



The Function of Martonggo Raja in the Saur Matua Tradition in Toba Batak

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ABSTRACT

Martonggo Raja in the Saur Matua tradition is an important family gathering (Dalihan Na Tolu) to prepare the ideal funeral ceremony for a parent who has died at an advanced age and has many grandchildren. This activity aims to agree on the time, technical details, and division of tasks, often called Pasada Tahi (unifying opinions). This study aims to describe and analyze in depth the role of Martonggo Raja as a forum for discussion and the division of tasks in the Saur Matua traditional ritual, as well as its contribution to the religious dimension and the recognition of customary law. The focus of this study is on the Batak Toba community in North Sumatra. The methodology employed is qualitative, utilizing literature review techniques to explore philosophical values and relevant cultural literature. The findings of this study indicate that Martonggo Raja functions as a democratic deliberative body aimed at reaching consensus (satolop and saoloan) while also serving as a traditional management system through the mechanism of serep ni horja (task division), which enhances the efficiency of ritual execution. Additionally, this tradition possesses a spiritual dimension as a place to offer prayers to Mula Jadi Nabolon and as a means of reconciliation within the family environment. The roles of the Dalihan Na Tolu groups (Hula-hula, Anak Boru, Dongan Tubu) and local leaders provide a crucial foundation of customary law (uhum), ensuring the ceremony's social and traditional recognition. Overall, Martonggo Raja is crucial for maintaining social stability and preserving the cultural identity of the Batak Toba people.

Keywords: martonggo raja, saur matua, tradition

Fungsi Martonggo Raja pada Adat Saur Matua dalam Batak Toba

ABSTRAK

Martonggo Raja pada adat Saur Matua adalah musyawarah penting keluarga besar (Dalihan Na Tolu) untuk mempersiapkan upacara kematian ideal bagi orang tua yang wafat dalam usia lanjut dan memiliki cucu lengkap. Kegiatan ini bertujuan menyepakati waktu, teknis acara, dan pembagian tugas, yang sering disebut Pasada Tahi (menyatukan pendapat). Penelitian ini memiliki tujuan untuk menggambarkan dan menganalisis secara mendalam peranan Martonggo Raja sebagai media diskusi dan pembagian tugas dalam ritual adat Saur Matua, serta kontribusinya dalam dimensi religiusitas dan pengakuan hukum adat. Fokus penelitian ini terletak pada komunitas Batak Toba yang berada di Sumatera Utara. Metodologi yang diterapkan bersifat kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui penelitian pustaka untuk menggali nilai-nilai filosofis serta literatur budaya yang relevan. Temuan dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Martonggo Raja berfungsi sebagai lembaga musyawarah demokratis yang bertujuan mencapai kesepakatan (satolop dan saoloan) sekaligus sistem manajemen tradisional melalui mekanisme serep ni horja (pembagian tugas) yang meningkatkan efisiensi pelaksanaan upacara. Selain itu, tradisi ini juga memiliki dimensi spiritual sebagai tempat untuk memanjatkan doa kepada Mula Jadi Nabolon serta sebagai sarana rekonsiliasi dalam lingkungan keluarga. Peran kelompok Dalihan Na Tolu (Hula-hula, Anak Boru, Dongan Tubu) dan pemimpin setempat memberikan dasar hukum adat (uhum) yang penting, sehingga pelaksanaan upacara tersebut diakui secara sosial dan tradisional. Secara keseluruhan, Martonggo Raja sangat penting dalam menjaga stabilitas sosial dan pelestarian identitas budaya Batak Toba.

Keywords: martonggo raja, adat, saur matua

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INTRODUCTION

Dalihan Na Tolu in Toba Batak culture refers to a very tight kinship bond and is the most fundamental basis in the entire socio-cultural structure. Philosophically, this term describes three balanced pillars, which in practice consist of three main components that are interconnected and inseparable. The first component is Hula-hula, who is the party who gives a wife, and they are highly respected because they are considered a source of blessing and moral guidance for the family (Simanjuntak, 2017). The second component is Anak Boru, who is the party who receives a wife and traditionally plays a crucial role in the technical implementation and is the main supporter in realizing various family customary plans. The third component is Dongan Tubu, which refers to a male relative from the same clan or fellow clan who serves as the main companion and protector of honor for the organizing family (Oleh, 2017). These three elements are required to be present at every important traditional event, such as Martonggo Raja, because their active participation provides customary legal legitimacy to every decision made. Without the presence and approval of the Dalihan Na Tolu elements, a traditional ceremony will be deemed to lack a strong legal basis and be considered flawed in the traditions of the Toba Batak people (Silaban et al. 2019). Therefore, Dalihan Na Tolu is not simply a family grouping, but rather a traditional management system based on shared values ??to ensure that every complex ceremony can be carried out with a high degree of efficiency.

