

Igam Ritual

KALINGA, KALINGA PROVINCE, NORTHERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *The contemporary Kalinga of the Cordillera mountains adhere to traditional practices while adjusting to the changing times. Even rites of passage are adapted to the requirements of modern-day society as seen in the practice of the ancient igam.*



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Playing bamboo percussion instruments, and chanting a victory song, Kalinga boys pass on to adolescence in the igam ritual to mark their approaching manhood.



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THE RITUAL IGAM marks the beginning of adolescence for males when they reach fifteen years old. They have to undergo an initiation to adulthood and establish sexual identity. In the preparatory rite called *lames ni wangwang*, the candidate goes to fish in the river or hunt in the forest. He returns after a successful trip, singing the *dinayan* or victory song, boasting of his success in bringing in the catch. The catch is the modern substitute for a head taken during actual headhunting ventures which was the traditional practice. The candidate has to jump over an *ardan* in the village entrance called the *sipotan*. The *sipotan* is like a point of passage that separates one's world and that of the enemy. The symbolic jumping is a physical expression of not leaving his soul or sanity in the outside world and a reunion with his own community.

Upon entry to the village, he strips off all his clothes (*karaka*) and wears only leaves to cover himself. "*Karakain nan kami*," he will

say, meaning that the people have taken away all his possessions, clothes, beads, weapons, everything he had. The *karaka* is a ritual believed to bestow good health and fortune to the people, transferring the luck of a successful warrior to them. It is also believed to make the candidate strong and sturdy like the warriors of the past. While approaching the village, he will sing the *dinayan* songs:

*Ag dinayan kamita
Nanmay kammi nanlames
Dinayan, Din-dinayan!
Ag man naed-naed day igam!
Umay kam't Tanudan
Umay kami't nan-urok
Umay gisa-ipnan nan kalalakian
Umanan nan igam*

The igam also entails the participation in the *baraknit* (inter-village conflict) and the kill or literally to bring home an enemy's head, even if only ritually. The warrior is given a *durao*, a warrior plume and is brought to the *kayaw* for the first time to join the virtual headhunting expedition.

The next day, a *mandadawak* is called to perform the *dawak*. There are chants and beating of the gongs. He dances holding a chicken. The *mandadawak* places a red scarf around his head where chicken feathers are stuck as plumes. Then the *mandadawak* ties the *baag* (g-string) around the candidate's waist. When he turns 20, he may now receive his tattoos. All companions are tattooed at the same time by the *manbatek*, a process that takes three days. This is the landmark solemnity for Ilubo (townspeople of Lubo) males, the passage from adolescence. Circumcision (*sigyat*) rituals can be performed after tattooing, which is a priority among the Ilubo males. Young women in puberty are also tattooed, just right after or before they begin to menstruate.

JTP