

# THE MEANING OF TOR-TOR SOMBAH SYMBOL IN THE DEATH CEREMONY OF SAUR MATUA ETHNIC BATAK

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**Abstract:** The research entitled “The Symbolic Meaning of Tor-Tor Sombah in the Saur Matua Death Ceremony of the Simalungun Batak Ethnic” discusses dance art related to the implementation of the Saur Matua traditional death ceremony. This research aims to explore the symbolic meaning contained in the Tor-Tor Sombah dance and analyze its relationship with the traditional ritual process of the Simalungun Batak community. In addition, this research also seeks to describe the performance form of Tor-Tor Sombah in the series of traditional ceremonies. One of the focuses of this research is to preserve the cultural heritage of the ancestors so that it is maintained and not forgotten, so that the next generation, especially children and grandchildren, can understand and respect the values and messages contained in the Batak Simalungun tradition. The method used in this research is a qualitative approach with phenomenology. The results revealed that Tor-Tor Sombah has a very significant role in the Saur Matua death ceremony for the Simalungun Batak community.

**Keywords:** Tor-tor, Saur Matua, Batak Tribe

## **Introduction**

Culture is everything related to the human way of life. In this case, culture teaches humans to understand how to think, feel, believe, and try to take actions that are in accordance with the values that apply in their society. Some examples of cultural elements include language in interaction, eating habits, ways of communicating, and social activities (Ammaria, 2017) . Without culture, people will have difficulty determining how they should act and behave in life. Therefore, every individual has a different culture as part of their identity, which makes culture very important for the survival of living things in this world. Thus, culture can be interpreted as a system of values and ways of life that are passed on between generations through the educational process with the aim of forming a pattern of life that best suits the circumstances of the environment in which they live.

Tradition has an important role in human life because it is closely related to habits or customs that are passed down from one generation to another. Traditions are maintained and applied by the community to ensure the sustainability of cultural values. As an essential part of life, traditions help maintain social balance while strengthening a sense of group identity. In addition, traditions also provide practical benefits in everyday life, such as in the celebration of cultural diversity. Therefore, tradition can be defined as a form of cultural heritage consisting of beliefs, values, norms, and rituals, which play a role in shaping the identity of a community (Saputra et al., 2024)

Traditions and cultures in each tribe in Indonesia have different cultures, including customs, music and language. For example, belief in the culture of the Batak tribe. The hobo tribe has different cultural habits in terms of differences in this hobo culture cannot be far away from the arts, starting from celebratory music, and the most famous dances in the hobo community are tor-tor dances which are often juxtaposed with traditional ceremonies, Tor-tor can be performed from various kinds of ritual activities then religious ceremonies and can also be shown performances in the context of customs. Every movement in the hobo tor-tor dance that expresses expression is called urdot, meaning moving the body and limbs expressively (Saragih, 2022) .

Tor-tor dance has a very important role for the Batak people because it serves as a means to convey prayers, hopes, and ask for protection to God Almighty (Nainggolan,

2017) . One of the known forms of tor-tor dance is tor-tor sombah, which is usually combined with various traditional ceremonies. For example, in the traditional saur matua death ceremony held by the Simalungun Batak community, tor-tor sombah dance becomes an integral part of the series of events. The presence of this dance is closely related to the beliefs of the Simalungun Batak community, which serves to honor the spirits of deceased parents and deliver them to eternal life.

Tor-tor Sombah is part of the traditional art of the Simalungun Batak tribe which has a significant role in every saur matua death ceremony, and has always been a ritual element performed (Akbar, 2022) . This dance has a special meaning, with hand movements that are divided into three main forms, namely sombah, rejecting bala, and prayer requests. Sombah itself means to honor or worship someone who has a higher position in the custom at the ceremony. Sombah movements between men and women have differences. In addition, the number of dancers in this dance must be odd, which is a minimum of three people and a maximum of eleven people, adjusted to the number of pangayapi which must also match the number of dancers. The prayer request movement is done with the position of the hands clenched into fists.

The position of the hands like this has a meaning to keep from entering the disturbance of black magic that people do to the bride and groom. The appearance of tor-tor both in traditional events and in the form of performing arts is not solely based on aesthetic taste alone, but must follow the rules that have been outlined in the rules of angkola worship.

