Journal of Social Studies (JSS), ISSN: 1858-2656 (p); 2721-4036 (e)
Vol. 22. No. 1 (2026), pp. 61-68 doi: 10.21831/jss.v22i1.98162

Cultural identity and social adaptation of indian community in Padang in the context of Minangkabau Culture

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to analyse the cultural identity and social adaption of the Indian Muslim minority in Kampung Keling, Padang in the perspective of the dominant Minangkabau culture. The research adopts a qualitative method to explore the ways minority communities keep their cultural identity while adapting to a multicultural social environment. Data were acquired through in-depth interviews, observation and reading of literature. The findings demonstrate that the Indian community keeps its cultural identity through religious institutions, cultural activities and social customs such as the serak gulo tradition and the major role of Masjid Muhammadan. At the same time, the community shows social adaptability by interaction with the surrounding Minangkabau society, including the use of local language and involvement in social activities. This encounter illustrates a process of cultural acculturation that builds social peace and mutual understanding. However, being a minority population, the community is still facing some obstacles such as social prejudices and pressures. In conclusion, the research reveals that cultural identification and social adaptability can co-exist in a healthy balance, developing an integration pattern that encourages social cohesiveness in a multicultural society.
Keywords: *cultural identity; Indian community; Kampung Keling; multicultural society; social adaptation.*

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural societies have been important in the contemporary world due to globalisation, migration and societal development. These activities also bring individuals from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds into greater contact, yielding complex and dynamic social situations. In such situations, the cultural identity plays a vital role in the way the individuals see themselves and interact with others. Cultural identity is a dynamic idea, not a set entity, but a fluid process of development through social interaction, historical experience, and adaptability to changing contexts Lu & Wang (2025) .

In multicultural contexts, one is often exposed to numerous cultural influences which lead to the creation of different and occasionally hybrid identities. Cultural identity is established by shared values , traditions and social behaviours that provide individuals with a sense of belonging and significance . Simultaneously, these identities are constantly negotiated when individuals engage with diverse cultural groups, emphasising the fluidity and developing character of identity Zhang et al. (2025) .

The increasing diversity of society also creates major problems, especially for ethnic minority populations. Cultural norms that are dominant are often hard for minority populations to adjust to while keeping their own cultural identity. These challenges can include social marginalisation, lack of representation and structural limitations to their engagement in social and institutional contexts. Research shows that ethnic minority people often feel excluded and 'other' which can affect their motivation, social engagement and well-being Isik et al. (2021) .

Minority communities may also experience systemic obstacles that restrict their access to opportunities and resources. These challenges are generally linked to cultural differences, linguistic hurdles, and social preconceptions, which might prevent their absorption into the larger society. Cultural competency and inclusive social structures are therefore vital in helping minority communities and promoting social equality Sawrikar (2020) .

In multicultural situations, the interaction of diverse cultural groups typically leads to processes such as acculturation and social adaptation. These processes do not inevitably result in the loss of original cultural identity, but rather offer the possibility for individuals and communities to negotiate between the preservation of their traditions and the adaptation to dominant cultural norms. Cultural identity is thus a dynamic result of continual negotiation among many cultural influences Xiao et al. (2025) .

Indonesia is a unique case of multicultural society which is characterised by a high degree of ethnic, cultural and religious variety. In this regard, local cultures tend to be hegemonic cultural systems that affect societal norms, values, and interaction styles. One of the examples is Minangkabau culture that has an important part in social life in Padang. The dominant local culture of Minangkabau values affects the interaction, adaptation and place of minority communities in the wider social framework.

In Padang, among the minority communities is the Indian Muslim community, better known as the Muhammadan community, who can be found in Kampung Keling. This community has its beginnings with Indian traders, primarily from Gujarat who settled in the area and built a distinct cultural and social setup. The Indian population in Kampung Keling has preserved its cultural identity over time through religious institutions, social customs, and communal traditions, while also interacting with other ethnic groups in the region (Alam et al., 2025; Syafeli, 2021) .

