

SIPAHALIMA IN PARMALIM TEACHINGS: AN ANALYSIS OF LOCAL SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE AGAINST THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNIZATION IN THE CITY OF MEDAN

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the meaning, function, and dynamics of the Sipahalima ritual within the Parmalim belief system in Medan City, as well as the adaptation strategies employed by its community in an urban and modern context. This research is significant because Sipahalima is not only a spiritual practice but also a marker of local cultural identity that is vulnerable to marginalization amid globalization and dominant socio-cultural pressures. The study adopts a qualitative approach based on anthropological theory, particularly Victor Turner's concept of ritual and theories of cultural identity. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with key informants from the Parmalim community, and document analysis. The findings reveal that Sipahalima functions as a medium for community unity, internal solidarity, and the transmission of Batak noble values to the younger generation. The Parmalim community also demonstrates creative adaptation efforts through the use of digital technology and openness to interfaith dialogue. The study concludes that the continuation of the Sipahalima ritual reflects the cultural and spiritual resilience of the Parmalim community, while also serving as a form of resistance against stigmatization and the erosion of local values. Broader recognition and systematic documentation are necessary to ensure the preservation of this practice within Indonesia's diverse cultural framework.

Keywords: Sipahalima; Parmalim; Cultural identity.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a country rich in cultural diversity and local belief systems. Amid the dominance of major religions, traditional belief systems continue to endure and serve as spiritual identities for certain communities. One such belief is Parmalim, the indigenous faith of the Batak Toba people, which has developed since the late 19th century (Situmorang & Zuska, 2023). Parmalim emphasizes the principles of purity, reverence for ancestors, and harmonious relationships with nature and God (Debata Muljadi Nabolon). The presence of the Parmalim community, particularly in the city of Medan, marks a form of spiritual diversity that often exists on the margins of mainstream religious discourse. Unfortunately, this belief system is still not fully recognized within Indonesia's official religious framework, resulting in various limitations on religious expression, including the construction of places of worship (parsantian) and the performance of sacred rituals such as Sipahalima (Nainggolan, 2021).

Various academic sources have highlighted Parmalim's existence as a unique form of local spirituality that has withstood the tides of modernization. However, specific studies discussing the Sipahalima ritual in an urban context—such as in the city of Medan—remain scarce. Previous research has mostly focused on the historical aspects of Parmalim (Wahyuni & Ud, 2024) or public reception towards local beliefs (Indra, 2017), but has yet to explore in depth the role of Sipahalima as a representation of cultural and spiritual resilience amidst the challenges of modernization in large cities. Within this framework, there exists a research gap concerning how the Sipahalima ritual is preserved, adapted, and interpreted by urban Parmalim communities living under dominant cultural pressures and limited state recognition (Katimin, 2012).

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This study aims to analyze the meaning, function, and dynamics of the Sipahalima ritual within Parmalim teachings in Medan. The main focus is on how the Parmalim community maintains this ritual amidst the pressures of modernization and the social stigmatization that often arises from the public's lack of understanding of local beliefs. This research also seeks to examine the adaptive strategies employed by the Parmalim community in facing contemporary challenges, including the use of technology, youth education, and participation in interfaith dialogue. Thus, this study contributes not only to the academic discourse on local belief systems but also expands the perspective on spiritual pluralism in contemporary Indonesia (Nugroho & de Jong, 2019).

Argumentatively, this research is based on the assumption that the Sipahalima ritual is not only a form of religious expression but also a cultural strategy to preserve the identity and existence of the Parmalim community in the public sphere. Using a cultural anthropology approach and Victor Turner's theory of ritual, this study seeks to demonstrate that Sipahalima is a manifestation of local spiritual resilience as well as a form of resistance against marginalization. In this context, the author hypothesizes that the Parmalim community in Medan has successfully transformed traditional rites into a modern, adaptive symbol of identity, without losing the essential values of their ancestral heritage (Ruruh Aris Setyawibawa, 2025).

