# Making Literature Alive: A Closer Look at Pala'isgen, a Tagbanua Ethnoepic

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#### **Abstract**

The Tagbanua, one of the ethnic groups of Palawan, has rich cultural and literary heritage which includes the ethnoepic Pala'isgen. Consisting of six chapters, the epic details the heroic exploits of Pala'isgen who is endowed with supernatural powers which he uses in defending his people against their enemies.

Pala'isgen is comparable with other Filipino ethnoepics; however, it still remains as unexplored wealth. This may be attributed to the absence of its publication or inclusion in a textbook or anthology. This prompted the researcher to find a way by which Pala'isgen could be included in English classes, particularly in first year high school which focuses on Philippine literature.

Pala'isgen was recorded, transcribed, and translated into Filipino by Dr. Paul Jagmis, Sr.. His Filipino translation was the basis of the researcher's English translation.

The researcher also conducted an ethnographic research in Cabigaan, Aborlan, Palawan, where many of the Tagbanua live, including the man who chanted the longest portion of the epic. Thus, the researcher's description of the residence of the Tagbanua, their sources of livelihood, culture and values enriched the teaching materials.

The researcher then prepared four sample lesson plans emphasizing student-centered activities. Afterward, the researcher developed an instructional compact disk (CD) to aid in teaching the Pala'isgen. The disk contains the English translation, a summary, information about the Tagbanua, sample lesson plans, and a glossary.

The teaching materials were then field tested in three first year classes in Palawan State University Laboratory High School. Based on the evaluation of faculty observers, the students participated enthusiastically in the activities, liked the Pala'isgen, and confirmed that the use of the CD and other instructional materials helped them understand the epic.

The observers' and students' evaluation affirmed the researcher's idea that Pala'isgen could become an interesting literary piece and could enliven the teaching of literature in our schools.

#### 1. Introduction

The Tagbanua, one of the various ethnic groups in Palawan, has rich cultural and literary heritage. Several studies about the Tagbanua that have been conducted for the past two decades attest to this statement. However, despite the number of studies conducted about it, many Filipinos, including Palaweños, are not yet aware of the way of life of the Tagbanua. This lack of awareness often leads to inappropriate descriptions or judgments about them. Inasmuch as knowledge about the Tagbanua shall pave the way toward understanding them, there is a need to find means to know them. This quest of knowing them could begin by studying their literature.

One of the various types of literature is the epic. Baltazar (1981) stated that "among the outstanding pieces of our literary heritage are the folk epics which are narratives of sustained length, based on oral traditions revolving around supernatural events or heroic deeds in the form of verse which is either chanted or sung with a certain seriousness or purpose. Epics embody or validate the beliefs, ideals or life-values of the people."

The Filipino epics are more properly ethnoepics, belonging to and representing ethnic groups and dealing with regional heroes (Nieto and Viray 1993) unlike the national epics of other countries such as Greek's Illiad and Odyssey which represent Greece as a nation and exalt Odysseus and the other outstanding epic characters (like Agamemnon and Achilles) as national heroes.

The Philippines abounds in ethnoepics. This statement is supported by the findings of the ASEAN – sponsored study of Filipino epics that "there are one hundred (100) extant epics in the country that have been discovered, most of these are from Palawan" (Santiago 2002). However, many of these ethnoepics have not yet been documented.

Having learned about the existence of other unrecorded epics in Palawan, the researcher (as an undergraduate student) and her research group were motivated to record an epic for their thesis. With this objective in mind, they conducted a study entitled," Palaisgen: a Tagbanua Epic" in 1994. The researchers' original objective was to record the whole epic, but it did not materialize because of time and financial constraints. What they were able to record was a chapter of Pala'isgen (Isgen Pala'isgen's Fight with Tigri) which they translated into Filipino and English. They also analyzed the Tagbanua culture that is exemplified in the said chapter of the epic which was sung by Fernando Lingsa, a resident of Barangay Cabigaan, Aborlan, Palawan.

In 1997, Jagmis completed his study entitled "Pala'isgen: ang Epiko ng Tagbanua." Jagmis' study consists of two parts. The first part is the ethnography of the Tagbanua which includes their geography and demography, life and society, and material and non-material culture. The second part is the epic entitled "Pala'isgen".

Consisting of six chapters, Pala'isgen tells of the heroism of Pala'isgen, a brave Tagbanua endowed with supernatural power which he uses in fighting the enemies to defend the Tagbanua race. Considered as the loftiest and longest piece of Tagbanua literature, Pala'isgen was sung by Gem-gem Bagued and Fernando Lingsa, natives of Aborlan, Palawan. One part of the epic was narrated by Delia Jardinero. The said epic was validated by several Tagbanua elders in Aborlan.

