

# The Symbolic Meaning of Costumes and Props in *Tari Piriang Suluah Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang* Dance

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**How to cite:** Putri, H. H., Irfansyah, I., & Fatrina, N. Y. (2025). The Symbolic Meaning of Costumes and Props in *Tari Piriang Suluah Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang* Dance. *Gorga : Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 14 (2), 752-760. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24114/gr.v14i2.68295>

**Article History :** Received: Agustus 6, 2025. Revised: December 30, 2025. Accepted: December 31, 2025

## ABSTRACT

*Tari Piriang Suluah* is one of the traditional performing arts of the Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang community. It serves not only as a form of entertainment but also as a reflection of the worldview, customary values, and cultural identity of the Minangkabau people. Although it has become an integral part of local cultural life, the aspects of costume and props in *Tari Piriang Suluah* have received limited scholarly attention, particularly regarding their symbolic meanings. This study aims to explore the symbolic meanings embedded in the costumes and props of *Tari Piriang Suluah* as representations of the cultural identity of the Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang community. A descriptive qualitative method with an ethnographic approach was employed. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and literature review. The data were then analyzed using Spradley's domain, taxonomic, and componential analysis techniques, supported by Clifford Geertz's theory of symbols. The findings reveal that each element of the costume and props in *Tari Piriang Suluah* embodies symbols that reflect modesty, religiosity, hard work, spiritual values, and the balance of life within the Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang community. These findings affirm that the visual elements in *Tari Piriang Suluah* function as a medium of cultural communication and a symbolic system that reinforces local identity and values amid the forces of modernization.

## KEYWORDS

Symbolic meaning  
visual elements  
*Piriang Suluah*  
*Nagari Gunung*  
Ethnography

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## INTRODUCTION

Culture is an important element in the life of society. According to Taylor, culture includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs, abilities, and habits that develop within society (Ithromi, 2006, p. 53). One of the cultural elements that is closest to the life of society is traditional art, which serves as a medium for expressing values and worldviews that reflect the cultural identity of its supporting community.

One of the traditional art forms owned by the Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang community is *Tari Piriang Suluah*. This dance has existed for a long time and has become an important part of the local community's life. However, *Tari Piriang Suluah* once declined due to the absence of younger generations to continue it and the aging of traditional performers who were no longer able to perform the dance. In fact, *Tari Piriang Suluah* embodies valuable cultural values and represents the identity of its community.

According to Asnimar, an artist and preserver of *Tari Piriang Suluah*, this dance is a visualization of the daily life of the Nagari Gunung community, who work as farmers, and an

expression of gratitude for the abundant harvest (**Interview, January 24, 2024**). As a traditional dance, *Tari Piriang Suluah* is flexible in its performance form, meaning it can be performed by anyone, with no limit on the number of dancers, and with movement sequences that may vary except for the *sambah* movement.

In general, dance art relies on movement as its main element. However, Soedarso explained that dance is also shaped by visual elements (**Sujana, 2007, p.261**). According to **Sujana (2007, p. 261)**, the visual elements of dance vary: some rely on costumes and props, while others emphasize the stage, decorations, and lighting. In this case, *Tari Piriang Suluah* highlights visual elements, such as costumes and props, that serve aesthetic functions and convey symbolic meanings and specific cultural messages.



Figure 1. The appearance of male and female dancers of *Tari Piriang Suluah*, along with supporting dancers  
(Source: <https://indonesiakaya.com>)

However, amid the current of modernization, this dance faces challenges that may threaten its existence. Asnimar explained that until now, no younger generation has been able to perform *Tari Piriang Suluah* using *suluah* (**Interview, January 24, 2024**). At present, only Asnimar and her younger brother, Syahrial, continue to preserve the performance form that uses this property. As a result, in several performances, such as during the Minangkabau Pamenan Festival on July 26–27, 2025, at the Center for Documentation and Information of Minangkabau Culture (Indonesian: *Pusat Dokumentasi dan Informasi Kebudayaan Minangkabau*; PDIKM) in Padang Panjang City, Asnimar presented a version of the performance featuring additional dancers who did not use *suluah* and wore more modern costumes. This indicates a shift in the presentation form that could erode cultural values if not preserved in accordance with traditional conventions.

