



## EXPLORING THE TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BATOBALANI, PARACALE, CAMARINES NORTE, PHILIPPINES

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### ABSTRACT

*This ethnographic study investigated the tangible cultural heritage of the Kabihug Tribe of Batobalani, Paracale, Camarines Norte. Data were collected from in-depth interviews with elders and members of the tribe. The inventory showed three themes for the tangible heritage of the tribe. The practices of building the dwelling place of the Kabihug tribe were still intact. However, minor alterations were made, like the walls and partitions on their house were evident. Bolo, their primary agricultural tool, was bought in the marketplace and their clothing is similar to the lowlanders. It is imperative that the impact and influence of civilization and rapid technological advancement change the lifestyle and practices of the Kabihug tribe. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conserve and preserve the cultural traditions and tangible cultural heritage of the Kabihug tribe as national and historical treasure of the country.*

*Keywords: Kabihug, Tangible Cultural Heritage, Batobalani, Paracale, Camarines Norte, Philippines*

### INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is an archipelago comprised of 7,641 islands (Visaya, 2018) and is a home of diverse ethnic groups, including indigenous people (IPs). According to the United Nations, indigenous peoples are a group of people in an organized community who practice unique cultures and ways of relating people and the distinct environment from those of the neighbor dominant societies. Based on the 2015 population census, the Philippines' indigenous population is estimated to be between 10 percent and 20 percent of the national population of 100,981,437 (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2019). These IPs belong to 110 ethnolinguistic groups, that the majority are in Mindanao (61%), 33% are in Northern Luzon (Cordillera Administrative Region), and the rest are in the Visayas area (UNDP, 2010).

One of the oldest surviving groups of indigenous people in the Philippines is Bicol Province's highlands, the Kabihug, which means friendly (Avengoza-Almadrones, 2015; Barcia, 2017). They are among the seven predominant Agta tribal communities, who belong to the Negrito race as their dark skin, thick and kinky hair, and short stature physically distinguish them (Avengoza-Almadrones, 2015; Business Mirror, 2015). They have their language called Manide. (Nolasco, n.d.). The Kabihug are nomadic who move from one place to another and depend on root crops, rice, and vegetables they grow (Vela, 1992; Barcia 2017). Based on the 2015 census of the Philippines, Kabihug is among the 2.2 million Bicolanos belonging to the poorest of the poor out of 5.8 million populations (Barcia, 2017). Meanwhile, one of the pressing global social issues of modernization is the disappearance of many of the world's remaining tribal populations, including those in the Philippines (Eder, 1992). One of the



reasons for their disappearance is the gradual loss of their indigenous knowledge as the natives stripped their lands. And the young who are in contact with the outside world have embraced the view that traditional ways are illegitimate and irrelevant (Linden, 1991). Moreover, due to the environmental impact, economic forces, religious missionaries, and displacement from original land, indigenous cultures become endangered. Hence, preserving the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples remains a problem in an increasingly globalized world (Olson, n.d.).

As defined by Daes (1995), "the heritage of indigenous peoples is comprised of all objects, sites, and knowledge which has been transmitted from generation to generation and pertains to a particular people or territory." The heritage of an indigenous people also includes objects, knowledge, and literary or artistic works which may be created in the future based upon its heritage." Likewise, UNESCO categorized cultural heritage into the tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. "The tangible cultural heritage refers to physical artifacts produced, maintained, and transmitted intergenerationally in society, while the intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills." Heritage is among priceless and irreplaceable assets not only of one nation but the whole of humanity; hence, its disappearance or deterioration is detrimental to the entire of humanity (UNESCO, 2017).

The *Kabihug*, as a tribe, have their tangible cultural heritage that is distinct from other tribal groups in the Philippines. Like other tribes, *Kabihug* have their archaic artifacts and material culture used for their daily lives. Hadji Abdul Racman (2015) defined archaic as tangible and intangible materials belonging to a much earlier period, such as objects made by humans, especially ones with the archaeological or cultural value used for a specific purpose.

Understanding other cultures is crucial as it develops knowledge of cultural differences, which helps build empathy and encourages an appreciation for diversity. Conducting ethnographic research on the *Kabihug* archaic artifacts and material culture provides an in-depth insight and understanding of how they use those materials

around them for their survival and as part of their cultural identity. Further, it also provides information if those archaic artifacts and materials are still prevalent and used today.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Exploring and recording the *Kabihug* artifacts and material culture indicate that a part of *Kabihug's* cultural heritage is retained as an aspect of their tribal identity. With that, the researchers explored to identify the different *Kabihug's* archaic artifacts and material culture and assess the socio-cultural relevance of these archaic artifacts and material culture. Lastly, it aimed to ascertain the raw materials used for making those archaic artifacts and material cultures.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used an ethnographic research design. As defined by Reeves et al. (2013), "Ethnography is a type of qualitative research that gathers observations, interviews, and documentary data to produce detailed and comprehensive accounts of different social phenomena." In this study, ethnography provides knowledge and information about the *Kabihug* cultural heritage, particularly their archaic artifacts and material culture.

