

# Mamanwa Ritual Dances of Surigao del Sur

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## **Abstract:**

Mamanwa ritual dances do not only define but also, more importantly, direct the choreographic ideas and history of the Mamanwas. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to ascertain the fundamental characteristics of Mamanwa ritual dances in terms of their nature, clothing, accessories and equipment, dance patterns, musical accompaniment, tempo, and the cultural values expressed in each ritual dance. The ethnographic approach was employed in this study to gain a thorough understanding of the ritual dances. It extensively used observations, analytical description, and qualitative judgment or interpretation in order to provide a comprehensive picture of Mamanwa ritual dances in Lanuza, Cortes, and Buenavista. Mamanwa ritual dances are conducted to express gratitude, thanksgiving and beseech favors from Tahaw, their supreme god. They make extensive use of altars and offerings. As a result of their wandering lifestyle, they were unable to retain or maintain even one of their traditional costumes. Tap, leap, close step, parallel tortilier, hop, stamp, slide, kick, mincing, and shuffling are the dance steps utilized. All their ritual dances are accompanied by the gimbar/gimbe-e and gong's percussive sound. All three ritual dances are characterized by dedication, reverence and humility, which are expressed through the dance steps and arm and body movements. This choreographic history will instill in the youths an appreciation for our race's history, motivate our artists to be more active and engaged, and enlighten our society's cultural inclinations and beliefs.

**Keywords:** Mamanwa, Ritual Dance, Ethnographic, Dance Steps, Surigao del Sur, Philippines

## **1. Introduction**

The indigenous people of Mindanao are the communities in the country with the most vibrant and well-preserved culture. Its plea for preservation is timely, as they represent a significant part of this country's cultural legacy and aesthetic wealth. Mamanwa is one of Surigao del Sur's IP communities. Numerous researchers have referred to them as the first Surigaonon, including Maceda (1964), Almeda (1993), Omoto (2016), Tomaquin (2013), and Trinidad (2014). On the other side, Omoto (2016) revealed that their history extends back 50,000 years and that the Mamanwa is the Philippines' longest surviving IP group. Additionally, while the Mamanwas have a smaller population than the other tribes, they have worked aggressively to preserve their arts and crafts for posterity as a component of Filipino cultural legacy. Their economic activities accounted for the Mamanwas' nomadic character. They are always on the lookout for good settlements that would sustain their subsistence activities, which is why they are spread over northern Mindanao and eastern Visayas. They relocate to areas where the land provided for their subsistence (Diaz, 2014), as cited by Balacuit et al (2018). Furthermore, the Mamanwas have withstood the test of time (Tomaquin, 2013) reviving the tribe's vibrant culture and rituals for posterity, and establishing the tribe's right to self-

determination. However, there is an assumption that social changes encompass these traditions, as cultural developments impact the traditional Mamanwa community to some level.

Anthropological researches indicate that dance was a component of prehistoric peoples' worship practices in order to communicate with the gods. Man could communicate with divine entities through the medium of the dancing shaman and by adoring and respecting gods to obtain the god's protection. Throughout the country, we would discover dances that represent the culture of the region in which they are performed. Since time started, rituals have been undertaken in all civilizations with the goal of encouraging health and peace among its members. While ritual activities are woven throughout human history, ritual has a variety of dimensions — biological, political, psychological, ecological and religious — that make it unique and also enormously beyond our comprehension (Crockett & Prosek, 2013; Stephenson, 2015). Simply said, ritual is a manner of thinking, a knowing, and a doing (Stephenson, 2015), emphasizing the mind-body systemic relationship.

Furthermore, ritual is a process. According to Stephenson (2015), ritual serves as a model for action in part, but it also shows and enacts the feeling of distance and tension between what is and what is sought, between the real and the unattainable, between fact and potential. Crockett and Prosek (2013) suggested that ritual may possess a number of distinct characteristics and purposes, including universality, facilitation of transitions and change, the development of new meaning, and the formation of a new identity. According to Lamothe (2014), rituals do not have to be religious in nature; they may simply be patterns of repeated, regulated physical action that are communal, civic, or otherwise humanist in nature, such as nuptials, celebrations, or even sports activities. Not only are rituals visible to the human eye, but also to other sensorium. Numerous rituals, for example, involve noises, touch, aroma, and sometimes taste (Wu, 2018). That is to say, all rituals materialize physically in the human sense organs. We refer to rituals as "visual" because sight is by far the most instinctive and strongest sense in the human body.

