

The Meaning and Function of Hata-Hata in the Mangupa–Upa Procession of the Mandailing Community in Sei Deras Hulu Village, Rokan Hulu Regency

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Abstract

The mangupa-upa tradition is one form of oral tradition that is still preserved and practiced in the life of the Mandailing community, especially in Sei Deras Hulu Village, Rokan Hulu Regency. This tradition does not only function as a customary procession but also contains cultural values that are transmitted through spoken expressions known as hata-hata. This study aims to examine the meanings and functions of hata-hata in the mangupa-upa oral tradition. The research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The data consist of hata-hata expressions used in the mangupa-upa procession, which are analyzed based on categories of spiritual, social, and moral meanings, as well as ritual, social, and educational functions. The results show that hata-hata in the mangupa-upa tradition contain spiritual meanings related to safety and the balance of the soul (tondi), social meanings emphasizing harmony and kinship relations, and moral meanings that teach maturity and strength of character. In addition, hata-hata function as a ritual medium, a means of reinforcing social order, and a tool for cultural education. In conclusion, the mangupa-upa tradition not only serves as an oral tradition but also as a cultural practice that plays an important role in maintaining the spiritual, social, and moral balance of the Mandailing community.

Keywords: Oral Tradition, Mangupa-Upa, Hata-Hata, Meaning, Function, Mandailing

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's cultural traditions are highly diverse. Each ethnic group across the archipelago has its own unique way of preserving and transmitting its identity from generation to generation. According to Meliyani (2022), folklore is a part of culture that is passed down from one generation to another within a community. Folklore can be transmitted through oral traditions or through examples accompanied by gestures or mnemonic aids, and it often exists in various versions. Furthermore, Amanat (2019) states that folklore is a branch of anthropology that studies cultural practices inherited across generations.

Folklore studies help us understand a nation's culture, including its beliefs, worldview, customs, and ways of thinking, before they are influenced by foreign cultures. Fakiuddin (2019) argues that folklore encompasses various traditions passed down through generations, including folktales, traditional expressions, legends, proverbs, riddles, and customary ceremonies that are commonly used in traditional rituals. Therefore, it can be concluded that folklore is a cultural heritage transmitted across generations that reflects the values, beliefs, and customs of a society within a tradition.

According to Ainur Rofik (2015), etymologically, the word "tradition" originates from the Latin *traditio*, meaning "to hand over" or "to pass down." In this context, tradition does not only refer to objects or ceremonies but also broadly includes ideas, norms, beliefs, and cultural expressions that continue to exist within society. Lilis (2022) further explains that tradition is a fundamental aspect of social life, encompassing various elements that collectively shape the identity and way of life of a group. It is not merely a legacy of the past but consists of practices and values that are actively maintained and sustained over time.

Syefriani, S. Ritawati, T., and Alsantuni (2021) argue that tradition represents human ideas and feelings expressed through aesthetic values and meaningful behavioral patterns. It is not simply a hereditary habit but a complex manifestation of the collective thoughts and emotions

of a community. This process occurs not only through historical narratives or physical heritage but also through meaningful oral traditions. Based on these perspectives, it can be concluded that tradition is a cultural inheritance that encompasses not only hereditary practices but also ideas, values, and collective expressions that shape the identity and way of life of a society and are continuously preserved across generations.

According to Sibarani (2015), oral tradition is a tradition that lives through spoken expressions transmitted from mouth to mouth and preserved within the collective memory of society, even before the widespread use of writing. Khoiriyah et al. (2019) define oral tradition as the transmission of messages or discourse from one generation to the next through verbal means; it includes not only words but also a combination of speech and specific actions. Collins et al. (2021) further classify oral tradition into three categories: verbal, partially verbal, and non-verbal traditions.

In society, oral tradition serves as a medium for conveying values and teachings, which is why elements such as *hata-hata* are commonly found within these traditions. According to informants, *hata-hata* are traditional expressions of the Mandailing community used in various customary activities, especially in the mangupa-upa procession. *Hata-hata* contain advice, prayers, blessings, and moral values delivered orally by a *parhata* (customary speaker) or elder to individuals or families receiving the *upa-upa*. These expressions are conveyed in refined customary language and carry deep meaning within the social life of the Mandailing community.

