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THE TURUN BAKA TRADITION OF THE KOTO TANGAH DISTRICT, PADANG, INDONESIA: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS FROM ROLAND BARTHES' PERSPECTIVE GUIDE

Syamsurizal¹, Muhardis^{2*}, Heksa Biopsi Puji Hastuti³, Sutarsih⁴, Erlinda Rosita⁵, Sutejo⁶, Exti Budihastuti⁷, Irmayani⁸, Ismeti⁹, and Indra Rahayu Setiawati¹⁰

^{1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9}Badan Riset Dan Inovasi Nasional (BRIN)

²Badan Riset Dan Inovasi Nasional (BRIN), Email: muha290@brin.go.id

¹⁰Badan Riset dan Inovasi Daerah (BRIDA), Provinsi Sulawesi Tenggara

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Corresponding Author: Muhardis
(muha290@brin.go.id)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the turun baka tradition practiced by the Minangkabau society in Koto Tangah District, Padang, Indonesia, as a system of cultural signification. The tradition, performed one hundred or one hundred and ten days after death, functions not only as a ritual of respect for the deceased but also as a medium for transmitting religious, social, and cultural values. This research aims to analyze how ritual symbols within turun baka construct meaning through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, encompassing denotative, connotative, and mythological levels. A qualitative approach was employed through direct observation and in-depth interviews with three key informants (urang siak) who possess authoritative knowledge of the tradition. Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative techniques combined with semiotic interpretation to uncover layers of meaning embedded in ritual stages, objects (baka), and verbal expressions such as prayers and zikir. The findings reveal that turun baka operates as a complex symbolic system reflecting the worldview of the Koto Tangah District. At the denotative level, the ritual consists of structured stages and the preparation of symbolic objects. At the connotative level, these elements represent values such as social solidarity, mutual cooperation, religious devotion, and familial responsibility. At the mythological level, the ritual constructs a cultural narrative of death as a transitional process rather than an end, reinforcing the integration of adat and Islamic teachings. In conclusion, turun baka serves as both a cultural text and a social mechanism that maintains communal harmony, strengthens identity, and preserves the continuity of Minangkabau cultural values amid ongoing social change.

KEYWORDS: Turun Baka Tradition, Minangkabau Culture, Cultural Semiotics, Symbolic Meaning, Death Ritual, Roland Barthes, Social Solidarity, Cultural Identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Minangkabau society is widely recognized for its strong social and cultural system, which is built upon the integration of customary law (*adat*) and Islamic teachings. This relationship is encapsulated in the philosophical principle *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*, which positions *adat* as both a social and cultural mechanism governing communal life (Aziz *et al.*, 2020; Salmadanis & Samad, 2002). Customary principles such as *raso jo pareso* and *malu jo sopan* serve as ethical guidelines for maintaining social harmony and shaping the collective value system of Minangkabau society (Moeis *et al.*, 2022; Rajo Penghulu, 2005:53–54). In this context, tradition functions not merely as a ritual practice, but also as a medium for transmitting values, identity, and worldviews across generations.

One tradition that continues to be practiced by Minangkabau society, particularly in Koto Tengah District, Padang City, is the *turun baka* (“descending provisions”) tradition. This tradition constitutes a death ritual performed after one hundred or one hundred and ten days following a person’s death. *Turun baka* is understood as a form of almsgiving on behalf of the deceased and as a final act of respect before the soul fully departs from the earthly realm (Rasyid, 2010). Beyond its religious dimension, the ritual also serves to strengthen kinship ties and reinforce social solidarity among society members involved in its performance.

Within the Koto Tengah District society, the *turun baka* ritual functions as a symbolic marker of transition between the world of the living and the afterlife. Objects prepared as *baka* (“provisions”), along with sequences of prayers and *zikir* and other ritual actions, are believed to carry meanings that transcend their material functions. This view aligns with Minangkabau perspectives that regard the one-hundred-day death ceremony as a symbolic farewell between the earthly world and the spiritual realm, as well as a final expression of respect for the deceased (Lestari, 2018). Although some groups perceive this practice as mythical, the tradition persists because it embodies moral messages and religious values that function as guidelines for social life (Saputra, 2019).

