“The Kalinga & Isneg Way of Life”

Kalinga-Apayao Way of Life

by AUS

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Historical Background

Identification of the Kalingas and Apayaos of northern Luzon as among the indigenous highland ethnic groups in the Philippines was done by the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes (BNCT) which the early American colonial administrators established to undertake social and scientific investigation of the mountain tribes in the northern Luzon area, as well as those hill-tribesmen of Mindanao.

The BNCT sent a team of social scientists in the forbidding heartlands of the Cordilleras, probing deeper into areas where Spanish colonizers failed to establish footholds.

The BNCT was replaced in 1903 by a new bureau named Bureau of Ethnological Survey (BES) in the Philippines. This bureau purused the social investigation and survey earlier started by the BNCT with anthropologists thrown into the regionwide ethnological studies.

The result of the scientific and social studies parceled the Cordillera ethnic groups into five ethnic groups, namely: Apayao, Kalinga, Bontoc, Ifugao, and Benguet. Years later, this ethnic grouping was to be the principal bases of the political subdivision of the old Mountain Province into five sub-provinces bearing the names of the five major ethnic groups of the region. For on February 4, 1020 and under Act No. 2772 of the Philippine Commission, a reconstituted new Mountain Province had five sub-provinces complete with its territorial boundaries delineated along ethnic lines and sub-provincial capitals and municipalities.

When the old Mt. Province was fragmented by Congress under RA 4695 into four independent provinces, the sub-provinces of Kalinga and Apayao were lumped into one political territory because Congress in 1966 found the sub-province of Apayao not economically viable to stand as a separate province.

It is significant to note here that Kalinga and Apayao had both been once upon a time under the provinces of Cagayan and Nueva Vizcaya during the latter part of the Spanish colonial regime and also under the early American colonization when by Act No. 1396, Kalinga-Apayao and Ifugao were placed under the Provinces of Cagayan and Nueva Vizcaya.

The Land and Its People

Historical records reveal that the first contacts made by Spanish colonialists in the Apayao and Kalinga area was in 1608 when a Spanish priest, Fr. Geronimo Molina opened a Catholic Mission in what is now known as Pudtol, Kalinga-Apayao. Father Molina, accompanied by a military group, was able to convert some natives who were called “Mandayas.” Missionary and military outposts were later established upstream of the Apayao River at Kabugao which was reached easily through the navigable Apayao River from the first outpost at Pudtol.
The natives found by the Spaniards in the Pudtol area were discovered to have striking similarities with those encountered in the upper stream regions of the Apayao River. Trade and commerce between the river bank natives were carried through their crude bamboo rafts which were used to transport their products. They also came upon mountain dwellers with advanced culture and arts – houses with distinct architecture, metal weapons and farm implements like spears and *aliwa* (native bolo), weaving and basketry, and earthenware.

The Mandayas and Isnegs of Apayao were living a sedentary life in communities or villages found along river banks and in the watershed areas near their “kaingin” (swidden farms). What was also found out by the early Spanish colonizers in the Apayao area was that there were natives who were already wearing loin cloths among the women and also cloth g-strings for men. These natives were different from another group of native inhabitants found in Apayao known as the “Agtas” or “Aetas.” Like other Agta or Negrito groups in the country, the Apayao Negritos were nomadic and tree-dwellers.

Meanwhile, explorations were also conducted in the southern portion of the Apayao area which was already pacified by the Spanish missionaries accompanied by politico-military forces. However, the Spaniards could only penetrate the Kalinga area known now as Pinukpuk where they garrisoned. Because of the belligerent Kalinga tribes who were harassing the Spanish garrison, the Spaniards only succeeded to establish their foothold in the Kalinga area eighty years later when the Spaniards successfully planted the cross of Christianity at Tuga, Tabuk, and at the present Capitol site of the Province of Kalinga-Apayao in Bulanao.

The Kalingas inhabiting the upper stream region of the Chico and Saltan Rivers have had their share of Soanian occupation. For about six years, the Spaniards established their garrison in the municipality of Tinglayan. Towards the end of the century, the Spaniards also constructed more than one-half of the Pan Ilocos-Cagayan road which was to link the Ilocos provinces with Cagayan through the Kalinga region.

It could therefore be said that the Spaniards had not penetrated the heartlands of the Kalinga and Apayao region. When the American colonizers came, all that they did was to pursue the road construction system envisioned by the Spanish colonizers, and at the same time utilize the local leaders who were appointed by the Spanish administrators in their pacification drive.

**The Isnegs of Apayao**

The Isnegs are the original inhabitants of Apayao. At the start of the American regime, the Isnegs were thinly scattered in what is now known as the municipalities of Calanasan, Kabugao, Conner, and Pudtol. They are still the predominant ethnic group in these municipalities today.

The Isnegs of Apayao also shared the wave of acculturation which had slowly transformed the life and culture of the cultural communities throughout the country. The entry of lowland immigrants into the Isnegs’ ethnic domain have contributed to a large measure the changes in this indigenous group’s manners, eating habits, and farming techniques. The Ilocanos have also influenced the Isnegs in trade and commerce.

Other strong influences which have made the Isnegs shed off their indigenous practices are the Church, the school and the government.
The customs and traditions of the Isnegs, however, have not been erased entirely by the outside influences of modern culture. Their superstitious beliefs, songs and dances, and their swidden farming still color the life of an Isneg today.

