



Cosmology of Native Indonesian Religions in Facing Contemporary Times: A Study of Sundanese Javanese Religion

Muhammad Alfani^{1*}, Asep Muhyidin,² Ajid Thohir³

¹ UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia;

² UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia;

³ UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia.

* Corresponding Author, Email: muhammadalfanmatdirjan@gmail.com

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Abstract: The reality of modernity, which has given rise to various complexities that are sometimes detrimental to humanity, has revived local religions which indeed have their own cosmology, which is seen as saving the world. The main focus of the research is cosmology within the teachings of Agama Sunda Jawa, exploring sources of ethics, views on the afterlife, and environmental ethics. The Seren Taun ceremony, as part of local cultural wisdom, becomes the center of attention in understanding the meaning of rituals and the symbolic significance of the Paseban building. This research utilizes a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, involving informants such as followers of Madraism, Agama Jawa Sunda (ADS; the Sundanese Javanese Religion), Paguyuban Adat Cara Karuhun Urang, and Adat Karuhun Urang. The results provide a deep understanding of the administrative and discriminatory challenges faced by Sunda Wiwitan followers and their efforts to maintain their existence and beliefs. This research also reveals the relationship between traditional arts, especially Gemyung art, with the expression of Sundanese cosmology. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of religion and spirituality in Indonesia while also highlighting social, political, and administrative issues faced by certain religious groups.

Keywords: administration of religion; local wisdom; Seren Taun ceremony; Sundanese cosmology; Sunda Wiwitan.

1. Introduction

The cosmology of indigenous religions is shaped by their unique relationship to the land and their understanding of nature (Kragh, 2020). These cosmologies often involve belief in various realms, such as the upper world, the lower world, and the middle world, inhabited by various entities and spirits (McMullin, 2023). The structure and order of these natural worlds are seen as interconnected and supported by the power of spirits and gods (Salimpour & Fitzgerald, 2022). This cosmology influences social structures, political mechanisms, economics, and religious expressions in indigenous communities (Reynolds & Schofer, 2022). Native American cosmology is deeply rooted in observation of and interaction with nature, with the sky, land, subterranean nature, waters, atmospheric processes, plants, animals, and more considered part of an integrated system (Krupp, 2015). The cosmos is not seen as a plural world or inhabited by extraterrestrial life. Rather, it is a holistic concept that unites the physical environment with the spiritual realm, often through the movements of celestial bodies such as the sun and moon (McCluskey, 2023). The cosmologies of Indigenous religions face contemporary challenges as advances in science and globalization have influenced the traditional beliefs of humans, wherever they are located (Brower, 2024). However, these religions continue to evolve and adapt, incorporating new ideas while maintaining their core principles and connection to the land and nature (Campion, 2012).

The emergence of indigenous communities in Indonesia after Soeharto's fall from power has led to unrest and violence, with the phrase "if the state does not recognize us, we will not recognize the state" becoming a provocative statement (Davidson et al., 2010). This movement has resulted in conflicts related to customary land, land clearing for industrial purposes, and marginalization. For example, cases such as PLTA in Lore Lindu, Central Sulawesi, and the Dongi-dongi Valley, as well as incidents in Poso, Mesuji, and others (Schulze, 2019). Indigenous communities have formed the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara-AMAN) to voice their interests and fight for their rights (Azra, 2002).

The indigenous community resurgence movement, carried out by indigenous peoples scattered throughout Indonesia, has been used as a means of unification for communities that have been oppressed and deprived of their rights and freedoms by the central government (Prasojo, 2011). Customary law, a complex system of interrelated rights and obligations, is tied to history, land, and law. Advocates for indigenous peoples realize that customary law refers to a loose set of values related to the past, such as authenticity, community, harmony, decorum, and justice (Ismira, 2017).

Indigenous communities are not isolated entities but have experienced dynamic changes throughout their long history, ranging from belief systems to social and political roles (Adams, 2020). Therefore, indigenous communities must be understood as complex and dynamic entities (Isnendes, 2016). Indigenous communities make many ways and efforts to maintain their existence by using local values in the form of their worldviews (Lestari & Parihala, 2020).

The Sunda Wiwitan religion, which authorities often leave blank in the religion column on ID cards due to administrative isolation regarding their beliefs, faces supportive or discriminatory behavior from the state in administrative and governance practices (Hidayat et al., 2020; Pratisti, 2021). This religion predates the emergence of "external" religions and is frequently classified as a "belief" or "sect of belief" (Miharja & Ruslan, 2020), posing challenges for the Sundanese people, both indigenous and non-indigenous, who firmly adhere to the teachings of their ancestral spiritual culture following acculturation and assimilation (Haq et al., 2023). Currently, Sunda Wiwitan people endure horizontal and vertical discrimination, leading to harassment, defamation, slander, and discriminatory policies from the central or regional government.

