

## **PAGANA MERANAO: A Royal Feast as an Institution**

**CADIDIA A. PIMPING**

ORCID No.: 0000-0002-6442-2072

[cadiapimping@yahoo.com](mailto:cadiapimping@yahoo.com)

Mindanao State University System

Marawi City

### **ABSTRACT**

The study aimed to describe its origin, historical and other components in the preparation of Meranao foods. Specifically, the research work pursued the following objectives. 1) To describe the Meranao decorations during the Pagana Meranao, 2) To describe the Pagana Meranao food preparation and serving, 3) To describe the Pagana Meranao as royal entertainment. The study used the descriptive design involving qualitative techniques, supported by interviews to key informants who are knowledgeable about the tradition and customs of the Meranao. The study utilized all available Meranao materials references on Pagana Meranao found in the library to counter check information given by key informants for better understanding of the research work and its significance, especially the non-Meranaos. The researcher also conducted an actual observation about the serving of Pagana Meranao.

**Keywords** - Social Science, Pagana meranao, royal feast, descriptive design, Mindanao State University, Philippines

### **INTRODUCTION**

The study on Pagana Meranao started when Dr. Macapado A. Muslim assumed to the Office of the President as Acting President of the Mindanao State

University System on January 2008, subsequently appointed as 6th President of the University System. President Muslim said one of his major concerns was to pursue the mandate of the university for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Muslim, Christian, and indigenous groups in Mindanao.

This mandate is expected to achieve a better understanding and harmony, and to prevent conflicts among the peoples of Mindanao. To realize this goal, President Muslim has formalized a permanent committee on Pagana Meranao with a major task to plan out, implement and handle activities pertaining to a Pagana Meranao. There are three offices which are members namely; the Office of the President which oversees and coordinates the proper implementation of the program, the Pre-University Center and the University Training Center.



The researcher was designated by the Office of the President as Chairperson, Committee on Pagana Meranao. The committee was reinforced by the emergence of the MSU's Royalties who are presently working with the University main-campus to carry different traditional titles

such as Sultans and Bai-a Labis. President Muslim believes that these traditional leaders can help implement the mandate of the University in preserving the culture of the Meranao. Among these is the traditional Pagana Meranao which handles the activity of tendering dinner or luncheon for important guests and visitors of the University.

In addition, it was clearly stipulated under the Charter of the University's mandate to pursue its vision for the cultural integration and preservation of the cultural heritage of the Muslim, Christian, and indigenous groups in Mindanao. The preservation of Pagana Meranao makes the MSU unique from other state universities in the country, including the great tourism potentials of the scenic campus.

Many had been written on the Meranao (also M'ranao, Maranaw), their beliefs and practices, way of life, people, and history. Notwithstanding the variety of interests that people had shown today towards anything that is Muslim or Meranao, there is however one domestic genre, almost like-day-today affair to speak of so common in Meranao household, but overlooked probably because it

either draws interest to scholarly nor scientific pursuits in the community.

The most overlooked cultural practice of which almost none has been written scholarly about it yet is the Pagana Meranao. The Meranao people have been holding or hosting Pagana Meranao as far as they could remember since the time immemorial up to their own contemporary times, but nobody asks?". What made them value and continue hosting or tendering such as royal feast?". Pagana as an institution ,if ever, through instituted or observed during ceremonial reception during weddings, enthronements and other celebrations, has not been regarded or treated distinctly as a separate institution from the rest.

Pagana may well be a function of a Meranao family and the Meranao society to preserve and show the value-system of "Maratabat "attached to this as a form of institution. It may well be as a sub-system of economic institution, a non-enterprising or income generating as in business entities or establishments, but rather a cultural event which has been perennially instituted by some establishments, like schools as educational institutions and for that matter, the Mindanao State University System-University Training Center.

During the time of late president Dr. Antonio S. Isidro who was the first president of the Mindanao State University, started to introduce the Pagana Meranao with the guidance of late Dr. Mamitua Saber, director of the University Research Center. The first guests who visited the University from the Asia and Ford Foundation officials were treated a Pagana Meranao. Other regular presidents of the Mindanao State University System like Dr. Mauyag M. Tamano, Dr. Ahmad E. Alonto Jr.,Dr. Camar A. Umpa as well as the acting presidents late Gov. Mohammad Ali Dimaporo, Professor Diamael M. Lucman, Dr.Ricardo de Leon, Dr. Mangiging D. Magomnang, Atty Tocod Macaraya and Dr. Alfredo Primero continued to tender a dinner Pagana Meranao , the highest form of hospitality afforded to a guests.

