

# Spiritual being in Parmalim theology of the Batak people in North Sumatra

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This article explains the religious system of Parmalim sect found in the Batak lands of North Sumatra. The problem in the research is how the Parmalim theology is constructed and several aspects related to the religious ceremonies. In Parmalim, theology and religious rituals tend to be more dominant with natural theology. The main teachings of this sect mostly come from narratives and cultural texts and ethical teachings of the Batak community. This community still exists today because of its ability to adapt to the culture of the community and the support of the traditional Batak leaders themselves.

**Contribution:** The study provides vital insights into the religious composition of the Parmalim sect and the socio-cultural factors contributing to its resilience. It contributes to the broader understanding of religious diversity, tolerance and the role of leadership in the survival of such communities, aligning with the journal's focus on religious studies and cultural dynamics.

**Keywords:** Batak; Mulajadi Nabolon; natural theology; supernatural; worship.

Parmalim is the name for the adherents of Malim, the ancestor of the Batak tribe. Parmalim is an indigenous religion from the ancient Toba Batak and has been categorised by the government as one of the 'local' religions in Indonesia (Harahap & Irmawati 2020) and gets legitimacy from the government through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Batak people generally adhere to Islam and Christianity, but Parmalim is a religion that emerged long before the arrival of Islam and Christianity in this region. Before the colonial period, Ugama Malim existed as a way to live a holy life. However, when the colonialists came, this religious enthusiasm turned into a movement to fight colonialism and contain the religion they brought to Batak Land (Pane & Manurung 2022).

The first Batak people in the Batak Land have been around for 3000 years BC (Parlindungan 1964). This means that the age of the spiritual tradition of Parmalim is the same as the age of the Batak people themselves. Katimin, based on his quotes on Western scholars such as Karl Helbig and Pedersen, writes that this religion existed within the framework of Sisingamangaraja's efforts, around 1870, to keep the ancient Batak religion strong in the face of Christianity, Islam and the Dutch colonisers (Katimin 2012).

From the aspect of everyday life, many prohibited acts such as eating pigs, dogs and all kinds of bloody animals as followed by the Eastern Messiah based on the *Bible* (Old Testament) and also Islam. Abstinance from consuming pork and blood in Parmalim's teachings refers to the beliefs of the Batak people in the past. Likewise, eating food from the home of a grieving family (died) is forbidden. Its contribution and relevance to moral education, such as increasing awareness and harmony in society, for example, prohibiting food from the homes of families who are grieving. Strong bonds of brotherhood are based on religious doctrines that always touch social sentiment for unity in rituals. What is also interesting about this community is that the costumes they use in carrying out religious ceremonies are exactly the same as the clothes worn by Muslims in Indonesia.

With the use of a white turban, Monang explained that the headband was commonly used by the Batak people in the past. The black one means *harajaon* (kingdom), the red one means strength and the white one symbolises purity. Parmalim himself can use all three colours, and it does not have to be white. However, the Chief of Parmalim, who is a descendant of King Mulia, used to wear a black headband with a red tassel called *Tumtuman* (a type of scarf used as a headband by the party carrying out the traditional ceremony) (Gultom 2017).

**Note:** Historical Thought and Source Interpretation.

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From the sociological aspect and regional position, Parmalim is surrounded by various other religious traditions that are intensively carrying out religious missions, modern culture and even this area is a major tourist destination in Sumatra. Almost every time the values of modernity are heard and seen by the community, but this does not affect the Parmalim culture. There are some reductions in the number of adherents of this belief in their place of origin, but on the other hand, adherents of this belief also appear in several areas in North Sumatra. Dewantara, based on his quote from Rosidi's book entitled *Manusia Sunda*, said that along with the changing times, there will be influence or elimination of customs and traditions (Dewantara 2013). However, the Parmalim community in terms of their religious beliefs and practices still survives. According to the researcher's assumption that the survival of these customs and traditions is the role of traditional leaders as community elites in maintaining these customs and traditions. The problem in this research is how the construction of Parmalim theology and how its implications for the existence of their lives in the midst of the community and the domination of various major religions in the Batak community.

