

Batak Toba Women's Struggle to Protect Traditional Frankincense Forests in a Geographical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Batak Toba oral literature represents women as farmers and discoverers of frankincense trees, highlighting the connection between women and nature. The ecofeminism perspective views this relationship as a form of resistance against environmental exploitation and gender injustice. The purpose of this article is to focus on the struggle of the Batak Toba Sipituhuta-Pandumaan ethnic women in preserving the indigenous frankincense forest against Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL). The research method that will be used is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Phase I (first) will be observing, identifying, and classifying the types of Batak Toba literary works that contain Batak Toba cultural values related to environmental conservation efforts. In the second stage, participatory observations and in-depth interviews were conducted with selected informants, followed by analysis, discussion, and conclusions. The struggle of women in protecting the frankincense forest has long been represented in folklore, portraying women as the discoverers of the tree that saved their family's economy. Within the forest-owning community, women also play a role in protecting men from potential violence during conflicts. Supported by KSPPM, the prolonged struggle of Sipituhuta-Pandumaan women resulted in the recognition of their customary forest by the government in 2021. Their close connection to the frankincense forest stems from their feminine nature, characterized by a deep concern for environmental preservation and household sustainability, which is perceived as a cultural burden.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between humans and nature has shaped various societal structures worldwide (Rero & Maryani, 2022). In many indigenous communities, geographical conditions influence traditional gender roles, particularly in environmental management and resource utilization (Setiadi et al., 2021). The relationship between women and nature has long been embedded in various cultural traditions across different societies. In the Batak Toba ethnic group, this connection is reflected in oral literature emphasizing women's roles in

agriculture and environmental stewardship. Traditional narratives, including poetry and ancient prose, depict women as caretakers of the land.

One example of this cultural perspective is expressed in the following excerpt:

*Tubu ma simarhora-hora di topi ni tapian
Tubu ma di hamuna anak na mora dohot
boru par balian*

Lahir lah *simarhora-hora* di tepian tempat
mandi

Lahir lah pada kalian anak laki-laki yang kaya, juga anak perempuan yang rajin berladang (A. Simbolon et al., 1986).

The excerpt above represents one of the intellectual treasures of the Batak Toba ethnic group, which has been preserved in the form of oral tradition, specifically in the genre of oral poetry. This poetry discusses the expertise granted to daughters, namely diligence in farming. This implies that past societies had already voiced and connected women with nature or the environment. Furthermore, the expression of the relationship between women and nature is also conveyed in the genre of ancient prose, namely *Asal Mula Danau Toba* (The Origin of Lake Toba) (Wuriyani, 2016).

In addition to *umpasa*, which represents women as laborers in the fields, there is also an ancient Batak Toba prose that narrates the existence of the frankincense forest in connection with women. Women are represented as those who discovered the trees that produce sap, which holds commercial value. From this sap, the woman's family who had this dream could pay off their debts and attain a better standard of living. Subsequently, the woman went to the forest to search for the frankincense tree she had seen in her dream. The presence of ancient literature that conveys the connection between women and nature demonstrates that such themes are not exclusive to modern literature. Modern literature also frequently takes inspiration from Batak Toba society.

Considering differences in time and era, the relationship between women and nature, as expressed in ancient and modern literature, differs in terms of the purposes for which the literature was created. The function of literature for its community is to serve as a means and tool for expressing thoughts, attitudes, and cultural values (Baiduri & Prihasti, 2021). Simbolon (1998) Explains that one of the purposes of *umpasa* is to serve as a philosophy of life (a guide for living), as law and regulation, and as a form of aspiration (Baiduri & Prihasti, 2021).

Other scholars referenced to support the background of this research include

those discussing the ecological characteristics of literature (Kaur, 2013) ecocriticism and ecofeminism (Capra, 2002; Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003; Murphy, 1991; Shiva, 1988, 2002; Shiva & Mies, 1993; Tong, 2010). These scholars examine the relationship between literature and nature due to the increasing environmental degradation, which affects all living beings, including humans, and has even more severe consequences for women.

