

## **Becoming Malay: Cultural Integration of Indian Muslims to Malay Culture in North Sumatra, Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

The cultural integration of Indian Muslims in Indonesia has been developing for an extended period and is proven by the cultural openness to accepting Malay identity. However, there is a significant scarcity of academic discussions specifically exploring this concept. Therefore, this research aimed to explore the combination process and different expressions of openness in Indian Muslim culture into Malay culture in North Sumatra. A total of three perspectives were examined, which included 1) the driving factors behind the formation of cultural integration in North Sumatra, 2) the type of cultural openness used by Indian Muslims, and 3) the pattern of combination in Malay culture. The method used was qualitative descriptive, and data were collected through in-depth interviews with Indian Muslim informants. Consequently, the results showed that Indian culture was highly friendly to understanding the local culture, advancing the integration process. Based on the extent of integration, it could be categorized into two types namely, semi-integration and total integration of Malay culture. Finally, the discovery served as a valuable agenda for preserving the different cultural heritage of the nation, promoting a sample for a balanced multicultural society.

**Keywords:** Indian Muslim, North Sumatra, Cultural forms, Integration patterns, Cultural openness

### **Introduction**

Historical and archaeological records show that India and Indonesia are significant sources of cultural evidence related to two major religions, namely Islam and Hinduism. The presence of these religions in Indonesia is closely related to India's historical role as the center of the Islamic kingdom during the Mongol Dynasty. This Islamic dynasty flourished in India from the early 13th century to the mid-19th century. Typically, the era of Islamic political influence started in the early 8th century when Muhammad bin al-Qasim, sent by Caliph al-Walid I, invaded the Sind region in 708 AD. Additionally, historical records reveal the prosperity of Hindu kingdoms in Indonesia from the 4th century (Kutai kingdom) to the late 10th century (Kahuripan kingdom). This shared historical evidence forms the basis for the close relationship between Indonesia and India. However, it is essential to be aware that historical sites have been transformed into religious tourism destinations for both nations.

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The extended historical process mentioned above resulted in the emergence of new cultural diversity, as foreign influences from India attempted to integrate with the local culture in North Sumatra. As these influences arrived with the traditions, the local acceptance in North Sumatra was crucial. In addition, the presence of the first generation of Indian Muslims in Indonesia dates to three distinct phases. Firstly, based on religious backgrounds,<sup>1</sup> the Indians arrived in North Sumatra to preach, and associating with the declaration of Datuk Syamsul Arifin preachers from India required delivering the mission to Sumatra. Secondly, some were accompanied by Dutch allied troops, specifically the Gurkha army, ensuring security in the plantation areas of the Dutches. The third phase included individuals pursuing a better life by trying to have luck on the plantation lands of East Sumatra. The considerable numbers in these three phases experienced a gradual process of assimilation with the local culture, coexisting pleasantly in the Malay community. As a matter of fact, the spreads of Indians into different parts of the word have been continuing until the present time.<sup>2</sup> Indonesia itself is known as very diverse multicultural nations, geographically expanding over thousands of islands.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural integration in human life occurs as individuals navigate conflicts and deviations in a social system, thereby leading to a unified cultural section.<sup>4</sup> In North Sumatra, Indian Muslim immigrants show a preference for engaging in cultural acculturation through four specific types of integration.<sup>5</sup> These approaches are considered more stable, which further increases their acceptance in the local community. Moreover, the impact of cultural assimilation extends beyond the immigrant group, potentially promoting positive lifestyles that contribute to the cultural richness of society when managed judiciously. However, there is also a risk of negative dynamics, particularly when approached with ego from existing cultures.<sup>6</sup> The choice of acculturation as a mixing strategy by the Indian Muslim community in adapting to local and Indian cultures is considered highly appropriate based on observed conditions in the research field. This gradual and peaceful process supports the acculturation strategy of Berry, aiming for greater harmony and unity to create a favorable atmosphere.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the presence of shared cultural similarities between the two cultures is a major factor in achieving this arrangement.<sup>8</sup>

After the arrival of Indian Muslims in East Sumatra, the survival and establishment of a stable life have driven efforts to search for job opportunities and fortune. The evidence of this connection, particularly in North Sumatra, can be found in the genealogy of Deli Malay Kingdom. This information, documented on the Maimun Palace page, reveals that Sultan Ma'moen Al Rasyid

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<sup>1</sup> A. Mani, "Indians in North Sumarta. In K. S. Shandu & A. Mani (Eds.), ISEAS." (Indian Communities in Southeast Asia, 1993), 46–58.

<sup>2</sup> Tengku Luckman Sinar, *Orang India Di Sumatera Utara* (Medan: Forkala, 2008); P. C. Jain and R. Prasad, "Indian Diaspora in the Twenty-First Century: Population and Regional Distribution.," *South Asian Diaspora* 17, no. 1 (2023): 67–81, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2023.2270329>.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Brown, *A Short History of Indonesia: The Unlikely Nation?* (Westport: Greenwood Press., 2006), 1–10.

<sup>4</sup> Peter M. Blau, "A Theory of Social Integration," *American Journal of Sociology* 65, no. 6 (1960): 545–56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2773647>.

<sup>5</sup> Chigusa Matsuyama, Hiroyuki · Okamoto and Yasuhiro Sato, "Social Integration of Immigrants in Cities: Theory and Evidence from the European Social Survey," *The Japanese Economic Review* 76 (2025): 957–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42973-025-00215-7>.

<sup>6</sup> Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi* (Jakarta: Aksara Baru, 1985), 247–56; H. Ganapathy-Coleman, "Becoming 'Authentic' Indian Women: Displacement, Home, and Identity among Women of the Indian Diaspora in the USA.," *Social Identities* 29, no. 5 (2023): 480–497, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2024>.

<sup>7</sup> K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, Third Edit (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1966), 395.