Mamanwa ritual dances may either go away or thrive, depending on the true value put on them by a society. If these are acquired through continued practice, community members will recognize their worth and the dances will be preserved for future generations. At the moment, technology has aided in the popularization of several of the country's ritual dances. While social media increased awareness of the existence of dances, it is not always possible to restrict the dancers' creativity through this medium. This creativity, also referred to as improvisation, may be insulting to the owner of the ritual dances, since it may diminish the dance's solemnity. While revisions to ritual dances are feasible, the possibility of ritual dances being lost entirely is not ruled out. Without adequate recording, ritual dances may fade into obscurity, robbing future generations of knowledge about their ancestors, particularly the Mamanwas of Surigao del Sur. Moreover, there is a chance of misinterpretation of meanings for younger viewers. The current study identified three Mamanwa dances performed during rituals in this context. Likewise, the background of the ritual dances and their significance were obtained from community members. Protecting our dancing tradition by reviving its practice and rediscovering its true significance may benefit the community as a whole (Margate, 2015). When these traditions are threatened with extinction in the future, an attempt at cultural revival, preservation, and potential spread is made to some extent. The researcher engaged this investigation on these premises.

### Framework of the Study/Research

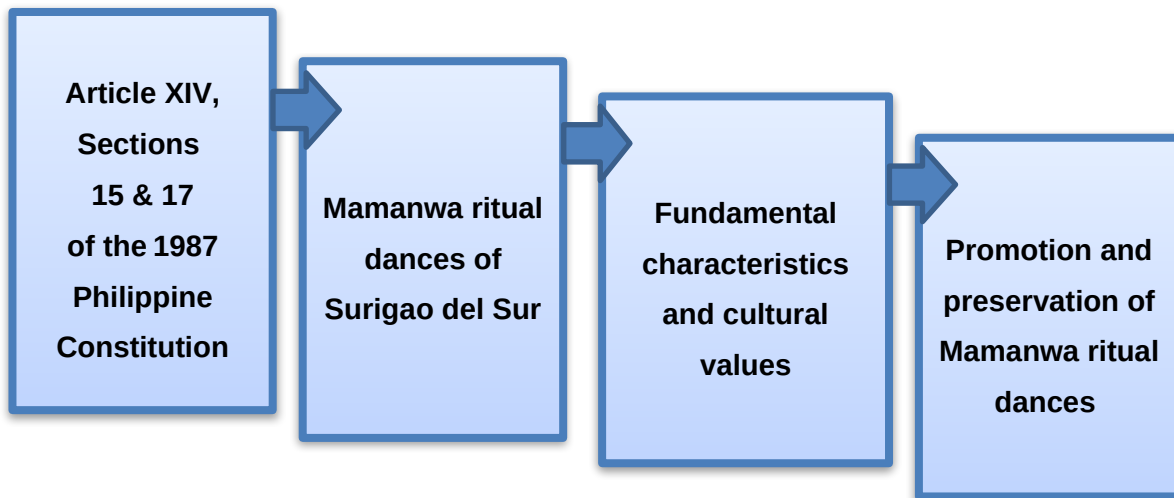


Figure 1: Schematic Diagram of the Study Research Objectives

The primary purpose of this study was to undertake ethnographic research on Surigao del Sur's Mamanwa ritual dances. It sought to accomplish the following:

1. Conduct an investigation of the fundamental characteristics of Mamanwa ritual dances, particularly their nature, costumes, dance steps and patterns, musical accompaniment, and tempo.
2. Identify the significant values embodied in each ritual dance.
3. Propose recommendations for the promotion and preservation of Mamanwa ritual dances.