Customary law for the Toba Batak people is accepted as a reflection of human thoughts, intentions, and emotions passed down from generation to generation with the aim of maintaining social structure and group identity (Simanjuntak, 2009). In everyday life, traditional law is a systematic and orderly collection of values ??that govern every aspect of human life, from birth to death (Pide). This traditional law is highly respected and serves as the basis for various official institutions, such as the Martonggo Raja

deliberation tradition, which plays a role in formulating, reviewing, and recognizing important rituals like the Saur Matua. Recognition of traditional law, known as uhum, is crucial for a traditional ceremony to be considered legally sound and valid within the community. Adherence to traditional law is also reflected in the Dalihan Na Tolu kinship structure and the participation of local leaders, where agreements reached in traditional forums become binding collective decisions and must be implemented responsibly by all group members (Guna, 2003). Therefore, traditional law is not merely an oral heritage, but rather a system of rules that ensures order, justice, and social harmony in traditional community life.

Martonggo Raja is derived from two words: martonggo, meaning to pray or ask, and raja, representing a respected traditional leader or community leader in the region. Furthermore, Martonggo Raja serves as a formal consultative body, providing a platform for discussion, coordination, and legitimacy before major events. This tradition demonstrates the Toba Batak people's strong emphasis on the principles of democracy and openness through deliberation to reach consensus. During the Saur Matua ceremony, Martonggo Raja plays a role in formulating, critiquing, and approving all plans to prevent errors on the main ceremony day.

Deliberation in Toba Batak culture is seen not only as a method of interaction but also as a highly valued and respected customary legal institution (Butarbutar, 2019). Saur Matua is a farewell ritual performed at death in Toba Batak culture, which has many stages (Flora, 2014). This ritual provides an opportunity to pay final respects to deceased individuals with a certain customary status, who are deemed "perfect" in their family life.

The existence of Martonggo Raja is also related to the Dalihan Na Tolu kinship structure, which forms an important sociocultural foundation in the Toba Batak community. Dalihan Na Tolu consists of three main elements: Hula-hula (the person who gives the wife), Anak Boru (the person who receives the wife), and Dongan Tubu (brothers



by blood) (Vergouwen, 2004). These three components, along with village government officials such as the raja ni huta (village head) and fellow villagers (dongan sahuta), are required to attend the Martonggo Raja meeting. Their presence serves not only as witnesses but also as active participants, providing customary legal legitimacy (uhum) to the plans made by the organizing family, or bona ni hasuhuton bolon. Without agreement in this forum, a traditional ceremony is considered to lack a solid legal basis in the community (Bahar, 2008).

More specifically, the Martonggo Raja has administrative and technical responsibilities known as serep ni horja, or division of tasks (Simanjuntak, 2009b). Given that the Saur Matua ceremony involves many things, from providing sacrificial animals and mass consumption to organizing prayer protocols, this burden cannot be faced alone by the bereaved family. With the Martonggo Raja, this burden becomes a shared responsibility. The determination of important roles, such as Raja Parhata as the customary spokesperson and Raja Parsaut as the decision-maker, takes place in this forum to ensure that each technical aspect has a clear responsibility. This demonstrates the still-visible social solidarity within Toba Batak culture, where the success of one family is an honor for the entire community.

However, beyond the technical and organizational aspects, Martonggo Raja has a profound spiritual and psychological dimension. From a religious perspective, this tradition expresses a prayer to God Almighty (Mula Jadi Nabolon) for protection from weather and other non-technical obstacles. From a psychological-social perspective, this forum serves as a tool for reconciliation or the resolution of internal conflicts between family members. The processes known as padomuhon tahi (unifying plans) and pasadahon roha (harmonizing feelings) become crucial during times of grief. The goal is that when the day of the ceremony arrives, all participants will attend with a clear mind, free from any lingering hostility or

conflict, thus achieving a state of satolop (agreement) and saoloan (concurrence).

Despite its importance, the challenges of modernization and shifting social values sometimes threaten the younger generation's understanding of the philosophical core of Martonggo Raja. Many view it as merely a formal gathering, yet it actually embodies complex values of leadership, law, spirituality, and conflict management. Therefore, research into the role of Martonggo Raja in the Saur Matua tradition is highly relevant for documenting and reanalyzing this tradition's crucial role in maintaining the stability of Toba Batak culture.