President Muslim believes in the existence of the traditional leaders. It is now reinforced by the emergence of the MSU's Royalty composed of MSU employees who carry traditional titles, the objective of which is to promote the MSU's special mandate of preserving the Meranao Cultural heritage and making them partners in peace and development. This is timely as President Macapado A. Muslim's new leadership helped prepared MSU to its 21st Century role as a University for World Peace. These traditional leaders help implement the mandate of the University in preserving the culture of the Meranao. Among these is the traditional Pagana Meranao of tendering dinner or luncheon for important guests during special occasions such as; the assumption of traditional

titles (Kandatu, wedding celebration (Ka-khawing ), etc., accompanied by playing of the Kolintang (Kalilang) or merry-making (Kakarila) consisting of Meranao songs and dances.

## FRAMEWORK

Pagana is a Meranao term which means to serve Meranao food and delicacies to visitors. It is usually accompanied with cultural entertainment and giving of tokens. During the historic Pagana Meranao and presentation of Rawaten award to Dr. Macapado A. Muslim, 6th MSU System regular President by the Meranao Royalties in Marawi City, the term used for Pagana Meranao was "kasapaat" from the root word "sapat" or to serve. It means the act of serving food to guests. The Meranao hospitality is manifested through its lavish presentation and offering of variety of food. The sumptuous meal is served on a tabak, a table-tray bedecked with ampas, ( a covering decorated with sequins, beads and coins). On the table are the yellow rice called koning, a native fish found in Lake Lanao usually tilapia or aroan, bakas and mamis (Meranao delicacy ) such as dodol, tiateg, browa, tamokonsi among others.

Reflective of the communal nature of the Meranaos, four to five guests share one tabak. Normally, guests eat with their bare hands in a Pagana Meranao. The tabak also serves as the table itself. Its close circular setting arrangement engages guests and hosts in a homely conversation reflective of the very warm nature of the Meranaos.

According to one of the informants, traditionally, a Pagana Meranao setting is usually an elevated platform called "Panggao" where the guests and visitors are being served. This highlights the Pagana Meranao as a gesture of golden hospitality or royal courtesy to guest and visitors attending a cultural event such as enthronement, kandori, commencement exercise or community affairs like wedding, thanksgiving and other celebrations.

Pagana Meranao could have originated from the inherent value-systems attached by the common people to a special hospitality towards the royal people, sultans and datus, and baes, and later invited guests and visitors to the affair. It manifests the Meranao character and cultural traits such as kambilangataw (social graces), kasesela-i (mutual honoring of relationships), kangiginawa-i (building of relationships), kapamagongowa (preserving relationships) embodied in the Meranao Maratabat (high pride).

Pagana, then, may have been from the start plain and simple as a gesture of royal hospitality to sultans and datus/baes, other invited guests and visitors for their social affairs, wedding, enthronement, and other activities.

As in the majority cases, where receptions for guests/visitors in weddings and enthronements, may be held, there is usually a Pagana, a special or royal feasting as part of the highlight to conclude the said event. Though not exactly synonymous, but where there may be a royal wedding, enthronement, celebrations, or the like, at the end there is usually a Pagana tendered for the guests and visitors in said affair.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To describe the meranao decorations during the PAGANA MERANAO;
2. To describe the PAGANA Meranao food preparation and serving; and,
3. To describe the PAGANA Meranao as royal entertainment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used the descriptive design involving qualitative research techniques, supported by interviews to key informants and observations of PAGANA Meranao celebrations. The writer used the participant observation technique. She validated the answers of the key informants through library documents.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Display of Meranao Decorations during Pagana Meranao**

A Pagana Meranao showcases Meranao hospitality and is set against the backdrop of Meranao colorful decorations. The venue of Pagana Meranao is usually highlighted with a variety of decors from floor to ceiling. The ceiling of the venue is often decorated with lines of lalansay (embroideries) as curtain walls pasted around from corner to corner. Lalansay is commonly accentuated with special okir (curve) designs which create the artistry of mamandyang designs on embroideries). With lalansay or mamandyang designs, the ceiling decors may not require any other, but not limited to other ceiling paraphernalia such as “umbrella” cloth or napkin/handerchief” hangers or “canopoy” luhur cloth, plain

or landap (woven fabrics). Wall curtains *lalansay* may serve as wrappers on posts and walks to create exotic mood/ambiance for said affair. Decors flow down to the matting, with floors of *paramadali* or variety of middle-eastern carpets or just plain native Meranao mats.



One of the most fascinating features of Meranao culture is the use of special ceremonial flags made in an array of distinctive shapes. These flags can be used for many different occasions, including parades, weddings, coronations, enthronement and other Meranao cultural activities. The set typically includes the flags called *sambolayang*, *payong*, *pamanai*, *dopo*, and *gada-gada*. The *gada-gada* consists of a pair of triangular flags similar in shape but larger than the *pamanai*. They are seldom displayed nowadays, but they are normally erected in a crossed position at the foot of a *pansandalan*. When used as a set, the flags are placed in a specific order and arrangement. The *dopo* is stationed firstly, followed by *payong*, *pasandalan*, *sombolyang*, *gada-gada* (when used) and finally the *pamanai*. The *sambolayang* is usually erected at the center with a *payong* on its left and a *pasandalan* on its right. Thus, the *sambolayang*, *payong*, and *pasandalan*, displayed with the *pamanai*, symbolizes the social rank, prestige, and honor of the *pagawidan* in the Meranao social order. The *pasandalan* also known as *pasandalan sa Morog* is a legendary ancestor of the Meranao and prominent character in the epic *Darangen*.