## 2. Methods

The descriptive survey and ethnographic approach were utilized in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of the Mamanwa ritual dances in Surigao del Sur. It made extensive use of observations, analytical descriptions, and qualitative judgment or interpretation in order to provide a complete picture of the Mamanwa ritual dances. The intense, first hand study also made use of unobtrusive data collecting methods such as informal interviews, observations, and conversations during immersion in the Mamanwa community, in order to gain the informant's trust and to gain a better knowledge of their ritual dances. The informants were Mamanwa age 30-80 years, residing in Sitio Libas, Sibahay; Sitio Bosci, Ambago and Palo 8, Buenavista, in the three municipalities of Surigao del Sur, namely Lanuza, Cortes and Tandag (LACORTAN). This does not mean, however, that the Mamanwa are not present in other parts of Surigao del Sur, but these are the only municipalities covered by the Kahugpungan sa mga Tribung Mamanwa ug Manobo (KATRIMMA), as their 11,765 hectares of *yutang kabilin* (ancestral domain) are contained inside the mountain ranges and dense, virgin forest of these three municipalities. The researcher held several pre-planning sessions with the KATRIMMA council to finalize the ritual activity schedules. Three distinct methods of data collecting were used in this investigation. The informal interview and casual talk came first. The second was recording by video and photos, which aided the researcher in studying the dance steps, motions, and facial expressions properly. Finally, actual observation of precise descriptions of Mamanwa ritual dances was conducted. The chairman of KATRIMMA and a Mamanwa *dakula* (chieftain) gave context for the ritual dances' specific moves and steps. They aided in the development

of an extremely thorough and detailed portrayal of the cultural values embodied in the Mamanwa ceremonial dances.

The researcher adapted Francisca Reyes Aquino's notation method for dance. This system organized and formalized movements into steps, figures, and music, and then fit them into counts and phases to facilitate dance interpretation.

### 3. Results and Findings

The evidences obtained indicated the existence of three Mamanwa ritual dances: Binaylan or Tinambajon, Binadbad, and Ulagdo. To facilitate the interpretation of the ritual dances, they are presented and documented, as follows:

#### A. BINAYLAN/TINAMBAJON

Meaning	: Dance of the priest or healer
Cultural Values	: Devotion, reverence, thanksgiving, humility, utang na loob (debt of gratitude)
Costume	: The baylan wears polo or t-shirt, long tapis and two white handkerchiefs
Count Pattern	: 1 and 2 and 3 and 4; 1,2 and 3 and 4 and; 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and
Music Pattern	: 4 4
Musical Accompaniment	: gimbar/gimbe-e and gong
Tempo	: Moderate
Formation	: No definite formation
Equipment	: bangkaso, apog, bujo, betel leaves, live pig, offerings (wine, biscuits, candies, cigarette, money)

#### Background/Context

The baylan or tambajon, the tribe's healer or medicine man, performs this ritual dance at the kahimonan or full moon prayer rite. The baylan faces the bangkaso (altar), which is decorated with young coconut leaves. He invites the spirits to join him in the ceremony and chants the worship hymn tud-om. Mam-on or pangapog ceremony follows, which involves the offering of bujo (betel nut) to the gods. The baylan continues the tud-om until he becomes possessed by the spirits and into a trance, speaking an unusual language thought to be a message from tahaw (supreme god). The assistant baylan will interpret this message. Following the ritual, the baylan performs a dance of thanksgiving to tahaw.

#### Basic Steps

- **Basic Step No. 1: Tap, step, tap, close** – Feet in 2nd position, tap R foot in front (ct.1), step R foot backward (ct. and), step L foot forward (ct. 2), tap and step R foot in place (cts. 3 and), close L to R (ct. 4)
- **Basic Step No. 2: Stamp, leap, slide. parallel tortillier** – Feet in 2nd position, stamp R foot in place (ct. 1), leap with the R foot to sideward R (ct. and). Slide L foot twice forward (ct. 2 and). Take 2 parallel tortillier steps to the right (cts. 3 and 4)

- **Basic Step No. 3 – Stamp, leap, slide, kick, close** – Feet in 2nd position, stamp R foot in place (ct.1), leap with the R foot to sideward right (ct. and), slide L foot twice forward (ct. 2 and). Kick R foot forward (ct. 3), close R foot to L (ct.4)