Based on this background, the research questions are formulated as follows: What is the function and significance of Martonggo Raja as a means of deliberation and task allocation within the Saur Matua traditional ceremony? How does Martonggo Raja play a role in religiosity and the legitimacy of customary law through the involvement of Dalihan Na Tolu elements and regional leaders?

In line with these questions, this study aims to describe and analyze in depth the role of Martonggo Raja as a forum for deliberation to reach agreements and its effectiveness in distributing logistical tasks and traditional protocols within the Saur Matua ceremony. Furthermore, this study identifies the significance of prayer requests to Mula Jadi Nabolon and the legitimizing function of the traditional kings in providing moral support for the event. The practical benefits of this research are expected to document and review the crucial role of this tradition in maintaining the stability of Toba Batak culture amidst the challenges of modernization. Theoretically, this research is useful for providing insight into the philosophical foundations of Martonggo Raja, which encompass the values of leadership, law, spirituality, and complex conflict management.

This research draws on several relevant previous studies to strengthen the analysis. These include Simanjuntak's 2017 work on the function

of Hula-hula as a source of moral support, and Vergouwen's 2004 study, which examined the basic structure of Dalihan Na Tolu in the social and cultural context of the Toba Batak. Furthermore, this research also draws on Simanjuntak's 2009b work, which discusses the concept of serep ni horja, or division of tasks in traditional Batak community management.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method approach. Metode kualitatif lazim digunakan dalam berbagai penelitian kualitatif (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Ratna, 2004; Razak, 2017). This method was chosen because the researcher wanted to explore in detail the philosophical values, functions, and meanings of the Martonggo Raja tradition in Toba Batak culture. This method allows the researcher to conduct in-depth interpretations of complex customary terms.

Data collection techniques were conducted through library research. The researcher collected, analyzed, and examined various information from reliable written sources. The primary purpose of using this method was to obtain a strong theoretical foundation, so that the analysis could be considered valid in both academic and historical contexts. Data sources in this study included relevant cultural literature, scientific journals, and reference books on Toba Batak customs. Specifically, the data focused on literature discussing the social structure of Dalihan Na Tolu, the Saur Matua funeral process, and the traditional management concept of serep ni horja.

RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that the Martonggo Raja tradition in the Saur Matua traditional ceremony in Toba Batak society plays a very diverse and complex role. Based on the literature review, it was found that Martonggo Raja is not only a place for ordinary deliberation, but also a traditional institution that combines various social, legal, spiritual, and psychological aspects into a single, planned system. This finding

confirms that the success of the Saur Matua ceremony depends heavily on the effectiveness of Martonggo Raja's implementation as a key preparatory step before the main event.

1. Martonggo Raja as a Medium for Deliberation and Consensus

The research findings reveal that Martonggo Raja's primary role is as a place for deliberation to reach consensus. During its implementation, the organizing family (*bona ni hasuhuton bolon*) does not have full authority in determining the course of the event. Instead, they are required to convey all plans to a forum consisting of members of the Dalihan Na Tolu and local traditional leaders (Harahap et al., 2019).

This deliberation results in collective decisions that are binding on all parties. The discussion process is open and participatory, with each member having the opportunity to provide input, criticism, and suggestions (Sulhan, 2017). This demonstrates that the Toba Batak social system prioritizes the principles of traditional democracy based on consensus.

Furthermore, research reveals that the presence of Dalihan Na Tolu elements, namely Hula-hula, Anak Boru, and Dongan Tubu, is a primary requirement for decision-making (Sitinjak, 2019). Without their presence, decisions are considered invalid under customary law (*uhum*). Therefore, Martonggo Raja serves as a legal and social mechanism throughout the entire ceremonial series.

Furthermore, the involvement of regional leaders such as the *raja ni huta* and *dongan sahuta* strengthens this legitimacy. They play a role in ensuring that ceremonial plans align with prevailing social norms and are accepted by the wider community.

2. Effectiveness of Task Division through Serep ni Horja

This research also shows that Martonggo Raja functions as an efficient traditional management system through a task division mechanism called



serep ni horja. In the complex context of the Saur Matua ceremony, the division of tasks is crucial to ensuring its smooth implementation.

In the Martonggo Raja forum, each task is systematically assigned to specific individuals or groups based on their social roles within the Dalihan Na Tolu structure. Research has found that the division of tasks encompasses various aspects, from logistics and catering to customary protocols to overall event management.

