

## **GANDINGAN DANCE: AN ARTISTIC CULTURAL PRESERVATION AMONG YOUNG YAKANS**

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### **Abstract**

When the current of globalization is strong, it is difficult to raise awareness of the importance of preserving local cultural arts like dance and music. The millennial generation has a greater understanding of global cultural arts than local arts like folk dance and music. Due to the fact that it documented the Yakan culture through close observations, a guided questionnaire, readings, and interpretation, the study used a qualitative approach and the ethnographic research method. The dance literature was constructed on the basis of a documentary analysis of all the data collected. In view of the record and interview, it was uncovered that there were exceptional and recognizing development characteristics, styles, and attributes in the dance. The Yakan culture was strictly preserved, propagated, and promoted through the strict use of the costume, accessories, and musical instruments. When it comes to the steps of the dance, there were modified movements that were incorporated as the dance developed over time. Consequently, this concentrate firmly suggests that a duplicate of this review be outfitted to the various libraries for exploration and execution reasons for school and local area-based dance organizations that might want to include the Gandingan dance as a component of their collection. As a means of promoting, propagating, preserving, and safeguarding the Philippine indigenous dances, music, and costumes, this study may serve as the foundation for subsequent studies in dance anthropology or ethno-choreography.

**Keywords:** *gandingan dance, cultural preservation, yakan, culture, Philippine folk dance*

### **Introduction**

According to Li & Karakowsky (2001), a culture is a group of people's way of life—their accepted behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that are passed down from generation to generation through imitation and communication. Culture can be passed down in a number of ways, but education is the most effective.

The process by which the culture of a sociocultural system is imposed upon the plastic, receptive infant is properly referred to as education in its broadest sense. This procedure makes cultural continuity possible. Socialization is specifically accomplished through formal and informal education. The process by which a child learns to conform his behavior to that of others, to behave similarly to others, and to become a member of a group is referred to as informal education. The deliberate and more or less systematic effort to influence others' behavior by imparting cultural elements—such as knowledge or beliefs, behavior patterns, or ideals and values—is referred to as formal education.

According to Otero (2014), who cited the Cultural Theory of Philip Smith and Alexander Riley (2008), "culture is defined as a heritage passed on over time through the generations." Additionally, the psychological definitions of culture emphasized its function as a tool for problem-solving and the satisfaction of material and emotional needs, as well as communication and learning.

The Philippines is also known as a nation with numerous distinctive cultures around the world. Basila has been referred to as the "Home of the Yakans" due to its location in the southern region of the country, Lamitan. The Yakan have Malay highlights. They are little of a casing, with earthy colored skin, inclining eyes, and dark hair — qualities like the Dyak of North Borneo, prompting the hypothesis that they began from this race (Barbosa, 2005).

In Lamitan, Yakans have always experienced and communicated what is important to them through music and dance. As early as the age of four, the Yakan parents instruct their children in the various Yakan musical instruments and dances. To preserve their identity, the Yakans have made it a priority to pass down their culture from generation to generation. As a result, the Yakan women of Lamitan dance to meet human needs: the need to communicate with other people, to maintain political and social order, to have fun with others, to perform rituals, and to use art as a means of communication. The Cultural

Theory provided an explanation for these ideas: "Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, and its own meanings," according to An Anthology of Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (2011). These are expressed in institutions, the arts, and education in every human society.

The Cultural Transmission Theory, referred to by Buot (2011) as "the passing of new knowledge and traditions of culture from one generation to the next," is very important, according to the World Health Organization (2009). "Folk dances belong to the folk and should not be distorted for the next generation," said Francisca R. Aquino, National Artist for Dance in 1973. The historical context, costumes, music, and body movement of these dances, which convey authenticity, are educational values and pertinent to Philippine schools' educational programs. The Department of Education's K12 Program now includes instruction in the study of folk and ethnic dances in schools. The dances of today are influenced by the types of dances that were performed in the past.