Similar death-related traditions are also found in practices such as *malapeh baka* in the Sungaitunu area of Pesisir Selatan Regency and *mambaok baka* in South Solok Regency (Lestari, 2018; Putra, 2022). In these practices, the deceased’s belongings are prepared and distributed to *siak* groups as symbolic provisions for the journey to the afterlife. This indicates that death rituals in Minangkabau culture are not merely ceremonial events, but rather

significant spaces for the production and reproduction of religious and cultural values that connect worldly life with life after death.

Alongside the rapid flow of globalization and modernization, changes have occurred in the perspectives and life practices of Minangkabau society. These changes have the potential to shift the symbolic meanings of tradition from their cultural and spiritual functions toward practices that are merely formal or ceremonial. The customary proverb *sakali aia gadang, sakali tapian barubah* reflects socio-cultural dynamics that continue to evolve and may gradually erode the essence of local traditions (Hakimy, 1978). Modernization affects not only social structures but also ethics, morality, and cultural values within Minangkabau society (Alesyati, 2003; Yuhansil, 2019; Nurlailatil & Supartiningsih, 2017; Rahmawati *et al.*, 2025). Therefore, scholarly inquiry is needed to document and reinterpret the symbolic meanings of tradition as part of strengthening cultural identity amid social change.

Research on the *turun baka* tradition that specifically examines ritual symbols as a system of meaning remains limited. Existing studies have generally focused on social and religious descriptions without thoroughly analyzing how ritual symbols operate in constructing cultural meaning (Lestari, 2018; Putra, 2022). Yet, as emphasized in semiotic studies, ritual practices constitute an important arena for the operation of signs that represent values, ideologies, and the worldview of a society (Sobur, 2003; Fiske, 2011).

Addressing this research gap, the present study offers a novel contribution by analyzing the *turun baka* tradition through Roland Barthes’ semiotic approach. The tradition is conceptualized as a cultural text that operates through layered sign systems encompassing denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings (Barthes, 1972; Fiske, 2011). Through this approach, symbols within the *turun baka* ritual are understood not only as religious expressions but also as constructions of meaning that represent cultural identity, moral values, and social solidarity within the Koto Tengah District society. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to cultural semiotics and to enrich understanding of the symbolic functions of local traditions amid ongoing social transformations.

Based on this background, the study departs from the question of how symbols in the *turun baka* tradition operate as a system of cultural signification that constructs and reproduces meaning within the Koto Tengah District society. The *turun baka* tradition not only involves sequences of ritual actions

and the use of particular objects, but also embodies layered processes of meaning-making that connect religious, social, and cultural dimensions. Accordingly, this study focuses on how ritual symbols—manifested in stages of performance, baka objects, and practices of prayer and zikir—construct meaning at denotative, connotative, and mythological levels, and how such meanings naturalize values, beliefs, and worldviews within Minangkabau society.

In line with this focus, the objective of the study is to interpret the turun baka tradition as a cultural text through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis by revealing the mechanisms through which ritual symbols construct systems of cultural meaning. Specifically, the study aims to explain how each ritual element represents religious values, moral principles, and social solidarity, as well as how these symbols function as media for transmitting values and cultural identity within the Koto Tengah District society amid social change. Thus, the study is expected not only to enrich cultural semiotic scholarship but also to provide deeper insight into the role of local traditions as living constructions of meaning that continue to be negotiated in social life.

1.1. The Concept of Tradition

Tradition is understood as a social practice transmitted across generations and performed repeatedly within a society. Polet (2014) emphasizes that tradition consists of activities carried out repeatedly in relatively similar forms. Etymologically, which means "handing over" or "passing down. This concept is deeply rooted in the idea of transferring knowledge, practices, or possessions across generations. In the Islamic context, tradition is referred to as 'urf, denoting customary practices that exist within a specific time and place, even though they are not explicitly regulated in the Qur'an and Sunnah (Yusuf & Yuslem, 2023).

