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Traditional *Tausug Pagkawin* in Sulu, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

In the history of the human race, intimate relationships have been normal. When civilization began to flourish, the norms and standards of societies also thrived and were preserved. Copulation is lawfully decreed to be bound by marriage. The marital norm is either prescriptive or proscriptive, depending on the societal standard. The Tausugs claim to be a Muslim tribe. Their marriage custom is traditional, however, but anchored on the Islamic principle where they are obliged to carefully observe the so-called ritual *Nikah* or *pagkawin*. Due to the geographical dimensions of the Sulu Archipelago, *pagkawin* among the Tausugs is of the same concept but slightly different in practice. This literature review aimed to describe the traditional *pagkawin* and its variations in five different municipalities of Sulu.

1. Introduction

Many believed that there is no culture today that is free from outside influence. The globalization era, facilitated by technological advancement, started from television in the early 1920s to the internet in the 1980s, has been influencing many aspects of life.¹ Countries such as USA, China, Japan and members of European Union have shaped global culture through technology and commerce. International interactions between and among states have carried cultural influences to each other. Philippines is no exception to this. Generally, colonialism has made the Filipinos open to outside cultural influences and specifically, the Tausug had received the same impact. Traditional Tausug *pagkawin* is marriage practices in Sulu.^{2,3} This literature review was aimed to describe the traditional *pagkawin* and their variations in five different municipalities of Sulu.

Pagkawin concept

The Tausug of Sulu have sustained their traditional practices through narratives both oral and written and lasted hundreds of years ago until it became evidences and proofs in today's practical basis. Among such traditional practices, the marital concept of *pagkawin* is considered as Tausug most valuable traditional values as it solidifies human relations socially, economically, culturally, and religiously. *Pagkawin* is the process of solemnizing marriage between a man and a woman. It is a symbol of civilization advancement for it is not only done superficially but meticulously followed. The formality of negotiation between two families starting from the *pagpanilas* (sensing possibility of acceptance) or *pagpasihil* (semi-formal or prenegotiation), *pagpangasawa* (final negotiation or formal proposal), *pagturul taymah* (re-deliberation), *pagtungguh tunang*

(fiancé/fiancée relationship), *pagkawah tugun* (final scheduling), *paghatud bugas* (sending of sacks of rice and other commodities as part of the demands or dowry), to *pagkawin* (formal legalization of marital union through solemnization) depicts sophisticated traditional practices that are honored and preserved from generation to generation.^{4,5}

Pagkawin also involves some significant processes or stages ranging from *pagliguh* (bathing both the groom and the bride), *wudoh* (ablution), *pagpassal* (coloring of fingernails), *pagkawin* (solemnization), *pagba'tal* (legal/nuptial touch), *pagtingkuang* or *pagbaid* (reversion or requesting the couple to the groom's residence while celebration is going on), *pagsalam* (spiritual exchange of greetings between the couple), and *pagkakat* (a fun viewing where the bride runs and need to be caught by the groom). If the later fails to catch, the viewers shouted "*kakaon sapall*" It has a deep meaning, where the groom is referred to an ordinary rooster who feeds on the residue of grated coconut after it was being squeezed compared to a fighting rooster who feeds well on the unhusked rice.³

Tausug norms before Pagkawin

The salient feature of the Tausug wedding tradition is that, from *pagpanilas* to *pagkawin*, the family of both parties (man and woman do not directly participate but through representatives. The pattern includes indirect courtship with gifts for the bride's family and negotiations by the intermediaries. Marriage is considered as alliance of families, not just of the couple involved; and since kinship is bilateral (true of all Filipino groups), relatives on both sides have the right to voice their feelings on any proposed union. However, in most cases of the Tausug, the family of a man will directly participate in the *pagpanilas* or *pagpasihil*. It is a semiformal negotiation where the parents of a man accompanied by respected personality either from the family, the *barangay* captain or an *imam* who is expert in negotiation go to the woman's house to converge semi-proposal. It is done secretly with only few members of the family are informed. In these five municipalities, it is here in this