The Sunda Wiwitan religion, the ancestral faith of the Kanekes community, does not engage in missionary activities or religious preaching (Hasting, 1974). It is primarily embraced and cultivated within Sundanese society, with rituals and language conducted in Sundanese. Consequently, Sunda Wiwitan is exclusively intended for indigenous people, with others potentially prohibited from following it.

The Sunda Wiwitan religion shares similarities with other faiths, as teachings are passed down from one generation to the next, primarily at the local level and through personal awareness. It underscores respect and prayers for ancestors as pioneers of current and future generations.

Sundanese cosmology, akin to Javanese cosmology, interprets life as a unity between humans at the center of the microcosm and God as the guardian of the supernatural realm. This belief is evident in various traditional ceremonies, including sacred dances, myths, legends, songs, and music, highlighting the belief in Sang Hyang Tunggal, who created the Niskala and Sakala worlds (Darsa & Ekadjati, 2022).

Understanding the cosmology that gives birth to belief systems is not a simple matter, as only large, civilized, and culturally sophisticated ethnic groups can build religious systems, societies, knowledge, language, arts, systems of life, and systems of living equipment. The Sundanese Cosmology manuscript explains the position of each inhabitant, both the macrocosm (related to issues of Sang Hyang Tunggal/Jatiniskala) and its inhabitants called the niskala earth (microcosm) (Ekadjati, 2005).

Arts and traditions often serve as expressions of beliefs, representing a community's cosmological views. Traditional arts function as "rites" linking individuals to the sacred history of the past, with their sanctity rooted in the community's appreciation of their history. As expressions

of a community's cosmological views, traditional arts should align with the religion they follow (Soeganda, 2007).

Sundanese cosmological perspectives are heavily influenced by artistic traditions, emphasizing gentleness and compassion. The structure of Sundanese mythology derives from the wisdom embodied by maternal figures like Sunan Ambu and Dewi Sri. These female figures are portrayed with a maternal demeanor, characterized by strength, gentleness, charisma, and affection.

The Sundanese tradition emerged from the amalgamation of the original Sundanese tradition, Sundanese-Islamic tradition, original Javanese-Mataram tradition, and Javanese-Islamic Mataram tradition during the Mataram occupation in Priangan. These traditions emphasize asceticism and symbolic meanings that facilitate the process of unification between oneself, nature, and God. Ascetic practices and *ruwatan* rituals are undertaken by individuals willingly, guided by inner motivation rather than external coercion (Lubis, 2002).

To achieve the path of salvation, Sundanese and Javanese people explore the values of their ancestors (*nguriuri* cultural ancestors) and perform *ruwatan*, mystical journeys for individual self-unification. Most Sundanese and Javanese people have well received this doctrine of salvation through songs that have been absorbed and remembered for generations. Art is not only a form of entertainment but also a means of religious ritual ceremonies, especially related to the fertility of agricultural land and the success of harvests.

Gemyung art, which flourishes in agricultural communities or agrarian areas, serves as a means of religious or ritual ceremonies, especially related to the fertility of agricultural land and the success of harvests (Liani & Gumilar, 2022). The characteristics of the Gemyung art ritual can be seen in the marriage vows performed by elders of the art group at the beginning of the performance, as well as the presentation of ancient songs as a special opener for the ancestral spirits believed to enjoy those songs (Luthfiatin & Abdillah, 2022).

Followers of Sunda Wiwitan do not denigrate other religions and do not feel competitive in spreading their beliefs (Saringendyanti et al., 2018). They believe that the Sunda Wiwitan religion has existed since the existence of "Sundanese people" created by "Nu Ngersakeun" or "Sang Hiyang Keresan" or "Gusti Pangeran Sikang Sawiji-wiji." The teachings of Sunda Wiwitan respect the truths of other religions and beliefs, and they argue that they should not invite others to embrace their religion because they cannot fully practice their religious beliefs.

Among the Kanekes residents in the Sunda Indigenous Customary Community (Adat Karuhun Urang-AKUR), there is no intention to spread the teachings of Sunda Wiwitan actively, nor do they seek to influence others to embrace it (Enjang, 2022). Sunda Wiwitan is not positioned as a missionary religion or one that engages in casual religious propagation for others to adopt. Instead, they hold deep respect for other beliefs or religions alongside Sunda Wiwitan.

