

## THE MEANING AND EDUCATION VALUE OF THE *GORGA* BATAK TOBA

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### Abstract

*Gorga* Batak Toba is a traditional carving art of the Toba Batak tribe living in North Sumatra, usually used to decorate traditional Toba Batak houses commonly called Bolon Houses. Each curve of the shape and color selection that appears has a meaning and character education value that is very sacred. *Gorga* Batak Toba has a characteristic shape and color that are not owned by other carvings, so this becomes a cultural heritage that must be preserved by the next generation of this ethnicity. However, along with the fact that this is inversely proportional, the younger generation today considers regional culture to be outdated, slangy, and conservative. Western culture is slowly gaining interest, and the nation's own culture is being eroded and forgotten. Based on the data showing that the number of young people from the Millennial Generation to Post-Gen Z reached 60.46%, or around 163.37% of the total Indonesian population, it is clear that the younger generation plays a very important role in the preservation of ancestral culture. The purpose of this research is to introduce and deepen the younger generation's understanding of the cultural heritage of the *Gorga* Toba Batak. The next goal is to reveal the values contained in *Gorga* Batak Toba. This research uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, where researchers are directly involved in the lives of the Toba Batak community. This research provides insight into the importance of preserving *Gorga* Batak Toba as an integral part of the Toba Batak cultural identity.

**Keywords:** *Gorga* Batak Toba.

### Introduction

Indonesia has a very diverse culture, this culture is preserved and used as a very valuable heritage for the community. Indonesia believes that culture is the result of the heritage of previous communities that need attention in the present and future. The heritage of a country's civilization, including culture, is the identity of a nation that must be preserved and defended. Article 32 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution mandates that "The State promotes Indonesian National culture amid world civilization by guaranteeing the freedom of the community to maintain and develop these cultural values" (1945 Constitution in Farid, 2017: 10). Here it is clear that culture is something very valuable to be preserved, as

Koentjaraningrat (2009: 144) says culture is a whole system of ideas, actions, and human works in the context of living in a society that belongs to humanity itself. Cultural heritage that is introduced and published to the public, will be maintained both in terms of quality and intensity to always be known and maintained (Ramadhan, 2023: 03).

Furthermore, Koentjaraningrat (2009: 150) divides culture into seven elements, namely language, knowledge system, social organization, tool system and life technology, livelihood system, religious system, and art. Judging from the last element, namely art, Indonesia has unique and interesting works of art, be it performance art, architecture, or fine arts. When viewed from fine arts, Indonesia

certainly has various forms of fine art, such as sculptures, paintings, ceramics, weaving, textiles, the decorative variety. There are various forms and colors of ornamental motifs in Indonesia, where each province has different motifs, shapes, colors, meanings, and values (Kuntjoro, 2010: 247).

If examined broadly, decorative variety is a work of art that aims to beautify an object by inserting decorative images. The results of this decorative variety can be inspired by flora, fauna, figurative, and geometric forms that can be applied to two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art (Fireza, 2020: 185). The number of decorative motifs that exist in Indonesia, in each province has its characteristics, let's say North Sumatra Province. The decorative variety in North Sumatra consists of 8 indigenous ethnicities, each of which has a different style of art. The original ethnicity is Batak which is still divided into 6 (six) sub-ethnicities, namely Toba, Simalungun, Karo, Pakpak, Mandailing, and Angkola, plus Malay and Nias (Saragi, 2017: 76). Each ethnic group has different cultures and artworks, such as the Toba Batak ethnic group, which has an ancestral heritage called *Gorga* Batak Toba.

*Gorga* Batak Toba is a carving art that is a legacy of the ancestors of the Toba Batak tribe (Simanjuntak, 2019: 224). The placement of *Gorga* is often placed in parts of the Toba Batak traditional house or what is also called the Bolon house (Regita, 2018: 74), this application is not just for decoration but has a deep meaning and philosophical value in the life of the Toba Batak people themselves (Ditasona, 2018: 02). The meaning and value of this philosophy arise from the shape and color of the *Gorga* itself. Every curve of shape and color selection that appears has a very sacred meaning and philosophical value.

*Gorga* Batak Toba has a characteristic shape and color that is not owned by other carvings, such as the shape of mythological creatures, geometric patterns, animals, plants, curved lines, and other abstract shapes, which of course the presence of this shape has its reasons for the ancestors. As for the colors that appear, they are not present suddenly, but with very strong reasons for the ancestors to choose these colors. In *Gorga* Batak Toba, there are three main colors, namely red, black, and white, these three colors are called *Tiga Bolit* (Siburian, 2022: 54).