A study of the Parmalim community and the Sipahalima ritual reveals a diversity of approaches and directions in current academic discourse. Broadly speaking, there are three dominant tendencies in the patterns of study: first, sociological studies that emphasize the social functions and community solidarity; second, literary-anthropological approaches that explore the symbols and cultural values embedded in the rituals; and third, ethical and aesthetic studies that delve into the moral and artistic dimensions of these religious practices. These three patterns reflect academic interest in the complexity of local traditions such as Parmalim, yet each still leaves gaps that need to be addressed—particularly concerning the community's strategies of adaptation in the face of modernization and urbanization.

The first tendency is evident in the research by Putri Amelia Sari and her colleagues, who focus their study on the sociological meaning of the Sipahalima ceremony in Medan Denai. They found that this ritual primarily serves to strengthen social solidarity, create a space for tolerance, and build a cohesive community network (Sari, Syahminan, & Muary, 2024). While this study provides valuable insights into the social role of Sipahalima, it has yet to explore in depth how the ritual also functions as a cultural strategy in responding to external pressures such as globalization, modernization, or stigma against religious minority groups.

The second tendency is represented by symbolic and literary approaches, as seen in the work of Kartika Sari. In her research, she examined the cultural values found in the mantras used during the Sipahalima ritual. Her findings indicate five primary relationships within Parmalim teachings that are reflected in these mantras: relationships with God, nature, society, fellow humans, and the self (Sari, 2018). While rich in symbolism and offering insight into the cosmological structure of Parmalim, this study has not yet connected its findings with modern social dynamics or the community's response to external pressures such as cultural shifts or urbanization.

The third tendency stems from ethical and aesthetic approaches, exemplified by Hartina's work on the values embedded in the Tor-tor Mangalahat Horbo dance. She explained that the dance embodies specific ethical values—ranging from intention, attire, musical accompaniment, to the use of properties—as well as aesthetic values emerging from the harmony of movement and spiritual symbolism (Hartina, 2008). This study enriches our understanding of cultural expression in the context of sacred rites. However, its scope remains limited to traditional areas like Laguboti and has yet to observe how these ethical and aesthetic values are preserved or transformed when brought into urban settings such as Medan.

Although these three approaches contribute significantly to the understanding of Parmalim teachings, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding how this community maintains and adapts its spiritual practices within contemporary urban life. In particular, there is a lack of studies that explicitly examine how the Parmalim respond to modernization pressures through innovations

such as the use of digital media, participation in public discourse, or educational strategies aimed at the younger generation. Moreover, most prior studies have focused more on the ritualistic and symbolic aspects, without considering the rituals as mechanisms of cultural resistance or expressions of identity within broader social spaces.

This research aims to fill that gap by analyzing how the Parmalim community in Medan City sustains the Sipahalima ritual through creative and contextual adaptive strategies. Beyond merely preserving the external forms of the ritual, this community has begun to integrate digital technology as an educational tool, strengthen community communication through social media, and build engagement with the wider society through interfaith dialogue. By adopting this approach, the study seeks to expand the scope of previous research by viewing Sipahalima not only as an inherited ancestral ritual, but also as a space for spiritual, social, and cultural transformation in confronting the challenges of modernization.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study examines the ritual practice of Sipahalima in the Parmalim tradition as a form of local spiritual resilience amid modernization. The material object of the research focuses on the Parmalim community in the city of Medan, as their presence reflects the dynamics of preserving tradition within a complex urban context. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study strategy (Darmalaksana, 2020; Salim & Syahrur, 2012), allowing for an in-depth exploration of the contextual meanings and functions of the ritual. Primary data were obtained through participant observation and in-depth interviews, while secondary data were collected from documents and scholarly literature (Cawelti, 1969). The main focus lies in understanding the ritual tradition from an emic perspective, particularly within the framework of cultural resistance and the spirituality of local communities.