## Religion and supernatural

According to Durkheim, religious phenomena are naturally arranged into two fundamental categories: beliefs and rites. Firstly, they are states of opinion and consist of representations; secondly, they are determined modes of action. Between these two classes of facts, there is all the difference that separates thought from action. The rites can be defined and distinguished from other human practices – moral practices, for example – only by the special nature of their object. A moral rule prescribes certain manners of acting to us, just as a rite does, but which are addressed to a different class of objects. So it is the object of the rite that must be characterised, if we are to characterise the rite itself. Now it is in the beliefs that the special nature of this object is expressed. It is possible to define the rite only after we have defined the belief (Durkheim 1915).

Among the characteristics of a religion or belief is the presence of the supernatural. The supernatural is an order of things beyond our control, a world of mystery that cannot be known and grasped by the physical senses. So, religion is a kind of 'speculation' on everything outside of science and common sense. Spencer said that religion basically contains the belief in the existence of something eternal that is beyond the intellect (Herbert Spencer 1862). Likewise, Muller saw all religion as an attempt to understand the incomprehensible and to express the inexpressible, a desire for the infinite (Muller 1873:18).

Of course, the role shown by this feeling of mystery does not become unimportant in certain religions, including what Parmalim believes. The idea of mystery is actually not entirely original. The idea does not just come to humans without a process. Humans themselves process these ideas as well as they influence humans and are influenced by others. Therefore, not many more advanced religions still maintain this mysterious idea. Another idea that can be used for religion is

the idea of divinity. According to M. Reville, as quoted by Durkheim, religion is the determining force of human life, a bond that unites human thought with mysterious thoughts that rule the world and that brings peace to human life (Durkheim 1915:203). However, for Parmalim, the word *divinity* cannot be understood narrowly, because factually there are still many other religious facts found in this community. For example, the spirits of people who have died and the spirits that still roam in the religious imagination of the group have always been objects of rites and even worship, even though all such things are not God. That's why to define religion here no longer only uses God, but a more inclusive word is made, namely something spiritual or spiritual being, as Tylor also uses that term (Tylor 1873:491).

With reference to Durkheim's theory of social sentiment, in maintaining the belief that it exists and is able to maintain its existence, the researcher sees that Parmalim maintains a strong social sentiment among fellow Parmalim followers. This theory states that the early religion emerged because of a vibration, an emotion generated in the human soul as fellow citizens. Nelita, according to Durkheim, writes that religion is still able to maintain its existence because there is a social sentiment that binds the belief community, but if we look at the cycle of society, which changes from time to time further (Situmorang 2017). To maintain balance in the social system, socialisation and social control mechanisms are needed to maintain social order. The relationship between the belief system and the culture that is owned by a society is so close that it even blends. A multicultural society is a society consisting of various ethnic groups, religions and cultures. The existence of a multicultural society will certainly affect individual behaviour patterns, where they must be able to adapt to the surrounding environment and different cultural backgrounds. Malinowsky adds that something can solve a problem if it works within the culture. This is because of the analogy of organisms in the natural sciences that states that each organism has its own function and can affect its environment (Malinowsky 1960:83–84).

The concept of divinity that is often associated with myth and culture usually lasts a long time. Myths play a role in continuing to rotate the dynamics of society. Wrahatnala, based on his quote from the work of Sutrisno, Mudji & Putranto, entitled *Cultural Theories*, said that myth transcends the content of collective cultural logic to influence patterns of view and patterns of action, and ultimately, society towards its world. Through myth, values as the sacred are formulated into metaphysical entities or from 'there world' so that they are more legitimate because they point to the sacred and are not questionable. Through the mystification of values being immortal, myth mediates how society relates to the external sphere and to fellow community members. Thus, myth is one of the powerful tools to bind the collectivity of society (Wrahatnala 2017:39).

For people who live in rural areas, the myth aspect generally plays a very important role, even though they already have a

belief that is based on religion. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the mythical and religious aspects of certain activities and rituals. For them, God, man and nature are one entity. From this concept, they also formulate a way of life or ethics in life. The function of ratio in this religious tradition is very low. Even the theology that develops in a society like this is more of a theology of fatalism, everything is up to God and the will of nature. That is not much different from natural theology, as practised in the Christian tradition prior to the 17th century, which was largely undertaken from a standpoint of faith (Jonathan Head 2021).