According to Warren (1997), women have an important connection to nature because of their feminine qualities. Warren presents four basic assumptions regarding the relationship between women and nature from an ecofeminist perspective: (1) there is an important connection between the oppression of women and nature; (2) understanding the connection between the oppression of women and nature is essential; (3) feminist theory and practice must incorporate ecological perspectives; and (4) ecological problem-solving must include feminist perspectives (Capra, 2002; Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003; Keraf, 2002; Tong, 2010). Sociofeminism in literature is a newer version of feminist theory, which had previously been applied. The critique of domination views living beings as objects, which diminishes moral considerations, making exploitation, abuse, and destruction more likely. Ecofeminist cultural literature practices view texts not merely as "texts" but as having "relationships with others," where the focus of this new model is on dialogical relationships (Kaur, 2013; Murphy, 1991; Donovan, 1996; Wuriyani, 2019).

On the other hand, the Batak Toba ethnic group is one of the six sub-ethnic groups of the Batak people, Indigenous to North Sumatra, including Toba, Mandailing, Simalungun, Karo, and Dairi or Pak-Pak (Barus et al., 2019; Harahap & Siahaan, 1987). From genealogy, anthropology, and ethnology perspectives, individuals categorized as Batak share similar cultural characteristics, particularly kinship and social systems known as *Dalihan na Tolu* or *Singkep Sitelu* (Karo). All these groups share a common language family and have similar customs, although they have undergone

different historical processes and cultural developments. *Dalihan na Tolu* literally means "The Three Hearths."

The Batak ethnic group originates from Pusuk Buhit and later spread around Lake Toba, including Samosir Island and the western and southern regions of the lake, with Pusuk Buhit being in the northern Tapanuli region during the Dutch colonial period. According to records, Tapanuli Utara (North Tapanuli) was the main region or center of Batak Toba. Batak Toba is the largest group among other Batak sub-ethnic groups (Karo, Pardembanan, Pakpak, Angkola, Mandailing, Simalungun), with the largest number of descendants, the center of Batak culture and the mythology of the creation of the Batak Toba land (Hasibuan, 1985; Nainggolan, 2012; Siahaan, 1982; Simbolon, 1998; Wuriyani, 2019).

Geographically, the area of North Tapanuli is around 10,605 km² (Takari, 2013). North Tapanuli is situated at an altitude of 300 - 1,500 meters above sea level, which includes hilly highlands and is part of the Bukit Barisan mountain range. The majority of Batak Toba people work as rice farmers (Nainggolan, 2012). According to data from Badan Pusat Statistik in 2020, the predominant religion in North Tapanuli is Protestant Christianity, with over 250,000 adherents. After the division of regions, North Tapanuli is no longer the center of Batak Toba, as it shifted to the Samosir and Toba Samosir regencies (Wuriyani, 2016).

Research on the struggles of Batak Toba women is not the first research to be conducted by researchers. As previously studied by (Baiduri, 2014) on "The Meaning and Dimensions of Work: Batak Toba Women Traders (Inang-inang) in Medan City," it revealed that the hard work of Batak Toba women is not only limited to improving their economy, education, and social mobility. However, the hard work done by *inang-inang* (women traders) is also aimed at gaining existence and dignity and as a form of resistance to the patriarchal culture in their family and household lives.

Moreover, in the modern literary work *Perempuan di Pinggir Danau* (Women by the Lake), Batak Toba women have a strong

connection with preserving the lake and their own way of conserving the environment. This pattern of struggle is very interesting to investigate in order to understand the noble local values that are still maintained to this day, as the Batak Toba ethnic group is generally a group that strongly adheres to tradition. However, it needs to be proven whether this tradition is still followed by the Batak Toba adat women, particularly those from the Sipituhuta-Pandumaan adat (customary) community, who a community organization has empowered called the *Kelompok Studi dan Pengembangan Prakarsa Masyarakat* (KSPPM). Therefore, this research aims to identify Batak Toba women's struggles in the Sipituhuta and Pandumaan villages in preserving the customary frankincense forest area.

