

Architecture of Surau and Its Role in Minangkabau Society: the Case of Surau Lubuak Bauak Nagari Batipuah Baruah, West Sumatra

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Abstract. *Rumah gadang* and *surau* are two important vernacular buildings of Minangkabau society and their architecture reflect the culture of Minangkabau society and harmony with nature. As part of the matrilineal culture of Minangkabau, women own the house and young boys have to live and learn in *surau* owned by the clans. *Surau* is the center of the activities of the Minangkabau boys and functions not only as a place of worship, but also as a place of Islamic and informal education. As part of *merantau* culture in Minangkabau or leaving home for a certain amount of time to gain experience and make some fortune, activities in *surau* also prepare those boys to be independent. It is the aim of this paper is to analyze sustainable cultural and architectural values of the Minangkabau *surau* and how *surau* has sustained to function as a place of worship and as a center of Islam teaching. Although the function of *surau* as the place for young boys' activities and get education fade with the spread modernity and changes in Minangkabau society, the sustainability of *surau* means sustaining Minangkabau culture.

1 Introduction

The Minangkabau people is an ethnic group of West Sumatra that was known as embracing a unique matrilineal system and also culture strongly influenced by Islam. Minangkabau traditional house or called *rumah gadang* is actually a clan residence. This house is inhabited by girls while boys have to sleep in *surau* that also belongs to the clan that and is located not far from the cluster of *rumah gadang*. In addition to serving as a sleeping quarter for boys, *surau* becomes the center of religious activities. A boy who has reached an adolescent is not allowed to sleep in his mother's house but in *surau*, therefore a small boy has been taught to live independently outside the house in. In *surau*, the young boys do not only rest but also learn Islam, customs, and martial arts – those things that the young boys learn in *surau* become parts of their skills to survive. From *Surau*, those young boys, later on, move to other city and usually develop trading activities.

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Modernity that occurs in the Minangkabau society leads to a cultural shift in Minangkabau from a strong clan community to a nuclear family. Modernity changes custom and culture of Minangkabau society and *rumah gadang* and *surau* are exposed to a huge impact in this cultural change. In the past, *rumah gadang* and *surau* were the centers of Minangkabau culture and now the function of *rumah gadang* and *surau*, which are associated with the identity of Minangkabau society inherited from the ancestors, gradually fades to make way to modern culture.

The vernacular architecture of the Minangkabau society, including *surau*, is an architectural property that must be preserved. Changes and shifts in how Minangkabau people live at the present threaten the existence of Minangkabau vernacular architecture. At the present, *surau* still functions as a place of worship, but its functions as the place where young boys learn Islam, culture and local customs are no longer present. From this issue, it is our intention to examine the role of *surau* in Minangkabau society, especially the architecture of *surau*, the spatial arrangement and how the architecture of *surau* is a part of a larger culture. By investigating the sustainable cultural and architectural value of *surau* in Minangkabau we hope to emphasize the importance of sustaining architecture of *surau* in sustaining the Minangkabau culture.

2 The Culture of Minangkabau People

2.2 Vernacular Architecture of Minangkabau People

Etymologically, the word vernacular comes from the Latin *vernaculus* which means original or indigenous. Vernacular architecture refers to the type of original architecture present at a specific time or place and does not come from the outside (Ackerman, 2017). Architectural work within the realm of vernacular architecture is a work designed by a person or group of people without formal training and specialized knowledge of design but they are guided by rules and customs (Brunskill, 2000). As time passes, traditional people like Minangkabau people undergo a modernization process and cultural exchange that transform local cultural values. The pattern of changes in architecture can be classified into some conditions (Kartono, 1999):

- The fixed form with a fixed meaning is the appearance of the architecture still adopts the old form though by using changes in building materials and the old meaning (mythology, cosmology, and genealogy).
- The fixed form with new meaning is the appearance of the form of architecture still adopt the old form but given a new meaning that occurs in the new transition society. Sacred meanings are transformed into profane, as well as desacralizing or eliminating all mystics.
- A new form with a fixed meaning is the appearance of a form of architecture that presents a new form in terms of the old elements that are renewed, so it does not escape at all because of new interpretations of the old form, but given a long meaning to avoid culture shock.
- A new form with a new meaning is the appearance of a form of architecture that presents a new form accompanied by a new meaning occurs because of a total paradigm shift in cultural acculturation.