The *pasandalan* is a rectangular flag mounted vertically by inserting a bamboo pole into a sleeve. Frequently, the top of the pole bears a decorative finial called *kilala* (literally “sapling”). The *payong* is the third-ranking flag. It is shaped like

an umbrella, its function is ceremonial rather than logistic. Some payongs are single -tiered, but most are multi-tiered; and the tiers are generally found in odd number of three, five, seven, or nine layers. Cloth tassels called padiontay are hung from the rim on occasions. Sometimes some payongs are displayed as a group and associated with women in particular. The obor-obor, a special class of payong with Sarimanok on the top is exclusively used for the sultan or baes. The pamanai is the smallest and most numerous of the flags in the set. These small triangular flags are mounted on a short stick low in ground, symbolically representing the multitude under the authority of a sultan or datu. Accordingly, when pamanais are displayed, they usually surround the biggest flags. The dopo is rectangular and normally flown horizontally in the familiar manner of international flags.

When displayed during a maritime battle, a red dopo and its location are related to the status of the ships occupants. For example, when it flies from the prow of a ship, a red dopo signifies that the occupants are pagawidan (nobility), but when it is from the ships, stern, the occupants are kadakelan sa tao (commoners).

### **The Legend of Meranao Food**

According to a scholar, food is one of the panabi-nabian (prophet), a mercy and a gift from Allah. When the world was created, mankind had no food to eat. The soil was asked to feed mankind but it refused because it does not have enough to feed all. One of the sons of Fatima, Asa, was buried so that Bai Adam (Prophet Adam) will also be fed and be able to move. For seven days Nabi Soapak was buried .After seven days, it grew. On the head part, grew a coconut, on the heart grew the palay, on the pelvis grew cotton, and on the lower art grew a white chicken. The palay was harvested and fed to mankind (Datu Acmad Guro, one of the informants was interviewed by Professor Hafiza M. Macada-ag 1990:40-41).

### **Meranao Concept of Food**

Dr. Cadidia A. Pimping cited the study of Hafiza M. Macada-ag's study on Maranao food (1990:viii) which revealed that food is considered: (1) rhama (mercy from Allah); (2) riskih (gift); (3) one of the panabi-nabian (prophets); (4) as satisfying hunger; (5) as rasa (nutrients); (6) as bolong (medicine); (7) as having social value (keeps family and community united and cohesive; (8) as having niawa (spirit) as in the case of the rice; (9) as having a soul; (10) as an

appetizer; (11) as having the capacity to beautify; (12) as a source of strength; and, (13) as a symbol of rank and social status.

The Almighty Allah has assured every living creature, more so with human beings, sustenance from birth till death. Moreover, the concept of halal (lawful) and haram (unlawful/forbidden), governs the food intake of a person. The human being, which constitutes both physical and spiritual entities, is assured of food and sustenance. Mother Earth provides all the necessary food and sustenance



that every living creature, including man, needs in his daily life activities.

Since Allah created all living creatures, it is also mandatory to utter the word, Bismillah whenever a fowl or an animal is slaughtered for only Him can take the life of any living creature.

In the same manner, when one begins to partake of the food, the word, Bismillah is likewise uttered. After eating, the word Alhamdulillah (thanks to Allah) is uttered. Bismillah is also uttered to drive away the evils spirits: one who is fat, the other thin. If the word Bismillah is not uttered, then the evil spirit is happy, he gets a share of the food. Any food that drops while one is eating is his share, too. Before slaughtering a chicken, one recites: Bismillah... Allahuma Saliili (3X) uba ako ngka panontoti sa alongan a maori, ka inisbap ka o Allah, kailangan ko on inaden iyan. In the name of Allah, praise to be Muhammad (pbuh); do not blame me (addressed to the Chicken) in the day hereafter. Allah, to feed His Creations, created you. Likewise, before eating, these verses are recited: Allahu mabarik lana fima razak tana wa kina ada banar. Allah, we thank you for the food we are about to take . It is also observed that a small amount of salt is taken before taking any food. The salt is an antidote to poison and likewise, it gives taste and flavor to the food, not to mention spices.