first step where they bring the *Tapil dilah* (bridal gift) which is usually in the form of jewelry or gold ring. In Patikul municipality, it could be a one cartoon cigarette or money that worth one thousand pesos. *Tapil dilah* is prepared ready as remedy for any unintentional shortcomings and misunderstanding that occurred or somewhat a penalty given to amend the inappropriate manners and speeches rendered during sensitive negotiation. *Pagpasihil* or *pagpanilas* is always the first step in the marital process because it assures the possibility of acceptance and an avoidance of embarrassment or insult whether by rejection or unaffordable demands (*sukat kahukaw*).^{3,4}

Pagpangasawa

Pagpangasawa is a mere expression of intent that the son or brother of so and so would like to marry the daughter of so and so. There is no assurance of acceptance yet. The father of the girl usually invites the paternal and maternal relatives of their daughter and decide whether to accept the marriage proposal or not. Assuming that the decision is acceptance, the next step is to decide as to what are the dowry will be. Once everything is listed, it will be then sent to the parent of the boy. If they can afford the dowry, then they will set the date for the *pagtural tayma'*. If the dowry is beyond their means, then they will officially withdraw the proposal.⁵

Pagpangasawa is considered as formal and official deliberation of marriage proposal. It is metaphorically term in other Sulu localities such as *parang* as *buyuh bunga* which implies the completeness of boy's family preparation. Albeit, they are not hundred percent of assurance, but they are confident enough to do so based on their perception during the *pagpanilas* or *pagpasihil*. Rejection and withdrawal is also possible but depends upon the outcome of the negotiation.⁶

Pagsampang or pagtural taymah

Pagsampang is a celebration proving the acceptance of marriage proposal or *pagpangasawa*. Handling over of the dowry can take place in this part

either half or whole of it. Nonetheless, the man's party can also choose to give it later. Tausug delicacies or *bangbang sug* and other modern delicacies wrapped in a colorful and transparent cellophanes, soft drinks, and others will be brought to the woman's family. *Maligay*, *lukun*, and *pamilas* are provided too during this stage. These are called *pakpak burak* in the municipality of Parang. If the girl had studied Qur'an under a *guru* (teacher), and her parent had not yet made the required *maligay* for her *guru* during *pagtammam* (graduation on the Qur'an study), the *maligay* will be given to her teacher as *lulukatan* or redemption. The *lukun* represents the foundation of the family and the love of the couple. As for the *pamilas*, it is a demand or will of the woman's dead forefathers, usually *Manggagabbang* (traditional Tausug singers) or a glass jar full of coins to be kept and could be spent only for a spiritual *duwaa* for the said ancestors. In the municipality of Talipao, it is in this *pagsampang* where they bring the *tapil dilah* which is accordingly a compensation given in advance as the pronouncement of asking the woman's heart is heavy and very sensitive issue in life specially on the part of the woman. One important thing in this deliberation is the *pagkawa tugun* or the finalization of the date of wedding which is the woman's party who usually decides for it.^{6,7}

Pagpanunggu tunang

While in the state of fiancé/fiancée relation, and no date for the wedding is yet agreed upon, the groom to be has to carefully observe and do things that might prove his capability to be a worthwhile husband and son in-law by showing kindness, generosity, and virtue to his prospective wife and parents in-laws. He will in some house chores like getting water or gathering and chopping fire woods. The fiance is even allowed to sleep in the house of his fiancée, but of course not together in one room. Also, in some Municipalities like Patikul, the fiance gives provision to his fiancée during this stage even just once a week, which is in the past it usually consisted of rice and dried fish. His prospective parent in-law on the other hand, are

observing the character, behavior and the true personality of their prospective son-in-law that once they perceive something wrong with him, they can annul the bond of the two anytime. This called in *tausug pagbaibad* (annulment). *Pagtungguh tunang*, is for a certain period of time depends upon the dealing, either weeks, a month, or even years till the man's party is ready for the wedding day.⁸

