

## ACCULTURATION OF ISLAMIC VALUES AND KAHARINGAN TRADITIONS IN THE DAYAK MERATUS COMMUNITY

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### Abstrak

This study examines the process of acculturation between Islamic values and Kaharingan traditions within the Dayak Meratus community in the Meratus region, Hulu Sungai Selatan, South Kalimantan. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, employing participant observation, in-depth interviews with converts, local preachers, and document studies, the research aims to map conceptual meeting points (divinity, ancestral figures, angels), ritual adaptation, as well as the integration of arts and ecological wisdom. The findings indicate that acculturation occurs through a selective mechanism: Kaharingan elements compatible with the principles of *tawhid* and Islamic ethics are reinterpreted and integrated into new religious practices, while elements that contradict them are explicitly reduced or recontextualized. The model of acculturation identified is not a fluid syncretism that blends all elements indiscriminately, but rather a critical reinterpretation that preserves the theological core of Islam while honoring the cultural identity of the Dayak Meratus. The practical implication is the importance of culturally sensitive *dakwah* strategies focused on education, economic empowerment, and value-based dialogue to strengthen social integration and the sustainability of local culture..

**Keywords:** Dayak Meratus; Kaharingan; Islam; Acculturation; Cultural *Dakwah*; Local Wisdom.

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### A. INTRODUCTION

The interaction between Islam and local traditions in the Indonesian archipelago is a historically rich and diverse phenomenon. From the Islamic-Hindu syncretism in Java to the ritual blending in coastal communities, local patterns of adaptation often shape how religious life is experienced in different regions. In South Kalimantan, the Dayak Meratus community maintains a strong tradition of Kaharingan or Balian, a belief system that

integrates elements of animism, dynamism, totemism, and forms of indigenous monotheism. Kaharingan operates not only as a religious structure but also as customary law, social order, and a guide for environmental sustainability. In recent decades, the growing number of conversions to Islam (muallaf) among the Dayak Meratus has prompted important questions: How can Islamic values and practices be integrated without erasing cultural identity? How do preachers and converts negotiate ancestral rituals, such as funerary rites, agricultural celebrations, or the tandik dance, so that they remain meaningful? This study addresses three central research questions: (1) how Islamic values encounter and interact with Kaharingan traditions; (2) how this acculturation takes shape in social practices, rituals, and art; and (3) the implications of these findings for dakwah strategies in customary communities. The research focuses on the practical and interpretive dimensions of acculturation, not merely on symbolic similarities, but on how local actors recontextualize meanings to make both systems coexist.

The spread of Islam in Kalimantan, particularly in the southern region, occurred through a long process involving trade networks, royal political developments, and the efforts of local ulama. Historical accounts indicate that Islam arrived in Kalimantan as early as the 15th century, introduced by traders from Java, Sumatra, and the Malay coast (Ricklefs 2008). However, major transformation followed in the 16th century with the establishment of the Banjar Sultanate. Founded in 1526 when Prince Samudera, later known as Sultan Suriansyah, embraced Islam (Daud 1997), the Banjar Sultanate marked the formal rise of Islam as both a political and cultural force in South Kalimantan. Sultan Suriansyah declared Islam the state religion and ordered the construction of the first mosque in Banjarmasin. This political decision accelerated Islamization, as the kingdom became the primary agent of religious dissemination.

Interaction between Islam and the Dayak population progressed gradually. Initially, Islam spread through trade and intermarriage, particularly between Muslim Banjar communities and inland Dayak groups (Saleh 1986). At the same time, many Dayak communities retained Kaharingan beliefs. Instead of displacing indigenous tradition, Islam entered through negotiated cultural adaptation. Rituals related to agriculture, death, and cosmology continued, while Islamic elements were introduced gradually. Local ulama played a significant role in this process. Figures such as Syekh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari (1710–1812) produced influential works, notably *Sabilal Muhtadin*, which served as a legal reference across much of eastern Nusantara (Malisi, et.al, 2024). Syekh Arsyad emphasized Islamic law while also encouraging the translation of Islamic teachings into

forms accessible to local cultural frameworks. His successors continued this adaptive tradition, upholding Islamic principles while respecting customary practices.