According to Siregar (2020), the Mandailing ethnic group is one of the indigenous groups spread across North Sumatra. The majority of the Mandailing people are concentrated in the regions of South Tapanuli and Mandailing Natal. Over time, the Mandailing people have migrated to various regions throughout the Indonesian archipelago, including Rokan Hulu Regency. Rokan Hulu Regency is located in Riau Province and is known as the “Land of a Thousand Suluk” due to the strong religious values and Islamic teachings embraced by its people. The regency consists of 16 sub-districts, 6 urban villages, and 139 rural villages, one of which is Sei Deras Hulu Village. This village is well known for its strong adherence to traditions and cultural practices. Sei Deras Hulu Village is predominantly inhabited by the Mandailing ethnic group, who continue to preserve their traditional customs. One of the traditions that remains deeply rooted in the daily life of the Mandailing community in this village is the mangupa-upa tradition.

Hata-hata in Mandailing society do not merely function as ordinary oral expressions but also contain profound values that are essential to community life. In the study of folklore and oral traditions, traditional expressions often embody meanings related to spiritual, social, and moral dimensions that are transmitted across generations (Danandjaja, 2007).

According to Candi and Jambi (2025), oral literature is an important element of cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions, containing spiritual, social, and moral meanings that contribute to shaping a community's identity. Furthermore, the mangupa-upa tradition holds deep spiritual and social meanings and serves important functions in strengthening social relationships, providing moral support and prayers, and preserving cultural values and identity. Advice and togetherness expressed in mangupa-upa ceremonies are not merely customary practices but represent a form of cultural communication rich in spiritual, social, and moral values.

The mangupa-upa tradition is an essential part of the social structure, embedding social relationships and responsibilities within families and the wider community. Its existence reinforces a sense of togetherness and socio-cultural cohesion that forms the foundation of society. The meaning of mangupa-upa goes beyond simply giving offerings or holding ceremonial feasts; it is deeply embedded with moral, spiritual, and social values (Rugun Panggabean & Mery Sianipar, 2025). Based on this perspective, meanings within oral traditions can be analyzed through the values they contain. In this study, the meanings of *hata-hata* in the

mangupa-upa procession are analyzed into three aspects: spiritual meaning, moral meaning, and social meaning.

In addition to containing various meanings, *hata-hata* also serve several important functions in community life. The mangupa-upa tradition functions as a social bond that preserves ancestral values and strengthens a sense of pride as part of the Mandailing community. Therefore, this ceremony holds not only spiritual and emotional significance but also a strategic role in maintaining socio-cultural continuity. These functions are closely related to the role of oral expressions in guiding the course of the ceremony and shaping social relationships within the community. In general, the functions of *hata-hata* can be categorized into three types: ritual, social, and educational functions (Rugun Panggabean & Mery Sianipar, 2025).

Based on these functions, this study analyzes the role of *hata-hata* in the mangupa-upa procession according to their functions in society, namely ritual, social, and educational functions. In the mangupa-upa tradition, the *hata-hata* delivered by customary elders not only contain prayers and hopes but also convey educational messages that teach the importance of politeness, respect for elders, harmonious living, and adherence to customary norms and religious teachings. Thus, *hata-hata* are not merely part of a customary ceremony but also serve as a medium of cultural education that instills important life values within the community.

Based on an interview with Mr. M. Nur, it was found that the mangupa-upa tradition consists of *pasahat tando* and *pasampe hagirot*. *Pasahat tando* refers to the process of presenting customary symbols to the person being honored in the mangupa-upa ceremony. These symbols usually include turmeric rice, roasted chicken, and eggs placed in a special container. Meanwhile, *pasampe hagirot* means conveying all wishes and intentions during the mangupa-upa process.