Research participants were selected purposively, taking into account their involvement in and knowledge of the Sipahalima ritual. The key informants were Mr. Doni MT Sirait (Ulu Punguan Parmalim Medan), Mr. Harianto Simantunjak, and Mr. Bistok Manurung, who were interviewed in May 2025 using a persuasive approach to ensure natural and informative interactions. The research process included literature review, field observation, interviews, and documentation. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and interpreting key themes such as the meaning of the ritual, adaptation to modernity, and the preservation of cultural values. This approach was chosen as it aligns with the anthropological tradition that emphasizes symbolic meaning and spiritual experience within indigenous communities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning and Fundamental Concept of Sipahalima in Parmalim Teachings

Parmalim emerged within the Batak community towards the end of the 1870s. The origin of this group lies in the efforts of several Batak individuals to preserve traditional Batak values and customs from what they perceived as harmful influences brought by Christianity, Islam, and colonialism. Guru Somaliang Pardede and Raja Sisingamangaraja were the founding figures of this movement. Parmalim teachings are grounded in several fundamental principles, one of which is the belief in the power of nature and ancestral spirits that inhabit the universe (Gultom, Gea, & Harefa, 2024).

For the Parmalim community, nature is the center of life and a sacred gift from God *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*, which must be preserved. This belief not only serves as a guiding principle of life but is also manifested in various rituals they perform. One such ritual is the Sipahalima ceremony, a sacred annual ritual dedicated to the Creator. Every aspect of the preparation is carried out with great care—from the selection of sacrificial animals to agricultural produce—all in accordance with established rules. Sipahalima is the pinnacle expression of gratitude for the blessings granted by *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*, while also serving as a means to instill the importance of preserving harmony with nature in the younger generation of Parmalim followers (Sirait, 2019).

Sipahalima is one of the sacred rituals in the *Ugamo Malim* faith, performed as an expression of gratitude to *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* (the Creator) for all sustenance and blessings received. This annual ritual is held in the fifth month according to the Batak calendar (*Parhalaan*), lasting for three consecutive days: the 12th (*boraspatinitangkup*), the 13th (*singkorapurasa*), and the 14th (*samirapurasa*). During this celebration, the Parmalim people offer the first fruits of their harvest (*matumona*) as a symbol of gratitude for nature's abundance (Susanto & Kholis, 2022). *Sipahalima* is not merely a religious ceremony but also a moment of communal sharing. As part of this tradition, a portion of the harvest is set aside collectively to help others. The accumulated social fund is used for various needs, such as initial capital for newly married couples or assistance for community members facing economic hardship (Nainggolan, 2021).

In the Parmalim belief system, there are seven mandatory rituals that form the core of worship: *martutuaek*, *pasahat tondi*, *marari sabtu*, *mardebata*, *mangan napaet*, *sipaha sada*, and *Sipahalima*. Among these, *Sipahalima* (*Palean Bolon*) is regarded as the most sacred and significant. This is not only due to the grandness of the offerings but also the large attendance and high enthusiasm of the devotees (Irfandi & Yusuf, 2024). The ritual serves as the highest expression of gratitude for all the blessings received from *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* throughout the year. The *Sipahalima* procession begins with *parsahadatan* (opening ceremony) on the first day—a moment of full submission to *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*, asking for a smooth and meaningful ceremony. For Parmalim followers, *parsahadatan* is not a mere formality but a sincere act of welcoming the sacred days.

In the *pamaleon* (offering ritual), a series of strictly regulated and deeply meaningful activities take place, accompanied by songs and music. Each ritual has its own worship procedures and symbolic meanings. Parmalim believers also hold that certain objects possess specific significance in everyday life. In *Ugamo Malim*, religious paraphernalia is specially arranged, such as *sokkor pogang* and *mombang sipitu-pitu*. There are also *pandaupaan* and *pangurasan* rituals involving freshwater, kaffir lime, and basil, so that the offerings are fragrant and pure for *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* (Sitanggang, Siagian, Panjaitan, Damanik, & Batubara, 2023).