<sup>8</sup> J. W. Berry, "Conceptual Approaches to Acculturation," in *Acculturation: Advances in Theory, Measurement and Applied Research*, ed. K. Chun, P. Balls Organista, and G. Marin (USA: American Psychological Association, 2003), 17–37, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/10472-004>.

Perkasa Alamsyah bearing the name Khan, is a descendant of India.<sup>9</sup> At a grass root level their presence can be seen in forms of communities settling in different parts of North Sumatra, involving in many forms of societal engagements.<sup>10</sup>

The integration of Indian Muslim culture in North Sumatra has gone through a lengthy process for acceptance in the local Malay culture.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, time has always been very fundamental in any process for adaptation and formation of new identity by migrants.<sup>12</sup> Initially, there was cultural opposition from early generations of Indian Muslims, some of whom were strongly attached to their traditions and hesitant to embrace change. However, with the progression of life, these challenges become ignored, as a result of the desire to survive. The integration patterns adopted by Indian Muslim immigrants in North Sumatra can be categorized into two types. The first is total assimilation (acculturation), including the loss of Indian identity and the absence of distinct characteristics in the lives of the people. However, some of the physical and facial features reflecting the Indian heritage may continue. The second pattern is simulated assimilation (diffusion), where the groups keep traditions and maintain some connection through the families in India, though not greatly. In this pattern, cultural reality, traditions, and family ties with the people original Indian families are preserved, even when the groups do not fully command the language of the native region in India. In both patterns, the reflection of the Indian heritage of the people is evident in the physical features that are still present and visible in the facial expressions of the groups. Moreover, the distinguishing factor between these two groups remains in how the reality of the culture is upheld in the daily lives of the people in the inhabited areas.<sup>13</sup>

## Method

This research used a descriptive qualitative method with the main data sourced from 11 informants selected for the extensive experience and knowledge of the group about the research topic. Selection criteria included seniority, participation in Indian Muslim community affairs, and accessibility. These informants were mainly from the third generation of Indian Muslim descendants, living across local communities in Medan, Delitua, Binjai, Tebing Tinggi, Serbelawan, Aek Nabara, Sibolga, and Barus. In addition to informants, the research used family documents, photos, and locations where the Indian Muslim community lived. Previous confirmation of informant willingness was obtained directly or through Indian Muslim organizations or figures. The members ensure that the published information receives approval from the informants. Data collection included in-depth interviews guided by an Interview Guide structured around the research questions. To describe the development of various cultural traditions, communication documents, and family photos were used. During the analysis of the documents, additional information about the context and meaning behind the documents and

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<sup>9</sup> Tengku Luckman Sinar, *Bangun Dan Runtuhnya Kerajaan Melayu Di Sumatera Timur*. (Yayasan Kesultanan Serdang, n.d.), 49–53.

<sup>10</sup> Hasan Asari et al., “The Historical Footprint of India-Muslim in North Sumatra: History and Management of the Al-Mukhlis Tebingtinggi Mosque,” *Journal Of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 7, no. 2 (2023): 269–92, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.30821/jcims.v7i2.18347>.

<sup>11</sup> A. Mani, “Indians in a Rapidly Transforming Indonesia,” in *Rising India and Indian Communities in East Asia*, ed. K. Kesavapany et al. (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008), 229–54.

<sup>12</sup> A. K. M. A. Ullah, “Struggles for Identity Formation: Second-Generation South Asian Diaspora Overseas.,” *South Asian Diaspora* 17, no. 2 (2024): 199–214, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2024.2328465>; M. Gupta, “Changing Identity Patterns among Women in South Asian Diaspora in the UK: Construction, Negotiation and Assimilation of Identities.,” *South Asian Diaspora*, 2025, 1–16, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2025.2482305>; Ganapathy-Coleman, “Becoming ‘Authentic’ Indian Women: Displacement, Home, and Identity among Women of the Indian Diaspora in the USA.”

<sup>13</sup> A. Karim, *Sejarah Islam Di India* (Yogyakarta: Bunga Grafies Production, 2003), 12.

photos was requested. Simultaneously, on-site observations of the areas where the Indian Muslim community resided were conducted to directly witness shifts in housing patterns. To ensure data validity, specific criteria were applied, considering credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.<sup>14</sup> The research data were analyzed in four distinct steps. Firstly, data collection utilized techniques such as interviews, document analysis, and observation.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, data simplification was conducted to identify relevant information. Thirdly, data presentation was executed to organize information for demonstrating results, with the significance shown through discussion. Lastly, the conclusion showed specific innovations generated by data analysis, with assistance from ATLAS Ti.9 software in data processing.

**Table 1: Integrity pattern of the Indian Muslim community to become Malay**

|                   | ◇ Aculturation<br>③ 22 | ◇ Asimilation<br>③ 35 |
|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| ◇ COMMENT... ③ 9  | 1 (0.03)               | 8 (0.22)              |
| ◇ CULINARY ③ 18   | 5 (0.14)               | 11 (0.26)             |
| ◇ DRESS CO... ③ 3 | 1 (0.04)               | 1 (0.03)              |
| ◇ RESIDENT ③ 14   |                        | 10 (0.26)             |
| ◇ MARRIAGE ③ 22   | 15 (0.52)              | 4 (0.08)              |

The field exploration focused on collecting complete data to understand the process of Indian Muslims becoming Malay in North Sumatra. The primary areas of interest were the supporting factors and the various forms of cultural addition commenced by the Indian Muslim community. The finding aimed to identify mixing patterns practiced by Indians in seven research areas, with 11 informants serving as important sources of information. The informants, representing the III and IV generations of Indian Muslim families, were selected for the capability to provide accurate information as well as samples for synthesis and analysis.

