

Local beliefs and religious practices of Parmalim in North Sumatra

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Abstrak:

Indonesian society is renowned for its rich diversity of religious traditions, including local beliefs that persist to this day. One such tradition is the Parmalim Religion, which originates from the Batak tribe in North Sumatra. This religion, also known as Ugamo Malim, is a belief system that regulates the spiritual relationship between humans and the spirit world, with Debata Mulajadi Na Bolon as God who created the universe. Religious practices in the Parmalim Religion involve various rituals and ceremonies that reflect the depth of humans' relationship with God and the natural environment, such as birth, marriage, and death rituals, as well as annual ceremonies related to the harvest season and the Batak New Year. This religion encompasses moral values such as solidarity, justice, and togetherness, which guide the daily lives of its adherents. This research uses a literature-based qualitative approach to examine Parmalim's religious practices, utilizing William James' theory of religious experience and Emile Durkheim's theory of religious practice. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the Parmalim Religion maintains the spiritual and cultural identity of the Batak people and its contribution to the diversity of religious practices in Indonesia. Through an analysis of written sources, it is hoped that this research will enrich our understanding of local beliefs and their preservation amidst current developments.

Keywords: Parmalim; religious experience; religious practice; ugamo Malim; William James.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian society is a society that has a very plural religious tradition, not only widely accepted religions that have become institutionalized, but also local beliefs that still exist and persist to this day (RI, 2012). Local beliefs, with a system of teachings, traditions, and followers, are something that lives in society to this day; even long before Indonesia became independent, these beliefs existed. The development of this local belief experienced ups and downs but remained persistent.

Culture and religion in society cannot be separated because the two have a very close relationship (Safitri & Suharno, 2020). Local religious practices are an integral part of a community's cultural life, developing naturally based on the traditions, environment, and history of a particular community. Religion serves as a guide in life for creatures created by God (Khoiruddin, 2015). These beliefs often reflect a deep connection between humans and nature, as well as belief in ancestral spirits and spiritual entities that are thought to have an influence on everyday life. As part of cultural heritage, local religious practices have an important role in maintaining community identity and strengthening social relations among its members. Traditional ceremonies, offering rituals, and oral traditions are a means of passing on the values of this belief from one generation to the next.

Parmalim religion is a traditional belief originating from the Batak tribe in North Sumatra. Parmalim actually refers to a person's identity, while the institution is known as *Ugamo Malim*. Among the general public, Parmalim is better known as a personal identity than as the institution *Ugamo Malim*. *Ugamo Malim* can be interpreted as a sacred spiritual relationship between humans and the spirit world. In the Batak language, the word "*Ugamo*" refers to matters related to *Ngolu Partondian* (spiritual realm), namely the way humans establish relationships with the spiritual realm. Meanwhile, "*Malim*" has a sacred meaning. Therefore, *Ugamo Malim* can be interpreted as a system that regulates human relations with *Ngolu Partondian*, which is conducted based on the principle of purity sourced from *God the Great Creator* (The Creator). People who adhere to this teaching are called Parmalim (Katimin, 2012).

Spiritual practices in the Parmalim Religion encompass a range of rituals, ceremonies, and traditional customs that reflect the profound connection between humans, nature, and the Creator. Parmalim's followers showed their respect to *Debate Mulajadi and Bolon* through various forms of worship, including offerings, prayers, and rituals carried out at important moments in life, such as weddings, planting seasons, or funeral ceremonies. Apart from that, the Parmalim religion instils moral values such as solidarity, justice and togetherness, which serve as guidelines for social life and the daily behavior of its adherents (Simbolon, 2024).

Through deeper exploration, Parmalim religious practices can offer valuable insights into how local traditions help maintain the spiritual and cultural identity of the community amidst changing times. This religion not only serves as a spiritual means, but also as a bridge that connects humans with nature and its creator, while preserving the nation's cultural heritage.

METHOD

This research employs a literature-based qualitative approach to examine religious practices in the Parmalim Religion through library research. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore a deep understanding of religious phenomena through analysis of written sources, such as books, journals, scientific articles and other relevant documents (Hadi, 1981). Literature study provides an opportunity to utilize theories that have developed and relate them to Parmalim religious practices more specifically. The focus of this research is on the theoretical and empirical understanding of Parmalim religious practices that have been documented (Rahman, 2025).

