



Islam and Adat Minangkabau: The Implementation of the Principle *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* within the Bundo Kandung Organization in Minangkabau, 2000–2018

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ABSTRACT

The Bundo Kandung Organization represents a prominent women's institution in Minangkabau society that plays a crucial role in preserving customary law and cultural identity, particularly through the implementation of the philosophical foundation *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*. This study aims to examine the historical background of the organization's establishment and analyze the strategies employed in maintaining and transmitting these values within the community. The research applies Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist theory to assess the social functions of the organization. Employing the historical method within a qualitative research framework, the study follows the stages of heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. Data were collected from literature reviews, historical documents, and interviews with traditional leaders and members of Bundo Kandung. The findings reveal that the Bundo Kandung Organization functions not only as a custodian of customary law but also as a center of moral and ethical guidance for Minangkabau women and the younger generation. Through its matrilineal kinship system, the organization assumes a strategic role in transmitting *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* values via training, cultural education, and community-based programs. These strategies firmly position Bundo Kandung as a pivotal institution in sustaining the continuity of Minangkabau customary law rooted in this philosophical foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

The teachings of Minangkabau customary law instill deep respect and high regard for women, both within the communal structure (*kaum*, a kin group descended from a common ancestress) and within the family. Women are regarded as the symbol of lineage in the Minangkabau matrilineal kinship system and are honored with the title *Bundo Kandung* (Hakimy, 1994). The term *Bundo Kandung* literally means “biological mother” or “true mother,” embodying the maternal figure with nurturing qualities as well as leadership. In this sense, *Bundo Kandung* is understood as an appellation for all Minangkabau women.

Historically, however, the term *Bundo Kandung* originates from the title *mande sako*, referring to the eldest woman in a clan or lineage who was respected and entrusted with authority due to her qualities and honor according to custom (Jamil, 2016). This figure held an important role as a leader and decision-maker within her clan. In Minangkabau's customary structure, *Bundo Kandung* is classified into two categories: *Bundo Kandung adat* or *Bundo Kandung sako*, who is responsible for the *Rumah Gadang* and her kin group, and *Bundo Kandung organisasi*, who is elected through deliberation at the village (*nagari*), subdistrict, district, provincial, and even national levels (Awwali, 2015).

In this study, *Bundo Kandung* is examined as a women's organization in Minangkabau that operates in the field of customs and culture, firmly grounded in the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*. This organization is of particular interest because it not only embodies Minangkabau identity but also plays a vital role in shaping the community's moral and ethical character through a strong religious foundation. Every woman who joins the Bundo Kandung Organization is expected to develop and practice the principles of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* as a way of life (Amaliatulwalidain, 2016).

The relationship between *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* and the Bundo Kandung Organization is inseparable, as both are rooted in the values and identity of Minangkabau society. This philosophy asserts that

Minangkabau custom cannot be separated from Islamic teachings; thus, all social, cultural, and political behavior must align with religious guidance. This principle is also reflected in the role of Minangkabau women as *Bundo Kanduang*—respected mothers, protectors of the family, and guardians of tradition.

The traditional role of *Bundo Kanduang* was later institutionalized into an organization. The establishment of the Bundo Kanduang Organization aimed to actualize the values of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* through the tangible participation of women in society. The organization functions not only as a body for preserving Minangkabau customs but also as a platform for transmitting Islamic values to younger generations. Thus, the philosophy is not merely maintained at the level of ideology but is actively manifested in social and cultural activities through collective women's movements.

From this perspective, *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* serves as the normative foundation, while the Bundo Kanduang Organization becomes the means of implementing its values. The synergy between the two ensures that custom and religion are preserved within Minangkabau society while also providing women with a strategic role in guiding their families and communities in accordance with both customary and Islamic principles. The Bundo Kanduang Organization is formally recognized as one of the traditional institutions within the *nagari* governance system. Beyond this, it plays a strategic role in shaping individuals of faith, piety, and knowledge, while also fostering a quality younger generation based on the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*. Together with *Niniak Mamak*, *Alim Ulama*, and *Cadiak Pandai*, the organization bears the responsibility of guiding descendants and the community in line with Minangkabau customs and traditions, while also upholding the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Nevertheless, in practice, the organization faces numerous challenges, particularly in implementing the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*.

The application of these teachings and values is deemed essential for addressing various issues confronting Minangkabau society today, including moral decline and the influence of foreign cultures. Against this backdrop, this study examines the strategies employed by the Bundo Kanduang Organization in actualizing the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* within the community (Yulika, [2017](#)). The organization in Nagari Tanjung Bonai, established in 1976, has since 1979 evolved into a significant customary institution in promoting this philosophy as its organizational principle. This is reflected in its involvement in customary ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, religious rituals, and other traditional practices. In addition, the organization actively conducts customary discussions, seminars, and introduces *Adat Salingka Nagari*. However, the enactment of Law No. 5 of 1979 on Village Governance during the New Order era separated customary elements from administrative governance. This political shift caused fluctuations in the role of the Bundo Kanduang Organization in Nagari Tanjung Bonai as a key customary institution.

