

Merging with the Universe: The Batak Ritual in the 'Martutu Aek' Ceremony

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menggali hubungan antara manusia dan alam dalam konteks kepercayaan dan ritual masyarakat Batak. Melalui analisis dokumen dan wawancara, penelitian mengkaji ritual "Martutu Aek" dan kepercayaan tradisional terhadap kesadaran ekologis dan spiritual. Integrasi nilai kearifan lokal dan ajaran Kristen menegaskan pentingnya menjaga alam sebagai bagian dari identitas dan tanggung jawab spiritual. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan baru dalam memahami praktik dan pandangan masyarakat Batak terhadap alam. Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini memperkuat kesadaran ekologis dan spiritual serta pelestarian alam di kalangan masyarakat Batak, sementara juga memberikan landasan yang kuat bagi pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif tentang hubungan manusia dengan alam.

Kata kunci: Batak, Budaya, Kosmos, Martutu Aek, Teologi

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between humans and nature within the context of beliefs and rituals of the Batak community. Through documentary analysis and interviews, the research highlights the impact of the Martutu Aek ritual and traditional beliefs on ecological and spiritual awareness. The integration of local wisdom and Christian teachings emphasizes the importance of preserving nature as part of spiritual identity and responsibility. These findings offer new insights into the practices and views of the Batak community regarding nature. In conclusion, the research enhances ecological and spiritual awareness and the conservation of nature among the Batak community, while also providing a strong foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between humans and nature.

Keywords: Batak, Culture, Cosmos, Martutu Aek, Theology

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with extraordinary cultural diversity. This nation is blessed with abundant natural wealth, with enchanting panoramas such as beautiful seas, forests and lakes, as well as fertile land and abundant water, which support people's lives. Indonesia has various cultural activities that are closely related to nature, especially the element of water. Water, as a part of nature, plays an important role in human life. For the Batak people in North Sumatra, water has a deep meaning in their cultural ritual life. Since ancient times, the Batak people have viewed natural elements such as water as the main support for life in every "huta" or village on their land ("Tano Batak"). Water is seen as something that must be protected and interpreted.

Water, in the life of the Batak people, is seen as an important means for survival and spirituality. Therefore, water is often used in Batak cultural rituals, one of which is "Martutu Aek," a ceremony welcoming the birth of a child (Gultom, 2010: xix). According to the Batak Dictionary, "Martutu Aek" means the traditional ritual event of bathing a newborn child in a spring ("mual na tio") or shower water. In the perspective of the Batak people, the universe is a home for learning about life. Natural elements such as water act as a 'preamble' or opening in life. The vast universe with its various components provides meaning for humans, making every human being aware of the greatness of God Almighty who created the universe and its contents. As intelligent creatures, humans can actually learn from the universe because the universe is also part of God's image.

Regional culture is culture that exists in a certain region or region. (Tantawi, 2019 :19). Likewise, the Batak people live by the natural elements that exist in their area, the element water. The Batak people's closeness to nature can be seen from the way they view and treat water as an

eye opener to life for newborn children. Water is used for ritual physical and spiritual cleansing. Water is an important means of bringing a baby into this world through the "Martutu Aek" ritual. In traditional Batak beliefs, water is seen as a natural element whose harmony must be maintained as an important part of human life. The "Martutu Aek" ritual is a form of integration of the Batak people with the universe through the use of water as an initiation of self-purification, building a sense of love for their customary land and "Tano Batak".

"Martutu Aek" is also known as "Tardidi" or water baptism in ancient Batak tradition. In this ritual, a newborn child is brought to a spring ("Mual or Homban"), which is a clear spring located in the villages or "huta" of Batak villages. Each Batak clan usually has "Parhombanan" or "Mual na Tio" as a legacy from their ancestors. These water sources are found in many Batak lands and have been guarded since their ancestors as a gift from Debata Mulajadi Nabolon (God Almighty). This water always flows throughout the seasons and never dries up, becoming a symbol of eternity and respect for the Creator.

This ritual is also a form of sacred respect for the Batak people to remember the greatness of the Creator. The Batak people, who are known as spiritual people (Sihombing, 2022:33), realizing this respect by protecting their Heritage Land as their 'Homeland'. This awareness needs to be maintained as a basis for ecological awareness united in the universe.