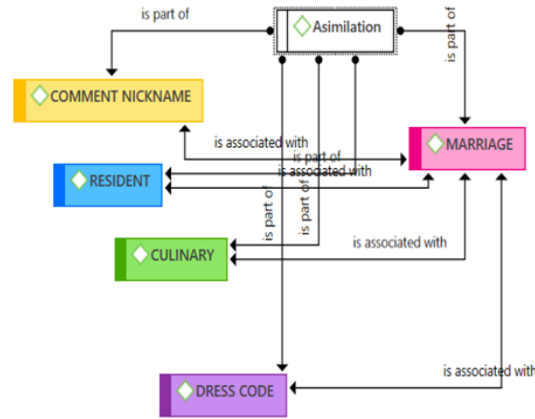
**Result and Discussion**

The analysis of Figure 1 was a result of interviews with the eleven informants regarding mixing patterns followed to become Malay. The interviews covered five Indian cultures, most of which were still dominant in the lives of Indian Muslims. The observed patterns were in two categories namely acculturation patterns (total integration), where Indian culture in the community was nearly lost, with only physical appearance and dress styles slightly modified to associate with Malay dressing styles. Furthermore, the second pattern was diffusion (simulated integration), where the cultural assimilation process to become Malay still existed, modified with the existing local culture. This research was associated with the focus described above, describing the background of the formation of Indian Muslim ethnic cultural mixing in North Sumatra, the pattern of interaction through the local community, and the types of Muslim Indian cultural disclosure that made the people Malays. The most influential factor in the formation of the two mixing patterns found in the field was the culture of marriage. While all five cultures of openness granted access to the aim combination and shown relationships, marriage activated the early process, as shown in the Atlas diagram below.

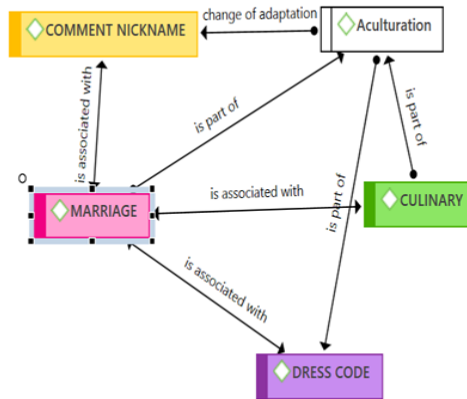
<sup>14</sup> Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 1985), 289–356.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 63–84.

**Figure 1: Assimilation pattern in culture**

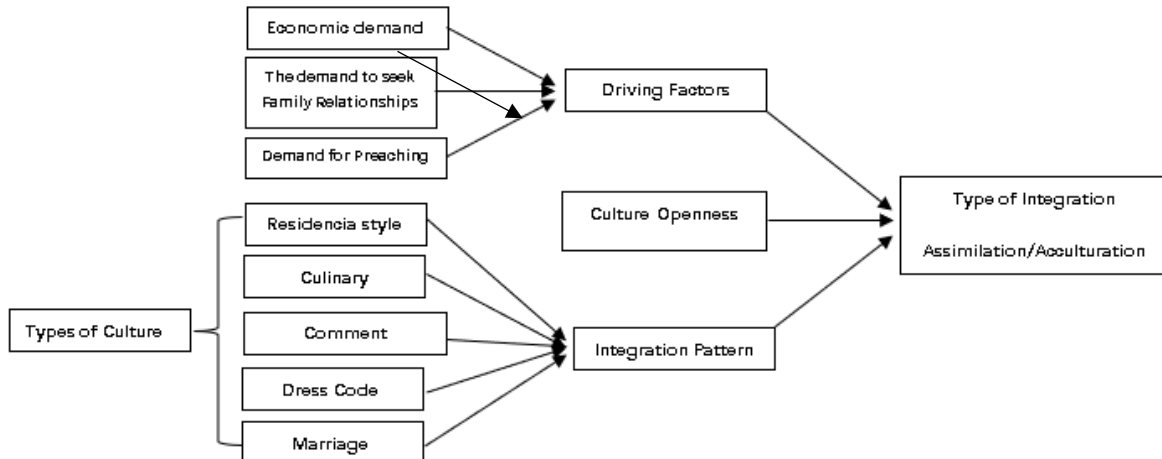


**Figure 2: Acculturation pattern in culture**



The innovation of this research was placed in the development of grounded theory, specifically examples of Indian Muslim openness of culture to becoming Malay were seen as follows.

**Figure 3: Indian Muslim openness of culture to becoming Malay**



The findings revealed the openness of Indian Muslim culture to Malay culture. This was evident through two distinct combination patterns, namely assimilation and cultural acculturation, both demonstrating similarities to the local culture.

## **Discussion**

The driving factors and reasons for Indian immigrants selecting North Sumatra as the destination, as reported by several informants, were influenced by numerous dominant factors. At least two major driving factors could be identified in the following manner. Firstly, Economic Demand caused many Indian Muslims to pursue opportunities abroad.<sup>16</sup> The background system and religious restrictions in India hindered equal opportunities, specifically compared to those with Hindu background privileges. Secondly, the unfair attitude of the Hindu-dominated Indian government, particularly in aspects such as government or private work recruitment, was a significant consideration.<sup>17</sup> According to Masdah, Mufidah, and Ahmad the group consistently faced tough competition for jobs, leading many Muslim Indians to find work outside of India. Other informants, Asraf, Yasin, Datuk, explained that the preferred destinations of the people were more familiar countries, specifically in terms of religion and beliefs. Hence, the groups often selected Arab countries and ASEAN countries where the Muslim population was more dominant. It was reasonable that Indian Muslims in North Sumatra were comfortable with the treatment from the government and the accepting community, considering the people as part of the social composition. The mission of connected nations to support the Dutch army in bringing Indian residents to colonial countries to serve the Dutch partners (Gurkha Army), family ties, the desire to establish relationships with family members residing in Indonesia, and the Islamic missionary factor were also influential. It was known that India performed a role in spreading Islam in the 18th century to Indonesia. This religious role still inherited by third generation of Indian Muslim such as Hanzalah, Rafiq, and Siddiq.