## Food Preparation during a Pagana Meranao

Macadaag's (1990) further explained that The Almighty Allah has assured every living creature, more so human beings, sustenance from birth till death. Moreover, the concept of halal (lawful) and haram (unlawful/forbidden), governs the food intake of a person. The human being which is constituted by both physical and spiritual entities is assured of food and sustenance. Mother Earth provides all the necessary needs in his daily life activities. Since Allah created all living creatures, it is also mandatory to utter some words in the preparation of whatever kinds of food that is to be served to guests and visitors for Pagana Meranao. This is further discussed the study of Meranao Concept of Food.

One of important ingredients Meranaos use in the preparation of food is the exquisite Meranao cuisine and hospitality called palapa. They are known of having a spicy taste in their foods. A condiment made of traditionally cultivated spices, locally known as Palapa is one of their distinguished cuisine symbol. It is made of stewed scallion bulbs or 'sakurab' in Meranao. The thinly sliced scallion bulbs and ginger are caramelized by slow cooking and mixed with chilies and a little coconut oil. Meranao recipe is so rich that it talks about life itself. The recipes are intertwined with the life cycle rite and rituals of all aspects of Meranao society and culture from birth to death. In other words, food cannot be separated with daily life activities because food is life itself.

Everestgurl (2001) study on Palapa revealed that it is a very unique dish because of its two-fold purpose and nature. It is the main ingredient in all Meranao cuisines; at the same time, it is also an appetizer for all seasons. No native Meranao dish is perfect sans palapa and no meal is that satisfying without it. This two-fold characteristic of a dish is exemplified only by Meranao palapa and with this; they take pride if founding this one of a kind ingredient-appetizer.

The main composition of palapa is ginger, native chili called "sili", and native scallions called "sakurab". It can be eaten raw after its ingredients are crushed finely, mixed and blended all together using a mortar and pestle. As soon as the components are well-blended, palapa is ready to be served as an appetizer in its raw form. How the Meranaos relish this basic concoction because of its spicy, tangy and exotic taste. Smoke will be coming out of your ears and nostrils. Most of the time, the ingredients are mixed with bits of chicken meat, fish or beef. This is the cooked form of palapa which also comes with desiccated coconut meat. The following are the ingredients: 2 teaspoons of oil, 1/4 kg garlic finely chopped, 1/4 kg medium onions finely chopped, 1/4 kg ginger peel and finely chopped, 1/4 kg native scallions cleaned and finely chopped, 1/4 kg chicken meat/fish meet/beef

cubed into small bits, 1/2 kg grated coconut meat totally squeezed of its juice, 5 pieces red native sili. 1 teaspoon kuning (yellow Meranao food coloring) powder.

The following are the steps in making palapa: 1) Ginger, scallion, and sili (chili pepper) are mixed all together and pounded in a large mortar and pestle until the three ingredients are no longer distinguishable. Set aside, 2) oil is heated in a pan with garlic and onions, 3) The meat is sautéed with spices until cooked, 4) the coconut meat is poured in and stirred until it is cooked, 5) The ginger, scallion, sili mixture is then put in the pan and stirred until completely mixed and ingredients are no longer distinguishable, 6) the kuning is sprinkled and mixed well into the mixture to give it a yellowish color, 7) remove mixture from the pan and set aside until it is cooled, and 8) Palapa is now ready to be served.

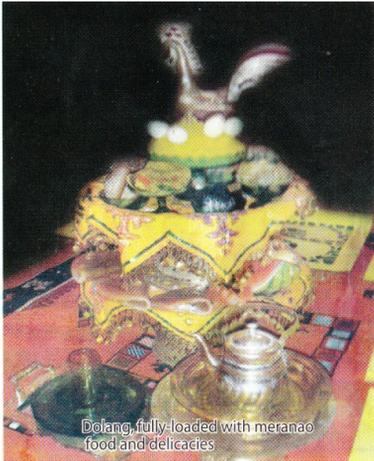
It is advisable that the person cooking should have a mask on because the aroma wafting from the mixture could sting and hurt the nostrils. The palapa is now ready to be served as an appetizer. It could last for a month with proper storage and sealing. It should be stored in a container that is properly sealed or capped. It should be stored in warm and airy spaces in the kitchen, and kept away from moist to avoid early contamination. If desired, it can be used as an ingredient to season Meranao cuisines such as spicy prawn, beef randang or bodi (caviar). These cuisines are served on large silver platters during pagana Maranao or Meranao feast when celebrating weddings, enthronements of royal leaders and other special occasions.

### **Kandolang: The Art of Serving Meranao Food**

If Pagana is the Meranao traditional way of serving Meranao food, kandolang is the art of serving traditional food. It is taken from the word Meranao dolang, the other word for tabak (brass tray).

