

Narrative Study on the Cultural Significance of the Practice of Komedya to the Locals of Santa Catalina, Ilocos Sur

Orlando A. Batara*, Cherie B. Orpia and Jocelyn L. Absolor

Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Poblacion Norte, Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur 2705

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ABSTRACT

Komedya reflects Santa Catalina, Ilocos Sur's heritage, culture, and traditions. The study determined the significance of the Komedya to the locals of the community and the factors that can indigenize the practice of Komedya in the community. Using the descriptive and narrative approach of qualitative research, this study evaluated and analyzed the perspectives of the ten Komedya participants or spectators. The results demonstrate that the cultural performance's influence on the community is transmitted to people supporting and participating in the Komedya. The significance to the community is accorded to three themes generated: socio-cultural, economic, and religious or spiritual. Komedya, as a cultural show, has been a reflection of indigenization through the use of new songs, music, and costumes. This is done to engage the audience while acknowledging that the form needs to be enhanced and updated to adapt to changing times. This cultural practice must be consistently passed on to the next generation. Since Komedya became their identity, the community must regularly practice this cultural practice with strong support from various stakeholders, including the government, church, and educational system.

Keywords: Komedya, significance, socio-cultural, economic, spiritual, indigenization, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Culture matters, according to Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11). Making cities or an area inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable is one of its goals. Amid failing infrastructure brought on by urban congestion, it also includes stepping up efforts to maintain and safeguard the world's cultural and natural legacy (UN, 2015). Cultural heritage can catalyze economic growth in the Philippines by highlighting the interactions between internal cultural cluster dynamics, economic effects, and socio-environmental impacts. This creates a cycle in which culture promotes development, which fosters culture, leading to development. (Hendersion, 2012).

The Philippines is a nation with many different cultural influences. Most of these effects are byproducts of earlier colonization, primarily from Spanish and American cultures. Despite these outside influences, the Filipinos' traditional Asian culture has persisted and may be observed in their way of life, beliefs, and customs. (Cruz, 2017).

Komedya refers to a traditional Filipino theatrical form characterized by its blend of drama, music, and dance, often featuring historical narratives, romantic plots, and heroic themes. Originating during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines, Komedya incorporates elements of Spanish drama, indigenous Philippine performance traditions, and local adaptations (Gonzalez, 2014).

The significance of Komedya lies not only in its cultural heritage but also in its role as a form of communal entertainment and social cohesion. According to Reyes (2010), Komedya performances traditionally served as a communal event that brought together people from different social strata, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity among participants.

One of the practices of Sta. Catalinians, during local fiestas, present a Komedya to entertain themselves after a

hard day in the fields or ashore. Komedya is an influence inherited by the locals of Sta. Catalina from the Spaniards during their occupation of the Philippines. It varies between two themes: secularism and religion or belief. They celebrate the day's work with love and humorous songs as they meet in the plaza. The komedya, or moro-moro, or pretending to be Moors, is a traditional Filipino play in the vernacular adapted from the Spanish *comedia de capa y espada*. It was used by Spanish colonizers in the Philippines circa 1766 to evangelize and strengthen the faith of Indios, or Filipino natives, in Christianity. It is a theatrical tradition among Filipinos, sometimes in the form of singing. It describes conflicts between Christians and Muslims. The Spanish used it to promote Christianity in the Philippines. Traditionally, the subject of the komedya is the war between Christians and Moslems, or the love affair of princes and princesses. In other parts of the country, the komedya may also be known as the *tibag*, *bakal-bakal*, *palo-palo*, or *linambay*. The participants were a mixture of personalities: employees, salesmen, tricycle drivers, factory workers, radio personalities, and youth. Moros costumes in the komedya are usually made of rich materials and decorated with embroidery, sequins, beads, plumes, and feathers. They drew plots and characters from Philippine life and were the first to present characters in the clothing of their time.

