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## THE CONCEPT OF *BANUA* IN MANDAILING ARCHITECTURE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Mandailing architecture as an unique culture in North Sumatera have several potencies that rarely published. The potencies like traditional settlements, traditional buildings and also the concept of Banua are very interest to discussed. The concept of Banua was one of an indigenous architecture as basic architectural design in Mandailing settlements. Banua has been used to organize Mandailing settlement and also has been shown in life setting of Mandailing community, not only in micro scale, like their houses; but also in macro scale, like their spatial environment.*

*This paper discussed about the concept of Banua in Mandailing Architecture. The concept of Banua is a cosmology of three world, namely (1) Banua Parginjang, (2) Banua Partonga and (3) Banua Partoru. Banua Parginjang (upper world) was a God world; God have control over this upper world who called Datu Natumompa Tano Nagumorga Langit. Datu Natumompa Tano Nagumorga Langit believed as creator and one in authority of earth and sky. This world is simbolized with white colour. Banua Partonga (middle world) was a human world, world for work with many activities everyday. This world is simbolized with red colour. Banua Partoru (bottom world) was a world for dead men or called soul world. This world is simbolized with black colour.*

*The concept of Banua has been applied on traditional building models by pillar houses and arrangement of environment settlement by setting of traditional main buildings in the middle of huta.*

**Keywords :** *Banua, Parginjang, Partonga, Partoru and Huta*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The existence of *Mandailing* has been recognized since 14<sup>th</sup> century based on the word of honor of Palapa Gadjah Mada on verse 13 *Kakawin Negarakertagama* by Mpu Prapanca as the expansion territory of Majapahit in 1287 Caka (1365 AD). The *Kakawin* hand writing was found at *Pura Cakranegara* Lombok and afterward, Dr. J. Brandes from Holland published it

in 1902 based on its origin language and letter with the title *Negara Kertagama, lofdicht van Prapanca op koning Radjasanagara, Hajam Wuruk van Majapahit* (Lubis, 1986 : II, 1)

The settlement of *Mandailing* consist of some villages which their locations spread in *Mandailing Julu* and *Mandailing Godang*. At the beginning, those villages were *huta* called *desa*. The pattern of the settle has been exists since the first inhabitant came to this area. By living as permanent residence, those people build their own villages as *Huta*. The newly forming *Huta* could be a main village by process of *Horja* which is symbolized as a king and a building named *Bagas Godang* as the mansion of the king and the other building *Sopo Godang* as public hall meeting and *Sopo Eme* as the rice barn. *Huta* village has also a large yard *Alaman Bolak Selangseutang* as a place for all village activities which located in front of *Bagas Godang* (lubis, 1999:VI,82).

The interesting phenomenon of *Mandailing* settlement is that the pattern setting of the building and its element form certain unique structure. Their traditional buildings consist of some types and each type has its physical characteristic with certain ornaments and symbols. Each building and its element in *Huta* has unique pattern based on concept of *Banua* which has been believed since long time ago.

## II. THE STUDY OF MANDAILING ARCHITECTURE

### 2.1. The Belief System and Banua Concept in Mandailing

Before Islam came and became a majority religion in this area, *Mandailing* people had a belief that this universe is divided into three parts or called *Banua*, they are :

- Banua Parginjang* (upper world), this is a place where God, the human master that called *Datu Natumompa Tano Nagumorga Langit* as the creator and the owner of this sky and earth;
- Banua Tonga*(middle world), this is a place where human does daily life activities. This place is symbolized by red color;
- Banua Partoru* (bottom world), this is a place for dead people or called as spirit world. This place is symbolized by black color.

The three beliefs world can be seen in *Mandailing* social life setting as micro scale(house) as well as macro scale (spatial domain). The three world cosmologies, *Partoru*, *Partonga* dan *Parginjang* are applied by *Mandailing* people to build their houses. House is lifted from the ground (bottom world) as the reason that it is considered as a place where the dead people are evil and dirty, thus, the type of this building is grandstand house.