More specifically, the research that focuses primarily on the principles of beauty, goodness, and truth is the Theory of Axiology Rescher (2005). A theory of education for the pursuit of the value of "trueness" is one of the findings of this study; In addition, the theory of art emphasizes the importance of "beauty"; Additionally, the value of "goodness" is the focus of the ethics theory. Through the aesthetic beauty of the dance known as Gandingan, this study will preserve the values of the people of Lamitan, specifically the Yakan tribe.

The Gandingan dance should be conserved through preservation and notation because only Princess Lily Cuevas has an in-depth understanding of the dance's significance to Yakan life and culture, as well as its historical background and authenticity. The researcher is eager to accomplish this study because this book will be a legacy of Princess Lily Cuevas (The Yakan Princess) in the world of dance. To preserve the integrity of the dance, safeguarding methods will emphasize the transmission of techniques and information. The preservation, promotion, and spread of the dance will inspire pride in the Yakan people and raise their awareness of the Filipinos.

It is in this light that the researcher was motivated to pursue this study in order help preserve the culture through an artistic way of dancing.

### **Related Literature and Studies**

#### **Cultural Preservation through Dance**

In the article by Pappas (2022), culture is defined as the traits and knowledge of a certain group of people. This includes their language, religion, cuisine, social norms, music, and the arts. According to Berger, the word "culture" comes from a French word that comes from the Latin word "colere," which means to work the land and make it bloom or to grow and care for something. One thing is certain, regardless of the appearance of a culture: cultures develop. Our interconnected world, which consists of so many ethnically distinct nations and is also riven by conflicts involving religion, ethnicity, ethical principles, and, fundamentally, the cultural aspects themselves, appears to have elevated the significance of culture. If culture was ever fixed, it is no longer so. It is predominantly fluid and in constant motion.

Rapid advancements in the economic, social, and technological sectors have contributed to the progressive decline of folklore cultural characteristics, resulting in the diminution and degradation of song and dance traditions in rural areas (Meraklis, 1989). (Meraklis, 1989). Namely, the disorder of the province and the urbanization of Greek society have affected traditional customs and patterns of social fabric. Consequently, cultural elements of the past are repeatedly replicated and altered, rather than surviving intact. Throughout this ongoing mutation, many conventional characteristics are lost, while others fight, endure, or adapt to new evolving situations (Meraklis, 1973). Schultz and Lavenda (2009) cited the Theory of Cultural Universals by George Murdock et al., which defines cultural universals as "something that exists in every human civilization on earth yet varies from culture to culture, such as values and behavioral patterns."

The different kinds of Filipino dances show how different the culture is in different parts of the country. Folk or ethnic dances can be a part of rituals and ceremonies that happen at important times in a person's life, like when they are born, get married, or die. Ethnic dances are of diverse kinds and styles, depending on the cultural background of the country. Folklore, folk arts, folk music, and especially Philippine folk dances show that the Philippines have a rich cultural history that is influenced by both native and Spanish cultures, as well as those of other South East Asian countries. In 1994, Corazon G. Inigo said that "Philippine folk dances are diverse, and include religious, ceremonial, romantic, burial, combative, exorcism, torture, humorous, and game dances..." There are a variety of themes linked with Philippine folk and ethnic dances, depending on day-to-day activities such as planting, harvesting,

weaving, fetching water, and fishing, among others. However, certain dances are religious in character and play a vital role during festivals, weddings, and births, as well as deaths and funerals. Because dancing evolves and eventually becomes a way of life, conserving and promoting the ancient dances, notably, the Gandingan dance is of highest importance.

According to research conducted in Greece by Georgios Lykesas (2017), the preservation of dance through education promotes students to maintain dance as a cultural heritage and national identity. "The teaching and study of Greek traditional dances will be more successful, but also to enable kids enjoy Greek traditional practices and build a cultural identity." This study evaluated cultural awareness as measured by students' knowledge of the types of Filipino folk dances, whereas Porferia Saraa Poralan and Rene M. Babiera Li (2014) examined cultural awareness as measured by students' knowledge of the types of Filipino folk dances. The results showed that learners are familiar with the dance "tinikling." They realized that bamboo poles are utilized in this dance. This dance imitates a sort of tikling bird that strides across bamboo poles. By capturing "ancient syntax, rules, and dance ethics," Anupama Mallik, Santanu Chaudhury, and Hiranmay Ghosh (2014) were able to preserve classical Indian dance as a historical artifact.

