

# Parmalim and Contemporary Hegemony of the World Religion's Missionary Agenda in Aceh Singkil

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**Abstract:** As a local religion, Parmalim in Aceh Singkil Regency Aceh Province is currently experiencing marginalisation in the presence of world religions such as Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Based on the perspective of Islamic puritanism and Christian missionaries, Parmalim is categorised as unreligious or heretical. This study aims to analyse the genealogies of distribution and changes in Parmalim as the religious identity that has spread in Aceh Singkil. This qualitative research obtains the data through observation, interview, and documentation for two months. This study found that a segment of the Singkel community adheres to Parmalim as their cultural identity. Religious leaders, such as clerics and priests, actively seek to convert Parmalim adherents to Islam or Christianity through da'wah and missionary agenda. The hegemony of both Islam and Christianity makes their right still restricted. Thus, this study suggested the stakeholders fulfill their rights in education and religious and cultural practices as their basic needs.

**Keywords:** Cultural Identity; marginalization; Parmalim religion; social discrimination.

**Abstrak:** Sebagai agama lokal, Parmalim di Kabupaten Aceh Singkil, Provinsi Aceh, saat ini mengalami marjinalisasi di tengah-tengah agama-agama besar dunia seperti Islam, Katolik, dan Protestan. Berdasarkan perspektif puritanisme Islam dan misionaris Kristen, Parmalim dikategorikan sebagai tidak beragama atau sesat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis genealogi penyebaran dan perubahan Parmalim sebagai identitas agama yang telah menyebar di Aceh Singkil. Data penelitian kualitatif ini diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi selama dua bulan. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa sebagian masyarakat Singkel menganut Parmalim sebagai identitas budaya mereka. Para pemuka agama, seperti ulama dan pendeta, secara aktif berusaha untuk mengubah penganut Parmalim menjadi Islam atau Kristen melalui agenda dakwah dan misionaris. Hegemoni agama Islam dan Kristen membuat hak-hak mereka masih dibatasi. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menyarankan agar para pemangku kepentingan memenuhi hak-hak mereka dalam bidang pendidikan dan praktik keagamaan dan budaya sebagai kebutuhan dasar mereka.

**Kata Kunci:** Aceh; Kristenisasi; Islamisasi; Parmalim.

## 1. Introduction

*Ugamo Malim* (Parmalim religion), or *Sipele Begu*, is a local belief in Samosir and Toba in North Sumatra. Since the 7th century, Parmalim has developed on the west coast of Sumatra. The spread of Parmalim came to Aceh from the port of Barus to Singkel (now known as Aceh Singkil-Subulussalam) (Hirosue, 1988). Historically, the adherents named its religious system *Sipele Begu* (spirit worshippers). *Pele* means to serve food or honor, *Begu* means ghost, so *Sipele Begu* is to honor and serve spirits or ghosts. Others called it *Sipele Sumangot*, or devotee of spirits (Tumanggor, 2017). They initially established an organisational religion, "Pabas" (Parpunguan Batak Sipele Begu/Sumangot), to gain social and institutional legitimisation. In the 70s, it changed to "Parbaringin" (Banyan Tree Lovers), then in the 80s, they renamed it "Parmalim" (the lover of chastity). Until now, Parmalim has been a personal identity, while its institution is Ugamo Parmalim (Religion of saints) (Nurhalimah, 2019; S. Situmorang, 2004).

Various influences emerged in Nusantara at the beginning of the 11th and 14th centuries. The most noticeable influence was the arrival of Islam. Sitor Situmorang (2004, p. 401) referred to it as a post-Hindu period where the Muslim traders reduced Hindu influence in the port gate of Barus. However, Hinduism gradually lost its influence even in the hinterland of Batak land. There was an enormous wave of Islamisation, but it only reached the coastal land, such as Malay society, and did not spread to the inland. Singkil belongs to the territory that Islamisation developed in the coastal port of Barus. The appeal of the Islamic and Hindu relationship is regarded as the cause of Parmalim belief. Situmorang describes it through social and trade association relationships (Situmorang, 2004: 87).<sup>1</sup>

The dialectic relationship that presents Parmalim to the surface became common in Islam, Hinduism, and Batak culture. Some linguistic styles found in Malay-Islamic culture are the term "*malim*" itself. The term "*malim*" is a Malay-Islamic mystical term that is usually used to demonstrate the esoteric rituals in the *Tariqah* ritual. Once adopted in the mystical cosmology of Batak-Toba, various meanings in practice and definition also show both in adjectives and nouns (S. Situmorang, 2004).