Paghatud bugas

Paghatud bugas is a Tausug implicative term for "sending the rice". Implicative in the sense that not just sacks of rice that is going to be sent but other commodities as well. It is to be done, one day before the wedding, where the family of the groom deliver all the commodities requested by the bride's family. It is then, part of the demands usually 20 – 30 sacks of rice, cigarettes, cow, and sometimes the whole dowry. In the municipality of Patikul, part of the demands to be brought on this day are *salingkat*, *lutuhan*, and *durul jambangan*. *Lutuhan* usually contains 100 *panyam* in it and *salingkat* (in other Tausug elders, *salingkat* is termed as *palanggung*) is in pairs. Usually 200 pairs, each pair contains 5 *panyam* a total of 1,000. These are given to the invited guests of the bride's family. In the Municipality of Parang, Sulu, *palanggung* is brought during *pagturul taymah*. While *durul jambangan* is in a decorative *maligay* form contains a native delicacy out of powdered rice called *durul* in black color. It is kept untouched until three days where the *pagsalam* is to be done.^{1,3}

Pagpassal

Pagpassal is inseparable in the customary practice of Tausug marriage. Varied as always, it takes place differently in time by Municipalities. Some do this on the day before the wedding like in Patikul and Pangutaran (Panglima Tahil). while others do this on the day of the wedding. Before the ritual Nikah takes place, the finger nails of both the groom and the bride should be colored by *passal* (plant whose leaves used for coloring finger nails in red-orange or purple). The *mamassal* is a boy and a girl of complete parents.

Usually, they are at the same time a groomsman and bride's maid. They do their task by gender respectively. Practically, the *pagpassal* is done first to the groom before the bride of course with *lugu* or *langan* (Tausug tales sang rhythmically by the *pangluluguh* "Tausug singer").⁴

Pagpassal seems easy but it is actually not, because the traditional Tausug bride does not allow easily her nails to be colored. This is due to the bashfulness and also the culture of the Tausug wherein during all the wedding events, a bride should appear shy and not to show full willingness and excitement even may be deep down she is in love with the groom. *Pagpassal* is very important considering the fact that, it is provided with a tray of foods called *dulang pamassalan*.

Pagkawin proper

Pagkawin in Tausug traditional practices has many processes. First, the groom and the bride should take ablution (*wudhu*) and wear a Tausug dress of elegancy. Second, the three *dulang* (tray) should be ready usually prepared and brought from the party of the groom. *Dulang pagkawinan*, *dulang pamassalan*, *dulang pa muhmeen*. *Dulang pagkawinan* is to be eaten by the couple after solemnization. Its *sampul* (cooked rice pressed into a basin or large bowl which is then overturned on a tray) is in three layers combination. The first layer is colored black (*pu'tan itum*), the second layer is white (*pu'tan putih*), and the third layer is yellow (*pu'tan putih* colored by turmeric to make it yellow). All of these are cooked with coconut milk (*gatah lahing*); walled with *panyam* (in the Patikul culture, no *panyam* in the *dulang pagkawinan*) and with roasted chicken and rooster on its top and a number of boiled eggs including the soup of a roasted chicken/rooster placed inside the squash (chicken and rooster are boiled first before it is roasted). The manner of eating is in accordance with the tradition where the bride and the groom drinks first the soup of the chicken/rooster before they take the first three bates which begins from the bottom layer of the food. Some Arabic pronouncements are made: first the word

Subhanallah is said in (black); the second at the middle of the food (white, the word *Alhamdulillah*, and the third at the top food (yellow) *Allahu Akbar*. Wherever the bride takes her bate in the first three, the groom will do the same (for every taste on a food, they always took a bate on the chicken, rooster, and eggs). The bones of the chicken and rooster should not be broken so as the egg shells should not be thrown anywhere). After the first three bates, they could eat to their satisfaction but they are not allowed to eat it again once they are done. The remaining food in the tray will be offered to the young girls and boys for the purpose of *kumawah lihi* (hope to be wedded next). *Dulang pamassalan* is prepared like *dulang pagkawinan* but there is only one roasted rooster. It implies the unity and progress of the future husband and wife once they become independent from their parents. It is in this *dulang* where the *imam* performs the *duwaa salamat* (thanksgiving or safety prayers).⁵