Figure 1. Bolon House



Figure 2. Three Colours in the *Gorga* Singa-Singa

In the preservation of *Gorga* Batak Toba, the role of the younger generation is highly expected by this nation. As time goes by, there are important concerns to be considered, this is done so that the ancestral heritage of *Gorga* Batak Toba is maintained and always preserved. In the midst of the swift flow of globalization, Western culture slowly began to enter Indonesia, and gradually this culture became the current trend among the younger generation.

This young generation considers regional culture as something that is outdated, not slang, and conservative. Western culture is slowly gaining interest and the nation's own culture is being eroded and forgotten over time. This situation is very unfortunate, their sense of pride and concern to preserve their own national culture is very lacking. Their interest in learning about their own culture is also low. This lack of interest from the younger generation cannot just drag on, the younger generation must have an important role and contribute to preserving the ancestral heritage of their own culture, one of which is the ancestral heritage of the Toba Batak ethnicity called *Gorga* Batak Toba. Several challenges are being faced by the younger generation regarding *Gorga* Batak Toba, where the younger generation of this ethnicity tends to be more interested in digital platforms and modern game applications rather than learning and appreciating their traditional arts such as *Gorga* Batak Toba. Then another thing that makes *Gorga* Batak Toba uninterested to the younger generation is their lack of understanding that there are educational values and cultural values contained in *Gorga* Batak Toba itself, the younger generation needs to be given an understanding of the educational values and cultural values contained in *Gorga* Batak Toba. They need to know that *Gorga* Batak Toba is not only a visual art, but also a means to teach

character education, ethics, cultural traditions, and harmony in the family and society of the Toba Batak tribe itself. The anxiety of this cultural heritage being forgotten will happen, where from the results of the author's interviews with several young people from the Toba Batak ethnicity, as many as 75% of the young generation do not know about the meaning and educational value of the *Gorga* Toba Batak itself, then as many as 25% of them do not know the shape and color of the *Gorga* Toba Batak. Almost 90% of them do not know the names of *Gorga* Batak Toba motifs. The data was obtained from the author's interview with several young people in Samosir on 21 January 2024 (Azis, 2024: 01).

This explains that there are symptoms of problems that arise from this situation, which include most of the younger generation not knowing the meaning contained in the *Gorga* Batak Toba. If the younger generation understands more deeply the meaning contained in *Gorga* Batak Toba, they will love and appreciate their cultural heritage more than outside cultures. Cultural heritage is a priceless treasure, and understanding its meaning and philosophy is a stimulus to strengthen love and deepen identity towards the ancestral culture itself (Tadesse, 2023: 12). Furthermore, the younger generation of the Toba Batak ethnic group lacks knowledge that the *Gorga* Toba Batak contains educational values that are important to recognize and understand. If the younger generation can understand the educational values contained in *Gorga* Batak Toba, it can increase the sense of togetherness, love of local wisdom, and mutual respect between each other in the social life of the people of the Toba Batak tribe itself. So the younger generation can take inspiration and learn to apply these values in their daily lives (Sinaga, 2024).

Because this application has a positive impact on restoring the love of the

younger generation for the local culture of the *Gorga* Batak Toba, namely the younger generation of the Toba Batak tribe will be able to gain a better understanding of the cultural values of the *Gorga* Batak Toba. Indirectly, they have received informal education that teaches them how to maintain and preserve traditional values, cultural heritage, and history of the Toba Batak tribe. The formation of an attitude that is proud of and appreciates its cultural heritage, so there are initiatives to create activities related to cultural development related to *Gorga* Batak Toba, such as creating *Gorga* Batak Toba carving community activities, cultural festivals, workshops, and various other initiatives that can promote awareness of their cultural values to the next generation. This way has an impact on the younger generation of the Toba Batak tribe to be able to understand, respect, and love their cultural heritage, thus helping to preserve it for the future (Swidler, 2001: 110).