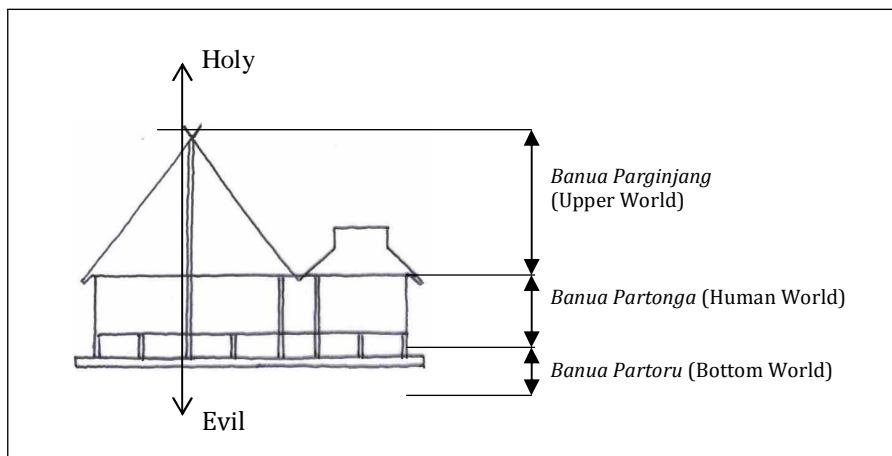


Figure 1. Mandailing People Cosmology  
(Source : Sudjatmoko, Eko, 1999)

## 2.2. Mandailing Traditional Architecture

*Mandailing* traditional architecture as a product of high culture and enriched by symbols like the other traditional building in Indonesia. Product of *Mandailing* traditional architecture consist of *Bagas Godang* and *Sopo Godang* which are equipped with *Sopo Eme* or *Hopuk*. These building spread in *Penyabungan District*, *Kotanopan* and *Muara Sipongi*. These traditional building are the inheritance of kingdoms from *Lubis* and *Nasution* clan in *Mandailing*.

*Bagas Godang* is also called village *bagas* and this is house for the *huta*'s king or *tunggane ni huta* or *King Panusunan* as the leader, *huta*'s regulator, upholder and as the village guardian. *Bagas Godang* as a main village building in a *huta* and a clan symbolizes *bono bulu* which means a custom unity with *namoranotoras* (honorable leaders), *kahanggi* (family in same clan), *anak boru* (family for son-or daughter-in-law), *datu*, *si baso*, *ulu baling*, artist and king *Pamusuk* as king of the village.

*Bagas Godang* also has a function as a place for gathering or meeting and as a place of protection for each member of the society who has disturbance from other *huta*. Closed by *Bagas Godang*, a *Sopo Godang* which is used as museum for art instruments like *gordang sambilan*. *Ogung* is a place for discussing and conference, place to decide customary, place for visitors and *tortoar* as stage for art performance.

*Bagas Godang* and *Sopo Godang* are also equipped with *Sopo Eme* or *Hopuk* whose their function as rice barn. *Sopo Eme* and *hopuk* have a meaning of social prosperity and each member of society who doesn't have enough food, they could ask help to the king.

In front of *Bagas Godang*, there is wide flat ground as the yard of *Bagas Godang* or *Alaman Bolak Selangseutang*. This yard is a place for traditional ceremony and protection from outside disturbance. Every member who takes cover at *Alaman Bolak* could not be disturbed, hurted, or hit because that person has been under protection of the king. The King will bring the justice by discussing with the honorable leaders. Today, this yard also becomes a place for art performance *gordang sambilan*, *monortor*, martial art training and other Islamic occasions.

The other facility in a *huta* is *Pancur Paridian* or *tapian* mandi. A hut in rice field called *Sopo Saba*, and in garden called *Sopo Ladang*. The king graves are protected by a building called *Bale*.

