

**BUNDO KANDUANG: A POWERFUL OR POWERLESS RULER?  
LITERARY ANALYSIS OF *KABA CINDUA MATO*  
(*HIKAYAT NAN MUDA TUANKU PAGARUYUNG*)**

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**Abstrak**

*Kaba Cinduo Mato* tidak dapat dipisahkan dari kehidupan masyarakat Minangkabau baik dalam ranah publik maupun privat. *Kaba* ini menampilkan figur *Bundo Kanduang* yang dipercaya oleh masyarakat Minangkabau sebagai raja pertama kerajaan Pagaruyung. *Bundo Kanduang* diakui sebagai figur yang meletakkan dasar-dasar sistem pemerintahan Minangkabau yang berlandaskan agama Islam dan adat matrilineal. Legenda *Bundo Kanduang*, yang citranya masih mendominasi kehidupan sehari-hari perempuan Minangkabau dalam masyarakat kontemporer Minangkabau, telah menjadi fokus penelitian beberapa peneliti yang tertarik untuk melakukan analisa politik gender dalam masyarakat Minangkabau. Citra *Bundo Kanduang* dalam *Kaba Cinduo Mato* digunakan untuk menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan: “Siapakah yang sesungguhnya memegang kekuasaan dalam masyarakat Minangkabau?” Apakah mungkin seorang perempuan menjadi seorang pemimpin, dalam ranah publik dan privat, dalam Minangkabau?”. Artikel ini menganalisa citra *Bundo Kanduang* yang dideskripsikan dalam *Kaba Cinduo Mato*. Argumen utama dari artikel ini adalah *Bundo Kanduang* dicitrakan dalam *Kaba Cinduo Mato* sebagai seorang raja yang berkuasa penuh dalam mengendalikan pemerintahannya di kerajaan pagaruyung, serta seorang ibu yang kuat dan bijak. Selain itu, *kaba* ini memperkuat deskripsi Minangkabau sebagai suatu masyarakat matrilineal dimana kaum perempuannya memiliki beberapa hak istimewa dan turut memegang peranan penting dalam kehidupan bermasyarakat.

**Abstract**

*Kaba Cinduo Mato* cannot be separated from Minangkabau social life, both in public and private spaces. This *kaba* describes the life of *Bundo Kanduang*, believed by most of Minangkabau people as the first queen of Pagaruyung. It is believed that *Bundo Kanduang* established the foundation of Minangkabau government system which was based on Islamic and matrilineal principles. The legend of *Bundo Kanduang*, whose image has still dominated the daily life of Minangkabau women in contemporary Minangkabau society, has become the research focus of some researchers who are interested in analysing gender politics within Minangkabau society. The image of *Bundo Kanduang* in *Kaba Cinduo Mato* is used in order to answer some questions such as “Who holds the power within Minangkabau society?” and “Is it possible for a woman to be a leader, both in public and private spaces, in Minangkabau *adat* society?”. This article analyses the image of *Bundo Kanduang* as described in *Kaba Cinduo Mato*. The main argument of this article is that *Bundo Kanduang* is described in *Kaba Cinduo Mato* as a ruler, who has a full authority in leading her government in Pagaruyung kingdom, and a mother, who is strong and wise. Moreover, this *kaba* strengthens the description of Minangkabau as a matrilineal society where its women have some privileged rights and play significant roles in their community.

*Keywords* : *Bundo Kanduang, Minangkabau adat, matrilineal, gender*

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**Introduction**

*Kaba Cinduo Mato* has a special position in Minangkabau traditional literature (Yusuf, 1994:1). According to Manan, a Minangkabau scholars, *Kaba Cinduo Mato* cannot be separated from Minangkabau

social life because the story reflects the values of *adat* and Islam as its nucleus which was the foundation of the Minangkabau’s way of life at that time (Manan, 1967:81). Moreover, P.E. de Josselin de Jong, a pioneer of Minangkabau studies, also used *Kaba Cinduo Mato* of Van der Toorn’s version, as his analysis basis on