This research offers a novel contribution by bridging the perspectives of ecofeminism and indigenous knowledge regarding the role of Batak Toba women in environmental conservation. Unlike previous studies, which primarily focus on economic and social mobility or the representation of Batak Toba women in literature, this research examines women's agency in preserving customary frankincense forests. By exploring their lived experiences and resistance strategies, this research highlights how traditional ecological knowledge, cultural identity, and gender intersect in local environmental activism. This research expands discussions on ecofeminism by highlighting the role of Batak Toba women in nature conservation, both symbolically and actively embedded in their everyday practices and customary laws.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. This method and approach were chosen because the research target is based on descriptive data from informants and other relevant literature. This research focuses on the struggle of the indigenous women of Sipituhuta-Pandumaan, which is related to the cultural values of Batak Toba.

Research Location and Time

This research was conducted in two locations. The first location is for collecting data on the types of Batak Toba "Umpasa." To generate a database on the literary works of "Umpasa" and *Perempuan di Pinggir Danau* (Women by the Lake), the research was conducted at the Language Center in Medan City and other regencies/cities that are home to the Batak Toba ethnic population in North Sumatra. The selection of these locations was based on the criteria of this research, which focuses on the literary works of "Umpasa" and *Perempuan di Pinggir Danau* that have developed and are practised by the Batak Toba ethnic group in North Sumatra.

The second location for the research is to conduct interviews with informants regarding the struggles of women in defending their customary land in the villages of Sipituhuta-Pandumaan, Humbang Hasundutan District. The reason for selecting this location is that the Sipituhuta-Pandumaan village has been fighting to protect its customary land since 2008. This village is located in the frankincense forest area, and since 2021, it has received government recognition by issuing a Regional Regulation recognizing the Sipituhuta-Pandumaan customary forest. Meanwhile, this research was conducted in 2024.

Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques

This research uses two types of data sources: primary data and secondary data. Primary data is information obtained directly from the research subjects. In this research, primary data includes field observations and interviews with informants, which are Batak Toba women representing the Sipituhuta-Pandumaan Indigenous women's community, related to their struggles in opposing the TPL (Timber Plantation) conflict and the resolution efforts in defending their customary land (hamilton/frankincense forest).

In addition, this research also uses secondary data. Secondary data refers to

information obtained or collected by the researcher from literature, books, previous research, and other sources. In this research, data were also obtained from the literary works of "Umpasa" and *Perempuan di Pinggir Danau* to obtain the concepts of the struggles of Batak Toba women. Data collection in this research was carried out through several steps of data collection techniques as follows:

- a) Literature related to the " Umpasa " research theme and *Perempuan di Pinggir Danau* has been published. This step is the initial phase of the research.
- b) In-depth interviews with informants representing the Batak Toba ethnic group (host population) from the Sipituhuta-Pandumaan indigenous community. Additionally, interviews were also conducted with community and cultural leaders from Sipituhuta-Pandumaan.
- c) Observations of efforts to protect the Sipituhuta-Pandumaan customary frankincense forest area.

Data Analysis Techniques

In this research, the data analysis techniques used include:

- a) Identifying types of "Umpasa" related to environmental preservation based on Batak Toba cultural values.
- b) Identifying the concept of environmental preservation from the literary work *Perempuan di Pinggir Danau* from a gender perspective.
- c) Identifying and analyzing the literary works of "Umpasa" and "*Perempuan di Pinggir Danau*" highlights the struggle of Batak Toba women to defend their customary land.
- d) I will take field notes from each practice and experience of Batak Toba women and customary leaders of Sipituhuta-Pandumaan related to efforts to protect the customary land.
- e) Reading, sorting, and grouping all data in order to compile the analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's Involvement in Frankincense Harvesting

In Sipituhuta Village and Pandumaan Village, Pollung District, Humbang Hasundutan Regency, North Sumatra, harvesting frankincense involves clearly defined roles between men and women. Frankincense, known as haminjon in the Batak Toba language, is the primary

commodity that sustains the local community's economy. The traditions and practices of frankincense harvesting have been passed down from generation to generation, with specific task divisions based on gender.

