

## ***Barangay Arimbay's Indigenous Verbal Lore: An Anthology of Riddles***

Shirley N. Maloles, Bicol University College of Arts and Letters, Philippines  
May Antoinette S. Imran, Bicol University, Philippines

The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2015  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Folklore expresses the cultural identity of a people which include shared beliefs, customs, practices and forms of verbal art. Folklore such as legends, folktales, poems, songs, myths, rituals, proverbs, and riddles that are passed on from one generation to another by word of mouth and preserved only by memory. One of the most popular entertainment of the folk is riddling. This study focuses on riddles indigenous to a place known as Arimbay in Legazpi City, Philippines. The objectives of this study was to anthologize existing Riddles in Barangay Arimbay, Legazpi City by; 1.) collecting various types of riddles from informants of the chosen locale; 2.) validate the authenticity of the texts (riddles) as folklore material 3.) document information on the personal profile of respondents; 4.) translate riddles from the vernacular into English; 5.) classify the riddles according to types; and, 6. include the riddles in the collection of existing Arimbay Verbal Lore.

This research is one of the studies of a big project entitled, "*Barangay Arimbay's Indigenous Verbal Lore*": An Anthology. The study has three phases. Phase I is the collection/compilation of riddles, Phase II is the analyses of the collected riddles and Phase III is the preparation of instructional materials out of the gathered data based from its analyses.

The study is a descriptive ethnographic-literary research which employed methodologies such as immersion, participant-observation and unstructured interviews. The researcher collected, validated, documented and translated the vernacular to the English language ninety riddles and classified them into five types namely; riddles on persons, animals, plants, things and erotic or sensual riddles.

Keywords: Philippines Albay, Arimbay, Legazpi City, Indigenous Verbal Lore, folklore, riddles, Anthology

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

Much of the oral ancient literature of the Filipinos shows customs and traditions in everyday life as traced in folk stories, old plays, short stories, proverbs and riddles. For Filipinos a riddle is a kind of folk speech characterized by very short statements about an object (Kahayon 2000). It makes use of metaphor, irony and descriptive language. In most primitive communities, riddling serves as a game the object of which is to identify the object referred to in the text.

The locale of the study, Barangay 47- Arimbay is a coastal barangay of Legazpi City, Albay, Philippines. It is located four kilometers north of Legazpi City proper. It is bounded on the north by Barangay Bigaa; on the east by the Albay Gulf; on the northwest by Barangay Bagong Abre; on the southwest by Barangay San Joaquin; and on the south by Barangay Rawis. Barangay Arimbay has a total land area of 151.4 hectares, of which 33% or 49.99% hectares is estimated to be build-up areas, classified as residential, commercial, light industrial (non-polluted and non-hazardous) and institutional. Topographically, the locale has upland, lowland, coastal and riverside communities where folklore flourishes.

Jan Brunvand claimed that folklore comprises the unrecorded traditions of a people in which it includes both the form and content of these traditions and their style or technique of communication from person to person. It is the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture that encompasses all knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples. (Brunvand 1978)

Riddles are found in folk literature throughout the world. The function of the riddle, being that of education and entertainment, remains true in hundreds of cultures. The definition of a riddle is found in written and oral tradition among American Indian, Chinese, Russian, Finnish, Hungarian, Dutch, Filipino and many other cultures.

Long before the Spaniards and other foreigners landed on Philippine shores, early Filipinos already had their own literature stamped in the history of their race. The Spaniards who came to the Philippines found out that ancient Filipinos were really fond of poetry, songs, stories, riddles and proverbs. (Kahayon 2000).

Riddles become a favorite pastime of the people. Known as "*Bugtong*" in Tagalog folk literature, a riddle is usually composed rhyming couplets presenting an enigma to be solved by guessing. There are usually six to fourteen syllables per line but many are heptasyllabic. (Kintanar 1996)

In this study, a riddle is defined as a form of a guessing game or joke consisting of confusing, misleading, or puzzling questions, statements or phrases having a double or veiled meaning which requires a witty answer. It is an indirect description of some things, persons, animals, plants or even something sensual or erotic, framed in such a way to challenge the reader/ listener to identify it.

