon assisted by two associate Baylanon.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The village institutions of the Mamanwas have three main social functions, first for continuity of cultural heritage, second to promote the unity of the village, third to showcase the uniqueness of Mamanwa culture which is a part of Filipino heritage. The various rituals covered the following themes: sustainable use of the environment while conserving it for the next generation and second respect for traditions. The various rituals illustrated the respect of traditions and indigenous knowledge. The reverence to the community belief system illustrated that the Mamanwas are very pious or religious people based on their community beliefs system and their great reverence to Magbabaja the Supreme Being. The Mamanwas are very creative and artistic people as illustrated in their ornaments, tattoos, chants, and indigenous recipes. Specifically, Mamanwas village arts such as their basketry, pangutob are an illustration that the Mamanwas are very creative people.

Aside from being peace-loving people they also seem to be people who possess genuine human values such as the practice of food sharing what they have (Pernia) [13]. Because of being peace loving, the Mamanwas avoided conflict especially to the dominant lowlanders. Their being peace loving resulted to the

sharing of work in the Mamanwas farm land which is collectively owned by them. So, being peace loving people is not a name calling but the actual social values in the Mamanwa land. A value which we the majority Filipinos can learn from them. As a peace-loving community, they have high respect for military, police and officials in the government. The Kahimunan celebration can also be celebrated when welcoming government officials truly a manifestation of the village as a peace-loving community.

Further, these provided the respect of Mamanwas Indigenous knowledge system (IKS) by non-Mamanwas. On the other hand, promoting the participation of Mamanwa women to local governance through the organization of Marigone, an organization of Mamanwa women with the end view in contributing to village governance and decision making. In terms of gender roles, the Mamanwa women contributed fairly on the household income by selling their basketry or products from rattan in the towns of Cortes and Tandag respectively. Others were active in the farm plating vegetables which improve family income and selling honey also.

The following are recommended development interventions: first, documentation of Mamanwa chant called Tud-em so that the researchers can look for its potential as oral literature which can be used in humanities and literature classes. Second, the model of village governance of the Mamanwas can be studied for possible integration in local government unit's system. Third, there is a need to promote the Mamanwa arts in the form of basketry for it has huge tourism potential.

Hence, the study is limited only on the village institutions and rituals of the Mamanwas future studies can be conducted on the areas of Mamanwas traditional healing system, chants or oral literatures, conflict resolution and system of Mamanwa land communal ownership.

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