

RITUAL OF THE MARTUTUAEK CEREMONY IN MAINTAINING THE IDENTITY OF THE PARMALIM COMMUNITY IN MEDAN CITY

Ari Suhada^{1a*}, Muhammad Jailani^{2b}

¹² Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

^aE-mail: suhada0604212055@uinsu.ac.id

^bE-mail: m.jailani@uinsu.ac.id

(*) Corresponding Author

suhada0604212055@uinsu.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Martutu Aek is one of the important rituals in Ugamo Malim which functions as a purification ceremony and naming of newborn babies, this ritual is still maintained by the Parmalim people in Medan City despite facing changes due to urban life. This study aims to describe the implementation of *Martutu Aek*, analyze its symbolic and theological meaning, and examine its role in maintaining the cultural and religious identity of the Parmalim community in the city of Medan. The research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were obtained through observation, interviews with religious leaders and Parmalim congregations, as well as literature studies, then analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that *Martutu Aek* contains symbolic meaning through the use of water, *itak gur-gur*, rimbang leaves, and weed leaves as symbols of purity, welfare, hope, and steadfastness of life. Theologically, this ritual is an expression of gratitude to Debata Mulajadi Na Bolon and a commitment to guide children according to the teachings of Ugamo Malim. In the midst of the multicultural community of Medan City, *Martutu Aek* continues to play a role as a medium for preserving the cultural and religious identity of the Parmalim community through the inheritance of values, strengthening community solidarity, and preserving ancestral traditions.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that has a diversity of religions, cultures, and belief systems that have developed as part of its people's identity, in addition to the six religions recognized by the state, various ancestral religions and streams of belief are still practiced by some people as cultural heritage that contains religious, social, and philosophical values. One of them is Ugamo Malim or Parmalim, which is the ancestral religion of the Batak people who still maintain various religious teachings and rituals in the midst of the dynamics of modern society. (Arbiah et al., 2025) (Saifuddin & Fahyuni, 2022)

In Ugamo Malim, rituals are not only understood as a form of worship to Debata Mulajadi Nabolon, but also as a medium of inheriting values, strengthening social solidarity, and strengthening community identity, one of the important rituals is *Martutu Aek*, which is a purification ceremony as well as the ratification of names for newborn

babies. This ritual is carried out as an expression of gratitude for the birth of a child as well as a prayer for children to get protection, health, and life in accordance with the teachings of Ugamo Malim. In addition to having religious meanings, Martutu Aek contains cultural symbols that represent human relationships with God, others, nature, and ancestors. (Br Pardosi et al., 2022) (Tambunan, 2023)

The existence of the Parmalim community in Medan City shows that local religion is still able to survive in the midst of a multicultural and dynamic urban environment, as a social space characterized by population mobility, modernization, and interaction with various religious and cultural groups, Medan City presents its own challenges for the Parmalim community in maintaining its cultural and religious identity. In this context, the implementation of Martutu Aek not only functions as a religious ritual, but also becomes a social practice that strengthens the sustainability of community identity in the midst of environmental changes. (Marahuddin et al., 2025)

Various studies have examined the Parmalim community from various perspectives. discussed religious rationalization in Parmalim religious practice as a form of local religious sustainability in Indonesia. examines the implementation of Saturday Marari as the main worship practice of Ugamo Malim, while elaborating on the belief system and basic values of Ugamo Malim in the Batak community. The research explains the strategy of the Parmalim community in maintaining the Toba Batak customs and culture in the modern era, while examining the existence of Parmalim as believers in Indonesia. The study highlights the spiritual dimension in Parmalim theology, while it analyzes the religious practices of Parmalim in the life of the people of North Sumatra. Furthermore, examine the spiritual resilience of the Parmalim people in facing modernization in the city of Medan. Lamahu (2020) Insani et al. (2021) Br Pardosi et al. (2022) Siregar & Gulo (2020) Irfandi & Yusuf (2024) Sirait (2024) Marahuddin et al. (2025) Kurniawan & Harahap (2025)