From an anthropological perspective, tradition is understood as a system of customs or magico-religious practices encompassing cultural values, norms, laws, and rules that are interrelated and function to regulate social action (Nikkel, 2022). Meanwhile, the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia defines tradition as hereditary customs regarded as the correct way of life and including the continuous transmission of religious teachings (Pusat Bahasa, 2008). These definitions indicate that tradition extends beyond habitual practice to encompass systems of values and norms that guide social behavior.

Cairns (2011) emphasizes that tradition includes everything transmitted from the past to the present, encompassing material objects, beliefs, images of events, social practices, and institutions. In cultural contexts, tradition functions to maintain the continuity of social, spiritual, and moral values amid societal change. Celis et al. (2025) views tradition as a form of cultural heritage containing systems of values, norms, and symbols that serve as the foundation of social integration.

Furthermore, Geertz (1992) asserts that tradition constitutes a historically transmitted system of meanings expressed through symbols that function to communicate and preserve cultural values. Thus, tradition not only represents the past but also operates as a dynamic social mechanism shaping identity, solidarity, and cultural resilience. Tradition also provides legitimacy for worldviews, beliefs, and social institutions, thereby binding members of society within a collective order.

Nevertheless, the legitimizing function of tradition entails a paradox. Traditions are often maintained simply because they were practiced by previous generations, as noted by Sztompka (2007): "some actions are performed simply, because they have been performed in the past." This perspective aligns with the concept of the invention of tradition, which emphasizes that traditions are not only inherited but also constructed and reproduced to support contemporary social structures and collective identities (Poppi, 2025). In the context of local traditions such as turun baka, this understanding is crucial for interpreting how ritual symbols are preserved, negotiated, or transformed in meaning.

1.2. The Turun Baka Tradition

The turun baka ("descending provisions") tradition is one of the magico-religious practices of the Koto Tengah District society associated with death. The ritual is performed after one hundred or one hundred and ten days following the death of a family member and is understood as a final act of respect and the release of the soul toward the afterlife. In the social life of the Koto Tengah District society, turun baka is not merely a ritual event but an integral part of the social structure. The absence of this ritual is often perceived as a moral and emotional burden for the bereaved family.

This phenomenon aligns with Malinowski's view (Koentjaraningrat, 1987) that cultural activities fundamentally aim to fulfill instinctual human needs, whether emotional, social, or spiritual. Accordingly, the turun baka tradition functions not only as an

expression of respect for the deceased but also as a means of fulfilling collective needs to maintain social and spiritual balance. The tradition represents a concrete application of Minangkabau traditional values that continue to operate in everyday ritual practices.

1.3. Symbolic Meaning from a Semiotic Perspective

The concept of the symbol is central to understanding ritual practices as systems of meaning. Etymologically, the word symbol derives from the Greek symbolon, from the verb simballein, meaning “to unite” or “to draw conclusions” (Kumekawa, 2020). In Indonesian usage, symbolic refers to something that functions as a sign or representation (Pusat Bahasa, 2008). Symbols represent meanings that transcend their physical forms and are meaningful only within the cultural contexts that produce them.

Symbols are objects (Kiziloglu, 2024), actions (Prandi, 2012), or events through which humans assign meaning and interpret culture. These symbols are arbitrary and function as conceptual media that unify human experience within a system of meaning (Haris & Asrinda Amelia, 2018). Language, in this sense, is understood as a system of symbols that enables humans to express implicit meanings in social life (Vorkachev, 2021).

The discipline that studies symbols and signs is known as semiotics. Derived from the Greek semaion, meaning “sign,” semiotics focuses on how signs generate meaning within social and cultural contexts (Schmidt, 2014). Peirce (Asif & Aslam, 2025) conceptualizes semiotics as a formal doctrine of signs, while Saussure emphasizes the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, which becomes meaningful only within a particular cultural system (Chandler, 2017).

In the context of the turun baka ritual, a semiotic approach allows ritual actions, baka objects, zikir, and prayers to be understood as layered systems of signification representing language, culture, and religion. This perspective is further developed through Roland Barthes’ theory, which emphasizes that signs operate at two levels of meaning—denotation and connotation—and that myth functions as a second-order semiological system that naturalizes cultural values and ideologies (Barthes, 1972; Fiske, 2011).

