



**Mäsinu Intaräy, Pala'wan Singer of Tales, Mänunultul A
narrative essay written for a GAMABA Publication Project, at
the invitation of Corazon Alvina, 2015**

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Mäsinu Intaräy, Pala'wan Singer of Tales, *Mänunultul*

A narrative essay written for a GAMABA Publication Project,
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My earliest remembrance of Mäsinu is linked to our arrival in Bungsud, upstream of Mäkägwaq River, on the 10th of November, 1971.

After a strenuous walk, according to the Pala'wan *Adat*, we were welcomed by the singing of a *tultul*. This time it lasted half the night. The singer of tales was a young man named Mäsinu, and the narrative he had chosen to let us listen to was "*Mämiminbin*".

His singing was marked by a fast delivery and a natural voice. The timbre was high-pitched mixed with low. It was firm and constant.

On that night, we could only enjoy the poetry of this voice in the Highlands. The following day, Mäsinu came to the *kälang banwa* and showed a great interest in our presence.

In this monolingual area, I was not able to talk yet, however we could start to transcribe "*Kudaman*" as he understood my demand not to drop any single word. He had the attentive listening quality and patience to repeat the words while assisting me in this tedious task of establishing the first manuscript of an oral poem. The transcription of the text was based on breath, the listening of silences and related lengths, as we had perceived the delivery was not in verse.

This was the very beginning of a long lasting collaboration in friendship and trust.

The quality of the voice, timbre and ornamentation, and the quality of the narrative, unity of meaning and composition of the plot, are equally appreciated by the Highlanders.

This is a syllabic music and the narrative is delivered in blocks formed by correlated words and pitches, generally delivered quickly and following the breathing capacity of each singer of tales. The syllabic delivery allows the ear to capture and comprehend the story as music and text are tightly correlated, united by a reciprocal constraint. Each block is characterized by a brief opening syllable /Hin / followed by repetition of the same note, and a closing syllable /in/ or /bä/. Therefore, the minimal unit is a "breathing group of words". The initial and final pitches of each melodic theme, as well as ornamentation in the variations, identify the various characters embodied by the singer of tales. They stand as sound icons, a substitute for puppets.

Mäsinu came several times to the island of Tataran, off shore of the little town of Quezon, on the West coast. For the Highlanders these visits were little holidays, riding an outrigger boat, collecting shells at low tide, fishing on the foreshore was fun, visiting Tabon Cave was impressive, eating fresh fish, crabs and *latoq*, a mere delight...

As we were sharing memories on the evening of August 26th 1996, together with Jose Rilla and Mägrägaq, I asked if they would like to tell about their life. With the vivid promptitude that characterized Mäsinu and the talent of a great storyteller, he instantly spoke making the first emplotment of his own life. It lasted two evenings.



N. Revel, Tataran, 1996

‘Let us listen to his words:

1-“In the old days, up to the time I reached the age of reason, we were living in Mandaluwän, in the Mäkagwaq Valley, on the opposite side of Tamlang River. There I grew up. I did not know yet how to hunt. As I was around eight my father said: “Let us go and hunt with blowpipe”. They used to set traps for the wild boar my father, his father-in-law the headman of the hamlet. Then, I was able to attend the capture of a wild boar. We were trilled for we got a tasty accompaniment to our rice.

The whole hamlet had a share, however it could not be eaten raw. We had to roast it before it became a food. At night we let the head and its tustwis roast on a grid of bamboo made at dusk, this gift that Läli, the Master of Boars, had just given us. We had a catch!

“Fine! said my father”, then, my grandfather began to sing a tultul the whole night long, up to daybreak. The adults were not sleeping, neither I. I wanted to listen. I enjoyed it very much for they were fights and the story was beautiful ...

I knew it all, deep down inside me. Up to the morning, I would not sleep. Each time a wild boar was captured a tultul was sung and from then on, I improved my knowledge. I was not able to sing the story yet, but we were playing in the lagwas, the surroundings of the houses and all day long, I was repeating the tultul, deep down. I was imitating the way the adults sing inwardly, I was not singing myself yet.

My father made for me a blowpipe, he did not teach me anything else. I learned how to lay down all kinds of traps, litag, bawang, including the big trap with propeller bawäg, to capture wild boar. In the river, I learned how to set creel and to make dams with stones. When the dry season came, my father took me along with him to the forest: “If you hunt you shall have no more worry. You shall always have an accompaniment to your rice.” He taught me also how to cut the trees and to clean the upland field. I planted bananas and sugar canes.

