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Gondang Mandudu: The Ritual of Rejecting Disasters During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Samosir Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, a sacred ancestral ritual in the Batak Toba community, specifically practiced to ward off the threat of COVID-19. Conducted by the Ruma Parsaktian Ompung Raja Isumbaon Community, this ceremony features the unique phenomenon of playing *gondang sabangunan* for approximately one hour, which is believed to invoke spiritual protection. This research aims to provide a descriptive account of the ceremony and understand its objectives in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Primary data was gathered through direct field research using a qualitative descriptive method, and secondary data from academic books and articles was added to the primary data. This triangulation-validated data ensured that the secondary sources and field observations were consistent. The findings highlight the significance of the ritual in the cultural and spiritual context of the community, showcasing its role in invoking protection from misfortune. This study contributes to the understanding of indigenous responses to global health challenges. It offers insights into the cultural significance of traditional rituals in modern times.

Keywords: Gondang Mandudu, COVID-19, Batak Toba, Rejecting Disasters



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1. Introduction

This paper examines art and rituals in the Toba Batak community called *Gondang Mandudu*. This study aims to analyze the aesthetic dimension of *Gondang Mandudu* and its spiritual role in facing crises such as the pandemic. Previous research on *Gondang Mandudu* is complicated to access through books and journal articles. Based on the author's findings, there are some related writings on *Gondang Mandudu*, specifically in the thesis titled "The Phenomenon of Use, Function, and Musical Semiotic Study of *Gondang Mandudu* Ceremony in Toba Batak Society in Sijambur Nabolak, Pangururan" (2024).

According to Heatubun (2014), art and ritual complement each other and exchange characters, each with its own advantages. Ritual without art is dead. And vice versa. Ritual is art, and art needs its perfect realization in ritual. Without ritualization, art is just activity and creativity without meaning.

The *Gondang Mandudu* ritual ceremony, with its rites and ritualization, places a work that should be appreciated as a work of art. Justifying a work of art is not only in the creative and/or creation processes but also in the ritualization process. Art always needs a container. It needs the right and special time and space to create its deepest meaning. Art needs a 'hermeneutical site' to display, emit, and give birth to its meaning and significance. Art must exist in an atmosphere that occurs at a particular time and space, creating an atmosphere beyond the everyday.

In the Toba Batak community, *Gondang* is always related to ritual and spirituality. Spirituality can generally be understood as a personal practice that enhances one's sense of meaning, connection, and purpose (Gilbert & Parkes, 2011; Milner, Crawford, Edgley, Hare-Duke, & Slade, 2019). According to Daniel Pasaribu, one of the young *panuturis* (leader of the ceremony) in the Samosir district, *gondang* cannot be separated from a big ceremony in the Toba Batak community. In an interview with Daniel Pasaribu on August 8, 2023, he

emphasized that the presence of *gondang* in large ceremonies in the Toba Batak community is crucial, as without it, the event can be canceled. *Gondang* has many different meanings and interpretations. It can function as a musical instrument, part of a musical ensemble, the title of a musical composition, a collection of several musical compositions (repertoire), a tempo determinant in a composition, and part of a series of ceremonies. In addition, *gondang* can also symbolize groups such as families or age groups and even function as a prayer.

Likewise, the *pasahat hoda* Debata ceremony, one of the highest ceremonies in the Toba Batak community who believe, must present the highest *margondang* ceremony, namely *Gondang Mandudu*. The role of *gondang* is vital in every traditional ceremony, especially in the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, because traditional ceremonies, especially those that have a large category or are called *ulaon bolon* (big ceremony) with the presence of *gondang*, have become a belief system that can help cure diseases. If people describe religious or spiritual aspects in their experience of psychosis, many prefer to seek help from spiritual healing before mental health services (Dein, Cook, & Koenig, 2012; Islam, Rabiee, & Singh, 2015; Suhail & Ghauri, 2010). If one of them is missing in a system, something is indeed missing, and the system may not work. This is also the case between traditional ceremonies and the presence of *gondang*.

The *gondang sabangunan* ensemble is a ceremonial ensemble whose instrumentation consists of: five *taganing* (single-headed braced and tuned drums), *odap* (double-headed drum), *gordang* (single-headed braced drum), *sarune bolon* (double-reed oboe), *ogung* (suspended gongs), namely *ogung ihutan*, *ogung oloan*, *ogung doal*, and *ogung panggora*; and *hesek* or an empty bottle (struck idiophone).

Gondang Mandudu, which will be researched by the author at this time, is carried out at a large ceremony (*ulaon bolon*) by the *Ruma Parsaktian Ompung Raja Isumbaon* Community. This activity is called the *pasahat hoda Debata* tradition. In terminology, the word *pasahat* means to deliver, *hoda* means horse (as a sacrificial offering), *Debata* means God. So, *pasahat hoda Debata* can be interpreted as conveying horse sacrifices to God. The God in the *pasahat hoda Debata* tradition is *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*.