Although these studies have made important contributions to the understanding of Ugamo Malim, most of them still focus on aspects of the history, belief system, theology, and existence of the Parmalim community. Studies that specifically analyze the Martutu Aek ritual as a *ritual process* using the perspective of Victor Turner, especially in the context of the urban community of Medan City, are still very limited. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this void by analyzing the stages of *separation*, *liminality*, and *reaggregation*, as well as the formation of *community* in the implementation of the Martutu Aek ritual as a mechanism that strengthens the solidarity and sustainability of the Parmalim community.

This study uses the theory of the Ritual Process proposed by Victor Turner to understand the implementation of Martutu Aek as a ritual process that not only has a religious function, but also shapes and strengthens the social life of the Parmalim community. , ritual is a transformation process that takes place through three main stages, namely separation, liminality, and reaggregation or incorporation. At the separation stage, the individual is separated from their previous social status. The liminality stage is a transition period when individuals are in a position between two social statuses so that they undergo the process of forming a new identity. Furthermore, at the reaggregation stage, individuals are accepted back into society with a new social status. Kapferer & Gold (2024)

In the context of the Parmalim community, Martutu Aek can be understood as a rite of passage that marks the change in the status of an infant from just a member of the biological family to being part of the Ugamo Malim religious community. The entire series of rituals, from the purification procession using water, the reading of prayers by Ulu Punguan, to the naming and witnessing by the congregation, show a transitional process that connects the spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions. In addition, the concept of community put forward by Turner explains that the involvement of families, religious leaders, and the entire congregation during the implementation of Martutu Aek creates a sense of togetherness, solidarity, and social bonds that strengthen the sustainability of the Parmalim community. (Siallagan et al., 2024)

Based on this perspective, this study aims to (1) describe the implementation of the Martutu Aek ritual in the Parmalim community in Medan City, (2) analyze the symbolic and theological meaning of each stage of the ritual based on the concept of Victor Turner's Ritual Process, and (3) explain how the Martutu Aek ritual functions as a social transition process and a mechanism for the formation of solidarity (*communitas*) in maintaining the sustainability of the Parmalim community in the midst of community life urban.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type to understand in depth the implementation of the Martutu Aek ritual, the symbolic and theological meaning it contains, and its role in maintaining the cultural and religious identity of the Parmalim community in the city of Medan. The research was carried out at the Ugamo Malim (Parmalim) house of worship in Medan City, North Sumatra, which was chosen purposively because it represents the Parmalim community in a multicultural urban environment. The field research will be carried out on February 27, 2026. The informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, namely Harianto Simanjuntak as the Ulu Punguan Ugamo Malim of Medan City and Doni Sirait as a young member of the Parmalim community who actively participated in religious activities. The two informants were chosen because they represented the perspective of community leaders and the younger generation in explaining the implementation, meaning, and function of the Martutu Aek ritual. (Fiantika et al., 2022; Sugiyono, 2020)

The research data consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through participatory observation of the implementation of the Martutu Aek ritual, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation in the form of photos of activities and field notes. The interviews focused on the stages of ritual, symbolic and theological meaning, forms of ritual adaptation in urban environments, and its role in maintaining the cultural and religious identity of the Parmalim community. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained through literature studies which include books, scientific articles, previous research results, Parmalim community documents, and various other relevant sources as a conceptual basis as well as a comparison to field findings. (Cormack & Kukutai, 2022; Sugiyono, 2020)

Data analysis uses an interactive model that includes data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The results of observations and interviews were transcribed, coded, and then grouped into research themes before being presented descriptively and interpreted using Miles & Huberman (2014) *Victor Turner's* Ritual Process theory, specifically the concepts of *separation*, *liminality*, *reaggregation*, and *community*. The validity of the data is ensured through triangulation of sources by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and literature studies, as well as *member checking* to informants to ensure the suitability of the researcher's interpretation with their experience so as to increase the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Implementation of the Martutu Aek Ceremony among the Parmalim Community in Medan City