The encounter between Islam and the Dayak Meratus was distinct from Dayak groups in other regions. Due to their relatively remote location in the Meratus Mountains, contact with royal and urban centers developed slowly. Islam entered Meratus areas primarily through riverine trade routes and personal dakwah relationships established by traveling ulama (local haji) with customary leaders (Hasan 2014). As a result, Islamization developed organically, relationally, and through compromise rather than coercion.

Recent demographic data show that the population of South Kalimantan is predominantly Muslim. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of South Kalimantan (2023), more than 96% of the population identifies as Muslim, with the remainder comprising Protestants, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of local beliefs such as Kaharingan. Within this broader demographic, the Dayak Meratus display a unique religious pattern. While Kaharingan remains a core identity, the number of Dayak Meratus muallaf has increased over the past two decades. Reports from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of South Kalimantan and local dakwah organizations (2022–2023) indicate that more than 3,500 Dayak Meratus individuals have formally converted to Islam (MUI Kalsel 2023). They are concentrated in districts such as Hulu Sungai Selatan, Balangan, Tabalong, and Tanah Bumbu.

This conversion process is neither massive nor uniform; it occurs at the scale of households or villages. Factors contributing to conversion include intermarriage between Muslim Banjar and Dayak Meratus, dakwah programs linked to economic empowerment and education, and the influence of customary leaders who are receptive to Islam (MUI Kalsel 2023). However, religious distribution within Dayak Meratus remains plural. Many continue practicing Kaharingan, while others have converted to Christianity, especially in remote areas influenced by Christian missionary activity since the 19th century (Arafat, et, al., 2024). Thus, the Dayak Meratus represent a religiously plural community where Islam, Kaharingan, and Christianity coexist and interact.

The rising number of muallaf among the Dayak Meratus presents both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, conversion to Islam necessitates changes in certain ritual practices, especially those involving ancestral spirits. On the other hand, cultural identity remains essential to preserve. For example, the *tandik* dance, formerly performed as part of ritual worship, has begun to be reframed as an expression of cultural art rather than

spiritual invocation. Similarly, traditional multi-day funeral rites have been adapted by some muallaf into *tahlil* and *yasin* gatherings. These negotiations illustrate that Islamization in Meratus is not simply religious conversion, but a complex acculturation process. Ulama, customary leaders, and muallaf collaboratively shape new religious expressions that continue to honor ancestral heritage. This process aligns with contemporary cultural dakwah strategies that prioritize dialogue over confrontation.

Thus, this introduction underscores the importance of understanding Islamization in the Dayak Meratus context not merely through demographic figures, but as a socio-cultural process involving negotiation of meaning, continuity of tradition, and reinterpretation of ritual, reflecting how Islam in the Indonesian archipelago grows within diversity.

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative design with a micro-ethnographic approach. The research was conducted in several hamlets within the Meratus region that serve as residential centers for the Dayak Meratus community, particularly in the Hulu Sungai Selatan area. Data collection methods included participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis.

In the participant observation stage, the researcher took part in several traditional rituals such as *aruh bawanang*, *aruh ganal*, *aruh manyidat banih*, *huma* (agricultural) ceremonies, as well as community-attended Maulid celebrations. The aim of these observations was to record practices, symbolic forms, and patterns of interaction among customary leaders (*balian*), muallaf, and *dai*. In addition, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with thirteen Meratus *muallaf*, local *da'i* or religious instructors active in the area, as well as volunteer *da'i* from outside the region. Further interviews were held with representatives from BAZNAS, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), customary leaders, and scholars who have previously conducted related studies. The interviews focused on personal conversion experiences, transformations in ritual practices, and perceptions of cultural and religious acculturation.

Separate FGDs were then conducted with muallaf groups and *dai* to gather collective perspectives on effective dakwah strategies and challenges encountered. Document analysis was also carried out, including local statistical reports (BPS), records from local Offices of Religious Affairs (KUA), dakwah teaching materials, and classical religious texts cited by *dai* in their preaching activities.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman,

which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Validity was strengthened through source triangulation (cross-checking among different informants) and document triangulation.

The theoretical framework of this study integrates three main pillars: classical literature on cultural acculturation, theories of cultural dakwah (Islamic propagation), and comparative religion perspectives relevant to the Indonesian context. By combining these perspectives, the study not only examines how Islam is received within traditional communities but also how it helps shape new relationships with local traditions and generates complex social implications.