This study was conducted in the Barangay of Batobalani, Paracle, Camarines Norte (Fig.1). Batobalani is one of the barangays in the 3rd class municipality of Paracale, in the province of Camarines Norte of Bicol Region (Region V). Batobalani is located at approximately 14.2357° N, 122.7399° E, on the island of Luzon; its elevation is estimated at 11.2 meters or 36.7 feet above mean sea level.



Figure 1. Brgy. Batobalani, Paracle, Camarines Norte

The researchers interviewed three informants during the fieldwork. The two informants were among the *Kabihug* tribe, coded as K1 and K2. K1 is a farmer and the group leader of the *Kabihug* tribe in their community. K1 is recognized as a leader of the *Kabihug* community by the local government serving as a representative of their community. He is responsible for the communication between their tribe and the local government. K2 is among *Kabihug* households who is a mother of three. Despite being a mother, she manages to help in farming with other *Kabihug*. The third informant, coded as L1, has her own house in Brgy. Batobalani. She is a retired professor who had conducted a study about the lifeways of the *Kabihug* in 1992. Accordingly, she had resided in the *Kabihug* settlement areas for three summer periods and Christmas vacations for three consecutive years, 1989, 1990 and 1991. Thus, she got firsthand experience with *Kabihug's* knowledge, beliefs, and practices.

The researchers personally visited Brgy. Batobalani to conduct this study. Permission was sought from the informants before the conduct of interviews. The primary purpose of the interview was to draft a series of topics that were used in obtaining the required information. With K1 and a resident, the researchers toured the area where the *Kabihug* had formerly settled, such as their abandoned dwellings, their farming field, and their ancestors' graveyard. An informal interview was done with K1 during the tour. After the tour, the *Kabihug* households were invited to a gathering where the researchers stayed. Through this, the researchers mingled with other *Kabihug*, including parents, youth, and even infants. A casual conversation was initiated with other *Kabihug* who were willing to cooperate. This was done to get their versions of some knowledge and information about their artifacts and material culture. Thereby, data were verified and obtained from the key informants. Data were collected through formal and informal interviews, observations, and group discussions with the informants. The responses during interviews and observation were jotted down and recorded.

The analysis of data was done by identifying themes and categories based on the research questions. The noted and recorded responses of the informants were categorized into unifying themes that answer each of the research questions. Data were then presented in descriptive form.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Despite *Kabihug's* simple lifestyle, they have diverse and rich tangible archaic artifacts and material cultures. Based on the interviews, researchers identified three (3) main themes of the tangible materials used by the *Kabihug*. Themes include their dwelling place, tools and accessories, and clothing.

### 1. *Kabihug's* archaic artifacts and material culture

#### 1.1 Dwelling Place



Figure 1. *Tug-onan*

Figure 1 shows the cooking area of the *Kabihug* house called *Tug-onan* that is level with the ground. You can also find the *tungko* or an improvised stove made up of 3-4 pieces of rocks used for cooking. In the cooking area, you can also find kitchen utensils like the *liwag*, a cleaned coconut shell used for drinking, the *Bang gerahan*, a storage place for water containers, and few utensils for eating.



Figure 2. Tinahaw

Figure 2, the *Tinahaw*, which serves as their bed, is where clothes are stored or hanged together with the fishing paraphernalia and weapons.



Figure 3. Pasingolan (Wooden Seat)

## 1.2. Tools

Interviewer: *Ano po yang nakatali nyo sa bewang niyo?* (What is tied in your waist?)

Interviewee: *Badi* (Bolo)

Interviewer: *Paano niyo po ginagamit ang Badi* (Bolo)? (How do you use Badi?)

Interviewee: *Ito ginagamit namin sa panggapas dun sa ginagapasan namin.* (This, we use it to clean the land.)

Interviewer: *Bukod po sa Badi, ano pa po ang ibang gamit niyo sa pagtanim?* (Aside from badi, what other tools are you using for planting?)

Interviewee: *Iyong mahabang kahoy, pangbungkal namin ng lupa.* (that long wooden stick, we use it to tilt the land.)

The *Kabihug* use the Badi or Bolo as their main agricultural tools for farming, kaingin, and cleaning other agricultural lands. In addition, Vela (1992) mentioned that the *Badi* is also used for slicing, cutting, and chopping. Aside from *Badi*, the *Kabihug* tribe also use long poles from the branches of the trees to help them tilt their agricultural land and plant seedlings to the ground.