Minangkabau people are part of the Austronesian tribes that spread to Nusantara archipelago and Minangkabau culture today is the result of an assimilation of old and new Malay culture as well as some other influences. The architecture developed by the Austronesians in the Nusantara archipelago is generally divided into residential buildings,

shrines, community hall, and storage. Similar to other Austronesian tribal buildings, vernacular architecture of the Minangkabau people can be divided into four types of buildings: *rumah gadang* (residence), *surau* (shrine), *balai adat* (community hall) and *rangkiang* (storage). Minangkabau vernacular architecture has post and beam structures raised on stilts with gabled roofs, typical of many other houses throughout South East Asia. Vernacular architecture of Minangkabau is organized in a hierarchical order, expressed in the arrangement of spaces and height. The highest level of the house is dedicated for important spaces while the less important spaces are lower in level and smaller in size.

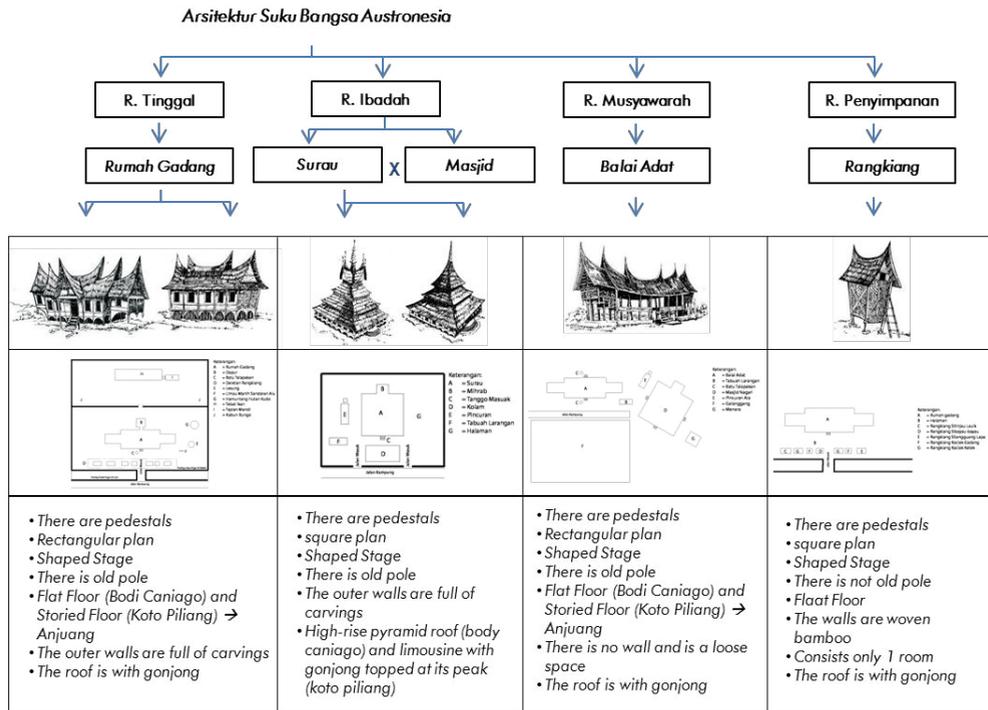


Fig. 1. Vernacular Architecture of Minangkabau. Source: Typology Ventilasi Bangunan Vernakular Indonesia.

2.2 Place of Worship and Belief of Minangkabau People

In architecture, the spatial arrangement in vernacular architecture is a sign system that vernacular buildings reflect symbols of heavenly-earthly images or uniting macrocosms with microcosms (Rapoport, 1969). Socio-cultural factors are the main forces and the spatial arrangement of vernacular architecture consists of a various system of a sign so that things can be interpreted (meaning and value) and provoke certain reactions. Vernacular architecture most of the time also signifies social status and the identity of the social group by reflecting cultural values that clearly embodies in the idea of sacred or profane, male or female, front or back, end or base and so on. Symbolism in vernacular architecture creates identity, culture and belief system of traditional people.

