

Ntak Awo Dance in the Social Life of the Kerinci Community

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ABSTRACT

The Ntak Awo Dance is a traditional performing art originating from the Hamparan Rawang area, Sungai Penuh City, Jambi Province. Initially, this dance functioned as part of a traditional ritual, but over time it has undergone a transformation into an entertainment dance popularized by a local artist named Arwati. This article aims to describe the form, function, and cultural meaning of the Ntak Awo Dance as a representation of the identity of the Rawang community. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with an ethnographic approach through field observations, in-depth interviews, and literature studies. The results show that the Ntak Awo Dance is performed in various social events such as weddings, cultural festivals, community activities, and official state events. This dance is usually performed with energetic musical accompaniment, distinctive poetry or rhymes, and a "three-step" movement pattern that follows the rhythm of the music. The clothing used is polite everyday clothing, demonstrating the closeness between this art form and the daily lives of the community. In addition to being a medium of entertainment, the Ntak Awo Dance also functions as a means of preserving traditional values, a medium for cultural education, and a symbol of the collective identity of the Rawang community. Therefore, the Ntak Awo Dance not only needs to be preserved physically through performances, but also contextually through cultural education and strengthening local narratives in building regional cultural identity.

KEYWORDS

Ntak Awo Dance
Rawang
Artistic Transformation
Cultural Identity
Traditional Dance

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INTRODUCTION

Art has always been an integral part of human life, weaving itself into the daily habits and cultural expressions of societies across time. From the earliest rituals to modern performances, art has never truly faded or disappeared. Instead, it continues to evolve, adapting to the dynamics of human creativity and societal development. The ability of art to transform and persist through time is a testament to the boundless innovation of its practitioners, who continue to shape and redefine its value in the eyes of the community. Among the many branches of art, the performing arts hold a particularly vital place. They encompass dance, music, theater, visual art, and literature, each of which intertwines with the others to create aesthetic unity. As Marett in Nathania (2021) affirms, the synergy between these artistic expressions fosters harmony and enriches the overall experience of performance.

Art, in its broadest sense, is one of the essential elements of universal culture. It exists in every society around the world, serving not only as a reflection of identity but also as a medium of transmission for values, beliefs, and shared memories (Sari & Pratama, 2023). Ralph Linton defines culture as the entirety of life patterns adopted by society, not merely the refined expressions but also the mundane and habitual practices. Koentjaraningrat, referencing the Sanskrit root "buddayah," emphasizes that culture is intrinsically linked to

intellect and reason, encompassing the ideas, behaviors, and creations of humanity developed through social interactions (Uhai et al., 2019).

One of the distinctive features of folk art is its fidelity to tradition. Traditional art maintains the stylistic patterns, narratives, and symbolic meanings passed down through generations. It embodies the artistic and spiritual heritage of a community and functions as a medium for cultural preservation. As Wildani (2015) explains, traditional arts are typically learned orally, lack formal notation, involve non-specialist performers, use regional languages and instruments, and are deeply embedded in community life. These characteristics are evident across Indonesia, a nation known for its rich and diverse cultural landscapes.

In most cases, traditional art forms have no identifiable individual creator. They are the products of collective creativity, shaped over time by the shared experiences and wisdom of the community. As noted by Sedyawati (Maulana, Budiwati & Karwati, 2022), traditional art emerges from the lived realities of a society, deeply influenced by its social and environmental conditions. The artists who develop these forms are shaped by the sociocultural context of their communities.

Kerinci Regency in Jambi Province is one such region where traditional arts continue to thrive. Each area within Kerinci possesses its own unique artistic expressions, from music to dance, that persist in everyday life. Among the most significant of these cultural treasures is the Ntak Awo Dance, a traditional dance form that transcends mere entertainment. It stands as a symbol of togetherness, spiritual values, and social cohesion among the Kerinci people. Other local dances include the Fun Dance, Ranguk Dance Basibah, and Ambung Gilo Dance, while musical expressions include the Gong Buleuh, bamboo flute, and the lyrical storytelling tradition known as Tale.