Sundanese people uphold a life philosophy centered on seeking a middle path (*sineger tengah*) and *tiis ceuli herang panon* (peaceful tranquility), which advocates for balanced and adequate behavior or actions, avoiding extremes (Saripudin, 2023). Similarly, in their religious lives, while they maintain adherence to old beliefs, they are also open to accepting new religions.

This research aims to uncover in-depth the journey of the Sunda Wiwitan religion from its emergence to the present day and their efforts to maintain their beliefs in the form of the Sunda Wiwitan religion. The term "ritual" in various religious ceremonies, such as *saren taun*, is a manifestation of the concept of doctrine or religious belief firmly held by the community. The traditional ritual tradition of *Saren taun* is more clearly seen in the *Ruwatan* event, where community members collaborate to hold this event, fostering harmony and brotherhood.

The traditional ritual performance of *Saren taun* in the *Ruwatan* event has symbolic meanings as an expeller and homage to ancestral spirits. Studying the meaning of the *saren taun* ritual tradition and the teachings of the Sundanese Javanese Religion (ADS) as an expression of Sundanese cosmology is interesting. Several studies have been conducted in this area. Research by Wahyono (Wahyono, 2003) explores the cultural and political responses of the Kejawen community to the rise of the Puritan Islamic Movement in Yogyakarta. This research found that the cultural typology of

Javanese society is divided, especially between puritan Islamic communities and Kejawen communities, who claim to be Muslim but only nominally. This study argues that theoretical explanations of the relationship between Kejawen and Islam, using syncretism, need to be questioned. Syncretism is static and does not imply dynamic cultural relationships. This research also shows that previous studies using syncretism as the main construction of the Kejawen community in relation to Islam still need to be revised. Then, a study by Sardjuningsih (Sardjuningsih, 2012) on myths in the south coast community. The Prigi Coastal Community is an inland Islamic community with syncretic beliefs, acculturative culture, and Javanese traditions. The community's religious practices and rituals are influenced by the slametan tradition, which has many meanings. This study identifies four variants of social-religious groups: traditional NU, modernist NU, Muhammadiyah, and *Abangan* (common people). Each variant has different constructions.

This research has several unique features and characteristics compared to previous research in various aspects. First, the research focuses on the Sundanese Javanese Religion and specifically on the Sunda Wiwitan religion, opening up deep insights into the spiritual dynamics and beliefs of the community in Cigugur Kuningan, West Java. This research places special emphasis on understanding Sundanese cosmology, which encompasses the relationship between humans, nature, and God. Second, this research provides significant insights into the administrative and discriminatory challenges faced by followers of the Sunda Wiwitan religion, especially regarding their administrative non-recognition of their religion in official documents. Horizontal and vertical discrimination that continues, including harassment, humiliation, and discriminatory policies, becomes the focus of research to understand its impact on Sundanese society. Third, this research highlights the relationship between traditional arts, especially Gemyung art, with Sundanese cosmological expression. Understanding the symbolic meaning in the saren taun ritual tradition and the role of art as a representation of the community's cosmological views provides new perspectives on the interaction between spirituality, art, and tradition. Fourth, this research provides a deeper understanding of the efforts of Sunda Wiwitan followers in maintaining their existence and beliefs. By uncovering the concept of "ritual" in various religious ceremonies, such as saren taun, this research details how the manifestation of religious doctrine or beliefs is embodied in the daily lives of the community.

Overall, this research not only contributes to the understanding of religion and spirituality in Indonesia but also highlights the social, political, and administrative issues faced by certain religious groups. Thus, this research can be considered a valuable and novel contribution to deepening insights into the Sundanese Javanese Religion and its social context.

2. Method

The research method used in this study is qualitative research (Maxwell, 2008), aimed at understanding the dynamics and complexity of the Religion Community in Cigugur Kuningan, West Java. The first step is to collect data from participants, including Madraisme, the Sundanese Javanese Religion (Agama Djawa Sunda-ADS), the Paguyuban Adat Cara Karuhun Urang (PACKU), and AKUR (Adat Karuhun Urang). This research process includes data collection and analysis, interpretation, and analysis of the developed theoretical framework (Anwar et al., 2019). The qualitative approach is used to identify the meaning of research questions in the context of the Madraisme tradition (ADS). This approach involves understanding the interaction of communities with their environment, language, and beliefs about the world, the phenomena they study, and their understanding of research questions. The phenomenological approach guides this approach, understood as understanding the relationship between social phenomena that can be understood rather than empathized (Ahimsa-Putra, 2012).

