

Umpasa in Batak Toba Wedding Ceremony in Medan: Meaning and Tradition of *Berpantun*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to document and analyze the role of *umpasa* in Batak Toba wedding ceremonies and provide younger generations with a deeper understanding of the importance of preserving wedding traditions. This study explores the cultural significance of *umpasa*, the traditional poetic expressions used in Batak Toba weddings, and their impact on the overall ceremony. By examining the historical context and contemporary usage of *umpasa*, this research seeks to highlight the intrinsic connection between language, rituals, and cultural identity in Batak Toba society. Additionally, the findings contribute to the development of educational resources and cultural preservation initiatives aimed at ensuring the continuity of these cherished traditions for future generations. The research method employed was an ethnographic study. Data were collected through participatory observations and semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders and families involved in wedding ceremonies. The findings reveal that *umpasa* plays a crucial social role as a tool for maintaining harmony, strengthening family solidarity, and passing cultural values on to future generations. However, interest in this tradition has declined over time, and more effort is needed to preserve it. This study is expected to enhance appreciation of the cultural richness of Batak Toba and inspire the preservation of *umpasa* traditions in the future.

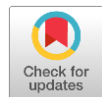
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INTRODUCTION

The Toba Batak tribe, as one of the tribes in Indonesia, is known for its rich culture and traditions that are still preserved to this day. One important element of the Toba Batak tradition is the wedding ceremony. This ceremony is not only a moment of unification of two individuals, but also the unification of two large families that have deep social and cultural ties. In this wedding ceremony, there is a tradition known as *umpasa*. According to Purba et al (2024), *umpasa* is the art of poetry in the form of *pantun* in the Toba Batak community. *Umpasa* consists of verses that imply statements of blessing, advice, and prayers for those who hear them which are full of local cultural values. *Umpasa* is uttered in ceremonies such as *ulaon pardongansaripeon* (wedding), *ulaon habot niroha* (mourning events). *Umpasa* is also commonly uttered when welcoming guests or other occasions in everyday life. *Umpasa* in the Toba Batak tradition not only functions as entertainment, but also as a means to convey the values of wisdom that have been passed down from generation to generation. (Togar Nainggolan, 2012) stated that the Toba Batak culture contains many philosophical aspects that are reflected in every traditional ceremony, including marriage. In this context, *umpasa* is a

means to remind the bride and groom about the importance of maintaining good relations with the extended family, respecting parents, and carrying out their social roles in society.

The meaning of *umpasa* is very deep and contains a moral message that must be held firmly by the bride and groom. As expressed by (Sitepu et al. 2020), the *umpasa* tradition is an important part of instilling noble values in the younger generation, as well as strengthening social relations between the two families. Through *umpasa*, the younger generation is taught to respect tradition and live life wisely. However, in recent decades, the influence of modernization and globalization has caused changes in the implementation of traditional ceremonies, including the use of *umpasa*.

The younger generation who grow up in urban environments such as Medan tend to be more open to the influence of outside cultures, so the *umpasa* tradition is often ignored in modern wedding ceremonies. This raise concerns that the values contained in *umpasa* could be lost if there is no effort to preserve them (Saragih et al., 2020; Tampubolon et al, 2020). Furthermore, (Pardosi, 2008) explains that in general, the Batak Toba people consider that the wedding ceremony is a sacred moment that should not be missed, and *umpasa* is an integral part of the ritual. However, the decline in interest in the *umpasa* tradition can be caused by the lack of understanding of the younger generation regarding the meaning and function of *umpasa* in social life. The lack of cultural education efforts that emphasize the importance of this tradition has contributed to the loss of appreciation for *umpasa* among the younger generation.

It is important to note that *umpasa* is not just a *pantun*, but also reflects the moral values embraced by the Batak Toba people, such as mutual cooperation, togetherness, loyalty, and responsibility. Sihombing (2018) states that in a wedding ceremony, *umpasa* functions as a reminder for the bride and groom to always maintain a harmonious relationship, respect each other, and maintain the good name of the extended family (Purba et al., 2023). Based on the description above, it is necessary to conduct research on *Umpasa in Batak Toba Wedding Ceremonies in Medan: The Meaning and Tradition of Berpantun*". This research is important to dig deeper into the meaning and function of *umpasa* as one of the cultural elements that is full of social and philosophical values of the Batak Toba community. In the context of ever-growing modernization, this research is expected to be an important effort in preserving the tradition of *berpantun* which is starting to be eroded by the changing times.