Minangkabau political organisation system, and matrilineal and patrilineal positions. De Jong argues that within Minangkabau political and social life, the matrilineal and patrilineal concepts are inter-related (De Jong, 1980:97-115). Minangkabau people use this *kaba* in order to answer some questions such as “Who holds the power within Minangkabau society?” and “Is it possible for a woman to be a leader in Minangkabau *adat* society?”. It is because the *kaba* describes the life of *Bundo Kanduang* (‘the Womb Mother’). *Bundo Kanduang* is a mythical female ruler of the Minangkabau.

According to Edward Djamaris, within Minangkabau historiography, *tambo*<sup>1</sup> and *kaba*<sup>2</sup>, only in *kaba* is explicitly stated the name of *Bundo Kanduang*, while in *tambo* her name is rarely mentioned. Moreover, in *tambo* the central figures are *Datuk Katamagungan* and *Datuk Papatih Nan Sabatang*. It is believed that they codified Minangkabau laws (Djamaris, 1991:65). This *Kaba Cindua Mato* is also known among Minangkabau people as *Carito Bundo Kanduang jo Cindua Mato* (the story of *Bundo Kanduang* and *Cindua Mato*).

The legend of *Bundo Kanduang* and *Kaba Cindua Mato* have attracted some researchers who are interested in analysing gender politics within Minangkabau society. Taufik Abdullah’s article ‘Some Notes on the Kaba Tjindua Mato: An Example of Minangkabau Traditional Literature’, published more than 30 years ago, is still one of the classic works on gender politics in Minangkabau society. Scholars, of Minangkabau studies, continue to refer to it as an authoritative work on power and authority within the traditional Minangkabau political system. While my analysis on *Kaba Cindua Mato* builds upon his work, I have a different interpretation regarding *Bundo Kanduang*’s position in traditional Minangkabau power structure. Based on Jacqueline Aquino Siapno’s criticism of patriarchal reading practices on Acehnese literature, it can be concluded that Abdullah’s reading of *Kaba Cindua Mato* is quite patriarchal (Siapno, 2002).

*Kaba Cindua Mato* (KCM) has many different versions. There are thirty three KCM texts which are kept in three libraries outside of West Sumatra. The Indonesian National Library (eight texts), University of Leiden Library (twenty four texts), and Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (one text) (Yusuf, 1994:72). This *kaba* was also edited into eleven editions, published both inside and outside Indonesia

(ibid,9). It is undoubtedly that many Minangkabau from different generations have been familiar with this *Kaba Cindua Mato*. For example, referring to Taufik Abdullah’s accord, during 1924 this *Kaba* was frequently referred to by the Minangkabau intellectual migrants in Java for their campaign to establish Minangkabau regional council (Abdullah, 1970:1). Despite the fact that most Minangkabau people were educated in this Minangkabau ‘classic’ *kaba*, it seems that their knowledge about this *kaba* is partial. During my fieldwork, I found that very few Minangkabau people, especially amongst the younger generations, knew the basic plot of the ‘original’ story. Many of them are only familiar with the title. For the analysis I have chosen one of texts KCM, collection of the University of Leiden library and catalogue number is Or. 8539. I decide to choose this version because according to M.Yusuf, the plot of the story of this text is complete, compared with other texts. Beside that it is also still in good condition (Yusuf, 1994:159). This text, written in old Minangkabau language with Arabic-Malay script, has been transcribed by Yusuf into latin script. I will use the transcribed text as the source of my analysis. Although my discussion on *Kaba Cindua Mato* is mainly based upon the printed edition (written literature), my approach to it is to consider KCM as oral literature.

In analysing this text I have one main arguments. The argument is that *Bundo Kanduang* is represented in this text as the female king who is not only wise, but also with full authority. Her position was, at least, equal with other elites within Pagaruyung kingdom. Moreover, I argue that the text shows that it is taken for granted that women are well-qualified to assume the highest political positions in their community. In short, I argue that *Bundo Kanduang* is, indeed, a powerful ruler; the first ruler of Pagaruyung kingdom.