Pala'isgen is comparable with the other Filipino ethnoepics. However, unlike the other ethnoepics such as Biag ni lam-ang and Darangen that are included in the study of Philippine literature, Pala'isgen remains as unexplored wealth. One reason for this is the absence of a textbook or reading material which includes Pala'isgen or any instructional material that contains the said epic. This prompted the researcher to find a way by which Pala'isgen could be included in Philippine literature classes.

Philippine literature is a component of the secondary and tertiary curricula in the country. In the secondary school curriculum, it is a part of the English subject or program for first year high school

The first year high school students are expected, among other things, to do the following: (1) discover Philippine literature as a means of having understanding of man and his environment, (2) discover through literature the need to work cooperatively and responsibly in today's global village, and (3) show understanding and appreciation of various literary types with emphasis on Philippine literature (Dep Ed 2002). Taking these objectives into consideration, Pala'isgen could be an important instrument for knowing, understanding, and appreciating not just the epic but also the Tagbanua people.

Since Pala'isgen is clearly a part of Philippine literature, the researcher believes that it has to be read, studied, and disseminated. Inasmuch as the complete epic is in the Tagbanua and Filipino languages, the researcher saw the need to translate it first into English so that it could be included in the study of Philippine literature in the English subject of the first year high school. Moreover, the researcher considered it necessary to make lesson plans showing how Pala'isgen could be taught through appropriate teaching strategies or methods with emphasis on student-centered activities. The teaching of the said epic can start by including it as part of the study of Philippine literature in the English subject for first year high school at Palawan State University. Pala'isgen can be taught as an additional literary piece or as a replacement for epics from other provinces in the country. Including Pala'isgen in the curriculum will help in making the students aware of the rich literary and cultural heritage of the Tagbanua. It will also help them in knowing and understanding the Tagbanua people.

Furthermore, since Palawan State University envisions global competitiveness, computer technology must be used in instruction. This is due to the fact that computer technology is now considered as an important tool in education in today's fast-paced world. Since literature is a part of education, its teaching can be enhanced by computer technology (Porter 1999).

In line with this, the researcher deemed it necessary to develop instructional material in the form of a compact disk (CD) which will be significant in teaching and in perpetuating Pala'isgen. The CD will also be a response to the demands of the changing times for the teachers to be "involved in the production of instructional materials" (AACCUP).

With these premises, the researcher embarked in this study with the hope that Pala'isgen, the Tagbanua epic, be considered an additional gem in Philippine literature.

#### 2. Methodology

# 2.1 Research Design

This study is a qualitative research. Particularly, this study used descriptive and ethnographic methods. The descriptive method was used in translating Pala'isgen into English while the ethnographic or fieldwork method was used in gathering information about the Tagbanua. The specific ethnographic or fieldwork techniques that were employed were observation and unstructured interview. The research procedure includes the translation of Pala'isgen, fieldwork,

preparation of lesson plans, development of the computer-assisted instructional material (CD) and field testing.

## 2.1.1 Translation of Pala'isgen

## (a) Seeking Permission from Dr. Paul D. Jagmis, Sr.

Before the researcher began the translation of the Filipino version of Pala'isgen into English, she sought first the permission of Dr. Paul Jagmis, Sr. because it was he who recorded, transcribed, and translated the said ethnoepic. It was included in his dissertation entitled "Pala'isgen: Ang Epiko ng Tagbanua" in 1997.

Dr. Paul D. Jagmis, Sr. is a Tagbanua who has lived in Cabigaan, Aborlan, Palawan. Among the Tagbanua of Aborlan, Dr. Jagmis is a highly-esteemed tribal leader. Aside from his dissertation on Pala'isgen, he has also written and presented articles about the Tagbanua culture in local and national levels.

# (b) Writing of the First Draft

The researcher read first the whole Filipino text of Pala'isgen. Then, she proceeded with the translation of the epic into English by line.

# (c) Evaluation of the Translation

Each line of the English translation was placed opposite the Filipino text. This was done so that the evaluators could easily look into the translation.

Example:

At ang sabi mo
Si Letang Bato
Nandoon na kumapit na
Doon kay Pala'isgen

And you said
Letang Bato
Held on
To Pala'isgen.

After making the revised draft for evaluation, the researcher gave a copy to each of the evaluators. Then, the researcher invited the evaluators for the evaluation of the translation. One of the evaluators was Dr. Paul Jagmis, Sr.