The migration of Indian Muslims to North Sumatra was driven by a combination of interconnected social, economic, and religious factors. Economic pressures and structural inequalities in Hindu-dominated India placed significant constraints on Muslim communities, limiting their access to employment in both government and private sectors. These conditions were further exacerbated by workplace discrimination that hindered their opportunities for social mobility. In addition, religious-cultural preferences influenced their decision to migrate, as Muslim-majority regions in Southeast Asia were perceived as safer and more spiritually comfortable environments. The historical roots of this migration also trace back to patterns of mobility during the colonial era, including the deployment of Indian troops by the British, which opened early pathways to the Indonesian archipelago. Family ties, kinship networks, and Islamic missionary activities further strengthened the historical connections between Indian Muslim communities and Indonesian Muslims, enabling migration to occur more intensively and sustainably.

### ***The Perception of Integration***

The perception of integration significantly influenced the acculturation process of Indian Muslims becoming Malays in North Sumatra. The research consistently showed cultural assimilation and the identity of Indian Muslims developing into Malays across various locations, showing similar conditions.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, several facts in the finding locations might have explained why the people took pride in or preferred to be called Malays. After the India-Pakistan Partition, India was declared a Hindu country with a majority Hindu population, while Pakistan was declared an

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<sup>16</sup> Allan Akbar, "Perkebunan Tembakau Dan Kapitalisasi Ekonomi Sumatera Timur 1863-1930," *Tamaddun* 6, no. 2 (2018): 65–66.

<sup>17</sup> Clifford Mandherst, *The Hindu-Muslim Problem in India*, E-Book (London: Routledge, 2025), 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003658771>.

<sup>18</sup> Ullah, "Struggles for Identity Formation: Second-Generation South Asian Diaspora Overseas.," 199–214.

Islamic country based on Islam.<sup>19</sup> Another significant factor was the total cultural adaptation of the group to the conditions of the surrounding community, providing a reasonable basis for acceptance by the environment.<sup>20</sup> Asraf Ali and M. Siddiq provided information regarding reasons for a genuine desire for total adaptation, including, first, a lack of knowledge of the Indian language, a situation experienced by the majority, particularly the third generation of Indian Muslims in North Sumatra. Second, a lack of knowledge of the national anthem of India, a situation not exclusive to Indian Muslims but also observed among many Indian Hindus due to the limited connection with the ancestral homeland. Third, the people did not know the specific region in India where the group originated, as the people had not once returned to India.

During integration, Indian Muslim communities underwent significant identity transformations. Many transitioned from identifying themselves as “Indian Muslims” to adopting a Malay identity, especially after the India–Pakistan Partition, which heightened identity tensions in India. This shift often involved the loss of ancestral markers such as mother tongues, knowledge of the Indian national anthem, or even awareness of their geographical origins. Malay identity offered a sense of social acceptance and religious affinity, creating comfort and security in daily life. Indeed, it has been established that cultural adaptation and integration into a new cultural system become easier and accelerates in conjunction with the passing of generations.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Pride of Being Malay***

Based on several pieces of information from the field, it was almost certain why Indian Muslims preferred and took pride in being called Malays.<sup>22</sup> They preferred to be identified as either Pakistani or Indian rather than being referred to as Bengali or Keling. There were reasons behind this choice, and it came from the need to claim identity in terms of religious beliefs. In this context, it was due to the consequences of religion and beliefs that needed to be shown, even though historically, the Indian Muslims may not have fully understood the labeling terms that were used.

This act was already known and recognized by the people of North Sumatra that Syamsul Arifin, who still had a lineage from India, was given the title *Datuk Lelawangsa*. Syamsul Arifin also served as the chairman of the Council of Malay Indonesian Customary Culture (MABMI) in North Sumatra until the time of this research. These titles and honors were given by the Malay community to someone with an Indian background, based on considerations that made the candidates fitting for such recognition.<sup>23</sup>

Several factors helped in explaining the reason Indian Muslims took more pride in being called Malays. Firstly, following the separation of India and Pakistan (Partition), India was identified as a Hindu-majority country, while Pakistan was declared an Islamic state. The discriminatory practices by the predominantly Hindu Indian government became evident, particularly in aspects including government or private sector employment where Hindus were given priority over

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<sup>19</sup> Nadeem Malik, *Secular and Religious Politics in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan Singapore, 2025), 69–117, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-6994-3>.

<sup>20</sup> D. Chatteraj and A. Basu, “In Search of Identity: Perspectives from Second Generation South Asian Diaspora,” *South Asian Diaspora* 17, no. 2 (2025): 191–98, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2024.2414670>.

<sup>21</sup> S. Banki and I. P. Adhikari, “Aligned and Shifting Identities in Distant Diasporas: A Multigenerational Examination,” *South Asian Diaspora* 17, no. 2 (2024): 257–272., <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2024.2394372>.

<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Rifqi Irsyad, “Migration, Colonialism, and Social Identity: Mandailing Ethnic Group in Indonesia and Malaysia since the 19th Century,” *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 1 (2025): 55–84, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.30821/jcims.v9i1.23903>.

<sup>23</sup> Fitri Handayani et al., “Tradisi Pemberian Gelar Dalam Suku Melayu,” *Jurnal Pelita Pendidikan, Hukum, Ekonomi, Dan Teknologi* 2, no. 1 (2026): 106–16.