The preparation takes weeks because the food served and displayed in a Marabong (intricate Meranao structure where food delicacies and fruits are displayed), and the dolang, takes a lot of time to prepare and cook. The preparation is a highly specialized skill and art that only few can do it. The dolang are in three, five or seven tiers at most. Every tier holds a special kind of food. It is tied together in a shape of a minaret and the four corners are elaborately decorated with okir motifs and cakes which resembles the panolog (house beam in the torogan), traditional house of the datu/sultan. It is usually done and assembled on very special occasions and very few skilled cooks can do it. Every item displayed or hang in the dolang is especially cooked and prepared to last for weeks.

The higher the tiers of tabak, the most prestigious the occasion and the wealthier the person is. On top of the dolang is a Sarimanok cake perched at the zenith. This signifies the highest degree of the occasion and its prestige. In a Pagana Meranao, about three to five pieces of the dolang are usually placed



in the panggao, the elevated platform where special guests and dignitaries are seated. This elaborately decorated dolang with sangkad (crown) is in the shape of the minaret, depicting distinctly Islamic influence. Dr. Zenaida P. Gania former Director of MSU's Manila Information Office (1990-23-26) gave as sample of some pananaro-on (saying/proverb) that goes with the dolang. The pananaro-on says: Pagawa sa sangkad, kagiya kidolon ka ko manga pepantaw a tao. O baka peman saleg sa ba ka on kadawai. Makipang so petanding minangoao

ko bantog. Ka iragan so inged randongan a kaparan ka daresay ka sangkad ka diwang ka sa dar. O baka kalilang-kalilang ka dika kaya bandingen ka seka man I ampiten ko mizaripag a ramig. Her free translation was "Be firm/stand still, songcad (crown) as you presented to the nobilities. Show/display no infirmities/short comings-these will bring disgrace to those who prepared /constructed you, and bring dishonor from where you come from. Be proud sangkad (crown) stand tall and firm, do not shake, be firm, stand tall, and be proud. Indeed, you are the first that people will emulate.

Pagana Meranao means to serve in the Meranao traditional ways (Pagana, literally "to serve"). Before the advent of tabak (brass tray), wood trays were used. The paraphernalia for this purpose is composed of the following: tabak (brass tray), pinggan (plates), bato intan) receptacle to hold fish/desert, kendi (kettle) panalagadan (flower stand made of brass, kararao (water container), and a palanggana (a receptacle used for washing hands).

Each tabak is covered with ampas (a cloth cover with beads and sequins) to signify the importance of the occasion. Special guests are served with the ampas. A cone-shape cover called todong is used to cover the food before it is served. In the middle of the tabak is a huge plate with yellow rice (kioning) prepared like a mound. Around it and on top are hard boiled eggs on sticks. Surrounding

the plate are smaller glass plates and receptacles which hold different dishes and desserts.

Below the tabak is another tray without a stand, *talam*, where glasses are placed, as well as the spoons and forks (in contemporary times). However, an informant resident of Buadi-Puso Buntong, Lanao del Sur said it is more preferable to eat using your hands rather than to use spoons and forks. The conservative people living in rural areas said it is a sign of disrespect to your culture if you eat using spoons and forks during Pagana Meranao.

Ideally, a minimum of three to four persons (of the same gender) squat around the tabak. For special guests, only the heads and eggs of fish as well as the middle parts are served. The tail of the fish is never served to special guests and may even cause trouble. A strict etiquette and proper norm is observed among people around the tabak. There is an elevated platform called *panggao* where guests are served first before anybody else. No person can just go to any tabak unless told to do so. As a practice, a group of young men (*manga ngongoda*) go around if someone needs assistance for additional rice, soup or water for that matter.

Usually, seven kinds of fish and fruits are served to reflect the seven kinds of food served in the life hereafter. The tabak symbolizes unity and equality because there is no such thing as “head table”. Sharing is shown equally taking food so that the other person has an equal share of what is served in the tabak. Among the four persons squatting around the tabak, they choose who the “leader” is, and this person takes the first move to pick the rice first. He takes the head of the fish first and the rest will follow. The traditional way to pick a handful of yellow rice is to squeeze it and soak it into the soup before eating it. When Islam came, the Prophet’s (pbuh) manner is not to leave even a single grain of rice on the plate. That single grain of rice could contain the grace of Allah and it should not be missed. After eating, the following verse is recited “ALHAMDULILLAH HILADI WATA AMANI WASAKANO WAJAALANI MINAL MUSLIMEN” Praise be to Allah who nourished us and gave us water to drink and render unto us Muslims.