Table 1. Gender Roles in Frankincense Harvesting

| No | Gender Role | Tasks and Responsibilities | Description |
|----|-------------|--|---|
| 1 | Men (Ama) | a. Harvesting frankincense in the forest. b. Clearing the area around the frankincense trees. c. Taking care of the frankincense trees. | Men are fully responsible for harvesting frankincense, which requires skills and physical strength to climb tall trees. They also clear weeds and parasitic plants around the trees to maintain the quality of the resin. |
| 2 | Women (Ina) | a. Preparing food for their husbands and sons going to the forest. b. Selling the harvested frankincense at the market. c. Managing finances from the sale of frankincense | Women play a crucial role in supporting the harvesting process by providing food. They are also actively involved in selling the frankincense and managing the income for daily needs and household expenses. |
| 3 | Together | a. Performing traditional prayers and rituals before harvesting frankincense. b. Protecting the frankincense forest from illegal logging | The community as a whole upholds strict traditions and ethics to honor nature and seek a good harvest. They also work together to conserve the forest environment, which is essential for the growth of frankincense trees. |

(Source: Research Results, 2024)

The gender roles in harvesting frankincense in Sipituhuta and Pandumaan villages are clearly divided based on specific tasks and responsibilities. Men (Ama) have the primary role in the harvesting process. They are responsible for climbing the tall frankincense trees and collecting the resin, requiring physical strength and specialized skills. In addition to harvesting, men are also responsible for clearing the area around the frankincense trees of weeds and parasitic plants, which can interfere with the trees' growth and affect the quality of the resin. This is reinforced by an informant with the initials SH, who stated that men are entirely responsible for harvesting frankincense.

"Pada saat yang tepat, kami mengambil getah

haminjon sepenuhnya menjadi tanggung jawab para kaum laki-laki (Ama) yang akan memanen kemenyan tersebut, dan pihak perempuan (Ina) akan bertugas dalam menyediakan bekal para suami atau anak laki-laki. Bisa saja perempuan ikut menjual hasil panen kemenyan tapi tidak pernah ikut memanen kemenyan ke hutan."

Not only are they responsible for harvesting, but according to an informant with the initials BN, caring for and maintaining the frankincense trees is also a duty that must be carried out by Ama (men) to ensure the quality of the frankincense remains preserved. On the other hand, Ina (women) have an equally important supporting role. They are responsible for preparing meals for their husbands and sons who go to the forest.

Additionally, women are crucial in selling the harvested frankincense at the market and managing the income earned from these sales. The household's financial management, including daily necessities, children's education, and debt payments, is generally the responsibility of women.

Both genders are responsible for upholding traditions and ethical practices before harvesting frankincense. They perform prayers and specific rituals to seek a good harvest and maintain respectful conduct while in the forest. Furthermore, the people of Sipituhuta and Pandumaan take great care to protect the frankincense forest from the logging of other trees, as these surrounding trees are essential in shielding the frankincense trees from direct sunlight. Direct sun exposure can reduce the resin quality produced, as highlighted by the informant BN.

"Tadi kita sebelum manen kemenyan berdoa dulu dan pada saat kita sudah mau mulai memanen salah satu ada yang memanjat dan akan mengatakan 'Parung Simardagul-dagul, Sahali Mamarung Gok Bahul-bahul Gok Ampang' yang artinya semoga sekali memanen hasilnya penuh, begitulah kira-kira pengharapan mereka. Bagi siapa yang berada dalam hutan kemenyan mendengar doa tersebut, mereka harus menjawab 'Emmatutu' yang bermaksud mengaminkan doa tersebut."

