

The Tradition of Gondang Sabangunan and Custom Ceremony of the Toba Batak People in Samosir District: Challenge, Hope and Opportunity

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Abstract: This research is entitled "The Tradition of Gondang Sabangunan and *Adat* Ceremony of the Toba Batak People in Samosir District: Challenge, Hope and Opportunity." This research uses qualitative method, involving techniques of interviewing, an in-depth observation, direct field research, recordings of the gondang music performances and *ulaon adat* (adat ceremony) of the Toba Batak. In the discussion it applies the theory of acculturation and traditional ceremony. The results of the research show that nowadays the gondang sabangunan musicians in Samosir region become less in quantity. This is caused by the changing era of the more functional 'keyboard music' in the culture of the society nowadays. On the other hand, there is a desire among artists and members of the Batak Toba community to maintain gondang sabangunan in various social functions, due to the expectation from the perspective of cultural identity. The opportunity for that is enormous, should it be accompanied by the awareness of the importance of continuing the cultural heritage in the space and time gone through.

1 INTRODUCTION

The tradition of the Gondang Sabangunan (ceremonial music), *tortor* (ceremonial dance) and *ulaon adat* (traditional ceremony) are parts of the strong identity of Toba Batak culture. The three aspects have important values in the context of the continuity and change of the Toba Batak culture. Gondang Sabangunan is seen as a symbol of the community's traditional strength. Gondang Sabangunan is also perceived fully of ritual values that maintain the cosmological relationships of men both as individual and as groups with God and the universe. Even after the introduction of the Protestant and Catholic teachings, the Toba Batak people continuously put effort of inculturating their *adat* practices, including the practice of the gondang sabangunan and *tortor*, with their new religions. The gondang sabangunan and *tortor* tradition is also identical with the traditional ceremony in Toba culture holistically, *habatahon*. (Purba 2000: 25-29).

The aim of this study is to explore the continuity and change of Gondang Sabangunan and *tortor* tradition including the practice of *adat* ceremony

(*ulaon adat*). There are various models of continuity in the context of the gondang sabangunan and *tortor* tradition. (1) Firstly, it is a purely continuity model with an ensemble format that has already been present prior to the entry of external influences-such as Protestant and Catholic Christian religion and education. All instruments in gondang tradition are used with no other instruments used. (2) Secondly, there is also a modified model that combines several musical instruments (such as taganing and gonrang and ogung) with other instruments-for example, gondang hasapi instrument and / or instruments that are popular in Western popular music, and usually with electronic instruments. Thirdly, the model of change and continuity of Gondang tradition and traditional ceremony that occurred in Toba Batak society in Samosir Regency is happening continuously, exposed to various activities of traditional ceremony and social media in society such as internet, mobile phone, newsletter, magazine, and television broadcast.

Along with the development of time, then various aspects related to tradition of gondang sabangunan and traditional ceremonies are also

influenced by various changes, both in aspects of social function and in the technical aspects of the performances, including the rules applied in the community in relation to how the tradition is used. [Purba 2000: 25-26; 2014: 258-275]. In general there is also degradation of the number of pargonsi (music players) who are originally involved in gondang sabangunan. On the other hand there is an increasing number of keyboardists. This research also targets data that describes the distribution of local musicians in gondang sabangunan nowadays.

From the existence of gondang in the Toba Batak society, it is important to look at the social aspect, namely: challenges, hopes and opportunities. The challenge is the shift of musical taste of Toba society from gondang sabangunan to the form of keyboard music. In addition, there is also a distortion of musical culture, from taganing as early as mixed musical instruments, as well as among the religions that come into the culture of the Batak Toba community has a variety of sosioreligious resistance to the presence of this goddess of warning, so it must get adaptation as way out. The hope that happens is that the Batak Toba people still have perceptions about the importance of gondang sabangunan and traditional ceremonies as an amplifier of cultural identity. Gondang sabangunan is also identical with the Batak culture that reflects their existence traversing the history of civilization. On the other hand the opportunity for continuity of the gondang sabangunan remained in the midst of a changing society. Opportunities are important to find, especially the functional ways in culture, and the way of putting gondang sabangunan