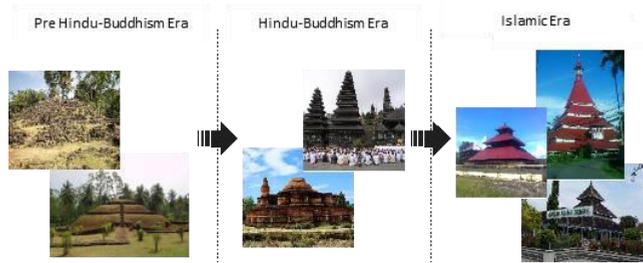


Fig. 2. The Development of Places of Worship of Austronesian People in the Nusantara Archipelago. Source: Authors' illustration edited from various sources.

The worship place of Minangkabau society is generally referred to as *surau*. According to Dobbin (1971: 120), the term *surau* itself is a well-known term in Minangkabau society before the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara archipelago. Worship buildings in Nusantara archipelago generally have a pyramid roof, very similar to the roof of Meru on Hindu temples in Bali. When Islam came to Minangkabau, there was already animist belief and prehistoric culture. The evidence for this claim is the archaeological findings of megalithic buildings in the form of *punden berundak* and *menhir* around the central Minangkabau region which is functioned as a center of spiritual activity of Minangkabau society at that time (Dobbin: 138). These temples are usually built on the upper reaches of large rivers that became the gateway to enter Minangkabau region. Some archives during the Dutch colonial era show us that *surau* was already existed (from the digital collection of Tropenmuseum and KITLV).

Table 1. Some changes in the architecture of *surau*

← Before 1900	1900 -1950	After 1950 →
<p>Architecture Surau in the early days following the form of Architecture of Rumah Gadang which has Gonjong shape and has a roof of multilevel peaks.</p> <p>Surau buildings follow the rules of the traditional building of Minangkabau society built by each clan.</p>	<p>In the large mosque, there are tower buildings that follow the architecture of minarets in general, which are made of cement, but still retain the original architecture in surau buildings that use wood and roof of fibers.</p> <p>In the mid-20th century people's homes began to use a roof made of zinc, while the roof of the surau still using the fibers.</p>	<p>After Indonesia's independence, the roofs of Surau's buildings have been using zinc replacing the fibers, with wooden buildings. In terms of shape, still maintains the shape of the stacking roof and house stage.</p> <p>Entering the 21st century most surau architecture uses cement to replace wood. some of Surau also changed shape following the modern architecture with the dome. there are also many surau that are not functioned anymore and not maintained.</p>

Previously, *surau* is part of a preparation for *merantau*. The matrilineal Minangkabau society's kinship system affirms that boys do not have a place in *rumah gadang*. *Surau* is not limited only as a place to sleep at night, but also a place to learn of religious, customs and cultural matters. All the boys who live in *surau* will get full support

from *ninik mamak* or their uncles. In Minangkabau, the society has the concept of *alam terkembang jadi guru* (nature can become a teacher) that reflects the importance of nature and built environment as part of one's education as well as the emphasize of living independently during *merantau*. One *surau* usually serves one clan and this means *surau* functions as religious and informal educational institution and an integral part of Minangkabau society.

The tendency of migration or *merantau* in Minangkabau society is closely related to the position of men in the system of Minangkabau society. After men leave their land and successfully live in a new place or *rantau* cities, they have more experience, freedom, and the matrilineal culture seems to influence them less. Women who are married and live outside the Minangkabau land also experience less strict Minangkabau culture. The architecture of *surau* does not change a lot but the function of *surau* changes. Along with the erosion of the matrilineal system in Minangkabau society, boys seldom sleep in *surau* and the existence of formal education further reduces the function of *surau* in Minangkabau society. Now some of *surau* are left degraded because people seldom used *surau* for religious activities and boys' informal school. Previously, successful *rantau* people came back to their village and continue to support *surau* as an informal institution. Nowadays, many people who migrate stay in their *rantau* city and this means increasing involvement of men in their wives matrilineage, as well as less support for the traditional role of *surau* for clans.