## **Materials And Methods**

This study was primarily conducted with the intent to collect riddles in Barangay Arimbay, Legazpi City, Philippines, to document and help preserve the slowly diminishing traditional verbal lore on riddles in the locale. The first phase of the project included the collection, validation, documentation and translation of the various riddles gathered from the said locale. The researchers employed methods of immersion, participant-observation, focused group discussion, house to house visits and unstructured interviews in the artificial context of folklore research. The artificial context takes place when the researchers arrange for a meeting with their specific informants drawing out data from their repertoire of folklore material. Unstructured interviews included the demographic profile of respondents as well as the three-generation vertical test and the five version horizontal test of Dr. Arsenio Manuel as a form of validation for generational transmission. Recording of data through pencil and paper method, as well as the use of digital recorders were part of the documentation process.

The gathered and validated riddles were classified according to types. Each riddle was translated into English as faithful to the original text and context of the document as possible. After proper documentation and translation, the legends were included as part of the anthology of Barangay Arimbay's indigenous verbal lore.

## **Results And Discussion**

The study collected ninety riddles, twenty six of these were repetitions meaning that a number of riddles were repeated or had been recited by several respondents. The gathered riddles were classified according to types. The researcher was able to classify them into five types namely; riddles on persons, riddles on animals, riddles on plants, riddles on things, and sensual or erotic riddles. The riddles on persons, animals, plants and things were classified based on their answers. However, sensual and erotic riddles were classified based on the questions or statements.

Riddles on persons are questions, statements, or phrases about some of the things a person does every day. It also includes indirect descriptions of things, human and their body parts, framed in such a way to challenge the reader/listener to identify the object referred to. The answers to this type of riddle all pertains to a person and/ or any part of his/her body. The study was able to gather nine riddles on persons, three of these were repetitions.

A total of fourteen riddles on animals were classified by the researcher. Seven of them are repetitions. These are personifications in the form of questions and statements describing a subject's ability to do something even at a very young age. The answers to this type of riddle are animals or insects found in the locality.

Riddles on plants are also personifications in the form of puzzling questions, statements or phrases regarding persons, animals, plants, or things which require answers about name of plants abundant in the locale of the study. A total of twenty riddles were classified under this type six of them were repetitions.

Statements or phrases about the life of a person, animal, plant, or thing were classified as riddles on things. Thirty riddles were gathered under this classification. Five of them were repetitions.

Fourteen riddles were classified as sensual or erotic riddles. Five of these were repetitions. These are funny, puzzling questions, statements having doubled or veiled meaning which often refer to the human genitalia. This type of riddle requires witty answers about some things, animals or plants.

### Sample Collected Riddles

Vernacular (Bicol)	English
<b>Riddles on Persons</b>	
1. <i>Kapkapon mo ta yaon Hilingon mo ta wara. - TALINGA</i>	It's there when you feel it. But it's not there, when you (try to) see it. - EARS
2. <i>Ano ang enot na guigibohon bago magkaturog? - MATUKAW</i>	What is the first thing to do before you sleep? - SIT (on the bed)
3. <i>Anong kahoy na pag nag bunga Daing dahon. - LOLONG KALBO</i>	What tree loses its leaves when it bears fruit?- A BALD HEADED GRANDFATHER
4. <i>Bago magkarigos Ano enot na dudumugon? - SU MAMARA</i>	Before you take a bath, what part of your body will you wet first? - WHATEVER IS DRY
5. <i>Duwang anghel Nakakasakat sa langit. - MATA</i>	Two angels reaching the sky. - EYES
6. <i>Patok sanang patok Dai nauutas. - MATA</i>	It chops and chops yet cannot cut. - EYES
7. <i>Naglalakaw ka, pigsusunod ka. - ANINO</i>	It follows you as you walk.- SHADOW
<b>Riddles on Animals</b>	
1. <i>Saday pa si nene Tatao na magtahi. - LAWA</i>	Although Nene is still young, she already knows how to sew. - SPIDER
2. <i>Sadit pa si Nonoy; tatao na magtagoy. - DULI DULI</i>	Although Nonoy is still young, he already knows how to whistle. - CRICKET
3. <i>Sadit pa si Nonoy Tatao na magtagoy. - BAYONG</i>	Although Nonoy is still young, he already knows how to whistle. - BIRD
4. <i>Sadit pa si Nonoy; tatao na maglangoy. - SIRA</i>	Although Nonoy is still young, he already knows how to swim. - FISH
5. <i>Ano daa ang pinakadakula na sira. - SAP SAP</i>	What is the biggest fish? - "SAP SAP"
6. <i>Pag nakatindog hababa Pag nakatukaw halangkaw. - AYAM</i>	Short when it stands Tall when seated. - DOG
7. <i>Sadayuton na agta, Marayon pumana. - NAMOK</i>	A tiny "agta" expert with his arrow. - MOSQUITO
8. <i>Anong hayop an bako sigurado? - BAKA</i>	What animal is not sure of itself? - COW (baka means maybe)

