

# Urdo-urdo: A Folk Song Containing Phylosophical and Cultural Art Values of Simalungun Ethnic Group

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Abstract: This paper discusses the folk song of Simalungun ethnic group which is classified into folklore. There is a folk song in Simalungun ethnic group that is sung to lull a child to sleep. A child will fall asleep after the song is sung for several times with soft and soothing voice. When a child sleeps well, his mother will be able to do daily chores. This lullaby is not only used to lull a child to sleep, but it contains philosophical values, namely advice to the child so that he will bring benefits to the ethnic group when he is grown up, and he will not become a burden to other people. In addition, its cultural art value is seen from a mother singing the song beautifully, and it indirectly presents a cultural art show to the people who hear her singing.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Simalungun ethnic group is one of the five other ethnic groups of Batak, namely: Toba, Mandailing/Angkola, Simalungun, Karo, and Pakpak/Dairi (Payung, 1993). Administratively, Simalungun ethnic group is found in Simalungun Regency, North Sumatera Province. This ethnic group has a folk song, *urdourdo*, which is used to lull a child to sleep. Its social function is to be a child caring of a mother to her child, which is used in her daily life from generation to generation. *Urdourdo* is categorized into the genre of folk song or folklore consisting of words and songs, spread orally among particular collectives, in traditional form with many variants (James, 1994).

Folklore is derived from English, a compound word, which is formed by two words *folk* and *lore* (James, 1994). Based on this definition, it is concluded that Simalungun ethnic has had *urdourdo* from generations to generations; and it has been used since the time of their ancestors and is still used and functions in daily life until now.

*Urdourdo* is a part of the traditional music of Simalungun ethnic group called *doding* (song/vocal music). Talking about music, Merriam calls it a symbol of things related to ideas or behavior of an ethnic group (Alan, 1964). Music is a part of art which is one of the elements of a culture (Koentjaraningrat, 1986) and is one of human's universal needs (Boedhisantoso, 1982), which is never separated from social context (Mellalotoa, 1989).

## 2 METHOD

The research used descriptive method with qualitative approach. It focuses on general principles underlying embodiment of existing phenomena or patterns in social life. It analyzed social and cultural phenomena using the culture of the ethnic group concerned to obtain the picture of the prevailing patterns; and the patterns found were analyzed again using objective theories (Parsudi, 1986). As for the data—they were collected in a research with qualitative approach—hence through observation and interviews.

This research employed participant observation. A researcher must fully participate in the life of the person studied. Therefore, the researcher observed the usage and function of Simalungun folk songs.

Interview method is a method used for a particular task to obtain oral information or standpoint from a respondent, by face to face conversation<sup>4</sup>. In order to obtain more accurate information, an in-depth interview had to be conducted repeatedly, so that it obtained the kinds, functions, cultural art values, and development of Simalungun folk songs.

Once the data were collected, the data analysis process began. The expressions and interviews were sorted to discover the kinds, usage, function, and philosophical and cultural art values.

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Process of Learning UrdoUrdo

In general, like most of the characteristics of folklore, there are six characteristics of the folklore for Simalungun children:

1. It is spread orally (oral tradition), which is spread of word of mouth (in Simalungun dialect, it is called *martakkapbabah*). Enculturation takes place naturally, and it is not tightly scheduled; it is adjusted with the daily life patterns of Simalungun people.
2. It is traditional which means that it is spread in relative constant or standard form. This kind of form has become the norm or general rules to sing it; it cannot be changed as the singer wishes, yet it complies with the provisions that have been collectively agreed. This song is also spread collectively for a quite long time (*at least two generations*). Thus, it is functional in the socio-cultural context of the ethnic group.
3. The existing *urdourdo* for kids have many versions and different variants. Although it generally has constant and standard form, it still has versions and differences because it has been improvised by composers or singers, and it is also affected by oral enculturation. Thus, the accuracy of its tone and melody is not prioritized.
4. *Urdourdo* for kids is anonymous, meaning that the name of its original composer is no longer known. It is unknown because this song has become a tradition for very long time and it is not a popular culture which requires a composer and royalty. It is a part of the life of a group who puts higher priority to social functions.
5. *Urdourdo* plays a function in the ethnic group. It is its main characteristic, that it is functional in social life. One of its functions is its socio-cultural function, that is, to entertain children. It also functions as the facility to learn the life values of its ethnic group, to integrate the role of family, either the nuclear family or larger structure of Simalungun ethnic group, to maintain the continuity of Simalungun culture, and to maintain physical and religious health, and so on.
6. *Urdourdo* is a collective possession. It is collectively owned by the ethnic group, not individually. In this case, it is collectively owned by Simalungun ethnic group. Therefore, it belongs to Simalungun ethnic group, and its intellectual rights is held by Simalungun ethnic group, not only by those who live in Simalungun, but also by those who live in the city or other regions.