The presence of Masjid Muhammadan as a historical and cultural landmark is a testimony to the strong cultural identity of the Indian population. Moreover, traditions such as serak gulo indicate how cultural practices are maintained and at the same time, how they serve as a means for social contact and integration with different communities. This behaviour shows that the Indian population is not alienated but is actively participating in social adaptation in the dominant Minangkabau cultural milieu Syafeli (2021).

There are studies on multiculturalism, cultural identity and social adaptation, however some limits still remain. For one, much of the research is generic or national-level analysis and often does not consider the particular experiences of minority communities in localised situations Zhang et al. (2025) . Secondly, the existing research is mostly dominated by Western viewpoints, which may not adequately capture the dynamics of cultural identity in non-Western contexts. Third, there is currently minimal research on how minority communities preserve their cultural identity and adapt to dominant local cultures in everyday social behaviours.

The gaps suggest the need to investigate the cultural identity and social adaptation of the Indian population in Kampung Keling, Padang in the context of the dominant Minangkabau culture. The aim of this research is to find out how the community maintains its cultural identity, communicates with other cultural groups and adjusts to social changes in a multicultural setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Identity in Social Context

Cultural identity is a basic notion for understanding how people build meaning in their social context. It represents ideas, beliefs and cultural experiences that impact individuals' views and behaviours. As it is related to emotional attachment and perception of value Dong & Li (2025) , cultural identity has a crucial role in influencing social interactions and decision-making processes.

In current culture, cultural identity is not just limited to traditional sites but also finds expression in different fields such as economic, social, and even digital situations. People are constantly remaking their identity through contacts, experiences, and cultural exchanges. This means that cultural identity is fluid and is subject to societal change. Therefore, it serves as a fundamental foundation for individuals in constructing meaning within their social environment. Through this foundation, cultural identity guides individuals' worldviews and behaviors, which in turn significantly influence their patterns of social interaction and decision-making processes.

Cultural Identity and Social Meaning Construction

The creation of cultural identity correlates directly with social interaction and symbolic significance. Today, people are actively involved in developing and expressing their cultural identity through a variety of modes of involvement and contact. Cultural identity is not only a mirror of ancestry but also a process of constructing meaning, which links individuals to their social surroundings Zhang et al. (2025) .

Not to mention, emotional experiences and social ties contribute to cultural identity. It is a bridge between individuals and their communities, allowing them to preserve a sense of belonging as they move through changing social conditions. This shows the relevance of cultural identity as an individual and shared concept. Cultural identity serves as the fundamental foundation for individuals to construct meaning within their social environment, encompassing ideas, beliefs, emotional bonds, and perceptions of values that underlie behavior and decision-making. More than merely a reflection of ancestral heritage, cultural identity evolves dynamically through active social interaction and symbolic significance, which continuously connect individuals to their surrounding social context

Social Adaptation as a Collective Process

Social adaptation is the process of adapting of people and groups to social change. Adaptation is not an individual process, but also a community one, with common habits, routines and relationships across society. Studies on social adaptation practices reveal that adaptation is typically generated by everyday acts and behaviours in communities, not just through official policies Teebken et al. (2023).

This perspective highlights the embeddedness of adaptation in social practices and cultural environments. People come up with ways to deal with problems in the environment and with other people . They do this with other people . Thus social adaptation is the outcome of structural factors and local knowledge.

Multiculturalism and Social Integration

Multiculturalism is the existence of various cultural groups in a society. It can be seen as a social reality and as a framework for managing cultural variety Brosseau & Dewing (2018). In multicultural communities diversity is not just recognised but also regulated by social, cultural and institutional means.

The presence of several ethnic and cultural groups needs the development of integration techniques to sustain societal harmony. Social integration is the development of common ideals, understanding and inclusive relations among diverse cultural groupings

Integration in Multi-Ethnic Communities

Studies of multi-ethnic communities show that social integration can be achieved through common ideals and collective activities. In Bali, the integration of the many ethnic groups is promoted by religious activities, common spaces and traditional organisations that incorporate several communities Suastika et al. (2020).

