

*The Talaandig's Courtship Practices  
As Depicted in Folksongs and Folktales*

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## **1 Introduction**

The Talaandig tribe is one of the indigenous groups in the province of Bukidnon. The members of the group have continued to preserve and promote their nature, customs, beliefs and practices despite the steady relentless onslaught of modernization and change. Members of the group are found in barangays and municipalities surrounding the mountain of Kitanglad, the historic domain of Talaandig people. Others may also be found in Lantapan, Bangkud, Malaybalay and Songco.

However, written materials about the Talaandig are very scanty. Social scientists like Samuel Briones and Inocente Javier, write an ethnographic account on the Talaandig people in *Mindanao Journal* but sequels to this have not followed with celerity. The two authors are few of the first to make such contact with the group. However, their writings seem not to lend impetus to similar studies. Only few collections of Talaandig oral traditions, such as songs, folktales, riddles, and proverbs, have been gathered and published. A study on their courtship practices is hardly available. Talaandig oral traditions, of which only very limited knowledge can be claimed, may thus add rich resource for scholarship. Fillings in this neglected acreage gain greater urgency as modernization and assimilation relentlessly make inroads and threaten to doom these oral traditions to extinction or oblivion.

It is therefore, the purpose of this paper to gather some of the Talaandig folksongs and folktales. Specifically, this paper is to study the courtship practices of the Talaandig as portrayed in the collected folksongs and folktales. Courtship practices in this study mean a Talaandig man finding a female object of his love, communicating in literary language his feelings to the one he loves, and responding to a lady who communicates her love to him. This also includes how a Talaandig woman communicates her feelings to the man who courts her.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study on the literary elements of the folksongs and folktales to draw the courtship practices of the Talaandig people explores two major approaches of literary criticism: formalistic and sociological. By using formalistic approach, this study focuses on the courtship practices the elements of character analysis and plot development analysis are considered dominant. Conversely, By using the sociological approach, characters become the purveyors of ideas on how men and women as members of the society exhibit the courtship practices.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Talaandig is one of the least known cultural groups in the Philippines. There is a dearth of scholarly materials about them and their rich cultural heritage. Few studies about their oral traditions are available. This unexplored vast area cannot remain neglected. This study aims to collect the Talaandig's oral traditions which specifically, include select Talaandig folksongs and folktales. Its emphasis is on the courtship practices as depicted in the tribe's selected folksongs and folktales. In the other words, the focus of interest is amatory songs and romantic elements in folktales.

### **Research Questions**

More specifically, the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. What available folksongs and folktales are reflective of Talaandig courtship practices?
2. What literary elements and devices in the folksongs and folktales mirror the courtship practices if Talaandig?
3. How does a man/woman communicate verbally his/her feelings to the one ho/she loves and how does each respond verbally in a courtship situation?

## **2 Methodology**

### **Participants**

There were only four major sources of the Talaandig folksongs and folktales. These sources were considered as the elders as far as Talaandig and its culture were concerned. In the community, the elders were assigned with different tasks according to their expertise in singing, dancing, chanting and storytelling. Thus, the researcher got only three singers and one story teller who were considered experts in folk singing and storytelling.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In realizing this study, the researcher had to go through different phases. The first phase included library works. Printed materials and sources about the Talaandig were gathered and read to strengthen knowledge and background about her study.

The second phase was the visitation of the place. The initial visit happened to make the necessary inquiries. During the final visit, the researcher after finding a place to stay, with her contact person brought along a white cloth, eight-peso coin and one chicken and traveled for two hours before reaching Songco, the research area. The researcher then, went to meet the chief Datu of the Talaandig to ask permission in conduct of the interview. Per permission, the researcher and her contact person had undergone the "*Pananghid ritual*" (Permission ritual) along with the elders of the community. Before the elders, the researcher offered white cloth and eight-peso coin. After the ritual, appointments regarding the conduct of the interview were argued upon. The researcher stayed with her foster family for one week while waiting for the appointed time of the interview.