## 2.3. History of Huta

The settle living pattern has been exist in *Mandailing* since the ancestors of *Mandailing* people came to this area. At the beginning, *Mandailing* people lived in mountain range and being nomadic. At that time, they did not have a certain belief and only believed *Sipelebegu*, an invisible creature and their ancestor's holy spirits. Afterward, they moved from the mountain range and made new village for settle. They still used their lands in mountain as agricultural field even though they had settled in their new village (source: direct interview with some main informants, 2002)

The classification of *Huta* (kampong) in *Mandailing* are divided into some phases which reflect the status of *huta* by some certain traditional ceremonies:

1. *Banjar*, a small *kampong* (village) with two or five houses.
2. *Pagaran*, *kampong* that consists some *banjar*.
3. *Huta* or *huta adat*, *kampong* that has already completeness of mores and becomes a mansion of the King. *Huta* has a king and its apparatus.

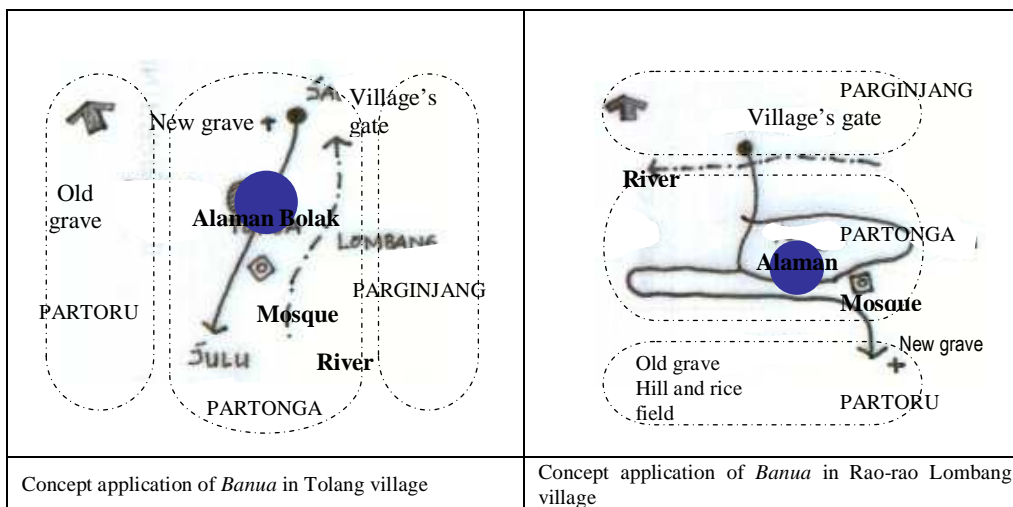
## A. Indigenous Architecture as Basic Architectural Design

During the existence process of a *kampung* in *Mandailing*, it is always started by the building of people houses or ordinary *bagas* by certain group of clan who come from mountain range. Each group has only three or five houses called *pagaran*. Henceforward, a *pagaran* could become a *banjar* and a *banjar* would become a *huta*.

To become a *huta*; a *pagaran* or a *banjar* must have a completeness of *mores* to do *horja* (traditional ceremonies to legitimize a *huta* becomes a *huta adat*). Thus, the process to become a *huta* does not always need some steps, like mentioned above. A *pagaran* or *banjar* can be directly become a *huta* if they could fill all main conditions as *huta adat* by equipping the completeness of *mores* and showing the ability to do *horja*. Other condition is that a *kampung* must have a small *kampung* as the expansion territory from its origin *kampung* that would be a *huta adat* (sumber: direct interview with some main informants, 2001).

At the beginning, the *kampongs* had a rule between king and people that to build *Bagas Godang* – it is forbidden if its position back of the sun, while people houses usually back of the sun. It is believed that only king who can face the sun power and also as the source of life. Beside as intellectual, the king must have magic and spiritual power.