Ntak Awo Dance is particularly notable for its enduring presence in Kerinci. It frequently appears at weddings, festivals, and various communal celebrations, signifying its relevance and resilience. Originating from the Hamparan Rawang subdistrict, the dance is known by several names depending on dialect: Ntok Kudo, Rntak Kudo, Rentak Kudeu, Rentiak Kudiu—all variations of "Rentak Kudo," meaning "horse stomp." Despite these linguistic differences, the essence and performance of the dance remain consistent.

The origins of the Ntak Awo Dance are shrouded in anonymity, a characteristic common to many folk traditions. However, it experienced a revival in 1989, thanks to the efforts of a cultural figure named Arwati. The dance is marked by its dynamic, agile, and energetic movements, typically following a rhythmic pattern referred to as "step three." These movements, often resembling jolts or stomps, reflect qualities of strength, urgency, and expressiveness. Dancers synchronize their stomping with the beats of traditional drums, guided by vocal chants or poems sung in the Rawang dialect. These lyrical narratives cover a broad spectrum of themes, from love and longing to ancestral lore.

Historically, the dance held a sacred function, often associated with spiritual rituals. In earlier performances, the trance-like state or "pinsau" experienced by dancers was considered a manifestation of the dance's magical power. The instruments used were modest—oil drums and glass bottles—accompanying the hypnotic rhythms of the performance. However, by the early 2000s, the Ntak Awo Dance underwent significant transformation. It began to incorporate modern musical accompaniments such as keyboards and organ singles, moving away from its sacred roots and evolving into a form of popular entertainment.

This shift reflects broader cultural changes within Kerinci society. Today, the Ntak Awo Dance is no longer performed as a sacred ritual but as a celebratory expression in public

gatherings. Although the symbolic "step three" movement persists, the choreography has become more spontaneous, and performances are often accompanied by modern music. The dance is now a staple of weddings, sko feasts (traditional heritage celebrations), and other communal events, both within Kerinci and in diasporic communities as far as Jambi Province.

Its transition from sacred ritual to popular culture is emblematic of the adaptive nature of traditional arts. Despite changes in form and context, the dance retains its core as a vessel of communal identity. It is not uncommon today to find Ntak Awo performances that last two to three hours, involving large groups of people who join in as the music plays. There is no restriction on who may dance; participation is open and spirited, underscoring the inclusive nature of this cultural form.

In its early modern iterations, the dance was revived using oil drums and glass bottles, particularly during weddings in Rawang. One of the earliest documented performances occurred in Koto Teluk in 1989. Over time, traditional drums replaced these makeshift instruments, and the performance context expanded. The night before a wedding contract, known as "Night of Ntak Kudo," would often feature the dance as a highlight. During the daytime cooking events (bekkejoua) preceding the wedding, recordings of Ntak Awo music would be played to energize the festivities.

Today, the music of Ntak Awo includes not only traditional melodies but also popular contemporary songs arranged in a similar rhythmic style. This musical evolution does not entirely erase its authenticity; rather, it recontextualizes the tradition within current sensibilities. Keyboard accompaniments and single organs provide the rhythmic base, while poetry—sung in pantun form—continues to deliver cultural narratives. These poems are often improvised, responding to the mood of the event and the energy of the dancers.

The sustained popularity of the Ntak Awo Dance across various public events is a testament to its significance within the Kerinci community. Its presence at weddings, cultural festivals, and diaspora gatherings reveals the deep emotional and cultural connection people maintain with this art form. Though the sacred aura of the dance may have waned, its social function and symbolic relevance remain potent.

The author's interest in studying the Ntak Awo Dance arises from these very transformations. The dance, having endured shifts in musical style, performance context, and cultural meaning, continues to thrive. It embodies not only the adaptability of tradition but also the enduring spirit of the community that sustains it. As such, the Ntak Awo Dance stands as both a historical artifact and a living, breathing form of cultural expression—a testimony to how tradition can evolve without losing its essence.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with a descriptive-analytic approach to understand the social and cultural dimensions of the Ntak Awo Dance within the Kerinci community. As defined by Moleong (2007), qualitative research seeks to deeply explore and interpret phenomena based on the experiences, perceptions, and actions of individuals within their natural contexts. This approach is considered appropriate for the study of traditional arts, particularly those embedded within the lived realities and collective memory of a local community.