Figure 2: The Baylan Performing a Binaylan/Tinambajon Ritual Dance

## B. BINADBAD

Meaning	: Untying of long strip of pig skin
Cultural Values	: Devotion, respect, reverence, amor propio (self-esteem)
Costume	: The baylan wears polo or t-shirt, long tapis. Female dancer wears ordinary blouse or dress and long tapis
Count Pattern	: 1 and 2 and 3 and 4; 1,2 and 3 and 4 and; 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and
Music Pattern	: 4 4
Musical Accompaniment	: gimbar/gimbe-e and gong
Tempo	: Fast
Formation	: No definite formation
Equipment	: bangkaso, apog, bujo, betel leaves, live pig, offerings (wine, biscuits, candies, cigarette, money)

### Background/Context

The baylan performs this ritual, followed by everyone else participating in the ceremonial rite. The ritual is performed to ascertain whether the spirits and supernatural will grant permission for the requested favor, such as when building a new lagkaw (house). The baylan face the bangkaso (altar) adorned with young coconut leaves where the live boar is tied during the kahimonan ceremony. The



baylan then requests the supernatural to bless the celebration. He chants the tud-om and then comes to a halt to perform the pangapog ritual, offering bujo to the gods. He continues the panawagtawag of the supernatural while possessed by spirits and in a trance, speaking in an unusual language thought to be a message from tahaw. Following the prayer, the boar is killed and offered to tahaw. A section of pig skin from the neck is cut into a long strip measuring one dupa (two extended arms) in length. They then dance to the gimbar/gimbe-e beat. Dancing continues as desired passing the pig skin from one dancer to another.

### Basic Steps

- **Basic Step No. 1: Tap, step, tap, close** – Feet in 2nd position, tap R foot in front (ct.1), step R foot backward (ct. and), step L foot forward (ct. 2), tap and step R foot in place (cts. 3 and), close L to R (ct. 4)
- **Basic Step No. 2 – Step hop** – Feet in 2nd position, step and hop on the R foot forward (cts. 1 and), repeat with the L foot (cts. 2 and), repeat all R and L alternately (cts. 3 and 4 and)
- **Basic Step No. 3: Stamp, leap, slide. parallel tortillier** – Feet in 2nd position, stamp R foot in place (ct. 1), leap with the R foot to sideward R (ct. and). Slide L foot twice forward (ct. 2 and). Take 2 parallel tortillier steps to the right (cts. 3 and 4)
- **Basic Step No. 4 – Tap, step, tap, shuffling step** – Feet in 2nd position, tap R foot in place (ct. 1), step R foot backward (ct. and), step L foot forward (ct. 2), shuffling step sideward alternately R and L (cts. 3 and 4)



Figure 3: The *Bangkaso* (altar) with Various Offerings for the Gods

### C. ULAGDO

Meaning : Harvest

Cultural Values	: Devotion, reverence, respect, thanksgiving, unity, cooperation, hospitality
Costume	: The baylan wears polo or t-shirt, long tapis. Female dancer wears ordinary blouse or dress and long tapis
Count Pattern	: 1 and 2 and 3 and 4; 1,2 and 3 and 4 and; 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and
Music Pattern	: 4 4
Musical Accompaniment	: gimbar/gimbe-e and gong
Tempo	: Moderate
Formation	: No definite formation
Equipment	: bangkaso, apog, bujo, betel leaves, live pig, offerings (wine, biscuits, candies, cigarette, money)

### Background/Context

This ritual is performed by the *baylan*, and then everyone else participates in the ceremonial rite, to express gratitude for a bountiful harvest. During the *kahimonan* ceremony, the *baylan* face the *bangkaso* to which the live boar is tied. The baylan then prays for the celebration to be blessed by the supernatural. He begins by chanting the *tud-om* and then comes to a halt to perform the *pangapog* ceremony, which involves presenting *bujo* to the gods. While possessed by spirits and in a trance, he continues the *panawagtawag* of the supernatural, speaking in an uncommon language believed to be a message from *tahaw*. After the ritual, the boar is killed and offered to *tahaw*. Following the ritual, merry making, eating, and dancing continue until sunrise.