## 1.3. Clothing

*Kabihug* women uses *tapis* as their skirt to cover their lower body parts while the upper portion of their body is covered with *bare*. Men of the tribe only wears *bahag* to cover their private parts. Both clothings are made from bark of the trees that is grown in the forested areas of Camarines Norte.

## 2. Socio-cultural relevance of these archaic artifacts and material culture

### 2.1 Dwelling Place

Interviewer: *Paano po kayo nagtatayo ng inyong bahay?* (How did you build your house?)

*“Ang bahay namin dyan sa taas ng bundok, basta mataas na lugar dun kami pumipili ng*

*kami pumipili ng pagtatayuan ng bahay. Ang ginagawa namin ay nagbabaon kami ng tagbak, kung nagkadahon yun sa loob ng isang lingo e di dun kami magtatayo ng bahay*". (Our houses are there up in the mountain or any high places. There we choose the site where we build our houses. What we do is we buried *Tagbak* on that site. And if it produces leaves within the week, then we make our house there.)

The *Kabihug* tribe's houses, also known as *Batukan*, are built mainly on higher grounds, and they choose the location of their house based on a plant called *Tagbak*. This is similar to the findings of Vela (1992). According to Vela (1992), the *Kabihug* buried *Tagbak* to the ground to select their housing site carefully. The *Kabihug* believes that if the plant produces shoot, it will bring good luck and cheer and avoid misfortune on the occupants. In addition, a clean lot due to *kaingin* is not considered for the housing site. *Kabihug* believes that the best place for constructing a house is the garbage dumpsite before because organic brings good luck.



Figure 4. The "Batukan", the *Kabihug* houses

Figure 4 exhibits the dwelling place of the *Kabihug* called "*Batukan*" it is usually located on the slope of mountain ranges; others are on top of ridges adjacent to their farm. It comprises of 4 to 6 forked stick branches of trees with banana leaves, coconut palm, or cogon grass as the roofing materials. Naturally, the *Batukan* has no wall covering. Vela (1992) indicated that the main reason for this is to see the enemies immediately when they are at war.

## 2.2 Tools

The *Kabihug* tribe depend on farming activities; they use the *Badi* or Bolo to clear pieces of land in the mountainside to plant root crops like sweet potatoes and cassava. *Kabihug* works as a group to perform the different farming activities; hence they also share their harvest with the community. They also use *Badi* to craft their essential hunting tools like pole sticks sharpened to catch fish and other wild animals.

## 2.3 Clothing

Nowadays, the *Kabihug* tribe wears clothes like the lowlanders, the female member of the tribe wears blouse and skirts to cover their body. At the same time, male member wears shirt for their upper garments and denim or shorts for their lower garments. Clothing is given to them as a donation by the lowlanders.

This is the opposite of the observation made by Vela. According to Vela (1992), the native clothes are made of a tree bark locally called *gumihan*. This tree belongs to the jackfruit family. The *Gumihan* with big trunks is cut down for this purpose. The bark is peeled off carefully from the trunk to avoid tears and rent. For *Tapis* or skirt of women, a bark one and a half yard long and a foot wide is taken from the trunk. For the *bahag* or breechcloth, a bark three feet long and a foot wide is used. The bark is softened like an ordinary woven cloth and then rinse in flowing water to remove loose fibers.



### 3. Raw materials used for making those archaic artifacts and material culture

The archaic artifacts of the *Kabihug* tribe are made up of natural materials that they collected from their environment. They utilized tree branches, banana leaves, coconut palm, and cogon grass as basic components of their houses and tree barks for their clothing.

### CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is empirical to argue that the *Kabihug* tribe of Bato-balani, Paracale, Camarines Norte, Philippines has a rich collection of tangible cultural heritage, which they have successfully identified and applied. However, because of their open interaction with the lowlanders and the introduction of new technologies and religious beliefs, some of their cultural practices, especially their tangible cultural heritage, are slowly altered and changed. The building of their dwelling place is also altered. *Kabihug* tribe are now building walls, partitions in their houses to protect them from different weather conditions. They are not anymore using bamboo shoots and coconut shells as their kitchen utensils but modern utensils. This is because of the impact and influence of civilization and technological advancement.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the limited data gathered in this study, it is recommended that further research may be conducted to include more informants from other communities to assess other tangible cultural heritage of the *Kabihug* tribe. It is further recommended that concerned government agencies and institutions may develop records and documentation of the tangible cultural heritage of the *Kabihug* tribes. In this manner, their ethnic contribution would be preserved and sustained.

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