Based on the above-mentioned characteristics of *urdourdo*, Simalungun ethnic group learns the song

orally or by the spread of word of mouth (*martakkapbabah*). A mother, or maybe a grandmother, may hold their baby while singing *urma lo dayok*, lull and pat their baby to sleep slowly. This song is sung repeatedly by a mother or other mothers. It certainly is followed by their daughters or others' daughter who hear it. They later get used to singing the song and memorize its lyrics. They then try singing it and as the time goes, they are able to imitate it. They can lull their younger brothers by this song as they have learned it.

#### 3.2 Child Caring in Simalungun Ethnic Group

When babies are born, their mother is responsible to take good care of them, although they live with their grandmother, siblings, mother's siblings or even father. In general during this time, *amboru* (the sister of the babies' father) comes to take care of them, especially if the baby is a baby girl; because it means that the baby girl is the candidate of her daughter-in-law in the future. The child caring of Simalungun ethnic group is bound with the agrarian life in Simalungun. Thus, the caring is also determined by the environment which culture is farming. The time and space used to take care of the children depend on the patterns of agrarian life.

The person who babysits is called *parorot*, who takes care, watches and looks after the baby (Saragih, 1964). The babysitter who lulls the baby to sleep by singing is called *pangurdo* does not directly lull the baby to sleep, but she firstly plays with the baby by singing child songs. She usually soothes the baby by holding the baby's armpits, lifting the baby up by singing a lullaby called *tihtolol*. The song has cheerful rhyme, is repeatedly sung, and contains loving lyrics, wishes, and movements such as lifting the baby.

This *urdourdo* has soothing song and melody, is repeatedly sung, and contains loving lyrics, wishes, and movements such as lifting and patting the baby slowly so that the baby falls asleep.

It is clearly explained that *pangurdo* is the female family such as the baby's mother or aunt. The baby's father actually functions as *parorot* (caretaker) of his child as well—when the mother is cooking or getting water, but a father very rarely or even is not able to sing *urdourdo*. This emphasizes that the child caring in Simalungun culture is usually done by women. On the other hand, the main duty of a man is to earn a living to fulfill his family needs. Therefore, it is understandable that only women are accustomed to singing *urdourdo*. Thus, *urdourdo* is a manifestation

of love, affection and attention of the baby's mother or aunt to the baby.

### 3.3 Study on the Show, Music, and Text

Theory of Semiotics is employed to study the meaning lying in the music and text of this child song. Since semiotics is used in many disciplines; thus, this theory is employed particularly in the context of ethnomusicology, to study the intrinsic aspects of the music and the meaning lying in the music and text of the song and show.

Semiotics studies on how a meaning is created and communicated through symbol system that builds an art event. Two pioneers of Semiotics, de Saussure, a linguist from Switzerland, and Peirce, a philosopher from the United States of America, (Peirce, 1986) view languages as a system that creates symbols consisting of sound image or signifier related to a concept (*signified*). Every language has its own sound image. Peirce also interprets languages as a symbol system, consisting of three parts that are related to each other: (1) representatum, (2) interpretant, and (3) object. In art study, it means that it requires to consider the role of artists and audiences as the observers of the symbols and to understand the process of creating a show or composition. Peirce distinguishes symbols into three categories, they are: icon, index, and symbol. If the symbol resembles what is being expressed such as a photo, it is called an icon. If the symbol shows an existence of something, like the existence of smoke is followed by fire, it is called an index. If the symbol does not resemble what is expressed, such as *garuda* which is used as the symbol of the Republic of Indonesia, it is called a symbol<sup>9</sup>.

