

# **BARAS, RIZAL, HOME OF SIKARAN**

## **By: Emmanuel ES Querubin**

Baras, Rizal, in the Philippines is the acknowledged historical birthplace of Sikaran.

Sikaran was a local recreational athletic activity of farmers that doubled as a system of fighting and self-defense. It is now a very popular sport and martial art, not only nationally but also internationally. It is now the most "imitated" fighting art with self-proclaimed grandmasters sprouting like wild mushrooms without verifiable legitimate genealogy. Check of the internet shows about a dozen different "schools" with as many claiming "grandmastership" based on their own deceptive assertion.

Meliton Geronimo, President, and Founder of the World Sikaran Brotherhood, the one and only legitimate Sikaran adherent with full filial rights to be called Sikaran Grandmaster said; "imitation is the greatest form of flattery and I am flattered that the Filipino art of Sikaran is imitated worldwide."

The Filipino Art of Sikaran is among the most well known martial arts in the world. However, whatever the "school," or no matter who the alleged "grandmaster" is, everybody agree that Sikaran is a Filipino art with origins from the Philippines. Those who are knowledgeable of the true history of Sikaran unequivocally pinpoint the municipality of Baras in the Province of Rizal as the exact birthplace of Sikaran.

Sikaran have existed, long before the Spaniards came in 1521. However, the lack of bibliography and written records cannot support this claim as "carved in stone," to the "doubting Thomases." However, as Meliton Geronimo said: "to the unbelievers no amount of explanation and convincing will be enough and to the believers no convincing is necessary."

Unlike India and China, there is no known written historical record of the Philippines, prior to the coming of the Spaniards. This is suspicious and very unlikely, because there was written language (baybayin) and a system of education (butuan or bothoan) and government (barangay) long before the colonization of the Philippines by Spain.

The anthropologist Dr. Otley H. Beyer, in his book *The Philippines Before Spain*, said that a Spanish friar boasted of burning records and writings that may have shed light on the real history of the country, its culture, and its arts. It was surmised that this was caused by the disdain of the Spaniards on the natives' culture based on paganism, which was in direct conflict with their Christian beliefs. The Spaniards went as far as replacing the ancient Filipino script with Roman alphabets.

Fortunately, there are eyewitnesses who confirmed the fact that Sikaran was elevated into a formal art and sport with competition rules in the 1800's, and the word of eyewitnesses carry more credibility, even in the court of law. The account of these

eyewitnesses is the principal component of the only written history of Sikaran, which appeared in the book Sikaran, The Fighting Art of the Filipino Farmer.

These eyewitnesses, Cipriano Geronimo, Melencio Bigasin, Manuel Ocampo, Aurelio Cubacob, Angeles Pilapil and Servillano Javier, all born in the 1800's have lived more than half a century when they were interviewed in the latter part of 1950 and early part of the 1960's. They remember the skill and exploits of the Sikaranistas who came before them, such as Bonifacio Geronimo, Rumagit, Pedro Castaneda, Alfonso Tesoro, Perfecto Ballesteros, Miguel Llagas, (all from Baras), Juan Diego (Tanay), Marcelo Santos (Taytay), Rufino Sumolong (Antipolo), Fernando Espiritu (binangonan) and Juan dela Cruz (Morong).

Meliton Geronimo, narrated that while growing up in Baras, he saw Sikaranistas step on carabao's dung just before a bout to force an opponent to back off and lose by default. Some clever, agile Sikaranistas entice less nimble opponents in the muddy field so they can have an advantage with their jumping maneuvers.

Geronimo was given the title Supremo (leader) by the Sikaran elders, and was named Sikaran Grandmaster in 1966, by the Asian Karate Association (composed of Japan, Korea, China and the Philippines)

Despite the overwhelming evidence and Meliton Geronimo's untiring efforts in making the municipal government give the due recognition to Baras as the birthplace of Sikaran, politicians did not really care. They cannot see and even envision past their political shortsightedness the benefits such recognition will benefit the municipality, the province and even the country.

More than anything else, this indifference to the cause of Sikaran made up Meliton Geronimo's mind to run for political office.

In 1977, after 30 years he retired as a Lieutenant Colonel from the Philippine Air Force and run for mayor in Baras winning handily and serving four terms.