By deeply understanding the meaning and role of *umpasa* in wedding ceremonies, we will not only preserve cultural heritage, but also develop it to be relevant and meaningful in the lives of contemporary society. In addition, this study can contribute to the study of local culture and traditions, which are very necessary to build awareness of the importance of maintaining cultural identity amidst the rapid flow of globalization. It is hoped that through research on *Umpasa in Batak Toba Wedding Ceremonies in Medan: The Meaning and Tradition of Pantun*", the philosophical meaning and cultural values contained in *umpasa* as part of the Batak Toba cultural heritage can be deeply revealed. This study aims to document and analyze the use of *umpasa* in wedding ceremonies, while at the same time providing a broader understanding to the younger generation regarding the importance of maintaining this tradition. With this study, it is also hoped that it can increase appreciation for the richness of local culture, which is often marginalized by the influence of modernization and globalization.

METHOD

This study was conducted in Medan City between May and August 2024. The focus is on the *umpasa* tradition of the Batak-Toba wedding ceremony. The research delved into the intricate details of *umpasa*, a traditional poetic form integral to Batak-Toba wedding rituals. Interviews were conducted with local elders, cultural experts, and newlywed couples to gain comprehensive insights into the contemporary practice and significance of *umpasa*. The study

also examined how modernization and urban living in Medan City have influenced the preservation and adaptation of this cultural tradition. This location was chosen because of its relevance to the Batak Toba sociocultural context, where the *umpasa* tradition is still carried out in community life. This research was descriptive and qualitative with an ethnographic approach involving participatory observation and interviews (Sihite et al., 2022; Munthe et al., 2024). Researchers selected community leaders, traditional elders, and the bride's and groom's families as participants using a purposive sampling technique. Data collection was carried out through direct observation at traditional wedding ceremonies, semi-structured interviews to explore the meaning of *umpasa*, and documentation in the form of photographs and videos. Data were analyzed thematically to identify the social function of *umpasa* and explore the story behind it.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participatory observation

The Batak Toba traditional wedding ceremony is a ritual rich in symbolism and tradition, one of which is the use of *umpasa* and *pantun*. *Umpasa*, which is a form of oral poetry, and *pantun* which has a distinctive rhythm and pattern, play an important role in the implementation of the wedding. Participatory Observation is one of the main methods in this study, where the researcher is directly involved in the process of the Batak Toba traditional wedding ceremony in Medan. By becoming an observer and an active participant, the researcher is able to understand the dynamics of culture in depth, including the meaning and function of *umpasa* in the *ulos* handover procession. The following is a description of how participatory observation was conducted in this study.

The Role of Researchers in Ceremonies

The researcher followed the entire series of the Batak Toba traditional wedding procession as a participant observer. The researcher did not only sit as a passive observer but was also involved in several traditional ceremony activities, such as attending discussion sessions with traditional leaders and families. The presence of the researcher in the community allowed for direct interaction with participants, which strengthened the ethnographic data collected. The researcher followed the *ulos* handover ceremony from beginning to end, focusing on the stages involving the delivery of *umpasa*. The activities observed included the preparation of the event, the ritual of delivering *umpasa*, as well as the reactions and social interactions of the bride and groom's families, the community, and traditional leaders.

Direct Observation in the *Ulos* Handover Procession

During the observation, the researcher recorded every stage in the *ulos* handover procession, which is the most sacred part of a Batak Toba traditional wedding. The handover of the *ulos* is usually carried out by the groom's family to the bride, and vice versa. Each step in this procession is accompanied by the delivery of *umpasa* by a traditional elder or older family member. The following are the detailed stages that were observed: The *mangulosi* ritual begins with the delivery of customary words (customary dialogue and *umpasa*) from the party who will be *mangulosi* to the party who will be *ulosied*. The bride's parents give words of advice and hope before *mangulosi ulos hela* to *hela* and *borunya*, usually this position is initiated by *Parsinabung* or *raja parhata* (customary narrator) as a representative of kinship in the customary *ulaon*. However, in some *ulaon*, parents or representatives of kinship (other than *raja parhata*) also speak and deliver their dialogue (hereinafter *hata ni umpasa*) to the bride and groom.

Preparation for Handing Over *Ulos*

Before the procession begins, there are preparations that involve dividing tasks among family members. The *parsinabung* and also the traditional elders gather to prepare the words of the *umpasa* that will be delivered at this important moment. The *umpasa* chosen must be appropriate to the situation, namely giving blessings, prayers, and hopes for the happiness of the bride and groom. Researchers noted how each word in the *umpasa* is carefully arranged, ensuring that the message conveyed truly carries meaning. Opening of the Blessing Speech: The first *umpasa* is delivered before the handover of the *ulos* begins, usually by a traditional elder or respected figure. This *umpasa* functions as an introduction to giving blessings and prayers to the bride and groom.