Some of Parmalim's adherents live in Aceh Singkil-Subulussalam. It is located on the border between North Sumatra and Aceh Province and is in contact with various cultural and religious changes (Tumanggor, 2017). The suburbs of Aceh Singkil in the district of Danau Paris and Suro Sub-district had a population that adhered to Parmalism as the inheritance of the part of Barus City (*Beneden Baroes*) in 1127-1152, which reached the region of Aceh Singkil is a part of the remainder of southern Barus. Nowadays (2023) there are 70 Parmalim people in Aceh Singkil. The amount is calculated from 20 Kartu Keluarga (family card ID) that are considered part of Parmalim.

Nurhalimah (2019), in her research, mentions that the lives of Parmalim people are not marginalised from the society of the Napa Galuh district. They lived a "normal" life and had a good social association with another religion. There has never been a conflict between the Parmalim community and other religions or ethnic communities in Aceh Singkil.

Recently, adherents of Parmalim have faced polemic dilemmas of religious and cultural pressure in Aceh Islamic society. They get pressure from public opinion, which labels Parmalim as a syncretic cult and considers its adherents as heretics or individuals lacking a good understanding of religion. However, the constraints of discrimination are no longer vulgar or blatant but symbolically bureaucratic due to various local regulations, local education systems, and religious views. The identity of Parmalim adherents in educational facilities in this case often clashes with the local bureaucratic system. There is no Parmalim religious education in schools, Parmalim adherent students must choose Islamic, Protestant, or Catholic religious learning in public schools. Even so, many of the Parmalim adherents identify themselves as Muslims or Christians to be accepted in the government and education bureaucracy outside the Aceh Singkil area.

Indonesian Presidential Regulations No. 1/PNPS 1965, which neglected indigenous religions, was judged to have discredited local religions in promoting "Belief in the one and only God" and "to ensure that there is a national unity of religious principles." The laws restricted Indonesian indigenous beliefs. Law No. 1/PNPS 1965 protects mainstream religions against heretical blasphemy. Indeed, this law is ineffective as it fails to uphold the rights of the indigenous religious system, which is deeply rooted in their cultural basis, to secure their civil rights.

Constitutional Court regulates No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016 on Revealing religion in the National Identity card and Family Card columns. The Constitutional Court approved the implementation of Article 61 of Regulation No. 23/2006 and Article 64 of Regulation No. 24 of 2013 on citizen administration, which required the completion of religion in the National Identity Card. Indonesian indigenous religions can list their faith in the religion column under this law. Various community groups have responded to MK No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016's inclusion of "disbelief of religion." The

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<sup>1</sup> "... The influence of Islam spread into Batak communities in the hinterland occurred through social and trade relationship with the regions of Barus and Singkel between the 14th and 16th centuries. Thus, Islamic terms or the Arabic-Malay terms were taken over in the belief system, although not as much as Hindu terms. The charms of the Batak people, for example, are often opened with the words of *Bismillah* (in the name of Allah), although they do not adhere to Islam" (S. Situmorang, 2004).

Indonesian Ulema Council stated that The Constitutional Court decision No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016 on indigenous religion in Indonesia violates the national agreement established during the New Order period (A. P. F. Hasan, 2018).

Many anthropologists and sociologists have mapped religious systems to all of the religious beliefs in Indonesia. In Indonesia, there are many indigenous religions embraced by various tribes. A religious study that saw the social and mystical elements in indigenous religion found in Nurit Bird-David's book titled *Animism 'Revisited' Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology* (Bird-David, 1999), Bird-David challenges the stereotypical of animism as a primitive belief system and highlights the diversity of animistic beliefs and practices across different cultures and societies. Samsul Maarif, *Dimensions of Religious Practice: The Amatoans of Sulawesi* (Maarif, 2012) Maarif provides an explanation of person-hood in Amatoanism which has a belief system with inter-subjective relations, which supports various arguments related to the indigenous paradigm. Besides, Nurhalimah in her research *Relasi Agama dan Aliran Kepercayaan: Studi Terhadap Sejarah, Sistem Kepercayaan dan Hubungan Antar Parmalim dengan Agama Kristen diKecamatan Danau Paris Kabupaten Aceh Singkil* (Nurhalimah, 2019), Nurhalimah looked comprehensively at the social condition of the Parmalim community in Aceh Singkil who were marginalised because they were considered a deviant religion. Historically, it can be seen how the relationship of Parmalim with cultural patterns and mysticism in the Batak area, Barus to Aceh Singkil as in the previous research by Rusmin Tumanggor *Gerbang Agama-agama Nusantara (Hindu, Jew, Ru-Confucian, Islam & Nasrani)*" (Tumanggor, 2017), and Sitor Situmorang *Toba Na Sae, Sejarah Sosial dan Politik abad XIII-XX* (S. Situmorang, 2004).

