



## **“SAPIT”, PEACE ACCORD OF THE BAGO TRIBE**

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**Abstract:** *Culture is a basic determinant of personality because man is very part of the environment he creates as he conforms to his culture. It is through culture that men discern values and makes choices as he seeks untiringly for new meaning through which he transcends his limitations. The peace accord of indigenous people is considered part of their non material culture of which they adhere to.*

*This study aimed to find out and describes the strength and uniqueness of the “Sapit” as a peace accord of the Bago tribe. The researchers were guided by the following 1. The processes in the practice of “Sapit”. 2. The Christian and social tenets revealed in the practice of “Sapit”. 3. The “Sapit” in the psychosocial life and development of the Bagos.*

*This qualitative study made use of phenomenological method, focus group discussion, immersion, interview, photo documentation and unstructured questionnaires were used to collect necessary information for the presentation of the processes involved in the “Sapit”.*

*The “Sapit” is an alternative peace accord, an intelligent way of settling any differences, conflicts, disputes and irrational actions among the “Bagos” which is anchored in the tenets of Christianity and social life. It is highly recognized, appreciated and being manifested by the “Bagos” as a legal justice system of their tribe.*

*Bagos become aware as they realize and discern about their actions which does not conform to their culture and may affect or severe their association with their co- Bagos. During the process of Sapit one realizes who he is, describing his total personality as a Bago who manifest a docile peace loving personality as he gives importance to others in his daily life.*

**Keywords:** *Culture, Justice System*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Culture is a system of beliefs, customs, literature, art, religion, morality, and attitudes that guide man's behavior in the society. It is a social heritage transmitted from one generation to another and commonly shared by people in a particular society. It is also a basic determinant of personality because man is very much a part of the environment he creates as he conforms to his culture. It is through culture that men discern values and makes choices. It is through culture that man becomes aware of him, expresses himself, questions his own achievements; seek untiringly for new meaning through which he transcends his limitations. Aristotle saw contemplation as the highest power of human beings as he recognizes the multiplicity of influence needed to develop himself to his fullest.

Non material cultures are people's habits, ideas, customs, and beliefs they hold on. The "Sapit" as peace accord of the Bago tribe is considered as one of the non material culture of which this study is concerned of presenting its strength to the younger generation to appreciate, and may use it in settling their differences, irrational actions, in order to reconcile and bring back the harmonious relationship among them. This also serves as reminder to the "Bagos" to become more aware that whatever actions they make, it has its equivalent fruit to reap. It also guides younger generation of the Bagos the need to adhere to the tenets of Christianity as they journey in their social life in the mainstream of society.

The practice of "Sapit" originally started before World War II when Bago tribesmen experiences scarcity of food, of which palay grains were harvested in panicles and are lined up in the rice paddies or in farm dikes until dried then be carried to the rice granary built and located in strategic places in the rice field. Rice is the staple food of the Bagos and it is a taboo to steal food instead one should labor for it. When a "singay" or "bettek of the harvest disappears the member of the tribe who stole it will be subjected to "Sapit", a process of making anyone realize that stealing a food is a taboo and the most common punishment of adolescents who stole the panicles of palay will be "Saplit", they were usually whipped by elders in the tribe and if he is not the culprit he is willing to say the "Sapata"(Vow) that something bad will happen to him, or to accept the punishment imposed by the council of elders of the tribe if he accepts such stealing. Punishing young people is one way of letting them realize that stealing, especially the panicles of palay, is a curse and Kabunyan threatens punishment therefore one must learn to labor with love in



order to reap good harvest. This way of punishing culprits among Bagos has evolved until “Sapit” became a practice in solving conflicts among themselves. To this day “Sapit” is being practiced as an indigenous peace accord, and practical way of solving any differences among the members of the Bago tribe and influenced by traditional beliefs.

