



The Meaning and Function of the *Batalam Ampek* Tradition from a Cultural Anthropology Perspective in Nagari Tanjung Bonai, West Sumatra

Butiras Falah*, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study explores the meaning and function of the *Batalam Ampek* tradition as an integral component of the Minangkabau customary marriage ceremony in Nagari Tanjung Bonai, West Sumatra, within the broader context of ongoing social transformation. It seeks to examine how this tradition maintains its relevance and to identify the symbolic, religious, and social functions it performs within the local community. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research collected data through *in-depth interviews*, participant observation, and a comprehensive literature review. The data were analyzed using a descriptive-interpretative framework to uncover layered meanings and their social significance. The findings demonstrate that *Batalam Ampek* embodies religious meanings that reflect the integration of *adat* and Islamic values, symbolic meanings that affirm social structure and kinship roles, and cultural meanings that reinforce collective identity. Functionally, the tradition strengthens social solidarity, preserves interfamily harmony, and facilitates the intergenerational transmission of Minangkabau customary values. The study argues that the continuity of *Batalam Ampek* transcends its ceremonial dimension, operating as a dynamic socio-cultural mechanism that sustains cohesion and cultural resilience within the local community.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted 27/11/2025
Revised 17/12/2025
Accepted 21/12/2025
Published 28/12/2025

KEYWORDS

Batalam Ampek; cultural anthropology; marriage tradition; Minangkabau custom; social function.

*CORRESPONDENCE AUTHOR

✉ butirasfalah@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v6i3.3034>

INTRODUCTION

Tradition constitutes a cultural asset transmitted historically from one generation to the next, while simultaneously representing the social fact that present realities are rooted in the past. Within cultural studies, tradition encompasses two primary dimensions: the material and the ideational. The material dimension is visible in the form of traditional attire, ancient ruins, temples, and other artifacts, whereas the ideational dimension includes beliefs, values, norms, rules, and systems of meaning that live within a community's collective consciousness. Tradition emerges from human creativity, intention, and action as expressions of inner life and social experience. Over time, a tradition may decline or even disappear when it is perceived as lacking utility or social relevance. Conversely, it may endure, develop, and be preserved when it is regarded as meaningful and capable of generating positive contributions to communal life (Setiarto et al., 2026; Wulandari et al., 2023).

Modern social transformations—including the rationalization of life, population mobility, and shifts in economic structures—have reshaped the ways communities interpret and evaluate tradition. In this context, customary practices risk a narrowing of symbolic meaning and a reduction of social function when they are treated merely as ceremonial formalities devoid of substantive understanding. The tension between customary values, the demands of modernity, and pragmatic considerations forms a crucial backdrop for assessing the continuity of the *Batalam Ampek* tradition. From a social science perspective, tradition is not merely a remnant of the past but a social mechanism that shapes a community's collective identity. It operates as a cultural framework that regulates social relations, defines individual roles, and cultivates a shared sense of belonging grounded in common historical experience. The endurance of a tradition thus becomes an indicator of a society's cultural resilience (Anwar, 2023; Lubis et al., 2023).

One tradition still maintained by the people of Nagari Tanjung Bonai is *Batalam Ampek*, a ceremonial offering presented by the *bako* (the father's sisters) within the sequence of the Minangkabau customary marriage ceremony. This practice continues to be strongly observed in the Lintau region, with each *nagari* exhibiting distinctive local variations. The present study rests on the assumption that *Batalam Ampek* remains significant for communities guided by the principle of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*. In practice, however, some members of society no longer observe it, citing considerations of functionality and relevance. This situation opens an analytical space for



examining the meanings and functions of *Batalam Ampek*, as well as the reasons underlying its persistence within a contemporary social context.

Over time, *Batalam Ampek* has interacted closely with Minangkabau local traditions grounded in Islamic teachings, thereby evolving into a practice that is not only customary but also religious. The integration of Islamic values strengthens the normative legitimacy of the tradition. The principle of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah* positions custom as a medium for internalizing religious values while simultaneously regulating social relations. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, traditions imbued with religious dimensions possess greater potential for endurance because they function as collective spiritual expressions within concrete social spaces (Daswan & Febrianto, [2025](#)).