“In order not to have a hard life you have to know how to cultivate tubers. You have to know how to cultivate the umah and associate rice and tubers. You have to know how to built a house and first of all, the rice granary, lagkäw”. Then my father showed me how to make a house, but I did not know how to do everything, just a little bit. In those times, there were no axe, but only adze, wasäy. He selected four posts and showed me how to measure. I did not know yet how to measure, then he made the roof out of diplak palm leaves and added bark for the walls, this is what my father taught me”.

2- Then Intaräy died when Mäsinu was 12 and he lost his mother when he was 17 according to the school teacher.

A forced marriage occurred.

“I was the only boy and I wanted to go to school. José had taught me Surat Tagbanwa, but they refused to let me go to school. There are epidemic, cholera, malaria, sälat. Quarantine was to be followed. To avoid contact, signs were on the pathways. Besides, the old people do not want to mix with the Visayas. This is a protection, sukan, to be successful in catching bird and wild boar.

My relatives called on me, my uncle Sigaw had chosen a wife for me, the ipag of Tagung. She is my cousin, ägsa käduwa. I do not want to go, I am embarrassed ... she is still a young girl and I am quite young too. The following day they went to Kangrian to bring the pakirim (a handkerchief, a soap, powder and a ring). They had a bisara about incest and 2nd degree cousin' marriage, and met with Lunggaya, my future father-in-law. The following day they returned: “ Do not go to school anymore in Bunbun (Brooke's Point), the girl has accepted the pakirim”. The wedding was fixed for Timbuwan, the incoming New moon. The price for the bride was 20 plates, älad rayaq, a barung and a betel quid box, sälapaq. We had the objects and my grandfather sent me to town to buy fish at the house of Mr. Santos. I have to tell him I will not go to school anymore then he said: “Too Bad, you are intelligent!” I walked all the way up to Pinukulan, as there was no road. I felt bad. What a pity, the school!

The marriage discussion, Bisara ät Pängäsawanän, started with the New moon and the advices, usyat, were given to the two of us: Adat ät mämikit, the obligation to help the father-in-law in fetching water and wood. The obligation to help the whole household, and never to lie to the father-in-law, the prohibition to love another woman ... I integrated it all and today, I still remember it, I have not forgotten. But I did not feel any love... and after one month, I ran away and went back to town. I was able to return to school thank to a letter of Mr. Santos to the principal. After one week, my father-in-law called for a discussion. My grandfather came down and asked me not to continue to be in the wrong. The following day he took me out from school. I ran away a second time and went back to school. “Don't act like this anymore! It is good you have been married.” I went back to the Highlands, I built up my house and I followed the advices they had given to me.

3- How Mäsinu turned to become a mänunultul

Little by little, I decided to learn the art of conducting a bisara. If quarrels or arguments take place in the hamlet, I shall give advices to others.

I did not sing yet tultul, I was whistling the voices, lyäg, while building my house.

Once my house was finished, I started singing up to sunrise: “Binyag bākāq Kāqislam-ilaman”. My father-in-law was amazed and said: “He is gifted!”

From then on, when they did not like to sleep they asked me for a tultul.

While singing, I was no longer embarrassed, I felt strong.”

When we had a visitor in the hamlet, they made me sing and the visitor was eventually requested to sing too. Then I do not make any comment, I only listen to the voices and the story. It is in me as if I am whistling. I do not interrupt. Inwardly, I whistle. The next day it is in my ear, and when I doze because of a night of wake, the voices are still there... hence I know already, I cannot forget neither the voices nor the stories.

By late afternoon, as soon as I had no more work, I used to go to the forest to catch birds and squirrels. In Banglās (Bungsud), together with Mangkinas, my brother-in-law, we were able to catch wild boars.

My breath is half long, not as long as that of Usuy. If I would force, if I would insist, I would reach the end of my breathing capacity while my utterance is not yet completed. For a long time, I was I whistling inwardly, at home, in the upland field, I was imitating the voices of the characters. I was repeating continuously in order to fix in my body the memory of them. Reitaration, päsansawilingan, allows the retention in memory, pägrändäm.

“Mämiminbin” and “Tyäw” I learned by listening to my maternal uncle Sunggud, in Mandalawän. His voice was quite acute, mäsning banar, and his narrative was very clear, mätlang tuturan yä.