The researcher acted as the primary instrument in the data collection process, supported by tools such as notebooks, audio and video recording devices, digital cameras, and flash drives to document the observations. The research was conducted in the natural setting of

the community, ensuring that data were captured in real-life contexts where the Ntak Awo Dance is typically performed, such as weddings, festivals, and other social gatherings.

The data collection techniques consisted of four main stages: (1) literature study, (2) participant observation, (3) in-depth interviews, and (4) documentation. The literature review involved examining previous studies, journal articles, and relevant texts on traditional dance and Kerinci cultural practices to build a conceptual and theoretical framework. Participant observation enabled the researcher to directly witness the Ntak Awo Dance, noting the choreography, musical elements, and audience interactions. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including dancers, musicians, community elders, cultural activists, and local government officials. These interviews aimed to obtain insights into the historical development, meanings, and current functions of the dance.

Documentation was used to record the visual and textual data in the form of photographs, video recordings, and transcribed interviews. This multi-modal approach allowed for triangulation of data, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings. The data analysis process followed the model proposed by Sugiyono (2011), which includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved organizing and categorizing the raw data into meaningful units, identifying patterns and themes. The data were then presented in descriptive narratives supported by direct quotations from informants and field notes. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the patterns and synthesizing them in relation to the research objectives. Overall, this methodological approach was designed to uncover the cultural values, historical trajectories, and contemporary transformations of the Ntak Awo Dance as it is practiced and perceived by the Kerinci community today.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dance, as a form of human expression, is a manifestation of movement and expression that does not emerge spontaneously, but rather through planning, structuring, and a clear pattern. As stated by Indrayuda (2013:5), dance is a human activity expressed through clearly designed, structured, and patterned movements and expressions, containing aesthetic, logical, and ethical values. Movement in dance not only reflects the beauty of the human body but also fulfills the aesthetic, artistic, and entertainment instincts within humans. From Jazuli's perspective, as cited by Prastya et al. (2017), dance is a form of beauty born from the body moving rhythmically and soulfully. This emphasizes that dance is a form of human expression expressed through aesthetic and communicative body movements, serving as a medium for conveying messages from the choreographer to the audience.

The explanation above provides a framework for understanding the existence of the Ntak Awo dance as a traditional art form that is not merely entertainment but also a medium for cultural and spiritual expression of the Kerinci people. Dance, in practice, consists of two types of movements: pure (*wantah*) movements that have no specific meaning, and meaningful movements that convey certain values or symbols (Mastra, 2022). Both are processed through stylization and become a series of movements that have been refined and whose meaning has been agreed upon by the community. This is where the Ntak Awo dance finds its context—a dance that developed in the Rawang community and represents daily life, social values, and local spirituality through simple yet meaningful movement patterns.

As a traditional dance form, Ntak Awo possesses all the characteristics of dance rooted in local wisdom. According to Hermaliza in Safitry et al. (2016), traditional dance represents local wisdom, embodying cultural values such as love of nature, mutual cooperation, faith, and the people's economy. This dance is also a symbolic form of ethnic identity. In line with

this, Indrayuda (2013:33) states that traditional dance is part of a particular ethnic culture, serving as a unifying identity for its community. It grows from local customs and is inherent in customary norms and rules. Therefore, traditional dance cannot be separated from the traditional value system that surrounds it, and the Ntak Awo dance continues to be performed in Kerinci traditional contexts.

The Ntak Awo dance is not only a form of aesthetic expression but also reflects the historical values, identity, and social structure of the Kerinci people. Maryono describes traditional dance as a reflection of community life deeply rooted in history, not merely a performing art (Nurwijayanti & Iqomh, 2019). Meanwhile, Aprianto, in Sovia & Indrayuda (2024), explains that traditional dance is a cultural expression that conveys religious rituals, mythological stories, and social dynamics.