The *umpasa* conveyed:

*Sada silompa gadong, dua sitiop puli,
Sada pe hami na mandok hata, Naung sude ma hami taruli,
Binuat ma hau toras
Bahen sopo di balian
Sai gabe ma hamu hala horas-horas
Tiur-tiur ma nang pansarian.
Sai tongkaon ni simaleang
Sai tung songon sihaporik
Ai godang hata ni natua-tua
Molo tumagon di ginjang porik*

In a wedding ceremony held at Wisma X in Medan, the researcher witnessed the preparation of the handover of the *ulos* which began with a small discussion between *Parsinabung* and the traditional elders. They debated about the most appropriate *umpasa* for the couple, considering aspects such as social situation, family status, and the traditional values they wanted to emphasize.

Implementation of the *Ulos* Handover Procession

When the procession began, the researcher was among the families present, noting how the *umpasa* was pronounced by the traditional elders. At this stage, the *umpasa* is usually pronounced in the Toba Batak language which is full of allusions. The researcher observed how the delivery of the *umpasa* was done with a distinctive intonation, reinforcing the majesty and meaning of each word spoken. Observation results show that in this event, the *Parsinabung* or traditional elder who delivered the *umpasa* stood in the middle of the bride and groom's family while holding the *ulos* that would be given. His voice was firm and rhythmic, adding to the solemn atmosphere.



Figure 1. *Ulos* Giving Procession

The *umpasa* spoken is not only advice, but also an expression of prayer, the following *umpasa* is conveyed:

*Na nidok ni si pandurung
Na nidok ni si suan pandan
Na malo i antong marlindung
Tu haha, anggi, hula, dohot dongan.
Sai horas ma hamu
Sai manjujung do hamu margana
Sai tung do mandok hata
Pasangapi dohot haro na marsada
Hau Simartolu
Di tombak ni Pinamparan
Sehat ma hamu leleng mangolu
Dihaliangi angka pomparan*

After the *umpasa* was delivered, the researcher also observed the reactions of the ceremony participants, including the bride and groom's families and the guests present. These reactions reflect how the Toba Batak people value *umpasa* as part of their cultural heritage. At several moments, the audience showed expressions of awe or emotion when the *umpasa* spoken touched on important values such as loyalty, honor, and happiness. The audience seemed emotionally involved when the *umpasa* was spoken. Many of them showed expressions of awe, with wide smiles and sparkling eyes. The *umpasa* spoken was not only a series of words, but also carried deep meaning and was relevant to their lives. At certain moments, when the *umpasa* touched on important values such as loyalty, honor, and happiness, several attendees were seen to be moved to tears. This reflects how deeply they experienced and felt the meaning of every word spoken.

The traditional elders who were present were also seen nodding in agreement, indicating that the *umpasa* delivered was in accordance with the values upheld in the Toba Batak community. This act shows respect for tradition and acknowledges the important role of *umpasa* in strengthening bonds between community members. In addition, several younger members of the bride and groom's family were seen whispering to each other, sharing their opinions about the meaning they captured from the *umpasa*. This shows that the *umpasa* tradition is not only appreciated by the older generation, but also by the younger generation who are trying to understand and inherit their cultural values. The researcher also noted the social interactions that occurred after the delivery of *umpasa*. Many participants exchanged views and talked about the meaning of the *umpasa* that had just been delivered, creating a friendly and warm atmosphere. This shows that *umpasa* not only functions as a binder in the wedding ritual, but also as a bridge to strengthen social relationships between family and community members.

The results of observations from the implementation of the *Ulos* handover, researchers noted how several members of the bride and groom's families cried when the *umpasa* delivered touched on the theme of loyalty and sincerity in living a married life. This emotional reaction shows the depth of the meaning of *umpasa* in the lives of the Batak Toba people. In addition to observing the procession, researchers also interacted with the local community to gain deeper insight into the meaning of *umpasa* in traditional wedding ceremonies. After the procession was over, researchers talked with traditional elders and family members to dig deeper into the process of compiling *umpasa* and how this tradition is maintained from generation to generation.

From this observation, it can be seen that *umpasa* has a very important role in every stage of the traditional procession. Each *umpasa* conveys a special message related to life advice, marriage blessings, and prayers for family life to be lived harmoniously, prosperously, and full of blessings.