Acculturation is understood as a dialectical process in which new cultural elements are adopted, transformed, or even resisted by the receiving community. In classical anthropological studies, acculturation involves dynamics of power asymmetry, practical needs, and the symbolic legitimacy of the adopted cultural elements (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits 1936). This process rarely occurs in a totalizing manner; rather, it is selective, only elements compatible with a society's core values tend to be integrated. Koentjaraningrat (2009) emphasizes that acculturation in Indonesian societies often functions as a mechanism for maintaining identity continuity, whereby core values are preserved while symbolic expressions may undergo modification. Within this framework, acculturation is not merely the layering of new ritual forms but also the reconstruction of meaning. New elements are reinterpreted to fill conceptual gaps or reinforce existing social legitimacy. Empirically, this can be observed in traditional communities that retain myths, rites, or symbolic practices while the meanings embedded within them have undergone reinterpretation.

The history of Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago provides extensive examples of such acculturative processes. The spread of Islam across different regions did not occur uniformly; instead, it followed negotiated patterns with local cultural systems. In Java, Islamization was advanced by the Wali Songo, who introduced dakwah through the arts, such as *wayang kulit*, *tembang*, and *gamelan* (Ricklefs 2008). In Sumatra, Islam interacted with Minangkabau customs, creating a synthesis expressed through the maxim *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* (Abdullah 1966). The traces of acculturation also appear in local celebrations of the Prophet's birthday (*Maulid*), where *rebana*, *qasidah*, and cultural festivals blend Islamic values with indigenous wisdom (Azra 2006). This adaptive approach enabled Islam to be widely accepted because it could align

itself with local expressions without compromising core theological principles. Thus, Islam in the Indonesian context did not emerge as a hegemonic force that displaced tradition, but as a flexible value system capable of negotiating cultural diversity.

Building upon this understanding, the theory of cultural dakwah provides a framework for explaining how Islamic teachings are communicated and integrated within diverse cultural settings. Cultural dakwah emphasizes methods of disseminating Islam that respect local wisdom and prioritize dialogue over normative confrontation. The success of dakwah is measured not only by the transmission of doctrine but also by the creation of dialogic spaces that allow reinterpretation of values (Hidayat 1996). Strategies of cultural dakwah include identifying conceptual points of convergence where local cultural elements aligned with Islamic values are used as communicative bridges, utilizing local cultural media such as folklore, music, dance, and familiar religious symbolism, and incorporating socio-economic empowerment to position dakwah as both spiritual guidance and community development. This model underscores that dakwah is not a monologic activity, but a reciprocal interaction that generates localized expressions of Islam, forms of indigenized Islam that are plural, adaptive, and contextually grounded. A complementary perspective emerges from comparative religion, which is essential in understanding the encounter between Islam and indigenous belief systems. In the Indonesian setting, Islam interacts with long-established local religions such as Kaharingan in Kalimantan, Sunda Wiwitan in West Java, and Aluk Todolo in Toraja. Such encounters do not always manifest as conflict; they often proceed through conceptual reinterpretation. For example, the idea of ancestral spirits in indigenous traditions may be paralleled with Islamic understandings of *ruh* or angels, facilitating symbolic translation (Geertz 1960). Comparative approaches thus prevent the analysis from falling into a binary opposition of “Islam versus local tradition” and instead illuminate how both traditions adapt and form new cultural configurations.

Grounded in these theoretical foundations, this study employs three analytical dimensions to interpret the empirical findings. The first dimension, conceptual similarities, identifies concepts in Kaharingan that parallel Islamic concepts, enabling meaning transfer. The second, mechanisms of integration, examines processes of reinterpretation (recasting meanings), substitution (replacing older elements with new ones), or rejection of elements perceived as incompatible. The third dimension, socio-cultural implications, explores shifts in religious identity, patterns of conflict, and processes of harmonization resulting from the encounter between Islam and local traditions. Together, these analytical dimensions guide

the interpretation of field data in a structured manner, enabling an explanation of Islamization dynamics not only from a normative perspective but also through cultural and social lenses.