Comparison check was used in evaluating the epic. During the evaluation, the researcher read each line of the epic in Filipino and English to the evaluators. The evaluators looked into the correctness, appropriateness, clarity, and naturalness of expression of the translation. Emphasis was given on lines or stanzas that the committee found necessary to revise or improve. After the evaluation of the translation, the researcher made the necessary revisions.

#### 2.1.2 Fieldwork

### (a) Research Locale

The researcher selected Barangay Cabigaan, Aborlan, Palawan as research site based on the following criteria:

- 1. Many Tagbanua live in the said place. Majority of the population are Tagbanua. This made the observation of their culture possible to the researcher.
- 2. The researcher is familiar with the place because she and her group conducted their fieldwork for their undergraduate thesis in the same place.
- 3. The Tagbanua who knows the epic lives in the said place. He was also the one who sang the last chapter of the epic to the researcher and her group in 1993.

# (b) Selection of Key Informants

The information about the Tagbanua was gathered through interviews with the key informants who were selected based on the following criteria developed by Tremblay (cited by Socrates1993):

- 1. Role in the community. The role of the informant in the community should expose him/her to the nature of the community being studied.
- 2. Knowledge. The informant should also have knowledge of the information about the community.
- 3. Willingness. The informant must be willing to share his/her knowledge to the researcher.

There were nine (9) key informants from the said locality who were significant in providing the needed data in this study. This number included four males and five females.

# (c) Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher gathered the information about the source of livelihood, culture, and values of the Tagbanua through unstructured interviews with the informants. The interviews were conducted in Filipino since the informants could also speak in the said language. However, there was an old Tagbanua who had a difficulty in understanding some Filipino words. This problem was immediately solved because the researcher's volunteer-guide also served as interpreter.

To validate the data gathered, the researcher read the Information about the Tagbanua to the key informants. What she presented to them was the Filipino translation of the said data. The informants confirmed that what the researcher had written was true and correct. Furthermore, the researcher also had the Information about the Tagbanua verified by Dr. Nita J. Socrates, a professor and researcher from Cabigaan. Dr. Socrates, a Tagbanua herself, has written and presented researches and articles on Tagbanua culture.

#### 2.1.3 Lesson Planning

After the fieldwork, the researcher prepared four semi-detailed lesson plans based on the 2002 Basic Education Curriculum (BEC).

The first lesson plan is designed for the whole epic to be taught over a period of three hours. The second lesson plan, to be taught over two hours, also covers the whole epic.

The third lesson plan focuses on Chapter V (Pala'isgen's Fight with the Giants) with the time allotment of sixty minutes. Lastly, the fourth lesson plan which focuses on Chapter VI (Pala'isgen and His Brothers' Fight with Tigre) is designed to be taught over two hours.

The lesson plans were evaluated by a committee which included four professors who teach language and literature and professional education subjects in Palawan State University. All of the members of the committee, except the English teacher from the Laboratory High School, are graduate degree holders. Their length of teaching experience ranges from eleven (11) to twenty nine (29) years.

# 2.1.4 Development of the CD

With these things ready—translation, information about the Tagbanua, and sample lesson plans—the researcher moved on to the next phase, the development of the instructional compact disk (CD).

The CD was then presented for evaluation. The committee on evaluation was composed of two faculty members who underwent training on Intel teach to the Future Program and an English teacher with specialization in Instructional Development and Technology. Their length of teaching experience ranges from nine (9) to fifteen (15) years.

# 2.1.5 Field Testing

To test the implementation of the lesson plans and the use of the newly-developed CD, the researcher conducted field testing in the Laboratory High School at Palawan State University. The field testing was done in I-Kabaitan, I-Pag-asa, and I- Kagitingan. I- Kabaitan was composed of fifty- two (52) students (18 boys and 34 girls) while I –Pag-asa consisted of fifty-four (54) students (24 boys and 30 girls). In I – Kagitingan, there were fifty- two (52) students (23 boys and 29 girls).

From the four sample lesson plans prepared by the researcher, only three were used for the try-outs. Lesson Plan Number 1 was used for I-Kabaitan, Lesson Plan Number 3 for I-Kagitingan, and Lesson Plan Number 4 for I-Pag-asa. The researcher implemented lesson Plan Number 1 while the English teacher of the said classes used Lesson Plan Number 4. A Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) student teacher tried out Lesson Plan Number 3.

Each try-out was observed by two professors from the College of Education. For the three try-outs, the total number of observers is five (5) because one of them observed two classes.

From the five observers, two were members of the committee who had evaluated the lesson plans while the other two had evaluated the CD. The other observer had verified the Information about the Tagbanua. The observers, except the one from the Laboratory High School, are graduate degree holders. Their length of teaching experience ranges from eleven (11) to thirty-seven (37) years.

