

BIAG NI LAM-ANG: AN ILOKANO EPIC ANALYSIS AND ITS IMPLICATION TO ILOKANO FOLK LITERATURE AND PHILIPPINE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Some Filipino researchers has analyzed the epic “Biag ni Lam-ang” but none of them used textual analysis which distinguishes this study. Thus, the researcher examined the data by determining the thoughts, emotions, behaviors and folkways embedded in it. The thoughts discovered in the epic are bravery, sacrifice, heroism, justice, love, romance, relationship, journey and friendship. The behaviors of the characters are fearless, brave, loving, impulsive, reckless, faithful, hopeful and firm. Interestingly, feelings of love of family and loved ones, anger to enemies or rivals, pain to predicaments, determination to love someone, vengeance, and happiness are the primary emotions replicated in the epic. As to folkways, the following are the major results: Ilokanos are family- oriented, Ilokanos are into extended type of families, practice of giving dowry, courtship, giving emphasis on rivalry, Ilokanos value and sanctify friendship, belief in a “higher- being” and supernatural forces around nature, and Ilokanos interpret meaning from dreams and adheres to superstitions. Moreover, this textual analysis of Iloko epic can help preserve, conserve and propagate the genuine and rich culture and traditions of the Ilokanos in the Philippines. Furthermore, this study is hoped to benefit the Ilokano teachers and administrators particularly students as the findings can be used as a springboard in their content and pedagogy in teaching the macro skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening and by giving them things to ponder on for them to realize and appreciate the beauty and authenticity of Ilokano mores because customarily speaking, this folk literature relate to and explicate several moral, spiritual, cultural, social, philosophical, ethnological, traditional and even educational aspects of a society from which it exist.

Keywords: folk literature, epic, Ilokano, textual analyses, Biag ni Lam-ang

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine archipelago is very rich in its folk literature and these literary pieces can be more traced by means of documenting and at the same time academically analyzing them in order to further enrich their existence. The carterhaughschool.com (2020) stated that analyzing a piece of folklore is what makes a culture. In this way, we are able to broaden our perspectives in life and understand more our existence as we relate and explicate the message we deduce from our readings.

Studying folklore makes us more aware and sensitive to our environment as well as to our existence as we decipher the relevance of these local literatures. The ideas and lessons we decode from the one that we are studying can be used by us to mirror life and see it in a wider and more meaningful perspective.

Furthermore, reading and analyzing folklores can help people elucidate and relate the past to the present and the future. It makes them more aware as they explain the past on a grander scale.

Traditionally speaking, it was described that epic is a fictitious, long, serious, poetic narrative about a significant event, often featuring a hero. Even before the advancement of writing, epics and other genre were already practiced as they were memorized and played and became an essential part in maintaining a record of the great activities as part of people's history of a culture. Soon after, these literary pieces specifically epics were penned down and the tradition for this kind of poem evolved and prospered.

Epics often feature a protagonist who embodies the values of a culture or ethnic group; something vital that depends on the success of the hero's actions; a broad setting, sometimes encompassing the entire world; intervention by supernatural beings (Chegg.com, 2022).

Like legends, epics do have stories too but epics are told on grander scale, with armies, heroes, gods, goddesses, and the brutal forces of nature depicted over long character arcs and sweeping landscapes. Protagonists meet with obstacles and disaster, action and triumph. Along with some other patterns and nuances, these elements distinguish epics from other writing styles.

In the Northern portion of the Philippines, it has its only existing and recorded epic, "Biag ni Lam-ang" (The Life of Lam-ang). This epic was orally handed down from generations to generations until it was penned by the regarded Shakespeare of the Ilokanos, Pedro Bucaneg at around 1640. It has been analyzed by some scholars, however, none of them used Textual Analysis in terms of thoughts, behavior, emotions and folkways.