In the culture of the Simalungun Batak community, the death ceremony known as saur matua is performed as a form of respect for the belief in the existence of life after death. The ceremony is usually accompanied by traditional gonrang bolon music, which is played both inside and outside the house, but still keeps a distance from the location of the body. This tradition has a very important value for the Simalungun Batak community because it serves as a way to honor deceased parents and provides an opportunity for families left behind, such as children, grandchildren and relatives to show their respect.

The Saur Matua traditional death ceremony can be understood as a symbol because the message conveyed through andung is closely related to the life journey

of the deceased. This ceremony is held when the family loses parents who have completed their earthly duties, especially in raising and educating children. The death of saur matua in Batak society has a deep meaning and is expected to continue to be carried out as part of the cultural and artistic identity of the Batak people. Thus, it can be concluded that the Saur Matua ceremony is a form of respect for death which is considered the second level after Mauli Bulung. This death is intended for elderly individuals, both men and women who have married off all their children and have offspring (Akbar, 2022) .

This tradition is carried out with the aim that children still appreciate the struggle of their parents in raising them, and always maintain the manners and manners that have been taught by parents. These values are expected to be passed on to the next generation as a legacy that cannot be replaced by anything. The Saur Matua traditional ceremony is held as a form of gratitude and happiness for the departure of parents who have passed away, because they have left offspring, both children and grandchildren, who will continue the family lineage (Situmorang et al., 2024) .

This tradition is carried out with the aim that children still appreciate the struggle of parents in raising them, and always maintain the manners and manners that have been taught by parents (Hasugian, 2017) . This tradition is carried out with the aim that children still appreciate the struggle of parents in raising them, and always maintain good manners and manners that have been taught by parents.

Based on observations made by researchers in the field, it is explained that there are Simalungun Batak communities who still apply this saur matua death tradition, but many have not applied this tradition or the method is different from time to time. The focus of this research is on one of the Simalungun people who live in Sunggal District, Medan City who have carried out the Saur matua death ritual tradition. The reason why the researcher chose Sunggal Sub-district, Medan City as the research area is because so that cultural heritage does not become extinct and is not forgotten and must be preserved even though it is at the level of children and grandchildren. And so that the younger generation understands the meaning and value contained in the Batak tradition of the Simalungun community.

## **Research Methods**

This research uses a qualitative method is a research approach that aims to understand social phenomena or human behavior in depth and holistically, by exploring the meaning, perceptions, experiences, and interactions behind an event or situation. Qualitative research focuses more on understanding the context, reasons, and processes rather than simply measuring or generalizing quantitative results.

This research uses a phenomenological approach in its approach. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that focuses on understanding and in-depth explanation of individual experiences and how they give meaning to these experiences. The main purpose of phenomenological research is to examine and describe the life experiences experienced by a person, including interactions with other individuals and the surrounding environment. In the context of qualitative research, phenomena are seen as something that appears in the researcher's consciousness, then explained and analyzed using certain approaches so that the process can be understood clearly and deeply. Phenomenological research prioritizes searching, understanding, and conveying the meaning of phenomena or events that occur, as well as how these phenomena relate to individuals in the context of certain situations. This research is classified as pure qualitative research, because it aims to understand and describe the characteristics of the phenomena experienced by individuals (Nasir et al., 2023) .

Data analysis techniques in qualitative research are the methods used by researchers to process, organize, and interpret descriptive and narrative data, in order to draw in-depth conclusions about the phenomenon under study. In contrast to quantitative research that focuses on measuring numbers and statistics, qualitative data analysis focuses more on patterns, themes, and meanings that emerge from the data. This research is based on interviews, documentation and observations consisting of fifteen informants consisting of key informants, expert informants and supporting informants.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Saur Matua death ceremony**

Saur matua, according to experts, is a concept in the death ceremony in Batak society which is carried out for parents who have married off all their children and have grandchildren. This type of death is considered an ideal death, because the person no longer has dependent children, so it is considered a perfect death and is highly valued by the Batak community. The term “saur matua” itself means complete or perfect. In this case, the perfection refers to a life that has been lived perfectly, especially in terms of offspring. The saur matua death is seen as the pinnacle in the classification of death ceremonies, because at the time of the person’s death, all of his children had families, which signaled success or success in living life.