METHOD

This research uses a combination of Library Research and Qualitative Practicum methods to research Toba Batak culture, with a special focus on the "Martutu Aek" ritual. Library Research is the main method for collecting historical data. This research began with an exploration of relevant literature to gain an in-depth understanding of Toba Batak cultural traditions and practices. Data sources in this historical research include documents, namely books, articles, manuscripts and historical records that document Toba Batak cultural practices and rituals. Heritage objects, namely artifacts and historical remains related to Batak culture. Interviews with cultural experts, traditional elders and traditional practitioners who have in-depth knowledge of Batak history and cultural practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Martutu Aek: Batak Ritual Uniting with the Universe

For the Batak people, "Martutu Aek" is an important ritual and full of spiritual meaning. This ritual is a form of gratitude for the presence or birth of a child (Gultom, 2010:xix) in the community. The "Martutu Aek" ceremony is likened to an initiation ceremony, especially for the Toba Batak people who adhere to the Malim religion. This ceremony uses water as a symbol of purification and the introduction of a newborn child to the universe. The Batak people continue to study the universe and this is the basis for the cultural idea of merging and living with nature. Culture is a whole system of ideas, actions and results of human work in social life which are made into human property by learning. (Koentjaraningrat, 2009:144).

The "Martutu Aek" ceremony is not only preparation for children to live their lives in the future, but also a request for protection, blessing and safety from the Almighty God (Debata Mulajadi Nabolon). In creation, water acts as an element that gives life and builds awareness of the importance of maintaining balance with nature (Sitompul, 1991:7).

"Martutu Aek", is a local Batak religious tradition which is mandatory for the Malim people to carry out (Gultom, 2010:xix). This ritual also strengthens humans' relationship with nature, emphasizing that humans are an integral part of the universe. "Martutu Aek" teaches values - ecological and spiritual values that are often forgotten in the development of modern times and technology. These values are important to preserve as part of local wisdom which contains deep ecological messages. Even though access to culture from other civilizations is wide open, a nation must be able to develop and maintaining the culture that has been owned from the past (Agus Widjojo, 2021).

The Batak Tribe and Their Villages

The Batak tribe is the third largest ethnic group in Indonesia, consisting of several sub-ethnicities residing in North Sumatra. The name "Batak" originates from the word "Batahan," meaning 'support' or 'hope,' reflecting a deep connection with nature and their environment. Expressions like "Anakhonki do hamoraon di ahu" (children are my wealth) demonstrate that children are considered the foundation and hope for the future, emphasizing their importance in the social and spiritual structure of Batak society (Simanjuntak, 2010:30).

The term "Batak" is a collective theme used to identify several ethnic groups living on the West Coast and East Coast of North Sumatra. The main distribution areas of the Batak Toba include Samosir Regency, Toba Regency, Humbang Hasundutan Regency, North Tapanuli Regency, and Central Tapanuli Regency. Other distribution areas include Dairi Regency, Simalungun Regency, Pematangsiantar City, Sibolga City, Asahan Regency, and Medan City (Wikipedia).

A huta, or Batak village, must be maintained and cared for; the awareness of the huta as a place to unite with the cosmos is crucial. A huta, a Batak community settlement bound by kinship (Dalihan Natolu) within a certain territorial boundary, is not merely a limited residential area but also includes the surrounding areas such as fields, forests, valleys, and rivers, which are communal property. This concept fosters a culture of living harmoniously with nature. This practice is a human cultural creation, and culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and human works in society learned by humans (Koentjaraningrat, 2009:144).

The daily life of the Batak Toba community is closely related to nature, with a comprehensive mindset governed by customary laws. The management of land and water in a huta results from mutual agreements and decisions that always consider the impact on nature. The Batak people, as an agrarian community, view land not only as an economic resource but also as a family or clan identity.