Consequently, this study was anchored on Republic Act No. 4846-An act to repeal numbered thirty-eight hundred seventy-four, and to provide for the protection and preservation of Philippine Cultural Properties as amended by Presidential Decree 374. Section 2 of the said RA is declared to the policy of the state to preserve and protect the most essential cultural properties and National Cultural Treasurer of the nation and to safeguard their intrinsic values and relevance. Also, Section 3.f. of the same RA emphasizes artifacts which are articles and are products of human skills or workmanship, especially in the simple product of primitive arts or industry representing past eras or periods.

Additionally, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts through its vision of 'Philippine culture as the proponent of national and global well-being' and by its mission and mandate as stated in RA No. 7356 Sec. 12 Par. (a), Subpar. (9) that the national commission shall initiate the encouragement and support of studies in Philippine artistic traditions which may aid in the creation of the contemporary forms. Likewise, Par. (b), Subpar (6) of the said section provides that the Commission shall encourage and support scholarly research into and documentation, promotion and propagation of Philippine cultural traditions, arts, and crafts, as well as significant cultural movements, achievements, and personalities especially in the literary, visual and performing arts, and

in mass media as well as the various aspects of Filipino culture. Thus, this paper focused on the textual analysis of one Iloko epic and its implication to Ilokano Folk Literature and Philippine Educational Development. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the textual analysis of the epic in terms of:
 - a. thoughts;
 - b. emotions;
 - c. behaviors; and
 - d. Folkways?
2. What is the implication of textually analyzing the Iloko epic to Ilokano Folk Literature and Philippine Educational Development?

1. RESEARCH METHODS

This study was limited to the textual analysis of an Iloko folk epic titled “Biag ni Lam-ang” (The Life of Lam-ang) particularly thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and folkways that were embodied in the analysis.

Also, it is limited at looking into the implications of the Iloko epic to Ilokano Folk Literature and Philippine Educational Development. The English text of the epic Biag ni Lam-ang (The Life of Lam-ang) was borrowed from The Kahimyang Project (2022) posted at <https://kahimyang.com/kauswagan/articles/1713/the-ilocano-epic-the-life-of-lam-ang> through the administrator’s permission and approval. It was explained to the copyright owner that the English translation of the epic will be used for educational and research purposes only.

A qualitative research design was employed in this study in order to process the data. It is qualitative because the researcher textually analyzed the epic in terms of thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and folkways. The idea of Textual Analysis was adapted from the study of Guzman (2013) titled “Kalinga Folk Literature as Materials for Literature of the Philippines”

According to Bhandari (2022), qualitative research design is a means of collecting and analyzing non-numerical data such as text, video, or audio and interpret concepts, opinions, or experiences embedded and it can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

An epic is defined as a long narrative poem that has been composed in a preeminent stylistic writing, that treats a substantial relationship of record or data of a particular group of people, and that endures because it can either entertain or educate the readers on

issues of ultimate necessities relating to the past. However, it is the images that the term “epic” induces mighty warriors described most often as protagonists who face fierce rivals on their journey and in their quest to exotic fantasies in search of superior powers that is beyond imagination and control.

Because of the long history of epic, its category however marked down into a class of adventure story. Subsequently, the critics who utilize this category emphasize aspects of epics that concern quests for faraway rewards rather than consolidations of holdings at home, clashes with enemies from outside rather than reconnections with beloved insiders, and aspirations to divine dominion rather than acceptance of human impotence (Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University). Below is the Ilokano Epic in Northern Philippines and its English Translation titled “Biag ni Lam-ang (The Life of Lam-ang)”.

The Life of Lam-Ang

Lam- Ang, a youth of superhuman strength, is born to Don Juan and his wife Namongan, of the town of Nalbuan (somewhere in the valley of the Naguilian river, east of Naguilian, La Union), the richest native- born citizen in Southern Ilocos.

Still a baby but already possessed of tremendous strength, he set out for the Igorot country, high up in the mountains to the east, in search of his father, who, he learns from his mother, had departed for the high lands before his birth to fight the Igorots.

On his way, he falls into a deep slumber and in a vision seeing the Igorots, arch- enemies of the lowlanders, feasting around the head of his father whom they had murdered in cold blood.