The last phase was the interview. Prior to the interview, the researcher went through "*Pamuhat*" (spiritism) ritual. At first, chicken was butchered and its blood was sprinkled on the camera, tape recorder, and even on the hands and head of the researcher. After the ritual which lasted for half a day, the interview started. During the interview, the researcher used the guide questions in eliciting relevant answers while the contact person helped the researcher in understanding the Talaandig dialect.

Finally, after the interview, translation of the collected tales and songs from Talaandig to English, extraction and categorization of the relevant points of these collections were done. The researcher then proceeded to discuss the literary devices and figures

speech which were found in the folksongs and folktales to bring out the courtship practices of the Talaandig tribe.

### 3 Results and Discussions

#### Available Folksongs and Folktales

The researcher had only gathered five folksongs and three folktales. These available folksongs and included 1) Tintay, a song which portrays the speaker's passion and intense feelings towards the woman, Tintay 2) Bitang ug Talubasan [The Lizard and the Tadpole] describes how the two meet accidentally in an unlikely situation and how each deals with its feelings 3) Kamutiyan [Camote Garden], a song which is not lively in tone and slow in beat portrays the speaker's loneliness, depression and frustration to see his beloved one who is far away 4) Ina [Mother] presents a common life /situation wherein a man has to ask for the hand of the woman from her mother/father and 5) Kalabasa (Squash), an expression of what the speaker wants to be, a squash. That way, he can spread out and bear fruits, the best way to get richer.

Moreover, the collected folktales were told by only one narrator. The influence of the Spanish and Portuguese corridos were noted in the use of names, such as "Don Juan", "Doña Maria", Doña Inez and other characters of the folktales. In turn, these folktales were 1) Don Juan, a story about the quest of Don Juan, his persistence, and his determination to find someone to marry 2) The Ring depicts how Don Juan uses the ring to ask Doña Maria's hand from the king and 3) Bataay and Punuuna narrates how two brothers are fated to love and help each other at all times to include finding each other a mate.

#### Literary Devices and Elements in Folksongs Which Mirror Talaandig Courtship Practices

Rhyme. Rhyming words are usually at line end. Among the folksongs, end-rhymes are not observed; instead internal rhymes dominate. The devices used by the speaker in expressing rhyming sounds are assonances and consonances which give ease and speed to pronunciation, which in turn, steps up the melody and the tempo within the poem. This is shown in the following lines from the song "Tintay":

Kay-a Tintay matay ad  
Matay-ad ta mata nu  
Ba buni man sa kilay nu  
Ke gawod a pa ganin  
Bun maghiwedhiwed ad  
Bun gaid katungkay un  
Ko bun iyad ad duun

As noted in the lines, sound /aI/ and /I/ are the most dominant as illustrated in the following words: kay, Tintay, matay, kilay, maghiwedhiwed, gaid, iyad.

Tugaok ka katyian  
Ta din kita kamutiyan  
Kalanganan ka imu ku din kita kalaanan  
Masakit sa nawa ku

Dangan kan ko dana da bun  
Patay ad duun  
Ka banug a ganin lumiyang  
Lumigawos ad diya patidagpak  
Ta limbabongan kay Apo

In like manner, consonants such as /j/, /k/ and /n/ are observed in the following words from the song "Kamutiyan" such as katiyan, kamutiyan, kalaanan, kalangann, dungan, limbabongan. This is also observed in the song "Tintay", such as the words like kay, Tintay, matay, kilay, katungkay.

The use of euphony through the patterned recurrences or repetitions of similar sounds is used to have a pleasant effect. In this case, the sound pattern is the so called, "attention-getting device used to attract the listener, in the courtship situation, the lady. The beauty in the sound of the words arouses a cheerful heart or softens the heart of the lady.