The *Pasahat Hoda Debata* tradition was repeated despite the coronavirus pandemic from the beginning of 2019 until 2022. In this context, the *pasahat hoda Debata* ritual is an important event. In addition to causing biological health problems, the COVID-19 pandemic also affects socio-cultural systems such as art and ritual activities. This causes a healthy mental crisis because there are various crowd rules or doing activities collectively.

In the belief of the ancient Toba Batak community, the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony was held if there were signs through natural symptoms such as the arrival of bad luck or disease in a village. However, it can also be marked by a good and satisfying agricultural harvest. Some are conveyed through someone's dream. Then, these signs will be conveyed to a *Datu* (psychic). Some cultures often attribute symptoms of mental disorders to supernatural causes, such as demon possession, the evil eye, or witchcraft (Al-Adawi et al., 2002). Mental disorders are serious public health problems involving significant disturbances in cognition, thinking, emotions, and behavior (World Health Organization, 2022). Approximately one in seven or eight people globally experience a mental disorder in any given year (Dattani, Ritchie, & Roser, 2021).

Researchers have long studied the impact of culture and religion on mental health, mental disorders, and mental health services and treatment. Cultural and religious traditions and perspectives have a significant impact on people's conception and expression of mental disorders (Prinz, 2022). Several previous studies have discussed results similar to what we have found in our study, namely that Arabs tend to believe that mental disorders are caused by supernatural forces (Islam & Campbell, 2014).

2. Method

The research method used in this study is qualitative. The characteristic of this type of method is that the data used is descriptive narrative, in contrast to the quantitative type in the form of numerical data. The instrument in qualitative research is the researcher himself, so it can be concluded that the quality of the research results is determined by the quality of the analysis and insight of the researcher (Fossey et al., 2002). The data source of this research is direct field research, namely to *Sijambur Nabolak*, Pangururan District, Samosir Regency as primary data, then scientific articles and books related to *gondang*, art, and rituals in rejecting *bala* as secondary data. At the data validity stage, this article uses the triangulation technique, which, in its application, will compare various scientific sources to be confirmed and presented as reliable data (Thurmond, 2001).

The key informants consisted of 5 individuals, including musicians (*pargonsi*) (Mr. Sijabat), protocols (*panuturi*) (Mr. J. Limbong), Batak Toba cultural practitioners (Mr. D. Pasaribu and Mrs. J. Manurung), and Head of *Siogung-ogung* Village Environment (Mr. Sitanggang). They were chosen for their extensive knowledge and experience with the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony and their roles in the ritual.

The interviews were conducted in-depth and semi-structured. Initially, unstructured interviews were conducted without a systematic interview guide, using only general guidelines related to the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony. Subsequently, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with key informants, allowing participants to explain their perspectives, experiences, and views in detail.

The data analysis in this study employed thematic analysis. Data obtained from interviews and document collection were analyzed manually using coding and categorization to identify themes relevant to the research topic, such as coding for each activity participant, including musicians (*pargonsi*), protocols (*panuturi*), and others.

This study utilized data source triangulation as a data validity technique. Data source triangulation was conducted by collecting data from various sources, including in-depth interviews with key informants, participatory observation of the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, and document analysis related to the writings and meanings of the ceremony. The purpose of data source triangulation in this study was to obtain more accurate and valid data about the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony and understand how the ceremony is perceived and practiced by the Batak Toba community from multiple perspectives. By employing systematic and structured research methods, this study aimed to obtain more accurate and valid data about the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony and significantly contribute to understanding Batak Toba culture and tradition.

In its application, interviews with key informants on related topics were conducted, and several scientific articles on gondang, art, and rituals were collected, as well as books with references related to the topic under study and other related documents. The three previous sources were analyzed, and similarities were looked for; the data was presented after validity.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Definition, Use, and Purpose of the Gondang Mandudu Ceremony

Gondang Mandudu is one of the most sacred ancestral ceremonies in the Toba Batak community. One of the unique phenomena of this ceremony is the activity of playing *gondang sabangunan*, which is played continuously for approximately one hour. This phenomenon is interesting to analyze further as something that appears to consciousness through its unique way of playing.

Terminologically, *Gondang Mandudu* can be broken down into two syllables: "*Gondang*" and "*Mandudu*". The word "*Gondang*" has many meanings in the context of Toba Batak culture, including as the name of a musical ensemble, traditional ceremony, prayer, repertoire, and others. Meanwhile, according to a dictionary of the Batak language by Andre Antonius Hutagalung, the word "*Mandudu*" is defined as "to beat the drum." However, this interpretation may not fully encompass the meaning and complexity of the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, as observed by the author. Simply put, *Mandudu* is a ceremony to ask for blessings from the Creator through the intermediary of ancestral spirits. Participants pray to the full accompaniment of *Gondang Sabangunan* without a *manortor*.