The dynamics of modernity—such as changing economic patterns, social mobility, and the rationalization of everyday life—also affect the sustainability of tradition. Some community members increasingly assess customary practices based on efficiency and practical benefit, placing traditions perceived as irrelevant at risk of simplification or abandonment. The tension between preserving customary values and responding to modern demands constitutes a central challenge in sustaining *Batalam Ampek*. Under such conditions, the symbolic meaning of tradition may be reduced to mere formality, while its substantive values are no longer deeply understood by younger generations (Syarif, [2025](#)). The transmission of tradition occurs not only through oral narration but also through lived experience that forms *embodied knowledge* within collective memory. Younger generations grasp the meaning of tradition when they participate directly, experience the social atmosphere, and observe the consequences of compliance or noncompliance. When such experiential spaces diminish, tradition risks becoming a symbol emptied of profound meaning (Dewi, [2024](#)).

Scholarly studies on the *Batalam Ampek* tradition in Nagari Tanjung Bonai remain limited. Existing literature, such as Kurnia ([2022](#)), examines the tradition in Nagari Balai Tengah but does not specifically address its meaning and practice within the context of Nagari Tanjung Bonai. This gap provides a critical foundation for the present research, which seeks to uncover the symbolic, functional, and institutional dimensions of *Batalam Ampek* in the life of the local community. The discrepancy between the idealized functions expected of the tradition and the social practices currently observed suggests a gap in meaning and function that warrants critical analysis (Islami & Hidayat, [2022](#)).

This study is therefore directed toward mapping the symbolic meanings embedded in each stage of the tradition, the social functions it generates within kinship relations, and the institutional mechanisms that preserve and negotiate its norms. By positioning *Batalam Ampek* as a living and dynamic social practice, this research aims to offer a conceptual contribution to the study of Minangkabau *adat*, particularly in understanding the interplay between custom, religion, and social change in contemporary society.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in historical methodology and complemented by a cultural anthropology perspective. The historical method is applied to trace the origins and diachronic development of the *Batalam Ampek* tradition, while the cultural anthropological approach is utilized to analyze its symbolic meanings and social functions within the life of the Nagari Tanjung Bonai community. The data sources consist of both primary and secondary materials (Faisal et al., [2022](#)). Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and field observations, whereas secondary sources include books, journal articles, and scholarly documents relevant to Minangkabau *adat* and the *Batalam Ampek* tradition.

Informants were selected purposively based on their roles and direct involvement in customary practices, including *Penghulu*, *Datuak*, traditional leaders, *Bundo Kandang*, and community members who had participated in the *Batalam Ampek* procession. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, focusing on dimensions of religious meaning, symbolic meaning, social function, and the dynamics of change within the tradition. Field observations were carried out to gain a contextual understanding of the practice, the structure of social interactions, and the symbolic expressions accompanying the enactment of the tradition. The collected data then underwent the stages of heuristic inquiry and source criticism—external criticism to assess authenticity and internal criticism to evaluate the credibility and consistency of the content.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through processes of data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretative meaning-making. Interview transcripts and observational data were transcribed, classified, and organized

into principal thematic categories: religious meaning, symbolic meaning, and social function. Triangulation was employed by comparing oral testimonies, observational findings, and relevant literature to ensure consistency and validity. The interpretative stage subsequently connected the empirical findings with theoretical concepts of meaning and function in cultural anthropology, enabling the *Batalam Ampek* tradition to be understood as a living and dynamic social practice—one that continues to be negotiated within the broader context of social change in Minangkabau society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The *Batalam Ampek* Tradition within the Social and Symbolic Structure of Minangkabau Society