Rhythm. In Talaandig folksongs, rhythm is everywhere alive and the meters are very irregular as shown in the following lines from the song "Kamutiyan" (Camote Garra):

Ta ga ok/ ka ka/ ti yan/  
-anapestic monometer, iambic monometer and trochaic monometer  
Ta din/ ki ta/ ka mu/ ti yan/  
-iambic monometer, trochaic monometer, iambic monometer, and trochaic monometer,  
Ka la nga/ nan ku/ i mu/  
-anapestic monometer, iambic monometer, and trochaic monometer  
Ku din/ ki ta/ ka la/ a nan  
-iambic monometer and anapestic monometer

The scansion shows that the division into feet needs not correspond with the division of words. As shown in the lines above, it is noticed that the dominant meters are combination of iambic, anapestic, and trochaic with an alternating dimeter, tetrameter and monometer. The pattern of the first line is the same with the pattern in the third line with the use of anapestic monometer, iambic monometer, and trochaic monometer. While in the third line, rhythm is similar with the use of iambic monometer except for one foot, which is trochaic.

The song "Tintay" further supports that the meters in the song are very irregular as shown in the combination of trochaic, iambic, and dactylic with an alternating monometer and tetrameter. Thus, though the meters are irregular but certainly, there exists a pattern in the Talaandig songs.

Symbols and Images. The different images presented and their deeper meaning are drawn by a careful analysis of how the various parts are related and how the idea-image moves in time and space to bring out the courtship practices of the Talaandig.

By assigning cultural meanings to them, we come to analyze each symbol and image in relation to courtship.

In the poem "Tinaty", the speaker creates for us a situation in which we are made to view the speaker's intense feeling for his beloved Tintay, how we adore her and how we wish to have her completely as shown in the images of the mata (eyes), kilay (eyebrow), matay (matter of dying), gawod (vine), and bun gaid katungkay un (coiling very tightly).

The mata (eyes) emphasizes communication. Loving from a distance, the only expression used by both the girl and the speaker in communicating with each other is the movement of the eyes. It is used to transmit messages for each other. What caused the speaker to love her from a distance? Apparently, communications through the eyes have been their only way because of restrictions. These social restrictions prohibit them to express freely and directly the love they have for each other.

As observed, the speaker points out matay (matter of dying). The matter of dying explicitly portrays the intense emotion of the speaker. His message comes across effectively that he certainly can die from his love or frustration/inability to consummate the love he has for Tintay because his whole life becomes dependent on the love of Tintay.

On the other hand, the image of kilay (eyebrow) as suggested in the third line of the first stanza further supports the idea that communication between the speaker and Tintay is only through nonverbal communication, their eyes.

Thus, the shifting of the speaker to the image of gawod (vine) in the second stanza is made possible by the speaker to express what he wants to do if social restrictions are not getting in the way. The same image of the vine connotes sexual implication that has something do with intense passion of the man towards a girl. A representation of how much the man wants to have Tintay completely, embrace her and consummate the love he has for her. But because of social restrictions the speaker can only wish, "If i were a vine..."

As noticed, the restricted cultural practice is paralleled by the economic conditions of the poor Talaandig, hence, his wishful thinking. This is also shown in another folksong "Kalabasa" (Squash).

In the poem "Squash," using the first person point of view, the speaker recreates the actual scene of a garden where the squash is. The opening line gives us the impression that the speaker is sad, desperate while looking at the squash in the garden. The image of the squash is used to communicate what the man wants to say. Like the squash, the man wants to progress, wants to reap bountiful fruits of labor to sufficiently provide a



comfortable life to his beloved one.

By using the image of the squash, the intense desire of the speaker is established but because as a person he also has his own limitations, he ends with a merely wishful thinking. The same situation is also observed in the poem "Kamutiyan". It opens with the mention of the rooster as illustrated in the following lines:

Tugaok ka katiyan  
Ta din kita kamutiyan  
Kalanganan ku imu ku din kita kalaanan

The image "katiyan" (rooster) is an identification of the speaker himself. He is lonely, being alone. The garden in the next succeeding lines creates a romantic scenario which suggests a meeting place of the speaker and his beloved. Alas, he is alone like the rooster. His similar situation with the rooster aroused in the speaker a desire to be with his beloved as implied in these three lines:

Ku banug a pa ganin lumiyang  
*If i were a hawk*  
Lumigawos ad diya patidagpak  
*i would really fly*  
Ta limbabongan kay Apo  
*and stop to the house of the old folks*

This desire is rendered through the shifting of the image from that of a rooster to that of a hawk. The urgent desire of the speaker is now developed through his identification with the hawk. The image of the hawk suggests the image of a compelling personality. It suggests power, courage, boldness and prestige. Because of the urgency of his desire to see his loved one, now he is as courageous and assertive as a hawk. Unfortunately, he is not a hawk, thus he could only wish. Restriction has always been observed all throughout because the speaker cannot do anything to see the girl except only to wish.