Muslims in certain cases, resulting in consistent job losses.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, many Indian Muslim communities searched for employment opportunities outside India, primarily in Muslim-majority regions such as Arab nations and ASEAN countries.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, the preference was also influenced by the comfort Indian Muslims in North Sumatra found in the treatment provided by the government and the local community, which accepted them as integral members of its social order. Furthermore, their significant role was attributed to their complete cultural adaptation to the local community's conditions, providing a valid reason for their acceptance within the community.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Malay culture itself by nature is very welcoming and can absorb different foreign elements into its fold.<sup>27</sup>

Hindus in North Sumatra actively preserved the identity of the group as Indians, specifically Tamil, Punjabi, and Bengali. The people steadfastly upheld cultural and religious traditions and engaged in conversations in the Indian language and respective regional languages. Additionally, the Hindus actively participated in events at the Indian Embassy and Consulate in Medan. The Hindus also frequently attended major Indian festivals and religious celebrations at the embassy, returned to the hometowns of the people, and memorized the Indian national anthem. Regarding marriage, the group remained strict in selecting Indian descendants who shared the same religion and beliefs, showing a strong reluctance to marry individuals from the local community.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Forms of Cultural Openness***

Certain forms of Indian culture combined with the local culture strongly influenced the formation of Indian Muslim businesses to become people who felt secure living alongside Malays. Moreover, data obtained in the field confirmed the happiness of the people as Indian-Malay or Malay Indians, allowing the group to actively participate and perform a role as the children of the nation. The sample model for the combination of Indian Muslim communities in North Sumatra served as a strategy for cultural development efforts to bring opportunities and tap into regional treasures for local governments.

### ***Patterns of Cultural Combination of Indian Muslims***

There were two forms of acculturation observed in the field namely, Pseudo Integration (Diffusion) and Total Integration (Acculturation). Pseudo Integration included individuals acculturating with the local community while preserving the traditions of the Indian Muslim community passed down through generations. This included combining systems and cultural values through the new place of residence, significantly different from the place of origin.<sup>29</sup> The foundations of the culture were reserved by following its important principles. Total Integration (Acculturation), on the other hand, included pleasantly combining two cultures with different characteristics, allowing for the differentiation between elements of each culture.

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<sup>24</sup> Mani, "Indians in a Rapidly Transforming Indonesia," 229–54.

<sup>25</sup> Jain and Prasad, "Indian Diaspora in the Twenty-First Century: Population and Regional Distribution.," 67–81.

<sup>26</sup> Z. B. Lubis, "Kajian Awal Tentang Komunitas Tamil Dan Punjabi Di Medan: Adaptasi Dan Jaringan Sosial," *Etnovisi: Jurnal Antropologi Sosial Budaya* 1, no. 3 (2005): 136–46.

<sup>27</sup> Irsyad, "Migration, Colonialism, and Social Identity: Mandailing Ethnic Group in Indonesia and Malaysia since the 19th Century.," 55–84.

<sup>28</sup> Farish A. Noor, "Pathans to the East! The Historical Development of the Tablighi Jama'at Movement in Kelantan, Trengganu and Patani and Its Transnational Links with the South Asia and the Global Islamist Revivalist Movement," *The Journal of Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007): 7–25, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-2006-040>.

<sup>29</sup> Blau, "A Theory of Social Integration," 545–56.

**Table 2: Patterns of Cultural Integration**

| NO | TYPIES OF CULTURAL          | TYPE OF INTEGRASION |                | INFORMAN                |
|----|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
|    |                             | DIFFUSION           | ACCUULTURATION |                         |
| 1. | Marriage                    | V                   | X              | 2,8,5,11,7,4,1,10,3,6,9 |
| 2. | Culinary                    | V                   | X              | 11,7,4,1,10,3,6,9       |
| 3. | Indian-Style Housing        | V                   | X              | 5,11,7,4,1,10,3         |
| 4. | Indian Traditional Clothing | X                   | X              | 4.1,10,3,6,9            |
| 5. | Greeting Language           | V                   | X              | 3 & 6                   |

Table 2 shows the opinions from various informants in the field, reflecting the views of the Muslim Indian community on the original culture in India. Two patterns of cultural integration appeared among the Muslim Indian community. In the Pseudo Integration pattern (Diffusion), the people still followed the cultural traditions practiced by the Indian Muslim community in the hometowns of the people, although, a significant portion may not have been fluent in the language. In the Total Integration model (Acculturation), there was a mixing of Indian and local cultures, forming a combined culture. This model could confirm that the group no longer supported the original Indian culture, and it could be declared that it had completely disappeared from their identity.

The findings obtained through field exploration on the combination of foreign and local cultures in the six cultural forms that were the objects of research could be discussed from several perspectives, including,

### *Marriage*

Marriage is a holy thing as well as has a function as a stage of survival of mortal life and all living effects created by God on this earth. Through the process of marriage, as a social critter a person will witness changes in his social status, from originally living alone also having a family and getting a new family in the community. The new social status they carry will not release them from their association with family connections and association inherited by their status and family name. therefore, they must follow the traditions espoused by their extended family which is manifested by marrying between close and distant families who have good relations both inheritance (*nashab*) and closeness (*Khufu*). This marriage tradition will be sacred because it occasionally links religion and beliefs and heritable and family status, and is generally carried out by Indian, Arab and Chinese communities who are veritably strict in maintaining this tradition. Although they live and live in overseas areas, occasionally with this system it's veritably delicate to acclimatize to their new terrain. thus, occasionally they limit or indeed reject marriage with natives for fear of breaking the family tree. There's indeed one supposition that they're more noble than the natives, and there are numerous further reasons why among them there's still a high position of resistance to accepting the original culture and marrying locals. Along with the passage of time and the demands of civilization, especially for foreign emigrants in their new terrain, of course, the position of challenge is relatively high. In addition to being suitable to maintain the tradition of marriage with family, on the other hand, they have to struggle to maintain life in the land of others, and the reason for being accepted in this new terrain requires them to prioritize further principles for them, videlicet how they can continue to survive in the new terrain or area by editing and marrying original people and also living in their midst by conforming and acclimatize to its terrain.

Gradationally the integration process of foreign emigrants, especially Indian Muslims in Malay land in Sumatra since the first generation until now began to form. In the first generation, the resistance is still relatively tight and high, but in after generations it has begun to open. There's still a strong number of intermarriages between families and that number is now veritably small, compared to those who intermarry with locals in the area of exploration has been done quite a lot by Indian Muslims.