## Brief profile of Parmalim

According to folklore, the pioneer of Malim's teachings in the Batak Land, originally was King Uti, whom Parmalim believed to be the direct messenger of Debata Mulajadi Nabolon with the aim of reconciliation between Banua Ginjang and Banua Tonga (the world), which at that time began to drift apart. The leadership of King Uti was then continued by Mr. Simarimbulubosi and continued by King Na Opat Puluh Opat after King Sisingamangaraja I to XII and finally King Nasiakbagi. After King Nasiakbagi, the leadership relay was handed over to His Majesty King Naipospos. It was during the reign of King Mulia Naipospos that Malim's teachings were then institutionalised into the Malim (*Agama Malim di tanah Batak* n.d.) religion. Until now, the belief held by Sisingamaraja is still maintained in the Batak Land, precisely in Huta Tinggi Village, Laguboti District, Toba Samosir Regency.

Followers of the Malim religion call or identify themselves as 'Parsolam' namely people who do a lot of good deeds or are interpreted as people who permanently limit themselves from certain foods. Hutatinggi village, as the centre of Parmalim followers, was pioneered by a spiritual figure, namely Raja Mulia Naipospos in 1921, and he was a student of Sisingamangaraja XII during the Dutch colonial resistance at that time. Parmalim has made Sisingamangaraja XII a central figure because it is considered a drop of Mulajadi Nabolon. At first, Parmalim was a spiritual movement to defend ancient customs and beliefs that were threatened with extinction caused by a new religion brought by the Dutch, which was considered as colonialism and imperialism (Siregar & Gulo 2020).

According to a similar opinion, the Parmalim religion was first initiated by a datu (spiritual figure) named Guru Somaliang Pardede, a person who was very close to Sisingamangaraja XII as the last king of the Sisingamangaraja dynasty. Some Western writers say this teaching was carried out by the followers of Sisingamangaraja, especially by two of its war leaders, Guru Somaliang and Raja Mulia Naipospos, to protect the traditional beliefs and culture of the Toba Batak from Christian, Islamic and Dutch colonial influences (Sidjabat 1983:326) But, in fact, the majority of Batak people adhere to Christianity and Islam, not Parmalim. This is because of the more aggressive spirit of Muslim missionaries such as Imam Bonjol and Christian missionaries. Parmalim is quite slow when compared to these

two religions, because Parmalim also emphasises local cultural aspects in its mission, while the other two religions have a more humanist and rational approach Masashi Hirose, as quoted by Irwansyah, argued that the Parmalim movement was an 'anti-messianist-colonial movement' that wanted to destroy the Sisingamangaraja kingdom. He further explained that this 'new religious movement' from Somalia was a reaction against the Dutch colonial government and the Christianisation of the Toba Batak people (Harahap 2000).

Before the Batak people embraced religion, they already had mystical beliefs, as found in the pagan community. Batak paganism is a mixture of religious belief in Debata, animistic worship of the spirits of the dead and dynamism (Gultom 2010:198). These three elements of religion cannot be separated from one another in every traditional event. In the system of worship, Parmalim performs worship to Debata; at the same time they also perform worship to the spirits of the dead and objects that are considered to have supernatural powers. Thus, the Parmalim religious system includes aspects of theology, culture and mystical beliefs held by the Batak community (Agusti 2010).

Institutionally, the Parmalim sect emerged in the 20th century, namely around the 1900s after the death of King Sisingamangaraja XII. Then in 1921, the Dutch issued a formal permit to King Mulia Naipospos to establish Bale Pasogit in Hutatinggi Laguboti through Contoleur van Toba Letter Number 1494/13 dated 25 June 1921, and since then the official Parmalim school has been openly carrying out the rituals.

## Parmalim's divinity teachings

The Parmalim believes that the source of everything is the owner of the Parmalim kingdom who is in *Banua Ginjang*. Parmalim is a belief in the Batak tribe, which is believed to have originated from Debata Mulajadi Nabolon, which means God is noble as the source of all events that exist. That is, here there is a confession of faith that Debata Mulajadi Nabolon as the Lord God, the one and only God, and Nabolon means the Greatest. This teaching was handed over to the Malim Debata or so-called messengers or prophets from Banua Ginjang. All of Parmalim's teachings came from there, then by 'malim' Debata was conveyed to mankind in Banua Tonga (Earth). Parmalim believes, before Debata created humans through the hands of *Deakparuraj*, the Malim kingdom actually existed in Banua Ginjang. Then Debata created other gods and appointed them as assistants as well as included them in the ranks of the owner of the Parmalim kingdom in Banua Ginjang. The names of the gods are Debata Natolu, Siboru Deakparuraj, Nagapadohaniaji and Siboru Saningnaga (Agusti 2010:39).