## Analysis

The printed edition of *Kaba Cindua Mato* was published under the title of *Hikayat Tuanku Nan Muda Pagaruyung* (the Epic of Tuanku nan Muda, Cindua Mato’s noble title, of Pagaruyung) or *Sejarah Tuanku Rang Mudo* (the history of Tuanku Rang Mudo, Cindua Mato’s noble title). However, this print title is not well known amongst Minangkabau people. The Minangkabau are more familiar with its oral title *Kaba Cindua Mato* or *Curito Bundo Kanduang jo Cindua Mato* (The story of *Bundo Kanduang* and *Cindua Mato*) (Yusuf, 1994:1). It is arguably that the dominant role of *Bundo Kanduang* in the story is the reason why the latter title mentions *Bundo Kanduang*’s name before *Cindua Mato*’s. It can be seen from the fact that in the first paragraphs of this text depicts the image of *Bundo Kanduang* (the Womb Mother), a prominent legendary

<sup>1</sup> *Tambo*, literary means, history, genealogy, is historiography of traditional Minangkabau. See Djamaris, 1991:7-8. See also Asnan, 2003, 319-320.

<sup>2</sup> *Kaba*, literary means news or report, is a genre of Minangkabau traditional oral literature which can be told by *tukang kaba/ sijobang* (*kaba* teller). See Junus, 1984:17.

female figure within *Alam Minangkabau* (Minangkabau world).

*Sadanglah rajo parampuan di dalam ulak Tanjuang Bungo, di dalam Alam Minangkabau, di dalam Koto Pagaruyuang, banamo Parik Koto Dalam. Bukanlah rajo dang mambali, bukanlah rajo dang mamintak. Rajo badiri sandirinyo. Samo tajadi jan alam ko. Timbalan rajo banua Ruhum, timbalan rajo banua Cino. Timbalan rajo di lautan...Nan manjujuang dang mahkota, nan banamo Kulah Qamar...Nan manaruh karih kasatian, nan banamo Madang Giri, nan bahulu kayu kamaik, dibahagi tigo bahagi; sakarek ka banua Ruhum, sakarek ka banua Cino, sakarek pado Pulau Ameh nangko. Jiko batamu kamudian, umua dunia sudah sampai...nan babaju kasatian..Nan manaruh ameh sijato-jati...<sup>3</sup>*

(There was a female king at Ulak Tanjuang Bungo, within the realm of Minangkabau, in Pagaruyuang capital city, named Parik Koto Dalam. She was the Queen whose position was neither purchased nor asked for. The queen who stood by herself, created together with this universe (the realm of Minangkabau). She was the counterpart of the King of Rome, the counterpart of the King of China, the counterpart of the King of the sea...who carried on a crown, named Kulah Qamar...who had sacred dagger, named Madang Giri which was adorned by hilt of Kayu Kamanik. Kayu kamanik had been divided into three parts; one part went to Rome, another part went to China, and the last part stayed at this Land of Gold. If all part would meet, it would be the end of the world...(the Queen) who had sacred costume...who had gold, named sijato-jati)

The following paragraphs give the readers or listeners a good description of the authority, possessed by the *Bundo Kanduang* as the ruler of the Pagaruyuang. The sentence below indicates the strength of *Bundo Kanduang*'s power:

*"...buliah pulo denai curaikan surek sebagai undang-undang. Jiko dibangkik sitambun lamo, nan sabarih tidak hilang, nan satitik tidak lupu. Dalam alam Minangkabau, nan denai pegang taguah-taguah, nan denai hitam denai putiahkan,*

*nan denai hilang denai timbuakan, nan den habih den sis{y}okan, nan den tungkuik tilantangkan, nan den hilia den mudiakkan, nan den hampiang picak-picak, nan den giliang bulek-bulek. Pusako Katemenggungan, lorong sukunya Koto Piliang dalam hukuman kito juo (Ibid, 68-69)*