back in both the context of the traditions and contemporary cultural context of the Toba Batak society, with various cultural and social considerations. This can be seen from the previous study by Simon (1984), Schreiner (1994) and Liberty Manik (1970) that depicted of how the gondang sabangunan tradition related to various aspect of the toba batak sosial and religious life, including numbers of ritual ceremonies, such as exhumation of bones ceremonies (*mangongkal holi*), funeral ceremonies (*saur matua*), and healing ceremonies (*gondang saem*). Other studies also explained that the gondang sabangunan tradition maintain the people identity (Purba: 2000, 2014). Through *gondang sabangunan* tradition the Toba batak people expressed their batakness and that make them feel toba batak people. These social factors, can not be ignored in viewing the course of gondang sabangunan as a main power of Toba Batak music. For this reason this study is conducted.

2 THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

To examine the challenge, hope and opportunity for gondang sabangunan and traditional ceremony in the culture of Batak Toba community in Samosir District, the researchers used the theory of cultural contact. In the cultural contact, the main thing is how further the certain individual has bound themselves in the process of acculturation. Several indicators are the level of formal education, participation in the paid work, the extent of urbanization, the usage of mass media, political participation, religious change, language change, daily life practices and social relations. A number of variables may be related to each other. So, herein, we find in the literature of efforts and attempts to develop the scale or the index of contact and participation that unite various of experiences.

The forms of cultural contact that lead to the acculturation process include: (1) Contact can occur between the whole society or several parts only. It can also occur between the individuals from two groups. (2) Contacts can also be classified between friendly groups and even hostile groups. (3) Contacts can also arise between a controlling society and politically or economically controlled society. (4) cultural contact can occur between people who: (a) just as great (b) just as different, (5) cultural contact can occur between material and non-material aspects between simple cultures, between simple and complex culture and also between complex cultures.

In the cultural contact, there will be quality known as the process and also quality known as outcome which is generated from that cultural contact. Furthermore, Kartomi (1981: 275-297) explains that there are three process of cultural contact, which are : transculturation, musical synthesis and *musical syncretism*.

In these three terminologies stored an understanding of a fusion process that needs time; and there are six type of results/outcomes generated from this cultural contact, which are : (i) *virtual rejection of an impinging music*, (ii) *transfer of discrete musical traits*, (iii) *pluralistic coexistence of music*, (iv) *nativistic musical revival*, (v) *musical abandonment*, (vi) *musical impoverishment*

Therefore, it is necessary to understand the theory of tradition that developed in the Toba Batak society in general. Based on emic approach, all people in this world have various kinds of ceremony, which serve as the fulfillment of cultural needs, both for individual and groups. In Toba Batak culture, when tribal religion is still the main model in the Toba

Batak society, tradition is understood as a series or order of social and religious norms. The tradition regulates social life, human beings with their ancestors, vertical relations to the Creator, and the execution of religious ritual ceremonies. Tradition can not be changed, but it must be obeyed.

The method used in this study is a qualitative method, which relies on the data of the gondang sabangunan performances and traditional ceremonies, information provided by key informants and the base in the framework of exploring the form of ideas behind the gondang sabangunan performances and traditional ceremonies. The data is recorded audiovisually. The techniques used are interviews, recording of research events, participated-observation, and analysis through the humanities and social sciences.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of this research is discussed into 5 sub-sections, which are : existency and challenge in the present day, challenge, hope and opportunity of gondangs sabangunan and traditional ceremonies of the Toba Batak culture in the Samosir District.

3.1 Existence and Challenge in the Present Day

One of the logic consequence of the social change and local culture that has not yet been anticipated maximally in the Samosir District, is not only the degrading of the knowledge of the local society about their own culture, but also the lesser contribution of energy by them [attention, usage and documentaries in the society].

The further effect is that in the present day, based on the field research, every area in Samosir that has been seen as the Batak center of civilization, there has only been one to six music players (pargonsi) specifically the taganing player (partaganing) and the sarune player (parsarune), even in one of the cultural region, there has not been found any music player, which is in Sitio. More of it can be seen in this table below.