Barthes conceptualizes signs as relations between signifiers and signifieds that construct social and cultural meanings (Saussure in Hawkes, 1977; Eco, 1979). Through the concept of myth, Barthes explains

how cultural meanings and ideologies are legitimized and perceived as natural within collective consciousness (Barthes, 1972). This framework is relevant for analyzing the turun baka tradition as a cultural text in which ritual symbols not only represent religious practices but also construct identity, social solidarity, and the worldview of the Koto Tengah District society.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at understanding socio-cultural phenomena in their natural settings through in-depth description, interpretation, and exploration of the subjective meanings attached by cultural actors to ritual practices (Creswell, 2018). A qualitative design is considered appropriate because the study does not seek measurement or generalization, but rather focuses on interpreting the symbolic meanings embedded in the turun baka tradition.

Data were collected through direct observation of the turun baka ritual and in-depth interviews with key informants who are actively involved in and possess authoritative knowledge of the tradition. Observation was conducted systematically throughout the ritual process to document the stages of the ritual, the use of baka objects, as well as accompanying prayers and zikir. In-depth interviews were conducted at the informants’ residences to explore their understanding of the symbolic meanings of ritual stages, baka objects, and the religious and cultural values attached to the practice.

Informants were selected purposively based on the relevance of their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the cultural practice under investigation (Cowley & Kelliher, 2023). Accordingly, three society leaders known as urang siak—religious figures who also function as customary authorities—were selected from three sub-districts in Koto Tengah District. These informants were considered to have an in-depth understanding of the symbolic system operating within the turun baka tradition.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative analysis through processes of data organization, categorization, and interpretation to construct coherent patterns of meaning (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The analytical stages included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Within this process, ritual actions, baka objects, and verbal expressions in the form of prayers and zikir were treated as cultural signs and analyzed using a semiotic framework. Descriptive data served as the basis for interpreting

denotative meanings and extending them to connotative and cultural meanings, in accordance with Roland Barthes' model of signification.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview data and the results of qualitative analysis, this study finds that the turun baka tradition is a ritual that functions not only as a form of final respect for the deceased but also as a social mechanism for strengthening family solidarity and reaffirming shared communal values. This finding supports Sahrul et al. (2024), who argue that cultural practices surrounding death rituals serve as markers of group identity and reinforce solidarity among ritual participants. The implementation of turun baka involves collective participation from extended family members and the surrounding society, each of whom carries specific customary roles and responsibilities. The tradition reflects an integration of social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions within the social structure of the Koto Tangah District society in Indonesia. Furthermore, it demonstrates that customary values continue to function as normative guidelines for managing death and maintaining social balance amid changing times (Azri, 2015).

3.1. *Forms And Stages of the Turun Baka Tradition*

Structurally, the turun baka tradition consists of five main stages: mangatoan urang 'notification,' manyadioan baka 'preparing the provisions,' mamasak 'cooking,' manaikan urang siak 'inviting the religious leaders,' and maantaan baka 'delivering the provisions.'

The mangatoan urang stage refers to the process of informing relevant parties – such as ninik mamak, bako (the paternal kin group), anak pisang (children of a woman's brothers), sons- and daughters-in-law, ipa-bisan, urang siak (religious leaders), and the surrounding society – about the timing of the ritual. At the denotative level, this stage signifies an act of notification or invitation. At the connotative level, it reflects the Minangkabau social system, which is oriented toward collectivity and customary consensus. This interpretation aligns with Barthes' concept that signs operate at two levels: denotation and connotation. Connotation is the domain where cultural values function, as explained by Fiske (2011:115–118), who argues that connotative meaning is the site of cultural ideology within a sign system. At the mythic level, this stage reinforces the belief that personal life events among the Minangkabau are not merely individual matters but

are inherently communal concerns. This corresponds with Barthes' view that myth works to naturalize cultural constructions as social truths (Barthes, 1972:129).