Furthermore, huta and Bona Pasogit hold religious significance for the Batak people, who value nature and their ancestral land as a medium of life. Traditional spirituality, such as "Ugamo Malim" or Parmalim Religion, is an essential part of their lives, aiming to align human life with the cosmos. The principles taught, such as living in simplicity and harmony with the universe, are ancestral legacies that are being marginalized in the modern era. Therefore, it is essential to understand that the awareness of a harmonious relationship between humans, huta, and the cosmos is an integral part of the continuity of Batak society (Sandika, 2019:15).

The Term Batak and Its Relationship with the Universe

The term "Batak" can be used as a reference to reveal the relationship of the Batak people with the universe. The word "Batak" derives from "Batahan," which means 'support.' This understanding brings back the awareness of the meaning of the word "Batak" as support and hope, forming the basis for the Batak people to befriend, merge, and unite with their natural environment. In everyday language, the Batak people often use the word "Batahan" in various expressions showing the close relationship between humans and nature. For example, expressions like "Anakhonki do hamoraon di ahu" and "Anakhonki do batahanku," meaning that children are the support and strength for parents, reflect how children are seen as the source of hope and strength for the future.

Another expression, "BatahiM do tungkot dohot hagagoon di ahu," meaning "Your support is my staff and strength," shows that this strength and support come from Almighty God (Debata Mulajadi Nabolon). Thus, the Batak people view "Batahan" as belonging to God, which is the source of human strength. This reinforces that the foundation of life and strength in Batak culture is rooted in a deep spiritual relationship with nature and God. In this context, the word "Batahan" not only implies hope and support but also reflects the Batak people's life philosophy that is in harmony with nature. This relationship is manifested in various cultural practices and rituals, such as "Martutu Aek," which enhances ecological and spiritual awareness.

In the Batak people's view, the universe is not just a physical environment but also a spiritual home that must be preserved and respected. Traditional rituals like "Martutu Aek" emphasize the importance of water as an element of purification and a symbol of life, showing the profound appreciation of the Batak people for nature as part of God's creation that must be maintained. Thus, the term "Batak" and the concept of "Batahan" illustrate the inseparable and close relationship between humans, nature, and God in Batak culture. This awareness teaches the importance of maintaining balance with nature and respecting it as a source of strength and life. These values are vital to preserve in facing modern challenges and environmental changes to keep the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Batak people alive and relevant in the context of uniting with the universe.

The Etymology of "Batahi" and the Philosophy of Harmony with the Universe

To understand more deeply the Batak philosophy in the context of harmonizing with the universe, we need to trace the etymology of the word "Batahi." As previously mentioned, "Batahi" consists of two components: "ba" and "tahi." The word "ba" derives from "Iba," meaning "I" or "ego." This refers to the individual's personality complete with self-awareness. Meanwhile, "tahi" refers to ideas, principles, or beliefs agreed upon by several people to achieve specific goals. In this combination, "Iba-Tahi" or "Batahi" means the agreement between an individual's personality and their goals or aspirations. "Batahi" is the personification of someone channeling their agreement to achieve shared hopes or aspirations (Manalu, 2021: 68-85). This reflects the philosophy that each individual in Batak society has a role in achieving harmony with the universe, according to collective agreements and adopted principles.

"Batahi" is inseparable from the Batak people's views and spirituality. "Batahi Tuhan" is the personification of God, representing God's will as the source of truth and strength for the Batak Toba community. Almighty God, "Debata Mula Jadi Nabolon," is the source of all strength and truth. This divine truth and power form the basis of Batak spirituality, requiring humans to live righteously, honestly, and free from wrongdoing. The "Martutu Aek" ritual is a manifestation of these values. Water ("Aek") in this ritual symbolizes purity, clarity, and coolness. Through the "Martutu Aek" initiation, a child is introduced to the principles of a clean and pure life ("Malim").

This initiation teaches the importance of maintaining a clean life, reflecting the values of truth upheld by the Batak community.

Linked to the understanding of "Malim" and "Batahi" or "Batak," the Batak Toba community emphasizes truth as the foundation of their lives. This philosophy teaches that harmonization with the universe is not just an aspiration but a necessity realized through real actions and moral integrity. Therefore, the term "Batahi" describes the Batak people's worldview of unity with the universe, emphasizing the importance of togetherness, agreements, and awareness of truth inspired by Almighty God. "Batahi" teaches that to achieve harmony with the universe, each individual must live according to principles of truth, purity, and integrity that are part of the Batak cultural and spiritual heritage.