Etymologically, the term “tradition” derives from the Latin *traditio*, meaning “that which is handed down” or a custom transmitted from generation to generation. In the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, tradition is defined as a hereditary custom that continues to be practiced within a community because it is regarded as correct and imbued with positive value. Tradition thus constitutes a sustained social practice that forms an integral part of a community’s collective life. In this context, the *Batalam Ampek* tradition in Nagari Tanjung Bonai, Lintau Buo Utara District, Tanah Datar Regency, represents a longstanding customary heritage that remains actively maintained. *Batalam Ampek* refers to ceremonial offerings presented by the *bako* (the father’s sisters) within the sequence of Minangkabau customary marriage rites. The practice involves multiple kinship elements, including the wives of *mamak*, the wives of brothers, in-laws, and close relatives (Interview with Erma, Monday, 29 May 2023).

In practice, *Batalam Ampek* constitutes an integral component of the customary wedding procession in Nagari Tanjung Bonai. The offerings typically include *siwajik*, *siputiah*, *sikunyik*, and *paniaram*, sometimes complemented by bananas and small cakes. The preparation of the contents of the *talam* is undertaken collectively by the *bako* and close family members in the morning, after which they are arranged in a *jamba* before being delivered to the bride’s or groom’s house. The procession is accompanied by performances of *talempong*, *silek Lintau*, and a ceremonial dance as expressions of customary respect (Interview with Khairul, Monday, 29 May 2023). This sequence demonstrates that *Batalam Ampek* extends beyond a ceremonial act; it functions as a site for enacting kinship solidarity and expressing communal cohesion.

From the perspective of symbolic anthropology, the practice of *Batalam Ampek* may be understood as a system of symbols representing the Minangkabau social structure. The arrangement of the *jamba*, consisting of three smaller and two larger trays, symbolizes the hierarchy of customary leadership: black *siwajik* represents the *niniak mamak*; *siputiah* symbolizes the *malin*; *sikunyik* signifies the *manti*; and *paniaram* represents the *dubalang*. The small cakes are interpreted as the mandate entrusted to customary leaders (Interview with Syamsurilas, 5 June 2023). These symbolic associations affirm that food within this tradition operates as a medium for representing authority structures and the division of social roles. In this sense, *Batalam Ampek* functions as a “cultural language” that articulates social order through material objects, ritual actions, and structured kinship relations.

The symbolic meanings embedded in *Batalam Ampek* reveal that Minangkabau social structure is institutionalized not only through written norms or formal customary speeches, but also through concrete material practices. The arrangement and composition of the *jamba* serve as a pedagogical space introducing hierarchy and social responsibility to younger generations. Through direct participation in the procession, community members learn—informally yet effectively—the position and function of each element within the customary leadership structure.

These symbols also operate in a performative dimension. Meaning resides not solely in the objects themselves but is animated through the acts of carrying, presenting, and receiving them. Each stage of the procession embodies nonverbal communication that reaffirms relations of authority, respect, and social legitimacy. In this context, *Batalam Ampek* functions as a mechanism for reproducing social structure, whereby customary authority is renewed and reaffirmed through recurring ritual practice.

Moreover, this practice reflects the strength of collective principles within Minangkabau society. The involvement of diverse kinship elements indicates that social structure is not individualistic but woven through networks of mutually binding relationships. The shared preparation and arrangement of symbolic foods demonstrate that customary leadership does not stand in isolation but rests upon communal support. *Batalam Ampek* therefore not only represents social structure but actively consolidates solidarity among its role-bearers.

The ritual further illustrates the interconnection between symbol and moral legitimacy. The representation of leadership structures through culinary elements suggests that customary authority is grounded in values of balance, harmony, and collective responsibility. When these symbols are consistently maintained and meaningfully understood, the community acquires an ethical framework for evaluating social conduct. Social structure is thus conceived not merely as hierarchical order but as a system imbued with moral obligations.

At a broader level, *Batalam Ampek* demonstrates how material culture can serve as a medium for articulating abstract ideas concerning leadership, authority, and social order. Through symbols embodied in objects and ritual acts, the community sustains continuity of meaning while simultaneously negotiating it in response to changing circumstances. This tradition affirms that social structure is preserved not solely through formal regulations but through symbolic practices continuously enlivened within collective experience.