This research focuses on Minangkabau customs and culture, which adhere to a matrilineal kinship system. Accordingly, the study adopts an anthropological approach within the framework of historical inquiry to explore the socio-cultural background of historical events. Cultural changes are also analyzed historically using concepts and theories of cultural anthropology (Abdurrahman, [2011](#)). This approach is employed to understand the socio-cultural foundations behind the establishment of the Bundo Kanduang Organization as an institution central to Minangkabau customs and culture.

Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist theory explains that every cultural activity is fundamentally intended to meet a range of human instinctual needs related to life as a whole. In this context, the implementation of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* by the Bundo Kanduang Organization is understood as a fundamental necessity that serves as the basis for organizing and regulating daily life.

METHOD

This study is based on data obtained through library research. As a historical inquiry, it employs the historical method. According to Gilbert J. Garraghan, the historical method is understood as a set of systematic principles and rules designed to assist in the collection of historical sources, to evaluate them critically, and to present a synthesis—generally in written form—of the results obtained (Herlina, [2020](#)). The historical method encompasses four essential stages: data collection (heuristics), verification, interpretation, and historiography.

In the context of this research, the object of study focuses on the history of the Bundo Kanduang Organization during the period 2000–2018. This timeframe was chosen because it reflects a crucial dynamic in the organization's

development, particularly in its responses to social, political, and cultural changes in Minangkabau. It also marks a significant moment when the organization sought to actualize the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* amid the challenges of modern transformation. Through the historical method, this study examines how the roles, programs, and contributions of the Bundo Kanduang Organization evolved during this period, as well as how it sustained the continuity of customary and Islamic values in Minangkabau society.

The data employed in this study consist of written sources, including organizational archives, books, theses, and scholarly works. At the verification stage, the researcher conducted a critical analysis of the language, spelling, and content of books, journal articles, and other references. Internal criticism was carried out to assess the credibility and authenticity of each source, determining whether the information provided was reliable. This stage was particularly important given that many sources were written from the authors' subjective perspectives. To address this, the researcher compared multiple sources, examined differences in interpretation, and identified which accounts could be considered objective and which were more subjective in nature.

Once authentic and credible data were obtained, the researcher proceeded to compile and interpret the historical events derived from these sources. The facts uncovered were analyzed and arranged in chronological order. Interpretation was carried out using theoretical frameworks as analytical tools. Specifically, this study applies Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist theory, focusing on the implementation of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* within the Bundo Kanduang Organization. The historical narrative is presented in a chronological and systematic manner, resulting in a descriptive-analytical account that facilitates reader comprehension.

Following the process of compilation and interpretation, the findings were written as a coherent, systematic, and chronological historical account using a descriptive-analytical approach. In this regard, the study outlines the history of the Bundo Kanduang Organization, beginning with the background of its establishment and culminating in the implementation of the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* within the organization.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Bundo Kanduang as a Representation of Matrilineality and Socio-Cultural Identity in Minangkabau

History records that the arrival of Islam in Minangkabau during the sixteenth century brought significant changes to the previously established customary order. Prior to the spread of Islam, Minangkabau society adhered to customs inherited from their ancestors, with a matrilineal kinship system that placed women at the center of lineage. The introduction of Islam created a dialectic between custom and religious law (*syarak*). Initial conflicts even arose, particularly during the Padri War (1803–1838), when religious scholars demanded that custom fully submit to Islamic law. Nevertheless, this dynamic eventually produced a compromise formulated in the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK). This principle affirmed that Minangkabau custom must never contradict Islam, and that Islam, in turn, provides the foundation that strengthens custom.

Within this framework, the position of women known as *Bundo Kanduang* acquired renewed meaning. As the central figure in the matrilineal system, *Bundo Kanduang* was entrusted not only with safeguarding family property and lineage but also with maintaining religious values. Minangkabau women were expected to guide their children to remain steadfast in Islamic teachings while upholding customary traditions. This role was later institutionalized through the establishment of the Bundo Kanduang Organization, which emerged in the twentieth century as a response to social change and the need to preserve Minangkabau identity in the face of modernization.