9. <i>Harong ko sa madugi Daing gapos daing harigi Pero nagbabaribari.- HANIT</i>	My house in the mud has no post nor binds But constantly bends. - CRAB (in the mud or fresh water)
<b>Riddles on Plants</b>	
1. <i>Sira sa Maribeles Sa irarom an kiskis.- LADA</i>	The fish in Maribeles Has scales underneath. - PEPPER
2. <i>Tubig sa mirisbiris Sa irarom an kiskis. - LADA</i>	The water in “mirisbiris” Has scales underneath. - PEPPER
3. <i>Sarong prinsesa nakatukaw sa tasa. - KASOY</i>	A princess seated in a cup. - CASHEW
4. <i>Senyora nakatukaw sa tasa. - KASOY</i>	A lady seated in a cup. - CASHEW
5. <i>Ano an prutas na an pisog sa luwas. - KASOY</i>	What fruit has its seed outside? - CASHEW
6. <i>Anong prutas an dakol ang mata. - PINYA</i>	What fruit has so many eyes? - PINEAPPLE
7. <i>Anong prutas an daing pisog. - PINYA</i>	What fruit has no seed? - PINEAPPLE
8. <i>Korona ni David Pano ki espada.- PINYA</i>	David’s crown is full of swords. - PINEAPPLE
9. <i>Langit sa itaas; daga sa ibabaw May tubig sa tahaw. - NIYOG</i>	Heaven above; earth on top With water in the middle. - COCONUT
10. <i>Tubig sa rikan dikan Dai nauuranan-. SABAW KAN NIYOG</i>	Water in the “rikan dikan”. Doesn’t get wet by rain. - COCONUT WATER
11. <i>Tubig sa rikan dikan Dai nauuranan.- NIYOG</i>	Water in the “rikan dikan”. Doesn’t get wet by rain. - COCONUT
12. <i>Sarong kaban, duwang gadan. - MANI</i>	One coffin; two corpses. - PEANUT
13. <i>Arin ang gulayon na dai nadudumog. - NATONG</i>	What vegetable doesn’t get wet? GABI LEAVES
14. <i>Harong ni Santa Ana Palibot ki kampana. - TAPAYAS</i>	Santa Ana’s house is surrounded by bells. - PAPAYA
15. <i>Anong bulong an madunong? - ANUNANG</i>	What medicine has wisdom? ANUNANG
16. <i>Tiktikan, tiktikan, bukasán, bulan. - AMPOL</i>	Hack, split, open to see (get) the moon. - “AMPOL”
17. <i>Naghaleng namimilipilik, nagsumpang dai na mabalik. - LANGKOY KAN NIYOG</i>	It left twisting and jerking and sworn never to return. - DRIED COCONUT LEAVES (“PALAPA”)
18. <i>Naglalakaw ka, pigtitikwil ka. - AWOT</i>	It pokes you while you walk. - GRASS
<b>Riddles on Things</b>	
1. <i>Kaptan mo ang buntot ko Ta malangoy ako. – TABO</i>	Hold my tail, so I can swim. DIPPER
2. <i>Buto’t balat; naglalayog. -</i>	A flying bone flesh. - KITE

