

Cultural Characteristics and Values in Sorsogueños' Poems

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Abstract - *To better understand the Filipino way of life, it is imperative to study the literature of the Philippines specifically the poetry of Sorsogon for it serves as a receptacle and a showcase of cultural characteristics, values, and traditions of Sorsogueños. The contemporary times showcase Sorsogueños' literature proliferating trilingually in English, Filipino and the vernacular. The desire for self-expression in any language seems to describe that literature is the most effective way to identify what comprises a meaningful human life. This study analyzed and extracted the cultural characteristics and values manifested in Sorsogueños poems. This is a descriptive qualitative study using documentary and content analysis of the works of Sorsogueños' poets in terms of the cultural characteristics and values manifested in them. The researchers collected 22 published poems in the 16 municipalities of Sorsogon. Analysis of the poems showed the following cultural characteristics viz: Sorsogueños are very religious; they are very sentimental and emotional; very passionate and lovable; optimistic and have positive viewpoint in the future. They are also risk-takers; have regards on the welfare of others, nationalistic have sense of brotherhood/comradeship and full of hope despite hardships in life. Values embodied in the analyzed poems consist of the elements of hospitality, comradeship, nationalism, unselfish love, confidence, ingenuity, courtesy, hopes, aspirations, dreams, culture, and traditions of Sorsogueños.*

Key words: *Literature, Sorsogueños' poems, cultural characteristics*

INTRODUCTION

A study of Philippine Literature should lead towards better understanding of the Filipino way of life for it serves as a repository, a showcase of culture and tradition. As Lombardi [1] avers, literature represents a language or a people: culture and tradition. It is more important than just historical or cultural artifacts for it introduces the folks to new worlds of experience and even grows and evolves through their literary journey with books.

Further, Maramba [2] states that literary tradition disseminates itself; it simultaneously disseminates the culture itself. She further says that the relation between literature and culture can be likened to the relation between speech and thought, which simultaneously serve each other. The more one knows a culture, the better he/she understands and appreciates its literature. Truly, Sorsogueños really need the benefits of this reciprocal function of literature and culture.

Culture, according to Geertz [3] is semiotic, meaning, it must be interpreted to extract its meaning which is relevant in the understanding of man and

society. Thus, through the study of Literature particularly the cultural characteristics and values embodied in poetry will give positive attitude towards one's culture. Also, Ribo and Reyes [4] mention that during the transition period, Filipino writers began to write more naturally and spontaneously about the things they really cared about. They began to dab in new variety of subjects and new styles and conventions in writing. There was a renewed feeling of national pride and awakening of social profundity.

As the country recovered from the toils of war, the literary outputs grew by leaps and bounds wherein poets are already equipped with greater flair in the use of trilingual language. Like the Sorsogueno poets, marked by versatility in the use of vernacular, Filipino and English languages, they formed excellent pieces with a deeper search for self-identity. Indeed, Sorsogueños are known to be poetic, romantic and have a natural flair for expressing themselves. Though limited in number, Sorsogueños' local poetry has its distinct quality.

After years of teaching Philippine Literature, Maramba [2] noticed a lack of appreciation and even a

tinge of diminishing appreciation of Philippine Literature. One reason she suspects is unfamiliarity with the culture behind the literature or lack of identification with the former. This is also due to the hybrid cultural orientation of the Filipino. This diversity brings them back to the problem of identity.

Albrecht [5] avers that literature is a reflecting norms and values, as revealing the ethos of culture, the processes of class struggle, and certain types of social facts. This he means that literature expresses some positive influence on the people's mind and attitude for society reacts to literature in a living way. Undeniably, an inspiring poem creates general influence on society and rouses one's feelings and enthusiasm that have altered their ways of life.

Mangaraj [6] states that the influence of literature on society is felt directly or indirectly. Thus, society creates literature. It may be described as the mirror of the society. But the quality and nature of the reflection depends upon the writer's attitude of mind, whether he is progressive in his outlook or reactionary. Naturally, Mangaraj elucidates that conservative-minded writer will stress those aspects of social life, which put the traditional ways of life in the best possible way. For example, he will set a high value on reverence for age-old ideals, respect for religion, chastity of woman and so on. On the other hand, a progressive writer will tend to show how old ideals act as restraints on the natural freedom of the human mind, cripple the free movement of man and women in an unrestricted atmosphere, set for liberating new ideals and moving society that looks forward to newer ways of life.