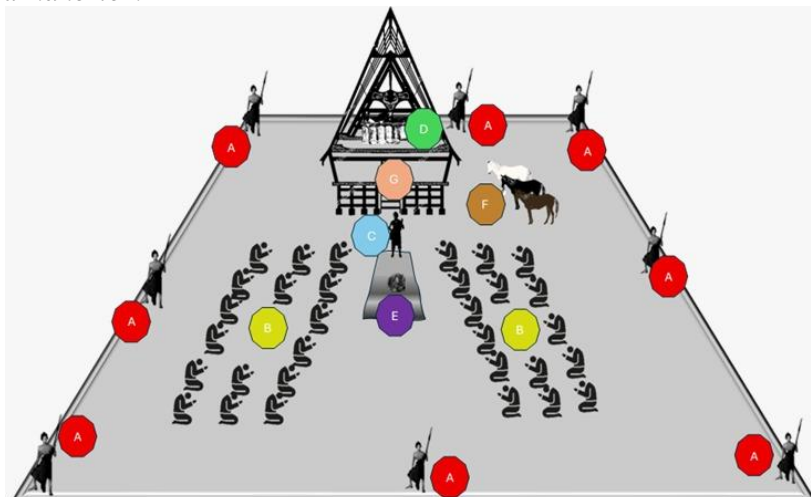


Figure 1. Sketch of the *Gondang Mandudu* ritual ceremony
(Source: Pane, 2024)

Table 1. Explanation of Figure 1 Sketch of *Gondang Mandudu* ritual ceremony

Letter	Icon	Description
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A	<i>Parhara</i>	As the guardian of the <i>Gondang Mandudu</i> ritual ceremony if someone disobeys the agreed rules. Eight parhara people symbolize the <i>desa naualu</i> (eight cardinal directions).
B	Ceremony participants	Participants are a community of descendants of <i>ompu Raja Isumbaon</i>
C	<i>Panuturi</i>	Leader of the ceremony
D	<i>Pargonsi</i> and <i>Pandungdang</i>	<i>Pargonsi</i> is the <i>gondang sabangunan</i> ensemble musician, and <i>pandungdang</i> is the representative of <i>pargonsi</i> dialogues with the <i>panuturi</i> .
E	<i>Lage</i> and <i>Pardupaan</i>	A place offering such as burnt incense, kaffir lime, etc
F	<i>Hoda Debata</i>	White, Black, and Red-colored offering horses
G	<i>Jabu bolon</i>	Place of <i>pargonsi</i> and <i>pandungdang</i>

After researching, *Gondang Mandudu* is often called *Panduduon*, a ceremony of belief in ancestors in the Toba Batak community with the sound of *gondang* as the center held for specific reasons. Usually, this ritual ceremony is carried out because something significant is requested of an individual, community, or village. Technically, this ritual ceremony plays *gondang sabangunan* non-stop for approximately one hour, during which participants are prohibited from dancing and are required to pray. In this context, *mandudu* does not only mean physically beating the drum but also includes a deeper spiritual and ritualistic dimension.

Playing the *gondang sabangunan* communicates spiritual messages, creating a sacred atmosphere and facilitating participants' spiritual experiences. Therefore, the interpretation of the meaning of "*mandudu*" in the context of *Gondang Mandudu* should be expanded to include the ceremony's important spiritual and ritualistic aspects. Thus, *Gondang Mandudu* is an ancestral belief ritual activity of the Toba Batak community, and the sounds of the *gondang* are used as a medium for prayers during the ritual ceremony. This ritual ceremony is not allowed to *manortor* or do movements and activities other than praying with the position of hands worshipping for approximately one hour.



Figure 2. Example of Praying Attitude during the Ceremony
(Source: Committee Documentation, 2021)

The author found several unique aspects of the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony. First, the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony does not allow *manortor* (dancing) during the ceremony. In general, if there is a *margondang* activity, it must be complemented by *manortor* activities, but in *Gondang Mandudu*, participants must be silent and pray. Secondly, during the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, the *pargonsi* play several repertoires without stopping until the event ends. Only the *pargonsi* sound the *gondang* to convey every prayer and request to *Debata Mula Jadi Nabolon*. The third is that the ceremony is held at night until morning, which requires that the place where the ceremony is held has no light. Spirituality can generally be understood as a personal practice that enhances one's sense of meaning, connection, and purpose (Gilbert & Parkes, 2011; Milner, Crawford, Edgley, Hare-Duke, & Slade, 2019).

The *Gondang Mandudu* ritual ceremony can be interpreted as a ritual ceremony that aims to call, ask, or invite *Debata Mula Jadi Nabolon* to attend the ceremony through natural signs and prepared offerings. In this case, the offering in the *Gondang Mandudu* ritual studied by the author is a horse, which the community calls *Hoda Debata* (Horse for God). According to the belief of those who carry out the ceremony, the position of

the horse indicates the ceremony's success. If it faces east, the ceremony is considered successful, but if it faces west, it is considered a failure.

