THE TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL RITUALS AND PRACTICES OF THE KASEPUHAN COMMUNITY OF WEST JAVA

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INTRODUCTION

In West Java, there is another social group who still live like the more famous Baduy, within strict traditions. They are called the Kasepuhan. They live, spread in small groups, in the southern areas of Banten, Sukabumi and Bogor, especially on the slopes of Mt Halimun. They earn their living by collecting forest products, by gardening, and by rice planting in both wet fields (sawah), and in dry swidden fields (huma). In spite of the great variety of their activities, swidden agriculture (huma) still constitutes their main method of livelihood today.

For the Kasepuhan as a community, swidden agriculture in the forest is a prime source of livelihood. In order to continue to live and survive, the forests must be sustained and preserved. This attitude on the part of the Kasepuhan can be understood because swidden agriculture and the forest form a unity. The Kasepuhan interpret the word huma as imah (home). According to this perception, this “home” is not only for sleeping but also serves as the main source for their spiritual and physical life. The destruction of the forests means destroying their homes, and this means a destruction of the Kasepuhan as a community.

The Kasepuhan way of preserving the forests can be seen from their perception of the forests. They recognize three types based on their knowledge of the forests as the source of life. The three types of forests are as follows:

a) the ancient forest (leuweung kolot or leuweung geledegan) is a type of thick forest, where large and small trees grow densely (geledegan). The characteristic of this forest is that the density of the trees is high, and various kinds of animals still live in it.

b) the exploited forest (leuweung sampalan) is the one in which people establish their farms, tend cattle and collect firewood. This forest lies close to settlements.

c) the sacred or holy forest (leuweung titipan) is a type of forest traditionally recognized by all the members of the Kasepuhan as sacred. It is not to be exploited without the

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approval of the leader of the community (the sesepuh girang). The cultivation of this forest is only possible if a message of permission is received from the ancestors through the sesepuh girang. Thus, the preservation of this type of forest is continuously maintained. The leiweung titapan around south Sukabumi is located on Mt Ciawitali and Mt Girang Cibareno.

For the Kasepuhan, swidden agriculture in the present day is not just a continuation of their ancestral traditions (atali paranti karuhun); it is also a form of survival in which a particular social organization has been identified as the basis for living.

AGRICULTURAL RITUALS AND PRACTICES

Most of the Kasepuhan inhabit state forestry lands where they continue their ancestral traditions. The activity of swidden agriculture is bound up in a system of beliefs with an orientation towards ancient values. Each stage of swidden farming is followed by a ceremony to avert disaster and to ensure the protection of the ancestors. The Kasepuhan hope that by performing the ceremony they will obtain a good harvest from their huma.

Swidden farming among the members of the present Kasepuhan is no longer the only method of cultivation. Among them there are those who cultivate wet rice fields. Nonetheless, huma cultivation for them is a compulsory social activity which has to be carried out because all the ceremonies for tending rice are still based on swidden agriculture.

On opening a huma, the cultivator applies to the leader of the community, either the sesepuh girang or the sesepuh kampung (for those who live far from Kampung Gede), to ask for blessings. With these blessings, he receives a packet of kemenyan (Agathis sp.) and panglay (Zingiber cassumunar). When he has found a proper location, he fixes the location by binding tree trunks so that they are easily seen by other people.

Before the huma location is opened, a simple ceremony is first carried out at the place. The cultivator sits down and meditates (chusu), facing the land which will be cultivated. He burns the kemenyan and chews the panglay, which he sprays from his mouth in several directions. Then, he utters a do’a amit (prayer for permission) to his ancestors that runs as follows:

Pun ampun
ka luhi
ka sang rumuhun
ka handap
ka sang batara
ka para dewa-dewi
ka silitan ka sileman
ka dewa kalakai salambar
anu nyicineun ieu bumi.

(I) ask forgiveness
to the power above
who masters the sky
to the power below
who masters the earth
to the gods and goddesses
to the evil and good spirits
to the god of the fallen leaf
who stays on this earth.
After having delivered the do'a amit, the cultivator adds the following words:

Ema
bapa
abdi neda widi bade muka ieu huma

ush aya nu ganggu ngaguna sika
berkah du'a salametna kalawan rahayu sadayana

Mother
father
I ask your permission to open this
swidden field
so that no one will disturb it
bless us with safety and prosperity.