3 Surau Lubuak Bauak in Minangkabau

3.1 Lubuak Bauak Settlement Patterns

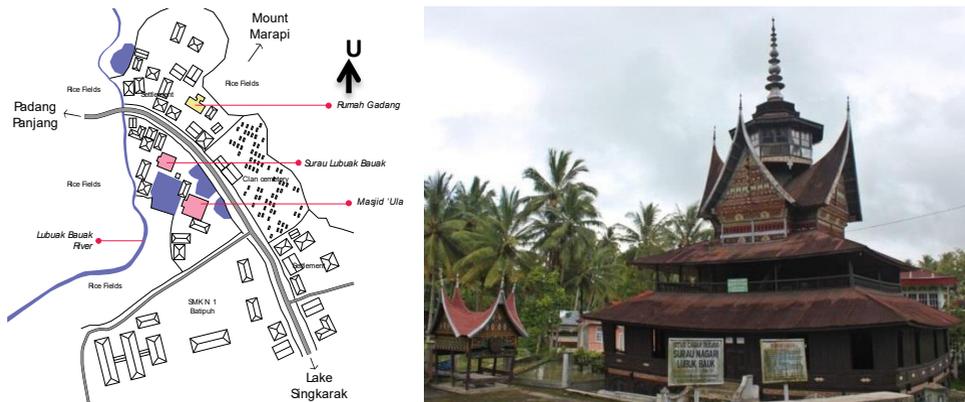


Fig. 3. (a). Jorong Lubuak Bauak Area, and (b). Surau Lubuak Bauak from the East. Source: Authors' documentation.

Surau Lubuak Bauak was built in 1884 by the head of Jambak's Clan in Nagari Batipuah, Datuak Bandar Panjang within the area of 486 square meters. The building was built with *Koto Piliang* type that was seen from the composition of the roof that has a *gonjong* and not owned by a certain clan as *surau* in general but belong to Nagari Batipuah.

Figure 3 shows the residential pattern in Lubuak Bauak and each land in this area is utilized in accordance with the environmental conditions of the land. The settlements of clan members are usually placed on a flat area and near a river and paddy plantation. In Minangkabau, typical kampung or *adat* settlements have some clan houses or *rumah*

gadang, *surau*, graveyard, market and *Balai adat* or customs hall. For Jambak clan of the Nagari Batipuah, there are also some *rumah gadang*, *surau*, a market, customs hall and a mosque as the central fo religious activities. Located at the highest terrain is the burial place for the Jambak clans. The lower area along the river flow functions as the clan paddy fields. The area for *surau* is located near the river basin so there are many fish ponds. The 'Ula Mosque is located on the south side of *surau* separated by the *surau*'s guard house. The mosque is more spacious than *surau* because the mosque is a place of Friday prayers for all people of Nagari Batipuah.

3.2 The Architecture of Surau

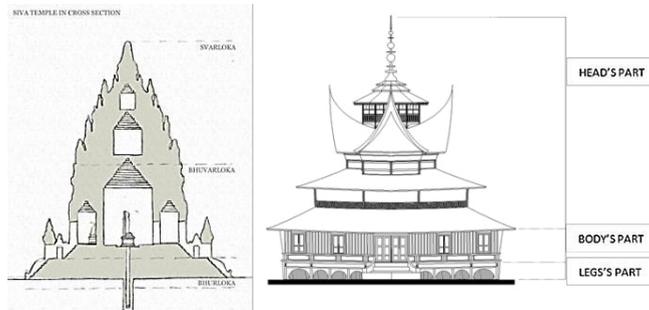


Fig. 4. The Part of Surau Corresponding to The Part of Hindu Temple such as in Bali. Source: *Konsepni Panca Mahabhuta dalam Perwujudan Arsitektur Tradisional Bali*, p. 11.

The architecture of Minangkabau *surau* was also influenced by the pre-Islamic culture, such as in the age of animism-dynamism or Hindu-Buddhist era, which was meant as a place of worshipping the gods and the ancestors. After Islam came to Minangkabau, *surau* functioned as a center of Islamic education for Minangkabau society. The multi-story pyramid roof of *surau* Lubuak Bauak may be understood as a *meru* or a mountain in Hindu and Buddhist mythology. But this shape is combined with the *gonjong* roof on all four sides that characterizes *koto piliang* architecture.

Minangkabau *surau* architecture is divided into three levels, the foot, the body and the head. The foot is the lower part of *surau* that functions as a storage. Many traditional people who lived in Nusantara consider the lower part is a symbol of the unclean underworld so that the sacred part must be put higher than the ground. This area is not used for any religious activities and usually only used for a storage. The position of the door is in the middle of the front side of the building, which creates a symmetry for *surau*. The body part of *surau* is the main part of the building that holds various religious and community activities. At the center of *surau* stands a pair of poles to support the *gonjong* roof. The overall pole on the *surau* is also in an outward sloping position and not perpendicular to the ground. The poles further strengthen the structure of the building as well as strengthen the connection with the horizontal blocks. This sloping pole is called *condong nan indak mambaok rabah* (inclines that do not bring down).