In Parmalim's belief, everything that happens has already been determined by Debata. Will and effort are Debata's motion and effort, not human. This model of religious belief is not much different from other formal religions that embrace fatalism. According to the teachings of Parmalim, Debata or

God cannot be seen through the eyes by creatures since humans existed until now. The debate will not be visible to humans as long as the spirit has not left the human body. People who can see Debata are only those who do good deeds and have been accepted by Him. On the other hand, Debate will not bring good luck to human beings who have abandoned its teachings. For the Parmalim religion, people who do not believe in Debata Mulajadi Nabolon means that he is not a follower of the teachings of the Parmalim faith.

In addition to believing in Debata Mulajadi Nabolon as God the Creator, according to Parmalim's teachings there are also Debata Natolu or three Debatas. Firstly, there is Batara Guru. He is an emanation of the power of the Debata Mulajadi Nabolon regarding *hahomion* or wisdom. Everything that exists and that will exist can be realised through Batara Guru. It is through Batara Guru that this wisdom radiates even though its source begins with Debata Mulajadi Nabolon, both the creation of this universe and the end of the world. He had created and continues to create the world, as well as ruling over the destiny of human beings (Tobing 1956). Batara Guru is the source of royal power and the holder of legal power. Secondly is the Debata Sorisohaliapan, and he is the embodiment of the power of the Debata Mulajadi Nabolon on *hamalimon* or purity and destiny. Sorisohaliapan's debate is in charge of determining human destiny, which is the determinant of everyone's life in the present and in the future. Thirdly is the Debata Belabuhan, which is a manifestation of God's power of Debata Mulajadi Nabolon regarding strength. This debate teaches *parbinotoan* or knowledge that makes people smart. These three debates are symbolised in the form of black symbolising Batara Guru, white symbolising Debata Sorisohaliapan and red symbolising Debata Balabulan. These three elements are reflected in the culture of the Batak people as seen in the typology of *ulos* or Batak shawls made of red, white, black thread. Parmalim's teaching about the form of the three Debata Natolu is symbolised by a statue of a chicken carved at the top of Ugamo Malim's place of worship called Bale Pasogit (Suharyanto 2017).

It should be noted that the principle of believing in the doctrine of 'the owner of the kingdom of Parmalim in Banua Ginjang' is not derived from a holy book, but refers to the sound of *tonggo-tonggo* or the text of prayers compiled by King Nasiakbagi. In other words, it is through reading the prayers that Parmalim adherents believe in and make them a reference in carrying out various religious rituals (Agusti 2010:40). Based on this, the teachings of divinity are not derived from biblical doctrine. In mystical history, for example, it often happens that members of other religious orders also contributed to the growing body of late medieval mystical handbooks (McGinn 2015). This is in accordance with what was conveyed by Monang Naipospos, a Toba Batak culturalist who said that Parmalim did not have the *Tumbaga Holing book*, and did not know Adam and Eve as the first humans. The first humans they believed were *Raja Ihat Manisia* and *Boru Ihat Manisia*, according to the teachings of the Batak people in the past. Formerly, the Batak people

understood *Hamalimon* or piety and purity referring to *Haiason* or physical and spiritual purity, then it increases to *Parsolamon*, namely the ability to maintain oneself from things that pollute the body and spirit. There are many things that are part of the *Parsolamon*, one of which is not consuming pork and blood, he said (Gultom n.d.).

However, there are other opinions saying that Parmalim has a holy book. The delivery of Malim's religious teachings was more often delivered orally, in the form of *turi-turian* or fairy tales and this is not much different from Batak teachings in general (Angerler 2016). There are almost no written remains, a kind of holy book, that contain the origin story of Malim. It was only during *Siraja Batak's* lifetime that it was discovered that he had given two letters to his two children in Batak script. The first letter was named *agong* and handed over to *Guru Tatea Bulan*. The contents are about *hadatuon* or traditional medicine, officership, swordsmanship and supernatural powers. While the second letter given to King Isumbaon is called the *Tumbaga Holing Letter*, which contains the teachings of the kingdom, the law of justice, rice fields, business and the arts. Another letter that recently appeared is *Pustaha Haboronon*, which is said to have been written directly by Sisingamangaraja XII, one of the saints in the teachings of Parmalim (Adam 2017). According to one opinion, *Pustaha Tumbaga Holing* is a book that existed before the Parmalim religion was born. However, *Pustaha Tumbaga Holing* is considered a holy book for Parmalim. The Book of *Pustaha Habonaron* is the teachings that contain Tona, Patik, Poda and Uhum. This *Pustaha* book is a holy book that is often used by Parmalim or also known as *Pustaha Naimbaru*. This book is a gift from King Sisingamangaraja XII (*Relasi Parmalim dengan adat batak toba* [Penulis Batak Institute n.d.]).