The procession of the saur matua death ceremony is justified based on excerpts from interviews conducted by researchers at the stall of Mr. Jhon Sipayung along with his colleagues who participated as informants in conducting interviews with researchers, namely myself, which was held at 11:35 in the village of Sei mencirim, suka maju. The following is evidence of the interview excerpt.

“... The saur matua death ceremony is indeed still held in this village which is the highest level of death in the Batak community which has its own meaning which means ...”

The following interview evidence below is also supported by documentation in the form of photos during interviews with informants consisting of 3 informants, namely Mr. John Sipayung, Mr. Andi Sipayung and Mr. Danu Purba.

From the interview picture above, the three informants who have been mentioned and explained their names above are Saur Matua death ceremony is a traditional Batak ritual performed to honor someone who died in an ideal state according to Batak culture. In the Batak traditional concept, Saur Matua refers to a person who has reached an advanced age and has seen all his children get married and have offspring. Such a person is considered to have completed his life’s work well (died with no more children).

This ceremony is not only to honor the deceased, but also an important moment for the extended family to gather, strengthen relationships, and preserve Batak cultural customs. The meaning of Saur Matua means Saur means “complete” or “perfect,” while Matua means “old” or “aged.” “A person who dies with Saur Matua status is considered to have reached the perfection of life because . All his children are married (married).

The Saur Matua death ceremony in Batak culture is part of a very important tradition in Batak society, especially for the Batak tribe. Saur Matua itself is a funeral ritual that involves a series of ceremonies that are full of religious, social and cultural values. In Sei Mencirim Village, the Batak community carries out the death ceremony as a tradition passed down from generation to generation, which aims as a final tribute to the deceased family, especially those who have reached the saur matua stage. The saur matua ceremony consists of two main parts, namely the jabu ceremony (inside the house) and the maralaman ceremony (in the yard). At the jabu ceremony, the body is placed in the jabu buna (living room) and covered with ulos saput, signifying that the deceased has reached the perfect death or saur matua.

The saur matua ceremony is one of the important traditional customs for the Batak people in North Sumatra, Indonesia. This tradition is carried out to honor the ancestors and ask for blessings for a good harvest. The event is usually held in July or August, coinciding with the beginning of the planting season. During this ceremony, the Batak community gathers to cook traditional food, perform traditional songs and dances, and hold a feast together. These activities aim to strengthen social ties between community members and strengthen bonds with their ancestors.

The saur matua death ceremony receives higher honors depending on the particular circumstances of the deceased, which are divided into the following categories: 1) First, those who died after marriage, but have no children, which in Batak language is called “mate di paralang-alangan” or “mate punu”. 2) Second, those who die after marriage and leave behind young children, which in Batak language is called “mate mangkar”. 3) Third, those who died after having adult children, some of whom were even married, but did not yet have

grandchildren, known as “mate hatungganeon” in Batak language. 4) Fourth, those who died after having grandchildren, but there are still children who are not married, which is called the term “mate sari matua”. 5) Finally, those who die after having grandchildren and no longer bear their children because all their children are married, which in Batak language is called “mate saur matua”.

Saur matua is considered the highest level in the series of death ceremonies, as this death occurs when all the children of the deceased are married. Although there is a higher level of death, namely mate saur matua bulung (death that occurs after all the children are married and have grandchildren, even great-grandchildren from both sons and daughters), both levels are still seen as the ideal concept of death, namely death without any more children.

The value contained in the saur matua ceremony. In Batak custom, a person's life is considered successful if he or she has fulfilled social and family responsibilities. The Saur Matua ceremony also reflects the principle of Dalihan Na Tolu (harmonious relationship between hula-hula, dongan tubu, and boru). This ceremony is not only to honor the deceased, but also an important moment for the extended family to gather, strengthen relationships, and preserve Batak cultural customs.

### **Conditions for the Saur Matua Ceremony**

The most important thing that the Batak community in Sei Mencirim village does is the same as in any village where the Simalungun Batak community is telling their families to hold deliberations in advance about when the date of the Saur matua death ceremony will be held so that the ceremony runs smoothly, then after the deliberation, the saur matua ceremony is held at the specified time.