This research employs two main frameworks. First, William James' theory of religious experience views religious experience as a subjective phenomenon that involves direct interaction with the spiritual dimension. This theory is relevant to understanding individuals' deep experiences in Parmalim religious practices, such as the offering rituals and prayers that connect them to *Debate Mulajadi and Bolon* (James, 2015). Second, Emile Durkheim's theory of religious practice emphasises the social function of religious practices in fostering community solidarity and cohesion. This theory is useful for analyzing how the Parmalim tradition strengthens collective identity and social relations among its adherents (Durkheim, 1912).

Data sources for this research include various literature, such as books, journals, scientific articles, and other documents relevant to the Parmalim Religion. These documents provide insight into the theological, social, and cultural aspects of Parmalim religious practice. Researchers will collect data from various sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. The data analysis technique used is descriptive analysis, which aims to identify patterns, themes and main relationships that emerge from the literature review. This analysis allows researchers to construct a detailed picture of religious practices in the Parmalim Religion, including their implications for the spiritual and social life of the

community. With this approach, it is hoped that research can contribute to enriching the understanding of local traditions and the diversity of religious practices in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Parmalim

From a theological perspective, it is not uncommon for people to define this belief group as one that has absorbed many Islamic teachings. The word "small" itself is believed to be derived from the word "scientist," which comes from Arabic. The Batak people have known about Islam since the 8th century AD, and several sources indicate that Parmalim has absorbed seventy per cent of Islamic teachings (Katimin, 2012). King Uti came from Barus and based several teachings and interpretations on him. As previously mentioned, Islamic teachings are very influential in Parmalim's beliefs, said "Little" taken from Arabic words found in holy books, which means sci and pious from the origin of the word "Teacher". If it's in Arabic, the teacher refers to the term holy person who is a guide and pillar. In the sense of the term Batak, it has evolved to mean pious people who wear white turbans.

The naming of Parmalim as a religion began with King Nasiakbagi's words at a meeting with his students. His final speech became a milestone in the early history of the Parmalim religion. Adherent in the corner of the little ones who worships Mulajadi Debate in Bologna, called Parmalim which is a local belief of the Batak people who developed around the Batak land which was still under the leadership of King Sisingamangaraja, with the consciousness of worshipping Mulajadi Debate in Bologna, this growth and teaching was initially King Sisingamangaraja's resistance to the invaders who tried to eradicate this belief from the Batak land (Siregar & Gulo, 2020).

Fauzan explained that the term Parmalim refers to the beliefs of those referred to as Ugamo Malim. Term corner: It cannot be equated in meaning with the word "religion" in the Indonesian sense. Explained that the term corner must be understood in the context of three important parts of the Batak tradition, namely: First, Manila, which refers to the regulation of social relations in society. Second, burnt, which encompasses ownership arrangements, including both communal and privately owned properties. Third, about himself, which regulates the relationship between humans and God.

There are four figures known to Parmalim who are believed to have been sent by Debate for the Batak people. One of them was Raja Uti, a leader who was highly respected and had great charisma in his time. He appeared in the Toba Batak community during conflict and social chaos. The second figure is Simarimbulubosi, who faithfully follows the teachings of King Uti (Asnawati, 2013). Their presence aims to strengthen the faith of the Batak people so that they remain firm in their beliefs Debate of the Nabologist. The third figure is King Sisingamangaraja, who appeared several decades after Simarimbulosi. He is in charge of introducing customs, tattoos, as well as um (rules and laws), as guidelines for living together for the Batak people. His presence strengthens the belief that King Sisingamangaraja did not really die. Meanwhile, the figure of the fourth King, namely King Nasiakbagi, has a unique character that attracts the attention of the Batak community at large. Parmalim's trust was then passed on to Raja Mulia Naipospos, one of King Nasiakbagi's loyal students. After accepting this responsibility, he played a major role in preserving and spreading the Parmalim faith to various groups for many years (Simbolon, 2024).

Most Parmalim are found in several areas of North Sumatra, especially around Lake Toba such as Samosir, North Tapanuli, Toba, Humbang Hasundutan, Simalungun, some areas such as West Pakpak, Central Tapanuli, and South Tapanuli.

Belief in The Great Creator in the Parmalim religion

In Durkheim's view, worship (cult, which comes from Latin, which means worship), which consists of the feelings of the ceremony participants and arises at certain times, is the essence of the life of the clan. Wherever and whatever form of feeling arises, the behavior of clan members when carrying out this ceremony is the most important feeling they have ever experienced (Pals, 1996).