### **Pagana Meranao as Royal Entertainment**

Kalilang which means entertainment is one of the essential parts of the Pagana Meranao cultural presentation. The royal entertainment usually starts with the playing of the kolintang while the guests were arriving. The players show their prowess in playing the kolintang. The kolintang or gongs in a row, is basically a

melody instrument played either as a solo instrument or part of the ensemble. It consists of eight gongs placed horizontally on top of an okir-decorated holder



(langkongan) and tuned to a flexible pentatonic or fine tone scale. As part of an ensemble, the kolintang is the primary melody instrument accompanied by the debakan (a conical), agong, gandingan (four suspended narrow-rimmed gongs) and babendir (small gong) usually the last of the kolintang .It is played by using two tassel-decorated wooden sticks, throwing them on air and catching them. They are used to beat with a precise tempo, most important of which is the

“kapranon”

The most popular Meranao dance is the Royal Meranao Fan Dance called Kasingkil. It is named after the singuel or singkil, which are the ankle bells used by a Muslim princess and dancers. Singkil is performed by a girl of a royal blood. It recounts the epic legend of the “Darangen” which is the fateful tale of diwatas (nymphs or fairies) that play a joke on Princess Gandingan. As the princess was taking a walk with her faithful slave (umbrella) girl, the diwatas caused an earthquake that made the trees tremble and the rocks roll. The bamboo symbolizes the fallen trees, and create crisscross pattern, tapping together to give the illusion of a violent natural catastrophe. Undaunted, the Princess nimbly skips from rock to rock avoiding this ordeal until she is finally rescued by the prince. The dancers use fans (apir) and scarves to symbolize the winds that prove to be beneficial for the princess in successfully escaping the trees and rocks from hitting her tiny feet.

Kapamalong-malong is a dance showing the several ways of wearing the malong. Usually the dancers used landap hand-woven materials during special occasions. Men and women wear landap although they differ in color and the manner of wearing it (Pimping, 2007). The prominence of the yellow color from food to decor and costume of the Meranaos is due to the royal nature of the



color. Yellow is a symbol of royalty. Traditionally, women's hair should be long and tied neatly in a pinalot style. When Islam came, this was replaced by wearing of kombong or veils.

The Mindanao State University System in Marawi City entertains their guests and visitors through Meranao dances and artistic performances of the famous Darangen Dance Troupe and the Sining Pananadem Ensemble. The Rawaten Cultural Troupe named in honor of the President of the Mindanao State University System, Dr. Macapado A. Muslim who was awarded the title as Datu a Rawaten sa Mindanao (Model Prince in Mindanao) by the MSU Pagana Meranao Committee and the Meranao Royalty Association of the Mindanao State University of Lanao.

### **Gift-Giving As Part of Entertainment**

In some forms of Pagana Meranao, special guests and visitors are afforded with valuable gifts. This is done towards the end of the affair. This accentuates the Meranao hospitality by providing complete entertainment to the guests and by carrying with them tokens of appreciation



for coming to the Royal Feast. The gifts are usually locally-made products and handicrafts, and other materials that would reflect the Meranao material culture. Examples of which are the baur (wooden chest), a miniature of the kampilan (datu's sword) or gonong (datu's knife), malong, and other cultural materials. These gifts are intended to always remind the guests of the Pagana Meranao tendered to them, and the Meranao hospitality, in particular.

During the Pagana Meranao the guests and visitors' attire is formal, with traditional garments and accessories like the traditional malong for the ladies and kopya (cap) for the gentlemen.

## CONCLUSION

Pagana Meranao culture and society will endure and persist against all odds for as long as the institutions that nourish it and sustain it will survive. The threat from within is that considering the present generation very few Meranaos have the talent and skills to prepare these highly specialized recipes, which are in turn served on special occasions to special guests and dignitaries.

A Pagana Meranao showcases Meranao hospitality and set against the backdrop of Meranao colorful decorations. The Pagana Meranao is usually highlighted with a variety of decors from floor to ceiling which is often decorated with lines of lalansay as curtain walls pasted all around from corner to corner. With lalansay or mamandyang designs, the ceiling decors may not require any other, but not limited to other ceiling paraphernalias such as "umbrella" cloth or napkin/handkerchief hangers or "conopy" luhur cloth, plain or landap (woven fabrics).

Another important culture of the Meranao that highlights in tendering a Pagana Meranao is the preparation of the food to be served to their special guests and visitors. The preparation of foods takes weeks because the food served and displayed in a Marabong (intricate). Meranao structure where food delicacies and fruits are displayed, and the dolang, take a lot of time to prepare and cook. The preparation is highly specialized skill and art and only few can do it. After the foods are being cooked, it is displayed in the dolang (tabak). The dolang is in three, five or seven tiers at most. Every item displayed or hanged in the dolang is especially cooked and prepared to last for weeks.

Kalillang which means entertainment is one of the essential parts of the Pagana Meranao cultural presentation. The most popular Meranao dance is the Royal Fan dance called Kasingkil. It is named after the singuel or singkil,

which is the ankle used by a Muslim princess and dancers. Other Meranao royal dances usually form part of the kalilang includes kapmalong-malong, sagayan, sadoratan, kambayoka, kapranon and others. The royal entertainment usually starts with the playing of the kolintang while the guests were arriving.