3.2. Elements of the Implementation of the Gondang Mandudu Ceremony

According to Koentjaraningrat (1984:243), every ceremony will consist of four components that characterize the main implementation of the ceremony, namely (1) the place of the ceremony, (2) the time of the ceremony, (3) the equipment of the ceremony, and (4) the supporters and leaders of the ceremony. These four things need to be considered as important elements that build unity in implementing the ceremony in general.

The *Gondang Mandudu* ritual ceremony was held at Sijambur Nabolak, Pusuk Buhit, Pangururan District, Samosir Regency, on September 28-30, 2021. The *Gondang Mandudu* was carried out by the community *Ruma Parsaktian Ompung Raja Isumbaon* Community in a big ceremony called *Pasahat Hoda Debata*.

3.2.1. Place of Ceremony

The *Gondang Mandudu* is a group ceremony, but the prayers delivered are based on personal wishes, so the place for the *Mandudu* ceremony is at the home of the *suhut* or the organizer of the ceremony, namely in Sijambur Nabolak Pusuk Buhit, Siogung-ogung Village, Pangururan District, Samosir Regency, North Sumatra Province.



Figure 3. Ruma Parsaktian of King Isumbaon
(Source: Committee Documentation, 2021)

3.2.2. During the Ceremony

In order to determine the appropriate time to hold the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, the activity of *meniti ari* is carried out, which aims to choose *ari nauli* as a good day and avoid *ari na roa* as an unfavorable day. It is believed that the ruler of nature will bless *ari nauli*. A person who can determine a good or bad day is known as *Datu Sijujur Ari*. A good or bad day can be determined using *parhalaan*, a traditional Batak Toba calendar that does not rely on numbers and years.

The day for organizing the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony is usually chosen from the days after the harvest period ends because, at that time, the supply of funds is sufficient—*Gondang Mandudu*, which was held on September 28, 2021. According to the Toba Batak *parhalaan* calendar, this time is *Samisara Bulan Mate*, and *Sipaha Onom* is a good time. This ceremony must also be carried out at the time of *tonga borngin* (midnight), around 24.00 until completion or approximately 1 hour. However, due to government regulations regarding time restrictions and crowds during the *COVID-19* pandemic, *Gondang Mandudu* was held earlier at 10:00 PM.

3.2.3. Ceremony Items and Equipment

Several objects or ceremonial equipment are used in *Gondang Mandudu*, namely *pington ropes* in the form of three-colored cloths: red, black, and white. Each is seven cubits long. The three strands of cloth are twisted together and used as a headband. In addition to the headband, *Datu* wears special clothes to call the *jujungan*. The shape resembles a gullet, and the color is black.

In traditional ceremonies, offerings have a profound and important meaning. As found in previous research on the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, offerings (*sesaji*) are a primary requirement in the implementation of the ceremony, consisting of two parts, namely *pelean habonaran* as an offering to the ancestral spirits and *pelean*

Debata as an offering to *Ompung Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*. This is in line with the research of Aulina Umazah (2021:25), which states that every performance of *Sandur Ronggo Budoyo* art is prepared with *sandingan*, an offering interpreted for the safety of everyone, including families with intent, players, and spectators from all obstacles that disturb. In both ceremonial contexts, offerings are crucial in maintaining balance and safety for all parties involved. Before the *Gondang Mandudu* event, *pelean* has been given beforehand at the time of *panakkokhon tibal- tibal* (raising offering on top Batak house), such as: *indahan na las* (white rice), *dengke nilae* (Batak fish), *pira ni ambalungan* (chicken eggs), *manuk mirapolin* (red chicken), *manuk jarumbosi* (black chicken), *manuk nabontar* (white chicken), *manuk nanidugu* (roasted chicken), *hambing puti* (white goat), *naniura* (seasoned fish without cooking), *pohul-pohul* (cakes made from flour), *openg-openg* (cakes made from flour and bananas), *sitompion itak gurgur*, *rondang* (roasted rice), cucumbers, bananas, betel leaves, bane-bane (basil leaves), *gajut* (betel place filled with rice, betel leaves, and bane-bane), and *paradatan* (*ulos*, white cloth, and money). These offerings are placed in two places, namely in the *sibuaton* and the *antaran*. Each offering is offered to certain spirits. The offerings placed in the *antaran* consist of a white goat and *nasumarsar* (consisting of *sagu-sagu*, *pohul-pohul*, cucumber, banana, and jackfruit). This dish is placed on a plate and offered to *Batara Guru Doli*, the guardian of the door of heaven for the Batak Toba people.