Ugamo Malim states that the world and its contents are created by Debate Mulajadi Nabolon (God who made everything and the creator of the universe). Words words Debate Mulajadi Nabolon is a typical term in the Toba Batak language to refer to the creator (Sibeth et al., 1991). At the beginning of the mention of God, the Batak people tend to use the word Ompung, which shows a position or status as "the

Great", "Your Majesty". The pronunciation is always woven in tong-tong-ong (prayers), until it becomes Ompung Mulajadi Nabeta or just Ompung Debata only (Sembiring et al., 2012).

The Great Creator in Parmalim belief has the nature of daulism, as feared by humans, the most cruel punisher, and as Merciful and Compassionate as the creator, but at the same time He also has authority over His creation. His eternity is not limited by space and time. *Debate Mulajadi Nabolon* possessing the most perfect qualities, others: Almighty, Just, Most Generous, Most Merciful, Most Powerful, Most Knowing, Most Great, Most Noble, Most Wise, and so on. His whole nature contains elements of perfection.

In addition to believing in God *The Great Creator*, In Parmalim's belief cosmology, the universe is divided into three, *First, banua ginjang* (upper world) which is filled by God *The Great Creator* and the angels, *Second, banua ginjag* (middle world) is filled with humans who must be guided, *Third, banua toru* (underworld) filled with spirits. The symbol of the radiance of power *The Great Creator* embodied in *Debata na Tolu* with the meaning of three colored roosters: black, white and red. Because the rooster is symbolized in Batak land, a symbol of the soul (spiritual) which is dynamic.

The black rooster symbolizes immortality, from the form of power *The Great Creator* in policy or hahomion. This means that the human mind is unable to guess eternity and also shows the symbol of Bataraguru, the source of Royal Law, Justice, Wisdom, Knowledge, Customs, and so on. Symbolized by the color Black (Eternity). The white rooster is a symbol of purity or *gentle*, also shows the symbol of Debata Sori (Sorisoaliapan), the source of the Law of Purity, Glory, Truth. Symbolized by the color White (Holiness), from the form of a power beam *The Great Creator*. Thus in the white color there is no other stain, he is the source of the power of purity. The red rooster is a symbol of courage, also shows the symbol *Balabulan Debate/Goodbye* source of supernatural powers, medicine, (shaman, divination or prediction), courage, strength, and so on. Symbolized by the color Red (Strength and Courage). as a manifestation of the radiance of Mulajadi Nabolon's Power of Strength and Courage.

If we combine the meanings of these three colors, we can conclude that power *The Great Creator* which radiates through *Debata Na Tolu* as His messenger contains nature *habomion, hamalimon*. These qualities are also used as guidelines in teaching **Parmalim** in everyday life. This symbol cannot be separated like separate flags, but must remain displayed close together, with the provisions: black on the right, white in the middle, and red on the left. The conclusion from the meaning of this black, white and red symbol is that it depicts the Oneness and at the same time the Great Power of *The Great Creator* which radiates through *Bataraguru, Debata Sorisobaliapan, And Debata Balabulan (Debata Na Tolu)* as His messenger. This understanding is found in *excuse me* (phrase) Batak: "*Where there is sirungguk there is sitata, where there is bita bundul, there is no Ompunta Debata*" (where sirungguk grass grows, there is a sitata/banana tree, where we are, then there God is).

The Holy Book of Parmalim

The holy book Ugamo Malim is currently referred to by name Pustaba Habonaron which is kept inside Bale Pasogit Partonggoan in Huta Tinggi currently. In general, the holy book contains rules about how Parmalim relate to Debate of the Nabologist as the Creator of the universe, how Parmalim relates to fellow humans in social life, as well as how Parmalim establishes relationships with the surrounding natural environment.

Gultom said that in terms of content, Bet Habonaron can be classified into three parts:

First, Rules (Patik): regulate relations between humans and Debate of the Nabologist and human relations with each other. Second, Regulations relating to the kingdom: especially regarding the provision of punishment for guilty members of society (Parmalim), including punishment for leaders, both formal and informal. Third, Regulations relating to the management of the surrounding natural environment and agriculture. This library is believed to have been written by Sisingamangaraja XII in Batak script, which is also called Pustaha Na Imbara (new book) (Gultom, 2019).