The term “Sapit” is a Bago word. It is formed from 3 base words “singay”, “saplit”, and “apit” which means bundle of palay, whip, and product respectively. These three words describes the whole process of “Sapit” that anyone who steals a “singay” or a panicle of palay he will be punished through “Saplit” or whip so that he will reap or “Apitenna” the fruit of his misdeeds. From the three words a letter is used as a prefix and a letter be removed to emphasize the process of “Sapit” like letter “S” is taken from the first letter of the word “singay” and used as a prefix to the word “Apit” to form the root word “sapit”. The punishment “Saplit” or whip is a derivation of the word “Sapit” when letter L is remove from the word “Saplit”

The word “Sapit” is a noun. The affixes “ma” and “en” forms the infinitive words “masapit” and sapiten. The prefix “ma” is changed to “na” forming the past tense “nasapit”. The present tense uses the prefix “ma” and “sap” first syllable of the root word is repeated to form the word “masapsapit”. The word explains that the perpetrator, upon submission of complaint to the council of elders be subjected to “Sapit” to face the consequences of his actions.

It is a common experience that the person who undergoes the process usually hear statements such as “Masapit ta apiten na ti aramidna.” (He will be tried so he will reap the consequences of his actions). The whole tribe is alarmed noise is heard among the tribesmen.

The emotional experiences and testimonies of those who underwent such process weighed heavily in the researcher’s desire to document her own peoples’ personality for the present generation to understand and learn from it as it describes the total personality of the Bagos as docile peace loving and have a high degree of civilization as they give importance to others in their daily lives.

The “Sapit” as a living testimony of the past generations of the Bago tribe in settling and managing any differences, disputes and irrational actions among them could be settled peacefully without the rule of court to interfere is a peace accord and a cultural justice



system of the Bago tribe that conforms to the definitions of culture and with these it is necessary to understand and document.

Republic Act 8371 popularly known as Indigenous Peoples Rights Acts promotes the fundamental rights of communities in safeguarding, conserving and enriching cultural heritage and traditions and to educate the people about the intensity of cultural impact in the way people value one another has provided the researchers the basics to undergo such study.

## **OBJECTIVES**

This study aimed to find out and describe “Sapit”, a peace accord of the Bago Tribe. The researchers were guided by the following specific problems;

1. What are the processes involved in the practice of “Sapit”
2. What are the tenets of Christian and social life revealed in the practice of “Sapit”.
3. What is “Sapit” in the psychosocial development of the Bagos.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study made use of phenomenology as its research design. Johnson and Christensen (2000) describe this as “a description of one or more individuals’ consciousness and experience of a phenomenon in obtaining views of people’s life-world and to understand his personal meaning constructed from his lived experiences, this statement guided the researcher to document one of the basic non material culture of the Bagos. The researcher is a Bago herself, living with the tribe and had enough experiences about their practices motivated the researcher to document the “Sapit” through emersion, and personal dialogues with key informants has helped the researchers.

Prior consent had been sought from the people concerned especially the perpetrators and aggrieved persons, they were made to understand that they are part of the research and their collective responses and their willingness to be interviewed is vital in coming up of data needed in the research.

Photo documentation is necessary to be able to understand better the processes in the practice of “Sapit” and serves as a document that will complement the transcribed narratives of the respondents. The results and processes were highly qualitative.

The members of the Bago tribe are the subject of the study. The members of the council of elders, perpetrators, offenders, aggrieved parties, women, Bago professionals, youths and



families who are now resident of the different barangays of Tabuk City, Barangay Casigayan and some Bagos from other provinces who once experienced the practice of Sapit for reconciliation were the immediate informants and respondents of this study of which the researchers grew up with the tribe. The first hand experience with her father who was a member of the council of elders of the tribe when he was alive has also helped the researchers to come up with this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY**

### **The Council of Elders**

The council of elders (panglakayen) is composed of qualified members from the Bago tribe that serves as arbiters, decides on disputes and not lawyers but elders who are trusted by the Bago tribe by their wisdom, dignity, morality, leadership, exemplifies respect and highly regarded by the tribe. They are not permanent members in the council of elders unless he possesses all the above qualifications the time the case is presented to this council. They have high concern for the community and feel proud if chosen to be the model of peace in settling differences and managing conflicts of the Bagos even without monetary benefits.