In some forms of Pagana Meranao, special guests, visitors and dignitaries are afforded with valuable gifts. In Mindanao State University main-campus, the giving of these royal gifts to the special guests and dignitaries is accompanied by the famous Darangen Dance Troupe and the Sining Pananadem Ensemble. In addition to this dance troupe, the Rawaten Cultural Troupe name in honor of the President of the Mindanao State University System, Dr. Macapado A. Muslim who was awarded the title as Datu a Rawaten sa Mindanao (Model Prince in Mindanao), by the MSU's Pagana Meranao Committee and the Meranao Royalty Association of the University main-campus with traditional titles as Bai-a-Labes representing their respective towns or municipalities due to their genealogical history. This is done towards the end of the affair. This accentuates the Meranao hospitality by providing complete entertainment to the guests by carrying with them tokens of appreciation for coming to the Royal Feast. The gifts are usually locally-made products and handicrafts, and other materials that would reflect the Meranao material culture. Like the baur (wooden chest), a miniature of the kampilan (Datu's sword) or gonong (datu's knife), malong, and other cultural materials. These are intended to always remind the guests of the Pagana Meranao tendered to them, and the Meranao hospitality, in particular. During the Pagana Meranao as a traditional practices, the special guests and dignitaries is required to be in formal traditional attire garments and accessories like the traditional malong for the ladies and kopya (cap.gura) for the gentlemen.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering that the Mindanao State University System, especially in the main-campus, has institutionalized the Pagana Meranao, it is recommended that a sub-committee on Pagana Meranao be organized in its respective campuses to be headed by concerned colleges. They should be trained in the preparation of foods so that they can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in order to promote the significance of Pagana Meranao enhancing its preservation of the Meranao culture.

It is also recommended that further research should be conducted on Pagana Meranao practices among the Meranaos for more documentation. Likewise,

it also recommended to collect photos of special guests and dignitaries served during the Pagana Meranao occasions.

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## GLOSSARY

**Ampas:** Each tabak is covered with a cloth called Ampas to signify the importance of the occasion. Special guests are served with ampas (placemats)

**Concept of Halal:** (lawful) and haram (unlawful/forbideen), governs the food intake of a person. The human being, which constitutes both the physical and spiritual entities, is assured of food sustenance

**Debakan:** The Kolintang is the primary melody instrument accompanied by the debakan (conical drum), agong gandingan (four suspended narrow-rimmed gongs) and bedendir (small gong usually the last kolintang. It is played by using two tassels decorated round wooden stick, in which the instrument player does an awe-spinning exhibition of twirling the sticks, throwing them on the air and catching them using to beat with a prices tempo, most important of which is the “Kapranon”

**Danganan:** Ceremonial sword display symbolizing the sultan’s power and prestige

**Darangan:** Meranao epic believed to be in 36 chapters/episodes; an account

of the origin of the Meranao

**Dopo:** Is rectangular and normally flown horizontally in the familiar manner of international flags. When displayed during a maritime battle, a red dopo and its location are related to the status of the ships occupants. For example, when it flies from the prow of a ship, a red dopo signifies that occupants are pagawidan (nobility), but when it is flown from the ships stern, the occupants are kadakelan sa tao (commoners)

**Gada-Gada:** It consists of a pair of rectangular flags similar in shape but larger than the pamanai. They are normally erected in a crossed position at the foot of a pasandalan. When used as a set, the flags are placed in a specific order and arrangement. The dopo is stationed first, followed by the payong, pasandalan, sambolayang, gada-gada (when used) and finally the pamanai.

**Isa Ka Koman:** One cooking pot; one household

**Isa Ka Labo-Ay:** Set of Meranao flags symbolizing Meranao grar (titles)

**Kolintang:** Musical instruments; eight graduate gongs, part of the musical ensemble called Lima ka daradiyat

**Kolintang Ensemble:** The kolintang or gongs in a row, is basically a melody instrument played either as a solo instrument or part of the ensemble. It consists of eight gongs placed horizontally on top of an okir-decorated holder and tuned to a flexible pentatonic or fine scale

**Kalilang:** It means entertainment. Another essential part of the Pagana Meranao is the cultural presentation which could either be a Singkil, Sagayan (war dance) or Kapmalongmalong (malong dance) or Kapangolintang)

**Kasapaat:** From the root word, sapaat or to serve, it means the act of serving food to guests. The Meranao's hospitality is manifested through its lavish presentation and offering of variety of food

**Kandolang:** Is the art of serving traditional food. It is taken from the word dolang, in other word for tabak, brass tray. The preparation takes weeks because the food served and displayed in a dolang takes a lot of time to prepare and cook. The preparation is a highly specialized skills and art and only few can do it.