The field of Sociology defined **society** "as a group of people having rapport or bond such as social status, roles and social networks. They could be large social groupings who share the same geographical territory and are subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations". Culture and society are co-existent and one cannot exist without the other. In other words, society is composed of people who have knowledge, ideas, customs, traditions, folkways, mores, beliefs, skills, institutions and organizations. Hence, the branches of Humanities fall under culture such as History, Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Literature and the Arts.

Poetry is a type of literature, or artistic writing, which attempts to stir a reader's imagination or emotions. Some forms of poetry are specific to particular cultures and genres responding to the characteristics of the language in which the poet

writes. As the poet Paul Valéry observes, "Poetry is an art based on language." It seems that, it is one of many ways in which humans employ the magic of language in their attempt to discern the mysterious aspects of reality.

Each locale urban or rural produces its own poet who in turn produces either oral or written poetry indigenous to its place of origin; the poems not only express the poets sentiments for a particular subject but also capture the local color and sensibilities of a people. Poetry is a medium by which the grassroots speak through the prolific pen of some well-known or obscure writers.

In addition, readers also learn values that could influence and shape their lives as stressed by Santiago [7]. Similarly, Galigao [8] states that the value-oriented curriculum requires the use of Philippine Literature as a rich resource that is attuned to the goals of education nowadays. She further says that it does not only infuse love for literature and nationalism but it also refocuses the mind of the learners on the pluralistic literary conditions they have been exposed to for so many decades.

The ideas presented by the aforementioned authors are similar to the idea of the authors in this study that manifested values, traits, beliefs and traditions that would provide a more vivid picture which can bring the students closer to that search for the Filipino identity. Through the study of literature, it seeks not only to evaluate the literary works but also the values that are inculcated in them which bring significant contribution in the nation's concern and insight into the Filipino culture.

Indeed, the world today embraces modernity. Not surprisingly, people have already modern style of thinking which also appears even in literary styles and cultural forms which is now a factor that triggers the tension between modernity and tradition, a concern which has been over looked.

Nierva [9], in his first book of Bikol poetry provides pervading metaphor and movement. The proximity of his place in the Tagalog region and the influx of internal migrants from other towns at the start of the 20th century shaped its culture and gave it a transitional and half-way character which he so nostalgically captured in his poems. His lyric form gave him his own defined theme, touching more intimately on the personal and psychological; and with much discernment and controlled emotion on the socially-engaged issues. In line with his thought, the

present study focuses on Sorsogueños' poetry that provides impact on the life of the Sorsogueños and likewise touches the inner selves of its readers.

The people in Sorsogon should appreciate and treasure the cultural heritage of the people in the past. This is one of the reasons why this study is conceived. Every Sorsogueño should grasp the significance of today in the light of yesterday's events and should boldly look ahead with his feet firmly planted on the realities from the present. People who have visionary socio-economic formations have obvious strong links with their past. Therefore, history cannot be separated from the present; since progress of a person established at present has a connection with his past.

It is hoped that through the study of Sorsogueno poetry which in reality neglected and unrecognized may lead the students to realize why they have a tradition of a somewhat ornamental language. Likewise, this may contribute to the discovery of Sorsogueños' cultural identity, give a general picture of Sorsogueños poetic writings and contribute to their collective literary dynamism.

Studying a particular literary genre like poetry means not only studying it because it is beautiful or mandated as a subject but most importantly because it is the cultural representation of the people behind it. The present study deals not only on the basic elements presented in the poems but also on the cultural

characteristics of the people of Sorsogon. Through the output of this study, the researcher may, in some ways, help the students and other people understand, appreciate and preserve their own indigenous culture.

Through this endeavor, the Sorsogueños could have a glimpse of what the past and the future hold for them. Only in reference to these literary historical materials will they be able to appreciate the past and the present and be hopeful of the future. The researchers do believe that it can serve as an authentic material to students for their ingenious minds in other fields such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, fine arts, history, communication and others. It is vital for every college student to develop his/her higher order thinking skills to be competent when it comes to critical thinking, analyzing and problem solving. These are essential in meeting the challenges of the modern world.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study analyzed the cultural characteristics and values manifested in Sorsoguenos' poems. Specifically, it documented the Sorsogueños' poems written in English, Filipino and vernacular, and analyzed the cultural characteristics and values manifested in the said poems.