The *dulang pa muhmeen* is part of offerings to the dead ancestors and to all the *muhmeen*. *Muhmeen* literally refers to all Muslims *bar iyman* (true believers in good faith/Muslim pious). But to the Tausug, it refers synonymously to the persons who had passed away that are believed to be free and purified. Third, the *imam* (religious leader), the *pangluluguh* (traditional singer), and the *mamassal* (traditional artist) should be ready usually requested from the groom's party. The *imam* is the one who solemnizes the wedding by reading the religious rite *kawin* (marriage) and other ritual prayers. The *pangluluguh* is the one who sings (*maglangan*) in order that the door of the bridal room will be opened by the bride's party. Traditionally, before *nikah* takes place, the bride is always locked in a certain room (bridal room). Together with her bridesmaids, her party never open the door without *lugu*, a form of *kissa* or tales sang rhythmically usually in Tausug dialect. She will do her task during *pagpassal* and *pagba'tal* (legal/nuptial touch). Since the couple is in ablution (*wudhu*) it needs to be nullified. The manner of *pagba'tal* is by touching the bride's forehead three times by groom's right thumb with a stick of cigarette to be dropped on

the bride's lap. Before each touch happened, the *imam*, held the groom's right hand and turning it around the bride's head three times. The *pagba'tal* will happen after the *pagkawin* (solemnization) and it signifies broken or losing virginity on the part of the bride. And since it is the first touch of the husband, it implies as his partial liberation or possession over his wife. The *mamassal* (boy and girl of complete parents) are the one who will do the *pagpassal* (from the word *passal*, a certain plant used by the early Tausug for coloring their nails in red- orange or purple). These roles are done following gender arrangement accordingly.

In Islamic perspective, *pagkawin* is unlawful without a *wali*. It is actually a permission, a clearance, and a consent of willingness from the right person among the family of the bride usually the father. With the absence of the father, her grandfather, uncle (biological brother of her father), brother mentally fit and a freeman could be a *wali*. These four steps or processes of *pagkawin* are all applicable to all types of Tausug marriage such as legal negotiation/engagement (*pagpangasawa*), elopement (*pagdakop*), abduction (*pagguyud/paglundat*), force marriage (*pagsarahakan tugol* and *pagpasumbaih*), *paguwih magbana*, and *tahakkim*. *Manguwih magbana* and *tahakkim* has the same concept for it is the girl that goes to the house of the boy and tell the parents that she is willing to become the wife of their son. But the difference is that, the former has a dowry (*ungsod*) that depends on the prescribed law of the municipality (sometimes the parents of the girl do not stick to the prescribed law, instead they demanded on their own). Some reasons for it to happen are; pregnancy due to unlawful intimacy and caught dating by the strict parents or relatives of the girl. While the latter is understood to be a real submission and dowry is not really a matter whether there is or none at all. Mostly, the one who did this *tahakkim* is a religious woman usually separated and widow that is knowledgeable of her duty to Allah. It is believed that a widow and a separated woman could give *wali* of her own because she had been wedded before.