In 2019, Mila Susanti and Erlinda conducted research titled “*The Aesthetics of Tari Piriang Suluah in Nagari Gunuang Padang Panjang, West Sumatra*.” This study discussed the elements within *Tari Piriang Suluah*, such as movement, dancers, props, floor patterns, make-up and costumes, music, and performance venue, which together form an integrated whole. Movement, as the main element, reflects the activities of the Nagari Gunung community, the majority of whom work as farmers. The researchers explained that the supporting elements also possess meaning and aesthetic value. The second study, conducted by Khairunisa and Darmawati in 2022, was titled “*The Meaning of Movements in Tari Piriang Suluah at Aguang Studio, Sigando Sub-District, East Padang Panjang District, Padang Panjang City*.” This study explained that dance movements are divided into two categories: meaningful movements and pure movements. The researchers found that *Tari Piriang Suluah* falls under the category of meaningful movements, as each movement in this dance embodies the values of the Nagari Gunung community.

Both of these studies focused on aesthetic values and the overall meaning of movement. No specific, in-depth discussion of costumes and props was found. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the symbolic meanings contained in the costumes and props of *Tari Piriang Suluah* as a representation of the cultural identity of the Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang community.

Understanding the symbolic meanings of these visual elements is essential to preserving and documenting local cultural values that are vulnerable to erosion by the current of modernization.

## METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. The research object was focused on the costumes and props of *Tari Piriang Suluah* in Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and literature study. After the data were collected, the next step was to identify the costumes and props using domain, taxonomic, and componential analyses, as described by Spradley (see Tables 1 and 2). The costumes were classified by gender (male and female; see Table 3). The symbolic meaning analysis stage was conducted using Clifford Geertz's theory of symbols, which views culture as a web of meanings embodied in symbols (Budiman, 2004, p. 17). Through this approach, the study is expected to reveal the symbolic meanings of the costumes and props of *Tari Piriang Suluah* in Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang.

**Table 1.** Derivative pattern of domain, taxonomic, and componential analysis of costumes

Domain Analysis	Head Cover	Upper Body Clothing	Lower Body Clothing
<b>Taxonomy Analysis</b>	<i>Deta/Destar</i>	<i>Baju Kuruang</i>	Traditional Loose Pants
<b>Componential Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Deta Batiak</i></li> <li>• <i>Deta Putiah</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Baju Guntiang Cino</i></li> <li>• <i>Baju Kuruang Basiba</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sarawa Batiak</i></li> <li>• <i>Sarawa Endong</i></li> <li>• <i>Sarawa Nari</i></li> </ul>
<b>Taxonomy Analysis</b>			Traditional Wrap Cloth
<b>Componential Analysis</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sisampiang</i></li> <li>• <i>Ikek Sisampiang (Cawek)</i></li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Derivative pattern of domain, taxonomic, and componential analysis of props

Domain Analysis	<i>Set Property</i>	<i>Hand Property</i>
<b>Taxonomy Analysis</b>	Stage Props	Head Props
<b>Componential Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrangement of plates forming a circle</li> <li>• Broken Plate</li> </ul>	<i>Suluah</i>
<b>Taxonomy Analysis</b>		Upper Body Props
<b>Componential Analysis</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plate</li> <li>• <i>Dama/Damar</i></li> </ul>

**Table 3.** Costumes and props of male and female dancers

Male Dancer	Female Dancer		
Head Cover	<i>Deta Batiak</i>	Head Cover	<i>Deta Batiak</i>
<b>Upper Body Clothing</b>	<i>Baju Guntiang Cino</i>	<b>Upper Body Clothing</b>	<i>Baju Kuruang Basiba</i>
<b>Lower Body Clothing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sarawa Batiak/ Sarawa Endong</i></li> <li>• <i>Sisampiang</i></li> </ul>	<b>Lower Body Clothing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sarawa Nari/ Sarawa Endong</i></li> <li>• <i>Sisampiang</i></li> <li>• <i>Ikek sisampiang (Cawek)</i></li> </ul>

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Tari Piriang Suluah* of Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang

*Tari Piriang Suluah* is a developed form of *Tari Piring*, which has its roots in *pencak silat* movements. According to Syahrial, this dance has existed since 1960, when it was performed by Gaek Saliang (Khairunisa, 2022, p. 167). *Tari Piriang Suluah* represents a traditional performing art form that has grown from the social and cultural life of the Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang community. This dance not only serves as entertainment that presents aesthetic elements but also

reflects collective knowledge, worldview, and customary rules internalized in daily life. This dance is performed by male and female dancers. The costumes worn, especially by female dancers, must be carefully selected to ensure modesty and avoid revealing body contours. Costumes play an important role as a system of visual signs that are easily recognized and interpreted by the audience (Sahid, 2016, p. 106). In addition to costumes, props serve as visual elements that help the audience identify the distinctive features of a performance.