A matter of fact, only some *Bagas Godang* that lead to the sunrise or east but the position do not back of sunrise in the east. In some cases, geographically, this is the position of *Bagas Godang* in *Huta*. When *Bagas Godang* leads to the east like the first belief, it should be put in the west while west is the position of *Alaman*. It is impossible to be directed to the north due to the other buildings and also it is not quite wide for *Bagas Godang* because its big size. In that condition, the most possible is position directed to the south or south east or the elements setting are influenced by environment.



## A. Indigenous Architecture as Basic Architectural Design

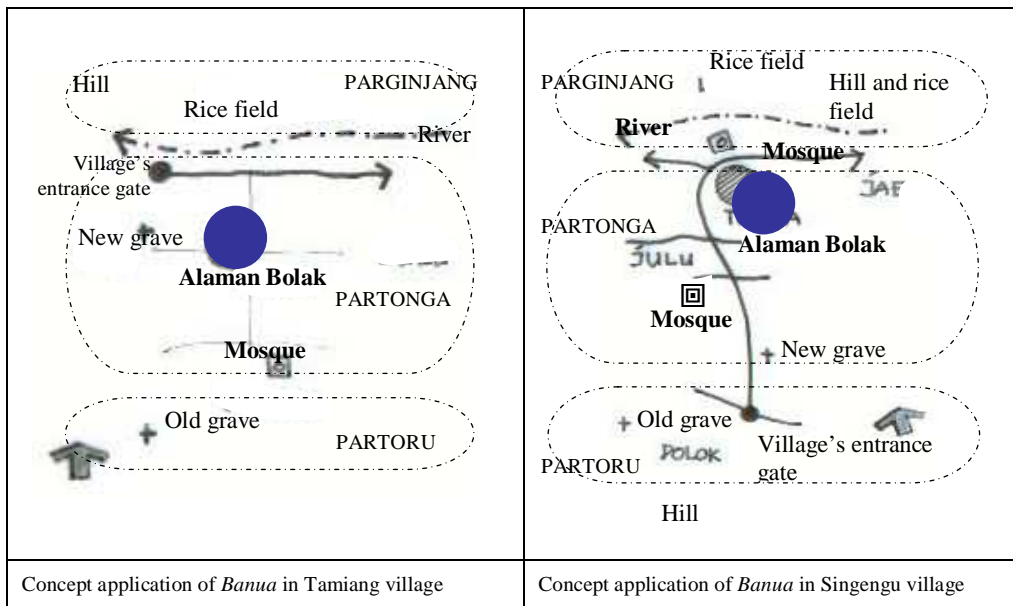


Figure 2. Concept application of Banua in Mandailing  
(Source : Analysis Result, 2002)

Nature and environment character are not the only factor that make the difference of building in *Alaman Bolak*. In some cases, most of *Bagas Godang* have the oriented direction to the others houses (ordinary people houses) and houses of king's relatives (conversely, the houses around *Alaman Bolah* orient to *Bagas Godang*). Beside that, the position of *Bagas Godang* face to the entrance road to the village even though indirectly. Everyone who comes to the village can find *Alaman Bolak* location because the entrance road always directs to the *Alaman Bolak*. It is related to the kinship system and social system *Dalihan Na Tolu* that keep custom values by an homage to the king as the founding father of Kampong, leader as well as servant of the people and to the *Kahanggi* whose privilege as decision maker is more important than the king in society life.

*Dolok* and *Lombang* are decided based on their position to the river and not only used as normative value but also in all cases contextually. From cosmology concept, it can be seen that *jae*, *julu* and *tonga* are part of *Banua Partonga* or middle world. It is appropriate to the *Mandailing* ancestors belief that have made *Banua Partonga* as a place for human to do daily activities, in such a way *Alaman Bolak* as center activities for the people in *Banua Partonga*.