Scientifically, the term semiotics is derived from Greek *semeion* (Sudjiman, 1992) state that semiotics refers to a sign or gesture in a larger symbol system. While pragmatics studies the impression of the use of a symbol in communication process, semiotics analyzes the implicit and explicit meaning of a symbol in daily life. It can explain the problems related to symbols, including the usage of symbols, meaning of a message and way of delivery.

There are three sides correlated among symbol, object and meaning (Stephen, 1992). A symbol represents the expressed object. A receiver who relates a symbol with object and meaning, is called an interpretant, who functions as the intermediaries between the symbol and its object. Therefore, the meaning of a symbol only exists in the interpretant's mind, after it is related to its object.

In music, including child songs, a song is usually studied by semiotic analysis.

Martinez's writing entitled "A Semiotic Theory of Music: According to a Peircean" offers three fields of inter-related studies in the semiotics of music. Firstly, intrinsic semiotics of music, or the study on signs of music itself, which focuses on the internal part of music. It consists of musical quality aspects, actualization of musical work and organization in music which is seen as musical systems. Secondly, music reference, or the study on musical signs and their correlation with any possible object, which focuses on the significance of music to the larger classification of object. Thirdly, musical interpretation, or the study on musical signs which is correlated with its various interpretation, and focuses on the actions of musical signs in man's mind who receive it or even further. Musical interpretation is divided into three sub studies, namely: (a) musical perception, (b) musical show, and (c) musical intellectualization covering analysis, criticism, theory of music composition, semiotics of music and composition (Jose, 1998).

According to the theories, the child song in Simalungun culture has characteristics such as: song of *UrmaloDayok* which intrinsic characteristic is that it uses pentatonic musical notes consisting notes c, d, e, f, and g. Note g, in particular uses the one below the middle c and the one above the middle c. Pentatonic scales is decorated with fis, especially to move from f to g. This fis becomes a decoration and aesthetical "bridge" in accordance with the principle of Simalungun musical system. The basic note of *UrmaloDayok* is c, with characteristics, the song is ended with note c, the tone and modus are also at note c, its duration is relatively long, it emphasizes that the basic note of the song is note c. The form of songs presented is repeated song (*ostinato*). *UrmaloDayok* puts more emphasis on melody aspect which launches and prolongs the last note duration of the phrase. It is based by the advantage of this song to lull a child to sleep, which is not too much bound with rhythm, but with swinging the child instead using the hands of *pangurdoor* a swing, so that it affects the structure of the song rhythm. However, all these intrinsic elements, semiologically, reflects the cultural identity of Simalungun music. The music building is Simalungun music, as is the other Simalungun cultural artifact.

The study on musical signs for *UrmaloDayok* song, soothing melody, lulling a child to sleep is actually an expression, so that this life notices two things filling each other. As an example, hardwork should be balanced with adequate rest. There must be

decisions to be made, but there are also things to be considered and decisions must not be made in haste. The objective of this life is to create harmony in nature. There must be differences in this life. Therefore, it is required to use strategies to deal with these differences which are parts of harmonization, not to hurt one to another.

(c) As for musical interpretation, *UrmaloDayok* song, by observing the interpretants especially those from Simalungun ethnic group. It is found out that the song is the faculty of teaching culture from early age. The text of this song contains positive things referred by all Simalungun people. This song does not only contain teaching aspect, but also life values, that the objective of living a life is to pursue success, however, in pursuing success, man should consider their limitation as a man, so we are not to pursue success at all costs. Structurally, this song reflects the intellectual of Simalungun ethnic group in music.

### 3.4 Text: Icon, Index, and Symbol

This song for Simalungun children contains semiotic meanings that can only be approached by studying the way of thinking of the ethnic group of its users. Thus, the participant observation approach employed by this research is useful to reveal the meaning in both songs. The full text of *UrmaloDayok* song and its relative meaning in Indonesia are presented as follows:

UrmaloDayok (*urdourdo*)

Urmalodayok ...