This research specifically focuses on three main aspects. First, it focuses specifically on uncovering the meaning of the creative heritage of form and color design of the *Gorga* Batak Toba. This involves an in-depth analysis of the visual elements found in *Gorga* Batak Toba, such as shapes, motifs, symbols, lines, and the use of distinctive colors. Secondly, this research will also in detail reveal the character education values contained in the *Gorga* Batak Toba. This involves understanding the moral messages, ethics, and life principles contained in the motifs and symbols used in *Gorga* Batak Toba. Thirdly, digitizing the shapes and colors of *Gorga* Batak Toba, this research will also delve further into the design of shapes and colors as the creative heritage of *Gorga* Batak Toba. This will include analyses of the aesthetics, manufacturing techniques, redesigning, as well as the role and function of *Gorga* Batak Toba in

the context of the culture and life of the Toba Batak people. This research, is expected to better understand and appreciate the cultural richness and values contained in the traditional art of *Gorga* Batak Toba (Manalu, 2023: 198).

Based on the empirical facts described earlier, this research presents a contributing and innovative novelty that can be evaluated from several aspects. Firstly, in terms of research objectives, this research will highlight the *Gorga* Batak Toba and explore the meanings contained in it through the analysis of the shapes and colors of the various visual elements contained in it. Secondly, in terms of research scope, the approach taken in this research has significant differences from the approaches generally taken by previous researchers. While previous studies tend not to explore and analyze in depth the character education values implied in the *Gorga* Batak Toba, this study presents a more comprehensive study of the character education values contained in the *Gorga* Batak Toba in depth. Third, in terms of modernization, this research will present an updated visualization in the form of the digitalisation of *Gorga* Batak Toba. In this redesign process, aesthetic values and manufacturing techniques will be carefully considered, but still pay attention to the authenticity and function of the *Gorga* Batak Toba itself. Thus, this research not only offers a new contribution in enriching the understanding of the *Gorga* Batak Toba but also opens space for deeper exploration and interpretation of the cultural values and character education contained therein (Sitorus, 2023).

### **Methodology**

Samosir Regency is the location of this research, which is the result of the expansion of the parent regency, Toba Regency (previously still named Toba Samosir), which was formed based on

Law Number 36 of 2003 concerning the Establishment of Samosir Regency and Serdang Bedagai Regency in North Sumatra Province. The formation of the regency was inaugurated on 7 January 2004 by the Minister of Home Affairs on behalf of the President of the Republic of Indonesia. The long history of the Samosir Regency, however, dates back to 1956, when the region was still part of North Tapanuli Regency as the parent regency which was later divided into several new regencies. The population of Samosir Regency in mid-2023 was 143,944 people, with an area of  $\pm 2,069.05$  km<sup>2</sup>, consisting of a land area of  $\pm 1,444.25$  km<sup>2</sup> (69.80%), which is all of Samosir Island surrounded by Lake Toba and part of the mainland area of Sumatra Island, and a lake area of  $\pm 624.80$  km<sup>2</sup> (30.20%).



Figure 3. Research Location

This research will use the ethnographic method referring to Spradley (2007) the research will apply an interdisciplinary approach to the science of community anthropology and the creative heritage of the ancestors in the form of *Gorga* Batak Toba. The study is conducted by examining the contextual meaning and structure of shapes and colors found in the *Gorga* Batak Toba. Spradley's step-by-step forward research flow uses 12 steps.

This step is an important foundation in Spradley's ethnographic research, as it is the informants who will provide in-depth data and insights into the research topic. Here is a brief explanation of Spradley's 12 research steps: 1). Selecting Informants. Informants who have rich

knowledge and experience about *Gorga* Batak Toba.

Informants are willing and able to be interviewed and observed, and researchers establish a good and trusting relationship with informants. 2) Interviewing Informants, conducting in-depth and open interviews with informants. Using interview techniques, such as structured, semi-structured, and narrative interviews, then recording the results of the interviews carefully and in detail. 3) Making Ethnographic Notes, and recording all observations and experiences while in the field. Take notes that are descriptive, rich in detail, and accurate, using various means of note-taking, such as handwriting, audio and video recording. 4) Asking Descriptive Questions, using descriptive questions to dig deeper into *Gorga* Batak Toba, by asking open-ended and neutral questions. 5) Analysing Interview Results, re-reading interviews, and ethnographic notes, then identifying emerging themes and patterns, then creating codes to categorize the data (Coding). 6) Conduct Domain Analysis. Map the main domains of the *Gorga* Batak Toba. Where domains are grouping the main concepts in the research topic, identifying elements and structures in each domain. 7) Create Structural Questions, using structural questions to dig deeper into each domain, then create questions about how the elements in the domain are interconnected, and then find out what the meaning, value, and function of each element is. 8) Making a Taxonomic Analysis, taxonomy here groups the domains used to organize and categorize objects, concepts, or phenomena based on certain characteristics or attributes in *Gorga* Batak Toba. 9) Asking Contrast Questions, contrast questions are used to compare and contrast the elements in the domains, by finding out what the differences and similarities are between the elements, and studying how these