On the other hand, women's involvement in frankincense harvesting is directly connected to several myths in Batak Toba culture. The mythology of women in Batak Toba culture, as reflected in the traditions of Sipituhuta and Pandumaan villages, has deep roots and is rich in symbolic and historical meaning. In Batak Toba mythology, women, referred to as Si Boru in the Batak language, hold a central role in the world's creation. One of the key mythological figures is Si Boru Deak Parujar, who is believed to possess the knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual power to create the world from a handful of soil (Baiduri, 2014).

Si Boru Deak Parujar is regarded as a highly knowledgeable figure with strong determination and a deep connection with nature. In Batak Toba mythology, women play a significant role in maintaining the balance of

nature and sustaining human life. They are considered wise protectors and caretakers of natural resources, including managing forests and plants such as frankincense, which is vital to the livelihoods of local communities.

In the communities of Sipituhuta and Pandumaan, although women are generally not directly involved in harvesting frankincense due to practical reasons, such as the difficulty of climbing tall trees, they still hold crucial roles in preparing food supplies, managing the harvested products, and maintaining the daily lives of their families. These traditions and myths reinforce the role of women in ensuring environmental sustainability and the social well-being of Batak Toba society.

Local Wisdom in Frankincense Management

The local wisdom in frankincense management in Sipituhuta and Pandumaan reflects the depth of culture and local knowledge intricately woven with the surrounding nature. In these communities, managing frankincense is not merely an economic activity but also a spiritual heritage and a practice governed by ancient rituals and strict customary prohibitions. They preserve the sustainability of frankincense trees with deep respect for the environment, ensuring that every step in the management process produces high-quality products and maintains harmony with nature.

1) Rituals before harvesting

The people of Sipituhuta and Pandumaan perform rituals before starting the frankincense harvesting process. One of these rituals is a prayer of supplication to God for an abundant frankincense harvest. This prayer reflects their respect for nature and the spiritual beliefs embedded in their activities.

2) Prohibitions and ethics in harvesting

The community strictly upholds the tradition of prohibitions at every stage of frankincense harvesting. These prohibitions aim to maintain harmony within the community and surrounding nature. Examples of such prohibitions include maintaining proper conduct and refraining from inappropriate behaviour in the forest

during harvesting as a form of respect for the environment and ancestral traditions. A frankincense farmer, identified by the initials SH, emphasized this in Sipituhuta and Pandumaan.

"tradisi larangan pasti ada itu sangat kita tekankan kepada siapapun yang memasuki hutan agar menjaga etika, sopan santun. Masyarakat Sipituhuta-Pandumaan dalam memasuki hutan tersebut terkhusus pada proses pemanenan harus menjaga sopan santun di hutan. Karena dulu ada kejadian ada salah satu warga yang sedang memanen kemenyan tidak menjaga etika dan buang air kecil saat proses pemanenan berlangsung maka warga tersebut jatuh terpentak dari atas pohon, maka dari pengalaman tersebut warga sangat menjaga sopan santun dan etika saat memasuki area hutan, dan masyarakat akan selalu memberikan keterangan dan arahan kepada siapapun".

3) Local knowledge in frankincense tree maintenance

The community possesses deep knowledge about caring for frankincense trees to produce high-quality resin. They clear the area around the trees from weeds and parasitic plants that may hinder their growth. Additionally, they do not use special fertilizers, as frankincense naturally thrives among other trees in the forest.

4) The community does not sell their Ancestral land

Ancestral land in Sipituhuta and Pandumaan is considered sacred and

crucial for preserving the existence of frankincense trees. The local community has agreed not to sell or repurpose their frankincense forests, ensuring environmental conservation and the sustainability of their natural resources.

5) Prohibition of cutting down other trees

The community strictly avoids indiscriminate logging of other trees near frankincense trees. They recognize that cutting down surrounding trees could disrupt environmental conditions and lower the resin's quality, ultimately reducing their product's market value.