Podas ma ham marbanggalanggiku o anggiku

Marbanggalasahobonanggiku o anggiku

Urmalodayok

Ulangsungkotbailabahanakku o anggiku

Podas ma ham marganjanganggiku o anggiku

Urmalodayok

Marganjangasahotanganakku o anggiku

Ulangsundalibungkulananggiku o anakku

meaning :

urmalodayok ...

grow quickly my child o my child

as big as the granary my child o my child

urmalodayok

but do not become bigger than the door my child o my child

grow big my child o my child

urmalodayok ...

get taller like the rattan tree my child o my child

but do not hit the house ridge my child o my child

The text of the above “free verse” contains advice and wish. However, it is expressed figuratively, not denotatively but connotatively. A mother wishes her children to grow quickly, and when they are grown up, they must not be troublesome to their parents. So is the word *bapa* in the text, which does not refer to its denotative meaning, but refers to the way to call a son. *Inang* is the word used to call a daughter. This way of calling is done by parents who regard them as the parents in the future. Thus, the words *bapaandinangin* in the song are actually indexes that the child is going to be parents to their child in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to teach children from early age so that they have cultural responsibility in the future, when they are grown up, to become parents.

The icon of a child considered ideal to parents in the context of Simalungun ethnic group is the child who grows and develops in accordance with nature. It means that the child is going to become parents, and to continue the generation of Simalungun to maintain its existence in this world. This child's needs in his life will be fulfilled which is symbolized by the grass. He/she must grow and develop as well as possible, yet they must be aware that as humans they have limitations. Thus, they must not force themselves to become great in everything.

The important aspect in the text of the aforementioned child song is symbol. Granary (*hobon*) is the symbol of prosperity, fertility and life success. This symbol clearly represents that in agrarian ethnic group like Simalungun ethnic group from the beginning until now, granary symbolizes good things. It is considered as the place to collect rice, which can be used to fulfill oneself's, family's and other people's needs.

The other symbol is rattan, which grows high achieving a goal or a dream; it acts as advice to have high dream as high as the stars in the sky. Rattan is also used to make housewares and medicine: for example, the rattan shoots that can be used to cure any kind of disease.

The other symbols used in the song are grass and hornbill. Grass symbolizes the fertility of the nature provided by God. It symbolizes the food consumed by livestock. In context of human, grass can be interpreted as the staple such as rice and additional food such as vegetables, fruit, and so on which are the

basic food for human. Grass also has the characteristic of willingness to be stepped on yet still grows in accordance with the law of nature. It can also become the facility of reforestation.

Hornbill is the symbol of valor or bravery in sailing through the space or nature. It embodies magical values, which can repel disease or disturbance from evil creatures. In theater of *toping-toping/huda-huda* of Simalungun, hornbill is played as the main character that is able to entertain people in grief. Therefore, the text used in both aforementioned songs is full of cultural signs and meanings, which are symbolic, implicit, and rich of philosophical and educational values.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The above explanation clearly describes that Simalungun ethnic group, as one of the native ethnics in Batak ethnic groups in North Sumatera Province, has a tradition of singing *urdourdo*, which is closely related to child caring and education. This child song is used and useful for the ethnic group. The use of singing the song is to inherit educational values to children, and to soothe and lull children to sleep. Its main function is to maintain the continuity of Simalungun culture.

Structurally, Simalungun child song consists of elements of music (*which has tone, musical scales, cadenza patterns, rhythms, duration metre, free metre, etc.*). The intrinsic aspect emphasizes the musical identity of Simalungun ethnic group, especially to be represented by pentatonic scales. The textual aspect consists of icon, index, and symbol. The icon used is how an ideal child is portrayed in Simalungun ethnic group, i.e. an ideal child must have a big dream and great effort to make it come true, but he also must be aware of his limitation as a human. Index is used to call the child with *bapa* (father), which means that the existence of a child in the family ensures that he is going to be a parent as well in the future. The text of *urdourdo* in Simalungun ethnic group uses many symbols such as: granary and rattan ---with variety of cultural meanings which are rich of philosophical, educational and cultural-art values.

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