differences and similarities affect the research topic. 10) Create Component Analysis, create a component analysis for each element in the domain. A component analysis is a detailed description of the element, explaining how it is made up of smaller parts, and then how these parts relate to each other. 11) Finding Cultural Themes in the Research, after finding the cultural themes in the research, then identify the cultural themes that emerge from the data according to the research topic. Cultural themes are ideas, meanings, values, or beliefs that underlie the culture in Gorga Batak Toba. Explain how these themes are manifested in cultural behaviors and practices in the form of a work of art. 12) Writing Ethnography, expressing the results of research in an ethnography. Describing rich, exhaustive, and in-depth data about the culture under study, then ensuring the ethnography of this research is clear, structured, and easy to understand (Rezhi, 2023).

Specifically, to understand the structure of the *Gorga Batak Toba*, a textual analysis or review of the meaning of shape and color design relating to the relationship between several shape and color elements such as shape and color identity, interpretation, and summary will be used. The informants of this research, referring to the criteria in ethnographic research, fulfill at least five requirements, as stated by James P. Spradley in his book "The Ethnographer's Method" (1979). The five conditions are 1) Full Enculturation, where an informant must have deep knowledge and experience of the *Gorga Batak Toba*. They must have lived and grown up in the culture, or have actively participated in the culture over a long period or period. 2) Direct Involvement, an informant must be willing to be directly involved in the research process, an informant must be willing to be interviewed, observed, and invited to participate in research

activities. 3) Unknown Cultural Atmosphere. Informants should be able to provide information about aspects of the culture that are unknown to the researcher. They should be able to help the researcher understand the meaning and function of the cultural behaviors and practices under study. 4) Sufficient Time. Informants should have sufficient time to be involved in the research process, as ethnographic research requires a long period to build relationships with informants and collect rich, extensive, and in-depth data. 5) Non-Analytical. An informant should be able to provide information about their culture objectively and without prejudice, and coercion from anyone and any party. They should not try to interpret or analyze their own culture (Rezhi, 2023). Therefore, informants in this research are planned to be cultural actors, *Gorga Batak Toba* craftsmen, artists, the younger generation of *Toba Batak* ethnicity, and the surrounding community in the research location distribution area, namely Samosir Regency.

When it comes to ethnographic research, there are some distinctive data collection techniques, that distinguish it from other qualitative research methods. These techniques are specifically designed to enable researchers to understand the culture and way of life of the people under study deeply and holistically. Here are some typical data collection techniques in ethnographic research: 1) Participant Observation. The researcher is directly involved in the daily activities of the community under study, the researcher observes behaviors, interactions, and cultural practices directly. The researcher may participate in cultural activities, such as rituals, ceremonies, or community activities. Participant observation allows researchers to understand the culture from the perspective of the community under study. 2) In-depth Interviews, researchers



conduct in-depth conversations with key informants to gain a deeper understanding of the Gorga Batak Toba and their experiences. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or narrative (Genzuek, 2003).

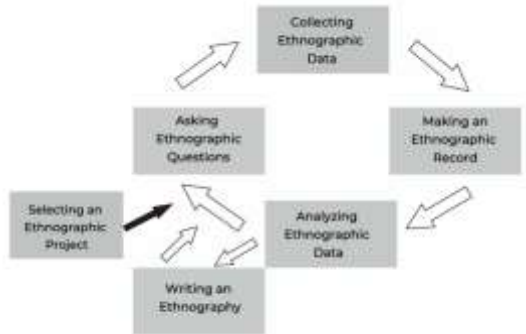


Figure 4. Ethnography and Grounded Theory

The type of research used in this research is qualitative research, with a suitable approach method which is an ethnographic approach, where this method examines in depth the culture and practices of the Toba Batak community related to the *Gorga* Batak Toba. The first thing that must be done by the researcher is to conduct participatory observation, which follows the daily activities of the Toba Batak community, especially those related to the making of *Gorga* Batak Toba carvings. Then researchers conducted in-depth interviews, where researchers conducted interviews with *Gorga* craftsmen, traditional leaders, and community members to reveal the symbolic meaning and character education values of the *Gorga* Batak Toba. Next, we conducted document and artifact studies, where we analyzed documents, photos, and artifacts related to *Gorga* to understand the history and evolution of the shape and color of *Gorga* Batak Toba. The next step is to collect observational data, by directly observing the process of making *Gorga* Batak Toba, until finally a conclusion is drawn from the research problem to be resolved (Wilson, 2009).