Martutu Aek is one of the important rituals in the teachings of Ugamo Malim which is carried out as a form of expression of gratitude for the birth of a child as well as a procession of purification and verification of the identity of children in the Parmalim community. Based on the results of an interview with Harianto Simanjuntak as the Ulu Punguan Parmalim of Medan City, this ritual is generally carried out when the baby is about thirty days old. According to him, this age is seen as the right time to introduce a child to the Debata Mulajadi Nabolon as well as to the Parmalim community through a religious procession that has been passed down from generation to generation. (Insani et al., 2021)

The implementation of Martutu Aek is not only interpreted as a series of religious ceremonies, but also as a medium for internalizing religious and cultural values to community members from the beginning of life. Through this ritual, families, religious leaders, and congregations together affirm that a child is part of the Parmalim community who has the obligation to practice the teachings of Ugamo Malim. These findings show that Martutu Aek has a social function that goes beyond the purification aspect, namely as a means of inheriting cultural and religious identity to the next generation. (Siallagan et al., 2024)

Based on the researcher's observations, the implementation of Martutu Aek in Medan City still follows the procedures that apply in the teachings of Ugamo Malim even though there are several adjustments to the urban environmental conditions, these adjustments are mainly seen in the use of water containers as a substitute for rivers or natural springs that are commonly used in the area of origin of the Parmalim community. Nevertheless, the

informants assert that the change does not diminish the sacred value or religious significance of the ritual because the main element that is retained is the use of water as a symbol of purification and life. (Siregar & Gulo, 2020)

These findings show that the Parmalim people were able to maintain the essence of the ritual despite being in a different social environment, in Martutu Aek's perspective it can be understood as a rite of passage that marks the change in the status of a baby. Babies who were previously only part of the biological family enter the ritual process through the purification stage as a form of separation from their initial status. Furthermore, during the procession of prayer, purification of water, and naming of the baby, the baby is in the liminality phase, which is a transitional period when his religious identity is being formed. After the entire series of rituals was completed and the baby was introduced to the Parmalim congregation, he entered the reaggregation stage, which is accepted as a member of the Ugamo Malim religious community. Thus, Martutu Aek is not just a religious tradition, but a ritual mechanism that validates the change in a child's social and religious status. Mekolle (2026)

The results of the interview showed that the implementation of Martutu Aek involved various elements in the Parmalim community, Ulu Punguan was responsible for leading the course of worship and ensuring that all processions took place according to the teachings of Ugamo Malim, while Ihutan assisted in the implementation of the ritual according to the applicable procedures. In addition, the baby's family and the entire Parmalim congregation were also present as a form of spiritual support as well as a form of togetherness in the community.

The involvement of all these elements shows that Martutu Aek is not only a ritual carried out by the nuclear family, but a collective activity that strengthens social relations between community members. The presence of the congregation, joint prayer, and active participation in the entire series of ceremonies reflect the strong social solidarity of the Parmalim community. These findings are in line with Durkheim's view that religious rituals serve to strengthen solidarity and strengthen the collective consciousness of a group. (Tambunan, 2023)

In Victor Turner's perspective, the involvement of Ulu Punguan, Ihutan, family, and the entire congregation shows the formation of a community, that is, a social bond born through a shared ritual experience. During the implementation of Martutu Aek, all participants placed themselves in an atmosphere of togetherness that reduced differences in social status and emphasized unity as fellow Ugamo Malim adherents. The presence of the entire community not only bears witness to the change in the status of babies, but also strengthens the solidarity and continuity of the religious life of the Parmalim community.

Based on the results of the interview, the Parmalim community in Medan City continues to maintain the implementation of Martutu Aek as part of their religious obligations despite facing the limitations of the urban environment. One form of adaptation carried out is the use of tubs or water containers as a purification medium when there is no river or spring suitable for the implementation of the ritual.

