

Love's Tests and Rituals from Courtship to Marriage

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In ancient Filipino societies, marriage did not take place simply because a man said "I love you" to a woman and the woman answered back, "I love you too." Love underwent set stages and trials and marriage was most often a family affair. Marriage by elopement or by abduction was very rare in contrast to the more common parental arrangement. Even when a girl and a boy happened to fall in love with each other, their wedding was still set by their parents or by elders in their families.

COURTSHIP PATTERNS

The first test of love took place during courtship. In cases where the marriage is not mutually arranged by parents, the boy or the boy's parents paid visits to the girl's family. The practice is called *panliligaw* in Tagalog and *manghingitah* in Tausug.

Some visits were carried out with music. In the *harana* or serenade, a boy would sing love songs below the window of the girl's house on moonlit evenings.

If the boy was received favorably during these initial visits, he began to perform services for the girl and her family. This stage is called *panunuyo*. The boy declared his devotion through physical labor, like fetching water, gathering wood, and helping in whatever occupation the girl's family was engaged in. Sometimes, the boy did household chores for the girls for many months before he succeeded in getting her attention.

ENGAGEMENT BY PARENTS

Lovers did not merely exchange rings to get engaged. The parents were involved in all the arrangements, negotiations, and promises. Among the Tausugs, wedding requirements were negotiated through a third party. A third party could be composed of community personalities, like religious leaders and government officials.

The boy's parents and go-between called on the girl's house at an appointed time. This is called *pamanhikan* in Tagalog. This meeting was usually long and tedious. Most often, the elders spoke in metaphorical and indirect language and the go-between had to be an expert in answering inquiries using folk proverbs and traditional beliefs.

THE PRICE OF A BRIDE

The hardest part of the *pamanhikan* was asking for the "bride's hand." In return, the girl's relatives asked for some payment or dowry. The dowry is called *bigay-kaya* and in ancient Tagalog society, it consisted of land, gold, or slaves. It could be made up of the *panghimuyat* or payment given to the mother for her sleepless nights rearing the girl, the *bigay-puso* or payment given to the wet nurse who fed the girl during her infancy, and the *himaraw* or payment given to the parents for whatever they spent in feeding and rearing her.

The Tausugs call the dowry *ungsud*. It is also demanded for negotiations during engagement or *pangangasawa*. The *ungsud* depended on the social status of the families involved. It was also separate from the *mahal*, a basic requirement of Islamic marriage given to other girl in the form of gold or piece of land.

The bride's price is called *bandi* by the Zambal Negritos. It included arrows, bows, bolos, cloth, and anything of worth. The boy was helped by his parents and relatives to put up the dowry. Thus an individual who lost favor among his relatives usually found it difficult to get a bride.

WEDDING CEREMONIES

Wedding rituals varied from the very simple to the most intricate arrangements. In some mountain tribes, once the dowry was met, the couple merely left to set up their own shelter. One wedding ceremony simply consisted of eating from the same plate with the couple taking turns at feeding each other.

The more intricate rituals involved some preliminaries. During the sunduan, an entourage organized by the bridegroom would fetch the bride from her house. Some singing and poetic discussion had to take place before the bride came out of the house to proceed to the wedding site.

Then the wedding was solemnized by a priest or a community elder.

Gifts were presented from both the couple's parties. In some areas, the couple was made to dance in exchange for offerings of present and money from their guests.

Of course, the banquet after the wedding could be most expensive. Sometimes, the whole community was fed for one whole day such that the couple left for their honeymoon with the sad thought of having to pay for all the festivities.

Source: *Students' Philippine Almanac (1991)*. p. 268.