### *Culinary*

Indian cuisine achieved significant popularity among the Indonesian community. Generally categorized as catering to the upper-middle class, distinctive Indian menus were found in different hotels and successful restaurants. Indian cuisine was often considered moderately expensive due to its matchless and aromatic flavors. However, in North Sumatra, Indian cuisine improved in appearance, spices, and taste, making it more available.<sup>30</sup> The cuisine was once seen as expensive and high class now seemed ordinary, and native audiences in North Sumatra became increasingly interested in Indian cuisine, influenced by experience in Indian films. Muslim Indian dishes in Indonesia also experienced changes in taste and presentation, making the dishes favorites among food enthusiasts. As a result, some dishes achieved high popularity due to the skill of the cooks including:

1. *Nasi Biryani*, a typical Indian dish served as the main course, included rice cooked with Indian spices and combined with either goat or chicken meat. While in India, this rice was consumed both during celebrations and as a daily dish, in Medan, Indonesia, *Nasi Biryani* often complemented honorary feasts, be the meals were small or grand. Indian culinary traditions signified strong flavors and spices, and in Medan, *Basmati* rice was simplified using *Balam* rice. The spices used were moderate, with *ghee* (clarified butter) being used in a more controlled style.
2. *Karee*, an Indian specialty served as a side dish, was a dish cooked with Indian spices and combined with either goat or chicken meat. In North Sumatra, Karee dishes, highly pursued by Indian cuisine enthusiasts, changed in taste while according to an informant, it was not such as the original curry in India. Our grandmothers who came from India taught us to make the spices in Indonesia; hence it did not taste like the curry we know (Asra Asyraf Ali). Some Malay communities in Tanah Deli combined it with coconut milk as a seasoning.
2. *Dhalca*, a vegetable side dish usually eaten with Indian bread, was improved in Indonesia through the addition of crushed meat or the head of goat, different from the original *dhal* vegetable from India, which was purely dal beans cooked comparable to peanut porridge. The green variant was a different mixture and seasoning, serving as a vegetable side dish to be eaten with rice.
3. *Chai* was a warming drink made with tea, milk, ginger, cloves, as well as cardamom while in Indonesia, chai was known as *Teh Tarik* or milk tea.

All the mentioned types of food were normal Indian dishes that had become part of daily cuisine in India, with a Malay twist in North Sumatra. Specifically, during celebrations in large Indian families, these dishes held great significance and were always served during feasts or gatherings, big and small. Dishes such as Karee were not once replaced and were always presented on the table during these occasions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Shuri Gupta and Kiran Bains, "Traditional Cooked Vegetable Dishes as Important Sources of Ascorbic Acid and  $\beta$ -Carotene in the Dietsof Indian Urban and Rural Families," *Food an Nutrition Bulletin* 27, no. 4 (2006): 306–10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/156482650602700404>.

<sup>31</sup> Vishnu Antani and Santosh Mahaptra, "Evolution of Indian Cuisine: A Socio-Historical Review," *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 9, no. 15 (2022): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-022-00129-4>.

### *Types of Indian-Style Housing*

The lifestyle of gathering with family members in a house was a long-standing tradition in the Indian community. This system aimed to build the potential strength of the family, both physically and spiritually as well as served as an effort to maintain the family and lineage. This cultural practice was deeply established in the entire Indian community, both in India and Indonesia, regardless of whether the people were Muslims or non-Muslims. In addition, the system was collectively formed by the family, and its members included all the men and the wives, as well as the women and the husbands, including unmarried children, as well as the number of members was unlimited.<sup>32</sup>

The term Joint Family lifestyle, commonly used in India, was referred to as an Extended Family by Carter. This concept included the nuclear family plus relatives, such as grandparents, nephews, cousins, uncles, aunts, and more.<sup>33</sup> However, in Indonesia, there were slight differences from the customs in the native region of India. The practice, still preserved in the past, included multiple family members living in a large house, including both the nuclear family and new families formed through generational marriages. Naturally, the people occupied rooms designed to accommodate the entire family,<sup>34</sup> a scenario often shown in Indian dramas or films on television. According to Kapadia, the joint family was a group formed by the husband, wife, and children, as well as other relationships, both from the paternal and maternal sides, depending on whether the joint family was patrilineal or matrilineal.<sup>35</sup>

In Indonesia, families did not reside in one large and luxurious house, as such a housing style was usually associated with economically wealthy families from high-class backgrounds. Instead, the families formed residential centers where several families from the same Indian lineage lived together. Regarding the lifestyle of the Joint Family system, Asraf Ali, described it as similar to large families in Deli Tua, “*similar to the houses in Deli Tua, with father, mother, siblings, and even nieces as well as nephews, similar to younger siblings or nieces, such as the child of Nana Amir from Tanjung Pura who stayed in Deli Tua to attend school*” According to Kapadia, this pattern had several advantages in using the Joint Family system including:

1. To maintain the economic integrity of the family.
2. To maintain family genealogy and lineage.
3. Maintaining the strength of family mutual support

This family system was supported by a nature of interest in maintaining the integrity of the joint economy, where family property was considered joint property. Family brotherhood was maintained with the value of pure love, and the interests of each family member were safeguarded. In general, the system was ruled by the two parents who acted as leaders of this large family. For instance, in terms of matchmaking for the children, the parents usually make the most important decisions.<sup>36</sup> The design of the house was prepared to accommodate many family members and usually included numerous rooms to suit the size of the family. In a way, the architectural style and format may have varied slightly from the culture in India. The practice of living inside the same house was still maintained in this environment which made the people live in a single-family neighborhood. Therefore, the form and architectural style of the buildings were houses capable of

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<sup>32</sup> Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, 395.

<sup>33</sup> Kapadia, 327.

<sup>34</sup> R. Vaidyanathan, “Declining Joint Family and Emerging Crisis in Old Age Security,” *International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management* 1, no. 1–2 (2007): 151–73, <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJCBM.2007.014476>.

<sup>35</sup> Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, 336.