### **Gandingan Dance**

Dancing is the best way to develop rhythm and learn how to control our innate desire for movement. One acquires autonomy through learning to freely express oneself, widen their perspective, and appreciate the tenets of efficient teamwork through freedom of movement (Kapsalis, 1977; Haselbach, 1979; Sanderson, 1988). (Kapsalis, 1977; Haselbach, 1979; Sanderson, 1988). Dancing is also a spatiotemporal art, consisting of a continuous sequence of acts that develop over time and place (Tyrovola, 2001). (Tyrovola, 2001). It is also characterized as a noncompetitive motor exercise that boosts physical fitness, promote good health, and develops flexibility, strength, stamina, balance, rhythmic ability, neuromuscular coordination, synchronization, and body control (Churcher, 1971; Sanderson, 1988; Brinson, 1991). Among the Yakan maidens in Lamitan City Basilan, Princess Lily Cuevas was the first to perform the Gandingan dance in public. According to Princess Lily Cuevas, the "Gandingan" was purportedly reserved as a form of entertainment for Yakans of high status and members of the royal family on special occasions like as the "kadatuan" (a gathering of the Datus and royal families) and during formal community gatherings.

Now, Gandingan has grown up and is part of the cultural shows at the Lami-Lamihan Festival in Lamitan and the Tumahik Festival in Isabela City, Basilan. Ramon Obusan (1999) stated, "Our traditional dance, which is found in all regions and ethnic groupings in the Philippines, ought to be studied and conserved from the threats that threaten it. The Filipino dance culture is made up of thousands of various pieces, and ideally, all should be recorded." His internationally acclaimed Ramon Obusan Folkloric Ensemble since its inception in 1972 continues to document and perform collections of folk and ethnic dance performances. Obusan has studied and documented indigenous culture of Filipino ethnic groups from north to south over the years, focusing on rites and traditions. His ceaseless research has preserved the vitality of his Folkloric Group's repertory. He aims to keep his folk dance presentations authentic by using actual movement patterns, costumes, and music, even as the dances go onstage (Villaruz & Obusan, 1992). (Villaruz & Obusan, 1992).

In spite of these artists, dance groups, or local agencies that invest so much effort in promoting and conserving traditional dances, there are still undocumented ethnic dances that exist here in the Philippines particularly in Basilan, an island located in Mindanao.

### **Research Objective**

1. To document Gandingan Dance as a way of preserving culture among Yakan children.

### **Methodology**

The study utilized qualitative approach employing ethnographic research method because it documented the Yakan culture through close observations, guided questionnaire, readings, and interpretation. A documentary analysis for all the gathered data was used as basis in constructing dance literature.

The following persons were interviewed and/or videotaped while performing the Gandingan dance and music:

- a. *Princess Lily Cuevas* (80 years old) is the granddaughter of Datu Kalun, the founder of Lamitan. Born last December 17, 1936, she is the daughter of Al Sultan Unding Cuevas Taha Kalun II and Sultana Aisa Cuevas. She became the President of the Datu Unding Mission School in Panandakan,

Lamitan. Furthermore, she owns a weaving business in Lamitan City, Basilan and is known as the First Yakan lady to dance in public; she is the pioneer dancer of the “Gandingan” dance.

b. *Mrs. Victoria Mallorca-Siason* (71 years old) is a descendant of Datu Kalun, founder of Lamitan. She is now a retired elementary school teacher. She was the pioneer member and director of the Lamitan Yakan Family Ensemble. In addition, she was the local coordinator for Uwang Ahadas, the Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan Awardee/ National Living Treasure, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and the Chair of Lamitan City Tourism Council in Lamitan City.

c. *Uwang Ahadas* (72 years old) is a Yakan virtuoso and master musician. He is the Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan Awardee, a National Living Treasure of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Because of his expertise in Yakan music, he was able to bring the Yakan culture around the world. Together with the Yakan Family Ensemble, he was able to perform in Paris, France, Sweden and European Embassy.

d. *Mrs. Rhaiya L. Abdulla* (37 years old) is a choreographer and dancer of Gandingan dance. She is currently teaching in Calut Elementary School in Tuburan District, Lamitan City.

e. *Hdja. Putli Casalin* (43 years old) is working in an administration office in Lamitan City. She has been performing the Gandingan dance since she was 10 years old.