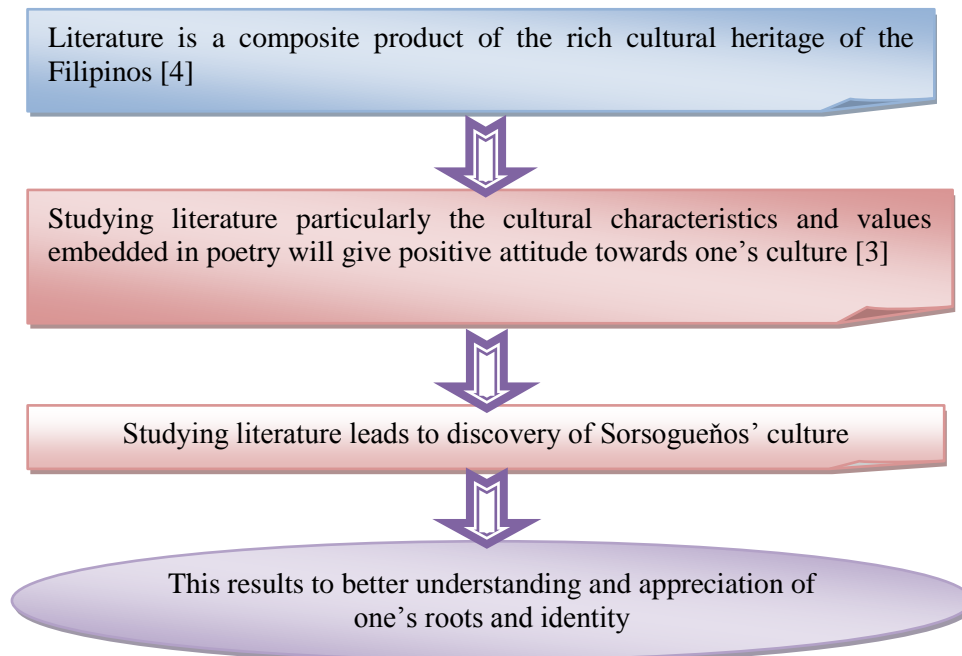


Figure 1. Theoretical Paradigm

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature of the Philippines is predominantly a reflection of the indigenous culture and traditions of the land. It is a uniting element among its people that encompasses life cycle and values cherished by the locals and will continue to evolve as enriched by modern-day changes.

Ribo and Reyes [4] express that literature is a composite product of the rich cultural heritage of the Filipino. Also Geertz [3] says that studying literature particularly the cultural characteristics and values embedded in poetry will give positive attitude towards one's culture. In addition, for Geertz, interpreting culture is likened to that of deconstructing the meaning of a literary text to figure out how things interconnect and what sort of social relevance and validity is found. He further says that analyzing a particular way of life is like close reading of a text which extracts meaning based from one's personal tradition and perspective in life.

The analysis and interpretation of the various poems from the local poets in the municipalities of Sorsogon will hopefully lead to the discovery of Sorsoguenos cultural identity and to better understand and appreciate the Sorsoguenos' poetry. Figure 1 presents the theoretical paradigm of this study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive qualitative study using documentary and content analysis of the works of Sorsoguenos' poets in terms of the cultural characteristics and values manifested in them. There are 22 published poems gathered from the 16 municipalities of Sorsogon province. The study was delimited only to those published poems which were collected from various libraries in Sorsogon National Museum, Aemilianum College, and St. Louise de Marillac College all in Sorsogon City and Aquinas University of Legaspi. Some were given by professors and friends and relatives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sorsoguenos' Poems Written in English, Tagalog and Vernacular Manifesting Cultural Characteristics and Values of Sorsoguenos

There were 22 poems originally composed by the Sorsogon poets in the two districts of Sorsogon which were collected by the researchers. Out of this number, 17 are written in the vernacular, only one is written in

Tagalog, and four are in English. The poems were arranged alphabetically according to the language used together with their authors in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Poems written in the vernacular (Bicol)