<sup>36</sup> Berry, “Conceptual Approaches to Acculturation,” 17–37.

accommodating many family members, specifically during family gatherings when numerous families came together under the same roof.<sup>37</sup>

In several areas on the borders of Medan, Muslim Indian communities lived in groups, like other foreign communities such as the Chinese and Arab communities, which also tended to have a similar lifestyle. For example, on Gajah Street in Medan, there was a community of Muslim Indians maintaining a historical legacy in the form of a mosque and this community originated from Northern India, Uttar Pradesh (UP). In other areas outside Medan, such as Deli Tua, Serbelawan, Siantar, Rantau Prapat, Sibolga, and Barus, with different styles, there were still distinctive features showing the comfort of the Indian Muslim community in Indonesia when the people could live in closeness, even when not in the same roof and one house. However, with a sense of culture and pride as people supporting the heritage of India, the group gathered in a specific area to show the descendants and future generations that they still had Indian blood and lineage. In general, Indians maintained the family lineage by marrying into families through slightly close relationships. This was intended to preserve the lineage and descendants for generations to come.

In the process of acculturation within this living arrangement, Indians expressed their individuality by integrating with a pattern of domestic developments, promoting connections with the local community. This indicated a willingness to embrace the presence of the local community, enabling them to share a compound initially reserved for close families. According to Informants, Masdah and Khan, the function of the *Mehman Khana* (guest house), initially used as a basecamp for newcomers from India to be assisted while the people were not yet established and settled in Indonesia. The newcomers were provided with training and capital for businesses to empower individuals to pursue a livelihood independently. Informant a while, this function could also be used by the Muslim community in general as a transit and lodging place.

### *Indian Traditional Clothing*

In general, traditional Indian attire was closely associated with the use of sarees for women, usually made of cotton or silk, while men commonly wore *kurta* pyjama, normally made from cotton. The saree, a traditional garment for Indian women, was an unstitched length of cloth, varying from 4 to 9 meters. It was worn in various styles, with the most common being wrapped around the waist, through one end placed on the shoulder to the back. *Sarees* were usually worn on a petticoat or inner garment, paired with a blouse known as *choli* or *ravika*. The *choli* included short sleeves and a low neck, designed to adjust to the hot summer climate in South Asia.<sup>38</sup>

This clothing was kept for holiday celebrations and was also worn in daily life in India. The custom of wearing a saree varied between girls and married women. Married women normally wore a 2-meter-long saree wrapped around the body, with an open center, while unmarried women usually wore it closed and less frequently. Among Indian Muslim ethnic groups in Indonesia, *sarees* were worn only at specific events, such as weddings or family parties, with some changes. *Sarees* were used as a basic material for clothing, later changed into garment brackets like the clothes worn by Muslim women in Indonesia, differing from sarees used in India.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> E. B. Havell, *Indian Architecture* (London: John Murray, 2016), 241.

<sup>38</sup> S.D. Pooja and Dr. H. Sofia, "From Tradition to Transformation: The Saree as a Mirror of Cultural and Gender Dynamics," *EXCELLENCE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH* 19, no. 1 (2025): 67–74.

<sup>39</sup> Apriani Harahap, "Orang India Di Perkebunan Tembakau Deli: Narasi Foto, 1872-1900," *JASMERAH: Journal of Education and Historical Studies* 1, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.24114/jasmerah.v1i2.14548>.

As for the attire of men, it was quite different and in addition to modern clothing commonly worn, traditional clothing was also maintained. One common type of clothing worn by Indian and Pakistani communities and the surroundings was the *Kurta* Pyjama, often referred to simply as *Kurta*. This attire was frequently worn in India and by members of the Jama'ah Tabligh worldwide. In Indonesia, the *Kurta* was usually paired with fabric (Indian, *Lunggi*), a tradition among a significant portion of the South Indian community. The *Kurta* came in several types, including those designed for women. Recently, *Kurta* clothing had become popular in Indonesia, specifically among young Muslims. The fashion style of the people was up-to-date and has been changed to suit the preferences of modern young Muslims.<sup>40</sup>

### *Greeting Language*

The research findings on the process and various forms of combination within the Muslim Indian community indicate that, in terms of address, common Indian terms are still prevalent. However, in certain segments of the community, a blending of languages occurs, incorporating terms commonly used by Malays. In fact, there were numerous adjustments in the terms of address in the Indian community. In Medan and its surrounding areas, variations existed in terms of address or calls. Some individuals complied strongly with Indian terms, while others integrated Malay and Mandailing terms. The following terms of address or calls were still generally in use.

The description of greetings and calls in Tabel 3 below showed the existence of a balanced atmosphere among Muslim Indian families and the neighbors of the group, who lived side by side with various traditions and customs. The people lived together, helping as well as supporting each other, and lived without recognizing ethnicity and religion, existing in unity as well as harmony. Muslim Indians in Sumatra on the other hand almost not once included titles or ancestral surnames in names, as commonly practiced in the naming tradition of Indian people. Different from the usual practice among Indian Muslims, where titles such as *Khan*, *Quraisyi*, and *Sayyid* were commonly added to the names as household identities, many of them in Sumatra did not follow this agreement. While some included the broader family name, the people generally did not use it as a symbol of integration with the surrounding community. This showed a long-standing accommodation and harmony in the Muslim Indian community in the region towards the surrounding environment.