Figure 4. *Nasumarsar* (offerings)
(Source: Committee Documentation, 2021)

This ceremony's primary offering is *pelean hidup* (living sacrifice), *hoda Debata* (*Debata* horse). *Hoda Debata* consists of three types, namely *Hoda sihapas pili* (white horse), intended for *King Hatorusan*, who can convey messages to *Batara Guru*, and then *Batara Guru* conveys them to *Mulajadi Nabolon*. *Hoda nabara* (red-colored horse), addressed to the *oppung* spirit of *Raja Padoha*, is considered to reside in *pusuk buhit* who can convey to *Debata soripada*. *Hoda silintom* (black horse) is addressed to the *parbanua toru* (underground ruler), *Naga Nabolon*, who can convey to *Debata Mangala Bulan*, a spirit that can reject *bala* and all diseases.

In the Toba Batak community, horses are often considered to have a deep philosophical meaning and are considered sacred. Some writings mention horses as a symbol of *Debata Natolu*. The book Dictionary of Toba Batak Culture mentioned the work of *Mulajadi Nabolon*, namely: the Creator of all things, the source of the most significant events, *Debata* the Creator of the Upper Continent (*Banua Ginjang*), the Middle Continent (*Banua Tongah*), and the Lower Continent (*Banua Toru*), has no origin and no end, is always everywhere.

According to the local beliefs of the Toba Batak community, horses are also considered to have a connection to the spiritual world and transcendence. Horses are often associated with the vehicles of the gods *Debata Batara Guru*, *Debata Soripada*, and *Debata Mangala Bulan*, which raise philosophical meanings about the relationship between the physical and spiritual realms. Horses symbolize the spiritual journey towards higher consciousness or the search for meaning in life.



Figure 5. *Hoda Debata* (horse offered to *Mulajadi Nabolon*)
(Source: Committee Documentation, 2021)

Peralatan The other leading equipment in this ceremony is a set of musical instruments, namely the *gondang sabangunan* ensemble, which consists of: first is *taganing* (membranophone), which is a set of one-faced pitched drums consisting of *odap*, *paidua odap*, *paitonga*, *paidua tingting*, and *tingting*. *Taganing* functions as a carrier of rhythmic and melodic variations. Second, the *Gordang* (membranophone) is a larger, lower, single-faced drum-bass. *Gordang* functions as a fixed rhythmic carrier, third *Ogung* (metallophone), and four gongs of different sizes: *panggora*, *pandoali* (*doal*), *oloan*, and *ihutan*. The resulting sound pattern organizes a constant and continuously repeated rhythmic pattern where the length is four beats. The fourth *Sarune bolon* (aerophone), is a type of double-tongued wind instrument—the *sarune bolon* functions as the melody carrier of the repertoire (song). Then, the last is *Hesek* (idiophone), a tool made of iron plates, empty bottles, or other objects that produce sharp sounds. *Hesek* functions to guide other instruments together in playing. It also functions as a rhythmic benchmark or constant rhythm carrier.

The function of this *pelean-pelean* is to honor and glorify the intended person who is requested through the sound of the *gondang* (in the context of musical sounds) as well as inviting the presence of the intended person in the *Mandudu* ceremony that is being carried out.

3.2.4. Ceremony Supporters

The supporters of the ceremony will be explained as follows:

3.2.4.1. Panuturi

The *Panuturi* in this *mandudu* ceremony is J. Limbong. He oversees all stages of the *Mandudu* ceremony, including leading or delivering *tonggo-tonggo* (prayers) and requests to *Ompung Mulajadi Nabolon* and other authorities.



Figure 6. Amang J. Limbong as Panuturi
(Source: Committee Documentation, 2021)

3.2.4.2. Pargonsi

Pargonsi often called *amang panggual Pargonsi* or *amang pande nami* or *amang tukangnami*. The position of *Pargonsi* and *ihutan* in implementing the *Mandudu* ceremony is the same. *Ihutan* is the one who leads in conveying *pelean* and requests through *tonggo-tonggo* (prayers), while *Pargonsi* is the one who conveys through the sound of *gondang sabangunan*.



Figure 7. Pargonsi in the *bonggar* (attic) *jabu bolon*
(Source: Committee Documentation, 2021)

In previous research on the Gondang Mandudu ceremony, value-based leadership values such as respect and responsibility towards tradition are fundamental. As stated by Mr. Sijabat, an experienced *pargonsi*:

"Gondang Mandudu is not just about music, but also how we honor our ancestors and preserve tradition. We are responsible for preserving our culture and ensuring this ceremony is conducted correctly."

This statement shows how values-based leadership, such as respect and responsibility towards tradition, are reflected in the practice of the ceremony. According to the value-based leadership theory proposed by Schwartz (1992), values such as conservatism and harmony are fundamental in promoting effective leadership. In the Gondang Mandudu ceremony context, these values are reflected in preserving tradition and harmony between the community and ancestors. Thus, the Gondang Mandudu ceremony is a cultural ritual and an example of effective value-based leadership in promoting respect and responsibility towards tradition.