Umpasa is not only a symbol of prayer and blessing, but also functions as a social bond between families. At the moment of the *ulos* handover, *umpasa* emphasizes the importance of family ties and social solidarity. The utterance of the *umpasa* by the traditional elders conveys the meaning that this marriage does not only involve the bride and groom, but also binds the entire extended family. Overall, the reactions of the ceremony participants after the utterance of the *umpasa* confirm the importance of this tradition in the lives of the Batak Toba people. *Umpasa* becomes more than just an oral tradition; it serves as a link between the past, present, and future, reminding everyone of the noble values that must continue to be maintained and passed on.

Semi-structured Interview

In order to deeply understand the meaning and tradition of *pantun* in Batak Toba wedding ceremonies, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with several *Parsinabung*. The *Parsinabung* that the researcher includes here are the informants who are usually called *Opung Sahata* and *Opung Oloan*, a traditional elder who is experienced in organizing various traditional ceremonies, especially weddings. This interview aims to explore further the role, meaning, and changes that occur in the *umpasa* tradition among the Batak Toba community. The following are the results of the interview with *Opung Sahata* and *Opung Oloan*

Definition and Function

Parsinabung opened the interview by explaining the definition and function of *umpasa* in the context of Batak Toba culture. Based on the informant's account, *Umpasa* is an oral poem that contains moral messages and local wisdom. In Batak society, *umpasa* functions as a means of communication to convey hopes, advice, and prayers, not only in marriage but also in various other traditional ceremonies," he said. He emphasized that *umpasa* is not just the art of speaking, but also has deep educational value. *Parsinabung* explained that before delivering *umpasa*, a small discussion is usually held between the traditional elders and the bride and groom's families. "We hold discussions to determine the *umpasa* that best suits the couple. We consider the social situation, family status, and traditional values that we want to emphasize," he said. In this process, the traditional elders and families share their views to choose the right *umpasa*.

"This discussion is very important because each *umpasa* chosen must reflect the character of the couple and the values they want to pass on. In addition, we also need to ensure that the *umpasa* is relevant to the current context," he added. This shows that the selection of *umpasa* involves deep consideration and is not just a random choice. *Parsinabung* explained that every *umpasa* delivered in a wedding ceremony is not just a form of artistic expression, but also contains deep meaning and serves as a reminder of the noble values that must be upheld by the newlywed couple. "The *umpasa* we deliver often contains advice about loyalty, honor, and a sense of responsibility," he said.

One of the central themes in *umpasa* is loyalty. In the context of marriage, loyalty is not only an expectation, but also the foundation of a lasting relationship. "When we convey *umpasa* that emphasizes the importance of loyalty, it is a reminder to couples that they must be loyal to each other, especially in difficult times," he added. In addition to loyalty, *umpasa* also contains messages about honor and self-respect. "In Batak Toba culture, maintaining family

honor is very important. The *umpasa* that we convey often invite couples to not only protect themselves but also maintain the good name of their family," said *Parsinabung*.

He added that in each *umpasa* there is advice to maintain behavior and attitudes. For example, in wedding ceremonies, there are often *umpasa* that emphasize the need to maintain good behavior in front of parents and invited guests, so as not to tarnish the family's good name. "By maintaining honor, they also maintain each other's self-respect, which is very important in the social interaction of the Batak Toba community," he said.

Umpasa also serves to remind couples about a sense of responsibility. "In marriage, each individual has a role and responsibility that must be fulfilled. The message we convey emphasizes that marriage is not only about love, but also about commitment to support each other and fulfill each other's obligations," *Parsinabung* explained. He explained that each couple needs to understand that they are not only responsible for themselves, but also for their partner and family. "The message that emphasizes responsibility is often accompanied by a prayer that they will always be given wisdom in carrying out their roles," he added.

Delivery of *Umpasa* in Ceremony

During the ceremony, *Parsinabung* explained that the delivery of the *umpasa* was done with great solemnity. "*Umpasa* is usually delivered after the handover of the *ulos*, which is a symbol of affection and protection. At that time, we stand in front of the bride and groom and all the guests," he explained. His voice was full of emotion as he recounted this moment, where all the participants of the ceremony seemed to be listening seriously. "When I say the *umpasa*, I feel a strong connection between me, the couple, and all the guests. It's not just about the words, but about the meaning contained in them. For example, when I say, 'Sada silompa gadong, dua sitiop puli,' it means we hope that they will always be united and support each other in their lives," he said.