According to Sari and Tanjung (2023), *upa-upa tondi* is a tradition aimed at restoring a person's life spirit (*tondi*), especially for those who are ill. Furthermore, Tambunan (2024) explains that the implementation of *upa-upa* can be categorized into four types: (1) *Mangupa hajat tercapai*, performed as an expression of gratitude for achievements such as graduating from school, obtaining a job, or reaching success; (2) *Mangupa sembuh sakit*, conducted for individuals who have recovered from illness as a form of gratitude and restoration of life spirit; (3) *Mangupa selamat*, held for someone who has just been spared from danger or disaster; and (4) *Mangupa khusus*, carried out during important moments such as childbirth, marriage, or official appointments. Thus, it can be concluded that mangupa-upa is a form of gratitude for the blessings given by Allah SWT to the person receiving the ceremony.

The mangupa-upa procession is inseparable from *hata-hata*. One example of *hata-hata* used in the mangupa-upa tradition in Sei Deras Hulu Village is: **“Mardalan-dalan komu tu rimbo raya, sai horas ma tubagasanmu”** (“Walk through the vast forest, may your body always be in good health.”)

The expression above represents one form of oral expression in the mangupa-upa tradition. It conveys hope and advice, encouraging the person being honored to live their life journey with health, safety, and success.

Several previous studies are relevant to this research. A study by Dina Lili Handayani (2024), entitled *The Symbolic Meaning of the Mangupa-upa Tradition in the Mandailing Community of Sukarami Village, Tapung Hulu District, Kampar Regency*, shows that the mangupa-upa tradition involves a series of processes starting from preparing the materials to performing the ceremony and delivering *hata-hata* (advisory expressions). This study focuses on the symbolic meanings of the offerings. Similarly, this research also examines the mangupa-upa tradition of the Mandailing community.

Another study by Fitriani (2024), entitled *The Meaning and Function of the Upah-upah Tradition in the Batak Mandailing Community of Kaiti*, found that mangupa-upa is not merely a cultural expression but also serves as a healing medium believed to bring positive energy and

blessings. This collective belief reflects the relationship between cultural practices and alternative healing systems that continue to exist in local community consciousness.

Furthermore, a study by Harahap and Dora (2025), entitled *The Upa-upa Tondi Tradition as a Spirit-Strengthening Ritual in Mandailing Culture*, discusses this tradition as an important ritual aimed at strengthening spirit and building solidarity. It provides moral support, motivation, and encouragement to individuals or groups facing life challenges. These studies are relevant as they all examine cultural traditions, particularly the mangupa-upa tradition within the Mandailing community.

The reason the researcher chose this topic is that the mangupa-upa tradition is gradually being displaced by modernization, leading younger generations to have less understanding of its meanings, functions, and moral messages. This research is an effort to preserve the position of the tradition so that it remains part of community life in the future. This topic is important as it contributes to enriching cultural data as an anticipatory step against the possible loss of traditional leaders who possess deep knowledge of this tradition.

The objective of this study is to describe the forms of *hata-hata* in the mangupa-upa tradition, to reveal the meanings contained within them, and to explain the functions of mangupa-upa in the life of the community in Sei Deras Hulu Village.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method. According to Slamet Suyanto (2005), qualitative analysis is a data processing method that focuses on words or narratives rather than numerical data. This technique is used to analyze research data in order to describe and discuss findings through conceptual and theoretical approaches. Qualitative analysis aims to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena from the participants' perspectives and to interpret them using relevant conceptual frameworks and theories.

Furthermore, Sujarweni Wiratna (2015) states that a qualitative approach is a research procedure that produces descriptive data. These data generally take the form of words, either spoken or written, as well as observed behaviors of the research subjects. Safrudin et al. (2023) also explain that qualitative research is an approach in which researchers rely on the perspectives of informants as the primary source of data. The process involves in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to obtain detailed information. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument. The primary research instrument in this study is the researcher themselves. However, once the research focus becomes clear, simple supporting instruments may be developed to complement the data and to compare findings obtained through observation and interviews (Sugiyono, 2021).