If examined from the aspect of religious epistemology, Parmalim's religious understanding is closer to natural theology where there is no scripture or revelation as the source of their divine inspiration. The life of the Parmalim people who are closer to nature makes them closer to theology that comes from direct life experiences that are quite challenging and suffering. This is similar to what Jonathan Head said when discussing *Anne Conway's Principia* in the section discussing religious epistemology and suffering (Head 2021). In this theology, the proof and acknowledgment of the existence of God do not come from revelation, but through an in-depth study of natural phenomena, which means believing in God in his creation.

In the faith of the Parmalim sect, there are four people who are recorded as 'King or Malim' Debata who was sent to Batak people, namely Raja Uti, Simarimbulubosi, King Sisingamangaraja and King Nasiakbagi. These four kings are the representatives of the Debate to convey religious teachings to the people of the Batak tribe so that they *marhadebataon* or worship gods and *marhamalimon* or perform acts of worship (Agusti 2010:40). In Parmalim belief, *habonaron* (truth) is in the form of *tondi* or spirit. It is supernatural, subtle and its substance cannot be grasped by the five human

senses. Although it cannot be seen with the eye, it can be seen through *roha* or the human spirit. According to Parmalim's teachings, habonaron is the son of naposo (the young) or the suru-suruan or messenger of Debata Mulajadi Nabolon. He is in charge of *mambonarhon* or justifying all forms of human behaviour on earth. In addition, he also acts as a witness, guard, *mangaramoti* or protect and also gives *pissang-pissang* or warnings to humans (Gultom 2010:173). The four Malim as Debata's envoys were then believed to be the chosen people of most of the Batak people. They were sent to preach about religion to the Batak people in stages over a period of approximately 400 years (Agusti 2010:33–34).

## Spirituality of Parmalim in the context of traditional leaders

In the context of Indonesia's national history, Sisingamangaraja XII, with the full name Patuan Bosar Ompu Pulo Batu Sinambela (18 February 1845–17 June 1907), was a king in the land of Toba, North Sumatra. He was a warrior who fought against the Dutch, then appointed by the Indonesian government as a National Hero of Indonesia since 09 November 1961 based on the Decree of the President of the Republic of Indonesia No. 590/1961 (Sidjabat 2007). The existence of Parmalim as a religious sect in the Batak community is increasingly gaining legitimacy with the presence of Sisingamangaraja XII in it. Besides this, Sisingamangaraja XII is not only an ordinary human being, who adheres to the Parmalim religion, but the Batak people view that he has supernatural powers that exceed the Batak people in general (Hirosue 2005).

There are many myths related to Sisingamangaraja. For example, he could disappear without being seen by the Dutch army at that time and had the power to ward off evil spirits, bring rain and control rice cultivation. Even today, there is a spring called Aek Sipangolu, which appears when Sisingamangaraja and his elephants cross the Bakkara area. The elephant he was riding was thirsty, and with his magic, Sisingamangaraja hit his staff on the ground. 'Let the water rise', Until now, this well is visited by many people, because the water is believed to cure all kinds of diseases. There are 12 Kings Sisingamangaraja, and according to Parmalim sect teachings, there is only one spirit of Sisingamangaraja, because the spirit in them is the emanation of the spirit of Debata Mulajadi Nabolon. Sisingamangaraja being shot dead by Dutch troops under the leadership of Christoffel. On 21 June 1907, the Dutch announced that Sisingamangaraja XII had died. However, according to Parmalim's belief, Sisingamangaraja was not dead, because not long after the shooting, a king named Raja Nasiakbagi appeared in Batak Land. It was Raja Nasiakbagi who was later believed to be Sisingamangaraja XII who had changed his name (Agusti 2010:36).

The spiritual power of the Parmalim religion, as described above, is even stronger, especially when this sect has mystical teachings called *sahala*. Mystical and myth are two aspects that are mixed in this teaching. In Bishop Sinaga's hands, the myth does not *represent* something, it is something (Hirschfeld 1983).