His first act of office was to have the municipal government acknowledge Baras as the birthplace of Sikaran. He presented his argument to the Sangguniang Bayan (Municipal Council) where he argued his case. It was then elevated to the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (Provincial Council) where he also unanimously convinced the political powers that the honor and recognition of Baras as the birthplace of Sikaran is long overdue.

The wheel of politics turns ever so slowly; nevertheless, although it was long in coming, it was finally approved. The first and probably most important action taken by the political powers of the Municipality of Baras and the Province of Rizal was approving placing the seal of Sikaran and the words Home of Sikaran on the official letterhead of the Chief Executive Officer of the Municipality of Baras. As far as it is

known, Baras is the only government agency, not only in the Philippines but also in the whole world that honors a martial art on its official letterhead.

Japan has judo, Korea has Tae Kwon Do, China has Wushu, Thailand has Muay Thai, but none of these countries has honored their martial art by declaring their place of birth. Only the Municipality of Baras carries the seal of its martial art and the words Home of Sikaran.

Interestingly, there were projects that did not present opposition from anyone. The first was erecting an arch at the entrance of the town that says: "Welcome to Baras, Home of Sikaran." Next was a monument in front of the Municipal Hall of two Sikaranistas exchanging biakids (the signature spinning heel kick of Sikaran). The biggest project was the construction of a multi-purpose gymnasium for Sikaran events.



REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
PROVINCE OF RIZAL  
**Municipality of Baras**

*Office of the Mayor*



#### EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 1

DECLARING LAST SUNDAY OF JANUARY OF EVERY YEAR AS  
**"SIKARAN DAY FESTIVAL"** FOR YOUTH SPORTS DEVELOPMENT OF  
BARAS, RIZAL.

WHEREAS, Section 19 (1) of Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution provides that the State shall promote physical education and encourage sports programs, league competitions and amateur sports, including training for international competitions, to foster discipline, teamwork and excellence for the development of a healthy and alert citizenry.

WHEREAS, Sikaran is a Filipino Martial Art developed by the farmer ancestors of Baras, Rizal for entertainment and self-defense purposes, even before the arrival of Spaniards;

WHEREAS, the sports is continuously gaining adherents both locally and internationally;

WHEREAS, through the sports, its loyal exponents would like to instill in the youth the much needed discipline and moral values, camaraderie and sense of leadership;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ROBERTO G. FERRERA, Municipal Mayor of Baras, Rizal, by virtue of the powers vested in me by law, do hereby declare every last Sunday of January thereafter as **"Sikaran Day Festival"** for youth sports development of Baras, Rizal.

All government agencies and instrumentalities in the Municipality, as well as business and commercial sectors and non-government organizations, are being enjoined to extend every possible support, assistance, and cooperation in making the annual celebration of **"Sikaran Day Festival"** for youth sports development a success.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Municipality of Baras, Rizal, Philippines to be affixed this JANUARY 28, 2001.

ROBERTO G. FERRERA  
Municipal Mayor

However, that was only the beginning. In 2000, Municipal resolution No. 66-2000 declaring a day of celebration to be known as Sikaran Day Festival was adopted. In 2001, the Municipality of Baras declared the last Sunday of January as Sikaran Day Festival. Furthermore, funds were appropriated by the municipality to make the event successful.



**Baras Gymnasium, erected to be the venue of the Sikaran Day Festival.**

In 2008, an ordinance was passed to move the Sikaran Day Festival from the last Sunday of January to the last Sunday of March. This move was made to further honor Sikaran Grandmaster Meliton Geronimo (better known as Supremo), whose month of birth is March. Thereafter Sikaran Day Festival is celebrated on the last Sunday of March.

In 2011, the Rizal Provincial Board declared Sikaran an Official Provincial Sport making it a medal event in the annual provincial meet.



**Geronimo, (right) Santiago Moya. Next to Geronimo is Ramon Valdenor. Next to Moya is Emmanuel Querubin.**

A plan to replace the aging arch and Sikaran monument was spearheaded by the current Chief Executive Officer of Baras, Honorable Mayor Willie Robles. The construction of the new arch and monument, made of bronze, is now underway.

**Courtesy call on Baras Mayor Willie Robles (center in red shirt), with his assistants. Foreground (left) Jimmy**

It is a pity that the Sikaran elders are no longer around to witness the growth of Sikaran from a local recreational athletic activity, to an international martial sport.