Table 1: Distribution of *Pargonsi* (Players) of Gondang Sabangunan in Samosir District

No	Region	<i>Partaganing</i>	<i>Parsarune</i>
1	Pangu Ruran	1. Naibaho (50)	1. Sinurat (55) 2. Jaliton Ambarita (65) 3. Barton Ambarita
2	Nainggolan	-	-
3	Onan Runggu	1. Bapak Samosir	1. Sitinjak (70) 2. Sitinjak (49)
4	Palipi	1. Marudut Sinaga (58) 2. Jagossi Sinaga (58) 3. Robinson Sinaga (54)	1. Sahat Sinaga (60) 2. Kamel Rumapea (45) 3. Saladin Rumapea (65)
5	Ronggurni Huta	1. Baja Silalahi (60)	1. Binsar Nadeak (67) 2. S.S. Simbolon (67)
6	Harian Boho	-	-
7	Sianjur Mula-mula	1. Aliman Limbong (55)	-
8	Simanindo	1. Mian Turnip (53) 2. Laspear Turnip (53) 3. Jo Simarmata (39) 4. Jonri Sidauruk (52)	1. Titer Nainggolan (54) 2. Jonder Sitio (43)
9	Siteio	-	-

Beside that fact, there isn't any growth in the numbers of musicians of gondang sabangunan in this Samosir District. Several factors that make the growth of the numbers of musicians of gondang sabangunan [*parsarune* and *partaganing*] are very little in quantity among others are due to these socio-musical things below :

- (a) There has become fewer artists / pargonsi who have knowledge of the tradition of gondang sabangunan and a few indeed who have succeeded in passing it down their future generation.
- (b) There has been no maximum effort either by the community or the government in overcoming the problem lacking of experts

who master the philosophical meaning of the tradition of gongang, tortor and traditional ceremony in the Toba Batak society in Samosir.

- (c) Many age-old musicians die without passing down their knowledge to the younger generation.
- (d) Revitalization has only been done so far in the context of developing the art galleries financed by Local Government (District).
 1. Revitalization has not touched on how the tradition of gongang sabangunan can be passed down to the young generation both as institutional and as non-formal
 2. Local knowledge about the tradition of gongang sabangunan, tortor and traditional ceremony (*ulaon adata*) is disappearing along with the death of the artists / *pargonsi* because of their old age and not passing down their knowledge to the young people.
 3. Moreover, many young people are not trying to learn about how to play the gongang sabangunan, they even learn more about how to play keyboard instead.

The phenomenon of this socio-cultural of gongang sabangunan brought opinions from some of the *pargonsi* that the existence of keyboard music in the traditional ceremony in the society of Toba Batak has been considered as an element that “shut off” the tradition of gongang sabangunan. In this situation, strong friction occurs between the gongang sabangunan and the keyboard.

There is an opinion saying that many *pargonsi* actually switch to keyboard music due to three main factors, namely: (i) economy (greater honorarium); (ii) more offers (demand) received to perform, and (iii) indeed the wishes of community members. Thus, the direction of the existence of gongang sabangunan in the tradition of Batak Toba should inevitably deal with the existing social phenomenon. The financial factor (wage for the music players / *pargonsi*) and the incompatibility of ancestral traditions with religious ethics adopted by most members of the Toba Batak community in Samosir District [including artists of gongang sabangunan] is another reason that makes people prefer keyboard music rather than the original gongang sabangunan. This is the main reason besides the supply and demand factors.

For some people, the essence of the tradition of gongang / tortor / *ulaon* is not as equally same as in pre-Christian time era because the existing one has

undergone a change, as a consequence of the change of mindset of the society. This is closely related to the invasion of advances in technology, information, economics, education and socio-cultural society in the society worldwide. The effect of this progress has not only entered into the social life of people in the city and in the remote areas, but also into the order of their spiritual life. As a result, matters relating to the implementation of rituals / customs and religions must receive / undergo various changes through various existing agents of change, such as mass media, schools / education and various subjects of other agents of change.