The Symbolic and Religious Dimensions of the *Batalam Ampek* Tradition

After the *bako* from both families complete the preparation of the contents of the *Talam Ampek*, the next stage involves arranging five *jamba*, consisting of three smaller and two larger trays. This arrangement is carried out collectively by the *bako* and close relatives in accordance with the symbolic meanings attached to each element: black *siwajik* represents the *niniak mamak*; *siputiah* symbolizes the *malin*; *sikunyik* signifies the *manti*; and *paniaram* represents the *dubalang*, while the smaller cakes are understood as the mandate entrusted to the *niniak mamak*. Once the arrangement is completed, the *jamba* are formally presented to the host family as a customary offering (Interview with Syamsurilas, Monday, 5 June 2023). This process is not merely technical in nature; it is imbued with symbolic messages that represent structures of authority and social responsibility within Minangkabau society.

The subsequent stage is marked by the gathering of *dunsanak* (extended kin), close relatives, and *bundo kanduang* at the house of the *bako*, all dressed in formal traditional attire to prepare for the ceremonial procession. The *Talam Ampek*, containing *siwajik*, *siputiah*, *sikunyik*, and *paniaram*, along with additional dishes such as chicken curry and *gulai ikan kalui*, is then carried in procession to the bride's or groom's house. The procession is accompanied by traditional *talempong* music and welcomed with *silek Lintau* and a ceremonial dance performance. Upon arrival, the dishes are presented, including offerings covered with a red handkerchief and accompanied by a small mirror placed beside them. After the ritual concludes, the *bundo kanduang* delivers *petatah petitih* (customary maxims) as a closing address before taking leave. This sequence reveals an integration of material symbols, ritual performativity, and normative customary communication.

Analytically, the meaning of the *Batalam Ampek* tradition may be distinguished into two dimensions: verbal and nonverbal. The verbal dimension is reflected in the types of offerings presented by the *bako*, each bearing a specific symbolic message. The nonverbal dimension is embodied in the collective practice itself, which affirms the community's commitment to preserving the tradition and expresses reverence for the *niniak mamak* as holders of customary authority. Through these recurring ritual actions, the tradition functions as a medium for the internalization of values and the reinforcement of social legitimacy.

The religious meaning of *Batalam Ampek* emerges from the integration of customary values and Islamic principles grounded in the maxim *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*. The presence of prayers, moral exhortations, and symbolic structures within the procession demonstrates that the tradition is not perceived as separate from religion but as a social practice endowed with religious legitimacy. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, practices that combine customary symbols with spiritual values tend to exhibit greater resilience because they serve as collective religious expressions within tangible social spaces. *Batalam Ampek* thus represents a contextual and integrative articulation of Islam within the framework of local Minangkabau culture.

The symbolic dimension is further reflected in the use of the red handkerchief and the small mirror accompanying the offerings. The red handkerchief signifies honor and protection, while the mirror represents self-reflection and moral responsibility in building married life. These symbols demonstrate that ethical and spiritual values are conveyed not only through spoken words but also through material objects rich in meaning. The tradition operates as a system of signs linking ritual action to broader moral messages concerning social responsibility, familial harmony, and the aspiration for blessing in married life.

The Social and Cultural Functions of the *Batalam Ampek* Tradition

The *Batalam Ampek* tradition in Nagari Tanjung Bonai performs a significant role in sustaining the social and cultural order of the community. One of its primary functions lies in the preservation of cultural heritage and local identity. Through this practice, customary values, social norms, and local wisdom are transmitted continuously from one generation to the next. The community's collective participation in each stage of the procession reinforces awareness of the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage as an integral component of communal identity. The tradition not only ensures the continuity of *adat*, but also cultivates a sense of pride in the cultural richness of Nagari Tanjung Bonai (Erlina & Nasrulloh, [2024](#); Ningsih & Wirdanengsih, [2022](#)).