The adaptation shows that changes occur only in the technical aspects of the implementation, while the main values of the ritual are maintained. Water is still understood as a symbol of purity, life, and grace of Debata Mulajadi Nabolon so that the religious meaning of the ritual does not change. Thus, the Parmalim people do not abandon ancestral traditions, but adjust the form of implementation so that it can still be implemented in the context of urban life. (Marahuddin et al., 2025)

In Victor Turner's perspective, the change in the use of water containers instead of rivers does not change the basic structure of the ritual because what matters most is the continuity of the ritual process itself. The stages of separation, liminality, and reaggregation continue to take place in their entirety even though the implementation media has undergone adjustments. This shows that the Parmalim people were able to maintain the meaning of ritual through adaptation to urban conditions without eliminating the sacred function of ritual as a process of transformation of social and religious status.

The Symbolic and Theological Significance of the Martutu Aek Ritual for Parmalim in Medan City

The results of the interview with Harianto Simanjuntak and Doni Sirait show that each element in the Martutu Aek ritual has a symbolic meaning related to the values of life in the teachings of Ugamo Malim. Water is the main symbol that symbolizes the purity, life, and grace of the Debata Mulajadi Nabolon. The use of water in the purification procession is understood as a form of prayer so that babies have a clean, healthy life, and are under God's protection from the beginning of their lives.

In addition to water, some ritual utensils also have symbolic meanings that complement each other. *Itak gur-gur* is interpreted as a symbol of welfare and hope for children to get an adequate life. The rhizome leaves symbolize the hope of the sustainability of offspring and an abundance of blessings, while the tied weed leaves are a symbol of constancy, adaptability, and strength in facing life's challenges. Based on the researchers' observations, the use of these symbols is still maintained by the Parmalim people in the city of Medan even though the ritual is carried out in an urban environment. (Sirait, 2024)

This finding shows that the symbols in Martutu Aek are not just a complement to the ritual procession, but a medium for conveying cultural and religious values to the younger generation, through the use of symbols that the Parmalim community continues to maintain to inherit a perspective on life, relationship with God, and values that must be upheld by every community member. Thus, ritual symbols function as a means of cultural transmission that maintains the continuity of the identity of the Parmalim community. (Junaedi, 2022)

In Victor Turner's perspective, ritual symbols are ritual symbols, which are symbols that not only have religious meaning but also become a medium of communication of cultural values to all ritual participants. Water as a symbol of purification, (Turkle, 2022) *itak gur-gur* as a symbol of welfare, rhizome leaves as hope for the sustainability of offspring, and weed leaves as a symbol of constancy become symbolic devices that work during the liminality phase. Through these symbols, ritual participants understand the meaning of changing the status of babies while strengthening the values that are the basis of the life of the Parmalim community.

Theologically, Martutu Aek is understood as a form of confession of faith to the Debata Mulajadi Nabolon as the source of life. Based on the results of the interview, the implementation of the ritual is an expression of gratitude for the birth of a child as well as a request for the child to obtain protection, health, longevity, and be able to live a life in accordance with the teachings of Ugamo Malim. Therefore, this ritual not only has a ceremonial dimension, but also becomes a form of spiritual relationship between humans and God.

The informants explained that the purification in Martutu Aek is not interpreted as the elimination of sins, but as a symbol of the surrender of children's lives to the Debata Mulajadi Nabolon and the family's commitment to guide children in accordance with religious values. This interpretation shows that the concept of purification in Ugamo Malim emphasizes the formation of character, moral responsibility, and a life that is in harmony with religious teachings.