Sipahalima is the most important annual ritual in Parmalim teachings, functioning as a medium for purification and spiritual renewal for its adherents. It is performed in the fifth month (*Sipaha*) of the ancient Batak calendar, which usually corresponds to July or August in the Gregorian calendar. Fundamentally, *Sipahalima* is understood as an effort to harmonize the relationship between humans and *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* (the Supreme God in the Parmalim belief). The ritual reflects the concept of “*sipaha*” (purification) and “*lima*” (five), symbolizing life's perfection through the five core principles of Parmalim: truth, purity, love, justice, and unity. According to Parmalim teachings, humans must constantly cleanse themselves from sins and wrongdoings in order to draw closer to the Creator. This purification is carried out through a series of rituals involving prayer, offerings, and sacred dances (Ningrum Amrul, Pasaribu, Hamdani Harahap, & Alief Aththorick, 2022).

The timing of *Sipahalima* is based on the Batak calendar, known as *Parhalaan*. When the third month (*Sipaha Tolu*) arrives, the Parmalim community begins their preparations. They harvest their crops, reserve part of it for the next planting season, and offer the first fruits (*matumona*) to *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*. In the fourth month, once the harvest is complete, they begin preparing the grand offering. Then, in the fifth month (*Sipahalima*), a religious leader (*Ihutan*) who also serves as the spiritual guide sets the exact day (*samira purasa*) for the main ritual ceremony (Harianja, Silitonga, & Situmeang, 2023).

The origin of the *Sipahalima* ritual dates back to a message received from their ancestors during the *Sipaha Opat* (fourth month ritual). After harvesting, they stored the crops in granaries, as most community members were farmers. They then expressed gratitude to *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*, and as a form of this gratitude, the *Sipahalima* ceremony was created and carried out under the command of *Raja Opat*. However, during the Dutch colonial era, the *Sipahalima* ritual was rarely held due to the confiscation of harvests by colonial authorities. Today, the *Sipahalima* ceremony strengthens the Parmalim faith, increases spiritual devotion, and serves as a reminder of

past mistakes, while fostering gratitude for the blessings received from *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* (Sari et al., 2024).

During the *Sipahalima* ritual (*Pamaleon Bolon*), a circle is formed with the *Ihutan Parmalim* (Parmalim leader) and his family standing in the center. They lead the *Sipahalima* ritual, one of the most significant annual events in the Parmalim religion. The ceremony takes place every fifth month in the Batak calendar as a sacred offering to *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*.

1. Holy Water (*Ai Nauli*)
Holy water holds a central role in *Sipahalima* as a symbol of purification. It is believed to possess spiritual power to cleanse both body and soul from the stains of sin.
2. Offering (*Pelean*)
Offerings in *Sipahalima* consist of various natural elements such as rice, fruits, and sacrificial animals (usually buffalo). These elements symbolize *gabe* (blessings) which are presented back to God, *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*, as an expression of gratitude.
3. Tor-Tor Dance and Gondang Music
The *Tor-Tor* dance and accompanying *gondang* music (Batak traditional drums) are inseparable parts of *Sipahalima*. The slow and reverent movements of *Tor-Tor* symbolize communication with the spiritual realm. Each movement holds specific meaning, such as raising the hands to symbolize supplication, or spinning movements that represent the cycle of life.

The performance of *Sipahalima* is deeply rooted in Parmalim cosmology, which views the universe as a hierarchical unity between the human world (*portibi*), the ancestral world (*Banua Ginjang*), and God, *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*. The ritual serves as a bridge connecting these three realms. The timing of *Sipahalima* (the fifth month of the Batak calendar) is closely tied to the traditional agricultural cycle of the Batak people. This month is considered a transitional period between the planting and harvesting seasons, giving the ritual significance as a plea for fertility and protection of agricultural yields (Amrul, Pasaribu, Harahap, & Aththorick, 2019).

"Sipahalima is a manifestation of the three main principles of Parmalim teachings. The first is devotion and worship to God Debata Mulajadi Nabolon, the Creator according to Parmalim beliefs, who created the heavens, the earth, and all within. The second is obedience and respect for the king. The third is love for fellow human beings. The manifestation of the first principle is thanksgiving or the Sipahalima ceremony as an act of gratitude to Debata Mulajadi Nabolon." (Simanjuntak, 2025).