The tradition of gongang sabangunan (in practice not in its instrumentation) has also experienced many changes, especially related to the mindset of its user community, and especially the people doing the tradition. Many things, including the process and rules related to the presentation of the tradition of gongang sabangunan tailored to the needs and social conditions that exist. This effort is made to gain legitimacy from religious institutions as well as conformity with the religious teachings of each individual (user) community of users of that tradition.

There are also members of the community who want different music instruments; some instruments of the gongang sabangunan built and used with other instruments like keyboard, trumpet, trombone, guitar, sulim, hasapi, tamtam. In addition there are also musicians of gongang sabangunan who switch from the gongang sabangunan ensemble to a different kind of ensemble that use instruments from the gongang sabangunan

Although the tradition of gongang sabangunan still exist but its presence in the community is threatened with the occurrence of the ensemble of music gongang / keyboard that has been used often as a replacement of the original gongang sabangunan in the traditional ceremony. This condition (the use of keyboard music) may be caused by several issues: economic / financial in terms of usage charges; customs and tradition which is complicated if involving *pargonsi*; the tradition that is inconsistent with one's beliefs / community; the tradition that still adheres to *pargonism*; the prohibition by religious institutions and the difficulty of finding *Pargonsi*.

It has also been a fact that there has been different perception/concept in how to behave (how one should have a certain attitude towards the tradition of gongang sabangunan and on how it is presented in a traditional ceremony/ *ulaon adat*, especially among other different denominates believers [among Protestants, Catholics and Pentecostal].

Overall, the whole community of Toba Batak, either the *pargonsi* (gondang sabangunan and gondang hasapi), *parmusik* (keyboard), brass band players, and etc, should understand the importance of continuity in the gondang sabangunan that is loaded with many values and identity of Toba Batak. For that reason, culturally and socially, there are hope and opportunity widely open for gondang sabangunan.

3.2 Hope

The hope for the existence and development of the tradition of gondang sabangunan and ulaon adat is very widely open if the people are aware of the importance of cultural values rooted in the tradition inherited from the ancestors of the Toba Batak community. The tradition of gondang sabangunan is a heritage inherited by the ancestors of Toba Batak people/sijolo-jolo tube (people who were born prior). The concept of local elders, especially the gondang musicians (*pargonsi*) about the tradition of gondang sabangunan is that the instruments used in the ceremony, the rules on presenting, for some of it, still considered the same with the tradition of gondang sabangunan during the pre-Christian era : that the conducts expressed during the ceremony of gondang sabangunan is mainly worship.

In other words, the essence of the tradition of gondang and traditional ceremony also contains a belief that is loaded with the spiritual values, togetherness, cooperation, kinship and sustainability of the genealogy and kinship system itself.

In the practice of the tradition of gondang sabangunan and the traditional ceremony (*ulaon adat*) inherited to the members of Toba Batak community in Samosir, there is also contained social science or social education. *Ulaon adat* (traditional ceremonies) is performed as the basis of laying the lineage or kinship. People coming to traditional ceremonies are not limited to eating and drinking only, but further to maintain the stability of brotherly relationships among fellow descendants of a clan. Kinship must be nurtured (constructed) so that it will last. Loss of kinship (lack of understanding of family position in the genealogy) results in the loss of one's status.

What is done in a traditional ceremony (*ulaon adat*) is to maintain the continuity of kinship, receiving and giving their obligations traditionally to their fellow relatives.

The reason why gondang sabangunan has always been present in a traditional ceremony (*ulaon adat*) is due to the conducts expressed through music and tortor in it is believed to be the way that the prayers and requests of people can be forwarded to The

Almighty. The tradition of gondang sabangunan (in this case the players, especially *partaganing* (taganing player) and the *panarune* (the sarune players) are the ones who are perceived as spiritually capable individuals to reach God Almighty (*Mulajadi Na Bolon*).

In addition, there are rules that must be appreciated and followed in every traditional ceremony of gondang sabangunan. The rules vary greatly; depending on the user, the educational background, religion /belief, economy, and others.