Researchers use research instruments to describe the meaning of existing phenomena from the perspective of informants and data sources. This means maximizing the identification of all situations and examining every aspect that emerges in every situation throughout the research period, with the help of a key data collection element observing informants in every activity (Creswell, 2014). The

data collection and analysis techniques involve employing various methods such as observation, interviews, and documentation pertaining to the research conducted, which includes Madraisme, ritual practices, and the understanding of adherents. Data collection through direct observation or participant observation is conducted in this research both before and after data reduction, with the researcher assuming a role in specific situations and actively participating in the events under study (Patton, 2005).

3. Results and Discussion

a. The Followers of the Agama Djawa Sunda (ADS)

The Agama Djawa Sunda (ADS) or Sundanese-Javanese Religion, also known as Madraisme teachings, is one of the local religions that has a significant impact in West Java, Indonesia. Originating from villages in Cigugur, Kuningan Regency, this teaching has spread to regions such as Banten, Garut, Bandung, and Cirebon. The influence of ADS is crucial in the development of local religions in West Java, as evidenced by the establishment of a village in Cireunde, Cimahi, Bandung, which makes ADS the foundation of its belief system. Although it has undergone modifications and assimilation with local culture in practice, the existence of ADS is still felt in several places, especially in Cigugur, Kuningan, as its place of origin (Yayasan Trimulya, 2000).

Cigugur, located in Kuningan Regency, West Java, is a district geographically situated at the foot of Mount Ceremai, with an altitude of 700 meters above sea level. The average rainfall is around 26.8 mm, and the average air temperature reaches 26° C. Its boundaries include the northern part of Kuningan District and Kramatmulya District, the southern part of Kadugede District, and the western part of Mount Ciremai. The population of this district reaches 7,084 people, and the majority of the residents' livelihoods in Cigugur are farmers. Although the level of education in this village is still low, the religious understanding tends to be passive. However, in the neighboring village, the community adheres to militant Islam, which causes tension with the people of Cigugur. They are less patient and quick to judge someone as an infidel when propagating Islamic teachings. Therefore, when a man named Madrais introduced a new teaching, namely ADS, many people in Cigugur welcomed it (Garna, 2008).

In 1848, in the village of Cigugur, a belief system called the Sundanese Javanese Religion (ADS), known as Madraisme, was established. Its founder, Madrais, was a descendant of the Sultan of Cirebon, born from a concubine in the Losari District, Cirebon. Although he never met his father, a Prince, Madrais was raised by his grandfather and later learned the truth about his origins. After receiving a religious education and living in Cirebon, Madrais was recognized as a member of the Sultan of Cirebon's family and later married a woman from Cigugur (Starthof, 1979).

Madrais then combined the teachings of Ngelmu Cirebon with elements of Islam and Sundanese Wiwitan tradition, creating a new teaching called ADS. ADS developed in Cigugur and spread to various regions of West Java, such as Indramayu, Majalengka, Ciamis, Tasikmalaya, Garut, Bandung, Padalarang, Bogor, Purwakarta, to Jakarta. Although ADS is considered a combination of Islamic Sufism and Javanese mysticism with elements of Sundanese culture, the number of its followers once reached more than 100,000 people, but only about 25,000 are recorded in the population census book (Kartapradja, 1985).

The teachings of the Sundanese Javanese religion focus on ethics and national characteristics, with compassion as a primary aspect. Uniqueness is another aspect of human life, with family structure and designations indicating differences. Etiquette is also important, with karma or ethics guiding community life and creating harmony. Cultivation and goodwill are the essence of etiquette, encouraging self-control and consideration (Rosidi, 2000).

Nations are created by the will of God, with appearance, language, customs, script, and culture becoming the characteristics of each nation. To instill noble character traits in its followers, the Adat Karuhun Urang (AKUR) holds meetings and ceremonies, such as 1 Sura and Sarasehan, where the teachings of noble character are imparted. The quality of human life is influenced by

inherent factors and the environment, with parents playing a crucial role in providing care to the fetus (Rozak, 2005).

b. Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian

Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian serves as the foundation of Sundanese Wiwitan ethics, outlining the relationship between humans and society and defining concepts of good and evil based on adherence to these principles. Goodness is categorized into four aspects: gold, silver, gemstones, and diamonds, each bearing its significance. Honesty is esteemed as noble, and there is a high regard for acknowledging and respecting the property rights of others. Speaking softly is considered an essential aspect of courtesy.

In essence, the teachings of the Sundanese Javanese religion emphasize the importance of compassion, uniqueness, politeness, and respect for others' properties. These teachings aim to promote a harmonious and respectful society, fostering a sense of responsibility and respect for others. Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian outlines ten points of devotion regarding the role of the head of the family, reverence for religious leaders, and relationships with individuals of high rank, such as kings. These points are called *dasa prebakti*, referring to obedience to children, wives, servants, students, farmers, and even kings. Therefore, devotion in Sundanese society is based on a clear hierarchy of rank, power, and influence. Every member of society strives to fulfill their duties without competing for positions, recognizing a division of labor marked by specific levels of specialization.

