The Dulimaman Epic

ITNEG, ILOCOS NORTE, ILOCOS SUR AND ABRA PROVINCES, NORTHWESTERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. The ethno-linguistic group Itneg inhabits the provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, and Abra. They are closely related to the Ilocano adjacent to them toward the west. Dulimaman is the epic of the Itneg in inland northeastern Luzon. It is widely known among Itneg communities in eastern Cabugao and Magasingal in Ilocos Sur and in Nueva Era, Ilocos Norte. It is also popular in Abra among Itneg-Inlaud speaking areas such as Langiden, San Quintin and Peharrubia and some areas of Danglas and Lagangilang.

The Epic is made up of no less than thirteen stories spanning four generations about the dulimaman or the elite in Itneg society. Endowed with supernatural powers, the dulimaman is regarded atop the traditionally wealthy babaknang. The stories revolve around the hero identified as Ligi Wadagan, at times Agimlang, and the heroine — Ayo, si babei nga Dulimaman.

Each of the stories lasts at least an hour when chanted or sung. The content can be independent of the others so that every story in the Dulimaman epic can stand by itself as a micro epic. Depicted are the customs and practices of the Itneg on courtship, marriage and death. The battles fought against the warriors of Matalagan and Kalaskigan of Apayao and Igusinaag are featured as the biggest challenges in life especially to the epic hero.

Aside from the strong kinship ties, the epic highlights the resiliency of the hero in pursuing a lady-love, his resoluteness in defending the community against marauders, the heroine’s staunch fight for justice, and her devotion to protect the lives of her immediate family members. Famine, pestilence, ethnic arrogance and rivalry are faced head-on. The son and the kin avenge a father’s defeat and a hero’s failure is at once redeemed by the wife who continues the struggle against all odds. With the belief in resurrection, death is not the finale but a sojourn to a more radiant and celebratory phase characterized by marriage rites toward a life of abundance and fertility.

Some of the more popularly sung stories in the epic are Agimlang, Apo ni Bolinayen, Patpasaul ni Ligi Wadagan kert ti Ay-aan na nga Dumaygawan, and Si Babei a Dulimaman. The Itneg epic singers are of any gender. Baket Kinya Infiel, a woman of Pag-pagong, Nueva Era in Ilocos Norte, knew several songs spanning four generations in the epic.

Norma A. Respicio (NAR)