The people of Ilocos Sur, particularly the locals of Santa Catalina, possess a distinct cultural background that makes them peculiar. The researchers have observed that some local members, especially the young ones, are no longer familiar with their cultural practices, while others lack interest in their preservation. At some point, these people are second-class citizens to some. People should reward them for keeping a genuine culture that retains pre-Hispanic culture indigenous to the country and is genuinely Filipino. The research will determine if these traditions are still being practiced nowadays. As pinpointed by the United Nations, the important point of researching cultural practices and beliefs is to continuously transfer these traditions from one generation to another and for the community to continuously practice them as they become the identity that characterizes them.

Despite its cultural and historical significance, there remains a notable gap in the scholarly literature regarding a comprehensive analysis of the komedya genre in Philippine theater. While existing studies often acknowledge its role in Philippine cultural heritage, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into its specific socio-political implications and its evolution over time.

According to Tolentino (2018), while there have been studies on Philippine theater and its various forms, such as the moro-moro and the *sarswela*, there remains a need for more focused research on komedya. This gap is particularly evident in understanding how komedya has adapted to modern contexts and its continued relevance in contemporary Filipino society.

Moreover, there is a dearth of comparative analyses between komedya and other Southeast Asian theater traditions, which could provide valuable insights into its unique features and cultural influences (Gonzalez, 2019). Such comparative studies could shed light on the transnational exchanges and cultural interactions that have shaped Philippine performing arts.

Furthermore, while some studies touch upon the significance of komedya in terms of community identity and resistance during the colonial period, there is limited research on its role in shaping national consciousness and its contributions to the broader discourse on Filipino identity formation (Reyes, 2020).

Thus, addressing these gaps in the literature would not only enrich our understanding of Philippine theater but also contribute to the global discourse on cultural heritage preservation and the role of traditional performing arts in contemporary societies. Future research should aim to explore these facets of komedya through interdisciplinary lenses, incorporating perspectives from theater studies, cultural anthropology, history, and sociology.

This paper determined the different cultural beliefs and traditions being practiced in Ilocos Sur. Moreover, it showcases the importance and significance of preserving these traditions and determines if any transformations are occurring, thus creating a sustainable policy to safeguard these traditions and practices. However, despite its enduring significance, there remains a gap in current research regarding the socio-political implications of Komedya in today's Philippine society. Future studies could explore how Komedya reflects and responds to

contemporary issues such as political upheaval, economic disparities, and environmental challenges.

Objectives

The study aimed to assess the Komedya as a cultural practice in Santa Catalina, Ilocos Sur Specifically, it aims to:

1. Determine the significance of the Komedya to the locals of the community; and
2. To find out the factors that can indigenize the practice of Komedia in the community;

LITERATURE REVIEW

The komedya is often called a three-act or longer verse play featuring staged conflicts, marches, and stylized motions and verse delivery. The lives of saints—typically the patron saint of the town where the komedya is taking place—or, more frequently, the war between Christians and Moors that occurs in medieval European and Middle Eastern countries are the typical subjects of komedya. Among the eight primary language groupings, "Komedya" or "comedia" is its most well-known moniker. At the same time, certain places may also refer to it as "moro-moro" due to the recurrent issue of Muslim-Christian strife. (Tiongson, 2010).

The Filipino komedya has its roots in the comedia written by the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega in the sixteenth century. The komedya inherited the different topic matter subtypes from its Spanish forebear, which may be drawn from either current events (*comedia de capa y espada*), the lives of saints (*comedia de Santo*), or the tales of far-off nations (*comedia a fantasia*). The original drama had three acts, each divided into three parts, with a convoluted and sensational plot, idealized characters, and themes of religion, love, and honor. The localized version also maintained the original drama's poem and prose format and its custom of sandwiching comedic sketches known as *entremeses* and *sainetes* between lengthy dialogue scenes. (Tiongson, *Kasaysayan at estetika ng komedya sa Parañaque*, 1979).

Buaquen asserts that culture is passed down from generation to generation and is something that a person learns while growing up in a particular society. As a result, certain cultural practices become lost throughout time while others alter, are renewed, or go through modernization (Buaquen, 2003).