These shared ideals become a common denominator that enables disparate groups to cohabit harmoniously. Within a multicultural society, cultural traditions, social structures, and community relationships are vital to maintaining harmony. This shows that integration is not just a structural but also a cultural process.

Indian Community in Kampung Keling, Padang

The existence of the Indian Muslim community in Padang is a noteworthy example of a minority group that has been able to preserve its cultural identity in a multi-cultural society. Historically, the community was established by Indian traders, primarily from Gujarat, who settled in the coastal parts of Padang and so established what is today known as Kampung Keling Alam et al. (2025) .

Over the years, the Indian community created a unique cultural identity closely tied with religion, tradition and social organisations. One of the most visible manifestations of their presence is Masjid Muhammadan, which serves not only as a place of worship but also as a cultural and social hub for the community. The mosque is a combination of Indian cultural influences and local adaptation, implying that cultural identity is maintained through physical structures and social rituals Alam et al. (2025) .

Other than physical symbols, cultural identity is also preserved through ancient behaviours such as the serak gulo custom. This tradition has been practiced for generations and is a way of expressing thanks and sharing with the community, while also establishing social ties among community members. The tradition also supports interethnic engagement and social integration in Padang Syafeli (2021) .

The involvement of different ethnic communities in serak gulo shows that the Indian community does not immure itself but actively involves itself in social contact. This engagement enhances social cohesion, promotes solidarity and tolerance among many ethnic groups in Padang Syafeli (2021) . Thus, the Indian group is able to retain its cultural identity while adapting to the dominant Minangkabau cultural context.

Kampung Keling is also a multiethnic place that has been shaped by historical migration and ethnic settlement patterns. The construction of ethnicity-based townships in Padang illustrates the co-existence and interaction of diverse populations within the same social structure Syafeli (2021). Though a minority, the Indian community has shown perseverance to preserve its cultural history and maintain peaceful relations with other communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study applies a qualitative research approach to analyse the cultural identity and social adaption of the Indian population in Kampung Keling, Padang. Qualitative research is used to study social phenomena in depth based on participants' views and experiences Sugiyono (2017) .

The investigation was conducted in Kampung Keling which is renowned as a hamlet of the Indian Muslim minority. In this study, informants were selected using purposive sampling, the participants were selected based on their knowledge and relevance to the research issue Sugiyono (2017) .

Data were acquired by three ways, in-depth interview, observation and literature study. Detailed information on cultural identification and social adaption was collected through interviews. Observations were employed to observe directly social interactions and cultural behaviours in the field. Meanwhile, literature investigation was conducted to support the analysis with the necessary theoretical references Sugiyono (2017).

The data were analysed using qualitative descriptive analysis which included data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusion. The purpose of this analysis is to seek patterns and understand the way the Indian community retains its cultural identity while adjusting to the social environment around it Sugiyono (2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The outcomes of this research reveal that the Indian Muslim population in Kampung Keling, Padang builds its cultural identity by adjusting itself to the dominant Minangkabau culture. This

dynamic connection is evident in cultural practices, social behaviour and physical symbols within the group.

The field observation shows that Masjid Muhammadan in Kampung Keling is not only a place of prayer, but also a central location for social and cultural interaction. The mosque is a symbol of the presence and resilience of the Indian Muslim community in a minority setting. The architectural style and its active involvement in community activities imply a strong, enduring group identity.



Figure 1. Masjid Muhammadan in Kampung Keling, Padang (Field Documentation, 2025).

The significance of mosque is not limited to the religious functions but it also becomes a space which supports social cohesiveness and cultural identity. The informant explained: "*we frequently assemble at the mosque, not just for prayers but also for community events*". This statement shows that religious spaces are important in the construction of the group identity in a multicultural environment. The maintenance of historic customs such as the Serak Gulo celebration also exemplifies cultural identity. The informant stressed that:

"*we still have customs like Serak Gulo since it is part of our identity as Indian descendants*".