Previous studies of Parmalim in Aceh Singkil were historical and theological. However, Aceh Parmalim studies have not yet examined the customary genealogies of Parmalim and the symbolical hegemony of the majority authority on the modern Islamization of Aceh and the Missionary agenda. Parmalim was Islamised and Christianised by government and church programs. The '*Da'i Perbatasan*' program in Aceh (2002–2022) aims to Islamise the Parmalim adherents, whereas Christianisation has been criticised since 1930. It has resulted in a lack of transparency about the Parmalim community and efforts to Islamise and Christianise it.

Based on the background of the above problem, this study focuses on deepening the genealogies of distribution and changes in Parmalim as the religious identity that has spread to Aceh Singkil Regency, Aceh Province. It covers religious expression of the hegemony of world religion, politics, culture, and theology. The Islamic-Christian hegemony of contemporary Aceh Singkil to the Parmalim religious system, related to social relations, freedom to express personal worship and civil rights support, can be seen in the role of the world religion dialogue on indigenous religion. This study is the result of direct observations of the Parmalim religious activity in *Parsatian* (worship house), social ordinances, and local culture in Napa Galuh Aceh Singkil Regency, Aceh Province.

This qualitative study was conducted in Napa Galuh village, Simpang Kanan district, Aceh Singkil Regency, Aceh Province. This location was chosen because it borders Aceh and North Sumatra and links Barus and Singkil. Napan Galuh's religious system is founded on customs and traditions that are more flexible than puritanical religious approaches. The location can bring indigenous and world religions together for Aceh's religious people. The researcher conducted two months of field research to explore Parmalim religious activities regarding social relations, local government support, and tolerance built with dialogue between Parmalim-Islam-Christianity. The researcher uses the approach of religious studies, sociology, and anthropology to study social practices in the research issue interactively.

The data was obtained by careful observation and interviews with individuals who possessed reliable expertise within the indigenous, governmental, and social community in Aceh Singkil. The informants in this research were the local leaders of Parmalim in Napa Galuh and the Parmalim's adherents. There were three key figures of Parmalim in Napa Gauluh: Murjin (Chairman of Napa Galuh's Parmalim), Jesma, Sailon (Head of Danau Paris's Parmalim), R Tumangger (Advisor of Parmalim's *Parsatian*) (personal communication, June 23, 2019). There were also Parmalim adherents who worked as teachers, such as Lisona Berutu (L. Berutu, personal interview, June 21, 2019), as well

as those who have family and close relationships with Parmalim adherents, such as Jesma (a Christian teacher in Napa Galuh). Researchers conducted interviews and participated in ritual activities, usually done on Saturdays. It becomes the research process in recognizing and positioning Parmalim in the world religions (Islam, Protestant & Catholic) in Aceh Singkil, especially Napa Galuh village.

In addition, the literature review also enriches data relating to local government authorities in supporting the civil rights of Parmalim and the reconciliation efforts for symbolic violence in social associations between Parmalim and major religions such as Islam and Christianity. These data begin with the Law, Qanun Aceh, and include local government regulation.

## 2. Parmalim: Struggle for Recognition between Religion or Culture

Parmalim is a local religion that has not been defined as a religion by the religious management policy since the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1946. In 1953, the Ministry of Religious Affairs established a formula for the definition of religion that recognised religion to have three elements: scripture, prophets, and international recognition, which are indeed rejected by some groups (Maarif, 2019; Mulder, 1978, p. 28).

The definition of religion has not been found until now, especially the definition that forms an idea that local religion also includes. Due to the difficulty of defining the religion, Parmalim as a local religion is affected and considered not a religion but a culture. In the administration of the Republic of Indonesia, Parmalim refers to part of the belief under the Ministry of Culture. Generally, it is considered a part of the Batak community, especially in Toba. The literature clarifies the concept and position of Parmalim in the social Association of the local religions in Toba, Barus-Singkel.