The mention of the old folks in the last line of the third stanza ties the two stanzas together. It is the image that ties the two distant images presented - the rooster and the hawk. The representation of the old folks mirror cultural value wherein a man has to go to the place of the parents of the elders to formally ask for the hand of the girl.

Now what is the role of the girl? What are some images which help develop this? In the poem "Ina" (Mother), two speakers are present: The first speaker is the daughter talking to her mother while the second speaker is a mother reprimanding the man who wants to marry her daughter.

The bringing of the matter of the suitor to the sleeping mother suggests acknowledgement of the power and authority of the parents as a whole, over the decision-making in relation to their children's welfare in the Talaandig culture as shown in the following lines:

**Ina, ina pukaw ka**  
*Mother, mother wake up*

**Ta nakauma sug kagen**

*Someone wants to marry me*

**Suketon di tag mama**

*I ask him if he wants to eat*

**Ta iyan kay kandin mama-en**

*He refuses for he wants me instead*

**Leko leko su kagen**

*Hear he comes again, asking my hand*

**Ta minatay su kagenan**

*For according to him, his fiancé is dead.*

The mother here is an image of authority. The girl plays an important role in the courtship process. The pictures present here make the girl appear assertive by bringing up the purpose of the suitor before her mother.

On one hand, the image of "mama" (betel) has a symbolic meaning; it presents the traditional or cultural practice of the Talaandig tribe to show hospitality to visitors.

Moreover, the role of the girl in courtship situations is seductively aggressive as in the song "Bita ug Talubasan" (Lizard and the Tadpole). This brings to light the image of the girl seducing a man. The lizard in relation to the tadpole, assumes the symbolic image of a man, while the tadpole assumes the symbolic image of a young girl. The phrase "nakalukso sa linaw" (fell into water), suggests that the lizard (man) is suddenly caught in an unexpected situation. He finds a tadpole (girl) lying flat on its back as suggested in these lines: **Iyan din naumahan, So bita nakalalay-ang.** This very act of the tadpole (young girl) epitomizes an attempt to seduce the lizard (man). This is echoed with the tadpole (young girl) asking for a massage (hilota-a). The word "hilota- a" (massage) in relation to the lizard (man) and tadpole (young girl) is a very seductive image.

The lizard (man), on the other hand, simply rejects the offer that he cannot return. The man has his own sense of value. He does not take advantage of the desire of the young girl. The cultural taboo in this scene is presented through his refusal as suggested in the following lines:

**Kagi da te taubasan**

The lizard answered,

**Hadi a matusan ka**

"I won't I might crush you"

Another image which creates a symbolic meaning is that of "matidusan" (crush) in the line: "Hadi a matidusan ka" (I won't, I might crush you). It suggests loss of innocence or loss of virginity and to a large extent suggests damage of reputation. The dramatic situation presented is actually atypical in the usual practice of the society wherein expression of restraint has been practiced because of cultural restrictions.



The use of symbols and images in the songs is designed by the speakers to express what they want to say to the listener. Through symbols and images, these courtship practices are drawn out:

1. Due to cultural restrictions, wishful thinking and loving from a distance are the only means to transmit the message of love.
2. In the song, it is the girl who initiates the first move in courtship.
3. Parents are the authority when it comes to courtship and marriage matters.
4. If a man desires a girl, it may/may not end to marriage.