(...I will explain the book, consists of standard rules. If the old book should be exposed, not a single line has been disappeared, not a single dot has been forgotten. In the Minangkabau world [the old book] that I have tightly kept, I could blacken a rule which was white, and vice versa, I could make disappear a rule which was exist and vice versa, I could vanish a rule which was kept, I could upside down a rule, I could change the direction of a rule (downstream become upstream and vice versa), I could reshape it (flat become round and vice versa). The heirloom of Katemenggungan of Koto Piliang is also within our rule)

The sentence shows that *Bundo Kanduang* is the guardian and corrector of her kingdom's constitution. She is the central ruler and her position is above the law.

In this text, it is taken for granted that women can occupy the highest political position in their society. This is evident from the way *Bundo Kanduang* is represented in the text. *Bundo Kanduang* is depicted as a talented person, which she needs to fulfil her position as one of the most powerful queens in the world: smart, wise, independent and firm. Her intelligence can be seen by the way she forms a government, similar to that of a modern day parliament. She is helped by four ministers, *Basa Nan Ampek Balai*. *Bundo Kanduang* educated *Basa Nan Ampek Balai* certain abilities such the knowledge on Minangkabau *adat*. *Bundo Kanduang* also gives them certain authorities to conduct their different tasks. She also establishes a democratic system of governance. It means every decision regarding the kingdom' matters will be decided based on consensus (*mufakat*) by her cabinet members:

*Alah manitah Bundo Kanduang. "Malah bak itua akan baiaknyo, karapatan Nan Ampek balai. Sananglah hati denai...Mandanga kato nan bak kian, alah manyambah anyo lai, Tuan Kadhi di Padang Gantiang. "Ampun saya Bundo Kanduang. Pulang maklum pada Bundo. Mano nan baiak pado Bundo, baiklah pulo pado kami, sagalo anak {anak} Bundo." (ibid, 82-83)*

(*Bundo Kanduang* then orders: '[I agree] If that is the best solution, a result of the meeting of Basa Nan Ampek Balai. How happy I was' ...listening to this kind of words [expressed by *Bundo Kanduang*], Tuan Kadhi from Padang

<sup>3</sup> Or.8539, Cindur Mata XXIII (manuscript collection, University of Leiden), edited by M.Yusuf in M.Yusuf (1994), *Persoalan transliterasi dan Edisi Hikayat Tuanku Nan Muda Pagaruyung (Kaba Cindua Mato)*, Master thesis, Universitas Indonesia, appendix p.1 section.1.

Gantiang then gave respectful greeting: ' Please forgive me *Bundo Kanduang*, everything depends on you. If this is good for you, it will also good for us, all your children)

The texts shows that *Bundo Kanduang* is a wise king who respects and considers advice expressed by her subordinates. However, the final decision is still in her hands as she says to her son, Sutan Rumanduang: "*Pulangnyo pado kito juo. Bak itu tatah titah barihnyo, nak itu undang-undangnyo* (finally, it [the final decision] will depends on us. This system [the ruler as the final decision maker] is based on [our] customs, it is the way of [our] laws)" (ibid, 6). *Sutan Rumanduang* also recognized *Bundo Kanduang*'s position as the highest authority of the Pagaruyuang kingdom, and *Basa Ampek Balai* are only *Bundo Kanduang*'s 'right-hand men' whose task tends to formally stand by *Bundo Kanduang*'s decisions:

*Bundo Kanduang parsambahan Basya Ampe Balai. Sapatah Bundo jangan tahu, Sapatah Bundo jangan pandai. Pulangkan bicaro kapadonyo. Jiko buruak, diburuakkannyo, jiko baiak, dibaiaikkannyo. Tunjuak di Bundo di bicaro, amak dirundiang dibandiangkan sadang di Basya Ampe Balai*(ibid, 257-258)