According to Mr. J. Limbong, the criteria for becoming a Pargonsi is to know and master the *ruhut-ruhut ni ulaon hamalimon*, meaning he must know all the rules in the *habatahon*. He also said that he could be good at playing musical instruments such as the *sarune*. However, if he did not master the *ruhut-ruhut ni ulaon hamalimon* he could not be a Pargonsi in the *mandudu* ceremony.

3.2.4.3. Raja Isumbaon Community

The participants in question are community groups from the community of descendants of Raja Isumbaon. Raja Isumbaon in the Toba Batak mythological genealogy is the youngest son of Siraja Batak. Raja Isumbaon has 3 (three) sons, namely: Tuan Sorimangaraja, Raja Asiasi and Sangkar Somalidang. The descendants of Raja Asiasi and Sangkar Somalidang are still unknown. Tuan Sorimangaraja had 3 (three) sons, namely: Raja Naiambaton, Raja Nairasaon, Tuan Sorbadibanua.

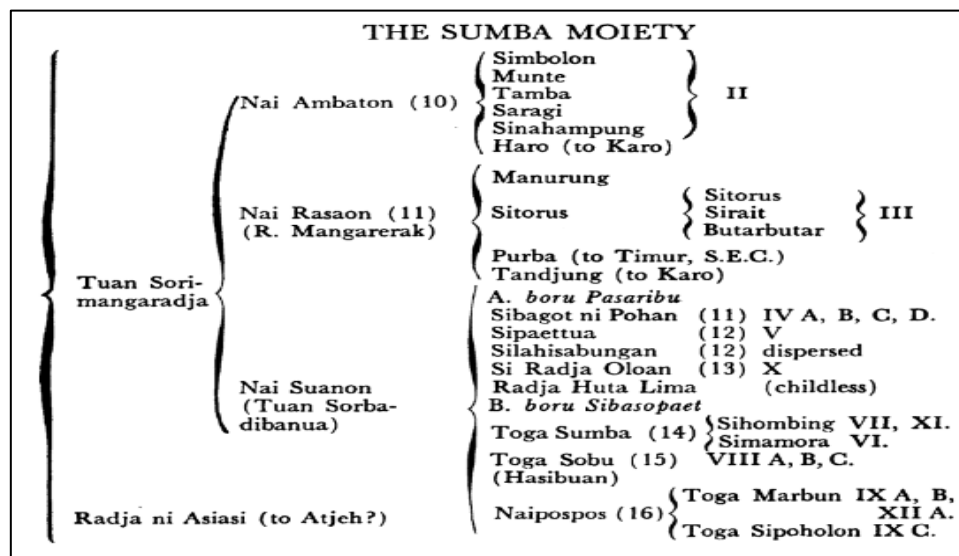


Figure 8. Lineage chart of *Raja Isumbaon*

(Source: The Social Organization and Customary Law of the Toba-Batak of Northern Sumatra by J.C. Vergouwen 1964:6)

Through the descendants of these two children of the *Siraja of Batak* (*Guru Tatea Bulan* and *Si Raja Isumbaon*), various groups of descendants of the *King of Batak*, tribes, and Batak sub-tribal groups emerged and spread, including the *Ompung Raja Isumbaon Descendant Community* and made their gathering place or what is called *ruma parsaktian* located in Sijambur Nabolak Pusuk Buhit, Samosir.



Figure 9. Some of the participants from the Raja Isumbaon Descendant Community at the *Pasahat Hoda Debata* ceremony in 2021

(Source: Committee Documentation, 2021)

3.2.5. The Ceremony

The *Gondang Mandudu* ritual ceremony will be held at night as determined by the *panuturi* as explained during the *galang raja*. When *Gondang Mandudu* is played, everyone must sit and listen quietly and must not do anything else. The ritual is played in the dark. It is primarily performed for the spirits to invite them to come down and bless the ceremony. The spirits are invited to dance invisibly in the middle of the ceremony.

Before the *Gondang Mandudu* event begins, the *pargonsi* plays the *gondang sabangunan* without anyone asking as a notification to the ritual participants that the event will begin soon as well as to harmonize the uniformity of the tone of the *gondang sabangunan* instrument played which is called *manghuruk*. *Manghuruk* in *margondang* activities is commonly implemented. However, there are differences in *manghuruk* in *Gondang Mandudu* activities, namely patterns that have been made by *pargonsi*, such as the following chart:

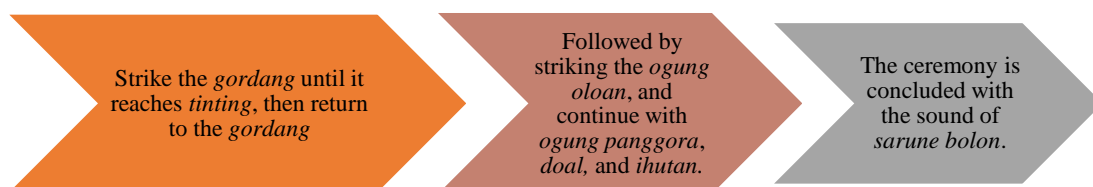


Figure 10. *Manghuruk Gondang* Process

After the *pargonsi* has finished *manghuruk*, there will then be a question and answer dialog from *pandundang* and *panuturi* as follows:

Pandundang : *Sian dia do mulaion nami gondang on, sian tinting do manang sian gondang?*

Panuturi : *sian tinting ma nian namalo nami, asa tinggil sipareon oppung Mulajadi Nabolon manangihon akka pangidoan ta.*

Translation:

Pandundang : Where did we start this *gondang*, from *tinting* or *gondang*?

Panuturi : Sound from the *tinting* drum, so the sound is loud and immediately heard. *Ompung Mulajadi Nabolon*, then all our requests will be granted.

After the dialog has been completed, the *pargonsi* will start hitting the *taganing*, starting from *tinting* to *gondang*. Then, after that, the *panuturi* will guide the ritual ceremony by asking the participants if anyone is pregnant or people who have protective amulets must first excuse themselves and hold betel or *napuran tiar* in both hands in a worshipful position. Then, the *gondang* is played without stopping for approximately one hour.

During *Gondang*, the horse is offered alive to *Debata Natolu*. *Pargonsi* is believed to be the messenger and translator of the purpose of every request and hope to *Mulajadi Nabolon*. In *Gondang Mandudu*, it must be done sacredly so that the *pargonsi* status will also be considered and believed as a god, namely *parsarune* as *Batara Guru Humundul* and *partaganing* as *Batara Guru Humuntar* who can make *gondang sabangunan* as a medium of communication with *Mulajadi Nabolon* through the sound of the *gondang sabangunan* played.

3.2.6. Purpose of the Gondang Mandudu Ceremony

The *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony has various backgrounds, aims, and objectives. If, in a village, there are signs through natural symptoms such as the arrival of bad luck or disease. However, it can also be marked by a good and satisfying agricultural harvest. Some are conveyed through someone's dream. Then, these signs will be conveyed to a *Datu* (psychic). In this context, *Datu* acts as a bridge between the human world and the power of *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*.

Traditional ceremonies play a significant role in shaping cultural identity and influencing society. As found in my research on the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, this ceremony is carried out with various backgrounds and objectives, such as addressing signs of bad luck or disease through natural symptoms or celebrating a good and satisfying agricultural harvest, which are conveyed through dreams or natural symptoms and then communicated to a *Datu* (psychic) who acts as a bridge between the human world and the power of *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*. This is in line with the research of Puthumana (2021; 43), which presents the aesthetic aspects of *Thidambu Nritham*, a temple folk dance in the Malabar region of Kerala state, showing the influence of the dance on society in developing a cultural identity in the region. Both demonstrate the importance of cultural and religious heritage in shaping society.

Meriam believes use is more closely related to practice, when, where, and in what situations *Gondang Mandudu* is used. *Gondang Mandudu* is often called *panduduon*, a ceremony of belief in ancestors in the Toba Batak community with *gondang* as the center held for certain reasons. Usually, this ritual ceremony is carried out because of a very important request from an individual, community, or village.

The *Gondang Mandudu*, which the author researched, is a ritual ceremony used to reject *bala*. Quoted from the International Journal of Infectious Diseases, Influenza versus COVID-19 cases among influenza-like illness patients in travelers from Wuhan to Hong Kong in January 2020, the occurrence of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in December 2019. The virus is a member of the coronavirus family, including the viruses that cause Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). SARS-CoV-2 spreads through respiratory droplets and direct contact with infected individuals. Symptoms of COVID-19 vary, ranging from mild symptoms, such as fever and cough, to more serious symptoms, such as pneumonia, multiorgan failure, and death.

On a global scale, the COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, given the rapid and widespread spread of the virus in countries around the world. Since then, COVID-19 has become one of the worst pandemics in history, affecting the lives of millions of people, damaging the global economy, and posing serious public health challenges.

In Indonesia, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on March 2, 2020 (two people tested positive after coming into contact with infected Japanese nationals). These two cases triggered the Indonesian government to take decisive steps to deal with the spread of this virus in the country. Over time, the number of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia continued to rise rapidly, triggering various social restriction policies, lockdowns, and other strict health protocols to prevent the spread of the virus.

In the Indonesian context, the spread of COVID-19 has caused serious health impacts and significant social, economic, and political impacts. The Indonesian government continues to work to control the spread of the virus through mass vaccination programs, public education on the importance of health protocols, and implementing other policies.