*Lombang* that shows the "bottom world" and closed to the river is part of *Banua Parginjang*. Literally, *lombang* that has meaning "bottom", it is not appropriate with the meaning of *Banua Parginjang* that has meaning "upper world" as sacred place of the Almighty Creator. However, for farther observation, *lombang* with the river is always close to the hill. The hill and river are believed as *Banua Parginjang*.

## A. Indigenous Architecture as Basic Architectural Design

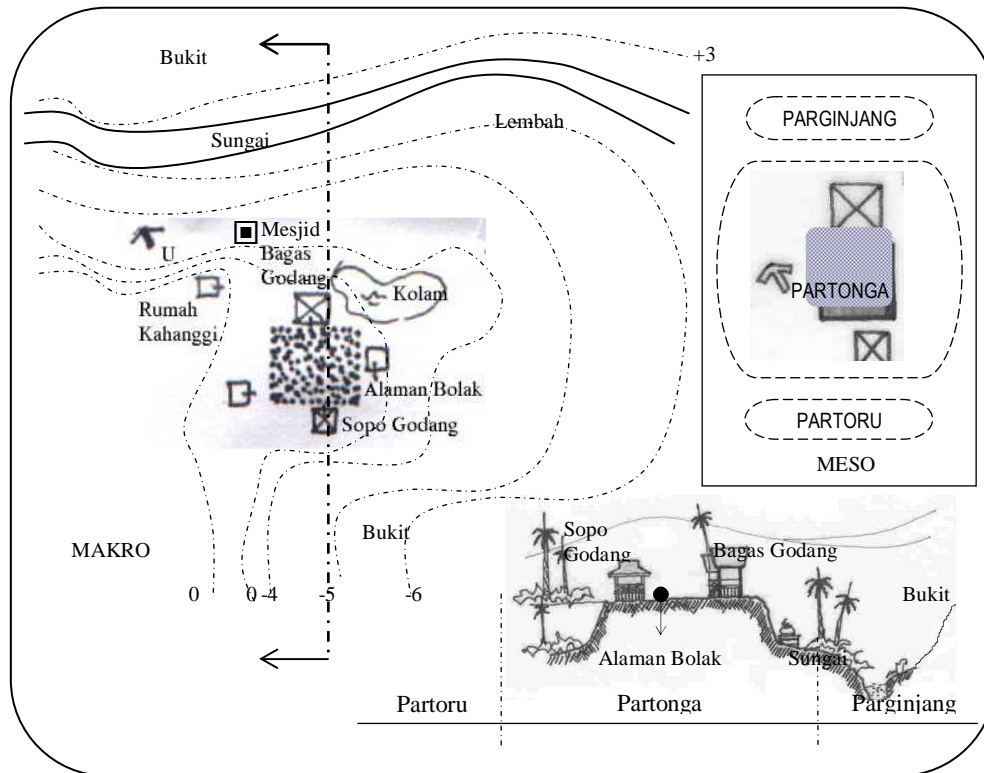


Figure 3. *Alaman Bolak* position based on *Banua* concept and Geographic.  
(Source: Analysis Result, 2002)

River and mosque throughout its side are located in *lombang*. From cosmology concept, this position is in *Banua Parginjang* area. As source of life, water is sacred for *Mandailing* people and it becomes a basic of water division in the village. *Banua Parginjang* as sacred upper world is symbolized by a river.

*Dolok* (Hill) is a part of *Banua Partoru* which means “bottom world” where the dead people stay. Literally, *dolok* is also not appropriate with the meaning of *Partoru* (beneath or humiliated). However, from all cases show that *dolok* is part of *Banua Partoeru* because it is always marked by the existence of old graves. The graves in *tonga* and located closed to people houses are new graves. Therefore, the “bottom world” as a place for the dead people is not place in bottom place as the meaning of *Partoru*, but precisely in upper place and far from the river. It is appropriated to the *Mandailing* ancestors belief that the dead people should be kept away from life source “sun and water”. For farther observation, it can be seen that all old graves are always located in the west area (sunset spot) and far from river. Although some graves are located closed to the river,, there is always certain difference such as a sharp contour, thus the grave is always located in upper place.