According to the beliefs of the Parmalim sect, *sahala* is a holy spirit that comes from Debata Mulajadi Nabolon, which was revealed through *Balabulan* to the chosen people of mankind. Therefore, *sahala* cannot be learned nor can it be called upon to acquire it, but it will come by itself (*maisolang*) to a human being without the person concerned. *Sahala* can be found in a person constantly, but it can also be temporary. The form of *sahala* is invisible, subtle and cannot be grasped by the five human senses nor is it known when it comes into humans. People who are visited by *sahala* are called *marsahala*, meaning those who have *sahala*. It means that *sahala* has been united with his soul and body. Whatever a person says and does, it is in fact the words and deeds of *sahala*. His original personality will not appear but the *sahala* person, and this *sahala* person always colours human attitudes and behaviour every time. The characteristics of people who are 'marsahala' can be seen in their daily lives.

Educational values learned from community rituals or customs include respect for elders through rituals, and self-improvement after someone becomes a 'marsahala' so that changes occur in oneself and one's behaviour in life. Apart from that, there are also aspects of social ethics between men and women, which can be seen in the Saturday Marari ceremony. Usually, people who enter 'sahala' will experience changes in themselves, especially in terms of human attitudes and behaviour. He will always control himself from something that can damage himself and others anywhere and anytime (Gultom 2010:192). Besides that, at certain times, there are also changes in the face of the person concerned. At first, a person's face looks normal, but with the presence of *sahala*, that person's face will appear more authoritative because they have gained charisma (Peri Agusti 2010:42).

In the early days, the influence of the authority of such figures influenced every decision in society. However, times have changed, and the influence of the characters' lives has also changed. For example, in ancient times, the Batak people lived in rural areas and obeyed customary law decisions. Trials are carried out by traditional kings, and all decisions of the kings are recognised and obeyed by violators of customary law. Nowadays, Batak people resolve crime problems with the state. Several intervening factors include new religions from the West, such as Christianity and modern education, which have had a great influence on the Parmalim tradition. Another aspect that makes this community have its own dynamics is the influence of the community's view that Parmalim is very fanatical and secretive about food. There are many taboos for Parmalim, which are sometimes considered too excessive. The majority of people also do not agree to marry their family with Parmalim because the differences between the two are difficult to reconcile. Natural changes and cultural shifts also influence Parmalim teachings, especially when many adherents of this religion also move from their original land (inland). In the new area, they also try to maintain this tradition, but it is not as effective as in the original place, because social mobility has changed. The traditional village lifestyle is very different from the urban lifestyle, which is full of rationality and changes rapidly.

## Social dimension in the Parmalim ritual

Parmalim's relationship with the local community is very intense; each of them can meet at any time, especially at certain events. Apart from that, the universal Batak tribal spirit always overcomes the traditional boundaries of each citizen, so that they can easily get along and unite. Every religion and belief has rituals or ceremonies that are routinely carried out by its adherents. Parmalim, as a religious sect, also has various types of rituals. In Batak society, Toba Batak customs and culture are used as a way of life and also as a religious system. A study by Dapot Siregar and Yurulina Gulo on the existence of the Parmalim religion shows that the way of life of followers of the Malim religion is very close to nature. Rituals or ceremonies performed by Parmalim are very dominant with Toba Batak customs and culture. In dressing, for example, they always use *ulos* or the traditional shawl, in worship they use the *gondang* (traditional drum). Even though the modern music industry has developed, they still wear *gondang* in worship. Music is important in rituals because it is related to culture (ŞEBNEM SÖZER ÖZDEMİR 2019). This is one of the things that Parmalim does to maintain the existence of Batak Toba culture by remaining faithful in wearing ornaments, traditional clothes and traditional music in religious ceremonies.