Understanding Parmalim as a local religious and cultural system, anthropologists arranged it as a diverse matter to agree on Parmalim in the framework of religious characteristics that agreed to its definition. In anthropology, the concept of religious systems emphasises the proportion of beliefs about human life relationships with occult powers. Some anthropologists devise a framework for the religious system itself. "Religion is the cultural knowledge of the supernatural (...belief) that people use to cope with the ultimate problems (...the problem of meaning; the problem of death; the problem of evil; the problem of transcendent values) of human existence" (Geertz, 1973, p. 90; Lessa, 1979, p. 9; Murdock, 1965, p. 252; Tylor, 2016).

In a previous study, Sadri Ondang Jaya wrote Parmalim by emphasising that the religious system of Parmalim is not considered religious features. He stated that Parmalim in Aceh Singkil has no belief in the unseen, nor has the belief in heaven and hell (Jaya, 2015). Nurhalimah disputed this assumption that the Parmalim adherents believed in God, whom they called *Ompu Mulajadi Nabolon*, who was believed to dwell in the Seventh Heaven (Nurhalimah, 2019). Understanding Parmalim required a foundation of religious studies based on the genealogy of the Parmalim religious system that could not be released from Islamic-Christian religious systems and customs.

In the general public, Parmalim as a personal or cultural identity is more popular than Parmalim as its religious identity (T. P. Situmorang & Zuska, 2023). Some anthropologists wrote Parmalim religion as Parmalim. Moreover, some Acehnese communities also misunderstood Parmalim as ghost worshippers (refers to *Sipele Begu*; it means ghost worshippers literally), do not believe in God, *Pekhaji* (the belief to poison other humans), and heretics. These assumptions are supported by the majority of religious authorities, both Muslims and Christians in Aceh Singkil.

Due to previous interpretations and public assumptions about Parmalim, it has become increasingly marginalised symbolically and easily stigmatised (Harahap & Irmawati, 2020; Hurriyah, 2023). Not surprisingly, Parmalim is considered an object that must be shaped by communities that have the power to transform Parmalim people into people who have a uniform belief and culture with the majority in Aceh.

## 3. *Da'i Perbatasan*: Province Aceh's Method to Islamise 'The Unreligious'

The *Da'i Perbatasan* (the border preacher) is the program of Islamisation for the border area of Aceh, which began in 2002 and continues until 2022. It led to various religious movements from Banda

Aceh to remote and border areas such as Southeast Aceh, Simeulue, and Aceh Singkil (A. Hasan & Sarkawi, 2022; Manan, Umar, & Misbah, 2023). Through the Islamic Shariah Official Service, the *Da'i Perbatasan* program received sufficient funds to send religious leaders from *Dayah* (a traditional Islamic boarding school) to carry out Islamic da'wah missions (Kemenag Aceh, 2013). Religious leaders sent to the border area of Aceh were assigned to be clerics in mosques, and they taught how to read the Quran, preach about Islam, lead prayers, and preach Islamic values to Muslims, Protestant, Catholic, and Parmalim communities.

The presence of *Da'i Perbatasan* in Aceh Singkil on the Islamic Sharia Office website says that many communities support this program. The support concerns how ideological hegemony is carried out by sending people outside Aceh Singkil to preach to Aceh Singkil (Kemenag Aceh, 2013). This program significantly influences local cultural and religious discourse in Aceh Singkil, especially for people who adhere to Parmalim. *Da'i Perbatasan* members felt that they must convert the adherent of Parmalim into Islam. The characteristic of da'wah is also to civilise marginal communities still struggling with a low economic index. The *Da'i Perbatasan* movement began to become a modern form of Islamisation, teaching Islam and guiding the people to conform to the theology and ideology of Banda Aceh. The legal basis of the *Da'i Perbatasan* is in the Regional Regulation of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province Number 5 of 2000 concerning the Implementation of Islamic Sharia in Aceh Province and Qanun of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province Number 11 of 2002 concerning the implementation of Islamic sharia in the field of Islamic theology and Islamic Sharia.

Abdul Rani, in the news released by the Islamic Sharia Office, said, "The Islamic Sharia Office is one of the wings of the Aceh's government that takes care of the implementation of Islamic Sharia, one of the duties and functions of the Islamic Sharia Office is strengthening in the field of Islamic religious counseling and Da'wah movement in border areas and remote areas (of Aceh) (Rani, 2023).