When the prayer is over, the cultivator cuts the branches of the trees that are likely to shade the growth of rice. This activity of cutting branches takes about 15-30 days, depending on the area of the huma that is opened. The trees themselves are not cut down. This activity is usually done in August; the tools which are used consist of sickles (sabit) and axes (baliung). The ceremony before the cutting is called the upacara sasarap (the breakfast ceremony) (Table 1).

After nyacar (cutting), the cultivator then performs a small ceremony called the “enlightening” (nyaangan-ngabersihan). He sits in front of his field and again delivers a do'a amit. After that the branches, twigs and grass are collected in the centre of the field. An earthen border is made around it so that fire will not spread to other places when the burning is done.

This process of burning is called ngaduruk and is usually performed in the month of September. Then the area is left for about ten days, after which it is cleaned up. Five days later a very important activity is carried out; the activity of ngaseuk (making planting holes) which occurs in the month of October.

The ceremony of ngaseuk is a very glorious and fabulous ceremony. The day before, important people of the social group gather in the house of the seseput girang. Among them are various traditional figures (baris kolot) such as the village leaders, and also members of the Kasepuhan living near Kampung Gede. They all sit in rows face to face (usually in three rows) to perform the ceremony of ngirim do'a (seading prayer) to their ancestors. After that they have supper together. While having supper, the juru pantun usually tell a story of the ngaseuk. In the yard in Kampung Gede, there are performances such as topeng, wayang, jipeng and others.

The next morning, around 5 am, work begins on the huma. A pupuhunan is prepared at a certain place in the huma area. Pupuhunan is a symbol of the “centre” and the place to carry out the planting ceremonies. For the Kasepuhan it stands for the beginning and the end of human life. The pupuhunan is located on the specially made central area called the paparakoan where the various kinds of tools for the ngaseuk ceremony are placed.

In front of the pupuhunan, the seseput girang or his representative, the dukun tani, sits and prays a do'a amit, while burning kemenyan on a coconut husk. Chewed panglay (Zingiber cassumunar) is spat out on the pupuhunan towards the four compass points. After that, co'o binih (seeds) which were previously kept in the paparakoan are taken and gathered with the seeds that are kept in a bakul (boboko). In that bakui are found not
only rice seeds but also some other kinds of seeds, including those of maize, pigeon pea (hiris: Cajanus cajan (L) Huth.), sesame (wijen: Sesamum orientale), squash (labu: Cucurbita moschata [Dusch] Poir), and beans (jaat: Psophocarpus tetragonolobus DC). Some of these seeds are planted together with rice.

After the do'a amit has been uttered, the sesepuh girang takes a stick (aseuk), the end of which has been sharpened, to start making holes so that the planting of rice can start immediately. He begins in the right-front direction, and in the back-left direction, around the square sides of the paparakoan. While doing this, he utters a prayer (jangjawokan), the words of which are as follows:

Bul kulus do'a Rasul

nya menyan pancering iman
niğkeun Sri Pohaci Purnama Alam Sajati
ka sukmaning bumi
ka rohaning bumi
ka sukmaning geni
ka rohaning geni
ka sukmaning angin
ka rohaning angin
tiap ka Prabu Susuk Tunggal
aku-aku anak incu

putu Nabi Adam
umat Nabi Muhammad
mihape bisi aya nu nganggang ngagunawita
bisi aya jin ilumun, iblis
bisi aya nu nganggang rongrong gogodongan