Key roles, such as Raja Parhata and Raja Parsaut, are determined collectively. Raja Parhata acts as the customary spokesperson, managing official communications, while Raja Parsaut validates customary decisions. Furthermore, technical tasks are also divided, such as providing sacrificial animals, preparing food, and arranging the venue.

These findings indicate that serep ni horja is not merely a division of labor but also a concrete manifestation of social solidarity. The burden, originally borne by the organizing family, becomes a shared responsibility for the entire community. This reflects the strong value of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) in Toba Batak culture.

Operationally, this division of tasks has been shown to minimize the potential for technical errors, avoid duplication of work, and increase efficiency in the ceremony. Thus, Martonggo Raja functions as a structured and effective traditional organizational system.

3. Spiritual Dimension: Prayers to Begin to Become Nabolon

The study shows that Martonggo Raja has a crucial spiritual aspect in the Saur Matua ceremony. Each Martonggo Raja ceremony begins with a prayer addressed to Mula Jadi Nabolon as a form of recognition of the power of God Almighty (Tobing, 1967).

The prayers offered serve several primary purposes: asking for the smooth running of the event, protection from both natural and non-technical disturbances, and blessings for the bereaved family. This demonstrates that the Toba

Batak people believe that the success of a ceremony is determined not only by technical preparation but also by the permission of the Almighty.

Furthermore, the study also indicates that this spiritual aspect provides mental peace for bereaved families. Through communal prayer, families feel they receive moral and spiritual support from the community and the belief that the entire process is under God's care.

Thus, Martonggo Raja serves not only as a social gathering place but also as a sacred space that connects people with God within a traditional and cultural context.

4. Social Legitimacy through the Blessing of the Traditional King

In addition to prayers to God, the study shows that seeking the blessing of the traditional king is an integral part of Martonggo Raja. This blessing serves as social and legal legitimacy for the ceremony.

Traditional kings, including the raja ni huta and other leaders, have the power to recognize the validity of a ceremony. Without their blessing, the ceremony is not considered to have a strong foundation in customary law.

This study found that this blessing is not only official but also has deep symbolic meaning. The blessing reflects the community's full support for the organizing family and serves as a guarantee that the ceremony is carried out in accordance with customary norms and regulations.

From a psychological perspective, this blessing provides a sense of security and confidence for the family in carrying out the ceremony. They feel supported by the entire community, allowing them to carry out the procession more calmly and solemnly.

5. The Function of Reconciliation in Resolving Internal Conflict

The study also shows that Martonggo Raja serves as a tool for resolving internal conflicts within both the family and the community. In times of grief, the potential for conflict often increases,

whether due to differing perspectives, division of tasks, or unresolved issues.

Through the Martonggo Raja forum, each party is given the opportunity to express their concerns. This process is conducted through deliberation, involving Dalihan Na Tolu members as mediators.

The concepts of padomuhon tahi (unifying plans) and pasadahon roha (unifying feelings) form the basis of this reconciliation process. Research shows that this approach is effective in mitigating conflict and creating a harmonious atmosphere before the ceremony.

Successful reconciliation is characterized by achieving satolop (agreement) and saoloan (unity). This demonstrates that all parties accept the decision not only formally but also emotionally and spiritually.

This function is crucial because unresolved conflicts can disrupt ceremonies and damage long-term social relationships. Thus, Martonggo Raja serves as a social mechanism that maintains harmony within the community.

6. Impact of Martonggo Raja on Social and Cultural Stability

Overall, the research results indicate that Martonggo Raja has a significant influence on social stability and the preservation of Toba Batak culture. This tradition serves as a means of maintaining traditional values amidst social change and modernization.

Through Martonggo Raja, principles such as cooperation, discussion, respect for family relationships, and adherence to customary law are preserved and passed on to future generations. This tradition also serves as a social educational tool, teaching important values such as collaboration, responsibility, and solidarity.

Furthermore, Martonggo Raja serves as a social oversight mechanism, ensuring that everyone carries out their duties in accordance with customary norms. This contributes to maintaining order and balance in society.

In the modern era, the study results show that despite changes in people's lifestyles, the values embedded in Martonggo Raja remain relevant. This tradition has been able to adapt without losing its core cultural foundation.

DISCUSSION

The function and meaning of Martonggo Raja in the Saur Matua traditional ceremony demonstrate that this practice is not simply a regular gathering, but rather a social mechanism steeped in cultural values, power structures, and symbols of togetherness within the Toba Batak community. Martonggo Raja is a customary deliberation forum held before the main ceremony. Its purpose is to formulate plans, assign roles, and ensure the entire event runs in accordance with prevailing customary norms and procedures.