A follower of the Parmalim religion has a ceremony from birth, maturity until death. There are nine obligatory ceremonies as a rule in the religion of Parmalim. They are Martutuaek (Birth), Pasahat Tondi (Death), Mararisabtu (Worship every Saturday), Mardebata (Worship on one's intention), Mangan Mapaet (Worship asking for the removal of sins), Sipaha Sada (Worship commemorating the birth of God Simarimbulubosi), Sipaha Lima (Sacrifice day worship), Mamasumasu (Marriage blessing), Marpangir (Purification by wearing oranges) (Siregar & Gulo 2020). There are three types of rites or ceremonies out of nine ceremonies that must be followed by followers who must use the *gondang* (traditional Batak Toba music drum) and accompanied by a traditional dance called *tortor*, that is Mardebata, Sipaha Sada dan Sipaha Lima. These three rites should not be separated from the *gondang* and *tortor*, because both of them signal that the worship ceremony has received a complete value (Wiflihani & Suharyanto 2011). According to this esoteric teaching, certain music is related to a certain emotion, and living through these emotions is quite necessary for a dervish or ceremonial leaders (Gade 2007). In Islam, for example, not surprisingly, the tradition of music, which is considered by tasavvuf as an important vehicle for self-cultivation, relates each music to a specific emotion as well. In his article on the effects of music on human beings, religious music researcher Ruhi Kalender (1992) draws attention to how theoretical works of the past have considered certain music as capable of generating certain emotions in the hearts of audiences. Music is the aesthetic bringing together of measured and harmonious sounds, with or without rhythm, within a certain understanding of art, in order to express an emotion, a thought and idea or a natural event. *Gondang* is one of the identities of the Toba Batak

people that is still preserved in the Parmalim community. *Gondang* music has a social and spiritual dimension (Harahap 2012). One of the ceremonies performed by the parmalmim, which is full of Toba Batak customs and culture, is *Marari Sabtu*, a type of worship performed on Saturday. Malim religious rituals are routinely carried out every Saturday; therefore, it is often referred to as 'Saturday Marari'. In this religious rite, all people wear Toba Batak cultural clothing. The fathers used Batak *ulos* and turbans full of ropes while the women wear *kebaya* and *ulos* and hair in a bun. *Ulos* is a kind of shawl, and one of the traditional rites practiced by the Batak tribe, which has deep philosophical meanings and values for their cultural activities (Nainggolan 2020).

*Ulos* cannot be separated from every ceremony and life of the Batak people because it has a spiritual dimension (Situmorang 2016). At the time of the ceremony, the sitting positions of men and women are separated where the man takes his place on the right and the woman on the left. The purpose of separating men and women is to maintain their chastity so that they are not sinful and to direct people to stay focused on the God they worship. The use of symbols and various traditional and cultural ornaments of the Toba Batak is not only in ceremonies or rites but even in almost every Parmalim worship.

The Parmalim community really takes care of the environment. This local wisdom, for example, can be seen from the procedures for carrying out the Sipahalima ritual ceremony on the first day. In the first stage, several men went to cut wood and went to the forest by wearing a sarong and *ulos*. The wood to be cut is called *hayu bintatar*, which is large enough to be cut down. The felling is done by a pre-determined chosen person. At the time the wood will be cut down, it must be ensured that small plants that are around the tree do not get crushed. It is a must for the Parmalim community to provide replacement seeds before logging is carried out, so that these types of wood do not become extinct and can be reused in the future. The felling process must not use machines. The tool allowed to be used is an ax, and the person cutting can take turns. It aims to make people realise that in this life, we must work hard and try to fulfill every need but still must not destroy nature (Siahaan 2018:54–55) This is relevant to what Liverman said, during the last decades, an acute awareness emerged about the ecological problems that affect our world, which are being caused, at least in part, by human action. (Liverman 2015).

Apart from that, Parmalim is also not allowed to cut down trees carelessly. It is believed that this prohibition will bring disaster if it is violated. The reason is that forests, as part of nature and also God's creation, must be preserved. Traditionally, if someone wants to cut down a tree in the forest, they must replant it instead. It is said that Parmalim's teachings believe that there was a king who ruled in the forest (*harangan*) who became known as Boru Tindolok (King of the Harangan). This then becomes a reference for the major events or rituals of the Parmalim religion, which are held regularly every Saturday and every year.

According to the majority of climate scientists, the massive emission of greenhouse gases associated with human activity is responsible for global warming and important changes in the climate. The problem is worsened by the accelerated deforestation of some regions of the planet (Lind & Nobre 2021). Parmalim followers are not influenced by popular culture. This is because their beliefs are formed from customs and culture. Loyalty in carrying out the teachings is one of the main keys for Parmalim in their existence and existence to maintain Toba Batak customs and culture. In almost every Parmalim rite, this paradigm is maintained. What is important about Parmalim's teachings in the global world is that they include the teachings of individual ethics and social ethics, which are always concerned with maintaining the balance of life and nature. Individually, a person must live a clean life and adapt to calm natural conditions. Socially, a simple and not too materialistic attitude to life makes humans always be careful and alert, not hate each other or be hostile. This is really needed by this world at this time.