The second stage, manyadioan baka 'preparing the provisions,' involves the preparation of all ritual necessities. During this stage, the family of the deceased, together with their kaum (clan), prepares food ingredients, ritual objects designated as baka 'provisions,' and the ritual space. Denotatively, this stage signifies logistical preparation for the ceremony. Connotatively, it reflects the values of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) and collective responsibility toward the deceased. This finding is consistent with Koentjaraningrat (2009:113), who states that gotong royong constitutes a core social value that binds Indonesian communities through collective labor. At the mythic level, this stage affirms the ideology of communal solidarity and intergenerational continuity in preserving tradition through shared work. This interpretation resonates with Geertz's (1973:92) assertion that communal rituals renew social identity through inherited cultural symbols.

This stage is followed by mamasak, the preparation of food, which is generally carried out by female members of the deceased's family with assistance from neighbors and close relatives. At the denotative level, this stage refers to the act of cooking performed by women. At the connotative level, it symbolizes the role of women as guardians of social and cultural harmony. This interpretation aligns with Ortner's (1996:44) argument that women are often represented as custodians of cultural continuity and family life. At the mythic level, this stage conveys the idea that women serve as connectors of life – both biologically and socially – ensuring the continuity of familial values. Lévi-Strauss (1969:49) notes that kinship structures frequently position women at the center of value reproduction and social relations; thus, their involvement in ritual practices reinforces this continuity.

The next stage is manaikan urang siak 'inviting the religious leaders.' During this stage, the family of the deceased invites the group of urang siak and other guests to gather in the house. The activity begins with pasambahan makan, a ceremonial offering of food requesting the religious leaders and guests to partake in the meal provided. After the meal, the ritual continues with the recitation of Qur'anic verses, zikir, tahlil, and prayers for the deceased as well as for the bereaved family. These activities continue until dawn and conclude with the giving of alms in the form of a set of objects

symbolizing baka 'provisions' to the urang siak as an expression of gratitude.

Denotatively, this stage signifies the performance of prayers and Qur'anic recitations led by the urang siak. Connotatively, it represents a process of sacralization and transcendence, emphasizing that death is not an end but a transitional phase in which the soul returns to its origin. Geertz (1966:32) explains that religious rituals create "moods and motivations" that connect individuals to ultimate meanings of life. At the mythic level, this stage embodies the integration of customary and religious values, producing the myth of unity between adat and syarak, encapsulated in the expression *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*. This principal functions as the moral foundation of Minangkabau society, as noted by Navis (1984:51).

The culmination of the turun baka ritual occurs in the maantaan baka 'delivering the provisions' stage. At this stage, family members, clan members, and guests gather for a communal meal while listening to customary speeches. Denotatively, this stage functions as a closing communal feast involving the extended family. Connotatively, it serves as a symbol of reconciliation and the strengthening of social networks. This interpretation corresponds with Durkheim's (1995:432) view that communal meals in traditional rituals generate collective effervescence, reinforcing group solidarity. At the mythic level, this stage represents the belief that eating together constitutes a form of social unification, serving as a means to renew genealogical and moral bonds among clan members. Turner (1969:132) argues that the post-ritual phase in rites of passage functions to restore and renew the social order within a society.

3.2. Ritual Objects in the Turun Baka Tradition and Their Symbolic Meanings

The ritual objects used in the turun baka ('descending the provisions') ceremony do not merely function as ceremonial equipment but also operate as religious symbols that represent the relationship between humans, the deceased, and divine power. Each object embodies spiritual meanings that reaffirm belief systems and cultural identity within the Koto Tengah District society of Padang City, Indonesia. Analyzing these ritual objects is essential to understanding how local belief systems are materialized through meaningful ritual symbols. Based on field data, the baka ('provisions') symbolically carried by the deceased in the ritual include a black umbrella, three bunches of bananas (three kinds of bananas: *kepok*, *lidi*, and *ambon*), a piece of sugarcane approximately 50 cm in length, a

bottle of soft drink (such as Fanta, Sprite, or Coca-Cola), a drinking glass, a *kambuik* (a small pandan-leaf woven bag) filled with rice, a teapot, a sarong cloth, a prayer mat (*sajadah*), and a pair of flip-flops. Interview data reveal layered symbolic meanings embedded in each object used as baka within the turun baka ritual.

3.2.1. Black Umbrella

Denotatively, an umbrella functions as a tool to protect the body from sunlight or rain and is sometimes used as a symbol of authority or status. In the context of death and funeral rituals, the umbrella does not merely serve as physical protection but also functions as a ritual safety net, signifying that the society continues to "shelter" the deceased even after death.