Banda Aceh and Aceh Singkil differ in terms of culture, race, and religion. The Muslim community in Banda Aceh has a puritanical religious orientation (Permana, 2021). Meanwhile, in Aceh Singkil, people are more inclined to embrace cultural Islam that blends with customs and mysticism (*tariqat*) (Putri, Kasim, Mursyidin, Suadi, & Nurdin, 2022). Linguistically, Banda Aceh also has a different language from Aceh Singkil (Singkel language), which is enough to describe the cultural differences between Aceh Singkil and Banda Aceh.

This difference created a distance between religious leaders from Banda Aceh and religious orientation in Aceh Singkil. Similarly, religious leaders are not equipped with communication and cultural introduction to Aceh Singkil before implementing the Islamic da'wah program. They have the basic Islamic religious knowledge.

Parmalim adherents were affected, as shown by the continuous movement of Islamic da'wah against people who still adhered to the religion of Parmalim. Although the purpose of the *Da'i Perbatasan* is not blatantly to Islamise the 'outsider' people, its social influence is quite strong. The lack of access of the Parmalim community to matters in carrying out their religion, such as government recognition in terms of education, social, and cultural, amid the incessant Islamisation project, which has a large budget, further minimises the awareness of sub-minority communities such as Parmalim.

#### 4. The Sub-minority

In 1930, in Pakpak Bharat Regency, a local pastor named evangelist I.W Banurea came to Aceh Singkil to do evangelism. Two years later, in 1932, I.W Banurea's activities received support from PT Socfindo (the oldest palm oil and crude palm oil industry in Aceh Singkil) to establish a church for the Protestant Christian community (Ismail, 2015). The church's presence in Aceh Singkil caused major problems in 1979 when the GTI (Gereja Tuhan Indonesia) church tried to establish a church in Gunung Meriah, the centre of economic activity in Aceh Singkil. There was an Islamic and Christian conflict in 1979, and until now, the church problem in Aceh Singkil has not found a definite point of peace. Christians are a minority in Aceh Singkil. However, Christians have vital economic access to trade in kitchen ingredients obtained from North Sumatra, which controls the distribution of vegetables, chili,

tubers, and so on to Aceh Singkil. The distributors from North Sumatra Province are Christian communities from Tiga Panah, Sidikalang, and Sumbul.

On the other hand, the Parmalim community is increasingly immersed in its position as a sub-minority that does not have adequate economic access, has limited houses of worship, and its adherents are decreasing. Indeed, Parmalim in Aceh Singkil gets access to law in establishing a house of worship but not in implementing their religious system. It is recognised as a social organisation, not as a religious identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). Parmalim adherents face symbolic discrimination by being unable to practice their religion and culture.

Murjin, the Chairman of Napa Galuh's Parmalism, admitted that his children had converted to Protestantism and Islam (Murjin, personal interview, June 23, 2019). It did not make him sad. Instead, he felt that converting his children from Parmalim made it easier for them in terms of employment, access to education, and social acceptance outside their village (Fealy, 2019). The conflict between Islam and Christianity in Aceh Singkil is not over yet. Still, the Parmalim problem has emerged as a polemic because it is not considered to exist at all as a civil rights problem of citizens that is not facilitated by the state and Aceh Province. As a sub-minority, the Parmalim community faces a dilemma. They have never been recorded as resisting their civil rights. Murjin and other adherents such as L Berutu, Jesma, and R Tumangger realised that the resistance they did would not have any impact at all (June 23, 2019; R Tumangger, Personal Interview, June 23, 2019), even if they are considered to exist, they are only limited to what the researcher mentioned above, as a unique society and symbolises the tolerance of Muslims. Religious people have a fairly strong religious base through the concept of religiosity and culture (Knitter, 2005). Parmalim can be seen not as a form of 'tolerance' but as fulfilling their rights as citizens of the Parmalim.

## 5. Hegemony of World Religions and Parmalim as Culture

Hegemony originates from the Greek term *hēgemonia*, which refers to the practice of dominance over other communities. Its use in political analysis was limited until the Italian politician and Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci extensively debated it. The meaning of hegemony is expanding with the increasing complexity of the discourse of authority in social life. Antonio Gramsci drew hegemony into other fields, such as ideology, rules, and religion (Arief, 1999). The hegemonic use of symbols of power exists in various social contexts. The motive for hegemony is the submission of certain groups to unequal power relations. Things like ethnic subjugation and forced individuals and groups must conform to ethical formulas run by those in power.