muga-muga panggilarkeun aku-aku anak incu
putu Nabi Adam
umat Nabi Muhammad

nyuhunkeun lulusna
mukisna
beresna
perelena
sing arenekeh alahbaten sereh

sing crukunuh alahbaten dukañ

May this incense rise as a prayer to the Prophet
this incense is the root of belief
entrusting Sri Pohaci Purnama Alam Sajati
to the earth's spirit
to the earth's soul
to the fire's spirit
to the fire's soul
to the wind's spirit
to the wind's soul
entrusting Susuk Tunggal
to the livelihood of his children and grandchildren
grandchildren of the Prophet Adam
followers of the Prophet Muhammad
entrusting not to be disturbed and destroyed
if there is an evil spirit, a devil
if there is one who disturbs all kinds of plants
may the crops of his children and grandchildren
of the grandchildren of Adam
of the followers of Muhammad be protected
we ask you to order the rice
to bless it
to arrange it
to multiply it
more than the sereh bush (Andropogon nardus L.)
greater than the dukuh (Lansium domesticum Corr.)
Thereupon everyone starts the ngaseuk activity together merrily and in a spirit of mutual cooperation (gotong royong). The overall plan of planting of different crops within a huma is shown in Figure 1. About 15 days after finishing the ngaseuk, the grass which has grown around the huma is cut and cleared (dikored or dioyos). This second cleaning in November or December is called dirambas.

Notes:  
X = Rice seed (Cereh variety: Pare gede)  
□ = Rice seed (Angsana variety) mixed with millet (kunyi: Panicum viride L.), pigeon pea (Cajanus cajan L.), sesame (wijen: Sesamum orientale L.), etc.  
— = Job’s tears (Hanjeli: Coix lacryma jobi L.) as boundary between huma  
■ = Arbila (roay: Dolichos lablab L.), maize (jagung: Zea mays L.) and cucumber (menismun: Cucumis sativus L.) etc.

Source: Observation, 1986

FIGURE 1: THE PLANTING PATTERN WITHIN A HUMA

Then, the huma is fertilized with a mixture of chemical and organic fertilisers. The area around the edge of the huma, called dibalungbang, is also cleaned. After that, huma cultivation involves waiting for harvest time. This period lasts about 3 months from January to March. In April, the harvest begins. Before harvesting the rice (ditegel), a certain ceremony called mipit, or sometimes nyalin, is performed.
In the evening, a thanksgiving party of ngirim do’a is held at the house of the sesepuh girang, but it is not attended by the sesepuh kampung and other traditional leaders living far from Kampung Gede because the same ceremony must also be performed in their own villages. By 5 am the following day the sesepuh girang and his wife (ema), followed by the agricultural shaman (dukan tani), neatly and cleanly dressed, go to the huma. As usual, the sesepuh girang sits with his legs crossed in the front of the pupuhunan, uttering the do’a amit, burning the kemenyan and spitting/spraying from his mouth the chewed panglay towards the various corners. Then he utters a jagjawokan (a certain prayer) that runs as follows:

_Bulukus do’a Rasul_  

nyam menyam pancerning iman  
hatur salam panarima  
hatur sangga pangabakti  
jistin abdi bade ngamitken ieu Sri Pohaci  
Purnama Alam Sajati  
dume ngus nepi kana bukaning taun  
geus keuna mangsaning bulan  
Nu ngumpang ngumbara di alam dunya  
ayeuna geura marulih ka gedong  
_Si Ratna Inten._

May this incense rise as a prayer to the Prophet  
this incense is the root of belief  
thank you for kind blessing  
receive this faithful offering  
wish to return Sri Pohaci Purnama Alam Sajati  
because the time has come  
because the month has arrived  
they who roam this world  
now, let them return to the house of Si Ratna Inten.

After reading this prayer the sesepuh girang or the dukan tani walks around the huma in a righthand direction sticking daun aren (Arennga pinita) in each corner. The end of each daun aren is bound firmly (simul mati). While placing the daun aren, the sesepuh girang and/or the dukan tani utters a jagjawokan which runs as follows:

_Nini akut-akut_  
_Aki akut-akut_  
pangangkatkeun tinu rengrongna  
ayeuna geura karumpul ka gedong  
_Si Ratna Inten._

Grandmother, carry it  
grandfather, carry it  
carry them from far away  
now gather at the house of Si Ratna Inten.

Then another jagjawokan is uttered to drive away evil creatures that may disturb the coming harvest. It runs as follows:

_Nini gajah balungbungan_  
aki gajah balungbungan  
anggeus bagian sia mah samet dieu  
tah anu aya dicirian pucuk kawung  
dina jru._

Thief elephant grandmother  
thief elephant grandfather  
here is your portion  
which is bounded by an aren leaf at each corner.
Besides this jangjawokan, the sesepuh girang or dukun tani utters another jangjawokan, as follows:

Ülah ngagangge
ulah ngagamisika
ieu mah lain keur sia
ieu mah bagian aing
saukur nu dicirian di sakurilingna.