The relationship between humans in Sundanese society is founded on the principles of mutual affection, mutual assistance, and mutual nurturing, meaning they must love one another, assist or teach one another, and nurture one another to create an atmosphere of communal life characterized by intimacy, harmony, peace, tranquility, and familial bonds. Envy and jealousy are forbidden in Sundanese society, as they can disrupt and cause mental illness. Envy is a trait that can lead to spiritual suffering and mental illness (Knoll et al., 2022). In Sundanese Wiwitan society, everyone must submit to those of higher status as a form of respect for Sanghyang. As said by Suryani (Suryani, 2017):

Do not be envious, do not harbor jealousy towards colleagues. Thus it is when witnessing others receiving praise, acquiring favor, or being favored by the king, then feeling tempted to waver in our loyalty. Refrain, for it is taboo! The consequence is feeling despondent, nursing a wounded heart. It cannot be remedied, no incantation will work, no intention will be fulfilled because it is not sanctioned by Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian.

The teachings of the Sundanese Javanese religion also highlight the difference between good and evil in Sundanese society, with both groups facing consequences for their actions. Sundanese society has a way of becoming noble depending on their actions. Clearwater symbolizes the goodness and happiness of humans due to good deeds, while murky water symbolizes human evil and makes them feel troubled (Suryani, 2012). Sundanese people believe that humans must have good life goals and realize that they are only a small part of the universe. Good qualities include politeness, simplicity, honesty, courage, kindness, reliability, respect, self-control, justice, and love for the homeland and nation. To achieve good life goals, one must have a teacher who guides them on the right path. Teachers are highly respected in Sundanese society; even the Almighty God is referred to as the Supreme Teacher.

In Sundanese Wiwitan society, there are three divisions of noble humans, namely noble humans, who are good in appearance, behavior, and actions; the second division, namely those who are ugly, eloquent, and good in deeds; and the third division, namely those who are ugly, malicious, and bad in deeds, should not be emulated (Ekadjati, 2005). Furthermore, in the Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian manuscript, to achieve virtue and prosperity, Sundanese people are advised to consult experts in their fields and follow the teachings of their ancestors. Thus, they can lead a prosperous

life and contribute to the improvement of the world. Moreover, the *dasa kerta* teachings emphasize the importance of maintaining all parts of the body, such as the ears, eyes, skin, tongue, nose, mouth, hands, feet, stomach, and *Baga-purusa*, to achieve true human prosperity. These ten sources of desire can cause disasters and misery in hell.

Sundanese Wiwitan society believes in the existence of the highest power called Sanghyang Kersa or *Gusti sikang sawiji-wiji* (the Almighty God). Sanghyang Kersa is believed to reside in a high and grand place called Buana Nyungcung, with five heavenly locations mentioned in the preface or Dasakreta. This teaching is a syncretism of Shaivism and Buddhism, with Hindu gods worshiped as Batara Seda Niskala, which can be interpreted as the "Great Invisible God" or "Great Invisible Deity" (Interview, Prince Djatikusuma, 2022).

The atmosphere of the heavens or eternity (immortality) is similar to that in Sewaka Darma, with the second part (*Darmapitutur*) stating that patience is the key to understanding the mystery of Sanghyang darmawisesa. When someone dies, they will find a paradise of happiness, experiencing days without nights, joy without sadness, glory without shame, pleasure without suffering, beauty without ugliness, unseen without form, and becoming hyan without being a god anymore.

In short, the *dasa kerta* teachings emphasize the importance of maintaining all body parts, preserving the virtues of hearing, sight, smell, mouth, hands, feet, stomach, and *Baga-purusa*, and achieving true human prosperity through these practices. In the teachings of the Sundanese Javanese religion, rules are also outlined to maintain balance in the social system, including ten duties and prohibitions such as *siwok kante*, *simur kante*, *simar kante*, and *darma kante*. These rules emphasize the duty of servants to serve masters, lords, and kings unconditionally. Furthermore, it mentions the importance of showing respect and humility when visited by tax collectors, guards, tribute bearers, or heralds. When receiving kindness, one must provide food, drink, blankets, and clothes and take refuge in Hyang and the gods.