### **Steps Involved in the Practice of “Sapit”**

The process of “Sapit” is a private affair between the culprit, the aggrieved person or immediate representative of the family and the council of elders of the tribe. Among them they solve their differences. Other members of the tribe especially children were not allowed to witness the process of the belief that undergoing such practice Kabunyan threatens punishment and is considered a taboo and a transmittable disease that could be pass on to their immediate family, until the practice has evolved as time changed that anyone could witness the process.

Today the process of “Sapit” is usually done in the “abong” or a public place where interested tribes men could freely join and witness the process of resolving conflicts. The following are the steps;

1. Bando= the council of elders summons both accused and aggrieved parties for their presence on the day of the “Sapit”. They themselves go to the houses of the involved parties to negotiate or encourage both parties to solve their problems as brothers and inform them of the agreed day and time of settlement if they could not solve their problems by themselves.



2. Isapo/Ikararag=The eldest among the council of elders usually gives a prayer to open the process of the “Sapit” invoking the presence and guidance of Kabunyan and that Kabunyan threatens punishment for anyone who goes astray during the process, as Kabunyan the supreme judge to all and conflicts must be settled peacefully in order to live harmoniously and be spared from the wrath of curse. In saying the prayer everybody become aware of that “Sapit” is influenced by their belief.
3. Pannakailatag ti gapo ti “Sapit”=The chairman of the council formally presents and informs the public in the among the reasons they were gathered and both parties agreed to undergo “Sapit” peacefully and are willing to accept a rightful decision. They are also inform of their role during the “Sapit”
4. Panagsaludsod/Pannakaibinsabinsa= Elders are given a chance to question or interrogate the accused as their way of investigating why such actions was made. They talk to the offender and the aggrieved party in a manner that both will be convinced to tell the real event using motivating but purposeful and powerful words making both parties not to negate from the settlement of their conflicts and making them understand that whatever irrational actions they made they have to reap it rather than pass on to the young children as curse. The elders emphasizes their belief that their environment or tribe will suffer the wrath of Kabunyan and no one is exempted from the curse, this way the aggressor will surrender and accepts his mistakes and be willing to be punished justly.
5. “Panangibuksil”ti Dakamat and“ Panangibagnos”=When the culprit accepts his misconduct the elders present their findings to both parties to enlighten them as they offer a “heart to heart talk” between the aggressor and the offended party in their presence before they impose, implements sanction and punishment.
6. Panangusig ti katataom =As the elders shares their findings, the principles of “just between us as brothers”, “entre nous” or “love your neighbors as a relative” is always emphasized by the elders through their narratives in the process and being observed by the members of the council realizing the tenets of social life and as Christians. Both the aggrieved and aggressor are given ample time to reflect on the decision of the council of elders.



7. "Bagbaga"/ "Dusa"=If both parties accept the decision, the council of elder reveals "Bagbaga" or pieces of advice in order to make them realize that whatever actions committed they are accountable for it and a corresponding fruit, they will reap which may affect themselves, their family and relatives and their association with their fellow Bagos. The culprit willingly accepts punishment as he makes amend and start to bring back the severed association to his tribesmen by apologizing publicly and make promises that once he do the same he will suffer the wrath of Kabunyan..

It is known to all members of the tribe that it is a taboo for anyone among the "Bagos" to undergo the "Sapit" so this serves as a reminder to strive and make good deeds every day of their life giving importance to others as manifested in their passive personality.