### C. RESULT

The findings of this study reveal several thematic areas where acculturation between Islam and Kaharingan becomes most visible. One of the earliest and most significant dimensions of this interaction lies in the concept of divinity. Within Kaharingan tradition, there is a belief in a supreme being known as Suwara, an ultimate divine force who governs the cosmos. This theological orientation provides an entry point for *da'i* to introduce the Islamic concept of Allah SWT without generating direct opposition to ancestral beliefs. The approach taken by *da'i* is not to juxtapose the two systems antagonistically but to highlight their shared acknowledgment of a Supreme Creator. Such methods make the acceptance of Islam more natural, as individuals feel that their ancestral faith is not negated but rather reframed and strengthened. Several Dayak Meratus *muallaf* interviewed noted that this form of *dakwah* allowed them to maintain a sense of continuity with their heritage, fostering emotional and cultural comfort during religious transition. The Qur'anic affirmation, "Say, He is Allah, the One" (Q.S. al-Ikhlāṣ [112]:1), is thus introduced not as a contradiction to Suwara, but as a clarification of the singular, all-encompassing nature of divine authority already acknowledged in Kaharingan thought. Another important site of acculturation emerges in origin narratives. Kaharingan mythology includes figures such as Datu Adam and Datu Tihawa, who are believed to be the first ancestors of humankind. This narrative bears a striking resemblance to the Islamic account of Prophet Adam and Hawa (Eve), forming a conceptual bridge for introducing the Islamic notion of prophethood (*nubuwwah*). By establishing continuity between Datu Adam and Prophet Adam, *da'i* present Islam not as an entirely foreign system, but as an extension of an already familiar cosmological story. This narrative strategy also functions pedagogically: discussions about Adam in Islamic teaching feel familiar and meaningful to Dayak listeners, providing an effective medium for conveying moral guidance, human purpose, and Islamic eschatology.

Similar processes of reinterpretation occur in the understanding of metaphysical beings. Kaharingan cosmology includes spiritual entities such as Jabaril, Surapil, Mikail, and Zarail, names that share phonetic and functional similarities with the Islamic angels Jibril, Israfil, Mikail, and Izrail. During the acculturation process, *da'i* use these similarities to introduce Islamic angelology, positioning angels as servants of Allah with designated

tasks. Instead of rejecting pre-existing spiritual knowledge, *da'i* reinterpret it by retaining local concepts but placing them within a new theological framework. Differences in angelic roles, such as the transmission of revelation or the recording of deeds, are explained gradually, allowing the transition of understanding to occur smoothly without cultural rupture.

The most sensitive area of acculturation concerns death rituals and the veneration of ancestral spirits. In Kaharingan belief, death signifies the soul's journey toward Balai Maratusi, the realm of ancestral spirits, and rituals honoring the dead often involve symbolic communication with these spirits. Although such practices are not aligned with Islamic teachings, *da'i* do not immediately prohibit them. Instead, reinterpretation strategies are employed whereby communal remembrance events traditionally held on specific days after death, such as the seventh or fortieth day, are retained but transformed into *tahlil* and *yasinan* gatherings. This method preserves social cohesion and emotional meaning while strengthening theological alignment with *tauhid*. In this way, cultural continuity is maintained even as ritual forms are reshaped to reflect Islamic monotheism.

Acculturation is also evident in ecological wisdom and agricultural practices. The Dayak Meratus possess deeply rooted environmental ethics, including prohibitions on hunting young deer, restrictions on cutting certain trees, and systems of shifting cultivation designed to maintain ecological balance. These practices resonate with Islamic teachings on humanity's role as stewards of the earth (*khalifah fil-ardh*) and the avoidance of waste (*israf*). *Da'i* often reinforce these customs by linking them to Qur'anic principles, thereby granting traditional ecological values renewed legitimacy within an Islamic framework. This linkage strengthens community pride in ancestral wisdom while embedding it within Islamic ethical discourse.

Finally, cultural acculturation extends to the realm of artistic expression. Traditional performances such as the *tandik* dance and ritual music featuring drums and *sarunai* hold a central role in Kaharingan ceremonies. Rather than eliminating these art forms, acculturation has enabled their recontextualization within Islamic expression. *Da'i* encourage the transformation of these artistic traditions into forms of Islamic spiritual creativity, such as *nasyid*, *qasidah*, or rhythmic *dzikr*. In some communities, movement patterns from the *tandik* dance have been adapted into collective devotional performances, preserving communal energy while redirecting its meaning toward worship. Through such

transformations, Islam does not function as a force that erases culture but as one that revitalizes it within a transcendent spiritual orientation.