(*Bundo Kanduang* who is respectfully obeyed by *Basa Ampe Balai*. Only you who knows and is smart. If [you think something] is bad, they will aggravate it. If [you think something] is good, they will say that it is good. *Bundo* is the person who dictate the words to be discussed by *Basa Ampe Balai*)

*Bundo Kanduang* is also represented as a competent war commander. This can be seen from the way she uses tactics to counter the attacks from *Imbang Jayo* and *Tiang Bungkok*. It is also worthy to notice that in the description of *Bundo Kanduang*'s appearance, character and abilities as the reign of one of female ruler, the 'author'<sup>4</sup> used the same appropriate language and schematic formula used to describe other *male* king. For example, in the text *Bundo Kanduang* is always referred as female king (*rajo*=king, *perempuan*=female) instead of queen (*ratu*) Moreover, her appearance and conduct are described as the 'standard king', not as how a woman should behave. For example, in the meeting *Bundo Kanduang* is described as sitting in the center of meeting, surrounded by her subordinates, who are all males. In the meeting she distinctly expressed her vision and is firm in making a decision. Her inferiors are

highly respectful and fearful towards her. They try to obey her and she admonishes them if they behave inappropriately. She was also very stern in punishing those who broke the laws, regardless of their background, even towards her own children. For example, she sharply criticized *Dang Tuanku*'s conduct, who was the second most powerful person in the Pagaruyuang kingdom: "*Jangan bicaro lalu lalang. Jiko tidak pandai bakato-kato, baiklah diam-diam sajo*" (don't speak unclearly. If you can't speak properly, just be quiet). Like the description of other male kings, the 'author' describes *Bundo Kanduang* as a person who dared to physically express her anger in 'unfeminine' way like other male kings did:

*"...alah mandanga nan bak kian, berang bangih inyo lai. Dihampekan kampia di tangan. Balah duo gandam perak. Pacahlah pulo m{l}lancang ameh. Alah mamutiah cando kapuah. Dihampehkan tangan di pangadam, ...Malenggang ustano basa nantun. Alah sunguik Bundo Kanduang. Alah anak haniang sajo, dalam ustano basa nantun. Surang pun tidak nan babuni* (ibid, 61)

After listening to the news, *Bundo Kanduang* was very furious. She thrown [her] bag down. The *gandam* silver was broken into two pieces. She dashed her hand against *pangadam*. The palace was becoming quiet *Bundo Kanduang* was complaining. Everybody in the palace then was speechless. Nobody dared to say a word

In addition, as the king *Bundo Kanduang* does not need to perform domestic duties. These are the responsibility of her loyal lady- in- waiting who is 'the manager' of her house (Ibid, 24)

As previously mentioned in introduction section that Taufik Abdullah's article 'Some Notes on the Kaba Tjindua Mato: An Example of Minangkabau Traditional Literature', published more than 30 years ago, is still one of the classic works on gender politics in Minangkabau society. Scholars, of Minangkabau studies, continue to refer to it as an authoritative work on power and authority within the traditional Minangkabau political system. Regarding to *Bundo Kanduang*'s authority Taufik Abudllah argues that:

"...but inspite of her function as a source of wisdom, *Bundo Kanduang* could not make any decisions. She was neither the authority on adat, which was under the jurisdiction of the *Rajo Adat* and the *Bendahara*, nor the expert on *sarak*, which was under the *Raja Ibadat* and the *Tuan Kadhi*. *Bundo Kanduang* was powerless because she had no official position in the hierarchy of

<sup>4</sup> Like other folklores which are considered as communal property, *kaba* author is anonymous. However, arguably the story teller, unconsciously or not, could give his personal interpretation to the story telling process.

*the Minangkabau political system* (Abdullah 1970:16 italic is added).