Reaching the land of the Igorots, he takes revenge, and alone, single- handed, engages practically the whole tribe in a bloody battle, from which, with the aid of his talismans, he emerges triumphantly.

He kills and maims thousands of the wild men- with his magic spear, and work such havoc and destruction that the land becomes a desolate waste.

He returns home, satisfied that he has revenged the murder of his father, and goes bathing in the Amburayan River with a bevy of beautiful girls. His hair has become so dirty during his war against the Igorots that the bath the girls give him in the river killed many fishes. He killed a huge crocodile after a hard- fought contest, and carries it victoriously ashore on his shoulders amid the plaudits of his girl companions.

Having heard of a beautiful girl, Ines Kannoyan of the town of Kalanutian (now a barrio of Sinait, Ilocos Sur) in Northern Ilocos, he intimates to his mother his desire to visit the maiden and ask for her hand in marriage. He meets with discouragement from his mother, who tells him she does not believe Kannoyan would accept him as a husband because there are many other suitors, Spaniards, handsomer and richer than he. He nevertheless dons his best clothes, and taking with him, among other things, his pet rooster and his

hairy white dog, both endowed with such magic powers as those of divination and human speech, he sets out on his important quest.

About the middle of the journey, he meets Sumarang, one of the suitors of Kannyoyan, who is returning home from Kalanutian. Sumarang tells him derisively that he had better not continue his journey, for Kannyoyan would surely not accept the love of such a person as he. Lam- Ang, keenly insulted, engages him in a duel. The fight at the beginning is about even, but gradually, Lam- Ang gets the better of his enemy, and in the end hurls him away over nine hills with his spear.

Resuming his journey, he passes by the house of Saridandan, a woman of easy virtue, who, with wiles and deceptions attempts to cajol him into remaining a while to partake of the buyo she says she has prepared especially for him. Lam – Ang, however, refuses her, gently but firmly.

When he reaches the home of Kannyoyan, he finds a big gathering of suitors – wealthy natives and Spaniards from all over the region- entertaining themselves in the yard, so big a crowd that he can hardly manage to get through. Undismayed in his hope of winning her, he edges his way toward the house and bids his rooster to crow, and a small outhouse topples down.

Disturbed by the noise, Kannyoyan lays aside her work, looks out of the window, and sees the new suitor. In the meantime, his hairy white dog begins to bark, and in a moment, the fallen building arises reconstructed.

At the instance of her mother Unnayan, Kannyoyan adorns herself and goes downstairs to bring Lam- Ang in a favour she has never shown to any other suitor. The other suitors look on crestfallen.

Through his rooster, which does the speaking for him, Lam- Ang makes known the reason for his coming. The parents of the girl tell him they would give him their daughter in marriage if he can give a dowry equal to all their wealth. They show him their riches: utensils and furniture wrought in pure gold, and point to vast fields which they have inherited from their ancestors. Lam- Ang tells them that all this wealth they are showing him represents only a small fraction of his riches. Satisfied, they grant his suit.

Lam- Ang goes home to Nalbuan to prepare himself for the wedding which is to take place at Kalanutian. He and his townspeople sail on two golden ships- trade ships owned by Lam- Ang plying regularly between the Ilocos and China ports. At Sabangan, the port nearest Kalanutian, they fire a salvo to announce their arrival. They are warmly welcomed. The wedding, which is solemnized according to the rites of the Catholic Church, is celebrated amid splendour in the Ilocos. There is feasting and dancing, and much merriment. After the festivities, the married pair, together with their townspeople, embark on the ships for Nalbuan, where the celebrations are resumed.

Lam- Ang undergoes one more crucial ordeal. Shortly after the departure of Kannyoyan's people for their own town, he is informed by a town captain that it is now his turn to go fishing for oysters (rarang).

He communicates to his wife a premonition that he will be killed and eaten by a monster fish. The premonition comes true, for he is devoured by a big fish called berkakan in the dialect. Lam- Ang's rooster, however, assures the sorrow- stricken wife that her husband can be restored to life if all his bones are found. All the bones, fortunately, are recovered by a certain Marcos, a skilled diver. After a series of incantations, performed by the rooster and the dog at which Kannyoan assists, Lam- Ang is brought back to life. And, they lived happily ever after.