The head part is the most sacred part of *surau*. The basic shape of the roof of the *surau* Lubuak Bauak is a pyramid roof with a *gonjong* roof at all four sides, which is similar to Koto Piliang architecture. The roof of this *surau* has three levels. The first and second levels are a trapezoid and the third level is *gonjong* roof with the addition of a roof crown at the top of the building. The overall arrangement of the pyramid roof of *surau* also culminates to one point. If the curved trapezoidal arch lines are extended, they will meet at one point above the rooftop crown. This symbolizes the sacredness of this *surau* and as a place of worship to the God. Minangkabau people call this point *titiak nan dari ateh* (the

point from above), which also mean that the purpose of the life of Minangkabau people should lead upward or to the God. Minangkabau people use special terms for this purpose of life *titiak nan dari ateh*, *mambasuik dari bumi* that describes the human position that comes from the bottom that leads upward. In addition to the pyramid roof that leads upward, the four *gonjong* arches resemble a circle that meets each other at one point at the top of the crown.

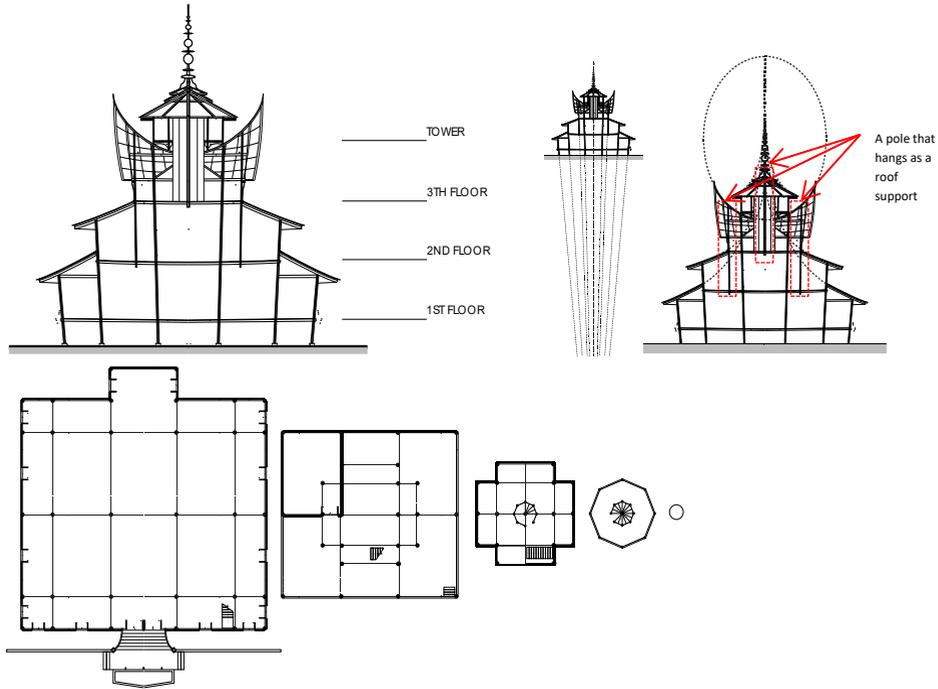


Fig. 6. (a). Section of Surau, (b). Imaginary Line Sketches of Poles to One Point and Roundabouts to One, and (c). Floor Plan of Surau Lubuak Bauak. Source: Authors' documentation.

Surau Lubuak Bauak has four floors consisting of three functional floors and one tower. The three functional floors have different functions that are adapted from the aristocracy's characteristic of *koto piliang* architecture. The lower floors have a square plan but in contrary to the lower floors, the highest floor or the tower has an octagonal plan. Both the roof and the floor plan of the highest floor show enclosed space and a hierarchy of space sacredness.

The first floor has a dimension of 12 x 12 meters with additional space at the back as a mihrab with a dimension of 4 x 2.5 meters. The first floor is the main room with three-meter-height ceiling. People use the lower floors for daily prayers and informal schools. As Surau Nagari, Lubuak Bauak Surau also serves as a place for a discussion when there is a conflict in Nagari Batipuah. The main room of *surau* becomes a courtroom used to hear arguments from conflicting parties and to decide the first level case. The four clans in Batipuah will sit together to resolve the problem led by their chief and old men of each clan will also be present. The second floor has a dimension of 10 x 7.5. This room has no wall and functions as courtroom when the chief and the old men cannot find the solution for the clans' problem. At this stage, only the chief and respected elderly may be present and they all sit in a circle on the second floor.