The *Sipahalima* ceremony also fosters interaction among Parmalim followers, allowing them to know and care for one another—men and women alike—without regard to social status. During this time, the Parmalim community reinforces its unity. Furthermore, they may expand their community by arranging marriages among their children, thus growing the Parmalim lineage. They also support one another in gaining proper employment and higher education to improve the economic well-being of fellow Parmalim believers (Sari et al., 2024).

Sipahalima also serves as a medium of communication with the ancestors (*sumangot*). In Parmalim belief, purified ancestors (*sombaon*) act as intermediaries between humans and *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*. Therefore, the ritual always involves invoking ancestral spirits through *Umpasa* (chants) and special offerings made in their honor. Uniquely, although the ancestors are respected, they are not worshipped; the highest position is still reserved for God *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*. Purity (*Hamalimon*) is the central principle underpinning the entire *Sipahalima* ritual. This concept includes:

1. Physical purity: Participants must undergo fasting and abstinence before the ritual.
2. Spiritual purity: The unification of thought, speech, and action in truth.
3. Environmental purity: The ritual site (usually a *huta* or traditional village) must be cleansed both physically and spiritually.

This concept of *hamalimon* distinguishes *Sipahalima* from other rituals in Batak culture. It is not merely a tradition but a metaphysical expression of Parmalim faith. For Parmalim adherents,

Sipahalima is not just a ceremonial event—it is a medium for self-purification and strengthening the spiritual bond with *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon* (The Almighty God) and the ancestral spirits. The values contained in this ritual reflect the Batak philosophy of life, such as *hamoraon* (honor), *hagabeon* (prosperity), and *hasangapon* (nobility).

The Existence of Sipahalima for Parmalim Followers Amid the Current of Modernization

The diversity of cultures and beliefs in Indonesia is one of the nation's priceless treasures, continuously preserved by its people. One of the indigenous beliefs that has survived to this day is *Ugamo Malim*, more popularly known as Parmalim. This belief system upholds sacred rituals that signify their faith, one of which is *Sipahalima*. Amid the strong currents of modernization, the existence of *Sipahalima* faces various challenges. The word “existence” actually originates from the English word *existence*, which is derived from the Latin *existere*. It generally refers to emergence, being, or how something becomes real. If we explore further, *ex* means “out” and *sistere* can be interpreted as “to appear” or “to stand” (Lorens, 1996).

Institutionally, *Ugamo Malim* began to be formally recognized in the early 1900s, shortly after the Dutch colonial government announced the death of Sisingamangaraja XII. The presence of *Ugamo Malim* grew stronger with the rise of Raja Nasiakbagi, who was believed by the Batak community to be the reincarnation of Sisingamangaraja. Through Raja Mulia Naipospos, Raja Nasiakbagi became the initiator of the institutionalization of *Ugamo Malim*. One of his famous calls to his followers was, “*Malim ma hamu*,” meaning “be Malim,” a message that became the foundational principle of this belief (Katimin, 2012). Although times have changed, the Parmalim community continues to exist. However, their journey has not been without obstacles. They persist in preserving their identity and teachings amidst social change and the dynamic diversity of religious life (Sarmauli et al., 2024).

In today's modern life, we are still deeply connected to the past through various traditions and values that we continue to uphold. Our intellect allows us to understand the heritage of our ancestors that remains relevant even today. Our ways of thinking, social norms, religious beliefs, and even the objects around us did not emerge out of nowhere—they are the result of traditions passed down by previous generations. We cannot simply detach ourselves from the past because it remains an inseparable part of the world we live in today (Tindaon, 2018).

The existence of *Sipahalima* in Parmalim teachings is a manifestation of the resilience of local spirituality rooted in Batak Toba culture. Amid the accelerating wave of modernization, the continuity of this ritual becomes the central focus of this study. In urban settings such as Medan City, the performance of *Sipahalima* is not only a religious routine but also a symbol of identity, a space for preserving customary values, and a medium for building internal solidarity among Parmalim followers. This study reveals three main findings: the ritual's resilience to modernization pressures, the integration of customary values into spiritual practice, and the efforts to regenerate values amidst social transformation.

