



Ritual Boras Si Pir Ni Tondi: Avoiding Problems or Misfortune in Life

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the meaning of the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual as a form of protection against danger or misfortune in Batak Toba society. This ritual is a hereditary tradition that continues to be preserved and is believed to possess spiritual power in restoring an individual's condition after experiencing traumatic events. The research was conducted in two different settings, namely the urban area of Padang Bulan in Medan City and the rural area of Parbuluan Village, Dairi Regency, North Sumatra. A qualitative approach was employed using in-depth interviews with selected informants. The findings indicate that the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual has multidimensional meanings, including spiritual aspects as a means of restoring the *tondi* (soul/spirit), psychological aspects in strengthening mental conditions, and social aspects as a form of adherence to customary norms and reinforcement of kinship solidarity. Furthermore, the ritual embodies symbolic meanings representing affection (*holong*) and hope for protection from future misfortune. In conclusion, this ritual functions as a holistic recovery mechanism integrating spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions within Batak Toba society.

Keywords: boras si pir ni tondi, misfortune, Batak Toba, traditional ritual, cultural meaning

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna ritual boras si pir ni tondi sebagai bentuk perlindungan terhadap marabahaya dalam masyarakat Batak Toba. Ritual ini merupakan tradisi turun-temurun yang masih dilestarikan dan diyakini memiliki kekuatan spiritual dalam memulihkan kondisi individu setelah mengalami peristiwa traumatis. Penelitian dilakukan di dua lokasi, yaitu kawasan perkotaan Padang Bulan di Kota Medan dan wilayah pedesaan Desa Parbuluan, Kabupaten Dairi, Sumatera Utara. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan metode wawancara mendalam terhadap informan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ritual boras si pir ni tondi memiliki makna multidimensional, meliputi aspek spiritual sebagai sarana pemulihan tondi (roh/jiwa), aspek psikologis dalam memperkuat kondisi mental, serta aspek sosial sebagai bentuk kepatuhan terhadap norma adat dan penguatan solidaritas kekerabatan. Selain itu, ritual ini juga mengandung makna simbolik sebagai representasi kasih sayang (*holong*) dan harapan akan perlindungan di masa depan. Dengan demikian, ritual ini berfungsi sebagai mekanisme pemulihan holistik yang mengintegrasikan dimensi spiritual, psikologis, dan sosial dalam kehidupan masyarakat Batak Toba.

Kata kunci: boras si pir ni tondi, marabahaya, Batak Toba, ritual adat, makna budaya



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1. Introduction

Culture can be understood as a system of values, meanings, and social practices that are continuously transmitted across generations within a society. Within this system, rituals occupy a central position as they serve not only as expressions of collective belief but also as responses to various life situations, including uncertainty, trauma, and threats to personal safety. Rituals function beyond symbolic acts; they play an important role as social and psychological mechanisms that help individuals and communities maintain balance, regulate emotions, and reinforce a sense of order in times of disruption (Susen, 2024). In this regard, ritual practices can be interpreted as adaptive strategies that integrate cultural knowledge with emotional coping processes.

In the context of Indonesian local culture, the Batak Toba community possesses a rich repertoire of ritual practices that are closely related to their worldview, kinship system, and spiritual beliefs. One of the rituals that continues to be preserved is the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual. This ritual involves the offering of rice as a symbolic medium to restore a person's *tondi* (spirit or life force) after experiencing misfortune, danger, or emotionally distressing events. The concept of *tondi* is central in Batak Toba cosmology, representing the essence of life that must be maintained in a state of balance. When individuals experience shock or threatening situations, it is believed that the *tondi* may become weakened or disturbed, requiring ritual intervention to restore harmony.

From a sociological perspective, collective rituals such as *boras si pir ni tondi* are not merely individual healing practices but also social events that strengthen communal ties. Durkheim (2008) emphasizes that rituals contribute to the reinforcement of social solidarity by bringing individuals together in shared emotional experiences. In this sense, the ritual serves as a medium through which social cohesion is maintained and collective identity is reaffirmed. Moreover, the involvement of family members and community leaders in the ritual highlights the importance of kinship networks in providing emotional and social support during times of crisis.

Psychologically, ritual practices can also be understood as culturally embedded coping mechanisms. The performance of rituals may help reduce anxiety, provide a sense of control, and facilitate emotional recovery following distressing experiences. The symbolic actions involved in the ritual can create a structured process through which individuals reinterpret their experiences and regain a sense of safety and well-being. Thus, the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual reflects an intersection between cultural meaning, social interaction, and psychological resilience.

Despite its continued relevance in contemporary Batak Toba society, studies examining the multidimensional meanings of this ritual—particularly its role in protecting individuals from danger and restoring emotional stability—remain limited. Most existing studies focus on general cultural descriptions without exploring the deeper integration of spiritual, social, and psychological aspects. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the cultural, social, and psychological meanings of the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual and to understand its role as a form of cultural adaptation to experiences of risk and uncertainty.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of social and cultural phenomena based on participants' perspectives, while descriptive research aims to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of the object under study (Nassaji, 2015). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with informants selected purposively, namely individuals who have knowledge of and direct involvement in the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual.

The research was conducted in two areas with different characteristics: the urban area of Padang Bulan in Medan City and the rural area of Parbuluan Village in Dairi Regency, North Sumatra. The selection of these two locations was intended to compare the continuity and meanings of the ritual across different social contexts, both in modern and traditional settings.

Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process was conducted systematically to identify patterns, meanings, and relationships among the data obtained from the field. This model is known as interactive qualitative data analysis, which emphasizes a continuous and iterative process throughout the research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

3. Result and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual is still practiced by the Batak Toba community, both in urban areas such as Padang Bulan in Medan City and in rural areas such as Parbuluan Village in Dairi Regency. This practice demonstrates that the ritual remains relevant in people's lives, despite

differing social contexts. It is generally performed in response to individuals who have experienced misfortune, accidents, or events believed to disturb the balance of the *tondi* (spirit/soul), which in Batak Toba belief is considered an essential element of human life.

In practice, the ritual uses rice (*boras*) as the main medium, which is placed on the head of the individual receiving the ritual, accompanied by prayers and expressions of hope that the person will be protected from future harm. The use of rice in this ritual is not without meaning; it carries strong symbolic value as a representation of life, prosperity, and blessing in Batak Toba culture. Research by Hutasoit et al. (2020) shows that rice in various Batak Toba rites functions as a sacred symbol that connects humans with spiritual values and the hope for well-being.

Furthermore, the practice of *boras si pir ni tondi* is not merely understood as a symbolic act but also as a holistic mechanism of recovery. This ritual integrates spiritual, emotional, and social elements through the involvement of family members and the use of prayer as a means of inner strengthening. Research by Naibaho (2023) reveals that this ritual has a positive impact on individuals' mental conditions, particularly in providing calmness and a sense of security after experiencing traumatic events.

3.1. *Spiritual Meaning: Restoration of Tondi as the Core of the Ritual*

The findings of this study indicate that belief in *tondi* constitutes the core of the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual in Batak Toba society. *Tondi* is understood as the source of life force that determines an individual's physical and inner balance. Informants stated that when a person experiences misfortune, the *tondi* may weaken or even leave the body, thus requiring a ritual to call it back and restore it. The *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual is therefore interpreted as a means of spiritual recovery through the use of rice and prayers aimed at restoring the balance of the soul and protecting the individual from future harm. These findings suggest that the concept of health in Batak Toba society is holistic, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Previous research also supports that this ritual functions to restore life force and provide inner peace for individuals experiencing crisis (Naibaho, 2023). This practice aligns with the perspective of Clifford Geertz, who argued that systems of belief and cultural symbols help individuals interpret and cope with crises through collectively constructed meanings (Geertz, 1973).

3.2. *Psychological Dimension: Ritual as a Mechanism of Mental Recovery*

Research by Naibaho (2023) shows that *boras si pir ni tondi* contributes to providing inner calm and hope for individuals facing difficult conditions, thereby accelerating mental recovery. The ideas of Émile Durkheim also emphasize that collective rituals function to strengthen individuals' emotional states and build social solidarity, which in turn supports psychological stability (Durkheim, 2008).

This study further demonstrates that the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual has significant psychological effects on individuals who experience misfortune. Informants revealed that after undergoing the ritual, they felt a sense of calm, comfort, and increased mental strength. This indicates that the ritual serves as a culturally grounded psychological recovery mechanism based on belief and traditional practice.

The effectiveness of this ritual is closely linked to the involvement of family and the surrounding social environment, which provide emotional support to the individual. Prayers, the symbolic use of rice, and the presence of family members create a sense of security and reinforce the individual's belief in recovery and protection from harm. In this context, the ritual functions as a traditional coping mechanism that helps individuals manage stress and trauma through symbolic and collective approaches.

3.3. *Social Function: The Role of Hula-hula and Kinship Structure*

The *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual also has a strong social dimension, particularly in relation to the kinship system of Batak Toba society. Based on the findings, the ritual cannot be performed by just anyone; it must be conducted by the *hula-hula*, who hold authority within customary law. This indicates that the ritual is not solely related to the individual recipient but also involves a broader social structure. The involvement of the *hula-hula* reflects the importance of kinship relations in maintaining both social and spiritual balance within the community.

In Indonesian anthropological studies, Koentjaraningrat explains that the kinship system is one of the fundamental elements of culture, functioning to regulate social interactions and preserve traditional values within society. Thus, *boras si pir ni tondi* can be understood as a social mechanism that not only restores the individual but also strengthens social cohesion and the collective identity of the Batak Toba community.

3.4. *Symbolic Meaning: Boras as a Representation of Life and Holong*

The use of rice (*boras*) in the *boras si pir ni tondi* ritual carries a very strong symbolic meaning in Batak Toba society. Rice is not merely regarded as a staple food but also as a symbol of life, prosperity, and blessing. In the context of the ritual, rice functions as a medium for conveying prayers and hopes for individuals who have experienced misfortune, reflecting the interconnectedness of material and spiritual aspects of life.

Research by Hutasoit, Lattu, and Timo (2020) in the Journal of Social Anthropology at Universitas Negeri Medan indicates that rice in Batak Toba rituals serves as a symbolic medium of spiritual communication, embodying hopes for a better life and well-being for individuals and their families.

In addition, this ritual also embodies the value of *holong* (love/compassion), which is reflected in the involvement of family members who provide emotional support through prayers and expressions of hope throughout the ritual process. This value strengthens social relationships while representing a form of collective care for individuals facing difficult circumstances. Analytically, the symbol of rice in this ritual functions as a medium that integrates spiritual, social, and emotional dimensions, representing enduring cultural values that continue to be maintained within Batak Toba society.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that *boras si pir ni tondi* carries multidimensional meanings encompassing spiritual, psychological, social, and symbolic aspects. This ritual not only functions as a form of protection from danger but also as a holistic recovery mechanism that integrates various dimensions of life within Batak Toba society.

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