**Table 3: The cultural openness after becoming Malay**

| NO | CULTURE'S TYPE | CULTURE  |  |
|----|----------------|--|--|
|    |                | INDIA  | OPENNESS   |
| 1  | Marriage       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Closeness</li><li>2. Sibling marriage</li><li>3. Interfamily Marriage</li></ol>   | Marriage has blended with various local ethnics, especially in the third generation, there are almost no more obstacles in marriage with local ethnic populations.   |
| 2  | Culinary       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <i>Nasi Biryani</i></li><li>2. <i>Karee</i></li><li>3. <i>Dhalca</i></li><li>4. <i>Achar</i></li><li>5. <i>Chai</i></li></ol> | With the same name but has undergone adjustments to the spices and flavors adapted to the Malay tongue: in <i>Biryani</i> rice with adjustments to spices and nail rice <i>Balam</i> , <i>Karee</i> and <i>dhalca</i> have been added coconut milk |

<sup>40</sup> Rekha Rana Shailaj, "The Making of Kurta" (Otago, 2017).

|   |                             |  |   |
|---|-----------------------------|--|---|
| 3 | Indian-Style Housing        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint Family</li> <li>2. Indian community village (Family complex)</li> </ol>  | Having blended into the surrounding environment no longer creates a barrier with our society and gathers exclusively.   |
| 4 | Indian Traditional Clothing | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Kain Saree</i></li> <li>2. <i>Kurta Pyjama</i></li> <li>3. <i>Lunggi (Sarung)</i></li> </ol>  | Modified into Muslim brackets made from sari and hijab, as only used in family parties and weddings   |
| 5 | Greeting Language           | <p>Language used by India families:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Dadha</i> and <i>Dadhi</i> (Father's Grandparents)</li> <li>2. <i>Nana</i> and <i>Nani</i> (maternal grandparents)</li> <li>3. <i>Pupha</i> and <i>Puphi</i> (Maternal Uncle and Aunt)</li> <li>4. <i>Chaca</i> and <i>Chaci</i> (Father's Uncle and Aunt).</li> <li>5. <i>Mamu</i> and <i>Mamani</i> (maternal uncle and aunt).</li> <li>6. <i>Ammi</i> and <i>Abba</i> (Father and Mother)</li> </ol> | <p>The Greeting language among India Muslim family after becoming Malay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Atok</i></li> <li>- <i>Om, Tante.</i></li> <li>- <i>Uwak, Bunde,</i></li> <li>- <i>Pak Cik, Mak Cik,</i></li> <li>- <i>Emak dan Abah</i></li> </ul> |

Source: Compiled from interviews with different informants

The housing pattern established in the Indian Muslim community in North Sumatra followed the joint family tradition, a common practice in India aimed at preserving family economic strength, lineage, and the famous family name. This tradition, embedded in the Indian Hindu community, was embraced by the Indian Muslim community in Sumatra to combine with the local culture. The lifestyle around Jln. Gajah-Medan Mosque or Tebing Nurul Iman-Siantar Mosque showed this adaptation. The description of this housing compound translated the gathering lifestyle commonly practiced by the Indian community. Despite its slightly complete joint family system in the first and second generations, this lifestyle showed a greater openness among Indian Muslims compared to other foreign populations such as the Chinese and Arabs. In the third generation and above, there was a greater willingness to accept intermarriage with different ethnicities and local customs.<sup>41</sup>

There was a significant openness among Indian Muslims in Sumatra to culturally add to the local community and aspire to become an essential part of the community.<sup>42</sup> Most customs of Indian Muslims were influenced by local culture, thereby breaking the connection through the original culture and simplifying a smoother combination process. Specifically in North Sumatra, cultural mixing became more perfect (total integration) with the adoption of surnames from local ethnic

<sup>41</sup> Vijayasarithi Ramanathan, "Values, Behavior and Identity: Acculturation of Indian Immigrant Men in Australia," *International Migration & Integration* 16 (2015): 625–38.

<sup>42</sup> Blau, "A Theory of Social Integration," 545–56.

*Becoming Malay: Cultural Integration on Indian Muslims to Malay Culture in North Sumatra, Indonesia* groups such as Mandailing, Karo, Aceh, and Padang. Marriages or honorifics leading to new names and identities contributed to the seamless combination of the local Malay culture.

The combination of Indian and Malay cultural elements has produced unique hybrid forms within the region's social structure. Local influences can be seen in the adoption of Malay surnames or honorific titles, incorporation of local customs, and the emergence of new social roles among later generations. Symbolic recognitions, such as the awarding of the title *Datuk Lelawangsa* to Syamsul Arifin, illustrate the high level of acceptance extended by the Malay community to Indian Muslims. As a part of North Sumatra's multicultural landscape, this community plays an important role in enriching the region's cultural diversity and strengthening its character of social openness.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Indian Muslims in North Sumatra introduced a cultural combination process with the local Malay community since the early generations. The group used various methods to be accepted and understood by the surroundings, including intermarriage with the local community and combining the traditions through local conditions in clothing, food, language, and greetings. Cultural combination with the local community happened through two models namely, apparent integration (diffusion) and total integration (acculturation).

The openness in the cultural practices of Indian Muslims was significantly influenced by religious factors and beliefs, as the group aimed not to be identified as Hindus and instead became Malays. Many lost Indian identities, specifically after adopting surnames connected with the ethnic groups in North Sumatra, setting the identity of the people as Malays.

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## **Appendix**

### **Informan:**

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Name of Informants</b> | <b>City</b>   |
|------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| 1.         | Syamsul Arifin            | Medan         |
| 2.         | Muhammad Siddik           | Medan         |
| 3.         | Anif Khan                 | Medan         |
| 4.         | Asra Asraf Ali            | Medan         |
| 5.         | Asraf Ali                 | Deli Tua      |
| 6.         | Muhammad Ridwan Khan      | Siantar       |
| 7.         | Muhammad Anwar            | Siantar       |
| 8.         | Muhammad Abbas            | Tebing Tinggi |
| 9.         | Nasir Ahmad               | Binjai        |
| 10.        | Muhammad Yasin            | Binjai        |
| 11.        | Hanzalah                  | Binjai        |
| 12.        | Abdullah Khan             | Serbelawan    |
| 13.        | Muhammad Azam             | Serbelawan    |
| 14.        | Rafiq                     | Sidempuan     |
| 15.        | Masdah                    | Rantau Prapat |
| 16.        | Mufidah                   | Barus         |
| 17.        | Nurbaiti Marbun           | Barus         |
| 18.        | Burhanuddin Tanjung       | Barus         |