What is presented here is as an example of cases of the Parmalim system of worship and rituals. What should be noted here is that almost all of the Parmalim worship systems are collective and in very large numbers. Rituals that are individual versions are not so widely introduced or found in Parmalim worship. Of course, in this system of worship, the pattern of social relations is permanently established; especially this ceremony is routinely held. In fact, it is always seen that the time to communicate with each follower is actually more than just the main ritual that is carried out. In this worship, all people who have different professions meet. The rich and poor, workers and employers, fellow workers, traditional leaders and so on gather in this ceremony. It can be imagined how strong the cohesion and intensity of public relations are.

In ceremonies like this, in addition to the purpose of worship, each community also wants to show their respective roles. Traditional leaders, community leaders and religious leaders also want to show themselves as citizens who are responsible for ordinary people. Ordinary people and commoners will also feel at ease if they can get close to the figures above. Sociologically, the presence of the community in these rituals is actually related to the need for recognition from others for each individual. If this recognition is realised, then each individual and group can prove its existence. The ritual system of the Parmalim religion, such as this, allows this religion to survive and progress in modern times and can even develop in certain areas. However, in certain cases, the development of this congregation is still relatively slow because the dominance of traditional Parmalim figures is not as sacred as in previous eras. The lack of Parmalim traditional figures who take part in strategic government positions also makes this tradition progress slowly.

Besides that, the dominance of customs and culture that has become part of the rites makes customs and culture a strong patron for the Parmalim group. The unification of customs and culture in the religious beliefs of Parmalim can make the

followers of this sect less easily influenced by modernisation and globalisation. The faithfulness and steadfastness of Parmalim in carrying out rites, ceremonies and also traditional and cultural values are a means of counteracting the various impacts of modernity and globalisation. Then the prohibition on stealing that is firmly adhered to by Parmalim residents makes the environment safe. Then, government support and the religious and cultural attitudes of other people whose strong pluralism made the situation even better. The doctrine of King Sisingamangaraja or also known as King Nasiakbagi instilled a motto for his followers to accept development without sacrificing Batak spiritual values. This motto is known as Parbinotoan Naimbaru (new knowledge) Ngolu Naimbaru (new life), Tondi na marsihohot (strong and steadfast spirit). This is a new concept of life, no longer what people think that the Parmalim community is behind the times and lives in the wilderness. Therefore, adherents of this belief also try to live in prosperity not only in Batak land but also move to other cities to get a more prosperous life.

## Conclusion

At the end of this article, it is stated that the construction of Parmalim theology is different from formal religious doctrines in general. Formal religion is usually strict with rules based on scripture. Whereas in Parmalim, there is not only an acknowledgment of the existence of God but also develops into a belief on the basis of the mystical power of the nature in which they live. Religious rituals that are carried out are not only worshipping God, but there are also several rituals related to the worship of natural and human forces that are considered sacred. This can be said to be a characteristic of the Parmalim religious system. People who are honoured as characters or heroes are not only considered great, popular and clever in strategy, but they are humans who have spiritual or mystical powers and they are also always associated with mythology.

The ways and strategies of Parmalim's diversity have implications for their survival in the midst of the community and the dominance of various other major religions in the Batak community. The spirituality they develop is not in the context of formal theology; on the contrary, they do many ceremonies related to nature and traditional figures. Parmalim's extraordinary respect for Sisingamangaraja made them get sympathy from the wider community. Their rituals are closely related to the community, like ritual of birth and death making them easy to adapt sociologically to their environment. Traditional parties make them welcomed by all levels of society, including those who are not from Parmalim itself.

Discussing Parmalim until now is an interesting theme. Since centuries ago, this flow came to the Batak lands and showed its distinctive characteristics, namely a belief system that was created from traditional societal culture but still survives in the modern era. The teachings and attitudes of adherents of these beliefs are unique and different from adherents of formal religions around them. It is not easy to answer why this group has survived until now. There are many

assumptions that have developed, for example, by geographical, social factors, the attitude of people who are still agrarian, natural conditions or economic and political factors. The mystical and mythological nuances of this tradition are still visible today and still survive as they are.

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## Author's contribution

S.S. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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