Servants must obey rules such as not violating, pushing, disturbing, or damaging the ranks when entering the palace. They must sit properly and carefully consider their words when speaking to the king. Therefore, the roles of ministers, prominent lords, royal advisors, courtiers, painters, blacksmiths, leather artisans, puppeteers, gamelan makers, actors, comedians, farmers, tappers, sweepers, corpse handlers, mourners, priests, soldiers, archers, swordsmen, officials, fishermen, divers, and all kinds of workers are mentioned.

Since pre-Islamic times, the Sundanese people have believed in the existence of God and recognize Him as the Almighty. While they previously followed Hinduism, Hindu gods were subordinated under Hyang Tunggal, Gorang Tunggal, or Batara Tunggal. God is acknowledged as omniscient, aware of His creatures' actions, thus emphasizing the importance of humans being devoted to and serving Him. In the Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian scripture, the text calls on humans to submit, obey, and worship God, as outlined in the *darma pitutur*. This behavioral teaching serves as a lesson for humans, such as worshipping Shiva, Buddha, and the perfect soul.

c. The Afterlife and Environmental Ethics

The Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian text explains that the fate of an individual after death is determined by their attitude, behavior, and actions in the world. If someone's actions are bad, contrary to religious teachings, they will return to the world in a lower form or enter hellish punishment. The text also discusses four things considered bad for humans such as stubbornness, anger, and glowering. If someone's attitude, behavior, and actions are good, they will ascend to a pleasant abstract realm called moksa, which is the ideal path always desired by humans. Moksa is the state of the soul that has successfully entered heaven, while *kahiyangan* is the place of the divine. The text also explains human desires: *yun suda*, *yun suka*, *yun mungguh*, *yun luput*, which are desires to become perfect, wealthy, not left behind, and not influenced by the inhabitants of *kahiyangan*. The principle of life's consequences after death aligns with the concept of Islam, which relates to the

situation and conditions of human life in the afterlife determined by their attitude, behavior, and actions in the world.

The Sundanese society believes that the natural environment will provide maximum benefits to humans if it is well-preserved, cared for, and used appropriately. They are encouraged to adopt a '*siger tengah*' or '*sineger tengah*' attitude, meaning neither lacking nor excessive, to meet daily needs and preserve nature. They are advised to be cautious, diligent, perseverant, eat sufficiently, energetic, courageous, wise, willing to sacrifice, generous, skillful, and proficient. Humans strive to understand the universe and its contents, categorizing visible and invisible phenomena to face nature more effectively. They develop environmental wisdom in the form of conceptual knowledge, customary norms, cultural values, activities, and tools. The abstraction of experiences from the entire supporting community serves as a guide or reference framework for understanding, categorizing phenomena, and choosing behavioral and managerial strategies in environmental management. The Sundanese society realizes that the natural environment will provide maximum benefits to humans if it is well-preserved, cared for, and used appropriately.

d. The *Seren Taun* Ceremony

The *Seren Taun* ceremony is a traditional wisdom practiced by indigenous communities in the village of Cigugur, Kuningan, West Java. This ceremony combines cultural rituals and spiritual processes to express gratitude to God for the abundance, blessings, protection, and natural wealth bestowed upon human life. Indirectly, this ceremony teaches the importance of respecting nature and maintaining harmony with it. The indigenous community in the village of Cigugur has shown a commitment to preserving ancient fish species that they consider a gift from God. They believe that pests are also important for human life and environmental sustainability, and humans should avoid killing them as they are part of the ecosystem. Their view of pests is positive for the soil and microorganisms, and their farming practices tend to use chemical fertilizers that can disrupt the ecosystem (Interview with Gumirat, 2022).

The *Seren Taun* ceremony is a revival and revitalization of classical Sundanese traditions, containing elements of the intimate relationship between humans and nature. The series of ceremonies conducted over one week, each standing on its own, reflect the values contained therein in the form of moral teachings for humans to appreciate the environment. If maintained and developed, the *Seren Taun* ceremony can be used as a medium for environmental conservation education. The indigenous community in Cigugur has proven capable of preserving nature, as evidenced by the well-preserved condition of the almost extinct *kancra* fish. By preserving and developing this tradition, it can become a valuable medium for environmental conservation education (Mutaqin, 2013).

The *Seren Taun* ceremony is a significant event in the Djawa Sunda Religion (ADS), a traditional celebration involving singing, prayers, stories, and festivities. It is a performance activity that embodies sacred actions, mantras, and performances, with an act of gratitude called *ngajayak* (welcoming). Symbols are presented in tools and behaviors that *encapsulate* the teachings of ADS, and the *Seren Taun* ceremony has the potential to communicate, critique, and even transform meanings (Al-Bustomi, 2012). The *ngajayak* procession includes art performances rich in symbols, such as the *Rajah Pohaci* mantra recited by the *Pupuhu* during the *Babarit* event and mantras during the rice pounding. The Ngararemokeun ceremony, performed by special participants, is a year-end celebration for members of the ADS community. This ceremony is heavily influenced by the teachings of Ki Ayi Madrais, as seen in the ceremonial equipment (Darsa & Ekadjati, 2006).

