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Plants and Culture: The Role of Plants in the Cultural Practices of the Kalanguya in Tinoc, Ifugao

The mossy forest of Tinoc

The diversity of plant species in the Cordillera Region, the northernmost part of the Philippines, is matched by an equally rich cultural diversity. It is unfortunate, though, that there are few systematic documentation and recording of the plant species and the cultural diversity in the Region. This research on plants and culture of the Kalanguya in Tinoc, Ifugao aims to contribute to the scant materials written by a few authors on these subject matters. It presents and discusses the relationship between the Kalanguya and the plants in his environs and how he integrates plant use in his cultural practices.

The research had the following objectives: 1) to identify and document the plants used in the cultural practices of the Kalanguya; 2) to contribute to the increasing information on traditional use of plants (i.e., folk medicine, food, building materials, cordage, etc.; 3) to encourage the sustainable use of plant resources in Tinoc, Ifugao and promote maximum utilization of these plants; and 4) to contribute to the baseline data on Cordillera flora.

Information on Kalanguya customs and traditions and the utilization of plants was gathered through individual interviews, focused group discussions, direct observation and field and herbarium research. A survey of the useful plant species in Tinoc was undertaken and 292 plants were identified and vouchered. These are distributed to 195 genera and 94 families that compose the major plant groups: ferns, gymnosperms and angiosperms.

Tinoc is a remote municipality of Ifugao. It is tucked away among mountains, rugged hills and dense pine and mossy forests. It is home to the Kalanguya, a relatively unknown tribe that inhabits the area. The Kalanguya traditional knowledge on plant use has evolved for years and the indigenous uses of these plants are integrated in every facet of their lives. These include the most basic such as food, clothing and shelter, adornment, cordage, ink, toys, rituals, basketry, medicine, musical instruments, cosmetics, poison, tools, transportation, soil and water conservation, ornamentals and many more. The forest, which houses these plants, serves as the provider, functioning as their grocery, store, pharmacy and hardware.

Plants for Rituals

The Kalanguya believe that, from birth to death, gods and deities around them have complete control over their lives, thus the deep and reverent belief in their powers. Displeasure can cause ailments, pestilence and unexplained occurrences. The Kalanguya then regularly perform rituals either to offer gratitude (for births or bountiful harvests) or appease the displeased god or deity (failure to observe ritual traditions). Among the most functional plants for the Kalanguya rituals are: betel nut (*Arecha catechu*), tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum* L.) used as offerings; *rono* (*Miscanthus* spp.) and *dangla* (*Cordyline fruiticosa* (L.) A. Cheval for calling spirits; *buyot/ habit* (*Rubus* spp.) used as protection from evil. *Miscanthus* spp. is, in fact, the most versatile as it has several other uses: in the construction of houses, as material for mats, as stakes or trellises for crops, as well as food. The more common plants that take center stage during rituals are *ube* (*Ipomoea batatas*), glutinous rice which is made into *tapey* or rice wine and *pihing* (*Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott.)

Plants for Medicines

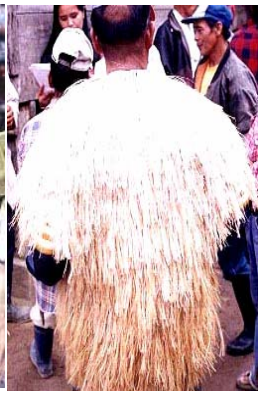
An assortment of medicinal plants is resorted to for the cure of a variety of ailments. The most functional of these plants that are indigenous to the area include the following: crushed *mullah* (*Ageratina adenophora*) and *lagpaw* (*Tithonia diversifolia*) leaves to treat cuts

Use of bamboo and banana stalks in cañao

and wounds; *gulon* (*Impereta cylindrical*) roots for kidney trouble; *gatah-gatah* (*Euphorbia hirta*) to treat asthma and sore eyes. Several species can also be used to cure the same ailment or disease: *kaliptus* (*Eucalyptus* spp.), *gayabah* (*Psidium guajava*), *ganaba* (*Lagerstroemia speciosas*) and *gatawa* (*Ricinus communis*) can cure scabies.

Plants for Clothes

The kalupi



The hunter's coat

The traditional Kalanguya garb (g-string for men and *tapis* for women) are woven from *alinnew* (*Trichospermum* lanigerum), *alinduweng* (*Trema amboinensis*) and maguey (*Agave* sp.) fibers. Fibers from these plants are also used as cordage for harvested rice stalks and firewood. An equally important plant is *pangdan* (*Freycinetia multiflora* and *Freycinetia cumingiana*) whose roots are pounded and the resulting fibers sewn to become the *bangew* or hunter's coat.

Plants for Acquiring Food

The Kalanguya supplements his farm produce with catch from hunting and fishing activities. The *balilli* (*Callicarpa formosana*) is an indispensable companion in fishing sorties as it is used as fish poison. Traps for small fish are fashioned from *Juncus effuses* L. In hunting, the sticky sap of the *pakpak* (*Artocarpus communis* Forst.) traps the feet of birds. *Alantap* (*Neonuclea reticula*) leaves also function as wrapping material for honey gathered from oak trees.

Tinoc's rice terraces

Plants Used in Making Musical Instruments

Just like all other tribes in the Cordillera, the Kalanguya consider the *gangha* (gongs) and *holibaw* as their major musical instruments. The *holibaw*, a drum-like instrument, is fashioned from elongated pieces of quality wood like *Clethra lancifolia*. One end of the *holibaw i*s covered with hide or leather from a cow, carabao or goat. The *pagkong* is another musical instrument made from bamboo. The *galdang* is an indigenous guitar made from a slab of local wood.

The research goes on to mention other uses of plant resources in the everyday life of the Kalanguya: basketry, fodder, house construction, etc. But the research also raises concerns on the incessant and indiscriminate harvesting of these plant resources without contemplation for replenishment. There are claims that some of the once readily available plant resources can now only be found in the deeper parts of the forests. As a recommendation, the study proposes a more comprehensive inventory of useful plants through the recording of geographical distribution as well as seasonal harvests of plant resources to avoid over-harvesting. It also suggests exerting efforts towards sustaining or increasing supply of medicinal plants (perhaps a national strategy for conservation and sustainable use can be formulated and enforced). The conduct of similar researches on traditional medicine has also been proposed to stimulate interest in these strategies.

The different kinds of gangha

Additionally, the study advocates the initiation of monitoring activities for species collected in large quantities and the recording of the intensity and frequency of utilization as well as harvesting. And for replenishment purposes, forest nurseries are eyed for establishment.

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Rice terraces with granary

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