Connotatively, the umbrella symbolizes a boundary marker separating ritual (sacred) space from every day (profane) space. When an umbrella is opened in the yard or ritual area, it implicitly signals that a member of the household has passed away. In ritual theory terms, the umbrella materializes a "status transformation" from life to death and from the profane to the sacred. Its presence also signifies that the deceased was a married individual who had been fully accepted within customary norms.

At the mythic level, the umbrella represents cosmic protection. In death rituals, it becomes a metaphor for the safeguarding of the soul during its journey toward the *barzakh* realm. At the same time, it symbolizes protection for the bereaved family from misfortune, danger, and spiritual disturbances.

3.2.2. Three Bunches of Bananas

Denotatively, three bunches of bananas refer to three separated clusters of banana fruits. In Minangkabau culture, bananas frequently appear in various customary ceremonies, including *batagak pangulu* (chieftain inauguration), *baralek* (wedding feasts), funerals, and other rituals. In the turun baka ritual, bananas serve as baka not only because they are readily available but also because they symbolize abundance and sustenance. The number "three" signifies completeness, balance, and unity among humans, nature, and God—core elements of the Minangkabau worldview.

Connotatively and mythically, the three bunches of bananas symbolize intergenerational continuity. In Minangkabau oral mythology, banana plants are believed never to truly die, as they continuously produce offspring that surround and protect the parent plant. When one banana stalk is cut down, new shoots emerge. This symbolism teaches that

humans should emulate the banana's way of life by protecting their elders and persevering through adversity. Embedded within this symbolism is the continuity of lineage and inheritance (*sako jo pusako*) transmitted through customary law. Thus, the presence of three bunches of bananas is not merely an offering but a cosmic declaration that human life continues through descendants, inherited values, and unbroken tradition.

3.2.3. *A Piece of Sugarcane*

Denotatively, a piece of sugarcane approximately fifty centimeters long refers to a tall, jointed grass plant whose stalk contains sweet juice commonly processed into sugar. In Koto Tangah District, sugarcane is placed alongside other ritual objects during the turun baka ceremony. Its moderate size reflects a balance between symbolic meaning and practical use within the ritual process.

Connotatively, according to local belief, sugarcane symbolizes a walking staff for the deceased on their journey toward the Creator. Should the soul feel thirsty along the way, the sugarcane may be consumed—an expression of empathy and affection materialized through an object. Sugarcane thus represents a balance between spiritual symbolism and familial compassion, symbolizing support so that the soul may travel a smooth and “sweet” path toward eternal life. This interpretation aligns with Geertz's (1973) view of ritual symbols as carriers of both spiritual meaning and emotional reinforcement of family bonds.

At the mythic level, Minangkabau society regard sugarcane as a form of metaphysical protection that repels negative energy and wards off misfortune. Sugarcane thus becomes a symbol of harmony and protection, functioning as a transitional medium between the human world and the spiritual realm. It serves as a reminder that human life, like sugarcane, should remain sweet until its final moment.

3.2.4. *A Bottle*

Denotatively, a bottle of soft drink such as Sprite, Fanta, or Coca-Cola refers to a carbonated beverage with a sweet and refreshing taste. In Minangkabau funeral rituals, this bottle is usually placed together with other objects on a *baki* (a rectangular wooden tray measuring approximately 60 × 80 cm). Physically, it complements the symbolic set representing water and refreshment.

Connotatively, the bottled drink symbolizes a provision to quench the deceased's thirst during the journey to the afterlife. Its sweetness and freshness express the family's hope that the soul's path will be

cool, gentle, and comforting. The bottle also symbolizes consolation and emotional care—an expression of familial love that seeks to ensure the soul does not suffer thirst on its spiritual journey.

At the mythic level, water is perceived as the essence of life and a connector between the human and spiritual worlds. In older myths, water is believed to be the first substance to touch the human body at birth and the last to cleanse it at death. In modern contexts, bottled drinks function as a symbolic transformation of this life-giving element. Colored and carbonated beverages are interpreted as “living water with spirit,” carrying energy and vitality for the soul's long journey. Thus, the bottled drink is not merely a modern consumptive object but an adaptive continuation of ancient symbolic meanings.