The *Seren Taun* ceremony also has magical elements associated with myths and is part of the Rice Pounding or *Nutu* ceremony. Rice is placed as an appropriate object to represent the sustenance provided by the creator, and this ceremony is closely related to beliefs associated with fertility events. It is considered the source of all life that brings blessings as an effort to increase awareness that human life is intertwined with nature and as a tribute to Dewi Sri, the goddess of rice. The *Seren*

Taun ceremony is not only a transformation of status but also an expansion of hopes and an increase in communal ritual awareness. Individuals can listen to music, pray, see visual symbols, taste consecrated food, smell incense, and touch sacred charms. Kyai Madrais viewed that religions (Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism) were based on foreign cultures (non-native), which underlie the *Seren Taun* ceremony (Danasasmita, 1987).

The *Seren Taun* ceremony appears to manifest *Pikukuh Tilu*, one of the teachings of ADS, and *iman kana tanah*, or *eling kana sawab Gusti*, which emphasizes remembering the nature of God. This sequence of events symbolizes the intertwining of human life with nature, with the *Nutu* event demonstrating reverence for the Goddess of Prosperity. However, the broader purpose of the *Seren Taun* ceremony is primarily a ritual expression of gratitude for the teachings of ADS. This gratitude is linked to the reciprocal relationship between humans and the spirits inhabiting the land, particularly regarding crops. The ceremony aims to promote unity among all supporting communities by underscoring an event intended to carry significant meaning. *Babarit* comprises a series of thanksgiving ceremonies led by religious leaders in the Cigugur area. The prayers are offered to seek harmony and peace among religious communities, with the closing prayer being the *Rajah Pohaci* by Prince Djatikusumah. The *Seren Taun* ceremony serves as the culmination of these events, symbolizing unity and gratitude for the abundance of rice bestowed by God. Dance movements, such as the *Buyung Dance*, incorporate colors and represent the five elements of traditional Sundanese dance.

The *Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal* building, the venue for the *Seren Taun* ceremony, conveys a message to descendants and followers of Ki Ayi Madrais, emphasizing the preservation of the building and land as common property for artistic and cultural activities. Oriented westward, the building symbolizes the sun's path, while the *Jinem* space, stretching from north to south, encourages individuals to embrace their humanity through reason, mental refinement, and contemplation of the universe's processes. The *Seren Taun* ceremony holds social significance, fostering interaction among residents of Cigugur with diverse religious backgrounds. It serves as a unifying force amidst religious diversity in the Cigugur area, attracting attendees from various parts of Indonesia and abroad without social barriers. The peak of the *Seren Taun* celebration draws thousands of people from across the Cigugur region, including hundreds from other indigenous communities throughout the archipelago and some from overseas.

The *Seren Taun* ceremony also has many cultural meanings, with efforts to preserve Sundanese customary traditions. This ceremony is inseparable from a series of cultural and artistic activities, with artistic touches recognized by Prince Djatikusumah, making *Seren Taun* more attractive and the center of attention (Ayatrohaedi & Darsa, 1987). The *Seren Taun* ceremony is not only intended as a symbol of gratitude for the abundant harvest throughout the year but also has social, cultural, and ritual values that cannot be separated from each procession. The *Seren Taun* ceremony serves as a gathering place for Cigugur and Kuningan residents, with Prince Djatikusumah being the dominant figure in the ceremony.

e. Symbolic Meaning of Cultural Sanctuary

Bangunan Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal in Cigugur, Kuningan, is an important symbol of ADS Sunda Wiwitan, a community that preserves the teachings of its predecessors. The *Paseban* complex serves as the venue for various rituals and important events, such as the annual *Seren Taun* ceremony to welcome the new year of the Saka calendar in Javanese-Sundanese culture. The *Paseban* complex also serves as the residence for adherents of Sunda Wiwitan teachings, including adolescents, adults, and older people.

The *Paseban* building symbolizes the spiritual teachings of Madrais, which emphasize understanding the essence of humanity, self-awareness, and returning to the essence of the human soul. The building consists of five rooms: *Pendopo Pagelaran*, *Jinem Pasenetan*, *Sri Manganti*, *Mega Mendung*, and *Dapur Agung*. Each room represents a macro symbol of humanity, symbolizing the gathering place of the universe and the essence of human life.