In short, based on his analysis on *text Kaba Cinduo Mato*, Taufik argues that *Bundo Kanduang* was only a ceremonial leader without authority. His argument then is used by those, who disagrees with women's leadership, as a foundation of their argument that even in Minangkabau society, where women get some privileged rights, it is not appropriate for a woman to be a leader of her community. This party, who challenge women's leadership in public sphere, also argue that identity of Minangkabau is not *matriarchal*, in which women hold the power, but is rather a *matrilineal* society, in which power is still in the hands of men despite the fact that women get some privileges.

Contrary to Taufik Abdullah's interpretation that *Bundo Kanduang* is powerless, I found that *Bundo Kanduang*, is indeed, has a full authority, having broad, acknowledged responsibilities and rights as the king of Pagaruyuang.

It seems that the description of the state of kingship and the state of having power transcends gender. This transcending of gender can also be seen in the position of *Bundo Kanduang* in the text. She is more represented as the successor of clan power than any other emerging independent female ruler. She came into the power because of her position as the eldest *child* (not a *daughter*). As the eldest child she had a right, not her younger brother- *Rajo Mudo*, to inherit *qamar pusako*, a symbol of the ownership of the kingdom, from her parents. This transcending of gender can also be seen from the fact that the 'author' prefers to choose the word 'parents' instead of 'father' or 'mother' as *Bundo Kanduang*'s predecessor may stress the assumption than gender, either male or female, is not so important in the continuity of clan power. Another example can be seen from the inauguration of *Puti Sari Dunia*, *Bundo Kanduang*'s granddaughter, as the female king of Rao, not Pagaruyuang. Pagaruyuang kingdom is *Sutan Alam Dunia*'s right as the first grandchild.

The other contrast finding is the representation of the power of Minangkabau female ruler. The text advocates the idea that the female rulers' capabilities in keeping their power are more outstanding than the male rulers' capabilities. In this text some male kings are described as unwise and incompetent and have to be supported by their female allies. For example, it is because of *Dang Tuanku*'s unwise act (kidnapping *Puti Bungsu* without *Bundo Kanduang*'s consent) the Pagaruyuang kingdom has got disaster as *Bundo Kanduang* says:

*Dangkalan malah kato denai. Sajak samulo den katokan, tidak elok urang pamberang. Urang pamberang tingga iman. Urang pambangih*

*hilang aka. Urang parusuah jauah hati. Labiah baik, urang saba. Urang saba kasihan Allah* (Yusuf, 1994: 399)

('[Why don't] you] listen to my words. From the beginning I have told, it is not good to be a bad-tempered person. The bad-tempered person could be lost his faith in Islam. The furious person could be lost his mind, the trouble person could be lost people's affection. It would be better to be a patient person. The patient person will be loved by God)

Another example is that, under *Sutan Alam Dunia*'s governance, Pagaruyuang had been lost some of its areas, taken to Acehese king as the payment of *Sutan Alam Dunia*'s debt. It is as a result of *Sutan Alam Dunia*'s improper conduct, which is against *adat rajo-rajo* (the customs of kings). He did not pay his debt to the Acehese King, his former father-in-law.

*Bundo Kanduang* role's as a mother was secondary to her role as a powerful leader. In her capacity as a mother *Bundo Kanduang* is depicted as a nurturer, caring and affectionate. It is towards *Cindua Mato*, who is her adopted son, *Bundo Kanduang*'s affectionate is emphasised (ibid, 21). Within the text there are many sentences which show the different expressions of *Bundo Kanduang*. Unlike her expression as an authoritarian king, as a mother *Bundo Kanduang* is more described as a soft, sensitive, caring and loving person (ibid, 23,26,31). For example, *Bundo Kanduang*, who, as the King of Pagaruyuang, firmly expressed her aim to punish her own brother because of his betrayal, is depicted as a mother who easily cries upon seeing her son temporarily leave their home for travelling (*marantau*) (ibid, 32). Another example, it is *Bundo Kanduang*, and not *Kambang Bandohari* - the womb mother of *Cindua Mato*, who is busy preparing *Cindua Mato*'s departure and is more concerned of his safety. (ibid,26). On the other hand, *Cindua Mato* is shown to feel closer and be more spoiled to *Bundo Kanduang* than to his womb mother (ibid, 120). After *Bundo Kanduang* vanishes to heaven, then the text exposes the closeness of *Cindua Mato* and his womb mother, *Kambang Bandohari*. While towards *Dang Tuanku*, her own son, *Bundo Kanduang* is depicted behaving more like a patron. *Bundo Kanduang* is shown trying hard to educate him on kingdom matters so he can fulfil his role as the successor of Pagaruyuang. *Bundo Kanduang*'s attitude towards *Dang Tuanku* is also sterner than of that towards *Cindua Mato*. On the other hand, *Dang Tuanku* is shown to behave more formal and serious towards *Bundo Kanduang*, his own mother. Arguably, it emphasises the idea that the nurturing character of woman is not directly be associated with her reproductive function.