To guide the observers in evaluating the implementation of the lesson plans and the use of the CD, the researcher prepared an observation form which consisted of six (6) questions in line with students' interest and participation in the activities, time allotment and instructional materials used. Three sets of observation forms were used for the three classes.

The observers in I-Kabaitan remarked that the implementation was excellent. Based on the observers' evaluation, the students participated in the activities with interest, they were challenged by the activities, there was adequate time for the activities, and the materials used were appropriate and helpful in making the tasks and the expectations clear.

Likewise, the implementation of the lesson plan number 4 in I-Pag-asa was rated as impressive by the observers. The following remarks came from one of the evaluators:

"The presentation was well-organized and systematic with the use of visual aids/materials equipped with what the teacher wanted to evaluate at the end of the discussion. Time allotted for each activity for the students was just enough for them to present their output. The lesson calls for creative and critical thinking on the part of the students. Each of them showed interest, appreciation and enjoyment in what they were doing. As a result, it was really great!"

For I-Kagitingan, the observers noted that the objectives of the lesson were carried out.

The students in the said classes were also asked to give their evaluation of the try-outs. All the students in three classes expressed that they liked Pala'isgen and they confirmed that the use of the CD and other instructional materials helped them in understanding the epic.

When asked about their suggestions to improve the lesson on Pala'isgen, most of the students remarked that they had no suggestions as one of them wrote:

"The lesson was taught in a manner that is easy to understand; so, I do not have any additional suggestions."

One of them added: "It is clear and the story is beautiful. Even the drawings are pretty."

Another comment that manifested student's interest toward the lesson was: "I want to know the whole story. I want it to be a part of our lesson the whole high school."

# 3. Presentation of the Translation and Learning Resource Material

The following are selected parts of the translation and the contents of the CD.

#### 3.1 Translation

# I. Pagdalaw ni Palaisgen sa mga Tao sa Mundo

Ang wika ni Pala'isgen
"Bunso kong kapatid
Na Liokyangan
Bilisan mo na.
Ihanda mo ang aking bangka.
Mayroon tayong hahanapin"

Ano pa ang masabi mo Sa kilos ni Liokyangan Nandoon na nakahanda na Ang bangka niya na sasakyan Ang bangka niyang ginintuan

Nakita niya, natanaw niya Habang siya'y nasa himpapawid Na may dalawa, may tatlo na Marami ng tao ang pinapatay. Naroon na sumakay na Nandoon na lumakbay na Mula sa langit sila.

Itong si Magreng
Tumira sa tabing dagat
Dalampasigan sa tabing dagat
Tatlo apat ang anak niya
Isa na si Pala'isgen
Panganay si Buaya
Sumunod si Baybayanen
Ikatlo si Palaisgen
Ikaapat si Liokyangan.

Itong si Pala'isgen Matagal na sa daigdig Natanaw na niyang lahat Na mga kaguluhan Wika niya sa mundo "Tigilan ninyong lahat

# Palaisgen's Visitation to the People on Earth

Pala'isgen said,
"My youngest brother
Liokyangan
Hurry up.
Prepare my boat.
There's something we shall look
for "

What can you say About Liokyangan's action? There he prepared The boat he will ride on His golden boat.

He saw
While he was in the sky
There were two, then three
Many people were being slain.
They rode
They traveled
From the clouds.

Magreng
Lived near the sea
By the seashore.
Four were his children
One was Pala'isgen
Buaya was the eldest
Baybayanen followed
Pala'isgen was the third
Liokyangan was the fourth.

Pala'isgen
Stayed long on earth.
He saw all
The troubles.
To the world he said,
" All of you, stop

Malilipol ang tao natin."Yan. Lahat ng tao'y huminto na Huminto sa pakikidigma Sumunod ito sa kaniya Ang lahat ay mapayapa na. Yan. Our people will perish." That's it. All the people stopped Stopped fighting They followed him And all was at peace. That's it.

# 3.2 Learning Resource Material on CD

The CD contains the following: welcome page, translation, summary, information about the Tagbanua, sample lesson plans, and glossary of terms.

# 3.2.1 Welcome Page

The welcome page orients the teachers about the contents of the CD-ROM. This page also includes some instructions in line with the implementation of the sample lesson plans in teaching Pala'isgen for first year high school.

The welcome page is followed by an introduction on Pala'isgen which a brief background about Dr. Paul D. Jagmis, Sr. and the Tagbanua elders who chanted Pala'isgen. The succeeding part contains the list of characters. The descriptions of the characters are based on the researcher's interview with Fernando Lingsa, the Tagbanua who chanted the sixth part of Pala'isgen.