This statement reveals the fact that cultural practices are deliberately maintained as a way of strengthening identity. This finding is consistent with the notion of cultural acculturation, which refers to the interplay of multiple cultural aspects without removing their original traits Setyaningsih (2020).

Interestingly, the survey also found out that the Serak Gulo ritual is not only attended by Indian community but also incorporates members of the local Minangkabau society. It's a process of cultural acceptance and social integration. Past study has demonstrated that the involvement of diverse ethnic groups in cultural practices is indicative of successful acculturation and social acceptance Walid (2024). Thus, the tradition of Serak Gulo becomes a means for forging interethnic connections and strengthening social harmony.

As for social adaptability, the Indian Muslim community is flexible in dealing with the majority culture. This is shown in the employment of local languages for day-to-day communication. The informant said:

"in our daily lives we utilise largely Minangkabau language and Indonesian language so that we can speak easily with others".

This adaptation is an attempt to fit into the larger social environment without forsaking their cultural heritage. Moreover, social contact patterns reflect a balance between preserving internal solidarity and interaction with the outside society. The informant told;

"in our community we are more connected, but we have contact with the outside society, especially in everyday activities".

This indicates that the community has a selective adaption strategy, where cultural uniqueness is conserved, yet interaction with other groups is still possible. Tradition is also a very important social value system that helps maintain cohesion in the society. Traditions are not only cultural expressions but also a system of values that is developed and sustained in society Yahya et al. (2022). Here, cultural rituals are a means of creating relationships and reaffirming a communal identity.

Also, the interaction between religion and culture helps to establish a peaceful social environment. Religion and culture are connected and affect the diversity of social life Katili (2018). Religious beliefs are interwoven in cultural customs in Kampung Keling, allowing the community to coexist harmoniously despite their cultural diversity. But the report also identifies certain social barriers. The informant said that:

"occasionally there are stereotypes from others but we strive to ignore them and keep living happily".

This suggests that the community has adjusted socially, yet they still face societal pressures as a minority group. However, the capacity to preserve identity while adjusting to the prevailing culture reflects a deep resilience inside the group.

In general, the results indicate that the Indian Muslim population in Kampung Keling shows a pattern of integration, where cultural identity and social adaptability are balanced. This represents a successful negotiation between the preservation of cultural history and the aspirations of a multicultural society.

CONCLUSION

The study suggests that the Indian Muslim community in Kampung Keling, Padang, exhibits a dynamic interaction between cultural identification and social adaptability in the dominant Minangkabau cultural milieu. The results reveal that the community is able to keep its cultural identity through religious institutions, cultural practices, and social customs, while at the same time being able to adapt to the surrounding social context.

The research shows that the cultural identification and social adaptation are not opposite processes, but complimentary factors that contribute to social integration. The contact between Indian population and local Minangkabau community is an example of cultural acculturation that promotes mutual understanding and social harmony. Here the community uses an integration method, which allows them to maintain their cultural history and at the same time engage in larger social engagement.

The survey also notes that the community still experiences some social obstacles as a minority group, especially in terms of stereotypes and societal pressure. Despite these hurdles, the group exhibits resilience in keeping its identity while adapting to the mainstream cultural milieu.

Based on these findings, it is suggested that future studies study cultural identification and social adjustment in other minority groups to offer more comparative perspectives. Further research might also explore the influence of government policies and social institutions in promoting intercultural integration and mitigating social inequality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is very thankful to the academic supervisor for his advice, important insights and consistent support during the study process. The author also thanks all informants from the Indian Muslim community in Kampung Keling, Padang, who were eager to share their experiences and contribute to the study. In addition, the author would like to thank colleagues and all parties that have provided support and assistance in completing this research.

FUNDING STATEMENT

This work does not receive funding.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study does not contain sensitive personal data and is based on voluntary participation of informants therefore no ethics approval is needed.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author does not have any potential conflict of interest to disclose.

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