Historical analysis shows that the relationship between Islam and custom in Minangkabau has never been static but is the product of a long process of negotiation and adaptation. ABS-SBK emerged as a unifying formula that harmonized custom and Islam, while the Bundo Kanduang Organization provided a practical medium to ensure that these values endured. Thus, custom and Islam in Minangkabau do not function independently but rather reinforce one another, with women—through the role of *Bundo Kanduang*—serving as key figures who bridge the two within the social and cultural life of the community.

Minangkabau society is widely recognized as matrilineal (*mater* meaning mother, and *lineal* meaning line), a system that organizes social life based on kinship, descent, and inheritance through the maternal line (Yunarti, [2017](#)). In general, Minangkabau communities uphold a set of norms transmitted across generations that function as binding

law and social order. However, these rules apply only within a given *nagari* (village federation) and may differ from those of another, a principle referred to as *Adat Salingka Nagari* (Alfurqan et al., [2019](#); Fardius, [2017](#)).

For Minangkabau society, custom is regarded as a holistic and dynamic culture. It guides collective behavior, is passed down from generation to generation, and serves as a force for unity. Nevertheless, there are also elements of custom that remain unchanged, as captured in the proverb: *kain dipakai usang, adaik dipakai baru* (cloth wears out with use, but custom endures with practice) (Marpuah, [2014](#)). Accordingly, Minangkabau custom is categorized into four types: (1) *adat nan sabana adat* (the true essence of custom), which is primordial, unalterable, and grounded in natural law; (2) *adat istiadat*, referring to communal practices or ceremonies, which may be observed but whose absence does not invite sanction; (3) *adat nan diadatkan*, referring to codified rules or laws enacted by consensus; and (4) *adat nan taradat*, regulations produced through social agreement or deliberation (Zainuddin, [2019](#)).

In the development of customary law in Minangkabau, changes frequently occur. These are considered natural, as custom is understood to be dynamic and adaptable to the times, provided that its fundamental principles remain intact. Despite various transformations, the matrilineal system has endured as a hallmark of Minangkabau identity, reflecting profound respect for women. In this context, women are viewed as the bearers of lineage, honored with the title *Bundo Kanduang*, literally meaning biological or true mother (Zainuddin, [2016](#)).

The figure of *Bundo Kanduang* embodies a woman endowed with qualities and privileges that distinguish her from others. Consequently, in contemporary Minangkabau society, the term *Bundo Kanduang* carries multiple meanings. According to Bundo Raudha Thaib, Chairwoman of the Bundo Kanduang Organization of West Sumatra, these include: (1) historically, a title for female rulers of the Pagaruyung Kingdom, with the last recorded being Yang Dipertuan Gadis Reno Sumpu in 1833, following the exile of Sultan Bagagarsyah to Batavia by the Dutch; (2) in myth and legend, such as *Kaba Cindua Mato*, a name for a sacred and powerful queen of Pagaruyung; (3) sociologically, a designation for Minangkabau women who have borne children, particularly the eldest woman in a clan who holds decision-making authority; (4) in customary terms, an honorific for elder women, even those outside one's clan; (5) symbolically, a representation of the motherland, akin to "Mother Earth"; (6) literally, one's biological mother; and (7) organizationally, the name of a women's institution that works alongside the Minangkabau Customary Council (LKAAM) (Zainuddin, [2010](#)).

The strength of the matrilineal system encouraged the formation of organizations as platforms for women to contribute actively while preserving Minangkabau cultural and customary values. The quality of society was believed to depend largely on the role of women, who bore the responsibility of creating a just and prosperous community grounded in Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, and Minangkabau custom. Together with *Niniak Mamak* (clan leaders), *Alim Ulama* (religious scholars), *Cadiak Pandai* (intellectuals), and with the support of government, Minangkabau women play an essential role in advancing society, particularly in matters of women's welfare, family life, and the education of younger generations (Mony et al., [2022](#)).

The Bundo Kanduang Organization was officially established on November 18, 1974, during the Third Grand Assembly (*Musyawarah Besar III*) in Payakumbuh. Its formation was intended as a forum for learning, accommodating, and articulating the aspirations of women, as well as addressing the challenges they faced in family and community life. Through its activities, members of the organization gained enlightenment, experience, and knowledge that could be disseminated among other Minangkabau women (Ashadi, [2019](#)).

The Philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* as the Guiding Principle of Minangkabau Society

The harmony between the matrilineal kinship system and adherence to Islamic teachings is one of the defining features that distinguishes the Minangkabau from other societies. The Minangkabau community is widely recognized for adopting both customary values and Islam as guiding principles in all aspects of life, including conduct, speech, social relations, and dress. The integration of custom and Islam, encapsulated in the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*, has become the foundation of social order and the philosophical worldview of Minangkabau society (Defrinal et al., [2019](#); Ritonga, [2024](#)).

The philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* embodies philosophical values as well as fundamental principles that have been institutionalized and have shaped the very identity of the Minangkabau people. Several essential meanings are embedded within this philosophy. First, the principle of *Alam Takambang Jadi Guru*

("nature unfolds as a teacher") emphasizes that nature is a primary source of knowledge and a guide for Minangkabau life. This worldview is manifested in proverbial sayings, poetic verses, and traditional expressions that connect human existence with the dynamics of nature. Nature is conceived holistically, not merely as the place of birth, life, and death, but as a profound source of philosophical wisdom (Hafizah et al., [2021](#); Rusyaida et al., [2024](#)). For *Bundo Kanduang*, this principle serves as a model for organizational activities, drawing lessons from the order and balance inherent in the natural world. Within Minangkabau custom, this balance is reflected in the concept of *nan ampek* ("the four elements"), such as sun and moon, earth and sky, day and night, water and fire, and land and wind (Amin, [2022](#)). Through this framework, Minangkabau society understands itself as a community of custom and civility firmly grounded in Islam (Suryani et al., [2023](#)).

Second, the philosophy of *adab* (propriety) and *budi* (virtue) affirms that the essence of Minangkabau custom lies in moral excellence. The dignity of a Minangkabau woman, particularly a *Bundo Kanduang*, rests on refined character and noble conduct. This principle is reflected in a traditional *gurindam*: *Nan kuriak iyolah kundi, nan indah iyolah baso, nan baiak iyolah budi, nan indah iyolah baso*, which means that nothing is more valuable than virtue and nothing more beautiful than courtesy. This value is in line with the central mission of the Prophet Muhammad, namely the perfection of human character. Accordingly, *Bundo Kanduang* is regarded as a role model who instills *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character) in Minangkabau social and cultural life, in accordance with Islamic law as grounded in the Qur'an (Rahmat, [2020](#); Sriwardona et al., [2024](#)).

Third, the philosophy of *barajo ka mufakat* ("sovereignty lies in consensus") underscores the centrality of deliberation in Minangkabau custom. All matters are resolved through the principle of *nan bajanjang naiak, nan batango turun* ("stepwise deliberation"), with consensus as the ultimate goal (*bulek aia ka pambuluah, bulek kato jo mupakat*). In these deliberations, the voices of *Bundo Kanduang* hold equal weight with those of men, meaning that no decisions concerning the clan or lineage can be taken without women's participation (Arifin, [2012](#); Febrianty et al., [2023](#)). This recognition illustrates the uniqueness of the Minangkabau social system, where women's voices carry customary legitimacy. Thus, gender equality in Minangkabau society is not merely the result of modern influence but has been rooted in cultural traditions for centuries (Sulistiyati, [2024](#); Yusutria et al., [2021](#)).

Fourth, the philosophy of solidarity and integration emphasizes the importance of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) in everyday life. *Bundo Kanduang* cultivates a sense of togetherness by emphasizing *raso jo pareso*, the balance between emotion and reason, in addressing communal challenges. This principle of solidarity is articulated in customary expressions such as *ka bukik samo mandaki, ka lurah samo manurun; saciok bak ayam, sadanciang bak basi*, which stress the importance of collective responsibility in confronting life's difficulties (Alikhsan & Yenti, [2023](#); Rifki et al., [2024](#)). Such cooperation operates as a social mechanism to maintain community stability, encompassing economic, political, and cultural dimensions.

The philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* is therefore understood as a comprehensive way of life that integrates custom and Islam into a unified framework. For *Bundo Kanduang*, this philosophy forms the foundation of her strategic role as both custodian of custom and nurturer of family and community. The values embedded within this philosophy shape the social identity of the Minangkabau as an egalitarian; civilized society deeply rooted in Islamic teachings.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the Bundo Kanduang Organization represents the concrete continuity of the historical role of Minangkabau women in safeguarding both custom and religion, rooted in the matrilineal system and later integrated with the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*. During the period 2000–2018, the organization played a strategic role in preserving Islamic-based customary values while simultaneously adapting to the dynamics of modernity. Its existence was not limited to the preservation of tradition but also demonstrated progressive transformation through programs in education, economic empowerment, and social participation. Thus, the Bundo Kanduang Organization stands as a harmonious representation of historical legacy and contemporary demands.

Future research is encouraged to explore more deeply the role of the Bundo Kanduang Organization within the contexts of globalization and digitalization, particularly how the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* can be internalized within patterns of women's leadership in modern times. In addition, comparative studies between the Bundo Kanduang Organization and women's customary organizations in other regions are essential to

enrich the understanding of gender-based models of cultural preservation. Broader field research employing an interdisciplinary approach will make a significant contribution to assessing the continuing relevance of Bundo Kandung's role in the future.

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