In the perspective of the cultural artists and musicians of Toba Batak, when asked if the traditional ceremony (*ulaon adat*) could be held without the gondang sabangunan and their answer was yes, it could, depending on the rules and what tradition one takes as their beliefs, but usually people would use the gondang sabangunan. Thus, the hope that gondang sabangunan would remain in its existence still be maintained according to their perception of this.

Other expectations are also revealed when asked whether the tortors should be presented only if they are performed along with the gondang sabangunan, and their answer was yes. Gondang sabangunan is only in accordance with the tortor dance. There are no other body movements, except the so-called tortors that are suitable to be presented with the gondang sabangunan. In addition there is a rule in *manortor* (doing the tortor dance) the context of traditional ceremony (*ulaon adat*), because every movement in the tortor dance has a philosophical meaning. Through the tortor dance on the presentation of gondang sabangunan the performers express their desire or feelings toward what/who they worship.

The tradition of gondang sabangunan and the traditional ceremony are heritage of the ancestors, of which the usage in the social life (traditional party/rituals) would generate many beneficial things including the more socialization of the importance education, as a medium of preservation of social norms (*partuturon*), as one of the tools to enhance tolerance and respects to each other (*marhula-hula, marboru* (in the aspect of *dalih annatolu*) and in terms of increasing the recognition in the values of the batakese practice, including language, tortor dance, *umpasa/umpama*, also the local culinary that still exist and have a central role and considered important in a traditional ceremony (*paradaton*). This knowledge was stressed by *pargonsi* (gondang sabangunan musicians) and local *adat* expert during field research conducted in different villages in Samosir.

3.3 Opportunity

The existence of traditional ceremony (ulaon adat) (especially ulaon saur matua and mangongkal holi) is a routine activity in the community that gives access to the tradition of gondang sabangunan to survive in society, although in certain conditions many community members who want keyboard music combined with some instruments from the tradition gondang sabangunan and by using popular songs that have nothing to do with the melodies of the tradition of gondang music.

Another opportunity to continue to exist and maintaining the development of gondang sabangunan and traditional ceremony (ulaon adat) is that there is a striking difference between a traditional ceremony (ulaon adat) that is accompanied by gondang sabangunan and by keyboard music. In a ceremony that accompanied by the keyboard music, it is always not clear anymore about the rules in the manortor as well as in the maminta gondang's manner. Similarly, the partuturon (kinship relationship) that occurs often does not indicate the "harmony" of the performers, because many things happen that have ignored the proper relationships-that is, according to customary norms. This [kinship and aesthetic values according to customary norms] is what is missing if a ceremonial / ulaon adat is accompanied by a keyboard music.

4 CONCLUSIONS

From the above discussion it can be concluded that things related to challenges, hopes and opportunities have a close relationship with each other. The challenge on the sustainability of the tradition of gondang sabangunan, tortor and traditional ceremony illustrates the level of need of the community for the tradition of gondang sabangunan, tortor and traditional ceremony in the social life of Toba Batak community in Samosir District.

Similarly, expectations and opportunities are also a projection of the need and availability of such practices in society. The lesser need of the practice of the tradition, the smaller opportunity there would be for the continuity of the tradition itself. This situation indeed affects the continuity of cultural values (wisdom) that is contained in it.

The change in the concept of the traditional meaning of the tradition itself is a cognitive area that can be replaced at any time depending on the educational background and the background of the belief or religion of the performers of the tradition.

The existence of different religious believers in society is also the substance that determines the fundamental understanding of the tradition of gondang sabangunan, tortor and traditional ceremony.

The diversity that exists in relation to the meaning or essence of the tradition of gondang sabangunan, tortor and traditional ceremonies is a inevitability. The situation must be received by the Toba Batak community with different religion/beliefs in Samosir District as a cultural richness and not vice versa.

Furthermore, observing the condition of traditional gondang sabangunan, tortor and traditional ceremony that took place in Toba Batak society in Samosir district today, it is necessary to have a planned and measurable revitalization activities and also to involve cooperation in society including government, private parties, artists and the community itself as the actual user and actors.

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