Thoughts or beliefs, emotions, behaviors, and folkways in “Biag ni Lam-ang” (The Life of Lam-ang)

Epic as reflected in the table below heightens the foremost thoughts in Biag ni Lam-ang (The Life of Lam-ang) such as bravery, sacrifice, heroism, justice, love, romance, relationship, journey and friendship which is reflective to Ilokano traits, attitudes and values. This is further strengthened by Rabago (2021) as it surfaced in his research that, the Ilokano tribal people in the upland area came from a long period of war against other tribal groups, thus, they were able to develop their own cultural values of brotherhood, peace, courtesy and solidarity.

Correspondingly, the behavior of the characters in the epic are fearless, brave, loving, impulsive, reckless, faithful, hopeful, determined and resilient. This finding in the epic is related to the claim of Writer (2020) that Ilokano are hardworking, determined and persevering making them hurdle, handle and overcome all situations, obstacles and impediments they face in their daily lives.

Furthermore, Rabago (2021) singled out that the Ilokano in the lowland and coastal areas of Ilocos Norte embody cultural values like gratefulness, perseverance, patience, religiosity and resilience. One of the reasons claimed by the latter is the effect of Christianity. Its impact is manifested on the cultural value of religiosity every time they organize fluvial parade and community Mass at the onset of every festivity.

Interestingly, love of family and loved ones, anger to enemies or rivals, pain to predicaments, determination to love someone, vengeance, and happiness are the primary emotions replicated in the epic. This result is further strengthened by the statement of Writer (2020) that there really is a strong tie between and among Ilokano family members in their life's struggles, and other traditions particularly in their marriage practices.

As to folkways indicated in the epic, the following are the major findings: Ilokano are family- oriented, Ilokano are into extended type of families, they practice of giving dowry, courtship, giving emphasis on rivalry, Ilokano value and sanctify friendship, belief in a “higher- being” and supernatural forces around nature, and Ilokano interpret meaning from dreams and adheres to superstitions.

Some of the results under folkways such as on courtship and practice of giving dowry can be anchored from the lines found at the encyclopedia.com that parents' consent of both the groom and the bride must be sought first for their approval. Practices such as giving dowries, promise of the groom to finance and handle all financial obligations for the wedding and other traditional exercises will be followed.

With regard to belief in higher-being and supernatural forces in relation to their dead relatives, an "atong" which is a piece of wood that is lit in front of the deceased's house and kept burning until the burial is done in order to officially and symbolically announce their love one's death (encyclopedia.com).

Additionally, the best clothes are chosen by the immediate family to be worn by the dead person and its corpse is normally kept in the house. And in order to avoid the odor of deceased body, normally, a white handkerchief or tiny towel is then tied around the jaw to prevent the tongue from showing; a glass of water mixed with local vinegar is placed under the bed. Another belief and practice is the placing and offering of money in the coffin to pay the "ferry man" who brings the soul to the other world (encyclopedia.com). In the days before burial, relatives keep vigil over the body, wailing and recounting the deceased's good deeds. Customarily, family members other relatives, professional mourners perform the lamentation (dung-aw).

Before the funeral, each of the relatives need to pay and give their last respects by kissing the deceased's hand or raising it to his or her forehead. Extreme care is taken in bringing the body from the house to the church; any mishap or faux pas could cause premature death from any members of the immediate family or its close relatives.

In relation to this custom, Perlas (2018) concluded in his study that various meanings and values from these folk practices can be drawn as a part of their religious faith. Also, he recommended that such cultural values of the tradition must be preserved so as to avoid its extinction and must be initiated by the local government to promote its awareness to the local folks and future generations since we are already living in an advanced world.

Below is a summary of the textual analyses of the epic titled Biag ni Lam-Ang as to thoughts or beliefs, emotions, behaviors and folkways.