The implementation of Martutu Aek also shows the integration of human relationships with God, fellow humans, and nature, the relationship with God is manifested through prayers led by Ulu Punguan, the relationship with others is seen from the involvement of the family and the entire congregation in providing support to the baby's family, while the relationship with nature is reflected through the use of water as a symbol of life. These three dimensions show that the teachings of Ugamo Malim place spiritual, social, and ecological balance as an inseparable unit. (Insani et al., 2021)

In Victor Turner's perspective, the theological dimension of Martutu Aek cannot be separated from the ritual process experienced by all participants. Ulu Punguan-led prayers, purification using water, and naming form a liminal experience that brings together the spiritual dimension with the social life of the community. Through these experiences, babies symbolically enter the religious life of Ugamo Malim, while families and congregations renew their collective commitment to the teachings of Debata Mulajadi Nabolon. Thus, rituals not only mark a change in the status of individuals, but also strengthen the religious life of the community as a whole.

Ritual Interpretation by the Parmalim Congregation

Based on the results of the interviews, religious leaders and young members of Parmalim view Martutu Aek as a ritual that cannot be separated from their religious life. For religious leaders, this ritual is a form of obedience to the Debata Mulajadi Nabolon as well as a means of maintaining the continuity of the teachings of Ugamo Malim. Meanwhile, for the younger generation, Martutu Aek is understood as a cultural and religious heritage that distinguishes their identity from other communities.

The difference in the backgrounds of the informants shows that although there are variations in the way rituals are interpreted, the two have the same views on the importance of maintaining Martutu Aek as part of the community's

identity. This ritual is seen not only as a tradition inherited by ancestors, but also as a medium for value education, character building, and strengthening of a sense of belonging to the Parmalim community. (Sirait, 2024)

The findings show that the symbolic and theological significance of Martutu Aek does not stop at the level of individual beliefs, but develops into a collective identity that is maintained through the active participation of all members of the community. Therefore, the implementation of Martutu Aek has a strategic function in maintaining the sustainability of the cultural and religious identity of the Parmalim community in Medan City through the inheritance of values, strengthening solidarity, and reproducing religious practices in a sustainable manner.

The Role of Martutu Aek in Maintaining Parmalim's Cultural and Religious Identity in the Urban Space of Medan City

Based on the results of interviews with Harianto Simanjuntak and Doni Sirait, Martutu Aek is one of the rituals that has an important position in the life of the Ugamo Malim community because it is a symbol of obedience to Debata Mulajadi Nabolon as well as a marker of the religious identity of the Parmalim community. The implementation of this ritual is not only intended as a purification ceremony and naming of the baby, but also as a form of recognition that a child has become part of a religious community that practices the teachings of Ugamo Malim.

In the midst of the multicultural life of the city of Medan, the sustainability of Martutu Aek shows that the Parmalim people still maintain their religious identity through ritual practices that are inherited from generation to generation. Based on the researcher's observations, even though there have been adjustments to the place and means of implementation, all the main elements of the ritual are still maintained according to the teachings of Ugamo Malim. This shows that changes in the social environment do not eliminate the religious meaning that is the basis for the implementation of Martutu Aek. (Irfandi & Yusuf, 2024)

According to Victor Turner, Martutu Aek is a transitional ritual that validates the change in the status of an infant to a member of the Parmalim religious community, the stages of the ritual that are passed show the transformation process that ends with the acceptance of the baby back into society through a new status as part of Ugamo Malim. Therefore, religious identity is not only expressed through belief, but is formed and legitimized through the implementation of rituals witnessed by the entire community.

The results of the study show that Martutu Aek has an important function as a medium for inheriting Batak Parmalim cultural values to the younger generation, the entire series of rituals ranging from the use of the Batak language in prayer, ritual equipment, to the involvement of religious and family leaders, becomes a means for children and community members to get to know the traditions inherited by their ancestors. (Siregar & Gulo, 2020)

Based on interviews, the informants emphasized that the implementation of Martutu Aek is not only aimed at fulfilling religious obligations, but also introduces life values, respect for ancestors, and a sense of responsibility to the community. Through direct involvement in rituals, the younger generation gains social experiences that shape their understanding of identity as part of Parmalim society.

