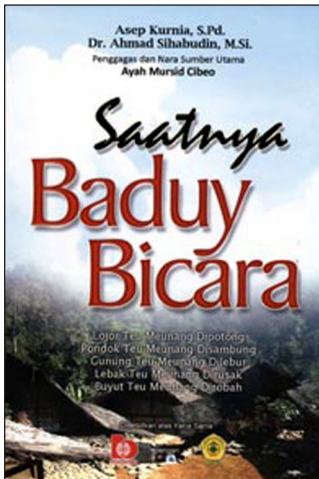


sources with data from archaeological fieldworks, yielding new, previously unexpressed interpretations.

Asep Kurnia and Ahmad Sihabudin, *Saatnya Baduy bicara*. Jakarta: PT. Bumi Aksara and Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Banten, 2010, 294 pp. ISBN: 978-979-010-998-8 (soft cover).



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The Baduys are a traditional society that lives in the Kendeng Mountains in South Banten. When exactly the Baduys started to live in this region is unknown, but they are thought to have settled in this area hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

Administratively, the Baduy people now live in the Kanekes Village, District Leuwidamar, Lebak, Banten Province. Unlike other villages in Indonesia, Kanekes is a tribal village in which the village head – called Jaro Pamarentah – is not appointed and dismissed by the Camat (subdistrict head), who is referred to as *puun* by traditional leaders. Because of their modest and secluded way of life in the mountains, the Baduy people are often regarded as a backward or primitive society.

Historian of the Sundanese, Edi S. Ekadjati (2009: 44-45) said that when he was a primary school pupil (in the 1950s), his teacher used to tell stories of the Baduys. He pointed out that the Inner Baduys always wore white clothes while the Outer Baduys were entirely dressed in black, and they never washed their clothes. They obtained their food from hunting and simple farming and that they liked to eat monkeys, but they did not eat the meat; they only drank the animals' bodily fluids while they hanged them over the fireplaces of their homes. Their houses were made of wood and bamboo but they did not use nails, and the roofs were made of thatch. They never bathed and they would carry a machete wherever they went. However, when Ekadjati himself visited the Baduy people for the first time in 1967, he found them to be very different. Their bodies, houses, clothes, and environment were clean enough, and every morning they bathed in clean water in rivers and springs. They also washed their clothes, rice, and other household appliances. Their food consisted of rice and side dishes just like any other Sundanese community. They were also agreeable and helpful.

This disproportionate and inappropriate description of the Baduy people presented above is one of the reasons why Asep Kurnia and Ahmad Sihabudin decided to write this book. Asep Kurnia is a junior high school teacher who teaches and lives not far from the borders of the Baduy land, while Ahmad Sihabudin is a lecturer at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Sultan Agung Tirtayasa University, Serang, Banten.

In the Preface to the book, the authors state that their main purpose of the book is to answer a number of questions and enlighten outsiders about the misrepresentation of the Baduys. The authors also acknowledge that they were strongly encouraged by one of the traditional leaders (vice Jaro Cibeo), Alim, also popularly called Ayah Mursid, and the village chief of Kanekes, Jaro Dainah. The book therefore largely reflects the opinions and views of both.

The title of the book *Saatnya Baduy bicara* corresponds to the collection of stories and the awareness of Baduy traditional leaders about their ethnicity told in simple Indonesian language. The stories about Baduy people are often inaccurately narrated in writing because the Baduys do not have a writing tradition.

Writing and reading are still considered taboo by Baduy communities. Even though there are many articles about the Baduys, they have all been written by non-Baduys and often based on the authors' views, or on those of the Baduys themselves who have little understanding of the matters.

The book contains the *suara dari dalam* (voices from within) as it includes a preface by the author and *apang rojong rasa* (response) from the Kanekes village head. The book also contains introductory remarks by the Rector of Sultan Agung Tirtayasa University, the Regent of Lebak, and the Vice Governor of Banten.

The book consists of 294 pages and 33 pages preceded by introductions. It is divided into 17 chapters, including those on the origins of the Baduy tribes, geography and demography, traditional authorities' duties and powers, calendars of customs, rituals and ceremonies, and the activities of today's society. The book is illustrated not only by black-and-white photographs, but also by coloured photographs and presents an interesting picture of the Baduy community and its activities.

The advantages of this book compared to other literature on the Baduys are that incorrect assumptions about the Baduys are redressed. Some say that the Baduys consist of 40 Susuhunan or 40 people, 40 families, and 40 houses. Ayah Mursid and Jaro Dainah state that this idea originated from a Dutch colonial official. Subsequently, as a result, people have long thought that there is a limit to the number of families and homes and some have to move out when these numbers are reached.

