Itawit, Tawit of Philippines

Introduction / History
The Itawes are culturally and linguistically close to the Ibanag. The Ibanag language is the mother tongue of the Itawes. Itawes communities are mostly found in towns along the lower Chico and Matalag Rivers in Cagayan. In many of these towns, the Itawes live with the Ibanags and speak Ibanag. They go through the process of linguistic adaptation which made the Ibanag and Itawes language indistinguishable. The Itawes are known with various alternate names such as "Itawet", "Tawit", "Itawis", Malaueg" and "Rizal". Linguists classified "Malaueg" and "Rizal" as dialects of Itawes language.

Itawes mode of dressing is more colorful than the Ibanag; red is their dominant color.

In the Itawes life cycle such as pregnancy, childbirth, marriage and death, certain taboos or sacred prohibitions reflecting traditional animistic beliefs are observed. Wedding ceremonies are either civil ceremony performed by a "hues" or justice of the peace, or a church ceremony performed by a priest. A simple wedding feast usually follows. After the wedding the couple resides in the girl's household for at least one year before they establish their own household.

The average Itawes family favors education. A good number of their children are sent to school. Many aspects of the Itawes culture and architectural structures (old Catholic churches, ruins of a fortress, cathedrals) reflect Spanish influence.

Farming is the leading source of livelihood. Rice is the main staple and produced in commercial quantities. They also raise other agricultural products such as coffee, corn, peanuts and tobacco. In addition, they raise domesticated animals such as poultry, carabaos, hogs and cattle. Some are engaged in hunting, forestry, fishing and related occupation. A few work in cigar/cigarette factories and food processing firms.

The political system is the usual government structure of local government, the barangay system, which is administered by a set of elected officials headed by a barangay chairman.

What are their beliefs?
The old religion is animism. Spanish colonizers and missionaries came to the Itawes area in 1572 onwards. During the colonial rule, they attempted to convert the Itawes. Though the Itawes met the colonizers with resistance, the colonizers prevailed. These days, the Itawes are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. They observe child baptism, confirmation, and confession as required by the church. The Itawes believe in saints, "santo" who supposedly serve as their guardians and intercessors. The "santo" occupy a revered altar in every home. Many religious practices and sacred prohibitions are associated with the "santo". These are in relation to sickness or epidemic, a long journey, graduation from school or poor and bountiful harvests. "Santo" are made of wood, ceramics, and plaster of Paris in different sizes and faces. These days, "santo" making is a thriving craft and considered a profitable industry. The Iglesia in Cristo and the Jehovah's Witnesses are also in the area and were able to convince/convert a few Itawes.

Prayer Points
* Itawes Catholics to come to a personal faith in Christ. Pray for their hearts to have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus. Pray for "santo" worship to be replaced with true worship of the true God.
* Itawes believers/churches to be strong and be a witnessing church.
* Itawes communities where the gospel has never been proclaimed. Pray for gospel workers to come to these communities.
* Gospel workers on site for God's empowerment and enablement. Pray for protection as well.
* Ibanag believers who live nearest to the Itawes. They could reach out to these communities without requiring many adjustments.

Text source: Asia Missions (AMNET)

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