Figure 1. The Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal Building

Source: Indonesiakaya.com, 2023.

Madrais's teachings revolve around the essence of human life, the essence of humanity, and the importance of understanding the value systems and religions practiced by Indonesian society. Sunda Wiwitan's teachings are not only monotheistic but also regulate the relationship between humans and God, humans and nature, and humans and other humans.

As citizens of Indonesia, efforts to preserve Sunda Wiwitan teachings should be upheld as part of the values of local wisdom. Adherents of this teaching can enjoy civil rights and uphold their beliefs without discrimination. The Paseban building serves as a reminder of the importance of understanding and respecting the teachings of Sunda Wiwitan society.

f. Cosmology and Sundanese Cultural Heritage

Sundanese culture serves as a significant source of richness for the Indonesian nation and is deeply rooted in its belief system. While the majority of Sundanese people practice Islam, there are still elements of syncretism and mystical practices. Sundanese life revolves around maintaining balance in the universe through traditional ceremonies and social equilibrium through mutual giving. One fascinating aspect of Sundanese belief is the Lutung Kasarung pantun, which believes in the existence of one God, Guriang Tunggal, who manifests a small part of Himself into the world to preserve human life.

Sundanese society holds a cosmological view inherited from their ancestors, which is reflected in their mythological heritage. Myths reveal a divine structure that can overcome and reconcile conflicts on a deeper level than can be expressed by rational experience. Myths also narrate the origins of the world, animals, plants, and humans, as well as the early events that led humans to discover their identity. Rituals and myths play a significant role in social life, and religion consists of performing rituals.

Mircea Eliade (Eliade, 1959) stated that religious individuals have a particular attitude toward life, the world, humans, and what they consider sacred. The universe is divided into three worlds:

sakala (the visible world), *niskala* (the invisible world), and *jatiniskala* (the true realm of existence). The inhabitants of *sakala* are various creatures that can be seen and touched, while the inhabitants of *niskala* are spiritual beings without bodies. The perfect manifestation is humans, and humans are obliged to strive to do good deeds so that their souls can return to their true nature in the highest heaven, called *moksha* (Susanto, 1987).

In Sundanese cultures, such as Bandung, Galunggung, Banten, or Cisolok, there is a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. Humans are greatly influenced by nature, and the concept of *leuweung larangan* (sacred forests) prohibits land cultivation in certain forests. Additionally, various rituals and ceremonies to honor the land, mountains, forests, ancestors, and other natural elements are conducted carefully and meticulously. This is often referred to as “local traditional wisdom” in preserving the environment.

Numerous indigenous tribes and groups are actively involved in intercultural discussion, environmental activism, legal advocacy, cultural revitalization, and community resilience activities in response to these modern problems (Bold, 2019). In facing the complicated circumstances of the contemporary world, these initiatives aim to preserve and safeguard the integrity of Indigenous cosmologies (Guzy, 2024; Truna, 2024). Promoting respect, understanding, and sustainable coexistence among people with diverse cosmologies requires cooperative collaborations, education, and civil engagement with indigenous knowledge bearers (Tickner & Querejazu, 2021; Wibisono, 2020).

4. Conclusion

This research provides in-depth insights into the journey of the Sunda Wiwitan religion in Cigugur Kuningan, West Java, from its emergence to the present day. By using qualitative and phenomenological approaches, this study successfully delved into a deeper understanding of cosmology in the teachings of the Sunda Djawa religion, particularly through sources of ethics, views on the human afterlife, and environmental ethics. The Saren Taun ceremony, as an integral part of local cultural wisdom, becomes the main focus in understanding the meaning of rituals and symbolism of the Paseban building. The research findings also highlight the administrative and discriminatory challenges faced by followers of the *Sunda Wiwitan* religion, including harassment, insults, and discriminatory policies from central or local governments. Furthermore, this study opens up an understanding of the relationship between traditional arts, especially *Gemyung art*, and Sundanese cosmology expression. Traditional arts not only serve as a means of religious ceremonies but also as representations of the cosmological views of society. Overall, this research makes a significant contribution to understanding religion and spirituality in Indonesia, as well as highlighting social, political, and administrative issues faced by certain religious groups, especially the Sunda Wiwitan religion.

Further research could expand its scope by delving deeper into the daily life aspects of Sunda Wiwitan adherents in various regions. Focusing on the influence of this religion on lifestyle, culture, and social interactions can provide a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, considering the perspectives and experiences of adherents from various societal layers can introduce diversity in their beliefs and religious practices. With this approach, future research can provide a more holistic contribution to understanding the role of the Sunda Wiwitan religion in Indonesian society.

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