<i>BURADOL</i>	
3. <i>Uya na uyan na Dai man nahihiling. – PAROS</i>	Here it comes; here it comes; Yet cannot be seen. - WIND
4. <i>Su nakawaltak maogma Su nakapurot dagit. - ATOT</i>	He who has left or let go of something is happy. He who receives gets angry. - FART
5. <i>Alabaon na balagon Manlain lain an dahon. - BALAYBAYAN</i>	A very long vine With different leaves.- CLOTHESLINE
6. <i>Sadit na bulod Dai makaputan. - IPOT</i>	A mound that cannot be held. - POOH
7. <i>May harong ako sa pungtod Saro sanang tukod. - TUBO</i>	My house in the mound Has only one post. - PIPE
8. <i>Magayon na daraga Tigkakaon an sadiri niya.- KANDILA</i>	A beautiful lady eating (consuming) herself. - CANDLE
9. <i>Kun kasuarin ginadan Iyo man an paghalaba kan buhay. - KANDILA</i>	The time it was killed; was the time its life was extended. - CANDLE
10. <i>Takot ako sa saro Alagad dai ako takot sa duwa. - TULAY</i>	I am scared of one but not of two. - BRIDGE
11. <i>Kun magdaralagan burulukon Kan nag ugpa urubanon. - UKOL</i>	They curled as they ran And turned gray haired as they landed. - WAVES
12. <i>Naghaleng bulokon, nagtungang ubanon. - UKOL</i>	They curled as they ran And turned gray haired as they arrived. - WAVES
13. <i>Anong kabayo an pigsasanglian? - KABAYO KAN PLANTSAHAN</i>	What horse gets dressed up? - IRONING BOARD
14. <i>Nagtago si Pedro Nagluwas su payo. - PAKO</i>	Peter has gone into hiding, yet his head was protruding. NAIL
15. <i>Bako hayop, bako tawo Nagbabado ki plantsado.- ULONAN</i>	Not an animal nor a man; but wears pressed or ironed clothes. - PILLOW
16. <i>Tigbas sanang tigbas Dai nauutas.- TUBIG</i>	(Despite) Incessant chopping, it doesn't break. - WATER
17. <i>Pag kaipuhan mo itatapok mo. Pag dai mo kaipuhan isasaray mo. - ANGKLA/ Lambat</i>	When needed it is thrown; when not needed it is kept. - ANCHOR/ fishing net
18. <i>Kiskis ki buwaya, Naghapon pagbatada. - BUBUNGAN</i>	Crocodile's scales exposed under the heat of the sun the whole day. - ROOF (corrugated galvanized iron)
19. <i>Ikog ki amid nagsabloy su bukid. - DALAN</i>	The tail of a bobcat bends over the hill. - WINDING ROAD
20. <i>Pighihiling mo, pighihiling ka. - SALMING</i>	It stares back at you, as you look at it. - MIRROR
21. <i>Binukag su linanot, Nagdarala-</i>	As the porridge was stirred, the vessel sailed.

<i>gan su sakayan. - DINARANG</i>	- (anything) GRILLED
<b>Sensual / Erotic Riddles</b>	
1. <i>Piniripisi ko, tuminuog. Dai napiritan na makalaog. - TURSIDO</i>	As I squeezed, it stiffened; yet could not be forced to enter. - THREAD
2. <i>Inugsob, ginilugilu. Binulnot, nagtaragdo. – SAGWAN</i>	Thrust, shaken, withdrawn, dripped. - PADDLE
3. <i>Nag iik –ik na si may mo Sige pa si pay mo. – VIOLIN</i>	Your mother is already giggling; yet your father is still insisting. – VIOLIN
4. <i>Sarong tindog Duwang bilog. – 100</i>	One erect; two rounds. - 100
5. <i>Takyag kasi takyag; Pusod kasi pusod May luho sa tahaw; Nyaon an kaogmahan. - GITARA</i>	Shoulder to shoulder; navel to navel With a hole in the middle, where lies delight. - GUITAR

### Conclusions And Recommendations

From the collected data it is evident that riddles are indigenous to the different *puroks* of Barangay Arimbay, Legazpi City. However, the number of informants and the riddles gathered reveal that only a few old folks from the said locale remember and recite riddles. Though some still recognize and appreciate the recitation of riddles, others don't seem to comprehend its significance. With the growing number of available forms of recreation such as television, movies, billiards, videoke, etc., many residents of the locale particularly the younger generation, opt for these modern and more relevant ones. Hence, the genre undeniably is slowly diminishing in number. The timely intervention of the study was fruitful. For better understanding of the significance of verbal lore such as riddles, it is therefore recommended that an analysis of riddles be done in accordance with the mechanics of poetry on form and content. A further study into the nature, role and function of said indigenous lore to the Arimbay community should also be looked into during the second phase of the research while development and production of instructional materials will be third phase and the final output of the subject under study.

## References

Mateo, G.E.C. (2001). *The Philippines: A Story of a Nation*. Hawaii. University of Hawaii.

Population of the Philippines. (n.d.). In *Worldometers online*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/philippines-population/>.

Putnam, J.F. (1964). *Folklore: A Key to Cultural Understanding*. Retrieved from [http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed\\_lead/el\\_196403\\_putnam.pdf](http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_196403_putnam.pdf).

Philippines. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines>.

Brunvand, Jan. (1978). *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Kahayon, A.H. & Zulueta, C.A. (2000). *Philippine Literature through the Years*. National Book Store.

Kintanar, T.B. & Associates. (1996). *The University of the Philippines Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos*. University of the Philippines Press. Anvil Publishi