Next, is the *nikah* or *pagkawin* (solemnization of marriage). While the bride is in the bridal room, the groom is outside with the *imam* who will lead the marriage ritual. Before it takes place, the emissary is ordered to go to the bridal room, and knock the door three times asking the name of the bride also three times. Once he gets the answer, he would tell the bride by mentioning her name for example, "Khadija, you are going to marry (mentioning the groom's name for example) Ahmad". This is done three times. Most Tausugs always used the name Fatimah and Muhammad before the real name of the bride and groom during *nikah* for example "Fatimah Khadija" and "Muhammad Ahmad". But some knowledgeable men do not follow this unless the real name of the bride and groom is Fatimah and Muhammad respectively. The reason behind is that, in the real sense, Muhammad (SAW) and Fatimah (RA) is father and daughter which is totally forbidden. The bride will give her ring (from the groom's party and had given to the bride earlier during *pagpassal* and the ring is called *mahar basingan* which implies the totality of the dowry. Thus, the bride had to take good care and never attempt to sell or least it no matter hardship is) to the emissary as a proof of "yes". The emissary will take his leave with the ring giving it to the *imam* to put it on the middle finger (*jaimanis*) of the groom's right hand. And then, the *imam* had to start the *khutbah nikah*, a religious sermon/orientation on how to be a good and responsible husband, son in-law, and father as well. When he is done with the orientation, he tells the groom to do the same as his by positioning their right foot stand on the calcaneus/heel (*tikud tikud*) and their toes against each other so as their right hands and their thumbs covered with handkerchief and eye-to-eye contact. The groom assisted by his groomsman that gives signal by pressing him from the back for his immediate answers on the ritual *nikah/kawin* orated by the *imam*. The oration begins with, "Ahmad...by the power vested in me, I am obliged to let you marry Khadija..." with groom's immediate answer with excitement, "I will accept the said *nikah* lawfully to me!" This is said once or three times depends on how

the groom responded to it. Then, the *imam* followed up the final oration such as, “*O’si’kom ibadallah*” where he had to respond it in the same manner, “*Insha’Allah!*” The oration is repeated three times so as the answers of the groom. Then, the *imam* leads the groom to the bridal room for *pagba’tal* (explained in the third process) and the *paggiling*. The *paggiling* is turning the couple (they are now couple because they are legally wedded as husband and wife) to the straight position. One of the early Tausug norms is, the bride will always conservative in nature. She does not show excitement no matter how happy she is. Thus, after the *pagba’tal* (nuptial touch), when her husband seats awkwardly beside her, she is in a side view position. So, the bridesmaid and the groomsman assigned will have to turn them three times until they are put into a straight position and close to each other. This is one of the most exciting scenes in the wedding ceremony where the relatives of the couple start to make fun of them by asking the husband if who is the name of his wife, how he sweetly addressed her, and how he said goodbye to her. And then, they will be requested to come out of the bridal room for *duwaa salamat* (thanks giving/safety prayers), to eat the prepared *dulang* (especially *dulang pagkawinan* explained in the third process), and for public scene. It should be noted that *pagkawin* is of two kinds. The first is the public one “*kawin mahalayak* or *kawin ha katiluagan*” that we had discussed. The second is the so called “*kawin duwa ruwa*” where most Tausug in the early times usually did this. It depends upon the acceptance of the couple and how they valued their relations as husband and wife. Some believed that if they do this kind of *kawin*, their relationship as husband and wife will last forever till the hereafter. The knowledge on this kind of *kawin* could be sought from a few sagacious Tausug.^{6,7}

Tausug norms after pagkawin

Consumption of *dulang/durul jambangan/pagsalam* shortly after the *pagkawin*, the newlywed couple is now ready to consume the special food prepared for them especially the *dulang*

pagkawinan. In Patikul, a *durul jambangan* in a decorative semi *maligay* form where flowers with stem poled into a *durul* is prohibited for everyone to touch it except the couple. During the night of *pagsalam*, it will be consumed by the couple. Some said that a bride will take one thing secretly either a flower or a candy decorated in the flowers and she hide it wherever she wants. If his husband fails to find it, he cannot get what he desires from his wife. Meaning, he cannot impose his absolute right on his wife as a lawful husband during this first night and even longer unless he could find the said hidden thing.