Figure 5. *Gorga* Batak Toba Carvers

### Finding and Discussion

The findings in this research cover various aspects that reveal how the *Gorga* Batak Toba functions not only as a work of art but also as a medium of character education and cultural identity. The following are some of the findings resulting from this research: 1). The symbolic meaning of the shape, color, and motif of the *Gorga* Batak Toba, the research found that the colors and motifs on the *Gorga* Batak Toba have a deep symbolic meaning. Red symbolizes courage and strength, white symbolizes purity and sincerity, while black symbolizes majesty and wisdom. Certain motifs also represent aspects of the life and beliefs of the Toba Batak community. 2). Character education values perseverance and discipline, the process of making *Gorga* requires perseverance, rigor, and patience. These values are instilled in *Gorga* craftsmen and passed down to the younger generation. There is cooperation and collegiality. *Gorga*-

making often involves cooperation between community members. This teaches the importance of cooperation and collegiality in achieving a common goal. 3). Respect for tradition, through *Gorga*, the younger generation is taught to respect and preserve their traditions and cultural heritage. It also teaches the value of respecting history and cultural identity. 4). The social role of *Gorga* in Toba Batak Society's Cultural Identity. *Gorga* serves as a symbol of Toba Batak's cultural identity. The use of *Gorga* in various traditional ceremonies and rites reinforces a sense of collective pride and identity among the Toba Batak people. 5). Non-Formal Education Media, *Gorga* acts as a non-formal education medium where cultural values and knowledge are conveyed visually. This creates an interactive and contextualized learning method. 6). Challenges in cultural preservation, globalization, and modernization this research identified that globalization and modernization bring challenges to *Gorga* preservation. Many younger generations have started to forget the traditions and values contained in *Gorga*. 7). Lack of Formal Education: There is an urgent need to include learning about *Gorga* in the formal education curriculum to ensure that these cultural values are taught in a systematic and structured manner. 8). Strategies for Preservation and Development Integration in Formal Education, Recommendations to integrate learning about *Gorga* in arts and culture subjects in schools in North Sumatra.

## Conclusions

The disclosure of the Meaning and Character Education Value of *Gorga* Batak Toba covers various important aspects that have been revealed through in-depth analysis of the symbolism, character education values, and socio-cultural role of *Gorga* Batak Toba. The following conclusions can be drawn from this research, The Symbolic Meaning of

*Gorga* Batak Toba, where the colours and motifs are distinctive, is not only a work of art but also loaded with symbolic meanings that reflect the religious, spiritual values, and philosophy of life of the Toba Batak people. Colors such as red, white, and black each have specific meanings that reflect important aspects of the life and beliefs of the Toba Batak people. The *Gorga* Batak Toba contains character education values that are essential for the personal and social development of the younger generation. Values such as perseverance, discipline, cooperation, and respect for tradition are internalized through the process of making and using *Gorga* in daily life and traditional ceremonies. *Gorga* serves as an effective non-formal educational tool in conveying these values. The Socio-Cultural role of the Toba Batak *Gorga* plays an important role in strengthening the cultural identity and sense of collective pride of the Toba Batak people. The use of *Gorga* in various traditional houses, rites, and ceremonies helps to maintain the continuity of traditions and strengthen social ties within the Toba Batak community. It also serves as a visual medium that communicates cultural values to the younger generation and the wider community. Challenges and Preservation Globalisation and modernization present challenges to the preservation of *Gorga* Batak Toba. Many younger generations have begun to forget this tradition, which points to the need for systematic efforts to maintain and develop this cultural heritage. The lack of formal education about *Gorga* and the values it contains is one factor that threatens its preservation. Strategic Recommendations This research proposes several strategies for the preservation and development of *Gorga* Batak Toba, which are integrated into the Education Curriculum advocating that learning about *Gorga* be included in arts and culture subjects in schools, particularly in North Sumatra.



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