Soedarsono, as quoted in Silvia & Asriati (2013), emphasized that dance is an expression of the human soul, embodied in rhythmic and beautiful movements, and has existed since humans first appeared on earth. He believes that the main characteristic of traditional dance is simplicity in movement, musical accompaniment, makeup, and costume. This simplicity is also evident in the Ntak Awo dance, which makes simplicity a fundamental aesthetic principle.

In the Kerinci context, the Ntak Awo dance is a cultural heritage deeply rooted in the Rawang community. Based on field observations and interviews, this dance is not only present in traditional performances such as weddings, folk festivals, and cultural festivals, but also serves as a popular form of entertainment. Its existence demonstrates the important role of artists, the community, and the local government in preserving local culture. The elements that make up this dance performance include dancers, accompanying singers (called *petale* or *tukang foster*), and musicians playing musical instruments.

According to Sutarno Haryono (Ash, 2021), a dancer must be able to combine elements of *wiraga* (body), *wirama* (rhythm), and *wirasa* (feeling) in every performance. Ntak Awo dancers are not limited in number and are not restricted by formal rules; sometimes even the entire audience joins in the dance. This dance serves as a space for social and cultural interaction, not merely a formal and rigid performance space. According to Arwati (interview, March 8, 2025), the dance movements used in the past were very simple, consisting of only one type of three-step movement repeated over and over again. Today, the movements have evolved and are no longer limited to monotonous patterns, but rather follow the rhythm of a single organ with freedom and variation. Dancers freely interpret the rhythm, making this dance a space for improvisation that remains within the framework of local values.

In terms of costume, there is no specific attire standard for Ntak Awo dance performances. The dancers, musicians, and audience members wear everyday clothing. This demonstrates the openness and flexibility of this dance in practice. The essence of the Ntak Awo dance lies not in uniforms or standard choreography, but rather in the emotional and spiritual engagement between the dancers, the music, and the community.

One crucial element in this dance performance is the presence of *tukang foster* (foster singers), or *petale* (singers who recite poetry in the Rawang or Kerinci languages). *Petale* are the lifeblood of the performance, inspiring the dancers and audience through the *pantun* (rhythmic poems). These songs are not memorized but are sung spontaneously based on the context of the situation. The *pantun* in this performance can contain traditional messages, moral values, romance, and even social criticism. As explained by Evi Nurwanti (interview, March 9, 2025), these *pantuns* are the foster singers' inner expressions of what they experience, see, and feel, which then fuel the movement and spirit of the dance.

In a single performance, there are usually three to four tukang foster singers and one organ player. This is consistent with field observations in December 2025 and interviews with informants. This combination demonstrates that although modern instruments such as keyboards are used, the essence and rhythmic patterns remain rooted in traditional patterns derived from drums and other local instruments. This was also expressed by Danil Guntara (interview, March 15, 2025), who explained that the transition from drums to keyboards is not a loss of traditional values, but rather an adaptation to keep the music alive and relevant today.

The role of music in dance performances is vital. Music is not merely a complement, but also directs the atmosphere and movement of the dance. Music has the capacity to regulate emotions, channel expression, and build the atmosphere of the performance. As explained by Prenika Yuniar et al. (2022), music is an art form powerfully capable of conveying human emotions. In the Ntak Awo dance, organ accompaniment not only provides rhythm but also serves as a foundation that unites the dancers' movements with the songs of the tukang foster and community participation.

The traditional music used in the Ntak Awo dance used local instruments such as drums and glass bottles. Now, these instruments have been replaced by a single organ, which maintains the distinctive rhythm of the Ntak Awo dance. Although the instrument's form has changed, its musical values and structure remain. According to Maulana, Suryati Budiwati, and Karwati (2022), traditional music is generally passed down orally, lacks standard notation, and uses distinctive local language and styles, as is the case with the music accompanying the Ntak Awo dance.