### Basic Steps

- **Basic Step No. 1: Tap, step, tap, close** – Feet in 2nd position, tap R foot in front (ct.1), step R foot backward (ct. and), step L foot forward (ct. 2), tap and step R foot in place (cts. 3 and), close L to R (ct. 4)
- **Basic Step No. 2: Stamp, leap, slide. parallel tortillier** – Feet in 2nd position, stamp R foot in place (ct. 1), leap with the R foot to sideward R (ct. and). Slide L foot twice forward (ct. 2 and). Take 2 parallel tortillier steps to the right (cts. 3 and 4)
- **Basic Step No. 3 – Tap, step, tap, shuffling step** – Feet in 2nd position, tap R foot in place (ct. 1), step R foot backward (ct. and), step L foot forward (ct. 2), shuffling step sideward alternately R and L (cts. 3 and 4)
- **Basic Step No. 4 – Tap, step, tap, mincing step** – Feet in 2nd position, tap R foot in place (ct. 1), step R foot backward (ct. and), step L foot forward (ct. 2), mincing step sideward alternately R and L (cts. 3 and 4)



Figure 4: The Killing of Boar as an Offering to *Tahaw*

#### 4. Discussion

Mamanwa ritual dances are performed to express gratitude, harvest, and to solicit favor from *tahaw*. These rituals represent the Mamanwas' spiritual and social lives. Each of the three ritual dances begins with *panawagtawag* or *panhagad*, a prayer that invokes supernatural creatures, and all three require *pangapog*. Female dancers wear an ordinary dress or blouse, a long tapis, and a white handkerchief in all three ritual dances. Male dancers and *baylan* alike wear polo or t-shirts, long trousers, and long tapis. It should be noted, however, that this is not their traditional costume. Due to their nomadic nature and exposure to civilization, they no longer perform rituals in traditional attire. Mamanwa ritual dances make extensive use of altars and offerings. Depending on the *baylan's* instructions, offerings may include boar, chicken, wine, rice, biscuits, candies, cigarettes, candles, and money.

Tap, leap, hop, stamp, shuffling, mincing, and parallel tortillier are the dance steps performed with the trunk and head bowed downward to convey affinity and connection to nature. Arms and hands are placed in lateral, oblique, and reverse T positions. Their dances are free-flowing and without a defined formation and floor pattern. This represents the Mamanwa's nomadic and free-spirited nature. The ritual dances are accompanied by the percussive sound of the *gimbar/gimbe-e* drum and the gong. When these musical instruments are not available, they make do with bamboo or a log. Their ritual dances are paced between moderate and fast. All three ceremonial dances place an emphasis on devotion, reverence, and humility and demonstrate respect for the existence of *tahaw*, *diwatas*, and supernatural beings.



## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Mamanwa believe ritual dances to be a vital element of their way of life. Their ritual dances are distinctive in that they are basic but evocative of the tribe's cultural group identity. They depict the Mamanwa people's rich culture and demonstrate their profound reverence for their religious beliefs as well as their extraordinary ability to express a range of emotions and feelings associated with daily life. They are completely distinct from other Filipino ethnic groups, yet they do not speak for the entire Surigaonon culture. Their cultural values, traditions, dances, and religion have remained mostly unchanged over time. In general, despite their exposure to civilization, these people continue to live in the past. The majority of their rituals include dance. Their dances' richness, exhibited in a variety of dynamics and forms, came out of their experience as one tribe. Their ritual dances' sociocultural values have survived as unique and enduring manifestations of the Mamanwa people's past. In order to recognize, respect, and protect the Mamanwa indigenous cultural rights and to conserve and develop their cultures, traditions, and institutions, it is thus proposed that the distinctive dance patterns, moves, and music of the Mamanwa ceremonial dances be included into the Philippine folk dances taught in schools so that students develop an appreciation and love for our indigenous dances. Additionally, new generations should learn the Mamanwa's distinctive ritual dances through correct interpretation of steps and movements and proper selection and use of music and equipment by using the researcher's dance literature as a guide. Teachers and choreographers should have sufficient knowledge and background of the ritual dances.

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