#### **D. DISCUSSION**

##### **Mechanisms of Acculturation: Selective Adaptation and Recontextualization**

Acculturation in the Meratus context represents a dynamic process of cultural negotiation rather than one of simple religious replacement. Theoretically, acculturation refers to the interaction of two cultural systems through which new elements are adopted without erasing the local identity. John W. Berry's (1997) typology identifies four possible outcomes of acculturation: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. The Dayak Meratus experience most closely aligns with the integrative model, often termed selective acculturation, where elements compatible with Islamic principles are embraced while those perceived as incompatible are consciously modified or abandoned.

This process resonates with Clifford Geertz's (1960) understanding of religion as a symbolic system. Religion operates not only as a doctrinal framework but also through social symbols, ritual expressions, and localized meanings. Thus, the Islamization of Meratus communities cannot be understood merely as doctrinal compliance; rather, it represents a symbolic negotiation where inherited cultural expressions are reinterpreted through Islamic concepts. Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of cultural hybridity further illuminates this phenomenon. The interaction between Islam and Kaharingan creates a "third space", a hybrid cultural domain where new meanings and practices emerge through reinterpretation and dialogical adaptation rather than simple layering or syncretism.

One of the clearest examples of selective adaptation is seen in the rearticulation of monotheistic belief. The Kaharingan understanding of Ranying Hatalla Langit as a supreme creator provides a natural point of convergence with the Islamic concept of Allah SWT. Dai often frame this parallel using Qur'anic affirmation such as, "Your God is One God; there is no deity but Him, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful" (Q. 2:163). This theological bridge allows conversion to proceed without emotional rupture, since the core belief in divine unity already exists within Kaharingan cosmology. Similarly, ancestral reverence, once expressed through offerings and ritual communication, is recontextualized as *birr al-wālidayn*, righteous conduct toward one's parents, supported by the Qur'anic injunction, "And We have enjoined upon man [goodness] to his parents" (Q. 29:8). The practice of

honoring ancestors thus shifts from ritual offerings to supplication and charitable acts in their name, preserving moral continuity while redirecting theological meaning.

Ecological ethics provide another field of convergence. The Dayak Meratus regard the forest as sacred, governed by prohibitions that maintain ecological balance. These values are reinterpreted through the Islamic concept of stewardship (*khalifah fil-ardh*), as expressed in the verse, “It is He who has made you successors on earth” (Q. 35:39). The transition from animistic guardianship to divine trusteeship reframes the same ecological wisdom within an Islamic cosmology, sustaining traditional environmental practices while grounding them in Qur’anic ethics.

Ritual transformation further illustrates how acculturation operates through recontextualization. In major ceremonies such as *Aruh Ganal*, a post-harvest thanksgiving ritual once dedicated to Ranying Hatalla and ancestral spirits, Islamic practices are gradually integrated. The ceremony now begins with *basmalah* and *Al-Fātiḥah*, while offerings are redirected toward communal charity. Music, dance, and festive gatherings remain, but their religious focus shifts toward expressing gratitude to Allah. This exemplifies Geertz’s notion of symbolic reinterpretation, where the cultural form persists but its symbolic meaning is transformed.

It is essential, however, to distinguish acculturation from syncretism. Whereas syncretism fuses distinct belief systems into an ambiguous theological hybrid, the Meratus case demonstrates adaptation that preserves the integrity of Islamic monotheism. The prophetic hadith, “Whoever introduces into this matter of ours what is not from it, it is rejected” (Bukhari no. 2697; Muslim no. 1718), sets the doctrinal boundary within which cultural adaptation operates. Local customs are permissible as long as they remain within the domain of *mu‘āmalah* (social practice) and do not encroach upon *‘aqidah* (creed). Thus, artistic performances, communal feasts, and ecological traditions are maintained as cultural heritage, while worship and theology are firmly anchored in Islamic principles.

This symbolic negotiation extends into spatial and social domains. Historically, the Meratus prayed in forests or mountains, seeking proximity to ancestral spirits. Today, dai encourage prayer in *langgar* (small prayer houses), yet still permit gatherings in forest settings, now reoriented toward collective supplication to Allah. This subtle shift maintains the affective resonance of place while transforming its spiritual orientation, embodying what Bhabha (1994) calls the “third space” of hybrid identity where Dayak cultural belonging is expressed through an Islamic worldview. Comparable patterns are found

elsewhere: the *slametan* in Java and the incorporation of *dhikr* into West African musical forms demonstrate that Islam's global spread often succeeds through selective adaptation rather than cultural erasure.