Pagba’tal (legal/nuptial touch)

After the pronouncement of marital legalization, the groom will then be led by *imam* to the bridal room. When the groom is asked how he addressed and say goodbye to his wife, usually he said, “my endearment for her is *hi rang piyagtuyuan piyagbugas sapian*”. Others preferred to call theirs as “*dang, lasa, dayangku*, and among others. Saying goodbye is depending upon their expression. But with the presence of the both relatives, and for them to be entertained, some grooms rhythmically said, “*mari pa ako dayang ko, pa hansipak pa liyu, misan aun pa cen ko, mag asawa dih na ako*”, which means, “I have to leave my darling, to the other side beyond, even I have still money, I will never marry again”. This implies his great love to his wife.

Pagtingkuang or pagbaid

Pagtingkuang is one of the marital norms where the newlywed together with relatives and friends is requested to the groom’s residence while the celebration is going on for the purpose of public viewing for the guests of the groom’s family. However, it is case to case bases. If the *pagkawin* is done first before celebration, then, it is a norm after *pagkawin*. But if the celebration is done first, it is a norm before *pagkawin*. It is observed differently by municipalities. In some parts of Parang they do it before *pagkawin* while others such as Patikul, Pangutaran (Panglima Tahil) and Talipao, they do it

after the *pagkawin*. *Pagtingkuang* or *pabaid* is done for the people of both families to witness the legalization of marital union and for the couple's families to be cleared from the watchful eyes of the gossipers. In this case, both parties (of the groom and the bride) has to prepare a well-decorated stage or in a certain part of the house. While the couple is on the public, the families and friends of the bride are entertained with different foods and drinks served in the process. After a couple of hours, the newlywed will go back to the house of the bride where they will stay until *dum salam*.

Pagjaga

The idea of *pagjaga* is the newlywed should not fall asleep the whole night after the *pagkawin*. Some friends and *pandalas* (groomsmen and bridesmaids) will accompany them in this event. It is believed that whosoever (groom and bride) remains awake, will have a longer life. Hence, the couple had to resist not falling asleep by any means such as non-stop drinking of coffee, telling funny stories, card games, and so and so forth.

Pagsalam

Finally, the *pagsalam* is the last to be observed in the Tausug traditional marriage practice. just like the *Pagkawin*, the couple will wear beautiful dresses.^{7,8} It is the process of exchanging spiritual greetings between the groom and the bride. Their right thumbs will be positioned opposite to each other so as their big toes and eye to eye contact like what was done by the *imam* and the groom during the marriage ritual. The groom will be the first to greet the bride by saying, "*assalamualaykom ya ()*", and the bride will reply by saying, "*wa 'alaykomussalam ya ()*". It is said three times. When it is done, a special *dulang and durul jambangan* will be served for the two to share while some members of the family from both sides are observing the exciting moment. It is in this stage where the *Pagkakat* is observed. The idea of *dum salam* is actually the first night for the couple to sleep together in the same bed. Like honey moon, giving

them an ample time to be closed to each other. After the *dum salam*, the marriage is finally consummated.

In the culture of the early Parang, *pagsalam* in marriage is also of two kinds like that of *pagkawin*. The first is the *salam katiluagan* or public *salam*, and the second is the *salam duwaruwa* which is secretly between the couple only. It serves as a key for the husband to exercise his absolute right to own his wife. But, if his wife has the knowledge of this said *salam*, he cannot just easily do what he desired unless he is also knowledgeable about it. If he knew nothing then, he needs to find someone who knows about it or he need the help of his wife's Guro (teacher) for him to conquer the holy fortress of the divine eye.

2. Conclusion

Pagkawin or Tausug marriage practice with its sophisticated processes, procedures and materials attached to it is an indication of high level of cultural orientation. As most sociologists argued, culture is a manifestation of advanced civilization because culture is considered as something that describes people, group and society's behavior. The Tausug culture is gradually disappearing because some preferred modernized practices partly symbolizing development and social acceptability. Without allocating some time and interests in knowing and writing the Tausug culture and tradition, western values, modernization and globalization may somehow replace what has been preserved by the early Tausug in Sulu. However, by engaging in studying and writing about Tausug culture and tradition, the Tausug identity will not only be preserved but also acknowledged as original and acceptable.

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