Poems	Authors
1. <i>An Buhay na Pag- Mawot</i>	Asisclo Jimenez
2. <i>An Kalmang-Nayon</i>	Rommel Habitchuela
3. <i>An Lalawigan kan Sorsogon</i>	Crispin Dionela
4. <i>An Paratagunhas</i>	Ben Escoto
5. <i>An Satong Wagayway</i>	Valerio Zuñiga
6. <i>An Simong Ladawan</i>	Valerio Zuñiga
7. <i>Canta</i>	Jose Figueroa
8. <i>Diin ka sa Gubat</i>	Ben Escoto
9. <i>Dolot sa Banwaan nin Irosin</i>	B-AZEBA
10. <i>Himagsikan</i>	Valerio Zuñiga
11. <i>Kahiraki Man</i>	Conсорcia R. Aves
12. <i>Kagayunan</i>	Asisclo Jimenez
13. <i>Paglimot</i>	Conсорcia R. Aves
14. <i>Romdoma</i>	Fely Villa
15. <i>Stabat Mater</i>	Valerio Zuñiga
16. <i>Sorsogon</i>	Asisclo Jimenez
17. <i>Sorsogon: An Tunay na Istorya</i>	Reynaldo T. Jamoralin

These poems which embodied certain cultural characteristics, traditions and values inherent to the natives of the place and written by residents of Sorsogon were purposively selected in the choice of the sample materials. Thus, poems whose authors are non-residents of the province were excluded in the study although they were written in Bicol dialect. Some of the poems were taken from the local libraries; others were shared by friends, relatives, professors and students. Unfortunately, the year when the said poems were written were not known except the poem of Jamoralin which was written in 1994. There is no way of determining the year of other poems since most of the authors have already passed away.

Table 2. Poems written in Tagalog and English

Poems	Authors
Tagalog	
1. <i>Pangarap at Paghahanap</i>	Rafael Buema
English	
1. Vigilante Recipe	Dennis Hermosa
2. After Oplan Karumal-dumal	Dennis Hermosa
3. For the Boy of 16	Dennis Hermosa
4. Rizal Time	Dennis Hermosa

Nevertheless, the list of poetry revealed that Sorsogon has prolific writers who could be at par with other illustrious writers of the world.

Cultural Characteristics and Values Manifested in the Poems

Literature is a way for man to express his thoughts, beliefs and ideas. Tanvir [10] says that the study of literature is a study of various temperaments; life is variegated, its facets and problems are multifarious and a study of literature gives life freely and abundantly. It elevates one's mind, and ennobles one's character. It is a criticism of life and its high seriousness serves to mould the minds. From the pettiness of life people pass over to the natural beauties or the domain of fundamental emotions mirrored in the lyrics, the pure and spontaneous forms of literature.

Table 3 and 4 show diverse cultural characteristics and values of Sorsoguenos' poetry written in Bicol vernacular, Filipino and English, respectively. The province has long been ripe for progress and development, has vast natural resources, with sheer beauty of potential tourist spots, wild, majestic, but ostensibly serene and its idyllic beauty perfect for nature lovers as in the lines of the poem *Dolot sa Banwaan nin Irosin* by B-AZEB:

*Magayon na gayo sa mata paghilngon
"Hardin" an kabaing sangkap nin tinanom;
Abaka, niyogan asin pang-mahon,
Sa pagbuhay-buhay dai nin hanapon
Si mga dayuhan kun minapadigdi
Dai nahahaloy tolos nawiwili;
Nabihag an boot pagsorosadiri;
nakisumaro na, biyong napaili.*

Table 3. Cultural characteristics and values in Sorsoguenos' poems written in the vernacular

Poems	Cultural Characteristics	Values
1. <i>An Buhay na Pag- Mawot</i>	Proud loyalty and devotion to the country	Optimistic/Hopeful, Nationalism /Patriotism
2. <i>An Lalawigan kan Sorsogon</i>	Appreciation of one's own place	Love
3. <i>An Satong Wagayway</i>	Love of country	Nationalism/patriotism
4. <i>An Simong Ladawan</i>	Trust God and leaving everything to Him for guidance and strength	Religious/strong faith in God
5. <i>Canta</i>	*Love of country *In spite of adversity, determination is always embodied in the hearts and minds of Sorsoguenos *Believe that in unity there is strength	Patriotism Perseverance Camaraderie
6. <i>Diin ka sa Gubat</i>	Serious search of Sorsoganon cultural origin	Cheerfulness
7. <i>Dolot sa Banwaan nin Irosin</i>	Appreciation of the beauty of nature	Nature lover
8. <i>Kahiraki Man</i>	A feeling that something desirable is likely to happen	Hope , Courage
9. <i>Kagayunan</i>	Appreciation and love of God's creation	Nature lover
10. <i>Paglimot</i>	Feeling light of the trouble with a kind of joy that withstand failure in life/love	Valiant, dauntless Forgiveness
11. <i>Romdoma</i>	Feeling of concern with others/loved ones	Debt of gratitude
12. <i>Stabat Mater</i>	Trust God and leaving everything to Him for guidance and strength	Religious/strong faith in God
13. <i>Sorsogon</i>	Reminiscence of the past experiences which affects one's outlook in life	Emotional/passionate
14. <i>Sorsogon: An Tunay na Istorya</i>	Appreciation of one's own place	Love