In this study, the instruments used by the researcher include: (1) interviews, which are used to obtain in-depth information from informants; (2) observation, which serves as a tool to record important aspects while directly witnessing the implementation of the tradition; and (3) documentation, which functions as a supporting tool to capture photos, videos, audio recordings, or field notes related to the mangupa-upa activities. Data collection techniques refer to a series of methods used by researchers to gather information (Makbul, 2021). The data collection techniques used in this study include: (1) interviews, conducted through face-to-face question-and-answer sessions with informants who are customary leaders and *parhata*; (2) observation, carried out by observing and recording *hata-hata* within the mangupa-upa procession; and (3) documentation, which involves collecting data in the form of photographs, videos, and audio recordings. According to Sugiyono (2021), data analysis techniques involve the process of systematically organizing and interpreting data obtained from interviews. In this study, the data analysis techniques include: (1) data reduction, which involves selecting, focusing, and

simplifying relevant information; (2) data presentation in the form of structured narratives; and (3) drawing conclusions supported by empirical findings from the field.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of *hata-hata* used in the mangupa-upu procession among the Mandailing community in Sei Deras Hulu Village, Rokan Hulu Regency, shows that these customary utterances can be classified based on interconnected meanings and functions. This classification reveals that *hata-hata* do not merely function as a series of ritual expressions but also serve as a medium for conveying cultural values that are alive and transmitted orally from generation to generation. Therefore, understanding the genealogy of the mangupa-upu tradition becomes important in tracing its historical roots, social development, and the transformation of meanings within the context of the Mandailing community.

In terms of meaning, *hata-hata* in the mangupa-upu tradition can be grouped into three main categories: (1) **spiritual meaning**, reflected in expressions containing prayers and supplications to God for the safety and blessings of the person receiving the *upa-upu*. These utterances are generally delivered at the core stage of the procession, indicating the central role of spirituality in the practice of mangupa-upu; (2) **social meaning**, seen in expressions emphasizing togetherness, kinship, and harmonious relationships among community members, reflecting the collective values that underpin Mandailing social life; and (3) **moral meaning**, manifested in advice and customary guidance related to norms and ethics in social life. These morally meaningful expressions function as reminders of proper behavior in accordance with prevailing customs.

Spiritual Meaning of *Hata-Hata*

1. “*Sai horas ma tondi nomu na dingin, sai i lopus ma tupudi niari*” (“**May your soul be safe and at peace, from now until the future.**”)

This expression is delivered by the *parhata* during the mangupa-upu procession as part of the ritual speech sequence. The phrase “*sai horas ma tondi nomu na dingin*” contains a prayer addressed to the *tondi*, or the life spirit of an individual. Lexically, the words *horas* and *dingin* convey meanings of safety and peace. In this context, *tondi* is not merely understood as a psychological condition but as a spiritual element believed to determine the balance of an individual’s life.

The phrase “*sai i lopus ma tupudi niari*” extends the meaning of the prayer by emphasizing continuity over time, from the present moment of the ritual into the future. This reflects the belief that the blessings and safety invoked are not temporary but are meant to accompany the individual throughout their life journey. Thus, this expression represents a spiritual meaning in the form of hope for protection, inner peace, and the continuity of spiritual well-being.

2. “*Pir tondi madingin, pir tondi matogu, mulak ma tondi tu badan*” (“**A calm spirit, a stronger spirit, return of the spirit into the body.**”)

This expression is delivered during the mangupa-upu procession as part of the ritual speech conveyed by the *parhata*. The phrase “*pir tondi madingin, pir tondi matogu*” emphasizes the ideal condition of the *tondi*, namely calmness (*madingin*) and strength (*matogu*). These two qualities reflect a balance between inner peace and spiritual resilience.

The phrase “*mulak ma tondi tu badan*” carries a deeper spiritual meaning, referring to the call for the *tondi* to return and reunite with the body. In the local cultural perspective, this condition symbolizes the restoration or strengthening of the balance between the physical and spiritual elements. Thus, this expression interprets the *tondi* as a vital spiritual element whose presence must be maintained so that an individual remains whole and in harmony.

Hata-Hata with Social Meaning

1. “*Sai marsipature huta na, marsihaholongan di bagasan marga.*”

(“Work together to improve the village, and show love within the family (clan).”)