Customs of the tribal communities are recognized as form part of the legal system in the Philippines. Under section 399 (Paragraph f) of the Local Government Code of the Philippines, information has been provided that in barangays, if indigenous cultural communities make up the majority of the population, local systems run by councils of *datus* or elders shall be acknowledged without affecting the relevant sections of the Code. On the other hand, article 11 of the Civil Code of the Philippines states that customs contrary to law, public order, or public policy shall not be countenanced. According to Chief Justice Cayetano Arellano, as cited by [7] Paras (1989), a custom is a rule of human action established by repeated acts and uniformly observed or practiced as a rule of society through the implicit approval of the lawmakers and which is; therefore, generally obligatory and legally binding. Several laws protect the rights of the Indigenous Cultural/tribal Communities in the Philippines. Article II, Section 22 of the Constitution emphasizes that the State recognizes and promotes the rights of indigenous cultural communities within the framework of national unity and development.

According to Alviento (2017) and Nisperos' research, the tribal communities comprise more than 12 million people who are descended from the archipelago of the Philippines' original inhabitants. These people have managed to fend off centuries of colonization while retaining their traditions, customs, and ways of life. Some even held the view that these indigenous people were rapidly disappearing as a result of modernization and commercialization's quick pace. (Alviento, 2008) .

The Global Declaration on Cultural Diversity from 2001 states that "culture is a way of life that comprises behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other shared products of human effort and intellect that represent the identity of a group" (UNESCO, 2002). So heritage is "a legacy from the past, what people live with

now, and what an individual or group of people jointly pass on to future generations," according to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS & IUCN, 2013). According to the notion of heritage, a person's legacy would be what they inherit from other people or groups or how they evolved from one race to another. The crucial component must be passed down constantly from one generation to the next. (Bessiere, 2013). As a person or the community continuously practices it, it becomes their identity or represents and characterizes them (UNESCO, 2003)

Intangible cultural heritage is considered an identity and the story of the community (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2003). This translates into what and how the group exhibits its heritage, customs, and beliefs, which later become commonplace practices or ways of life. These legacies are passed on orally or physically by an individual or a group of people. A community's cultural value and human inventiveness are shown respect and honor by transferring its intangible legacy (UNESCO, 2003). Intangible cultural heritages eventually undergo alterations when they are passed down, either by an individual or a community (UNESCO, 2003). When intangible cultural heritages are passed down, some specifics are eventually altered by a person or a community. The legacy is changed according to how people perceive its importance, the complexity of legacy practice, the accessibility of necessary resources and other things, the development of human creativity and skills, the legacy's documentation, and the influence of contemporary information and technology.

The 2003 Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage was created to ensure that all member states ratify the convention's provisions and that they are recognized internationally. The 2003 Convention intends to protect the intangible cultural heritage that complies with international human rights conventions and satisfies conditions for inter-communal respect and sustainable development (6). Additionally, member states, particularly those that have ratified the convention, must identify the various ICH on their national territory, undertake adequate documentation and inventory, and carry out conservation activities to maintain the community's identity and worth. The agreement also honors exceptional ICH that provides a universal value (Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity) and ICH that urgently require protection (of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding). The agreement also establishes guidelines for ICH documentation and produces a detailed action plan for ICH preservation and sustainable development that includes public and private input.

Komedya gained popularity as a literary form. The ease with which it kept the audience's attention can be attributed to it being primarily a social act and falling under the spoken word genre. According to N. Frye says, "Drama, like music, is an ensemble performance for an audience, and music and drama are most likely to flourish in a society with a strong consciousness of itself as a society..." (249). And the zarzuela, being a musical drama, strengthened the collective consciousness among the Filipinos even more. The Philippine komedya derives its name from the Spanish comedia and is known for being formulaic and stylized (Frye, 1973). The formula is always thus: kingdoms, More and Christian, are ranged against each other in love and war; the resolution to all the conflicts and obstacles is obtained by having the wars end, the enemies reconciled, and the Moros converted so that they can marry their Christian loves and presumably live in imagined peace ever after. The stylization is visually splendid: Christian plumed and gallooned in blue and purple; Moros arrogant in reds and oranges; battles set to music; words of love not just spoken, but declaimed; tournaments and marching; entrances and exits that flourish befitting royalty (Fernandez, 1986).