3.2.5. *A Glass*

Denotatively, a glass is a cylindrical container used for drinking, typically made of glass. In Minangkabau funeral rituals, a glass is placed together with water or other beverages as part of the ritual equipment. Practically, it serves as a container, but symbolically it becomes an essential element accompanying the soul on its journey.

Connotatively, the glass represents receptivity and spiritual cooling. It symbolizes the soul's readiness to “receive” divine mercy and forgiveness during its journey in the afterlife. Symbolically, the glass also represents the relationship between container and content: the body as the vessel and the soul as its essence—two elements separated by death yet bound in spiritual harmony.

Mythically, the glass is believed to symbolize balance between the human world and the spirit realm. It is regarded as a miniature representation of a “cosmic vessel” holding the water of life flowing between realms. In mystical narratives, the soul is said to “drink” from this vessel as a sign of acceptance and comfort during its passage.

3.2.6. *A “Kambuik” Filled with Rice*

Denotatively, a *kambuik* (also called *kambut*) is a rectangular basket woven from pandan leaves, commonly used to store food or fruit, while rice refers to husked grains of paddy.

Connotatively, a *kambuik* filled with rice symbolizes food sufficiency and household resilience. It reflects the family's capacity to manage resources, maintain domestic stability, and uphold social solidarity. The object also symbolizes women's domestic authority within the Minangkabau matrilineal kinship system.

At the mythic level, the kambuik filled with rice represents the ideal Minangkabau household—one that manages sustenance wisely, preserves customary values, and lives collectively in harmony.

3.2.7. A Teapot

Denotatively, a teapot is a covered container with a handle and spout used for pouring water or beverages. In the turun baka ritual, it is placed near the glass and bottled drink as part of the ritual set, functioning practically as a water container.

Connotatively, the teapot symbolizes a source and distributor of spiritual life. It represents the family's readiness to "pour" prayers and affection onto the soul's journey. With its spout that releases and its body that holds, the teapot symbolizes balance between giving and receiving.

Mythically, the teapot is viewed as a representation of the cosmic womb, the origin and sustainer of life. Water poured from it is believed to be sacred life-water connecting the human world and the spiritual realm, symbolizing love that continues to flow beyond death.

3.2.8. A Sarong

Denotatively, a sarong is a tubular cloth used to cover the body, particularly during daily activities or religious practice. In the turun baka ritual, it is placed alongside other ritual objects as both a body covering and a prayer garment.

Connotatively, the sarong symbolizes warmth, protection, and devotion. It functions as a boundary between the living and the deceased while simultaneously bridging the physical and spiritual realms through final acts of respect.

At the mythic level, the sarong represents the womb of origin and the cyclical nature of life—born from the womb, living under the protection of custom, and returning to the origin wrapped in the same cloth. It becomes a symbolic blanket guiding the soul with warmth and prayer toward divine acceptance.

3.2.9. A Sajadah (Prayer Mat)

Denotatively, a sajadah is a prayer mat used by Muslims during prayer as a clean and sacred surface for prostration.

Connotatively, the prayer mat symbolizes submission, purity, and the path toward forgiveness. Its presence beside the deceased signifies a life once oriented toward prayer and obedience, affirming the religious and moral identity of the deceased within the society.

At the mythic level, the sajadah is perceived as a

"spiritual pathway toward eternity," a luminous surface guiding the soul back to God. It symbolizes the meeting point between earth and heaven, humility and exaltation, marking the transition toward eternal life.

All of these objects are offered as baka ('provisions') symbolically accompanying the deceased on their journey toward the Divine. Subsequently, the objects are distributed to the respective urang siak (religious leaders). This practice reaffirms the belief of the Koto Tangah District society in life after death and underscores the importance of maintaining spiritual relationships between the living and the deceased.