Utilization of Frankincense by the People of Sipituhuta and Pandumaan

Frankincense trees require minimal maintenance, primarily clearing the surrounding area and cleaning the tree trunk before harvesting. Seedlings are obtained by relocating fallen fruit from mature trees rather than directly planting seeds. The resin extraction process includes clearing weeds around the tree, making small incisions in the bark to allow the resin to flow, and removing old bark. High-quality resin is identified by its white colour, while the yellowish resin is considered lower quality. The drying process takes approximately 2–3 days under favourable weather conditions but may extend to a week during rainy periods.

Frankincense, known as hamijon in the Batak Toba language, plays an essential role in Sipituhuta and Pandumaan in the Humbang Hasundutan Regency, North Sumatra.

Table 2. Utilization of Frankincense in Daily Life

| No. | Benefits | Realization Form |
|-----|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Main source of income | Frankincense is the primary commodity that generates income for the local community. Frankincense farmers rely on their harvest to meet daily needs, including children's education expenses and debt payments. |
| 2. | Used as traditional medicine | Frankincense has various uses in traditional medicine. For instance, it is used to treat digestive issues such as diarrhea or dysentery. The treatment process involves boiling frankincense with other ingredients like turmeric and rice to extract active compounds beneficial for health. |
| 3. | Burned in religious practices | Frankincense plays a role in religious and spiritual practices. In Catholic worship, it is burned as an offering (upa-upa) to purify the prayer space and as a symbol of a |

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|---|
| | | fragrant sacrifice. |
| 4. | Adhesive in building construction | In the past, frankincense was used as an adhesive substitute for cement in building construction. This demonstrates the flexibility and numerous uses of frankincense in various aspects of community life. |

(Source: Research Results, 2024)

Based on the table above, frankincense has a variety of benefits. Traditionally, it has also been utilized by indigenous communities across the world. Research findings (Maksimović, 2021) indicate that frankincense is commonly used for treating arthritis, asthma, ulcerative colitis, coughs, wounds, and wound healing in North Africa and India. This is scientifically supported through research. Scientific studies back these traditional uses by showing the therapeutic potential of *Boswellia serrata*, the active ingredient in frankincense. Research (Khajehdehi et al., 2022) published in Phytotherapy Research reviews the benefits of frankincense, particularly its boswellic acid content, which has anti-inflammatory, antitumor, and analgesic properties that aid in memory enhancement, inflammation prevention, and cancer treatment.

On the other hand, frankincense is often burned as incense in various religious traditions and rituals to produce a pleasant aroma believed to bring tranquillity and purify the air from negative energy. The burning of frankincense has been used since ancient times for both spiritual and medicinal purposes. Frankincense has been cultivated in regions with certain monsoon climates, such as the Arabian Peninsula, Somalia, Ethiopia, and India. According to (Efferth & Oesch, 2022), frankincense was traded along the Nabatean trade routes to Europe and China for the last 5,000 years. Just like in the communities of Sipituhuta and Pandumaan, frankincense has been used in various funerary ceremonies and religious rituals in Catholic and Orthodox churches across different countries.

The Struggle of Batak Toba Women in Defending the Adat Kemenyan Forest

In the adat community of Sipituhuta, the system of ownership of the kemenyan forest is implemented through three main methods. First, the kemenyan forest is passed down from

parents to their sons. Second, the kemenyan forest can be given by a man to his sister or to his in-laws. Third, the right to use the kemenyan forest is granted to the incoming clans from the royal clan. However, conflicts arise when TPL (Toba Pulp Lestari) encroaches on the adat forest, threatening these forms of ownership.

The conflict between the Sipituhuta-Pandumaan adat community and PT TPL stems from the state's seizure of adat land that has long been inhabited and managed by the adat community according to customary rules. This adat land is a legacy from their ancestors and contains kemenyan trees (tombak haminjon). However, the state unilaterally took this land, giving PT TPL the authority to manage it without the community's consent. PT TPL, formerly PT Inti Indorayon Utama (PT IIU), is a paper company granted permission to manage state's forests in the Tapanuli region. The company was established on April 26, 1983, with its factory in Porsea, Toba Samosir Regency.