A study demonstrates that while living in the modern day, tribal societies still kept some of their cultural customs alive. Nowadays, a large portion of the value system that indigenous societies have upheld since their inception is still evident. (Alviento S. &., 2017). In contemporary times, scholars such as Santos (2018) argue that Komedya continues to play a crucial role in local cultural festivals and celebrations. It serves as a means of cultural preservation and identity assertion in the face of modernization and globalization. Santos further suggests that Komedya performances have adapted to incorporate new themes and narratives that resonate with contemporary Filipino audiences, thereby ensuring its relevance and continuity.

Moreover, the significance of Komedya extends beyond mere entertainment; it is also seen as a form of cultural resistance and assertion. As noted by Rivera (2012), Komedya performances often challenge dominant narratives and empower local communities by reaffirming cultural pride and resilience in the face of external influences.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This investigation is qualitative research that employs a descriptive and narrative design that focuses on assessing and analyzing the opinions and perspectives of the participants of the Komedya or spectators of the event. Before the conduct of the study, permission from the proper authorities was sought and obtained. Informants were identified during the preliminary visit, an in-depth interview was conducted with the informants, and other data were collected from other sources.

Locale and Participants of the Study

The study was conducted in the municipality of Santa Catalina, Ilocos Sur. The study included ten participants who joined the performance of the Komedya during the locality's town fiesta, either as performers or audience in the event.

Data Measure and Collection

Since local studies on Komedya are unavailable in the locality, researchers were guided by the interview guide questions to gather data. An in-depth interview, a qualitative type of research that seeks to determine a comprehensive insight from a person with only a small group of respondents, was employed. Then, for ethical considerations, the researchers distributed appropriate letters of intent to the municipal mayor, proponent, and organizers of the Komedya and waited for their approval before the conduct of the study. After the approval, research fieldwork was done specifically on the observation and documentation of the Komedya during the town fiesta; in-depth interviews were conducted with the different stakeholders, proponents, organizers, participants, and spectators of the Komedya.

Mode of Analysis

Data were collected, documented, and described based on the data taken from the key informants. Data gathered through interviews was transcribed, and researchers identified significant details and categorized descriptors and components, then major themes were formulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Significance of the Komedya

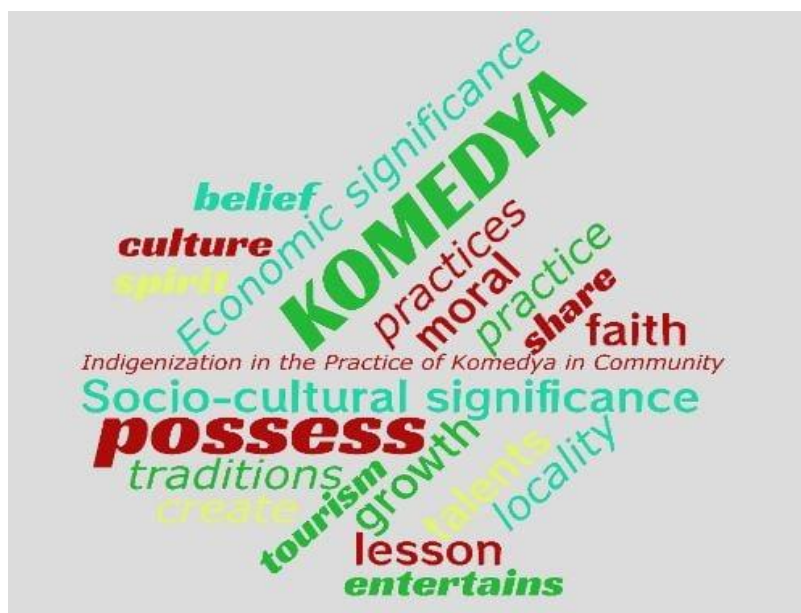


Figure 1. Simulacrum

As shown in the simulacrum, three themes were generated on the significance of the Komedya as a cultural tradition to the community identified as:

Socio-Cultural Significance

To underline the connection and importance of heritage to the local issue, the community's perspectives on heritage are essential. People, both locals and visitors, are inspired to preserve and defend cultural heritage and heritage because of its social significance and identity. (Neuman, 2018); (Timothy & Ron, 2013).