Before departure. The body will be taken from the funeral home to the cemetery accompanied by family and relatives. During the departure, there are various prayers and songs led by a religious leader or traditional elder. Before the funeral ceremony is held, the bereaved family must prepare various equipment such as traditional clothing, food, and other materials needed for



the ceremony. In addition, the family must also inform extended family and close relatives about the death and when the ceremony will be held.

The traditional saur matua death ceremony involves several stages, one of which is the covering of the corpse with a piece of ulos, a specially woven traditional Batak cloth, before the body is buried. In the case of mate poso-posito and mate dakdanak deaths, the ulos cloth used to cover the corpse is given by tulang, the brother of the deceased's mother. In contrast, in the case of mate bulung and mate dakdanak deaths, the ulos cloth is provided by the parents of the deceased.

In the saur matua death ceremony, there are equipment that must be prepared and considered mandatory. The equipment is known by the term in the Batak language as "marsanggul marata (sijagaron)", which is arranged in an ampang (basket). Some of the equipment that must be present include: 1) Boni sitamba tua, which symbolizes the number of offspring; 2) Miak-miak, a candlenut, which represents the spirit of the ancestors; 3) Gantang, which indicates that the deceased already has great-grandchildren; 4) Baringin, which symbolizes the presence of daughters and grandchildren; 5) Pira ni manuk, which is a chicken egg, which symbolizes a good life; 6) Sanggar, which illustrates that all the livelihood of the deceased was obtained in a good way; and 7) Ampang, which indicates that the deceased has reached saur matua status, which is placed near the head of the deceased.

In Batak culture, the term "Suhut" refers to a grieving family paying their customary respects to the pargonsi in the form of a traditional meal. The dish consists of a tandok (chopstick container) containing three candlenuts, an egg, a complete betel nut and an even amount of money. This honor is received by the parsarune (sarune blower), who acts as the leader of the group. The Saur Matua traditional ceremony consists of three main stages, namely: 1) The ceremony inside the house (jabu), 2) Ceremony outside the house (in the yard), and 3) The ceremony after the funeral.

### Stages in the Saur Matua Death Ceremony

Figure 1.2



The first procession of the saur matua death ceremony is the ritual of putting the corpse into the chest along with the ulos given to the body of the corpse.

Figure 1.3



The explanation of the picture above is the opening or remarks from the family and priest that the ceremony will begin.

Figure 1.4



Figure 1.5



Figure 1.6



The picture above explains. Traditional elders give ulos to the immediate family of the deceased. The explanation of the meaning of the ulos given is conveyed with prayers and traditional words. The family receiving the ulos reciprocates with thanks and respect. Ulos symbolize warmth and spiritual protection for the family left behind. This process also signifies that the family has completed their responsibilities towards the deceased according to Batak custom.

Figure 1.7



From the picture above, it is explained that this is a traditional discussion led by customary elders or customary kings to determine the procedure and arrangement of ritual events. This stage is important to ensure that all processes are in accordance with Batak customary rules. The elders gather in the traditional hall or a special place in the traditional house. The strains of gondang (traditional Batak music) are played to create a sacred atmosphere. Discussions involve the division of tasks, the order of rituals, and the giving of blessings to the family. Decisions made are announced to the extended family and guests. Meaning This stage ensures harmony in the execution of the ritual Provides respect to Batak customs and ensures the deceased is given the highest respect.

Figure 1.8



This ritual is the giving of traditional food to the bereaved family as a form of spiritual strengthening and a symbol of energy restoration. The process of preparing a traditional meal Traditional foods, such as chicken, fish, rice and tuak (a traditional drink), are served on a special tray. Traditional elders or extended family bless the food with traditional prayers and words of encouragement. The meal is given to the immediate family, especially the children of the deceased, while offering prayers and wishes for strength. Symbolism: Each type of food has symbolic meanings, such as strength, prosperity and gratitude. Mangupah-upah is an expression of care for the bereaved family to keep them strong.

This stage is the core of the tribute to the deceased, where the family performs a tortor (traditional Batak dance) accompanied by gondang music. The nuclear family wears traditional clothes complete with ulos, ready to dance the tortor The gondang music is played by traditional musicians, following the rhythm determined by the elders then the dance is performed by the family, starting from the children, sons-in-law, to the grandchildren of the deceased, as a symbol of respect and gratitude. Every movement of the tortor has a meaning, such as a prayer for the happiness of the deceased in the afterlife.