The existence of the Ntak Awo dance in the Rawang community emphasizes that art cannot be separated from its social context. It is not merely an aesthetic product but also a means of constructing identity, expressing social values, and maintaining the continuity of tradition. This dance serves as an intergenerational space that allows for the natural transmission of culture through collective participation. Amidst the onslaught of popular culture, this dance persists because it is rooted in the practices of community life, making it part of everyday social activities, not merely a spectacle exclusive to formal venues.

Ntak Awo Dance in Wedding Ceremonies

Marriage is an emotional bond between two people based on the shared intention and sincere desire of a man and a woman to live together as husband and wife. This emotional bond is initially marked by the agreement between the prospective bride and groom to marry (Munawar, 2015). In the context of local Kerinci culture, marriage is not only interpreted as a social or religious contract, but also a space for cultural expression steeped in traditional symbols. One form of this cultural expression is the Ntak Awo Dance performance, which is present as part of the traditional procession leading up to the wedding ceremony.

According to Sedyawati in Uhai et al. (2019), local wisdom can be defined as a form of wisdom within a community's traditional culture, encompassing normative values, ethics, aesthetics, and ideas that have implications for technology, health, and the arts. In this regard, the Ntak Awo Dance is not merely a form of entertainment, but also a representation of cultural richness, local wisdom, and social values passed down from generation to generation.

The Ntak Awo Dance, performed during wedding processions, is usually accompanied by energetic and rhythmic music. The movements in this dance depict strength, tension, and speed, inspired by the movement of a horse, often referred to as "step tiga." This dance is usually performed in yards or open fields, and is performed by anyone who hears the music

and is compelled to join in. This dance is participatory and has no limit on the number of dancers, allowing any guest or community member to participate.

In its performances, the Ntak Awo Dance is accompanied by a single organ as the main musical instrument, replacing traditional instruments such as drums or glass bottles used in the past. The accompanying music consists of various variations of Ntak Awo songs sung by a tukang foster or accompanying singer. The lyrics are pantun (pantun) or poetry in Kerinci and Rawang, encompassing themes of love, life, and happiness. These lyrics are sung spontaneously based on the situation and atmosphere of the evening, creating a close emotional connection between the dancers, singers, and audience.

The Ntak Awo dance performance during a wedding ceremony typically lasts two to three hours, starting around 11:00 PM and lasting until 2:00 AM. This dance is part of the farewell ceremony for both the bride and groom, and is performed the night before the wedding ceremony, known as Malam Ntak Kudo (Night of Ntak Kudo). This event serves a symbolic function as a form of farewell and blessing for the bride and groom as they enter a new phase of their married life.

In addition to the evening before the ceremony, songs from the Rentak Kudo album are also played during the day during the bekkejoua (cooking together) ceremony as part of the wedding preparations. This music accompanies the community's collective cooking activities and reinforces the sense of togetherness, joy, and the spirit of mutual cooperation in welcoming this major event.

Thus, the Ntak Awo Dance's presence in Kerinci wedding ceremonies is not merely entertainment, but also an expression of cultural values, collective spirituality, and a symbol of social transition. This dance enriches the meaning of weddings as cultural events, strengthens social ties between residents, and emphasizes the role of art in preserving the identity and local wisdom of the Kerinci people.



Figure 1. *Ntak Awo dance at a wedding ceremony*

Ntak Awo Dance in Traditional Festivals and Celebrations

Festivals are a form of social and cultural activity found in various cultures around the world. They are not merely a space for entertainment, but also a social phenomenon that represents the dynamics of community life and serves as a platform for the expression of cultural identity. In this context, festivals contain a strong dramatic intensity—both in the form of myths, legends, and history rooted in the lives of indigenous people. As stated in PP (2019), festivals not only showcase cultural diversity but also hold profound meaning for participants and the wider community. The participation of local communities in festivals represents their social identity and affirms the continuity of the local community's history and cultural values to outsiders.