Cultural festivals positively and negatively contribute to a region's society and culture. Festivals embrace the culture, including ancestors' music traditions, drama, dance, and cuisine, and allow attendees to glimpse the past. (Durgamohan, 2015). Through concerted efforts, festivals enable the host communities to highlight their regional customs, religion, art forms, cuisine, and identity (Walker, 2019). They enhance social relationships and fortify ties within groups. It strengthens cultural roots and values and makes preserving traditions and practices possible (Jauhari, 2015). This kind of activity also allows artists to perform, especially art forms that are not prevalent in contemporary times. It also allows the communities to show their local traditions and maintain harmonious relationships with others.

The residents of Santa Catalina see the social-cultural importance and benefits of Komedya. Komedya is indeed important to the people of Sta. Catalina. This must be performed every year because it is a form of entertainment for the community's people. The Komedya enriches the culture of the people since it practices the community's beliefs and traditions. It not only entertains the locals, but it introduces values, particularly to the youth.

As stated by *Participant 1*, "Komedya enriches the culture of the people since it practices their beliefs and traditions. *Participant 3* said, "The impact of the show in the field of culture is that when we wear costumes, it makes us different as we possess the character's personality. As a participant in this event, I can show my talent to people, and I am happy to share it and make new friends". *Participant 2* noted that "Komedya does not only entertain the people of Sta. Catalina but it gives a lesson to the audience". *Participant 4* further remarked that Komedya is one of the most awaited events during the conduct of the town fiesta as it gathers people from all walks of life to watch for it.

Economic Significance

The cultural and community-level festivals provide economic importance to society. It provides a platform for artisans to gain economic benefits by showcasing their arts and crafts (Jauhari, 2015). Festivals and events have become an effective strategy for improving local economies and reducing poverty (Wu, 2013).

As stated by *Participant 1*, "Komedya creates and boosts tourism in our area. It provides income to the locality". *Participant 3* stated that "Komedya stimulates business growth in the town and is a growing force in the tourism industry". (Nurse, 2001) The economic benefits of festival tourism include increased tax revenues and employment opportunities, more businesses in the region, high hotel occupancy levels, and increased media value for the host region.

Participant 5, "We were given a chance to perform in other places and countries". The alliances and awareness of the locals of this activity offer them a chance to perform on international platforms and gatherings. Festivals and events are instruments of sustainable livelihood in the community.

Religious or Spiritual Significance

The earliest type of tourism is religious tourism, driven by religious considerations (Rinschede, 1992). The Philippine culture is fundamentally based on religion, which is the foundation for everyday rituals and values.

As mentioned by *Participant 1*, "The Komedya brings a deep sense of faith to God. Komedya is indeed important to the people of Sta. Catalina. It is also part of their belief that there will be a strong typhoon whenever it is not performed. It shows the importance of life to the people. The usual subject of the Komedya are the lives of saints (usually the patron saint of the town in whose honor the komedya is being staged) or, more commonly, the strife

between Christians and Moors, set in Europe and Middle Eastern kingdoms in the middle ages (Tlongson, 2010).

Participant 2 stated, "People watching Komedya will somehow have relief in their hearts just by watching the show and will boost their spirit about what happened in the past. It shows the importance of life to the people. Meanwhile, *Participant 3* said, "The event provided a strong link to strengthen the relationship to God".