## 1. Costume of Tari Piriang Suluah

### a. Head Cover

#### 1) *Deta Batiak*

In the performance of *Tari Piriang Suluah*, the head-tying technique used by male dancers is called *Deta Patiak*. This technique is commonly used in *pencak silat* and is characterized by both ends of the *deta* pointing upward on the right and left sides of the front part of the head, resembling the ears of a tiger or a cat. Meanwhile, female dancers use a similar tying technique but without emphasizing the two ends at the front.

In the context of traditional art, the *deta* does not only function as a head covering but also conveys a specific meaning. The transformation of a loose cloth into a meaningful *deta* symbolizes the process of identity formation within the Nagari Gunung community. The shape of the *deta* worn by male dancers, resembling the ears of a tiger or a cat, represents that Minangkabau men are resilient, alert, and courageous in facing life. Conversely, the shape of the *deta* worn by female dancers, with the “ears” not emphasized or kept hidden, suggests the characteristics of Minangkabau women, associated with modesty, gentleness, and discretion in keeping secrets. As expressed in the proverb “*babiliaak ketek dan babiliaak gadang*,” it means that a woman must know what is appropriate to discuss within the context of her immediate family as well as the extended family (*kaum*) (Navis, 1984, p. 67).

#### 2) *Deta Putiah*

In addition to *Deta Batiak*, male dancers in *Tari Piriang Suluah* also wear a layer of *Deta Putiah* (white cloth) wrapped around the outer part of the *Deta Batiak*. The use of this white cloth creates an appearance reminiscent of urang siak or buya, religious figures highly respected in Minangkabau society.

The use of *Deta Putiah* symbolizes religiosity. The white layer covering the batik suggests that, behind the strength and firmness of a man, lies a religious value that must be upheld. This reflects the reality of Minangkabau men’s lives. From childhood to adolescence, men usually spend their time in the *surau* to seek knowledge, recite the Qur'an, and practice martial arts (Agustina., 2016, p. 19). After reaching adulthood, they will “descend from the *rumah gadang*” or go on *rantau* (migration) to broaden their knowledge and life experiences. As expressed in the saying “*ketek di surau, gadang di rantau*,” it describes the life journey of Minangkabau men, beginning with the process of character formation filled with moral and religious values, and continuing into life in the overseas land. Through the *rantau* tradition, the Minangkabau people often bring cultural influences from the places they migrate to.



Figure 2. The use of *Deta Batiak* (by male and female dancers) and *Deta Putiah* (by male dancers)  
(Source: Illustration by Hasya Hanani Putri, 2025)

## b. Upper Body Clothing

### 1) Baju Guntiang Cino

This shirt is a type of traditional men's clothing, especially worn when going to the *surau* (a small mosque). The *Baju Guntiang Cino* bears a close resemblance to the contemporary *Baju Koko* that is widely recognized and worn in society today. However, in the performance of *Tari Piriang Suluah*, its form follows the traditional model, which is white in color, has a round collar without a neckline, and has no pockets. This shirt is *basiba*-cut, meaning it has a loose fabric cut, neither too long nor too short.

The white color of this clothing reflects humility and simplicity. As a garment commonly worn in daily life, this shirt embodies the character of Minangkabau men as individuals ready to work with wisdom. In reality, in social life, every form of work can give rise to problems or conflicts. In Minangkabau, resolving issues through deliberation is considered the fairest and wisest way to reach consensus. In this context, *Baju Guntiang Cino* reflects openness or sincerity of heart, which serves as an essential foundation for creating a peaceful social life.