After the tortor is over, the traditional leader says a final prayer for the deceased and the family. The tortor portrays respect and love for the deceased. The gondang and tortor also symbolize communication with the spirit of the deceased, providing comfort and farewell.

This stage is the final procession where the body is taken to its final resting place with the accompaniment of prayers, traditional music, and traditional honors. The process of giving the Last Prayer: Traditional elders lead the final prayer in front of the body, accompanied by the solemn strains of the gondang. The body is placed on a stretcher decorated with ulos and lifted by the closest male relatives.

Then the procession is carried to the tomb, accompanied by gondang music, tortor, and tears of farewell from the family. After arriving at the tomb, the burial procession was carried out with traditional prayers. After the burial is complete, the family of the deceased expresses their gratitude to the guests and those who helped. The departure of the body symbolizes the final physical

farewell, but with the belief that the spirit of the deceased is welcome in the afterlife. The procession also marks the ultimate tribute to the parents who have witnessed all their children marry. With this stage, the Saur Matua ceremony is complete. The final stage of the ceremony is the expression of gratitude and the completion of the ritual performed together by the entire family and relatives present.

### **Closing Ceremony**

After the funeral procession is complete, the family and relatives gather for a prayer as an expression of gratitude for the completion of the ceremony and as a wish that the family left behind be given fortitude and strength.

The family thanks the guests for helping and participating in this event. Some traditional food is served as a token of gratitude to the guests and relatives present. Closing Ceremony Welcoming the spiritual recovery and acceptance of the deceased's farewell by the family Strengthening the relationship and unity of the extended family in facing difficult times Ensuring that the traditional procession goes well as a form of cultural respect for ancestors and Batak customs.

Overall, Saur Matua is a very sacred ceremony in Simalungun Batak culture. Apart from being a way to honor the deceased, this ceremony also serves to strengthen social relations between families and relatives and maintain traditional traditions. So it can be concluded by the researcher from the informant's explanation above Overall, Saur Matua is a very sacred ceremony in Batak culture. Apart from being a way to honor the deceased, this ceremony also serves to strengthen social relations between families and relatives and maintain traditional traditions.

### **Meaning of Tor-tor Sombah in Saur Matua Ceremony**

The traditional Sayur Matua death ceremony aims to reflect a sense of joy at the death of parents who are considered to have achieved success or success in life, especially because they have offspring who will continue their name and lineage. In Simalungun Batak society, children are seen as the most valuable asset. For example, in the Batak language there is an expression, "Anakkhonki

do hamuraondi ahu,” which indicates that parents view children as priceless treasures. This view emphasizes the importance of children in the implementation of the Sayur Matua traditional death ceremony among the Simalungun Batak community. Death that occurs in old age is considered a desirable death, especially if the deceased parents have managed to marry off all their children and have grandchildren.

The explanation above is justified based on the interview excerpt conducted on the terrace of Mrs. Sukari Br Purba’s house at noon at 13.45 in the village of sei mencirim kom johar 1, Now the following is evidence of the interview excerpt

“... The saur matua death ceremony in the Batak community has its own meaning because this ceremony is the highest throne in Batak culture as the most respected death in Batak society because the person who died saur matua has completed his task well, juxtaposed also with the tor-tor sombah dance which means honoring people who have mate saur matua ...”

The evidence from the quotation above is supported by photo documentation with Mrs. Sukari Purba as an informant as follows:

Based on the results of interviews conducted by researchers with Mrs. Sukari Purba, explained in detail about the meaning of tor-tor sombah contained in this Saur Matua ceremony.

The traditional Sayur Matua death ritual is carried out by performing the Somba Jangkung dance as a form of respect for deceased parents, grieving families, God Almighty, and ancestors. The Jangkung Somba dance is an inseparable part of the artistic tradition of the Simalungun Batak community and is always performed in every traditional ceremony, especially in the Sayur Matua death ceremony. Aside from being a cultural element of the Batak community, Tor-tor Sombah also has an important role in maintaining and preserving their social system. Although it appears as a dance, every movement in Tor-tor Sombah contains a deeper meaning.