3.3. Symbolism In the Turun Baka Ritual

The turun baka ritual constitutes a customary ceremony that is rich in symbolic meanings. Each ritual object and the sequential order of the ceremony contain signs (symbols) that represent the worldview of the Koto Tangah District society. Within the framework of cultural semiotics, the symbols embedded in this ritual do not merely function as ceremonial accessories but serve as a medium of spiritual communication between the human world and the spirit world. These symbols convey messages concerning the continuity of life, the relationship between humans and nature as well as with the Creator, and moral and social obligations toward family and society.

The symbolism of the turun baka ritual also reflects the value system of the Koto Tangah District society, which emphasizes: (a) mutual cooperation and social solidarity, as the entire family and neighboring society actively participate in the ritual; (b) obedience to customary law and ancestral traditions as a form of respect for tradition as a guiding principle of life; and (c) balance between the physical and the spiritual realms. Death is not perceived as an end but as the beginning of an eternal spiritual existence. Symbols such as sugarcane, bananas, sarong cloths, water, and prayer mats function as material manifestations of these moral and spiritual values. For instance, sugarcane symbolizes support for the soul's journey, while water and the prayer mat signify purity and the act of returning oneself to the Almighty.

The turun baka ritual further reveals a syncretic belief system, namely the integration of Islamic teachings with pre-Islamic or local ancestral traditions. This belief system is reflected in the recitation of prayers and tahlil (Islamic elements), symbolic offerings to the deceased (ancestral belief elements), and a ritual structure that connects the

spirit world and the human world through social mediators. Symbolism thus functions as a spiritual bridge between the temporal world and the afterlife, reinforcing the belief that the soul of the deceased remains present and requires respect in order to maintain cosmic balance.

The cosmological perspective of the Koto Tangah District society regarding death is evident in how they interpret the relationship between humans and the universe. Death is not viewed as the termination of existence but as a transition from the worldly realm to the afterlife. Balance between these two realms is maintained through ritual practices. Symbolism in the turun baka ritual affirms that: (a) the universe consists of interconnected physical and spiritual dimensions; (b) the human soul remains part of the cosmic order after death; and (c) through ritual, humans play an active role in preserving harmony between the corporeal and spiritual elements, between humans and ancestors, and between the temporal world and the hereafter.

Thus, symbolism in the turun baka ritual functions not only as a cultural expression but also as a reflection of the value system, beliefs, and cosmology of the Koto Tangah District society. The ritual affirms the society's perception of life and death as a continuous unity, highlights the balance between tradition and religion, and underscores the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships among humans, ancestors, and the universe.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the turun baka tradition constitutes a complex system of signs that represents the worldview and value system of the Minangkabau society in Koto Tangah District. This tradition is not merely a concluding procession within the sequence of death rituals but also functions as a symbolic medium containing denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. At the denotative level, turun baka manifests as a social and religious practice involving the provision of baka

(‘provisions’) to parties representing the deceased. At the connotative level, however, both the ritual process and the baka objects convey symbolic meanings that articulate relationships between humans and God, family, and community. For example, the umbrella symbolizes protection and hope for the soul's safety in the afterlife, while bananas represent the transience of life and serve as a moral reminder to perform good deeds during one's lifetime.

At the mythological level, the entire system of signs within the turun baka tradition constructs a cultural representation of death as a transition rather than the end of life. Death is understood as a journey toward the spiritual realm that requires moral provisions, familial affection, and social acknowledgment from the community. In this sense, turun baka becomes a symbol of harmonization between custom and religion, between the temporal world and the eternal one.

Beyond its symbolic meanings, turun baka also fulfills a strong social function. The ritual serves as a space for interaction and social bonding among various social groups: children and parents, sons- and daughters-in-law and parents-in-law, siblings-in-law, induk bako and anak pisang, as well as community members and village authorities. Through this collective engagement, values of mutual cooperation, solidarity, and togetherness are tangibly realized in accordance with the Minangkabau customary principle *barek samo dipikua, ringan samo dijinjang* (‘heavy burdens are carried together, light burdens are shared’). Consequently, the turun baka tradition is not only understood as a death ritual but also as a system of signs that embodies social, religious, and cultural meaning structures. It reflects the collective myth of the Koto Tangah District society regarding balance between worldly life and the hereafter, between customary values and religious teachings, and simultaneously serves as a medium for character formation and the reinforcement of Minangkabau cultural identity.

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