### 2) Baju Kuruang Basiba

Similar to *Baju Guntiang Cino*, *Baju Kuruang Basiba* is a traditional garment worn by Minangkabau women, usually in daily life. As the name suggests, this shirt has a *basiba* cut, meaning it features *siba* and *kikik* seams on the left and right sides. The shirt has a loose fit, long sleeves, and extends down to the knees. The neckline is round without a collar, and there is an opening at the front about 15 cm long (Niapati, 2019, p. 346). At present, *Baju Kuruang Basiba* has undergone many modern and fashionable variations. However, in the performance of *Tari Piriang Suluah*, the shirt is black, maintaining its original form.

Its loose, covered, and long cut creates a visual boundary around the body, implying a sense of control over physical freedom. This means that a woman's body is regarded as something that must be protected and respected. The black color itself can obscure shadows, so when used for clothing, the body contours are not clearly visible. This gives the impression that women are valuable beings, thus protected by customary and religious rules through the form of their clothing. In the view of Minangkabau society, women are considered ancestral treasures who occupy an honorable position (Taufiq, 2023, p. 197). In the performance *Tari Piriang Suluah*, the use of *Baju Kuruang Basiba* by female dancers symbolizes that, although they appear in public spaces, they continue to uphold their dignity and maintain their honor. The use of this garment affirms a commitment to modesty and serves as a form of protection against negative perceptions.

## c. Lower Body Clothing

### 1) Sarawa Batiak

*Sarawa Batik* is a type of traditional lower garment commonly worn by Minangkabau men. These pants are generally paired with *Baju Guntiang Cino* as everyday attire. The Minangkabau people often use batik as a result of cultural interaction, particularly from their *rantau* (migration) experiences in the Java region. The batik products brought from Java are known as *batik jao*, a local term used to refer to batik cloth originating from "Java" (*jao*) (Ibrahim, 1986, p. 103).

In the performance of *Tari Piriang Suluah*, the *Sarawa Batiak* are generally black and brown. These two colors represent closeness to the elements of earth and nature, reflecting a connection to cultural roots (nature) and a simple way of life. Its loose, straight cut gives the impression of calmness, openness, and direction, implying the character of Minangkabau men, who are simple yet firm. In addition, the loose shape of the pants allows flexibility in movement, symbolizing men's readiness to move actively, such as when working.

### 2) Sarawa Nari

These loose black pants are an essential element of the *Tari Piriang Suluah* costume, designed to enhance the comfort and flexibility of the dancers' movements, especially during dynamic, agile movements. The black color of the pants helps to conceal the overall body contours of female dancers. Their loose cut throughout, particularly around the hip and thigh areas, allows the dancers

to perform various movements. The edges of the pants are decorated with neat golden-thread embroidery. This accent not only beautifies the appearance but also represents the cultural values and natural wealth of Minangkabau. Meanwhile, the elastic band at the waist provides ease of use while symbolizing flexibility and the ability to adapt to various situations without losing self-control. Symbolically, these pants represent the figure of Minangkabau women who are active, open, flexible, and resilient, yet still move within the framework of highly upheld customary and religious values.

### 3) Sarawa Endong

These pants resemble *Sarawa Galembong*, but they differ in crotch length. *Sarawa Galembong*, which is commonly used in *randai* performances, has a crotch length that reaches the ankles. Meanwhile, *Sarawa Endong*, usually worn as part of *pencak silat* attire, has a crotch length that extends only below the knees (Sapitri, 2023, p. 78). *Sarawa Endong* has a loose cut around the thighs and knees, then tapers at the ankles. In *Tari Piriang Suluah*, the *Sarawa Endong* used are generally black. The shape and structure of these pants allow the dancer to position the body in a low stance, provide stability while moving, and support sitting positions such as cross-legged or *duduak baselo*. The low stance reflects readiness to face opponents or uneven natural conditions, such as in the *Darek* region, namely Nagari Gunung, which is located on the mountain slopes. Meanwhile, the cross-legged sitting position reflects the value of deliberation in Minangkabau culture as a form of openness in seeking consensus. Overall, these pants give an impression of solidity, strength, and firmness, representing the character of a resilient society that still prioritizes wisdom.