Despite the slightly difference types of approach, to both of them *Bundo Kanduang* gives her full protection and guidance. It is *Bundo Kanduang* who looks after, educates them, finds spouses for them and gives wealth to them. Similarly, the text exposes *Dang Tuanku*'s and *Cindua Mato*'s 'spoiling' and dependent behaviors to their mother as can be seen from the text below

*Diliek Bundo sudah sunguik, alah diam kaduonyo."*...*Sudah babuek kusuik rancah. Badan ko juo mananguangkan* (ibid,266)

(Seeing that Bundo is upset, They both (*Cindua mato* and *Dang Tuanku*) then do not say any word.' After [you] entangled everything, this own body [*Bundo Kanduang*] only who has to bear it)'

What is clear is that the text shows the strong bond between the mother (*Bundo Kanduang*) and her children (*Dang Tuanku* and *Cindua Mato*), especially the multi type-relationship between *Bundo Kanduang* and *Dang Tuanku*. It can be argued that *Bundo Kanduang* and *Dang Tuanku* is a 'person' in two bodies, who cannot be separated. It is *Dang Tuanku*, not *Cindua Mato*, who accompanies *Bundo Kanduang* to the Seventh Heaven (*langiak katujuh*) in avoiding *Tiang Bungkuak*'s attack. Based on this finding, I disagree with Jeffrey Hadler's statement :

"Throughout Minangkabau (and much of Sumatra) the preeminent mother-son myth is the *Kaba Cindua Mato*—the story of a *perantau son who rejects his destitute mother, and as a punishment is turned to stone* (Hadler, 2000:250, italic is added)

While Hadler regards this text as an exemplary story, showing the weak relationship between a mother and son as a *perantau* (a migrant), a son who refuses to acknowledge his own mother and as a punishment he was turned into stone. I, on the contrary, argue that this story is a significant example of the strong bond between a mother and son, who have multi-faceted relationship: king-successor, patron-client and teacher-pupil relationship. Moreover, a son, who cannot be separated with his own mother, help the mother in emerging their power over the kingdom. As a gift of his loyalty the son's position as a successor of Pagaruyuang kingdom is protected. His authority is continued by his own children. It can be said that through him the paternal line of Pagaruyuang kingship is acknowledged. In my opinion, Hadler's comment is more appropriate to be referred to other famous Minangkabau folklore, *Malin Kundang*. *Malin Kundang*, considered as a non *kaba* story and printed only in Indonesian language (Junus, 1982:32), is broadly well known among the Minangkabau. *Malin Kundang*, a migrant faithless son

cursed to be stoned by his own mother, become symbol of bad person according to Minangkabau values. This story is almost quoted in order to educate young Minangkabau, who are preparing to go migration, to not forget their mother, either own mother or mother land, otherwise they will follow *Malin Kundang*'s fate. This story, like *Kaba Cindua Mato*, is also expressed how strong is a mother's position within Minangkabau society.