Hegemony manifests as the voluntary acceptance of ethical norms rather than through forceful suppression. Therefore, what frequently arises in social discussions is surrendering one's consciousness without any objects or experiences being suppressed. Based on the interview stated by Sailon (one of the oldest Parmalim leaders) on June 23, 2019, the Parmalim community in Napa Galuh asserts that Parmalim is a cultural phenomenon rather than a religious one. This statement is supported by the fact that the Parmalim community was initially affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, not the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Furthermore, Sailon stated that they are adherents of the belief system known as animism-dynamism, as defined by the state. However, other adherents are indeed recognised as religions.

In a nutshell, hegemonic subjugation refers to exerting control over groups that cannot resist the dominance imposed upon them by intellectual leadership through symbols, laws, and norms. Aceh Singkil Regency is a remote region inside Aceh Province that has had significant Islamisation efforts. In addition, there are frequent instances of horizontal religious confrontations involving the burning and sealing of Christian places of worship. The Parmalim community protects against potential conflicts by strictly adhering to all religious ethical principles. Hegemony in the Parmalim community operates in two directions. First, there is the pressure of acknowledgment from the government, which views these practices not as religions but as ancestral knowledge, customs, and civilizations that require safeguarding. Second, regional hegemony limits recognition efforts for the Parmalim community in Aceh Singkil. Hegemony, defined as the control over people's thoughts and beliefs, operates on a

conceptual level. However, when this control is exerted physically, it is called repressive dominance. However, in this instance, hegemony exerts a prolonged and organised influence in upholding the concept of dominant power (Berger & Luckmann, 1986).

The fact that Aceh Singkil Parmalim adherents are elderly is the most visible brutality and symbolic prejudice. Through Islamisation and Christianisation, their children became Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants. Administrative pressures exist to join government institutions or work in or beyond the area without socially rejecting Parmalim. In Aceh Singkil, many believe Parmalim is misguided, animistic, and does not contribute to the society of Aceh Singkil. Symbolic discrimination and other Parmalim issues are new. Former Parmalim was merged with Islam and Christianity in Barus-Singkel.

Rusmin Tumanggor used Max Muller's henotheism to describe the change in religion and culture among Parmalim, Christianity, and Islam in Barus-Singkel (Tumanggor, 2017). Henotheism is the belief that there is only one God or one fellowship of the Gods/Gods adopted by a man in conjunction with the belief of a subtle being or a variety of spirits living in the human environment (Mufid, 2012; Tumanggor, 2017, pp. 115–116). Islamic and Christian monotheism makes Parmalim more apparent to henotheists. In Aceh Singkil district's outskirts, such as Danau Paris and Suro, henotheism melted with Barus-Singkel culture in the customary relationship tolerance of Parmalim, Christianity, and Islam.

Regarding their restricted rights, this study proposed that all the stakeholders fulfill their rights, not only tolerate their presence. Tolerance of the Parmalim community is not a last effort to meet their needs as citizens. There are three things to do: 1) fulfill their fundamental rights in education, 2) allow them to practice religious rituals, and 3) make Parmalim a subject capable of defining themselves through the spirituality and culture they believe in and practice.

## 6. Conclusion

Parmalim is a religion with rituals, social organisation, and sacred notions. Therefore, Parmalim should have the same civil rights as other world religions. Religious scholars from Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism who have an agenda to make Parmalim adherents covert to world religion stem from a lack of understanding of religious identity for Parmalim adherents. For those who adhere to it, Parmalim reflects the ancestors' teachings and the identity of a local indigenous community in Barus-Singkel based on genuine culture.

The traditional genealogy of Singkel does not come from Aceh but from Barus, where many religions are intensively in contact in the archipelago. Parmalim is a synthesis of many religions and is a response of the local indigenous people of Singkel to the dissemination of world religions from Barus since the 7th century. However, the strong economic and political power, which is motivated by elements of the spread of world religions, has caused it to be increasingly marginalised and considered as part of religious apostasy, or groups that worship ghosts, animists, and deviant religious expressions.

The shortage of understanding of Parmalim significantly impacts the theological, customary, social, and political discussions in Singkil Aceh. The removal of Parmalim as an element in Aceh's custom, theology, and culture has led to the loss of indigenous Singkel customs. It declines in environmental ethics, causing disputes including church burnings, restrictions on civil liberties, and the rise of Islamic puritanism. Parmalim, the sole surviving indigenous religion in Aceh, is a significant historical aspect that has been deliberately erased or neglected in Aceh's historiography.

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