This expression is delivered in the mangupa-upa procession as part of the speech that emphasizes values of togetherness and social responsibility within the community. The phrase “*sai marsipature huta na*” contains a collective call to maintain and develop communal life within the village or homeland. This meaning highlights the importance of the individual’s role as part of a broader social structure.

Meanwhile, the phrase “*marsihaholongan di bagasan marga*” emphasizes the values of affection and harmony within kinship ties. In the cultural context, *marga* is not merely a genealogical identity but also a social space where values of togetherness, solidarity, and moral responsibility are practiced.

Thus, this expression conveys a social meaning in the form of encouragement to maintain harmony, both within the community and in kinship relationships.

2. “*Ulang komu marbada-bada, sai marsitanda do dohot dongan.*”

(“Do not be in conflict with one another; continue to know and connect with your friends.”)

This expression is delivered during the mangupa-upa procession as a form of speech emphasizing the importance of maintaining harmonious social relationships among individuals. The phrase “*ulang komu marbada-bada*” contains a prohibition against conflict and hostility in social life. This prohibition reflects collective values that prioritize peace and stability in interpersonal relationships.

Meanwhile, the phrase “*sai marsitanda do dohot dongan*” highlights the importance of mutual recognition, building closeness, and maintaining good social relations. In the cultural context, “knowing one another” goes beyond formal acquaintance; it also includes recognition, respect, and social bonding. Thus, this expression represents a social meaning in the form of an appeal to preserve harmony and prevent division within the community.

Hata-Hata with Moral Meaning

1. “*Hambeng pahat raja-raja, namanjalaki tu pangalora.*”

(“Be strong and dignified like the king’s ram as you walk through the journey of life.”)

This expression is conveyed in the mangupa-upa procession as part of speech containing advice about the attitudes and character expected in life. The phrase “*hambeng pahat raja-raja*” uses the metaphor of a king’s ram as a symbol of strength, courage, and authority. In the cultural context, the animal is not interpreted literally but represents an ideal character embodying firmness and self-confidence.

The phrase “*namanjalaki tu pangalora*” extends this metaphor to the journey of life, which is understood as a process of facing various challenges and responsibilities. Therefore, this expression conveys a moral meaning in the form of encouragement to possess a strong, dignified, and determined character, without losing direction or principles in navigating life.

2. “*Mula madung ari Selasa, angkon tibo ma ari Rabu.*”

(“If it is already Tuesday, then Wednesday will surely come.”)

This expression is delivered in the mangupa-upa procession as a form of speech containing advice about process and continuity in life. The phrase “*mula madung ari Selasa, angkon tibo ma ari Rabu*” conveys a cause-and-effect relationship that is certain and sequential. Metaphorically, the transition of days represents the journey of life, which unfolds through specific stages.

Discussion

In this context, the moral message conveyed is that every process requires time and cannot be bypassed. This expression instills values of patience, perseverance, and acceptance of life’s stages. Thus, the moral meaning contained is not judgmental but rather teaches a realistic and wise attitude in facing the journey of life.

In addition to containing meanings, *hata-hata* in the mangupa-upa tradition also have clear functions in the implementation of customary ceremonies. These functions are related to the role of speech in regulating the course of the ceremony and shaping social relationships within the community. In general, the functions of *hata-hata* can be grouped into three categories: (1) **Ritual Function** In this context, *hata-hata* serve as a medium for conveying prayers, hopes, and blessings to the individual being honored. The utterances delivered during the mangupa-upa procession create a sacred atmosphere and mark specific stages in the customary ceremony. (2) **Social Function** This function is reflected in the role of *hata-hata* as a means of strengthening kinship ties and affirming the social structure within the community. Through the expressions conveyed in the mangupa-upa procession, relationships among family members and the wider community become closer, reflecting values of togetherness and mutual respect. (3) **Educational Function** *Hata-hata* also function as a medium for transmitting advice, moral values, and life teachings to the younger generation. Through these expressions, the community passes down cultural values, customary norms, and ancestral wisdom that serve as guidance in daily life.