In Kangrian, as a newly wed, I could listen to the grandfather of my wife Märadya Kälaq, Lambung and Lunggaya’s father. He was singing “Ugang-Ugang” and “Datuq ät Tägpalawan”.

From my grandfather Payas, my father’s 1rst cousin, I learned “Käswakan”. The timbre of his voice was deep and low, mälambäg and his narrative was strait, mätigna tuturan yä.

From Ranngi, the uncle of my mother in Amrang, I memorized “Lädpan”.

In Kämantiyan, with Kabut, the younger brother of Payas who was the 1rst cousin of my father I learned “Ulu ät Danum” His voice was high pitched and fine and his narrative was clear and net.

In Kämantiyan, I was able to listen to Misläm. His voice had no inversion, bäliwat, nor ornamentations, lilibu, I memorized “Lumalayag”, as well as “Käkulasyan”. In this place, I was also able to listen to and fix in my memory “Mänggigiräng”, as well as a long excerpt of “Limbuhanän” with Bägsäk who had a long breath and a deep timbre.

When Kundipal was coming to visit us, I was learning from him a repertoire from Ilug valley, across Mont Käbatangan (Mt. Mantalingayan). Thanks to him, I was able to memorize “Käpandanan” and “Käbätangan”. His voice had very high pitch but his narrative was beautiful, sober, clear, transparent. I admired very much his manner to sing a tultul and I took inspiration from him.

4- How Mäsinu became a shaman and one day made the decision not to heal anymore:

“With Lamut we had five boys and three girls who died at birth.

In the past, I did not yet know how to heal.

After the births of my first and second child, I still did not know.

I became very ill at Kangrian. I had great pain in my chest. I could no longer breathe and for several hours I was in a very serious condition. At five o’clock in the evening I stopped breathing. My wife was crying, the children were very young. At four o’clock in the morning I began to breathe again, at the break of day, with the crowing of the cock.

It is as if in a dream...

I am walking in a far off land. There is a path. It is not a pretty open path, but the bushes are not very thick. I am not aware of my house. It is like a dream, and I walk...

Half-way up there is a hill and I see a path, like a road with a fence running alongside it.

Many people lean against it in silence...and I keep on walking.

I go along and in front of me there is a house made of palms of basnig that are still fresh. I arrive. “It’s the house of father and mother!” I go up and the door isn’t closed. There is a seat, like a bench, and on the side platform my father is making a blowpipe, but his eyes are looking towards the back. My mother is also there, weaving a basket.

They do not speak. Nor do I.

.....

I have been sitting for a long time and the seat turns and I see an opening at the other end of the house. There is a kind of curtain that opens and I see a woman with long hair, wearing a white robe. But I do not see her quite clearly. She disappears and reappears. She is standing but is small and she asks me: "What are you doing here?"

.....

I feel I am holding something and it is basil, a white sprig, and a black sprig, the basil of Anduwanän, abode of Ämpuq.

Whose basil is this? I smell it while I am still lying down and I say, "I would like to eat. If there is something to eat, I feel hungry".

.....

From the moment that I was cured, I knew how to heal.

If I had to make an invocation, sägina, I called on this little girl. Christians call the being which came to me "an angel", but we call "Diwata," the mediating Diety of Ämpuq, the Master. And it was thus that I knew how to heal.

Mänginaru, Dumarap, the bone eater in the bushes, Lumandagäw, the dog with a human face, but there is also a horse. She didn't tell me to strike the Lumandagäw. If he is aggressive towards man, I can strike him, I hear him.

So for a long time, I knew how to heal...

But even if I never told you, I no longer heal now. I have given it up since I lost two sons. It is a kind of suicide. I do no more healings.

If I am ill, I do nothing to be healed. I want to die because I feel such deep sorrow for my two sons.

If there is a Benevolent One, a Good Doer of the Hills who comes to me, who becomes my brother – for up there in Mount Kābätangan are also the Good Doers of the Rising Sun, the Good Doers of the Reefs, and that is why the mountains are never destroyed – there are Good Doers who come close and one of them whispers in your ear and tells you what treatment to give. And if you go on the Voyage, Ulit, you know that one or two of them come and alight on you, and if their words are, "Go up to the Master or Rice," you fly off! It is not your physical body that makes the trip, but it is like a dream.