Komedya holds significant religious symbolism within the context of Philippine cultural heritage, particularly in its portrayal of moral struggles, redemption themes, and the clash between good and evil. Rooted in Spanish colonial influences, the genre often incorporates Christian narratives and allegories, reflecting the interplay between indigenous beliefs and Catholicism in Filipino society.

According to Gonzalez (2016), komedya's religious significance is evident in its dramatization of biblical stories, saints' lives, and moral lessons, which serve to educate audiences about Christian virtues and ethics. The performances, typically staged during religious festivities, not only entertain but also reinforce religious teachings and foster community cohesion through shared cultural experiences.

Moreover, komedya plays a role in the ritualistic aspects of Philippine religious practices, blending theatrical performance with devotional elements to engage audiences spiritually and emotionally (Gonzalez, 2016).

Indigenization of the practice of Komedya in the community

Nowadays, Komedya in other localities is no longer performed. However, in the municipality of Sta. Catalina Ilocos Sur preserves it by encouraging youth to join and practice for the show. As stated by the organizers of the Komedya, they are actively inviting participants, especially the young ones, as long as there is a commitment to be trained. The practice involves speaking and fighting a battle. Since one of its central focuses is a fight between Muslims and Christians, it includes characters like kings, emperors, princes, princesses, soldiers, and nights. The show lasts for three days, but nowadays, it can be performed in just one day. Usually, it starts on the 23rd of November and until the 25th of the same month. It is passed down from one generation to another generation.

Participant 6 verbalized, "Komedya is performed annually and it is considered as one of the highlights of the town fiesta. Townsfolk from all barangays and all walks of life proceed to the plaza to watch for it." *Participant 7* further added we feel lucky that we are given the chance to see what our ancestors loved to watch during their time."

Despite modernization and the advancement of technology, the townspeople of Sta. Catalina consider the religious value of Komedya. Whenever it is performed during town fiesta, it's not only the old members of the family who go out to watch but even younger members of the family. The parents inculcate to their value its significance.

Participant 5 remarked, "Our parents don't have to take us anymore to the plaza but we go there because we want to see our fellow youths perform their roles.

Participant 7, on the other hand, added, "Komedya gives us a thrill every time it is performed as it allows us to witness our townspeople perform and how they transform during their performance by their outfits and how they carry them on stage."

The clothing and music serve the komedya's only goal of creating a spectacle by symbolically representing the heroes and villains (Tiatco, 2014). While music accompanies each character's entrance and exit, the costumes in Komedya are a pastiche of many inspirations and intrinsic markers of territoriality, such as giving dark colors to Muslims and light colors to Christians (Tiatco, 2014).

The reimagined and contemporary war dance, which uses new lyrics, music, and costumes, is one of the most noticeable modifications in the Komedya performance. With the show's main idea remaining intact, some sequences were changed to grab viewers' attention.

Filipinos have adored komedya for many generations and have adapted it in many ways. Because cultural

practices like the komedya give Filipinos their distinctive and particular identity, the nation cannot allow it to merely perish or fade away. Komedya must keep up with the fast-paced pace of modern life and be relevant to the times to survive as a cultural heritage. It must engage audiences, whether in a small town or a city, and they must be open to screenplay and production changes. When implemented with consideration and care, these alterations help to enrich the form, foster its development, and improve its ability to relate meaningfully to its viewers (Tiongson, 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

Komedya, as a cultural tradition, contributes to the community's sustainable development. Socio-cultural, economic, and religious or spiritual aspects all contribute to significance. Komedya's cultural show preservation has taken the form of a performance that has been updated and modernized with new songs, music, and outfits. This is done to engage audiences while knowing that the form needs to be enhanced and changed to adapt to modern times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Local Government Unit should actively support the Komedya as a cultural heritage of Santa Catalina. A policy recognizing the importance and contribution of the cultural show must be emphasized to preserve the tradition and should be continued by the next generation. The Committee of Education of the Local Government Unit should recommend the inclusion of the Komedya as part of the existing curriculum for the students. This is to create awareness of the contribution and significance of the Komedya as a cultural practice of the locality.

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