### **Punishment of Perpetrators**

Punishment is not final until both parties is heard, the offended party is given a privilege to talk against or in favor of the offender. In case of an impasse the council of elders are given the powers to have the final decision. Punishment differs depending on the case committed by the aggressor. Punishment is usually understood by both parties and accepts willfully like;

1. A peace offering like rice wine ("basi" or "tapey") is enough for light offenses for the council to warm their throats as they give their ("Bagbaga") advices to the offender. Light offenses like boxing the other person without grave physical damages, misunderstanding between brood, not following the tribe policies in maintaining peace in order are some offenses that could be resolved by this kind of punishment.
2. Free labor is also another, the number of days rendered will be the equivalent of what was damaged or the weight of punishment. This punishment is given when one destroys something that he could not pay back the cost of damaged thing to the offended party.
3. Banishment is a grave punishment and usually given to habitual perpetrators or recidivists who committed crimes most hated or shunned by the tribe such as adultery and rape. Couples were made to understand the sacredness of matrimony but when committed again and inflicts physical damage the culprit must leave the tribe and leaves an ample amount for his family to a start a life without him until he commits himself to change.



4. "Bando" is a punishment which requires the offender to go around the community beating a drum while shouting what he had done and advising the community not to follow his misdeeds. Stealers, cattle rustlers were punished this way so that he will feel how painful to be ostracized by his own tribe.
5. Fines or giving back the rightful owner of something that has been stolen and shoulders enough meal for the tribe men who are present during the "Sapit" is also another kind of punishment but being discouraged and not executed all times for the council believes that perpetrators will habitually do the same offense because they are capable of offering monetary equivalent.
6. "Saplit" and "Kolis" are some of the punishment for children and adolescents who committed light offenses. In the process of the "Sapit" parents of these young kids are present to understand that their children are to be punished adhering to a saying from the Bible "Spare the rod spoil the child". This punishment were given to children found not going to school after the second world war and up to present to let children understand that education must be valued.
7. "Sapata" is a vow of any culprit who does not concede guilt. It is a vow or swears to God or Kabunyan that something bad will happen to him like to die or get insane, and etc. No one would like to make the "Sapata" because of the belief that whatever one utters it will always happen to him or to his family.
8. Scalding is a willful act of a culprit who does not concede guilt and if he is not scalded he is innocent of the crime.

At present the Bago tribe uses this process side by side with the Lupong Pambarangay Laws to settle conflicts. The members of the council of elders are members of the Lupong Tagapamayapa too. Decisions and agreement were not written and it is orally understood and known by the whole tribe until the Lupong Pambarangay Laws calls for it.

#### **Social Tenets/Values Revealed in the Practice of "Sapit"**

Social tenets serve as a guide for human being in their action. These are norms, doctrines and principles which man conforms for the realization of a harmonious relationship and living meaningfully and peacefully in a society.

The "Sapit" serves as concrete living evidence guiding the Bagos in their quest in achieving psychosocial strength and socio cultural life development.



The realization of one's weakness and acceptance of any misdeed done and the willingness to undergo the process with an open heart and mind with full understanding and belief is the strength of an individual that will lead him to a better person.

The eldest member of the council giving the prayer portrays a strong faith in Kabunyan. The belief that Kabunyan is the supreme judge, the quest is successful and the relationship of both parties is reconciled. The culprit willfully follows the decision though the elders are not lawyers.

The virtue of obedience is evident in the process when both parties adhere to the decision of the elders of council.

Benevolence is being manifested by the council of elders showing genuine sacrifice in the dispensation of service in the solution of cases without any monetary benefits or profits afforded them by the two parties and the whole tribe. They are happy to have done something right for others in order to bring back the harmonious relationship of aggrieved parties and perpetrators.

Trustworthiness is a value that a Bago learns in the "Sapit" that he has to labor with love in order to reap a fruitful harvest in all walks of his life.

The "heart to heart talk" and "just between us brothers" being emphasized as a part of the process adheres to Christian tenets. Bringing out one's feeling with honesty eases down stressful experiences and brings back that bond of association among themselves.

Being pacifist is characterized by the Bagos. They don't like to have conflict with their neighbors, and to take advantage of their fellows just for little gain even in the delivery of punishment to perpetrators, that punishments should be understood and accepted by both parties.