That amount Pustaha Na Imbara So far there is only one. One of the articles on the site states that the book Bet Habonaron is a role model for humans as well as a basic value in carrying out the

principles of purity. This book relies on Mar Patik as part of The Uselessness of Habatahon (Sembiring et al., 2012).

Parmalim Religious Practices

Religious practices, such as rituals and religious ceremonies in Parmalim, serve as a medium for expressing gratitude to God Almighty, specifically to the Debate of the Nabologist. For Ugamo Malim, their religious ceremonies are referred to in Indonesian as "ibadah." The rituals carried out can be divided into two large parts, namely: First, rituals at times that are considered important by every parmalmim, including those related to various stages of human life. Second, ritual worship to Debate on the Nabolon is carried out as a form of gratitude for achievements during life. This ceremony is conducted over a certain time duration, either weekly or yearly.

Religion is not separated from the name of the ritual and the religious group itself; this can be seen in the various ways a religion performs religious rituals. According to Van Gennep, religious ceremonies universally basically function as an activity to restore the spirit of social life between people, social life in every group of people in the world repeatedly, with certain time intervals, doing what is called "regeneration", such a spirit of life (Nurdin & Jesica, 2018). This is because there are always times when the enthusiasm for social life decreases, and as a result, there will be sluggishness in society. Thus, to maintain a stable religious spirit, society needs to increase activities that generate new religious enthusiasm.

Parmalim religious practices have scheduled implementation, such as weekly ceremonies called Marari Saturday and ceremonies carried out every year, referring to the Batak calendar, such as rituals eating bitter (eats bitter), sipaha sada (ritual of entering the new year of the Batak calendar and remembering the day of birth Simarimbulubosi) And sipaha lima is a large offering after the harvest which is carried out in the fifth month of the Batak calendar. The rituals and implementation of this ceremony refer to the Batak calendar, which is called Right now (Siahaan, 2018).

In a Parmalim ceremony, it is obligatory in every Parmalim religious ceremony to have offerings or they fight (offerings) and slowly (offering prayers). Apart from that, there are also rituals that require it goal-goal (dances) accompanied by traditional Batak drums called gondang sabangunan or gondang hasapi (Tobing, 2015).

Practice Ugamo Malim. There are several types of religious rituals that are carried out today, as follows:

1. *Martutu Aek*: Birth Ritual

An initial ritual in the life of the Parmalim belief is a strengthening ritual for the baby's ghost (soul), and as a thank you for the addition of family members. Because they believe the baby is experiencing a transitional crisis from the transition from the other world (in the womb) to the human world. This ritual has been practised since the inception of the Parmalim religion.

2. *Pamasu-masu*: Marriage Rituals

In Parmalim religious marriages, marriages are considered valid through marriage by the leadership *Ugamo Malim*, which is referred to as *Mamasu-masu*. In the ritual, the bride and groom will recite prayers to the Debate of the Nabologist. The core of the prayer is asking God to bless their marriage and make their marriage last.

3. *Give the Spirit*: Death Ritual

In the Parmalim belief, death rituals are generally divided into two main parts. The first part includes the process of managing the body until the funeral, while the second part is the implementation of the pasahat ritual *ghost*. However, some Parmalim view these two processes as one complete series. The body was delivered to the burial place by *ihutan* (which is followed) or *ulun pungan*, accompanied by prayers aimed at bringing the soul of the deceased back to its origin, namely to *Debate of the Nabologist*

4. *Happy Saturday*

It is an important ritual (worship) routine in *Ugamo Malim*, which is held every Saturday, or the seventh day according to the Batak people, it is called *samisara*. *Samisara* is the seventh day in the Batak

calendar, which corresponds to Saturday in the general calendar, which is based on the Earth's rotation and the sun's orbit. This ritual is carried out at the Parmalim house of worship, both at Bale Pasogit Partonggoan and at Rumah Parsantian. The ceremony was led by *Forest* if done at the Parmalim location center in Hutatinggi, or by *ulu panguan* at each branch location. The purpose of this ritual is to worship and praise *Debate of the Nabologist*. Apart from that, in this ritual, the ceremony leader also provides guidance and counseling to his followers so that they become more obedient and can implement Ugamo Malim's teachings in their daily lives, both within Parmalim's internal environment and to the surrounding community.