The Meaning of *Umpasa* in Wedding Ceremonies

Parsinabung emphasized that each *umpasa* has a deep meaning and serves as a reminder of noble values. "The *umpasa* that we convey often contain advice about loyalty, honor, and a sense of responsibility. This is very important to emphasize in the context of marriage, where the bride and groom are expected to respect each other and maintain their relationship," he said. For Example:

*Dakka ni arirang, peak di tonga onan,
Badan muna naso jadi sirang, tondi mu marsigomgoman.
Giring-giring ma tu gosta-gosta, tu boras ni sikkoru,
Sai tibu ma hamu mangiring-iring, huhut mangompa-ompa anak dohot boru.*

The example above that he gave is a frequently used *umpasa*, which contains the hope that the couple will always be committed and support each other. "This *umpasa* is a symbol of hope and promise that must be upheld by the bride and groom throughout their lives," Furthermore, *umpasa* in wedding ceremonies also functions to strengthen social relations between the bride and groom's families. "Every time we deliver *umpasa*, it is also an opportunity for families to interact with each other and strengthen bonds. The *umpasa* delivered becomes a moment for everyone to unite and celebrate the happiness of the newlyweds," said *Parsinabung*. In this context, *umpasa* becomes a bridge that connects not only the couple, but also two different families. "By listening to *umpasa*, families and invited guests can feel togetherness and the same hope for the happiness of the couple," he said.

Changes in Delivery of *Umpasa*

When asked about the changes that have occurred in the delivery of *umpasa*, *Parsinabung* admitted that there has been a significant shift. "In the past, the delivery of *umpasa* was more often done by all family members. However, currently, many of us prefer to rely on traditional elders in delivering *umpasa*," he said. The sources said that this change may be due to various factors, including busyness and modernization. "People are now more involved in daily activities that make them less able to be directly involved in traditional ceremonies. However, we still try to maintain the essence of *umpasa* and ensure that every delivery is done meaningfully," he said. However, he emphasized that the core of the tradition remains intact. "We still invite families to participate in deliberations, so that they can understand the meaning of the *umpasa* that will be delivered," he added.

Challenges in Preserving *Umpasa*

The *Parsinabung* also discussed the challenges faced in preserving the *umpasa* tradition. "Today's young generation is often more interested in pop culture and technology, so traditions like *umpasa* can be marginalized. We feel responsible for reintroducing cultural values to the younger generation," he said with concern. They suggested that the community be more active in educating their children about the importance of this oral tradition. "We need to invite them to participate in traditional ceremonies, listen to *umpasa*, and understand its meaning. This is the best way to ensure that this tradition does not die out," he said.

Hope for the Future

In closing the interview, *Parsinabung* expressed his hopes for the future of the *umpasa* tradition. "I hope that the younger generation will appreciate and preserve this tradition more. *Umpasa* is part of our identity as Batak people, and it is very important to maintain the sustainability of this culture," he said with confidence.

"If we all work together and commit to maintaining and continuing this tradition, I am sure that *umpasa* will live on and contribute to shaping the character and values of the Toba Batak people in the future," Finally, *umpasa* often functions as a hope and prayer for the future of the couple. "We hope that every *umpasa* that is conveyed can be a guideline for the couple in living their lives together. By listening to these messages, it is hoped that the couple can better understand the meaning of marriage and how important it is to respect and support each other," said *Parsinabung*.

Thus, *umpasa* is not only a part of the ceremony, but also a form of moral and spiritual education that is very important for newlyweds. "We believe that by listening to *umpasa*, couples will be reminded to continue to uphold the noble values that exist in Batak Toba culture," he concluded.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study showed that *umpasa* in Batak Toba culture has an important role in wedding ceremonies, both spiritually, socially, and morally. *Umpasa* is not only a language art, but also a medium for conveying meaningful advice, prayers, and blessings for the bride and groom and extended family. In the context of traditional marriage, *umpasa* becomes a bridge between the older and younger generations, strengthening social and spiritual relationships between families, and emphasizing the values of honor, responsibility, and loyalty in the family. One of the main findings is that *umpasa* not only functions as a traditional ritual, but also as a means of maintaining family harmony. Each *umpasa* contains a deep moral message, such as maintaining the good name of the family and building a wise household. These noble values are passed down from generation to generation and become an important guide for couples. However, modernization has resulted in a decline in interest in the *umpasa* tradition, especially among the younger generation of Batak Toba who live in cities such as

Medan. Globalization and foreign cultures have caused many to lack understanding of this tradition. This study emphasizes the importance of Batak Toba cultural education to improve understanding and appreciation of *umpasa*. In conclusion, this study confirms that *umpasa* is an important part of the Batak Toba cultural identity that needs to be preserved. In addition to functioning in traditional rituals, *umpasa* also reflects moral, social, and spiritual values that must be passed on to the next generation.

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