

Pagkombiti Marriage Rituals

MAMANUA, SURIGAO DEL NORTE PROVINCE, NORTHEASTERN MINDANAO ISLAND, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. *The Mamanua are the oldest extant population of the country, known to have existed in Mindanao as early as 50 to 60 thousand B.C. The area they inhabit has generally been occupied by the large Manobo group and they are concentrated only about Lake Mainit.*

A YOUNG MAN'S parents commonly negotiate with the girl's parents, with the kin group acting on their behalf if the parents are deceased. It takes about two and a half years to complete a dowry (*tande/hingkat*). *Saka sikrito* is the initial step in negotiating a marriage contract. The go-between for the boy and his parents is a relative who is good at speaking. He comes with the boy's parents bringing gifts (rice, palm toddy and a pig) to the girl's parents. The grandfather, uncle or father is the spokesperson for the girl. If the girl's parents are interested, they will eat with the boy's group. The girl's parents pass around a plate with betel-nut chew, and if each person dips in it, there is unity and acceptance.

The second step is the *tande/hingkat* when both set of parents meet to discuss the dowry (*in-azò*), which takes a long time. There can be as many as thirty-six kinds: enamel dinner plates, rice pots, *bolos*, money for rice, pig and wine for the wedding feast. The date of the wedding is also discussed.

After this is the *pangalagad*. The boy serves the girl's family for as long as it takes to complete the dowry. He can go home only to prepare the dowry. They may live as husband and wife, and even have children. He can only be freed to go home upon payment of the dowry. The girl's kin can also make personal requests from the boy's kin since the contract is between kin groups and not between individuals.

Nakaganas is the formal wedding event, whereas the *saka sikrito* and *tande/hingkat* are more of a betrothal. The feast is called *kombiti*. It includes all the activities on the occasion of a marriage, merrymaking, dancing, which is borrowed from Western culture, and drinking. Elders spend considerable time (two hours) exhorting the newlyweds on the obligations of married couples. The entire dowry is presented here, and after the activities, the girl goes to live in the home of the boy.

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The kawin starts with the sound of a gong. This is done on a lavishly decorated raised platform. Prominent members of the society are present. The bride and groom each have three sponsors. The bride sits first. The officiating imam recites the *Fatiba* (opening chapter of the Koran). The groom is queried about his religious duties. The imam grasps the thumb of the groom and presses their thumbs together. He steps on the right foot of the groom and presses their big toes together. The clasped hands are covered with a scarf then the imam asks the groom if he is willing to marry and to take care of the bride, to which the groom replies, “*Inshaallah*”. The groom goes to the bride and presses his right thumb onto her lips, then her forehead to indicate submission of the bride. The imam recites a final prayer which concludes the ceremony. The guests offer wishes to the couple and give gifts. There is dancing and a final thanksgiving to the guests.

Death and burial

The Kalagan recite the shahada to the dying person. Relatives and friends are informed about the death. Aid in any form is solicited (*nagpapalimos*) from them.

The dead is cleaned by the *uztadj*. If female, this is done by females; while if male, by males. *Tivalan* water (holy water) is poured in three cups. Unused needles are stuck on three pieces of ginger and placed in the cups while the *balyan* recites prayers. The water is then drunk from these cups. Water can be added when the original amount is consumed. This blessed water can also be sprinkled on persons possessed by evil spirits or used for washing them.

The dead is laid down on his right side, keeping his face in the direction of the holy *Kaaba* in Mecca. If the man is bearded, this beard is tied down onto his chest using a piece of cloth, his eyes closed gently. The hands and feet are laid straight and the body is wrapped in a white piece of cloth. The bench used in washing the body must also be washed and perfumed three to five times. While the cadaver is being washed, it is covered with cloth from the waist down to the ankles. There are no restrictions in washing a baby. A wife may be allowed to wash her husband, but not otherwise. The body is buried within 24 hours in accordance with Islamic practice.

The body is taken out through a window of the house for interment. At the burial site, an imam reads from the Koran before the body is lowered into the grave (*kobar*). A sacrificial animal (*aqiqa*) is offered to serve as the dead's transportation to the next world. A three-night wake follows where the Koran is read by several people. On the third day, a *kandari* is held. The imam prays for the soul of the dead. The family wears white; the color for mourning. The family gives *sadaka* to protect the deceased from punishment. This involves giving offerings to the poor. A cow is slaughtered to be feasted upon by the community. Food is also taken to the grave and the imam pours water over the marker to quench the dead's thirst. Nobody should shed tears. It is also taboo to weed or cut branches near the grave. Those who witness the burial must not look back at the grave when leaving. Those who joined the procession are obliged to bathe later. Rice is thrown at those who return to the bereaved family's house.

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