5. *Mardebata*

In the Toba language, *mardebata* can be interpreted as meaning 'worshipping God'. Rituals *mardebata* This is done because a person or a family has realized that they have violated the teachings contained in it *seal* (God's Teachings). *Mardebata*, this serves as a medium to ask for forgiveness of sins from the Debate of the Nabologist. The nature of this ritual can be personal or communal, depending on whether it involves a community in its implementation. The place where this ritual is carried out is at the house of Parmalim who has the intention of carrying it out *mardebata* or in the house of one of the group of relatives who belong to one clan from the father's lineage or what is called the kin group *Tempt*. The day for this ritual is determined based on the 'good day' which refers to the traditional Toba calendar called *parhalaan*. For Parmalim, *mardebata* interpreted as a worship ceremony to God which is carried out through offerings or is called intercession *pale*. *mardebata* This is carried out to the accompaniment of traditional Toba music called *gordang sabangunan*.

6. *Bitter Eats: Eat the Bitter*

A worship (ritual) asking for forgiveness of sins for Parmalim. This ritual is an internal rule *Ugamo Malim* which must be done at the end of each Batak calendar year. This act of forgiveness of sins is shown in the form of fasting for 24 hours and eating bitter food is the beginning of breaking the fast which is carried out through rituals *bitter handle*. This ritual is a ritual of atonement for sins that have been committed during the current year and as a form of regret for the mistakes (sins) that have been committed. According to King Marnangkok Naipospos as *Forest* Parmalim's current highest level, through ritual *eating bitter* this, Parmalim can spiritually and outwardly understand the struggles and struggles of the *Malim Debate* in carrying out their duties which are full of the bitterness of life and hard struggle. With this understanding, Parmalim will be more surrendered and feel grateful for what they have now which they would not have been able to achieve if they had not gone through the bitter struggle of life.

7. *Sipaha sada*

A big ritual that is annual and is a gathering place for the Parmalim community from various existing Parmalim branches *Event* this big is celebrated to enter the new year in *Ugamo Malim* and also commemorating the birthday of Lord Si marimbulubosi. *Sipaha sada* means the first month in the Batak calendar and the ritual is carried out on the second day (*also sum*) and third (*ari budget*). The implementation is usually carried out in March on the calendar: AD.

8. *Sipaha Lima*

Sipaha lima is a big annual ritual for Parmalim which is based in Huta Tinggi, Laguboti. All Parmalim from all branches along with deputy branch heads (*ulu panguan*) is required to attend the ritual *sipaha lima*. The implementation time is in June or July and sometimes falls in August, every year in the Gregorian calendar. In the Batak calendar, ritual *Sipaha lima* This is done every 5th (fifth) month in the Batak calendar with the aim of being grateful for the harvest or good fortune they have obtained. This ritual also has another function, namely as a means of collecting funds by setting aside a portion of the harvest or business results for the benefit of Parmalim in need. In this case, these funds will become social funds for the internal Parmalim community which will be managed by the Institute *Wash Torop* (Sembiring et al., 2012).

CONCLUSION

Parmalim is a traditional Batak belief that absorbs many elements of Islamic teachings. The word "malim" is believed to come from the Arabic word "alim," meaning a wise or holy person. Its history shows close interaction between Batak society and Islam since the 8th century AD. This belief began to be called *Ugamo Malim* after King Nasiakbagi stated it in a meeting with his students. *Ugamo Malim* centered on worship *Mulajadi Debate in Bologna*, the Creator who is Almighty, Most Merciful, and Most Punisher. The symbol is Debata Na Tolu, three roosters colored black, white and red, symbolizing immortality, purity and courage. Parmalim's holy book, *Pustaha Habonaron*, is believed to have been written by Sisingamangaraja XII. This book contains rules for human relationships with God, others and the environment. Religious practices include birth rituals (*Martutu Aek*), wedding (*Pamasu-masu*), death (*Give the Spirit*), and weekly worship (*Marari Saturday*). There are also annual rituals such as *Sipaha Sada* to welcome the Batak new year, *Sipaha Lima* as thanksgiving for the harvest, as well *Eat Bitter* as penance. Parmalim beliefs are preserved in the areas around Lake Toba, such as Samosir, North Tapanuli, and Humbang Hasundutan. These rituals are often accompanied by traditional Batak music such as *gondang sabangunan* And *tor-tor dance*. Parmalim is not only a form of spirituality, but also a symbol of culture and the struggle to maintain Batak identity from external influences.

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