Tor-tor Sombah dance is used by the Batak community as a medium to convey prayers, hopes, and other goals. Each movement performed by the

dancer has a deep meaning. For example, maneanea movement means asking for blessings, mamasu-masu symbolizes giving blessings, and manomba shows respect in Tor-tor dance (Purba & Utara, 2023) . Tor-tor dance is accompanied by energetic music. Although physically this dance consists of a series of body movements, the meaning contained in it makes Tor-tor a form of communication. The movements create interaction between the participants of the ceremony. Therefore, the Tor-tor dance in this ceremony is not just an aesthetic movement, but also has a meaning and purpose to be conveyed.

Various elements in Tor-Tor Sombah dance play an important role in describing its meaning and symbolism. These elements include musical accompaniment, clothing, makeup, props, spoken umpasa, and rituals performed at the stages before, during and after the performance. The Simalungun Batak community continues to strive to preserve this tradition by maintaining all these elements. In addition, the Tor-Tor Sombah dance has hand movements that are full of meaning. There are four types of hand movements used in this dance, namely Sombah, Dihar, Mangalo-alo, Mamasu-masu, and Huda-huda or Toping-toping. These movements not only illustrate symbolism, but also function as a means of communication, where interaction between ceremony participants takes place through these movements.

Every ceremonial participant in the Tor-tor dance is required to wear Ulos, which is an important element in Batak culture. Different types of Batak Ulos are used according to the type of traditional event being organized. The same applies to the music and songs accompanying the Tor-tor Sombah dance, where there are differences between music used in traditional ceremonies and music for entertainment. The choice of traditional music is strongly influenced by the theme of the ceremony as well as the role of the traditional leader who leads the event.

Based on the explanation of Mrs. Sukari Purba, researchers concluded that the meaning of Tor-tor Sombah dance in the Sayur Matua death ceremony is a form of respect for ancestors or God, as well as a symbol of prayer for the spirits. Although Tor-tor dance physically looks like a movement accompanied by gondang music, this dance contains a deeper meaning. Every movement in

this dance is not just a beautiful demonstration, but also has a certain purpose and intention that wants to be conveyed to the ceremony participants.

The saur matua ceremony in Simalungun Batak custom is a ceremony that is very rich with symbolism and spiritual meaning. Each stage aims to ensure that the spirit of the deceased can travel to the afterlife safely and peacefully, and to maintain a harmonious relationship between the family left behind and their ancestors. All parties involved in the ceremony have an important role to play in preserving the traditions and customs that have been passed down.

As previously described regarding the symbolic meaning of tor-tor dance associated with the saur matua ceremony, the theory used is Herbert Mead's theory which views symbols as dynamic and diverse. This symbol can change along with the development and interests of individuals, which are influenced by the context of space and time. Thus, the Tor-tor Sombah dance in the Saur Matua death ceremony can be understood as a symbol of expression of happiness and respect, expressed through dance movements performed in the event.

This research on Tor-Tor Somba in the Saur Matua death ceremony of the Toba Batak community is based on an article entitled "Tor-Tor Somba Symbol in the Saur Matua Death Ritual of the Simalungun Batak Community" written by Febriana. The main difference lies in the focus of the research, where this research focuses on the ritual of death in the Toba Batak community while the previous research did not cover the ritual.

## **Conclusion**

The saur matua ceremony in Simalungun Batak custom is a ceremony that is very rich with symbolism and spiritual meaning. Each stage aims to ensure that the spirit of the deceased can travel to the afterlife safely and peacefully, and to maintain a harmonious relationship between the family left behind and their ancestors. All parties involved in the ceremony have an important role to play in preserving the traditions and customs that have been passed down.



### The Meaning Of Tor-Tor Sombah Symbol in the Death ... (*Dinda, Yummy*)

Tor-Tor Sombah in the Saur Matua death ceremony of the Simalungun Batak ethnic group has a deep meaning as a symbol of respect and a statement of loss for the deceased. This dance movement reflects the relationship between the human world and the spirit world, expressing grief while celebrating the life of the deceased. In addition, tor-tor also serves as a medium for spiritual communication, strengthening social ties between community members, and preserving rich cultural traditions. Thus, tor-tor sombah becomes an integral part of the grieving process and a reminder of the values of life in Simalungun Batak society.

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