In the ancestral belief system of the Toba Batak community, if a *bala* comes, *Gondang Mandudu* must have a response, which must be done by carrying out the *Gondang Mandudu* ritual ceremony. This can be seen from the statement of the Raja Isumboan Community committee before carrying out the ceremony at the time of *galang raja* (question and answer between the committee regarding the purpose of the ritual) starting with "*Marsintuagabe*," namely the question and answer between *panuturi*, *ihutan*, and *Suhut*. The questions and answers are as follows:

Suhut: *Baenonta do dudu marhitehon gonsi sidua-dua, sai anggiat ma nanon turun oppungta laho mamasu-masu hita saluhutna. Songoni muse mangkuling ma ogung sabangunan botari ima hour 10.00.*

Hula-hula: *Horas ma jala gabe. Songoni ma nang lao pasahathon ta do Hoda Somba manang Hoda Debata ima tu oppung Batara Guru, Soripada, Mangala Bulan. Ala na on nama on timbo di ulaon habatahon, ima marhitehon Hoda Debata. Diakka na nibereng akka oppungta naparjolo namangulahon ima goarna Hoda Debata, alana hubegei dihatorangan ni akka suhut dipangido do asa dao sian akka bala parsahiton. Molo nga tiris mudarna, on do naboi manolak balai asa gabe Hoda Debata's adong parhitean napadaohon akka sahit na adong diportibion asa sae sude namasai.*

Translation:

Suhut (Ceremony Organizing Committee): We will hold a *gondang* ceremony; hopefully, our ancestors will come down to this earth to bless us all. For that, we will sound the *gondang sabangunan* at night around 10:00 pm.

Hula-hula (Honored invitees): *Horas ma jala gabe.* Likewise, we will offer the Holy Horse, the God Horse to *Batara Guru, Soripada, Mangala Bulan* because this ceremony is the highest in the beliefs of the Batak people. As we have seen, it is appropriate for our ancestors to carry out this ceremony, just like Suhut requested to be kept away from all diseases. From all diseases, if later the *gondang* has been sounded and the blood has been poured onto the ground, this can reject the disease in this world.

4. Conclusion

The *Gondang Mandudu* traditional ceremony is a form of local wisdom still preserved by the Batak Toba community. This ceremony not only functions as a ritual to ward off bad luck but also as a means of spiritual negotiation that strengthens the cultural identity of the Batak Toba community. One important aspect of the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony is the sound of the *gondang sabangunan* instruments as an accompaniment to the ceremony. In the context of local wisdom, the *gondang* ritual art has a profound meaning in the Batak Toba community.

The *gondang sabangunan* music is believed to bring spiritual and moral messages to the community and strengthen the relationship between humans and nature and supernatural forces. In the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony, the *gondang sabangunan* music is played at specific times, such as when calling the ancestral spirits and performing rituals to ward off bad luck. This music is believed to bring strong spiritual energy and help the community face challenges and difficulties. Furthermore, the *gondang* ritual art also plays an important role in maintaining and promoting the cultural continuity of the Batak Toba community.

The *gondang sabangunan* music is one of the cultural aspects still preserved and developed by the Batak Toba community, making it a potent symbol of cultural identity. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Gondang Mandudu* ceremony and *gondang* ritual art can be one form of response for the Indigenous community in facing global health challenges. By performing traditional ceremonies and playing *gondang sabangunan* music, the Batak Toba community can strengthen its relationship with supernatural forces and seek protection from disease and bad luck. In the practical context of its use, *Gondang Mandudu* is often called *panduduon* and is performed for specific reasons, usually because of a very important request within an individual, community, or village. One of the main focuses of *Gondang Mandudu* under study is to ward off bad luck, especially in the face of the "Coronavirus Disease 2019" (COVID-19) pandemic.

In the ancestral belief system of the Toba Batak community, when signs of trouble come, *Gondang Mandudu* must be performed as a response in the form of a ritual ceremony. This ceremony is considered a means of communication with *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* to ask for protection and blessings. The *Gondang Mandudu* ritual ceremony is used in a ritual and spiritual context to call, request, or invite *Debata Mula Jadi Nabolon* to be present at the ceremony. This is done by interpreting natural signs and preparing offerings, where the primary offering is a Horse called *Hoda Debata* (Horse for the Creator).

More specifically, *Gondang Mandudu* communicates spiritual messages, creates a sacred atmosphere, and facilitates participants' spiritual experiences. In addition, the ceremony is considered a means to honor traditions, unite communities, seek spiritual connections with the supernatural world, reinforce social norms, and maintain and encourage cultural continuity and community integration.

In conclusion, the *Gondang Mandudu* traditional ceremony and *gondang* ritual art are some of the forms of local wisdom still preserved by the Batak Toba community. The *gondang sabangunan* music is important in traditional ceremonies and is believed to bring spiritual and moral messages to the community. Thus, this research shows that *gondang* ritual art can respond to Indigenous communities facing global health challenges and maintaining cultural continuity.

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