The Isnegs’ “Taddok,” which is the most popular ethnic dance of the Isneg nation still stands out as the most popular of all Isneg native dances. The multi-colored dress of the Isneg woman is still preferred by elders to the modern-day dresses. However, even the young also don these colorful attires during special occasions where their songs and rituals are enthusiastically and proudly exhibited.

Head-hunting which was once a part of the life of the pre-Spanish Isneg is unknown today in the Isneg nation. Even the peace pact system among tribal groups are not strictly observed. However, their tribal laws on vengeance and amicable settlement of disputes still prevail over the government laws in the settlement of petty tribal differences.

Always a hospitable ethnic community the Isnegs are traditionally known for their lavish entertainment of guests, especially prominent visitors and relatives. Above all, the Isnegs are a peace-loving people who are proud of their dialect, their culture and their history.

The Kalingas

The term “Kalinga” has no derivative from any of the Kalinga dialects spoken in the Kalinga area. The name has simply been given to the people living in the mountains by outsiders. Some Ibanag writers claim that Kalinga is a term for warlike people in the mountains. Since the Ibanags of Cagayan have long been engaged in trade intercourse with their neighbors in the western highland region of the province, it is safe to say that the Ibanags own the word Kalinga.” Besides, Kalingas were also known to have been head-hunting in the lowland areas along the western river banks of the Cagayan river now known as Kalinga.

There are even suggestions that the Kalingas came from the Ibanag “race.” Those who are of this belief or theory point to the fact that many Kalinga names of persons are also found among the Ibanags of Isabela and CAgayan, like for example, “Simangon,” “Panabang,” “Mamawag,” etc. Physical features of the “lowland” Kalingas also support the theory that many of the tribal groups of Kalinga are of Ibanag ancestry. On the other hand, the Kalinga dialects also belie the fact that the Kalingas come from the so-called “Ibanag race.” To Kalingas, Ibanag is totally Greek, and Ibanags regard Kalinga the same.

The Kalingas are spread over the present eight Kalinga municipalities of Rizal, Tabuk, Pinukpuk, Balbalan, Tanudan, Pasil, Lubuagan, and Tinglayan. A Kalinga tribal group also inhabits the southernmost area of the Apayao region. Recent statistics reveal that the Kalingas constitute about 85 percent of the total population of the former sub-province of Kalinga.

The Kalingas as a tribal nation have 17 known sub-tribes each having its own dialect and customs. It is in their multilingual diversity that the Kalinga tribal community is often referred to as the “Babel of the Philippines.” In spite of the number of dialects spoken by each of the sub-tribes, the Kalingas can understand each other even if they speak or communicate with other Kalingas in their own distinct dialect.
The Kalinga “Bodong” institution governs the lives of all Kalinga ethno-linguistic groups, even up to this day. Bodong is a Kalinga word for peace pact, and a peace pact is a bilateral non-aggressive pact between the two communities” (Scott, 87). Strictly speaking, Bodong (Northern Kalinga dialect) or Podon (Southern Kalinga dialect) means “bind together.” The Bodong refers to an agreement between two parties to make peace and to bind themselves with the maintenance of peace between the communities they represent.

In the early days, Kalingas made head-hunting as part of their lifestyle. They would launch massive raids on their enemy’s villages and take home heads of their victims as trophies. The jaws of the heads of their victims were used as gong handles. These head-hunting sorties were called “Kayaw.” Kayaws were resorted to by Kalingas because of revenge, to get even with the enemy. They were not launched against their tribal enemies for territorial expansion but purely to redeem their pride lost to a pillaging enemy.

As had been stated earlier, the Kalingas are grouped into many sub-tribes, each having its own dialect, customs and traditions. These differences in culture and dialects often cause trial misunderstanding that lead to inter-tribal armed warfare. It is this lex talionis principle that gave birth to the Bodong.

Today, the Bodong is still an inseparable part of the socio-economic life of the Kalingas because it governs not only the security relations between two tribes or among tribal groups, but also the trade and commerce of bodong parties. Its “Pagta” or Code covers all criminal and civil offenses committed against another tribe. Among the provisions of the Pagta which is still observed among Bodong parties is the “automatic retaliation” provision, which allows an aggrieved tribe to avenge the killing or wounding of a fellow tribesman on the aggressor tribe.

The Bodong has been criticized by non-Kalinga ethnolinguistic groups as “anachronistic.” Present-day Kalinga leaders, especially those educated and acknowledged religious leaders, frowned at the Bodong as an active agent of tribal killing. There are Kalinga intellectuals who view the Bodong institution as an unnecessary and counter-productive practice. Some advocate the total scrapping of Bodong as a bilateral rule of inter-tribal relationship. But the fact remains that many of the Kalinga elders still religiously cling to the Bodong precepts, reminding their youngsters that the Bodong has been an influential institution in the promotion of government programs in the Kalinga “nation.”

The Kalingas are a hospitable people and in spite of the frequent tribal violence that erupt between and mong Kalinga tribal groups, they still live up to their time-honored practice of guaranteeing the safety and comfort of their guests. In tribal wars, warring parties do not harm any of the tribe or non-Kalinga tribe who has no involvement and participation in the cause of the tribal conflict.

As with other cultural communities who have been modernized in their way of life through the process of acculturation, the Kalingas are slowly leaving behind their old practices in favor of western culture brought in through education and intermarriage as well as association with the cultural majority.