In fact, there are more than 40 people, families and houses, and nobody has to move out. This story needs to be clarified, say the authors, to avoid causing a negative picture of the Baduy people (pp. 36-37). Another advantage is that the book includes matters previously not disclosed to outsiders, for example about *Islam* in Cicakal Girang village. The book explains that Cicakal Girang

is not the place where Baduy citizens who want to convert to Islam would go, nor is it the place where the Baduys are Islamized. After the Baduy traditional leaders entered into an agreement with the Sultan of Banten, Cicakal Girang village has been the place where Ki Ahum and his descendants assisted the Outer Baduy people to marry according to the Islamic Shari'a (p. 84).

Another thing that is rarely revealed to outsiders is the names of the Baduy customary leaders. From 1900 until the present, each of the Inner Baduy villages (Cibeo, Cikartawana, and Cikeusik) has six *puun* leaders:

CIBEO	CIKARTAWANA	CIKEUSIK
Tameng	Keuceu	Atar
Baok	Baok	Kais
Jandol	Yalcin	Yainten
Ajal	Yalceu	Saiti
Janteu	Kiteu	Sadi
Jahadi	Sangsang	Yasih

In addition, the book also lists the names of officials Girang Seurat, Tangkesan, and Jaro Pamarentah (pp. 103-118). Another important aspect the book reveals is concerned with Baduy leadership, which is very different from the state leadership of Indonesia.

According to traditional Baduy leadership: a leader never nominates himself as leader, but leaders or potential leaders are sought and selected by the customary leader with a set of criteria and qualifications, and then discussed by the existing customary institutions to be decided together using inner wisdom. Therefore, the Baduys cannot be forced to vote or support an individual or a party. The obligation of Baduy people under the Sunda Wiwitan belief is to guide and advise the leader. Violation of this obligation may lead to catastrophe (pp. 120-121).

As the saying goes, nothing is perfect. The book also has its weaknesses. There are a striking number of typos and other technical deficiencies like local terms or phrases that are not accompanied by translation in Indonesian. Another deficiency is the dominant opinion of traditional leaders like Ayah Mursid and Jaro Dainah, which may not entirely reflect the traditional Baduy opinion as a whole. Nevertheless, the information provided by them is very revealing and adds to the deepening our knowledge about the Baduy communities.

A study of a traditional society is less complete if it does not include its philosophy of life. According to the Baduy's customary law (*pikukuh*), their philosophy of life, in particular, is *lojor teu meunang dipotong, pondok teu meunang disambung*, which means: "what is long should not be cut, what is short should not be extended" (pp. 129-131). The meaning of this adage is that the Baduy people should accept and maintain the conditions set by their ancestors without making additions or deletions.

This is revealed, for instance, in the ban put on the Baduy people (Baduy *tangtu*) not to level the ground when setting up a home. To obtain flat floors, they set up their houses on high poles when the ground is low. Another example is concerned with land (*huma*). The Baduy people cannot change the surface of the soil, which should be allowed to maintain its natural form and may not be levelled (Permana 2006).

Another expression of their main philosophy is *gunung teu meunang dilebur, lebak teu meunang di ruksak* meaning: "mountains should not be destroyed; water sources should not be tampered with". The Baduy people make efforts to maintain and preserve their environment, which has resulted in the protection of 5635 hectares of forest area in the watersheds in Kendeng Ciujung Mountains. Not only does the Baduy people benefit from environmental protection but communities outside also enjoy the benefit. Because of their wisdom, the Baduy people were bequeathed with the Kehati Award in 2004 by the Foundation for Biodiversity for the category of "Prakarsa Lestari Kehati" (Permana 2011: 3).

Other words of philosophical wisdom include *buyut teu meunang dirobah, larangan teu meunang dirempak*, which means: "nothing should be modified, prohibitions should not be violated". This philosophy has become an obstacle and a challenge for the Baduy people living in the present and for their future life, especially in terms of health, education, and politics. It is a dilemma for them because in one way compliance to customs means resorting to a kind of backwardness, while following contemporary developments would constitute violations of their traditions.

The book asks the question: how can the Baduy advance when so many things are prohibited because of buyut or "taboo" and the Baduy existence needs to be maintained, protected, and preserved as cultural assets and for tourism; but, how can the Baduy people be asked to accept innovation in stages, and wise.

The book ends in expressing the hope that in the future, Baduy people will be able to strike a balance between following the progress of time and keeping the hallmarks of their traditional culture (pp. 228-229).

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