The Higaonon
DATU MANSUDUYAN'S
Basic Profile:

**Ethnic Group:** Higaonon

**Language:** Binukid/Higaonon

**Location:** The Higaonon is one of the least known ethnolinguistic groups that inhabit North-Central Mindanao. They occupy the mountainous regions of Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon plateau, the mountain borders of the provinces of Agusan and Lanao in the east and west, respectively.

**Population:** There is an average of 6.3 members in an Higaonon household (a range of 6.04-6.9). The estimate of Higaonon population in a 15-20 kilometer radius is between 10,000 and 20,000. From Misamis Oriental to Cagayan de Oro City, there are approximately 100,000 Higaonon members.

**Mythology:** Archaeological excavations in some caves in an area where no Higaonon are living anymore, yielded decorated pot shards, deer bones, sea shells and skeletal remains. The sites were disturbed and much has been lost through the collection of guano in the caves. It is believed that there are affinities between the Higaonon and the people that used the caves as burial grounds.

**Literary:** The Higaonon have their own system of writing. Their myths and legend speak of a great ancestor named "Suwat" who kept a list of the people who were living and dead during the great flood that took place long ago.

**Lore:** A memory devise used by the Higaonon in recounting ethnic history, religion, traditional law, war, agriculture, and hunting customs is in the form of a piece of wood provided with notches and incisions representing units of the narrative.

**Culture of Peace:** An ancient ritual for making peace or for settling modern-day conflicts is the tampudas hu Balagun, or the treaty of the green vine branch. Literally it means the cutting of the vine, and is symbolic of the act of cutting short feuds among the ethnic groups. Tampudas, according to oral traditions of the Higaonon, are re-enacted whenever feuds rise between groups.

**Religion:** The indigenous religion of the Higaonon no longer exists. Vestiges of this still remain with the older generation. Even when already Christianized, no one is against the recounting of stories concerning their traditional religion. Marriages, baptisms and other sacraments are done in churches administered by the Catholic priest or Protestant minister, respectively. When baptized the Higaonon keeps two names - a Christian and an Higaonon name.

**Means of Livelihood:** The main economic activity is slash and burn cultivation of upland rice and corn. The agricultural cycle starts during March and April when the Higaonon devote themselves to clearing and planting. They also engage in food gathering. Their livelihood is supplemented by logging timbers like apitong, lauan, yakal, kamagong and narra. The timber is cut by hand and the logs are hauled using carabaos as draft animals to bring the logs down to the Agusan river. The hunting of banog, bats, snakes, field rat, monkey and different kinds of birds is prevalent. Fishing is also one of the major activities. Occasionally, poisons are used in streams. Spear guns are also employed.

The average income of a Higaonon household as computed in the Salug area alone is approximately one hundred pesos a day.
**Political System:** The political system of the Higaonon revolves about a datu. There is usually a principal datu who rules over an entire group composed of several units that are each headed by minor datus. These minor datus form a counseling body for the whole community. The datu assumes multiple roles in the community. He is at once headman, supreme judge, medicine man, ceremonial man and the military commander. As headman, he is responsible for looking into the needs of his people. With such a task goes absolute power. He is supposed to be the wisest and bravest among his people.

The datu's right-hand man is the bagani, the war general who is usually the best warrior of the community. He heads a platoon of young warriors who are in time of peace the datu's body guards.

Datuship is both acquired and achieved. It can be inherited as when a dying datu passes on his title to one of his children. A son is selected preferentially although primogeniture is not usually the rule. It is usually the most deserving son who acquires the position.

**Kinship and Social Organization:** True to almost any society, the extended family in the Higaonon world is the major social and economic unit. The extended family may be composed of several nuclear families, which may include the families of daughters together with their respective husbands and children.

With the practice of polygamy in Higaonon society, the kinship has a patrilateral bias. The husband maintains systematic supervision over his wives who, nowadays, average three to a household, live with him under a single roof.

Children in polygamous marriages are considered equals. No discrimination is made between those of the first marriage or those from later marriages. Any child grows up as one born into a monogamous family.

**Marriage and Courtship:** Marriage in Higaonon society is arranged mainly by the parents of the boy and girl. The arrangement is a long and tedious process. Prior to the wedding, the boy must live in the girl's house for about a year to prove his worth and where he is scrutinized by the parents of the girl.

The wedding ceremony is elaborate and expensive. Feasting lasts for several days at the residence of the bride and groom. The marriage of a datu is even more elaborate.

About the Author:

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