The third floor has a dimension of 3.5 x 3.5 meters and this floor is located in the space under the *gonjong* roof. This space has the height of a standing adult. The room on the third floor is not used for *surau*'s daily activities but only used as a final courtroom among the

clan chiefs. The decision in this final room becomes a final decision against unfinished dispute sessions at the lower levels. The chief of the four clans will sit in a circle and look for the right decision for the clans. The floor plan of the tower is an octagonal plan with a radius of two meters. The position of this tower is above the *gonjong* roof. The floor of the tower is connected to the third floor with a staircase. The space of this tower has two meters of height and this space is formerly functioned as a place of the muezzin to perform the call to prayer.

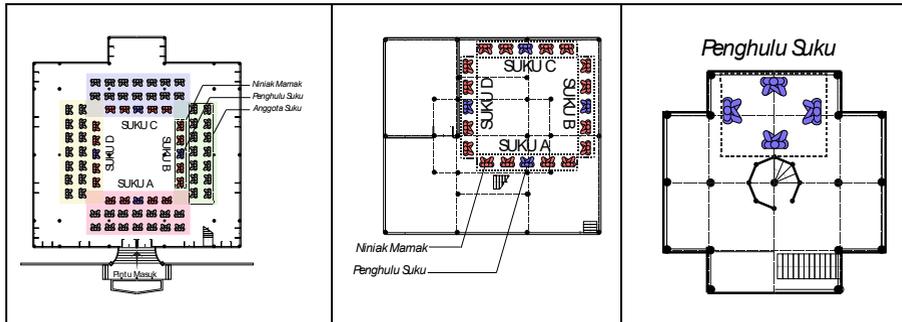


Fig. 7. (a). Composition of Seats of Clan Representative on First Floor, (b). Composition of Ninik Mamak Representative Seating on the Second Floor, and (c). Cluster Seats of Clan Chief on the Third Floor. Source: Authors' documentation.

3.3 Changes in the role of Surau Lubuak Bauak in the People Nagari Batipuah Baruh

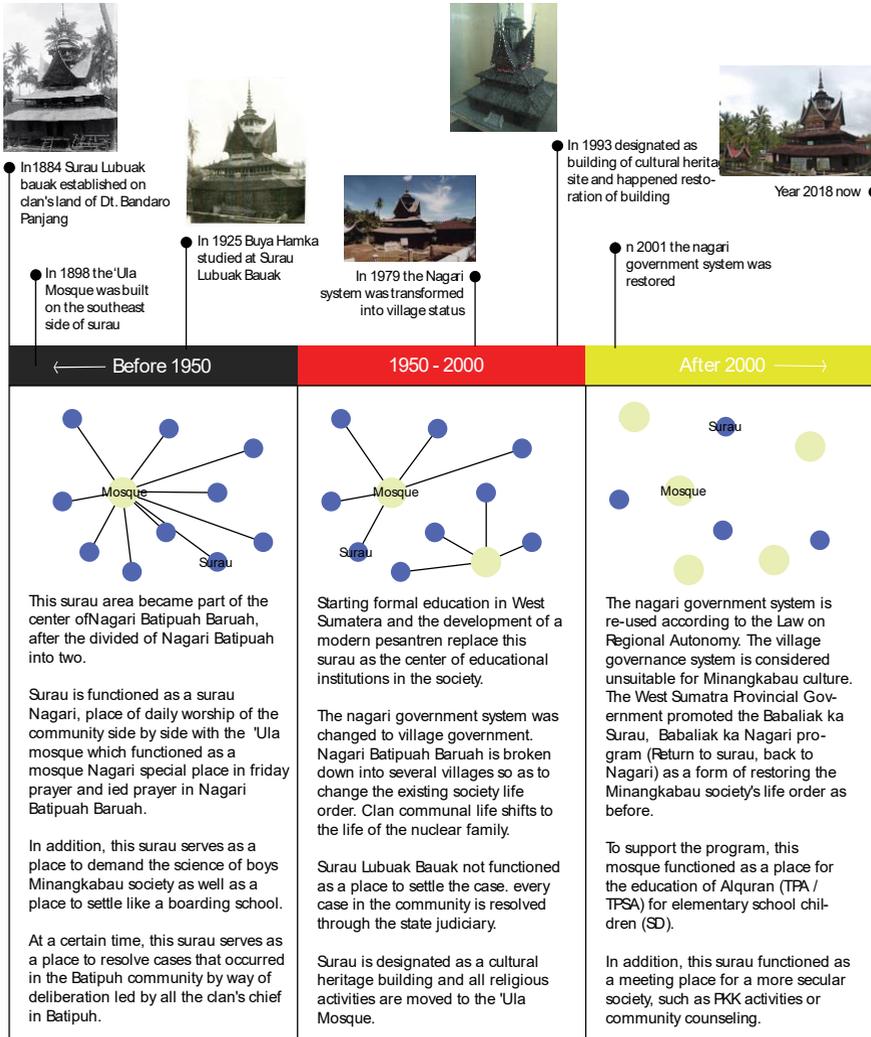
Surau Lubuak Bauak in Nagari Batipuah Bauak suffers some changes since people who live in Batipuah also changes because of modernization in many aspects happened in Minangkabau society. People no longer follow the value of surau as a place to educate young boys and those young boys are very often live with their family. The meaning of surau is less sacred because their existence is limited to the place for prayers only instead of as the place for educating young boys.