### 4) Sisampiang

The *sesamping* cloth used in the performance of *Tari Piriang Suluah* is generally made of Bugis fabric or batik. This cloth covers the dancer's hips or lower body, and its use is adjusted according to gender. For male dancers, the *sesamping* is folded into a triangular shape and tied around the waist. Meanwhile, female dancers wear the cloth like a sarong, with the length slightly below the knees. The use of the *sesamping* symbolizes self-restraint and readiness to face various situations. In the context of martial arts, this cloth can also function as a weapon or a defensive tool. For women, it limits their steps, particularly to prevent excessively wide strides, as a form of self-control and modesty. In addition, the use of Bugis fabric and batik reflects the cultural interaction of the Minangkabau people with the outside world, particularly through the *rantau* (migration) process and trade relations, thereby enriching the aesthetic and symbolic values of traditional clothing.

### 5) Ikek Sisampiang (Cawek)

During the performance of *Tari Piriang Suluah*, female dancers use the *cawek* as a fastener or support to maintain the firmness and neatness of the *sesamping* cloth. The *cawek* is a long piece of fabric measuring approximately 1.5 meters in length and 12 centimeters in width, in red and golden-yellow. As an ornament, the fabric is decorated with golden-thread embroidery featuring *saik kalamai* and diamond-shaped (*wajik-wajik*) motifs, enriching its visual appearance and creating an impression of elegance. At both ends, some tassels also possess symbolic value.

*Ikek sisampiang* is interpreted as a representation of additional protection for women. Meanwhile, the tassels at the ends of the *cawek* are interpreted as a symbol of the role of *Bundo Kanduang*, the maternal figure who serves as a source of support for her descendants in life. According to Asnimar, the term *Bundo Kanduang* does not refer to a specific individual who exists in the physical world. Instead, it results from an agreement among the *niniak mamak* (customary elders) in Minangkabau, serving as a symbol of the ideal woman within the customary system (Interview, January 28, 2025). *Bundo Kanduang* is essentially a trait or role inherent in mothers, not in a specific individual. Meanwhile, the *saik kalamai* or *wajik-wajik* motif on the *ikek sisampiang* serves as a visual representation of the traditional Minangkabau delicacy *kalamai*. Symbolically, the *saik kalamai* motif represents hard work, carefulness, and respect toward guests.

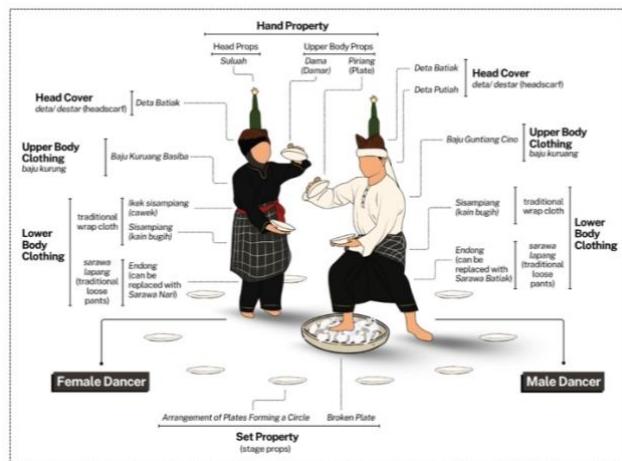


Figure 3. Costumes and props of *Tari Piriang Suluah*  
(Source: Illustration by Hasya Hanani Putri, 2025)

#### d. Props of *Tari Piriang Suluah*

##### 1) Set Property

###### a) Plates arranged in a circular formation

The plates are arranged by stage size and the number of dancers performing in the show. The arrangement forms a circular pattern on the floor, which functions as a stepping area for the dancers during the performance. The circular arrangement of plates represents the social structure of Minangkabau society, which upholds equality among individuals, with all members of the community interconnected and having equally important roles in maintaining customary balance. The dancers' movements circling around the plates in a circular formation reinforce the meaning that human life moves in a continuous cycle, similar to the seasons, customs, and inherited values that must be preserved collectively. This circular form is a symbol of togetherness among the people of Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang, both in times of struggle and work, until they finally harvest the results and share happiness with one another. The plates arranged on the floor illustrate the path of life that must be traversed with great caution, just as people walk along the narrow embankments of rice fields, which require balance, precision, and full awareness.