Functionally, Martonggo Raja serves as a means of collective deliberation involving various kinship elements within the Dalihan Na Tolu system: hula-hula (the giver of the woman), dongan tubu (relatives of the same clan), and boru (the recipient of the woman). In this forum, each group has a clear position and role in expressing opinions, providing considerations, and making decisions. This demonstrates that Martonggo Raja functions as a deliberative space that emphasizes the principles of traditional kinship-based democracy. Decisions are not the result of one party's dominance, but rather a collective agreement reached through dialogue and customary deliberation.

From a religious perspective, Martonggo Raja reflects the strong connection between individuals, ancestors, and cosmological values in Toba Batak culture. Each deliberation process is viewed not only as a social activity but also as an act with spiritual impact. This is evident in the behavior of deliberation participants, who maintain appropriate behavior, language, and etiquette throughout the meeting. The words spoken in this forum often contain symbolic prayers, hopes, and blessings to the ancestors, ensuring the smooth running of the entire ceremony.



The involvement of Dalihan Na Tolu components in Martonggo Raja adds to this religiosity. Hula-hula, as respected individuals, are often considered to possess higher moral and spiritual influence, so any advice or decisions they make are considered truthful and blessed. Dongan tubu serves to maintain internal balance and solidarity, while boru carries out operational duties responsibly as a form of devotion. These three elements create harmony that is not only social but also spiritual, as each role is carried out with an awareness of sacred customary values.

Furthermore, Martonggo Raja also serves as a means of seeking spiritual legitimacy for the ceremony. In Toba Batak culture, every major traditional event, such as Saur Matua, requires collective approval, which is not only social but also symbolic. This harmony is believed to be a manifestation of the "permission" of customary and ancestral order. Therefore, Martonggo Raja serves as a forum where religious values are realized through collective agreements that contain profound spiritual meaning.

In terms of the legitimacy of customary law, the Martonggo Raja plays a vital role as a decision-making forum recognized based on customary norms. Decisions issued in the Martonggo Raja are considered binding for all community members because they are produced through a deliberation process involving all key elements of the social structure. This allows the Martonggo Raja to function as a kind of "customary law enforcement institution" that establishes regulations, allocates tasks, and resolves potential conflicts before ceremonies are held.

The involvement of regional leaders, such as the Raja Huta (village head) or local customary figures, further strengthens the legal legitimacy of decisions made. Their presence is not only a symbol of power but also serves as guardians and interpreters of customary norms. They ensure that every decision is in accordance with applicable customary rules and does not deviate from inherited values. In this way, decisions made by the Martonggo Raja are not only socially legitimate

but also have normative force that is widely recognized within the community.

Furthermore, the recognition of customary law in the Martonggo Raja is also evident in the discussion process, which emphasizes mutual agreement. In Toba Batak culture, decisions made by a single party are not considered valid. Conversely, decisions resulting from deliberations involving Dalihan Na Tolu and regional leaders are strongly recognized because they reflect the collective will. This principle aligns with the collective concept of customary law, where truth is determined by consensus, not by a single individual.

CONCLUSION

First, as a Means of Discussion and Agreement: The Martonggo Raja serves as a forum for discussion that supports the principles of traditional democracy in reaching mutual agreement (satolop and saoloan). The resulting decisions are binding and provide social law for the families hosting the event.

Second, effectiveness of Traditional Management: With the serep ni horja mechanism, the Martonggo Raja serves as an efficient task-sharing system for handling the logistical and protocol complexities of the Saur Matua ceremony. This demonstrates the value of cooperation and social solidarity, where responsibility for the event is shared by the community.

Third, religious and Spiritual Dimensions: This tradition serves as a sacred place for praying to Mula Jadi Nabolon for the smooth running of the event. Beyond the theological perspective, this forum also plays a psychological role as a means of reconciliation (pdomuhon tahi and pasadahon roha) to resolve internal conflicts before the main event.

Fourth, Validation of Customary Law and Social Structure: The presence of Dalihan Na Tolu elements (Hula-hula, Anak Boru, Dongan Tubu) and regional leaders (raja ni huta) provides crucial certainty of customary law (uhum). Without the approval and recognition of this forum, a cus-

tomary event is considered invalid or lacks a strong legal basis.

In general, Martonggo Raja is more than just a technical meeting; it represents a cultural identity that maintains social stability, order, and the continuity of the noble values of the Toba Batak amidst modern developments.

This structure provides a solution to the problem. The conclusion is a generalization of the analysis results derived from the problem. Avoid conclusions that are not based on the problem formulation.

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