Ritual Function

1. “*Sai horas ma tondi nomu na dingin, sai i lopus ma tupudi niari*”

(“May your soul be safe and at peace, from now until the future.”)

In the mangupa-upa procession, this expression functions as a ritual utterance that strengthens the sacred dimension of the ceremony. The prayer delivered by the *parhata* positions this expression as a medium for conveying hopes and blessings symbolically. Its ritual function lies in the role of language as a bridge between humans and the spiritual forces believed to be present in the procession. Through the recitation of this *hata-hata*, the mangupa-upa ceremony is not merely a formal activity but is understood as an effort to seek continuous safety and inner peace.

2. “*Pir tondi madingin, pir tondi matogu, mulak ma tondi tu badan*”

(“A calm spirit, a stronger spirit, return of the spirit into the body.”)

In the context of the mangupa-upa procession, this expression functions as a ritual utterance aimed at calling, affirming, and stabilizing the presence of the *tondi*. The phrase “*mulak ma tondi tu badan*” carries a symbolic role as a spiritual invocation for the soul to remain united with the body. Its ritual function lies in reinforcing the collective belief in the importance of spiritual balance as the foundation of safety and well-being for the individual undergoing the ceremony.

Social Function

1. “*Sai marsipature huta na, marsihaholongan di bagasan marga*”

(“Work together to improve the village, and show love within the family (clan).”)

In the mangupa-upa procession, this expression functions as a reminder and reinforcement of social norms within the community. Through this utterance, participants are encouraged to maintain harmonious relationships, support one another, and contribute to collective well-being. Its social function lies in transmitting values of togetherness and affection across generations, ensuring that the mangupa-upa oral tradition not only preserves ritual aspects but also strengthens the social structure of the community.

2. “*Ulang komu marbada-bada, sai marsitanda do dohot dongan*”

(“Do not be in conflict with one another; continue to know and connect with your friends.”)

In the mangupa-upa procession, this expression serves as a means of reinforcing social norms that regulate individual behavior in society. It reminds participants of the importance of avoiding conflict and building respectful relationships. Its social function lies in instilling values of peace and unity, allowing the mangupa-upa oral tradition to contribute to maintaining long-term social harmony.

3. “*Hambeng pahat raja-raja, namanjalaki tu pangalora*”

(“Be strong and dignified like the king’s ram as you walk through the journey of life.”)

In the mangupa-upa procession, this expression functions as a reinforcement of social values related to an individual's role and position within society. It encourages individuals to demonstrate confidence, dignity, and responsibility in social interactions. Its social function lies in shaping an ideal self-image according to local cultural norms, so that individuals are able to contribute positively and gain respect within their social environment.

Educational Function

1. *“Mula madung ari Selasa, angkon tibo ma ari Rabu”*
(“If it is already Tuesday, then Wednesday will surely come.”)

In the mangupa-upa procession, this expression functions as an educational medium that conveys life lessons through simple and easily understood analogies. This utterance helps participants understand the concepts of process, time, and continuity symbolically. Its educational function lies in its ability to instill values of patience and mental preparedness, encouraging individuals to go through each stage of life with maturity and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of *hata-hata* in the mangupa-upa oral tradition, it can be concluded that this tradition is closely connected to the life of the Mandailing community. Mangupa-upa is not only practiced as part of a customary ritual but also functions as a medium for conveying values that shape the community's worldview.

The *hata-hata* expressions used in the mangupa-upa procession contain various meanings, including spiritual, social, and moral meanings. These meanings are reflected through prayers for the safety of the soul (*tondi*), the strengthening of social relationships, and the instillation of character values and individual maturity. In addition to their meanings, *hata-hata* also serve important functions within the community, namely ritual, social, and educational functions.

Thus, the mangupa-upa tradition cannot be understood merely as a ceremonial oral tradition but rather as a cultural practice that plays an active role in maintaining spiritual balance, social harmony, and the transmission of life values within the Mandailing community. Therefore, preserving the mangupa-upa tradition is essential as an effort to sustain the cultural identity and values of the Mandailing people.

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