You no longer recognize your friends, your wife, the children, but you go there and ask what kind of remedy, you raise the questions that human beings wonder about. You rise up and then you shoot back down again. You have been there. Your soul is like your thought – it is powerful, it is as quick as a glance sight, and you have had access to it.

Then, according to the situation, you offer a box of betel nut or a gong. A chicken is sacrificed or an offering of glutinous rice cooked in a bamboo internode, lutlut, is made, and the sick person recovers.

You have paid, you have given a counterpart, you have made an exchange.

In the past when I was at Inabangan, at Kangrian, I did not yet know.

Now, I no longer know. .

After the death of my other son I gave it up completely. I asked my four protective souls, lapis, to go away, but they did not want to...

When Miduy died, it was also the end for me.

I saw an enormous wound across his body after a blow by Särapan, an Evil Doer of the Forest. Miduy asked me to heal him, and I saw this enormous wound as he was lying with his arm outstretched to me. When I saw his heart, it was cut in two, with only half of it still beating".

5- From 1983 to 1990, Mäsinu decided to work for PIADP, a bilateral Development Program of the Philippine Government and the European Union. Then Mäsinu became Pänglima.

“After you left, my income in cash money was only bägtik, (Almaciga resin). As all my children were boys, when I saw them all growing up, I worried about the future and I thought that, alone in the Highlands, I would not be able to afford the price for the bride. I looked for a land to plant and be more at ease. I visited my uncle Sigäw who said: “In the plain, dārānasan, there is no land left. It is over, people are everywhere”, but he added that PIADP would start soon. A Project on 50 ha. of borrowed land to the Pala’wan on the foothills, tikäl, to teach us how to build terraces to fix the soil and plant corn, vegetables, trees (ipil-ipil, mahogany, gumilina) fruit trees (mangga and mampalam) and to graft them, a way to take care of the fruit trees, mängipat.

Madyatu, the father of my wife had passed away and in a bisara, her uncle, Ugang ku, si Lambung, accepted my decision to move and go to the hamlet of Yangyangän, where three first cousins of my wife were living.

So, with the hope of receiving a salary, I went to Samariñana. I became part of the team. During four days I assisted them measuring the 50 ha., without pay. Each one of us gave 2 ha. (not 3, nor 4) and then we received a stewardship contract. My salary was small. They asked not to do uma any longer and they did not provide any fertilizers. My two sons contribute this work too.

I received P30.30/day. Meanwhile I could no longer cultivate my upland field and I had to borrow rice. I was their interpreter and their go between to convince Täktariq, Pänglima in Kämantiyan, to trust the project and to lend them 2 ha.

They gave us seeds to plant in our land but in my upland field only the bananas were growing well. We tried it all. The heavy rains destroyed the terraces as there was no stone to fix the soil.

In Samariñana, I seldom sang. When you came to see me in 1988, I sang again “Tyäw”. One cannot sing a long time for the stump of a dead tree, tuwäd... if one does not hear the presence of an audience by way of its tubag” (brief comments revealing an interest in the plot as it unfolds).

“They gave me P.4000 to cut the posts and built four houses. My salary was P2,000/month. We had to plant many ipil-ipil trees.

In 1990, after I returned from the CCP Exhibit in Manila, I was able to pay the price for the bride for the marriage of Miruy. Then I went back to the traditional way to cultivate my umah, planting rice in association with maïs, aturäy, tubers and other vegetables”.

From 1996 to 2000, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP), a community micro-project, started to be implemented. A new program of planting trees in the *kugun* areas and the areas of their choice, developing springs and pipes, protecting watershed, started. Mäsinu and Tagung were part of it for the Tämlang Valley.

In 2001, Mäsinu moved from Yängyangän to Kābangaqan and the construction of a new *kālang banwa* began. Mäsinu was monitoring the making and the marketing of *Tingkäp*, the fine basketry made by women in Kämantiyan, this micro-project continues today.

In 1993, as a musician and an epic chanter, Mäsinu Intaräy was proclaimed by NCCA *Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan*, National living Treasure. This recognition gave him a profound joy. It came as the ultimate consoling reward for the school years he had been forbidden to attend

as an adolescent. He shared the price with Jose Rilla, the highly esteemed *Ukum* and with Apäl as the three of them played the gongs ensemble *Basal* and where excellent musicians too. Then they committed themselves to build a *käläng bänwa* in their respective hamlet and to teach their children the ancient syllabary *surat*, as well as their musical and verbal arts.