### **The Role of Dai as Cultural Negotiators**

Within this intricate process of acculturation, the role of the *dai* emerges as pivotal. Among the Dayak Meratus, *dai* function not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as mediators between two cultural systems. They act as interpreters who translate Islamic theology into symbols intelligible to local audiences, embodying what Edward T. Hall (1976) termed "meaning bridges" in intercultural communication. Their effectiveness lies not merely in doctrinal mastery but in cultural fluency, the ability to read local idioms, myths, and ritual codes and to articulate Islamic concepts through them. When explaining *tauhid*, for instance, they draw parallels between Allah SWT and Ranying Hatalla, emphasizing continuity rather than rupture.

Successful *dakwah* among the Meratus is dialogical and empathetic, reflecting the Qur'anic principle: "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best" (Q. 16:125). Wisdom (*hikmah*) in this context entails sensitivity to local meanings and emotional landscapes. The Prophet's teaching, "Make things easy and do not make them difficult; give glad tidings and do not drive people away" (Bukhari no. 69; Muslim no. 1734), further anchors this approach in prophetic pedagogy. *Dai* who adopt this inclusive method position themselves as companions in spiritual transformation rather than as external authorities imposing change.

Field observations and interviews reveal several recurring strategies. *Dai* employ local language mastery to explain Islamic concepts through familiar analogies; they weave Islamic narratives into local folklore, aligning stories of prophets with tales of ancestral heroes; they integrate traditional instruments such as bamboo ensembles and drums into *nasyid* or rhythmic *dzikr* performances; and they participate in communal rituals, reorienting them toward Islamic supplication rather than prohibiting them outright. These strategies exemplify Stuart Hall's (1980) notion of encoding and decoding in communication, the *dai* encode Islamic meanings into cultural forms that local audiences can decode without resistance.

Through such practices, *dai* help reshape rather than erase identity. The Meratus conception of themselves as "guardians of the forest" is reinterpreted through Islamic

stewardship, rendering them *khalifah Allah fil-ardh*, vicegerents of God on earth. This synthesis produces a hybrid identity where cultural pride coexists with religious devotion. Yet, challenges persist. *Dai* who adopt a puritanical stance, rejecting local customs outright, often encounter social resistance and alienation. Such failures underscore what Milton Bennett (1993) describes as a lack of intercultural sensitivity, the inability to appreciate difference as a potential bridge rather than a barrier.

To sustain both authenticity and legitimacy, effective *dai* often ground their approach in the jurisprudential maxim *al-‘ādah muhakkamah*, custom may serve as a legal source when not contradicting scripture. This principle, emphasized by classical scholars such as al-Suyuti, provides theological justification for contextual adaptation. In this sense, *dai* serve as cultural negotiators who safeguard Islamic orthodoxy while preserving the moral and aesthetic continuity of Dayak heritage. Their success illustrates that Islamization in Meratus does not proceed through confrontation, but through careful cultural dialogue, an embodiment of faith that grows from within the soil of local meaning.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the acculturation of Islamic values and Kaharingan traditions within the Dayak Meratus community is not merely a process of symbolic blending, but rather a selective and socially-oriented recontextualization. Theological points of convergence, such as the concept of a supreme deity, narratives of human origins, and recognition of spiritual entities, provide a meaningful foundation for Islamic dakwah that does not demand a rupture from ancestral heritage. The integration of traditional arts and ecological wisdom further illustrates that Islam can function as a moral and ethical framework that affirms and strengthens local cultural practices aimed at sustainability.

However, the findings also indicate that culturally insensitive or strictly normative dakwah approaches risk generating tension and alienation. Effective cultural dakwah requires dialogic engagement, contextual education, and community-based empowerment. Practically, this suggests that sustained religious development in indigenous communities is best supported through capacity-building programs for *dai*, the development of contextualized religious education curricula, and the establishment of collaborative forums involving customary leaders, religious scholars, and local policymakers.

Future research should consider longitudinal studies to examine how cultural and religious identities evolve across generations, as well as comparative studies of the Meratus and other

indigenous communities in Kalimantan to assess the broader applicability of the proposed acculturation model.

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