#### 3.2.2 Translation

The translation is divided into six (6) parts. These are the following: 1) Pala'isgen's Visitation to the People on Earth, 2) Pala'isgen's Courtship of Tubod kat Bulawan, 3) The Wedding Feast of Pala'isgen and Tubod Kat Bulawan, 4) The Visitation of Letang Bato to Pala'isgen and Tubod kat Bulawan, 5)Pala'isgen's Fight with the Giants, and 6) Pala'isgen's and His Brothers' Fight with Tigre. The summary of the epic comes after the translation.

#### 3.2.3 Information about the Tagbanua

The information about the Tagbanua includes their residence, source of livelihood, culture and values. Some Tagbanua values are presented below.

#### (a) Strong Family Ties

The Tagbanua value their families. This is not only limited to their immediate family but it extends up to their relatives or their clan.

As one of the manifestations of this bind that connects the Tagbanua together, married children build their houses near their parents' house. Since the Tagbanua follow matrilocal residence rule, couples live close to the woman's family. They form a cluster of houses which marks an extended family or clan. This they do for them to assist their family easily whenever

they are needed. At present, however, married children may also choose to live in another place.

The Tagbanua are always ready to help whoever in the family needs assistance. For example, if a member of a family gets sick, his/her relatives readily assist him/her by contributing money that he/ she needs to buy medicine or for hospitalization.

# (b) Respect

The Tagbanua respect their parents and elders. They address their grandparents as Apo; their fathers as Ama; their mothers as Ina; their aunts as Menan; their uncles as Amay; and their brothers or sisters as Aka.

The children obey their parents. They follow what their parents tell them to do. If their parents get old, they take care of them. They believe that they have to take good care of their parents to repay them for taking care of them when they were still young.

In an extended family or clan *(sansulsugan)*, the eldest is usually considered as the head. He is respected by his clan and his advice is always sought.

# (c) Bayanihan

The Tagbanua practise the bayanihan system. For example, during planting season, if a farmer needs help, his fellows come to help him in planting. He does not pay them; he only serves them food. In return, he also helps when his fellow farmer's turn to plant comes.

# (d) Debt of Gratitude

The Tagbanua value or cherish whatever help is extended to them. They consider it as *utang nga nakem* (debt of gratitude). Throughout their lives, their gratefulness to the person who has helped them in time of need remains. In return, they are always ready to help the person who has helped them even if they will not be asked to do so.

#### (e) Pakikisama

For the Tagbanua, this value is like giving consideration for others to maintain a harmonious relationship among them. For example, when a Tagbanua is invited to a gathering, he/she has to attend. If he/she cannot attend, he/she has to explain his/ her reasons to the one who invited.

#### 3.2.4 Lesson Plans

The following are the descriptions of the sample lesson plans that are included in the CD.

#### Lesson Plan Number 1

Designed to be taught over three days, this lesson plan is for the whole epic (from Part I to Part VI). In this lesson, the students identify, describe, and evaluate characters with the aid of student activity sheets like major character traits and clues about a character. Students will also illustrate the setting and dramatize scenes from the epic. They are also expected to point out the Tagbanua culture and values that are shown in the epic. Lastly, they reflect and write about their own traits

#### **Lesson Plan Number 2**

This lesson plan is designed to be taught over two days. Students will describe the characters, illustrate the setting, and trace the plot of the epic. They will also point out the characteristics of Pala'isgen, the epic hero. Moreover, they will identify the culture of the Tagbanua as shown in the epic. Lastly, students will show how they can be heroes, too.

# **Lesson Plan Number 3**

Designed for a sixty-minute period, this lesson plan focuses on Part V of Pala'isgen. Students will identify and evaluate the characters. They will also identify the main character's problem and his solution to it. Furthermore, students link the said part of the epic to related current issues in the Philippines.

#### **Lesson Plan Number 4**

With Part VI as its focus, this lesson plan is designed to be taught over two days. Aside from identifying and evaluating the characters, students will also trace and discuss the plot through a flow chart. Moreover, they will point out the Tagbanua culture and values that are reflected in Part VI. In addition, students relate a value from the epic with their own lives. They will also analyze symbols and link these with our society at present.

#### 3.2.5 Glossary

The CD also contains the glossary of terms used in Pala'isgen and in the Information about the Tagbanua. Some of these terms are *agong, antenganen, babylan, kilala, langguway*, and *masicampo*.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the observers' and students' evaluation, Pala'isgen could become an interesting literary piece and the teaching of literature could be made alive through the use of student-centered activities. Hence, it is recommended that Pala'isgen be included in the study of Philippine literature in first year high school.

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