Mäsinu was gifted for singing long narratives, but also for playing all the music instruments known in the Highlands: the jew's harp, *äruding*, the two luths *kusyapiq* for *kulilal* love songs or for *bägit* birds songs, the two flutes *suling* and *bäbäräk* and of course *basal*, the ritual and festive music of gongs. With Apäl, he knew how to make the instruments from wood and bamboo, to tune them and to play them.

His various repertoires seemed infinite and the pleasure irradiating from his eyes and smile, as well as his immense capacity of concentration and attention were the projection of wit, *utäk*, imagination *kira -kira* and exceptional memory, *rändäm*.

The kind way to listen to plaintives and the sophisticated way to talk during the long lasting *bisara*, the poetic and respectful invocations to *Ämpuq* and the Deities, the art of telling stories with an exquisite sense of humor, all these verbal talents converged in him and made him the artist we had the privilege to meet one evening long time ago, to work with during so many years in a joint attempt to safeguard the Intangible Heritage of a very modest society leaving in scattered hamlets on the successive slopes ascending to Mont Mantalingayan, in between the Mäkagwaq and the Tämlang river valleys.

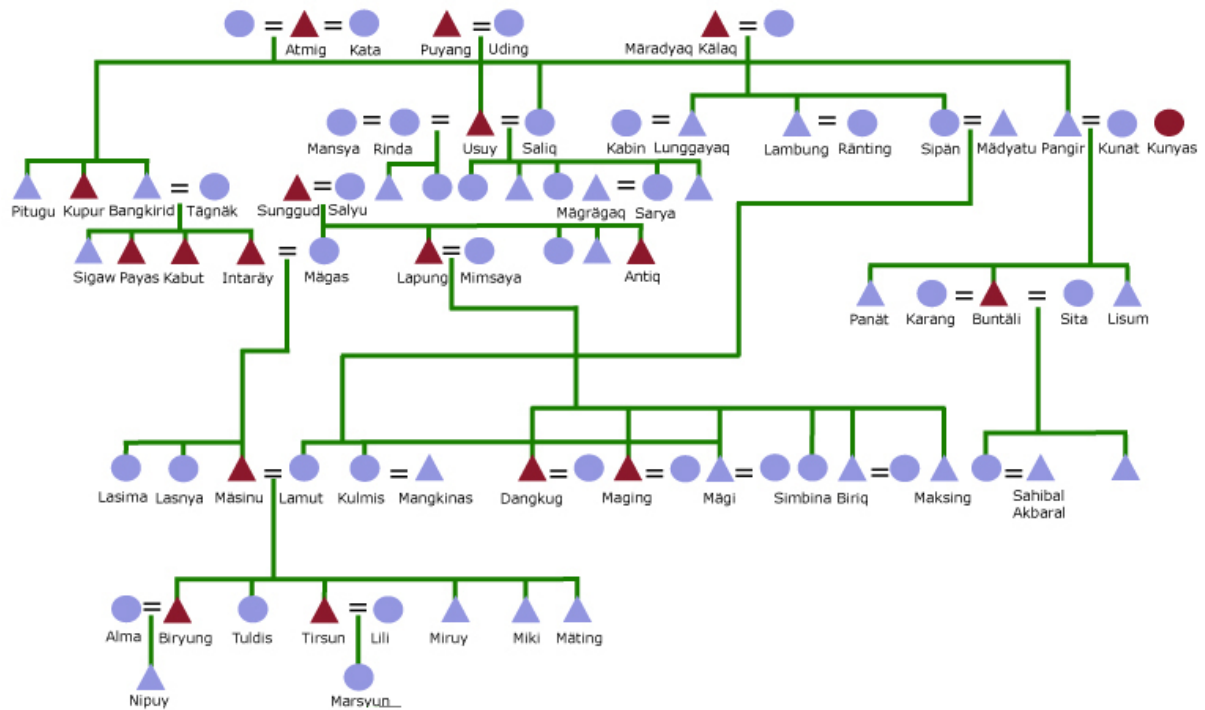
After he had a stroke, we visited him several times. He was very sad not to be able to walk any more but kept on being the centre of formal discussions *bisara* in order to solve problems and make decisions as a Pänglima.

On the 1st of December 2013, Mäsinu died.

Nicole Revel, 2015-16.



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19 Singers of Tales around Mäsinu Intaräy