###### b) Broken Plates

This property is usually presented at the final part of the performance. When the music tempo increases, one of the dancers steps forward to the front of the stage with the prepared broken plates. Asnimar explained that at this moment, the dancer is required to have complete faith and surrender to Allah while avoiding arrogance. This is because if arrogance exists in the heart, the glass shards can injure the dancer's feet ([Interview, July 21, 2024](#)). The broken glass symbolizes the sharp, painful, and risky trials and challenges of life. However, the dancer's success in jumping and dancing over the shards without injury reflects courage, steadfastness, and sincerity in submitting oneself to Allah SWT.

##### 2) Hand Property

###### a) Plates

The plate property held in both hands of the dancers is the main element that characterizes *Tari Piring*, as well as *Tari Piriang Suluah*. The plates are made of white porcelain, a type commonly used in household settings. The use of plates in this performance signifies that customary values do not always need to be manifested in sacred or luxurious forms but can also appear in simple and familiar forms that are closely related to daily life. Symbolically, the plate represents gratitude for the sustenance bestowed by Allah SWT. The balanced use of plates in both hands by the dancers conveys the importance of maintaining balance between worldly activities and worship, between physical and spiritual needs, and between individual interests and communal life. On the other hand,

the plate's fragility implies that life, balance, and success are delicate and must be preserved with great caution.

b) *Suluah*

*Suluah* refers to a traditional lighting tool used by the people of Nagari Gunung, Padang Panjang, before the presence of electricity in the area. This tool was usually used when walking at night, returning from work, or performing activities in the *surau*. The presence of the *suluah* in the dance performance is not merely a visual element but also an integral part of the community's daily life in the past. As a traditional lighting tool, the *suluah* symbolizes the human need to seek guidance amid darkness, both physically and spiritually, continually. The *suluah* conveys that humans require direction in life, and that this direction originates in values, knowledge, and faith. The flame that burns from the wick and oil within the *suluah* illustrates that light, in the sense of knowledge and faith, does not emerge on its own but requires continuous effort, maintenance, and awareness. When carrying the *suluah*, the dancer must look straight ahead. This movement symbolizes confidence and balance in life. The gaze should not be directed upward, which symbolizes arrogance, nor should it be constantly directed downward, which reflects humility or lack of confidence. This dance teaches the attitude of *tawadhu'* (humility) without demeaning oneself, and confidence without becoming arrogant. Similar to the broken plates, the *suluah* can also be dangerous if not carried carefully, making it a symbol of caution in living life.

c) *Damar*

*Damar* is a property used on the tip of the dancer's index finger in the performance of *Tari Piriang Suluah*. This tool has a hole in the middle so it can be attached to the finger and flicked against the plate's surface, producing a sound that becomes part of the performance's rhythm. The sound is synchronized with the rhythm of the accompanying music, helping the dancer maintain synchronization between body movements, plate beats, and musical tempo. The placement of the *damar* on the index finger, which symbolically functions to point and give direction, illustrates the dancer's role as both the rhythm guide and the movement conductor within the performance. The sound produced does not occur randomly but results from the synchronization of movement, rhythm, and concentration, indicating that every action follows a certain social and spiritual rhythm. The collision between the *damar* and the plate also represents the importance of maintaining balance between thought, action, and emotion. This serves as the foundation of life for the people of Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang.

## CONCLUSION

*Tari Piriang Suluah* is a form of cultural expression that originates from the social life and customary values of the Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang community. As a traditional performing art, this dance not only presents aesthetic aspects but also conveys messages through symbols that represent the worldview, values, and cultural identity of the Nagari Gunung Padang Panjang community. Each part of the costume, ranging from the *deta*, shirt, pants, *sesamping* cloth, to the *cawek*, conveys symbolic messages about gender roles, modesty, religiosity, and the life philosophy of the community. Props such as plates, *suluah*, *damar*, and broken plates also contain spiritual and social meanings that reflect balance, mindfulness, hard work, and submission to Allah SWT. By using an ethnographic approach and Clifford Geertz's theory of symbols, this study reveals a web of meanings in the costumes and props of *Tari Piriang Suluah*, a manifestation of local cultural identity. These results are expected to contribute to the preservation of traditional arts and to document Minangkabau cultural elements that are vulnerable to erosion from modernization.

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