The epic Biag ni Lam-ang and its thoughts, behaviors, emotions and folkways

Title of the Epic	Thoughts	Behaviors	Emotions	Folkways
Biag ni Lam-ang (Life of Lam-ang)	It depicts bravery, sacrifice, heroism, justice, love, romance, relationship, journey and friendship which is reflective to our traits, attitudes and values.	The characters in the epic are fearless, brave, loving, impulsive, reckless, faithful, hopeful and resilient	Feelings of love of family and loved ones, anger to enemies, pain to predicaments, determination to love and avenge someone, vengeance, and happiness.	<p>Ilokanos are family- oriented.”</p> <p>Ilokanos are in to extended type of families</p> <p>Practice of giving dowry and courtship</p> <p>Giving emphasis on rivalry.</p> <p>Ilokanos value and sanctify friendship.</p> <p>Belief in a “higher- being” and supernatural forces around nature.</p> <p>Ilokanos interpret meaning from dreams and adheres to superstitions.</p>

Implication of Textually Analyzing the Iloko epic (Biag ni Lam-ang) to Ilokano Folk Literature and Philippine Educational Development

In the Northern part of the Philippines, folk literatures such as riddles, proverbs, poems, folksongs, legends, epics, folktales and other genre of literature whether written or oral are an essential part of its culture, traditions and customs.

Customarily speaking, these folk literatures elucidate and develop several moral, spiritual, ethical, cultural, anthropological, social, ethnical, traditional as well as educational aspects of a society from which they are existing and evolving.

These literary masterpieces perform significant functions of serving as sources of entertainment, enlightenment on societal orientation and customs of the people, and educating the people of the various aspects of community particularly the learners and local folks.

Furthermore, Biag ni Lam-ang as a piece of Ilokano folk literature could represent the thoughts, beliefs, values, emotions, behaviors and folkways of the people of a society, where the local folks specifically Ilokano students and adults that love reading literary pieces learn through the principles, values and morals conveyed, reflected, articulated and replicated in this oral folk literature.

Consequently, Amali (2014) singled out that education is a life activity, which entails passing through learning processes and acquiring knowledge and other skills for positive development.

Thus, textually and academically analyzing this oral literature of the Ilokanos can contribute to the enrichment, preservation and conservation of the ingenuity and veracity particularly craftsmanship of the Ilokanos in the educational arena.

All of these can be done by enriching the Philippine school's curricula through the inclusion of this literary masterpiece and its findings in the Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts and even in the graduate studies of the Republic of the Philippines wherein it can provide the learners with valuable reading materials. The findings can also be used as a springboard of teachers in their content and pedagogy in teaching the macro skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening while offering them better perception, and respecting and valuing more their own and of other's folk literature and culture.

Finally, there will come a time that traditional cultural practices of the different tribes from all walks of life specifically the Ilokanos in the Philippines may disappear and be forgotten because of modernization, cultural diffusion and even intermarriages.

Hence, through this humble undertaking, extinction of the values and folkways embedded in the Ilokano epic will be avoided and the Ilokanos particularly literature teachers and students in Ilokano speaking communities in the Philippine archipelago will be left with a lasting legacy and chronicles of folk masterpieces. This study is hoped to benefit them by giving them something to look back on, so they may realize and eventually put into practice to academically analyze, conserve, preserve and enrich other Ilokano Folk Literatures before they shall be long forgotten.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Based from the findings, it can be concluded that Ilokano culture and literature are rich and genuine. Also, academically analyzing this Ilokano folk literature can contribute to the preservation, conservation, propagation and enrichment of the inventiveness and ingenuity of the Ilokanos in Philippine learning institutions.

Additionally, it hopes to benefit the Ilokanos and other readers around the globe by giving them something to remember and embrace, so that they may realize that it is truly imperative to conserve, preserve, discover and enrich local and Folk Literatures before they shall be long forgotten because of cultural extinction, transformation, tribal and cultural intermarriages.

Finally, without timely intervention, there will come a time that traditional cultural practices may disappear and be forgotten. Therefore, through this research work, the Ilokanos particularly the students in Iloko speaking institutions and communities in the Philippines will be left with a lasting legacy of folk masterpieces.

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