The docile personality of the Bagos and willful act to adhere to decisions serves as a guide and a reminder to any Bago to try to make good deeds daily or he will be ostracized, isolated from his relationship to others once he become a perpetrator who underwent the process of "Sapit"

#### **Implications of "Sapit" practice in the psychosocial development of the Bagos**

The Bago have a rich cultural heritage of which they adhere to. Their beliefs and superstitious concepts have helped them regulate their actions in their daily life. In the practice of "Sapit", Bagos have internalize values and Christian tenets that serves as a guide



and reminders as they are being absorbed in the mainstream of society and is very evident in their passive and docile personality. The practice has helped them exert control over their own acts to commit irrational actions as they develop self control.

The “Bagos” at their early age learns that anyone who becomes an erring member of the tribe be subjected to “Sapit” and reaps the fruit of his misdeeds and realizes the feeling of being ostracized by the tribe, making him understand that taking advantage of others for gain, causing pain in the lives of others is not life fulfilled. This culture influences behavior positively especially children learns that they lack approval from their parents and relatives towards their misdeeds and their wish to avoid interpersonal conflicts with adults keep young people to strive to do good deed everyday of their lives. This cultural experience leaves a deep print on the mind and marks the attitude of Bagos toward an accepted behavior.

Today the Bagos easily adjust and associate with other tribes in the locality especially with our highland brothers in the different fields like education, economics, agriculture, politics, and religion as they practice their customary beliefs and customary laws.

#### **Phenomenological Experiences of Some Subjects**

“Sapit” as an alternative way of settling problems among us Bagos, before we are govern with government laws, is more judicious and everybody is heard during the process. You can express everything and the person who has done wrong will always realized the fruit of his misdeed and with the acceptance of his mistakes, he could make amends and his punishment is rightfully given” narrates one of the elder. Economically it is not expensive compared when problems are brought to court. The narration of an elder shows their benevolence and commitment to do the task justly.

A narration of a culprit who underwent the “Sapit” “I have stolen an amount from my sister that I used for my vices and put a bet on games of chance. Unknowingly the amount is for my niece tuition fee in college. I was caught and my sister reported this account to the board of elders. I underwent the process and I really felt ashamed of myself that I am the reason that my niece could not pay and take her test, I repented and I made a promise not to do shameful acts again in my life.” I paid the amount but too late to realize the damage I have done.” This narration explains that the value of “hiya” to a person make him realize that he personally ostracizes himself.



“The process of “Sapit” is more humane and make one realize that nobody in the tribe is indispensable especially so when one feels that his association to his tribe is cut. It is difficult to be separated from your tribesmen especially so that you are living in the same place or locality. We are like a brood of siblings so my conscience bothers me and with that I must strive to understand others and learn not to act impulsively.”

“When my son was killed I wanted to take revenge to any member of the family who took my son’s life even if the family took pain to regain peace with me. I asked the council of elders for their advices before the “Sapit”. “Kabunyan” will be with you, but never put revenge in your hands, it hurts to lose someone you love but it is more painful to see the fruits of crime he has done, time will pass and before you realized it he has paid the crime he has done.” This was advised by the council and after 5 years after the “Sapit” the killer suffered the same death but the culprit was never known. This gave me strength to hold on to my faith, to this day I believe that God has the power to make revenge for us and he will never forsake us”. This narration of an aggrieved party believing on the powers of Kabunyan and bringing the case to the council of elders he gained justice for his lost son.

## **CONCLUSION**

From our personal experiences and as a member of the tribe, first hand interviews, dialogues from key informants and written documents we were able to establish that “Sapit”;

1. Is a process practiced by Bagos in managing their conflict giving importance of discernment, that life is not fully fulfilled when his relationship is detached from his own tribe.
2. Serves as guide to every Bago that undergoing such process is a taboo and hinders their socio cultural development and progress as a tribe, making every Bago to strive to do good deeds and not to take advantage of others.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are given:

1. Parallel studies should be made by other researchers, there are more to learn from the collective memories of our people to document for the preservation of their oral history and culture.



2. A more in-depth study on the customs and beliefs in relation to the practice of “Sapit”.

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2. Compas, Anselmo
3. Cadalig Crispin
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5. Lipawen, Cayetano
6. Macusi, Desiderio
7. Wayet, Nieves
8. Et. al