**Theme.** The folksongs presented have different themes yet each of them centers on the courtship practices. In Tintay, it focuses on the restricted love of a man towards Tintay as depicted in the images of mata (eyes), kilay (eyebrow), gawod (vine), bun gaid katungkay ad (coil very tightly). While in the song "Bitá ug Talubasan" the theme highlights the requited seduction of a tadpole towards the lizard as illustrated in the use of images of bita (tadpole), talubasan (lizard), matidusan (crush), nakalukso sa linaw (fell into the water), and hilota (massage). On the other hand, in the song "Kamutiyan", the theme concentrates on the yearning of a man to see his loved one as depicted in the images of katiyan (rooster), banug (hawk), and apo (old folks). However, in the song "Ina" (Mother), the theme directs on the practice of asking the hand of the girl from her parents as supported in the images of ina (mother) and mama (betel). And in the song "Kalabasa" (Squash), the theme pictures a man who could only wish for riches as portrayed in the image of kalabasa (squash).

### **Literary Devices and Elements in Folktales**

**Symbols and Images.** In appreciating a narrative, it is necessary to interpret the symbols that are distinct to Talaandig culture. By assigning cultural meanings to these symbols and images, we will be able to see a glimpse of implied Talaandig culture particularly looking at some of their courtship practices.

The mention of "mama" (betel) and the offering-exchanging of it symbolizes acceptance of marriage proposal, the culminating event of courtship upon the girl's acceptance of the boy. In the folktale "Punuuna and Bataay", Punuuna's desire to find a mate is fulfilled through the help of Bataay, his brother. Uwinaw, the sister of Bataay's wife is the woman he is to win. Uwinaw's acceptance of the courtship that would eventually lead to marriage is manifested by the preparation and offering of betel.

Similarly, betel chewing as an important ingredient used to highlight the courtship proposal is further supported in the in the folktale "Don Juan". In the folktale, Don Juan's quest to win the elusive woman and his persistence to fulfill his desire leads him to catch the elusive woman in her hammock. He brings her to the hut of the old woman. With the help of the old woman, the elusive woman is persuaded to accept the courtship proposal. As presented, betel chewing signals the elusive woman's acceptance.

Therefore, the presence of betel in the folktales depicts the Talaandig practice in particular because traditionally, Talaandig people have been practicing betel chewing within the community.

Furthermore, the image of "old woman or elder" in the three folktales also gains a symbolic function for the Talaandig. In the courtship stage, as describes in "Don Juan", "The Ring" and "Punuuna and Bataay", the old woman determines the success of courtship. In "Don Juan", the old woman becomes the counselor of Don Juan in his pursuit to court the elusive woman. Meanwhile, in "Punuuna and Bataay," Bataay as the elder brother becomes the bridge for Punuuna to succeed in marrying Uwinaw. Therefore, the image of the old woman represents the parents or the elders as a whole within the Talaandig community. Great respect for the elders or the parents in particular has been emphasized in the folktales.

Hence, the use of symbols and images in the narrative of events provides a way to mirror the cultural and traditional courtship practices of Talaandig and help come up with the following generalizations:

1. In the courtship, betel is an important ingredient used to highlight the courtship proposal. Its significance among the Talaandig is culturally high.
2. Elders are used as the ways to determine the success of courtship.

**Plot and Characterization.** Plot and characters play an important role in dramatizing courtship practices, which perpetuate the tribe's culture. Various actions of the characters show patterns of courtship behavior.

First, each of the male characters in the folktales starts with the desire of finding a mate. Second, the desire is followed by a quest characterized by hardships and obstacles. Each readily sacrifices his own ease to undergo hardships for the sake of courtship. Courtship does not take many steps toward marriage.

The representation of the female characters in the folktales, such as the elusive woman, Doña Maria and Uwinaw serve as the main obstacles for the male characters in their pursuit to find a mate. These three female characters have something in common, they refuse the courtship proposal of the male characters yet they all end up marrying them. One common person who prompts the woman characters to marry is the old woman. The old woman as the representation of the elders or parents has a strong influenced towards the women characters.

With all these, plot and characters work together to dramatize the patterns of the courtship practices among the Talaandig members:

1. The desire to find a mate comes first.
2. A man has to travel from place to place in his quest to find a mate.
3. When man finds a woman anywhere by accident or fate, man readily expresses his intentions.