Based on the theory of patterns of change in architecture proposed by J. Lukito Kartono, changes that occur in surau Lubuak Bauak can be categorized as a fixed form with new meaning that shown in table 2. In the beginning, this surau has a very big role in Batipuh. Apart from being a place of worship, surau in the realm of Minangkabau at that time became the cultural center of Minangkabau society. Surau was the center of the life of Minangkabau boys, where *ninik mamak* (the uncles) lowered knowledge to his nephews as a form of hereditary heritage. So that the function of the surau at that time was more like a monastery as it functions in pre-Islamic times that proposed by Kroeskamp. In addition, this surau was also intended as a place of Batipuah society solved problems that occur within the society.

In the post-Independence period, *surau* was still used as a residence of the young boys of the surrounding of Lubuak Bauak, however, the function of *surau* as an educational institution began to fade. This change cannot be separated from the presence of formal schools and more modern Islamic boarding school education. At that time, people still practiced Minangkabau custom and the boys were prohibited to stay at *rumah gadang*. In the 1970s, the traditional system of *nagari* was abolished and transformed into village administration in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Indonesia. This change in the administration of the city resulted in a change of social order within Minangkabau society. The clan chief who previously had the power to organize the *nagari* community was

replaced by the village head. The clan chief only had a role in traditional activities. Likewise, the problems that occurred in Batipuah will be brought into the village office or formal justice institution established by the government. Although in 2001 there was an enactment of the regional autonomy law with the return of the nagari system, it still could not restore the role of *surau*.

Table 2. Changes in the Role of Surau Lubuak Bauk



4 Conclusion

The Minangkabau people in West Sumatera Province has a rich and unique culture and is famous for maintaining the matrilineal system of inheritance. Islamic and custom are integrated and both Islam and custom and are the basis of Minangkabau society that is reflected on the value of *Adat Basandi Sarak, Sarak Basandi Kitabullah* (the custom based on shari'a, the shari'a based on the book of God). *Surau* as one of the architectural features of Minangkabau society is important – in addition to *rumah gadang* – as a place for religious activities and education of young boys. The culture of Minangkabau society

includes customary, kinship and belief systems, as well as the settlement pattern that becomes the life view of Minangkabau society. The important of surau for Minangkabau people can be understood from Surau Lubuak Bauak, Nagari Batipuah Baruah, in Tanah Datar Regency. Batipuah also becomes one of the adherents of *the Koto Piliang* system that is characterized, an aristocrat. In terms of architecture, this surau has the same form as the Hindu temple building, both the structure and arrangement of space which signify the similarity of traditional architecture of the Austronesian tribal people. *Surau* has sustained to function as a place of worship, a center of Islam teaching and informal education. The function of *surau* as the place for young boys' activities and get education fade with the spread of modernity. This paper has analyzed the importance of *surau* as a center of activities and the sustainability of *surau* means sustaining the Minangkabau culture.

Acknowledgements

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