It is also revealing that people in Sorsogon are very religious. It is manifested that because not everything is within their control, and therefore, leaving everything to God for guidance and strength. These are reflected in poem *An Buhay na Pag Mawot* by Asisclo Jimenez:

*Oh Dios na poon, Dios na halankaw,
mantang ikang Dios nin katotohanan,
saimong ampona an samong banuaan
ligtasan sa sogot asin pag alaman*

Also, as observed, in the poem “Diin ka sa Gubat” by Ben Escoto, the identity of being a Sorsogueno can easily be identified because of the serious search of his Bikol cultural origin and his ethnic aesthetic as in the lines:

*Diin ka sa Gubat
Makilala ko man lugod ikaw
An mga hinalean mo
Sa iyo lugar*

*Sa may poso , sa sanga na dalan
San Daco-na-Cota*

Contemporary poets on the other hand, manifest revolutionary minds and expresses nationalistic identity. These are embedded in the lines of Jose Figueroa entitled *Canta*:

*Nagtatangis kami, simo Filipinas
Huli sa karatan nin simong palad
Kon samong mahimo na kamo iligtas
Uya an buhay mi kon iyo mong hagad.*

With local diverse flora and fauna of Sorsogon, these could compete with some of the country’s best and could be as major tourist attractions for Sorsogon.

Sorsogueños are very hospitable, have sense of endurance, happy men and with good humor. They could turn frequent problems into an occasion of fun and games despite all adversities in life like in the lines of *Rizal Time* by Dennis Hermosa:

*and as the condemned time started to fall,
hidden smiles lingered
behind the bored jaws
of the future Hopes
of the Fatherland.*

The language used in the analyzed poems is the determining factor of Sorsogueños’ values. Certainly, literature promotes and perpetuates their cultural heritage which is distinct to other culture. According to Omas, et.al. [11] Language as embedded in Literature like poetry possesses culture and considered as the central feature of all human cultures.

The Spanish conquests in the land greatly influence the poems of Sorsogueños. This is probably because religion constitutes the strongest influence brought by the Spanish occupation upon our literature. Like for instance, the first mass in Luzon was celebrated in Sorsogon particularly in Magallanes which directly affects the literary craftsmanship of the writers like Valerio Zuniga, Rafael Buema and Dennis Hermosa. Moreover, as revealed in the Sorsogueños’ poems, it is considered as a “see-saving balance between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, elitism and democracy, arts and politics.”

Table 4. Cultural characteristics and values in Sorsogueños’ poems written in Tagalog and English

POEMS	Cultural Characteristics	Values
Tagalog		
1. Pangarap at Paghahanap	Dedicate whole heart and mind in doing something for the good of everyone	Determination, Self-Confidence Strong faith in God, fellowmen and self
English		
1. Vigilante Recipe	Being watchful and alert particularly to danger Being conscious that the present age is a changing and revolutionary society	Alertness and Consciousness
2. After Oplan Karumal-dumal	misery of war; national sentiments	Sentimental
3. For the Boys of 16	Feeling of concern with others/loved ones	Helpful; Perseverance
4. Rizal Time	Inculcate that the youths are the hope of the motherland	Hope

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is concluded based on the analysis that there are several poems in Sorsogon which are written in vernacular, Filipino and English. These poems manifest cultural practices and values which are distinct to Sorsogueños as a group of people. Sorsogueños are very religious; they are sentimental and emotional; passionate and lovable; optimistic and have positive outlook in life. They are also risk-takers; have regards on the welfare of others, nationalistic have sense of brotherhood/comradeship and full of hope despite hardships in life. Values shown in the poems are hospitality, comradeship, nationalism, unselfish love, confidence, ingenuity, courtesy, hopes, aspirations, dreams, culture, and traditions of Sorsogueños.

It is recommended that the documented poems written by Sorsogueños may be further analyzed to determine other aspects which can be used as sources of teaching other subjects like humanities, philosophy, religion, history, arts, communication and many others. Further, the instructional materials may be generated for use by the secondary and tertiary students in literature and other classes. After its development, said materials may be tried by other teachers to determine its acceptability and efficacy.

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