Another essential function concerns the strengthening of social solidarity and communal harmony. The *gotong royong* process in preparing the offerings, the interaction between families, and the formal customary reception create an intense space of social encounter. Through these interactions, kinship ties are reinforced and social networks reaffirmed. From the perspective of social functionalism, rituals of this kind contribute to maintaining social cohesion and equilibrium by reproducing structured social relations. The *Batalam Ampek* tradition generates a harmonious atmosphere that deepens collective belonging and strengthens community integration (Amelia & Amri, [2025](#); Lindawati et al., [2023](#)).

The religious–spiritual dimension constitutes another central function of *Batalam Ampek*. The recitation of prayers and the presence of symbols associated with blessing within the procession indicate that the tradition extends beyond social relations to encompass transcendental meaning. It embodies supplications for protection, safety, and divine blessing for the bride and groom as well as their extended families. Within the Minangkabau cultural framework grounded in the principle *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*, the tradition demonstrates the integration of customary norms and religious values, framing married life as both a social and spiritual responsibility (Putri et al., [2025](#)).

Structurally, *Batalam Ampek* functions as a medium for intergenerational value transmission. The involvement of diverse community members—from customary leaders to younger generations—enables social learning to occur directly and participatorily. Values such as responsibility, respect for customary authority, and collective awareness of social harmony are instilled through tangible ritual experience. The tradition thus operates as a vehicle for character formation rooted in customary ethics and religious morality.

In the context of contemporary social transformation, however, the implementation of *Batalam Ampek* faces challenges stemming from rationalization and considerations of efficiency. Some community members choose to simplify the procession or omit certain elements for practical reasons. This phenomenon reflects an ongoing negotiation of meaning between customary values and pragmatic orientations in modern life. The continuity of *Batalam Ampek* does not depend solely on normative obligation, but rather on the extent to which the community sustains a substantive understanding of its symbolic values and social functions. The resilience of this tradition ultimately rests on its capacity to adapt without losing its essential meaning within the social structure of Minangkabau society.

CONCLUSION

The *Batalam Ampek* tradition in Nagari Tanjung Bonai affirms that *adat* is not merely preserved as a ceremonial ritual; rather, it functions as a social and symbolic mechanism that reproduces kinship values, solidarity, and the integration of custom and religion within Minangkabau society. The legitimacy of this tradition rests upon its consonance with the principle *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*, through which its religious dimension and social function mutually reinforce one another in practice. Its continuity amid processes of rationalization and considerations of efficiency demonstrates that the resilience of tradition is not determined solely by normative obligation, but by its capacity to sustain symbolic meaning and social relevance within changing societal contexts. The persistence of this practice illustrates that the endurance of *adat* depends fundamentally on its role as a foundation of social cohesion and collective identity.

Future research may expand this inquiry through comparative approaches across different *nagari* in order to examine variations in practice and the negotiation of meaning surrounding the *Batalam Ampek* tradition within diverse social contexts. More in-depth studies of younger generations' perceptions, as well as analyses of the impact of modernization on the symbolic transformation of the tradition, are also necessary to understand its prospective trajectory. Interdisciplinary approaches integrating anthropology, sociology, and religious studies would enrich the

analysis of the relationship between *adat* and religion in contemporary Minangkabau society and strengthen the theoretical contribution to scholarship on the sustainability of local traditions.