The first finding shows that even though modernization brings about more practical and instant lifestyles, the Parmalim community remains committed to performing *Sipahalima*. This can be seen in the consistent annual observance of the ritual, involving participants from all walks of life—parents to children. In an interview, Mr. Bistok Manurung explained:

“Everyone participates—parents and children join in performing the *Sipahalima* ritual to praise God *Debata Mulajadi Nabolon*. Parents, children, the youth. There are many challenges in carrying out *Sipahalima*... Even in finding [a buffalo], there are challenges too in meeting the requirements, and we may not always have the livestock.”

This indicates that the implementation of *Sipahalima* is not merely a formality but a spiritual commitment upheld despite various economic and social challenges. The mapping of these findings shows that the existence of *Sipahalima* is rooted in deep spiritual values rather than material conditions. Although the economy of urban communities like Medan has changed significantly and the availability of traditional symbols such as buffalo has become a challenge, adherents continue to strive to fulfill customary requirements. The intensity of this ritual's performance can even be seen as a form of resistance to a modern lifestyle that tends to neglect traditional values. The presence of *gondang* and *tor-tor* as essential elements of the ritual signifies that customary components are preserved in their authenticity (Siregar & Gulo, 2020).

The second finding reveals that *Sipahalima* is inseparable from the Batak Toba customary structure. In *Parmalim* teachings, this ritual is an expression of life principles known as *patik*, *poda*, *tona*, and *uhum*—the four core values that shape the moral framework of the *Parmalim* community (Tambunan, 2023). These principles encompass teachings on purity, reverence for ancestors, and harmonious relationships between humans, nature, and God. This ceremony unites spiritual teachings with Batak traditions as realized in the social structure of *Dalihan Na Tolu*.

Institutionally, *Ugamo Malim* has deep historical roots. Since the emergence of the call “*Malim ma hamu*” by Raja Nasiakbagi, this belief system has gained a solid foundation as an independent religious system. The practice of *Sipahalima* affirms the continuity of these teachings, in which noble values are transmitted not only through texts or narratives but also through living ritual practices within the community. This spiritual intensity renders *Sipahalima* more than just a tradition—it is part of a life philosophy that shapes the identity of the community (Katimin, 2012).

The third finding highlights how the *Parmalim* community responds to contemporary challenges through a strategy of value regeneration. Amid social change and exposure to global culture, younger generations often experience a cultural gap with ancestral traditions. To address this, the *Parmalim* community in Medan has developed informal educational spaces. Mr. Doni M.T. Sirait stated:

“We start educating our children—for example, here on Sundays, there are special classes on *Ugamo Malim*... So, for the younger generation, they participate in order to understand and ensure it is not lost. We call it the regeneration of *Parmalim* teachings, *marpuang marsundut*.”

This statement reflects a collective awareness to build continuity of tradition across generations.

The mapping of this third finding shows that the regeneration of *Parmalim* teachings is not limited to verbal instruction, but also includes active participation in ritual practices. Children and youth are directly involved in preparing the *pelean*, learning the meanings of prayers, and understanding the symbols within the ceremonies. The intensity of this program illustrates that, although the state has not fully recognized local beliefs as official religions, the community possesses internal mechanisms to sustain its teachings (Nasution, Harahap, & Syahrin, 2023).

These three findings are closely interconnected. The commitment to implementing *Sipahalima* (finding 1) aligns with the internalization of customary values integrated into the spiritual life of *Parmalim* (finding 2), and both are strengthened by an active and adaptive value-regeneration strategy (finding 3). In other words, *Sipahalima* serves as the epicenter of cultural and spiritual resilience for the *Parmalim* community. It is not merely a religious ritual, but also a fortress of identity, a medium of cultural education, and a tool of resistance against marginalization and the erosion of values in the era of globalization.