The Concept of Batahi, Living Clean and Pure in Unity with the Universe

The concept of "Batahi" within the Batak community is intertwined with their spiritual views. "Batahi Tuhan" is the personification of God Himself, representing God's will as the absolute truth. Debata Mula Jadi Nabolon, as Almighty God, is the source of strength and truth for the Batak Toba community. This divine truth and power provide the basis for spiritual understanding of mistakes and sins.

The effort to live well, honestly, and free from mistakes is at the core of Batak spiritual teachings. Living honestly and cleanly is the primary goal of the "Martutu Aek" initiation, a ritual using water ("Aek") as a symbol of cleanliness, clarity, and coolness. Through this initiation, a child is taught to maintain a clean life to remain pure ("Malim"). Water in the "Martutu Aek" ritual symbolizes purity and is a representation of the principle of clean living that each Batak individual must follow.

The understanding of "Batahi," or "Bataki," related to the term "Batak," emphasizes that the Batak Toba community must uphold the values of truth. "Batahi" holds a philosophical meaning that individuals must align themselves with God's will, the source of all truth. By living a pure and honest life, the Batak Toba community strives to live in harmony with the universe, in accordance with teachings passed down from generation to generation.

The philosophy of "Batahi" teaches the importance of harmonizing with the universe. Uniting with the universe is not just an aspiration but a necessity realized through real actions and moral integrity. This is reflected in the "Martutu Aek" ritual, where water as a vital element shows the relationship between humans and nature. Through this ritual, the Batak community is taught to live in harmony with nature, maintain personal and environmental cleanliness, and sustain harmony with the universe.

Thus, the concept of "Batahi" not only describes the Batak people's worldview in uniting with the universe but also emphasizes the importance of maintaining purity, honesty, and truth in daily life. This teaches that each individual plays a role in preserving the balance and harmony of nature, in line with the principles of spirituality and cultural heritage of the Batak Toba community.

CONCLUSION

The "Martutu Aek" ritual in Toba Batak culture teaches the importance of taking lessons from nature, especially from the sun as a symbol of selfless light and warmth. This ritual, as part of the life initiation tradition, reflects awareness of the need to protect ecology and care for the environment as a form of respect for God. "Martutu Aek" describes the sincerity of living a life with purity and cleanliness, as part of the inseparable relationship between humans and nature. Even though this local wisdom heritage has existed since ancestral times, understanding of its value is often forgotten, causing the almost extinction of the ideas of this rich archipelago (Sandika, 2019:15).

The "Martutu Aek" ritual in Toba Batak culture strengthens the awareness of living in harmony and unity with the universe, in line with church teachings which emphasize the importance of ecology. This ritual is not only a form of respect for God, but also represents the local wisdom values of the archipelago which are almost extinct. Social cohesion and mutual cooperation in Indonesian culture show solidarity and strong social interaction, which are important aspects that need to be maintained (Maulana Irfan, 2017:1-10). Culture, as the result of human work in social life, is a property that must be protected and maintained. "Martutu Aek" is a local Batak religious tradition that is inseparable from regional identity and culture. Even though it is open to external cultural influences, a nation must continue to enrich and maintain culture which is an integral part of its identity (Agus Widjojo, 2021).

In the Batak tradition perspective, "Martutu Aek" is not just a cultural ritual, but is also an effort to form initial meanings while honoring the Creator. This ritual is the first step for a new born child, where prayers of gratitude and hopes for dreams are also conveyed. The concept of "Batahi", which is an integral part of this ritual, expresses a collective agreement to achieve ideals that are realized in ritual actions (Manalu, 2021: 68-85). The state has an important role in advancing Indonesian national culture, by guaranteeing the people's freedom to maintain and develop their cultural values (pemajuankekulturan.id). As a Pancasila country, Indonesia takes its foundation and ideology from the cultural roots of the archipelago. Therefore, it is important not to forget our identity and recognize that we together grew and were raised in the "same house", namely Rumah Pancasila which is based on our cultural roots (Sutrisno, 2006)..

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