**Kioning:** In the middle of the tabak is a huge plate with yellow rice kioning prepared like a mound

**Lalansai:** The ceiling of the venue is often decorated with lines of lalansay (embroideries) as curtain walls pasted all around from corner to corner. It is also commonly accentuated with special okir (curve) designs which create the artistry of Mamandyang (designs on embroideries)

**Landap:** This is hand-woven material used during special occasions. Men

and women differ in color and the manner of wearing it. The prominence of the yellow color from the food to decor and costume of the Meranao's is due to the royal nature of the color. Yellow is a symbol of royalty. Traditional, women wear their hair long and tied neatly in a pinalot style. This was replaced by the wearing of kombong or viels when Islam came.

**Leader:** Among the four persons squatting around the tabak, they can choose who the "Leader" is, and this person takes the first move to pick the rice first. He takes the head of the fish first and the rest follow. The traditional way is to pick a handful of the yellow rice, squeeze it and soak it to soap before eating

**Mamandyang:** Once Mamamdyang designs or lalansay is display, the ceiling decors may not require any other, but not limited to other celing paraphernalia such as "umbrella" cloth or "napkin/handkerchief " hangers or canopy"; uhur cloth, plan or landap (woeven fabrics. Wall curtains lalansay may serve as wrappers on posts and walls, to create exotic mood/ambiance for said affair

**Meranao:** Is taken from the two words Mera (peacock) which is one of the most beautiful birds, and Me-anao meaning one who is awake alert and caustious of the things around him and the future. Thus, the two words, Mera plus Me-ano, put together mean Meranao (Madale, Nagasura T. 2002)

**Okir:** Okir Maranao art characterized as flora and geometric craved in the torogan

**Ol-Ol:** A canopy placed on the top of the ceiling directly above the bed

**Obor-Obor:** A special class payong, serves as a symbol of sultanates (bailabi)

**Pasandalan:** It is rectangular flag mounted vertically by inserting a bamboo pole through a sleeve. It is also known as pasandalan sa Morog, a legendary ancestor of the Meranao and prominent character in the epic Darangen. On top of the pasandalan pole bears a decorative final called kilala (literally "sapling")

**Payong:** The third-ranking flag. It is shaped like an umbrella, its function id ceremonial rather that logistic. Some payongs are single-tiered, but most are multi-tiered; and the tiers are generally found in odd numbers of three, five seven or nine layers.

**Pamanai:** It is the smallest and most numerous of the flags in a set. These small triangular flags are mounted on a short tick low in the ground, symbolically representing the multitude under the authority of a sultan or datu. Accordingly, when pamanais are displayed, they usually surrounded the biggest flags.

**Padiontay:** The cloth tassels called padiontay are hung from the rim on occasions. Sometimes some payongs are displayed as a group and associated with women in particular.

**Panggao:** In a pagana Meranao, about three to five pieces of the dolang are

usually placed in the panggao, the elevated platform where special guests and dignitaries are seated fully carpeted. The walls are fully decorated with lalansai and mamandyang. There is also a canopy above the panggao known as ol-ol that displays the Ka'aba, holy place in Mecca

**Palapa:** Is a condiment principally made of stewed scallion bulbs locally known as “sibujing” in Visayas or Sakurab in Meranao. The thinly sliced scallion bulbs and ginger, “luy-a” in Visaya, are caramelized by slow cooking and mixed with chili's and little coconut oil

**Palapa:** Is a regular feature of the Meranao cuisine .It come whatever dish or even as main dish for families who are experiencing hard times. (Nahara Mutia, Enterprise Development Officer of LGSU's, Munai Lanao del Norte

**Pagawiden:** One of the geographic areas divided in into 15 pagawiden (supported villages) and including the 28 pagawiden a mababaya ko taritib (supporting villages)

**PAGANA MERANAO:** Means to serve in Meranao traditional ways (pagana, literally “to serve) before the advent of the tabak (brass tray) wooden trays were used. The paraphernalia for this purpose is composed of the following: tabak (brass tray, pinggan, (plates, bato intan), receptacle to hold fish/dessert, panalagadan (brass stand receptacle), kararao (water container) doda-I (spitton) with panalagadaan and kararao (flower stand made of brass for washing the hands

**Sambolayang:** It is usually erected at the center with a payong on its left and a pasandalan on its right. Thus, the sambolayang, payong, and pasandalan, displayed with the pamanai, symbolizes the social rank, prestige, and honor of the pagawidan in the Meranao social order

**Sarimanok:** The Maranao bird of art symbolizing the datu/sultan's power and prestige; a component of the Meranao set of flags

**Tabak:** Symbolizes unity and equality because there is no such things as “head table” it is also used to serve food in a special occasions like, weddings, coronations and other Meranao traditional activities

**Todong:** A cone-shaped cover called todong is used to cover the food before it is served

**Talam:** Below the tabak is another tray without a stand, talam, where glasses are placed, as well as the spoons and forks 9in contemporary times)

**Torogan:** A Sleeping place; the ancestral house of the datu/sultan: an official house and residence of the sultan

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