This study reveals that the *Sipahalima* ritual is not only consistently preserved in the city of Medan, but also maintained through the mechanisms of customary values and youth education. Unlike previous studies—such as Siregar & Gulo (2020) which focused on the existence of the

Parmalim in the Laguboti area—this research adds a strategic dimension by explaining how the urban Parmalim community modifies ritual practices in response to urban pressures. These findings complement Sihalohe's (2016) study on the adaptation of local religions, which described the Parmalim community's adaptation in Medan without specifically focusing on the *Sipahalima* ritual.

Reflectively, the results of this study are not a conclusion but rather the beginning of the next phase in preserving local spirituality. The successful preservation of the *Sipahalima* ritual through the conscious reinforcement of customary values and the education of the younger generation marks a transitional phase—from descriptive study to active intervention. We are now at the "ending" stage of the "beginning" phase of exploration; this dialectic opens the door for further research focusing on the long-term institutional and cultural impacts.

The interpretation of these findings affirms that *Sipahalima* functions as an adaptive ritual: it goes beyond its formal religious function to become a symbol of cultural resilience. The integration of local value practices—such as *gondang*, *tor-tor*, *Dalihan Na Tolu*, and the principles of *patik/poda/tona/uhum*—empowers the Parmalim community to remain relevant and meaningful within modern urban society. This ritual is not merely a silent act, but a symbolic action that asserts the community's identity and existence in public space.

In comparison with earlier studies—such as Kartika who analyzed the values within *Sipahalima* incantations without considering the context of modernization, and San Mikale et al., (2025) who emphasized the threats of globalization to local cultures without discussing ritual preservation—this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between customary values, urban context, and regenerative strategies. This synthesis demonstrates that the preservation of local culture in modern society requires a multidimensional approach.

As practical implications, the Parmalim community and policymakers may consider the following strategic steps:

1. Facilitating access to local education through curricula based on Parmalim cultural values (*Sipahalima*, *gondang*, *tor-tor*).
2. Promoting formal recognition of the Parmalim community through interfaith dialogue and cultural politics agendas—aligned with the ICIR (2023) recommendations on strengthening national values through this ritual.
3. Supporting audiovisual documentation and the publication of the ritual as a source of cultural literacy.
4. Organizing community forums as platforms for dialogue between the Parmalim community and the wider public to eliminate stigma and foster inclusion.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the "Sipahalima" ritual demonstrates strong spiritual and cultural resilience amid the pressures of modernization and the marginalization of local religions in Indonesia. The findings affirm that the religious practices of the Parmalim community are not static cultural expressions, but are instead flexible and adaptive—evident in their integration of digital media and the strengthening of internal community education. The fact that the Parmalim community in the city of Medan continues to perform the "Sipahalima" ritual despite living in a complex and pluralistic urban environment serves as compelling evidence that religious identity and local culture can continue to exist with dignity amid the dominance of mainstream currents.

The main contribution of this study lies in reinforcing a conceptual approach to local spirituality as a form of cultural resilience. Theoretically, the findings enrich the study of local religions and ritual practices within the field of the anthropology of religion, particularly in the context of urban spaces and identity contestation. Methodologically, the use of participatory approaches and in-depth observation proves the effectiveness of anthropological methods in uncovering the meaning of rituals and the collective narratives of minority communities such as

the Parmalim—groups that are often overlooked by academia and the state. This study also offers a reinterpretation of modernity, suggesting that modernization does not necessarily entail the erasure of tradition, but can coexist alongside it.

However, this study is limited in its geographic scope and informant representation. Its focus on the Parmalim community in Medan opens opportunities for further exploration in other Parmalim communities, such as those in Laguboti, Balige, or among Batak diasporas outside Sumatra. Future research could pursue comparative analyses across Parmalim communities or delve deeper into the effects of interreligious interaction on the continuity of “Sipahalima”. Interdisciplinary studies involving cultural-political or educational approaches may also offer new dimensions for understanding the resilience of local spirituality more comprehensively.

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