*Banua Parginjang* which means sacred upper world is always located in the east or north east and not in the west. It is appropriated to the belief of *Mandailing ancestor*. Before Islam came, they had a belief of sun power as the source of life and the Almighty *Datu Natumompas Tano Nagumorga Langit* who created and controlled the sky and the earth, thus *Banus Parginjang* is always area in the east where the sun rises.

Mosque as a worship place which was built when Islam came to this area. Its function as a place for worship activities and it is placed in *Tonga* which part of *Banua Partonga* zone.

Basically, *Mandailing* people still use the older cosmology concept to decide a location and the placement of *huta*'s elements. The change of a certain element location which is not appropriated to cosmology concept occur due to the system belief alteration from *Sipele Begu* to Islam, therefore the grave as an humiliated area must be kept away from human area where the location is closed to the people houses even though it is located in the higher area.

### III. CONCLUSION

The placement of each element in *Huta* is classified based on 3 aspect as well as hierarchy, i.g. (a) *Banua* cosmology, (b) belief system which related to the river and sun power, (c) nature condition. Physical object location is decided according to the sun position. If natural condition did not support, the orientation could be change but it would be the opposite of the direction where the sun rises. In this case, *Banua* concept application and belief to the river during orientation direction decision in *Huta* are consistent, while belief system to the sun power depend on nature condition.

*Alaman Bolak* has a function as the center of activities, which means it is located in *Banua Partonga* zone. The position of *Alaman Bolak* and configuration of the buildings depend on *Huta*'s status, the existence of *Bagas Godang* and *Sopo Godang*, Physically(environment) or non-physically (*Banua* concept, custom and belief. *Alaman Bolak* is an important element and a main condition for every *Huta* which becomes *Huta adat* and power state. *Alaman Bolak* position is decided early than *Bagas Godang* and *Sopo Godang*.

In macro side, the position of *Alaman Bolak* on *Huta* is configured to its function as a center for people activities which is wide enough as well as in the right zone. The proper places as *Alaman Bolak* location in *huta* is (1) *jae* means downstream area; (2) *tonga* means middle area of *huta* and (3) *julu* means headwater area. Those places are located in *Banua Partonga* zone.

The position of *Alaman Bolak* is a manifestation of older *Mandailing* people belief which came from their ancestor tenets as (1) *Banua* conception which is believed as 3 different worlds, i.g. (a) *Parginjang Banua* or *tua haratan*, as *upper world where the Almighty Datu Natumompas Tano nagumorga Langit*, (b) *Banua Partonga* or *hanjonjongan diha sianganon* as middle world where human does the daily activities, and (c) *Banua Partoru* or *honding situmandok* as bottom world for dead people or spirit world; (2) The belief to the river as a sacred element and a foundation to decide *Banua kampong* zone and the power of the sun which means morning sunrise as a sacred direction.

*Alaman Bolak* dan *Sopo Godang* as a center of mores occasion is located in *Banua Partonga* zone, while *Bagas Godang* is located in *Banua Parginjang* Zone. The orientation of *Bagas Godang* is not the opposite of the morning sunrise. The grave as a place for dead people is located in *Banua Partoru* zone, as the sunrise spot and kept away from *Banua Tonga* as place human and river as sacred place in *Banua Parginjang*.

In meson scale, the position of *Bagas Godang* is located in *Banua Parginjang* and *Sopo Godang* in *Banua Partonga*. The personification of non-physic belief aspect, placement and configuration of *Huta*'s elements also consider physical aspects such as nature and environment condition. If the nature condition does not support, it is supposed to be in other zones except *Banua Partoru*. Thus, nature condition becomes a consideration to apply or to

personified the non-physic belief aspects into physic aspect. The exception is in the placement of *Alaman Bolak* in *Banua Partoru*.

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