In the Kerinci community, the Ntak Awo Dance consistently appears as an important part of cultural celebrations and festivals. This dance is not merely entertainment or a complement to events, but also serves as a powerful medium for cultural preservation. An interview with Arwati (March 8, 2025) revealed that every arts festival held in Kerinci, such as the Kerinci Lake Festival, always features the Ntak Awo Dance as the closing act. This dance performance serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving local cultural heritage and introducing it to the wider public, especially the younger generation and tourists.



Figure 2. *Ntak Awo dance at the festival event*

The Ntak Awo Dance performances at the festival are performed not only by professional artists but also by members of the general public who have long internalized the cultural values of this dance. This dance is also frequently performed at community events such as *kenduri sko* (traditional heritage festivals), commemorations of national holidays, and other traditional celebrations. Ovia Netalia (interview, March 20, 2025) stated that the Ntak Awo Dance is often featured at community weddings, *kenduri sko* parties, gymnastics competitions at the Family Welfare Movement (PKK) Jamboree, and even the Sungai Penuh City Anniversary celebration. In all these contexts, the Ntak Awo Dance is not only performed but also celebrated as a symbol of the Kerinci community's cultural identity.

Makisal Hadi, the Head of Hamparan Rawang District, echoed this sentiment (interview, March 3, 2025). He stated that the Ntak Awo Dance always holds a special place in major celebrations such as the Sungai Banyak City Anniversary, the Family Welfare Movement Festival, and the Kerinci Lake Festival. Even in sports and arts events, such as Ntak Awo-

themed gymnastics competitions, the dance serves as inspiration for movement, blended into a modern context without losing its traditional values.

The Ntak Awo Dance is not limited to the Kerinci region; it also appears in broader contexts, such as Kerinci student activities spread beyond the region. M. Najmi Saputra, Chair of IMKS-UNP (interview, March 22, 2025), stated that every important event held by the Kerinci Sungai Penuh Student Association at Padang State University, such as welcoming new students, inaugurating administrators, and even the Kayo Folk Festival (KFF) held by HMKS West Sumatra, always concludes with a Ntak Awo Dance performance. This signifies that this dance has become a cultural icon carried and maintained by Kerinci's younger generation living abroad, while also serving as a form of emotional connection to their homeland.

Through various celebrations and festivals, the Ntak Awo Dance is not only maintained but also continues to undergo revitalization and contextual adjustments. The function of this dance has gone beyond mere aesthetic expression to become a collective symbol for the Kerinci people in celebrating their identity, history, and social togetherness. Festivals serve as a strategic space for transforming tradition into a vibrant and ever-evolving cultural force.

CONCLUSIONS

The Ntak Awo Dance is an intangible cultural heritage originating from Hamparan Rawang District, Sungai Penuh City, Jambi Province. Initially, this dance served a ritual purpose closely tied to local traditions. However, over time, this function transformed into a popular form of entertainment, particularly through the active role of a local artist named Arwati, who popularized it to a wider audience. This dance now not only represents the cultural identity of the Rawang community but has also become a symbol of dynamic artistic expression that adapts to changing times.

Ntak Awo Dance performances are characterized by energetic musical accompaniment and the recitation of pantun (traditional poetry) sung by a traditional caretaker. The dance movements follow the rhythm of the music and a distinctive step pattern called "step three." This dance is performed openly, either in fields or in yards, with performances lasting quite a long time, approximately 2 to 3 hours. Another unique feature lies in the costumes, where dancers wear modest everyday clothing, reflecting the close relationship between art and the daily lives of the community.

The Ntak Awo Dance is prominently featured in various socio-cultural events, such as weddings, arts festivals, traditional feasts, gymnastics competitions, and student events. Both in their hometown and abroad, this dance continues to be preserved and passed down by the Kerinci community and younger generation, who use it as a form of cultural identity. Therefore, the Ntak Awo Dance is not only a cultural identity of the Hamparan Rawang community, but also part of Indonesia's cultural richness that needs to be preserved, developed, and introduced more widely, so that it is not eroded by the currents of globalization and modern culture that tend to be homogenous. Preserving this dance is the collective responsibility of all parties who care about the existence of local culture amidst the dynamics of the times.

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