In Humbang Hasundutan Regency, PT TPL received permission to manage an area of 134 hectares, which includes the adat land of the Sipituhuta-Pandumaan community, leading to resistance, particularly from women, who became the front line of the struggle to defend their adat land. The community protested by cutting down the kemenyan trees, which were replaced with eucalyptus trees, affecting the economy and the environment. Women led demonstrations and strengthened solidarity through traditional ceremonies and support from non-governmental organizations such as KSPPM, while men faced physical violence and detentions.

The Sipituhuta-Pandumaan community, together with KSPPM, formed the Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara Wilayah Tano Batak (AMAN Tano Batak) to oppose PT TPL, which began encroaching on their adat land in

June 2009. Despite demonstrations and issuing a Decree halting the logging of kemenyan forests, the company continued its operations. The conflict escalated with violence, tight security in the forest, and protests in various government offices until 2010. Despite facing arrests and violence from security forces, the struggle of the women and the adat community continued until 2019, with support from KSPPM and other organizations, ultimately succeeding in defending their adat land.

The women of Sipituhuta-Pandumaan proved to be the front line in the struggle against PT TPL, with a strong commitment to preserving their identity and ancestral heritage. Women were the most affected when TPL seized the adat forest in Sipituhuta-Pandumaan. They felt the direct impact of the takeover of the adat forest. The community in this area heavily relied on the kemenyan harvest from the forest to meet daily needs, fund children's education, and pay off debts, responsibilities that fell on the women as the caretakers of the family. Therefore, women became the leading force in the fight to preserve the kemenyan when the adat forest was taken. With women at the forefront, the number of male casualties from violence was minimized.

The active role of Batak women in defending the adat kemenyan forest is rooted in their function as "breadwinners." Although the primary income responsibility lies with men, women take on the role of managing the family and resolving issues, as reflected in the Batak Toba proverb (A. Simbolon et al., 1986):

Eme piniar-niar (Rice that has been threshed)
Na jomurni pardegean (Sun-dried by being trampled)
Sorang ma di hamu anak na pistar (Come forth, you clever children)
Dohot boru boi pangaluluan (With women as the place of complaint)

In addition to the meaning explained above, there is an additional meaning related to the specific role of Batak women. "Women as a place of complaint" indicates that they bear a heavier burden in the family than sons, who are expected to be clever. Through this

umpasa, the expectation for women to be a place of complaint highlights the hope that they should be wiser and more intelligent than men. This role is crucial in the family, as Batak women are expected to have the ability to resolve various conflicts, both within the family and in the community, as demonstrated by the women in Sipituhuta-Pandumaan.

There is also another umpasa that reinforces the role of Batak women in the livelihood system (A. Simbolon et al., 1986). In this *umpasa*, the position of men still follows a patriarchal structure, where men they are expected to be wealthy, while women are expected to farm diligently. This *umpasa* shows that women's role in farming is not a sign of weakness but reflects qualities that men do not possess. The patience and perseverance of women in managing the fields are essential strengths in overcoming nature.

CONCLUSION

The struggle of women to defend the frankincense forest is not a movement that emerged suddenly. This struggle has been represented in the folklore of the communities that own the frankincense forest. In these stories, women are depicted as the discoverers of trees that can be used to pay off family debts. Today, within forest-owning communities, women defend the forest and protect the men (husbands and sons) from violence. The women's long struggle from Sipituhuta-Pandumaan has received full support from KSPPM. In 2021, their efforts bore fruit with the government's legalization, officially recognising the Sipituhuta - Pandumaan customary forest. The close relationship between women and the frankincense forest exists because of their feminine nature, which is seen in their deep concern for preserving the frankincense forest and the continuity of their household lives. The responsibility for maintaining household survival is seen as a cultural burden that women are expected to carry out.

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