The researcher made an interview guide, which served as the basis for acquiring data or needed information. A dance notation of the basic steps was made based on Francisca Reyes-Aquino’s method of notation, or aquinotation, for the teachers, students, choreographers, and dance enthusiasts in the Philippines to comprehend and understand. The dance notation includes the dance description, movement quality and style, time signature, counts in each executed step, and formation. Furthermore, a description of the suggested combination of steps and arm movements was provided for instructional purposes. A camera/video camera was used for documentation of the dance performed in different locations and settings in a given time. A recorder was used for the recording of the musical accompaniment as the basis for the construction of the musical score.

#### **Data Gathering and Data Treatment**

The researcher went to Basilan on June 25, 2015 to witness the Lami-Lamihan Festival of Lamitan and conducted a pre-interview with Mrs. Victoria Siason and Princess Lily Cuevas. Prior to the formal interview, a letter was given to the Graduate Program Chair of Southwestern University, signed by the adviser, seeking approval for the researcher to conduct the study. A letter was also given to Mrs. Victoria Siason and Princess Lily Cuevas to conduct a study and interview on Gandingan dance. Due to the fact that the Yakan respondents can only speak their language, Mrs. Victoria Mallorca-Siason served as an interpreter of the researcher to facilitate the flow of the interview.

After the interview, the researcher went back to Basilan to record on video how Princess Lily Cuevas and other female Yakan Gandingan dancers did different kinds of Gandingan. A video documentation of the dance instruction and music of Gandingan was made to facilitate the readers understanding of the actual execution of the basic steps.

After the interview and direct observations, all data were gathered, analyzed, and interpreted. The data gathered was analyzed and interpreted in a descriptive narrative form. Recorded dance steps were analyzed and transcribed using the Aquinotation Method. Recorded music for the dance accompaniment was also notated.

#### **Results**

Based on the transcription and interview, it was revealed that there were unique and distinguishing movement qualities, styles, and characteristics in the dance. The costume, accessories, and musical instruments were strictly used and implemented for the purpose of preservation, propagation, and promotion of the Yakan culture. In terms of the dance steps, there were modified movements that were incorporated as the dance evolved with the passing of years.

Furthermore, the music played nowadays in a Gandingan performance remains the same, namely the umaral. In the absence of musicians or musical instruments, the Yakan performer uses recorded audio umaral music.

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study concludes that the anthropological perspective on the beliefs and practices of the Yakan tribe through the Gandingan dance still exists and is preserved by the living Yakan tribe, as evidenced by the dance performances during the Lami-Lamihan Festival in Lamitan City, Basilan. The cultural arts of

traditional dance as a local culture have very important values and cannot be ruled out. Therefore, traditional dance culture must be preserved and passed down so that the nation's culture is always solid and intact.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researcher recommends the utilization of this study, through its dance module and the dance literature, as a standard basis for the teaching and staging of Gandingan dance at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary level. As this study focused on the traditional music, costumes, and movement vocabulary of the Gandingan dance, integration of this dance in the physical education curriculum and in the major dance courses at the tertiary level is also recommended.

It is further strongly recommended that the dance literature in this study be used during the Lami-Lamihan Dance Festival Gandingan Dance Competition in Lamitan City. This shall be mandated through a memorandum issued by the City of Lamitan.

A series of dance seminar-workshops on Gandingan dance and music shall be undertaken in coordination with the Department of Education for the teachers, students, choreographers, and dance enthusiasts for them to understand the dance in terms of its traditional music, costume, accessories, and movement vocabulary.

It is also strongly recommended that a copy of this study be furnished to the different libraries for research and performance purposes by school and community-based dance companies that would like to use the Gandingan dance as part of their repertoire. This study may be used as the basis for future studies in dance anthropology or ethno-choreography as a means of promoting, propagating, preserving, and safeguarding the Philippine indigeneous dances, music, and costumes.

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