In Victor Turner's perspective, cultural inheritance takes place through ritual experiences experienced directly, during the liminal phase the ritual participants not only witness the religious procession, but also learn to understand the symbols, values, and norms that are the basis of the life of the Parmalim people. The collective experience produces a community, which is a sense of togetherness that strengthens the continuity of culture from one generation to the next.

The life of the Parmalim people in Medan City shows that modernization and urbanization do not necessarily eliminate their religious traditions. Based on the results of the interviews, the changes that occurred were more related to the technical aspects of the ritual implementation, such as the use of water containers instead of rivers, adjustments to the implementation location, and timing according to the conditions of the urban community. (Situmorang, 2018)

Despite this, the Parmalim people still retain the main elements of the ritual that are considered to have religious and cultural value. These findings suggest that the Parmalim community did not resist change, but adapted without losing the essential meaning of the ritual. This adaptation is a strategy so that Martutu Aek can still be implemented in the context of Medan City life which is more complex than the area of origin of the Parmalim community. (Siregar & Gulo, 2020)

Based on Victor Turner's theory, changes in location and the medium of ritual implementation do not eliminate the main function of Martutu Aek as a transitional ritual, as long as the ritual structure and its main symbols are maintained, the process of separation, liminality, and reaggregation continues. Thus, adaptation in the urban environment shows the ability of the Parmalim people to maintain the meaning of ritual without losing its social and religious transformation function.

Overall, the results of the study show that Martutu Aek not only functions as a religious ritual, but also as a mechanism for reproducing the cultural and religious identity of the Parmalim people in Medan City. Each ritual involves families, religious leaders, and the entire congregation in joint activities that strengthen social relationships while reaffirming the values that are the basis of community life.

Through repetitive ritual practices, the Parmalim people reflexively maintain their collective identity in the midst of plural urban life, this identity is not maintained through rejection of social change, but rather through the ability to adapt the form of ritual implementation without losing the religious and cultural meaning inherited by the ancestors. (Kurniawan & Harahap, 2025)

Overall, the results of the study show that Martutu Aek is a transitional ritual that changes the status of an infant to a member of the Parmalim religious community. Based on Victor Turner's theory, each stage of the ritual shows a process of separation, liminality, and reaggregation that takes place sequentially. During this process, a community is formed, which is solidarity that arises through a shared ritual experience between family, religious leaders, and congregations. The sustainability of Martutu Aek in Medan City shows that rituals not only have a spiritual function, but also become a social mechanism that maintains cultural values, strengthens community solidarity, and ensures the sustainability of the Ugamo Malim tradition in the midst of urban life.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that *Martutu Aek* is an important ritual in Ugamo Malim which functions as a purification ceremony and naming of newborn babies as well as an expression of gratitude to Debata Mulajadi Na Bolon. This ritual contains symbolic meaning through the use of water, *itak gur-gur*, rimbang leaves, and weed leaves which represent purity, welfare, hope for posterity, and steadfastness of life. Theologically, *Martutu Aek* reflects man's relationship with Debata Mulajadi Na Bolon, fellow humans, and nature as part of the teachings of Ugamo Malim.

In the midst of the multicultural life of the people of Medan City, the implementation of *Martutu Aek* has undergone adjustments to the technical aspects without eliminating the main values contained in it. This ritual plays an important role in maintaining the cultural and religious identity of the Parmalim people through the inheritance of values to the younger generation, strengthening community solidarity, and preserving ancestral traditions. Based on Victor Turner's Ritual Process theory, Martutu Aek is a transitional ritual that leads babies to enter a new status as a member of the Parmalim religious community, through the stages of separation, liminality, and reaggregation, this ritual not only has religious meaning, but also strengthens solidarity (*communitas*) and ensures the sustainability of the cultural and religious values of the Parmalim community in the city of Medan.

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