REFERENCES

- Amelia, R., & Amri, E. (2025). Batalam Ampek: Simbol Hubungan Induak Bako dan Anak Pisang dalam Upacara Perkawinan. *Culture & Society: Journal of Anthropological Research*, 7(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.24036/csjar.v7i1.167>
- Anwar, S. (2023). Melayu Islam dan Batak Kristen: Labelisasi Keagamaan terhadap Identitas Kesukuan di Sumatera Timur pada Awal Abad Ke-20. *Warisan: Journal of History and Cultural Heritage*, 3(3), 82–92. <https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v3i3.1630>
- Daswan, M., & Febrianto, A. (2025). Makna simbol Maarak Anak dalam Upacara Perkawinan di Nagari Tabek Patah. *Culture & Society: Journal of Anthropological Research*, 7(2), 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.24036/csjar.v7i2.191>
- Dewi, C. (2024). Gender and Social Power: Anthropological Analysis of the Role of Women in Traditional Minangkabau Society. *DEMOS: Journal of Demography, Ethnography and Social Transformation*, 4(2), 94–105. <https://doi.org/10.30631/DEMOS.V4I2.2778>
- Erlina, E., & Nasrulloh, N. (2024). Tradisi Makan Bajamba di Minangkabau: Studi Living Hadis. *PERADA*, 6(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.35961/perada.v6i2.1225>
- Faisal, A., Pabbajah, M., Abdullah, I., Muhammad, N. E., & Rusli, Muh. (2022). Strengthening Religious Moderatism Through The Traditional Authority of kiai in Indonesia. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2150450>
- Islami, N., & Hidayat, M. (2022). Makna Tradisi Mombasuoh Kaki pada Masyarakat Minangkabau dalam Upacara Perkawinan. *Culture & Society: Journal of Anthropological Research*, 4(2), 103–112. <https://doi.org/10.24036/csjar.v4i2.114>
- Kurnia, I. (2022). *Tradisi Talam Ampek dalam Walimatul 'Urs di Nagari Balai Tengah Kecamatan Lintau Buo Utara Kabupaten Tanah Datar Ditinjau dari Perspektif Hukum Islam*. Institut Agama Islam Negeri Batusangkar.
- Lindawati, L., Zurmailis, Z., & Iman, D. T. (2023). Upaya Menumbuh Kembangkan Minat Belajar Seni Tradisi Minangkabau pada Daerah Perkotaan. *Buletin Ilmiah Nagari Membangun*, 6(3), 217–228. <https://doi.org/10.25077/bina.v6i3.449>
- Lubis, S. N., Siregar, Y. D., & Yasmin, N. (2023). Nilai-Nilai Islam dalam Tradisi Pernikahan Masyarakat Etnis Melayu di Tanjung Balai. *Warisan: Journal of History and Cultural Heritage*, 4(2), 74–85. <https://doi.org/10.34007/warisan.v4i2.1925>
- Ningsih, R. P., & Wirdanengsih, W. (2022). Orang Minangkabau dalam Tradisi Rewang dan Nyumbang. *Culture & Society: Journal of Anthropological Research*, 4(1), 59–67. <https://doi.org/10.24036/csjar.v4i1.100>
- Putri, S. D., Aisyah, S., & Yulniza, Y. (2025). History and Value of Batalam Tradition in Koto Baru Payakumbuh (1942-1990). *Journal of Philology and Historical Review*, 2(2), 129–137. <https://doi.org/10.61540/jphr.v2i2.96>
- Setiarto, R. H. B., Wardana, A. A., Herlina, V. T., & Anshory, L. (2026). A Narrative Review of Mandai: Traditional Fermented Cempedak Peel (*Artocarpus champeden*) among the Banjar Ethnic Group in South Borneo, Indonesia. *Food Ethics*, 11(1), 4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41055-025-00186-w>
- Syarif, V. D. P. (2025). Pelestarian Tradisi Lisan Minangkabau melalui Tarian Kreasi Baru: Sebuah Kajian Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Anuva: Jurnal Kajian Budaya, Perpustakaan, Dan Informasi*, 9(4), 1–11. <https://ejournal2.undip.ac.id/index.php/anuva/article/view/30163>
- Wulandari, S., Warsito, A., & Zulaikha, I. (2023). Sejarah dan Pengaruh Tradisi Takiran pada Masyarakat Desa Tugu Agung, Kecamatan Lempuing, Kabupaten Ogan Komering Ilir. *Local History & Heritage*, 3(1), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.57251/lhh.v3i1.908>