In addition the strong bond between *Bundo Kanduang* and *Dang Tuanku* can be seen as an acknowledgement that the traditional concept of nuclear family consists of mother and children only called *samande* (one mother). The mother's position in her society is more strongly related to her children than to her husband. Similarly, the children belong to their mother while the father does not have full authority to his own children. This concept is strengthened by the fact that in this text *Bundo Kanduang*'s position as a wife is never exposed. She is described as a virgin mother as she has never married to any man.

*KCM* also exposes the relative equal gender relations within Minangkabau society. In this text women are described as the equal counterpart of men. Some women are represented wiser, smarter and more influential than men. For example, because of *Puti Ranit Jintan*'s advice, whose the younger sister of *Imbang Jayo*, *Imbang Jayo* takes revenge to *Cindua Mato*. Moreover, it is *Puti Bungsu*, the eldest daughter of *Rajo Mudo*, who consoles her father's fear over *Bundo Kanduang*'s punishment. In addition, equality in husband and wife relationship is also exposed in this text. It shows that men as husbands should not treat their wives improperly because their wives are not their inferiors. The text shows how women as wives firmly and outspokenly demand their needs to be treated equally (Yusuf, 1994:192).

The story of *Kaba Cindua Mato* is opened by a greetings from the *tukang kaba* (the story teller) who says that "*Ampun, ampun, ampun baribu kali ampun. Kaba urang kami kabakan, bohong urang kami tak sato* (have mercy, have mercy, have mercy for thousand times, people's story we deliver, people's lies we do not get involve) (ibid,1). These sentences imply that the story had been transferred orally from one *tukang kaba* to another *tukang kaba*. Because of the nature of transmission process, there is a strong possibility that every *tukang kaba* had added his own imagination and interpretation which mostly influenced by his own cultural environment.

Notwithstanding this, the text does not explicitly state the date of its presence, it is clear that the text subsists after Islam came to Minangkabau around sixteenth century. Within the text spread a lot of details showing

the syncretization Islamic ideas with existing local beliefs and displayment of tolerance towards local pre-Islamic practices. For example, it is mentioned that *Bundo Kanduang* performs dawn prayer (*sambahyang*) (ibid, 253). It is also mentioned that Jibril, a messenger of Allah, the owner of *Kabah* of Mecca, who came into *Bundo Kanduang's* and *Dang Tuanku's* dreams and advised them on the future of Pagaruyung kingdom (ibid, 396). Based on the expression in the text saying that: "...*mako dek adaik basandi syara', dek syara' basandi adaik, bak itu sakarang [kini] nangko...*" (because customary laws are based on Islamic laws, the Islamic laws are based on the customary laws, it is existing now)" (ibid:10-11), it can be assumed that the text firstly existed during the period of the second stage of Islamization in Minangkabau world. This modification expresses their equality but dependence on each other. The first stage of Islamization was indicated by the aphorism: "*adat basandi alur, syarak basandikan dalil* (customary laws are based on context; the religious laws are based on relevant passages of the Koran) (Abdullah, 1970:12. see also Azra, 2003). It shows that both values are equal and independent.

## Conclusion

Scholars, especially folklorists, have studied folklore as a relics of the disappearing past. Moreover, folklore is also used as one of the alternative sources for tracing the relationship between power and gender within a society (Yaqub, 2003:330-334). Based on the analysis of *Kaba Cindua Mato*, it can be said that Minangkabau women are relatively privileged not only in private sphere but also in public sphere such as in society's political structure system. Women's leadership is quite naturally accepted in Minangkabau society as can be seen from the activities of *Bundo Kanduang*. In *Kaba Cindua Mato Bundo Kanduang* is portrayed as a strong, independent, wise, intellectual and beautiful woman who perfectly fulfilled her roles as a authoritarian political public figure and a mother simultaneously. She represents the strong maternal figure, promoting the private and public roles which have mostly performed in Minangkabau society. In short, based on the analysis, *Kaba Cindua Mato* exposes the image of *Bundo Kanduang* as a powerful ruler and strong mother. Moreover, the text strengthened the description of Minangkabau as a society in which women possess a privileged status and play significant roles in their communities.

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