4. Elders have strong influenced towards the woman to persuade her to accept the courtship proposal.
5. The exchange of betel highlights the courtship proposal.

**Setting.** The place where and when the courtship proposal usually varies from a river, to a house and to a hammock. In the folktale "Don Juan," the courtship proposal happens in the hammock of the elusive woman while in "Punuuna and Bataay," the courtship occurs in the house of Bataay. Finally, in the "Singsing," it takes place in the river.

The different places where the courtship proposal happens have connotative implication. The setting of the folktales illustrates that courtship occurs at no definite time and no definite place. It takes place anywhere. But no matter where the act of courtship happens, when it is time to ask for the hand of the girl, the man ends up consulting the elders/parents of the girl for final decision and blessing.

Hence, using the element of setting, one practice of courtship has been extracted: Courtship in the Talaandig occurs everywhere but the man definitely has to formally ask the hand of the girl from her parents/ elders for marriage.

**Theme.** The folktale is the embodiment of the Talaandig way of life and it becomes a significant part of their oral traditions that could best help in extracting courtship practices.

In the folktales, the quest of each male character to find a mate and overcome obstacles becomes the primary concern. As portrayed in the narratives, the major characters, Don Juan and Punuuna, are very aggressive to find someone to marry. One travels from place to place; another blackmails a lady, and still another gets help from his brother to find a mate. This quest is a theme.

In sum, the series of actions exhibited by the characters as well as the other literary elements has contributed largely to the understanding of the deeper meaning the author wishes to communicate to his readers. It is a clear statement of courtship and marriage. Courtship and Marriage as the themes, unify the plot together.

### **Talaandig Man and Woman Verbal Communication in Courtship Situations**

Sociologically speaking, any society undergoes changes but in spite the enormous changes all people of the world are undergoing in so many spheres of their cultures, folktales and folksongs continue to mirror the realities of life. By using the sociological perspective, we will be able to establish a coherent system of beliefs and practices among the Talaandig community.

The patterns of courtship practices in the songs and folktales can be gleaned from the

literary elements and devices. In the collected folksongs and folktales, man and woman verbally express these patterns in courtship situations as the analysis shows.

#### Man

In a courtship situation, man as an individual is expected to make the first move. It is a typical pattern dictated by the social norms. This is true in the Talaandig courtship situations as portrayed in the use of images, ornate language in songs, and poetic or figurative expressions. Men are presented as straight forward. When they like a girl, they immediately express what they feel verbally and marry her. Yet, the straightforward approaches of the males are toned down by social restrictions at times as shown in folksongs and hardships posed by women as revealed in the folktales.

Although most of the times, men initiate the first move in courtship yet in rare cases women also do as depicted in the folksong "The Lizard and the Tadpole". In response, man does not condemn her but he simply refuses the offer he cannot return. Being respectful towards the woman is the redeeming quality revealed in the song.

#### Woman

Within the Talaandig society, women are considered as fragile and obedient. They are expected to bear children, nurture and care for them until these children are old enough to take care of themselves. They are expected to manage the household matters and obey their husbands. In courtship, ideally, a woman just sits in one corner and waits for the man to express feelings for her and propose marriage. It is unlikely for a woman to take the first move to express what she feels for a man unless the man initiates the first step. But in some cases, a woman goes outside beyond what they call "standards of the society." She may express what she feels about and responds to a courtship situation verbally. The following generalizations can be drawn based on the collected folktales:

As shown in the song "The Lizard and the Tadpole", the young girl (tadpole) readily conveys what she feels about the man (lizard). Without realizing what she is doing, she asks the man for a massage. In contrast to the stereotyped expectation that a woman is a shy type and is modest, one woman in this case becomes assertive and aggressive. She put across her feelings and even seduces the man disregarding the social norms imposed by the society.

Moreover, a woman cannot decide for herself with regards marriage matter, for her elders/parents have power over the decision making. At times, she may be forced to accept the courtship proposal out of her great respect to the elders/parents.

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