Please, don’t disturb us
please, don’t destroy
this is not your portion
this is ours
all that is marked round.

While uttering the jangjawokot, the sesepuh girang may not talk to anyone and all his attention must be concentrated on this activity.

Around the pupuhuncon during harvest time a small hut (sanggar) is set up, known as the "building (gedong) of Si Ratna Inten". In it are placed offerings of ketupat (rice boiled to a sort of paste and wrapped in young coconut leaves), tanggang angin (rice covered by a triangular-shaped leaf), chewed sirih (tek-tek: betel leaf with lime and sambir ready for chewing), small pieces of coconut, a piece of sugar-cane, one block of aren sugar, seven kinds of rujak, bananas, tape, jamboo, buah honje (Icolaca speciosa horan), boiled eggs, congco (rice cooked by steaming in a bamboo steamer), five pieces of kelepon (cake made of rice flour and palm sugar), rice flour wet with kunyit (Curcuma domestica Val.), water and a paisal of red and white rice flour.

After the sesepuh girang or dukun tani has put the food into the small hut (sanggar) he utters the following jangjawokan:

Nini akut-akut
aki akut-akut
panggangkuteun tinu rengrongna
ayewa geura karumpul ka gedong
Si Ratna Inten
pipit aci samayang leuwih
sekar mulia sekar cendana
candoli ti Kahyangan
nuruhuy jauh ka punduk
saecik sareana.

Grandmother, carry it
grandfather, carry it
please, carry it from far away
please, gather it now into the house of Si Ratna Inten
picked more than was promised
like mulia flowers, sandalwood flowers
the authority of heaven
as golden as hoped for
as much as possible.

Having finished this jangjawokan the sesepuh girang cuts stalks of the best rice among those on the huma. Then the wife of the sesepuh girang (the ema) cuts five other stalks of rice as well, all of them are bound together, and this binding is called indung pare (the rice mother).

After the ceremony is over, other people come to the huma and cheerfully snatch away the food which is inside the hut (sanggar). Together they start harvesting the rice on the huma. The harvested rice is not directly brought home, however. It is first dried in the sun, a process called ngalantay. When the rice is dry, it is then carried home and put in a rice
barn (lumbung), but beforehand a simple ceremony is performed called the ngadiukeun ceremony (to store in the rice barn). Before the harvested rice is used, there is still another simple ceremony called ngaryaran (to use the newly harvested rice), after which the zakat (religious tax) is fulfilled whereby one-tenth of the harvest must be distributed to the poor.

In the first year, after the area of the huma is harvested, it is called a jami. There is a part of the land which is planted with useful trees such as durian, rambutan, petai or cloves. This area is commonly called a talan. The rest of the jami is planted with vegetables, sweet potatoes, maize, cassava, etc. Land abandoned to second growth bushes is called reuma. When the bushes have grown large and tall the jami is called "old reuma" (reuma kolor). Finally, after the land has been left for years, the jami is once more called "forest" (leuweng).

GLOSSARY

dibangsal    rice still in the husk but separated from the stalk
dibuat      harvesting
dileut       storing
dipilih     choosing seeds
dipocong     rice is tied up in bundles of equal weight
direongkeun  bringing together
diuatu       pounding of rice
marel/ingens     digging
mipithyalin    harvesting
ngabalumbang     protecting the huma while waiting for harvest
ngaberak      fertilizing
ngapersihan    cleaning
ngadiukeun    collecting all of the rice bundles to prepare for storing
ngaduruk        to pile and burn
ngahuru        to burn
ngalanay     fresh cut rice is hung to dry (tied horizontally to stakes of bamboo)
ngaryaran    first meal of the new rice
ngarambas   second step of ngored
ngaseuk     sowing seeds, especially rice seeds, by dribbling them from the fingers
            into the ground
ngazakat    paying the social tax
ngored       cleaning or scraping away with an iron instrument
nyacar       clearing/cutting the forest
pare gede    cereh variety of traditional rice
pare reuneuh  growing rice which is about to burst out into ear
ponggonkan  meeting of Kasepuhan leaders to settle the thanksgiving ceremony
sasarap       breakfast
seren taun    thanksgiving ceremony