



Buddy Prasadja

IN MEMORIAM: BUDDY PRASADJA (1944–1991)¹

Anton Lucas

One evening in October 1991 I was talking on the phone with Jan Hostetler, then director of the Cooperative Southeast Asian Studies Program based in IKIP Malang in East Java, to arrange a lecture time for her students during their forthcoming visit to Yogyakarta. Jan told me her husband Farchan Bulkin also wanted to speak to me. His sad and totally unexpected news was that Buddy Prasadja had died suddenly in Jakarta. It was understood that he died from AIDS.

Towards the end of September 1971 I put my motorbike (an old blue 1969 Honda 90 cc) on the night train in Yogyakarta bound for Jakarta. The train didn't unload baggage at Gambir, so at Kota station I retrieved the bike from the baggage van, and, following directions Peter Britton had given me, I set off from Kota towards Merdeka Square along Jalan Hyam Wuruk. In Jalan Medan Merdeka Barat before the old Museum building (the Gedung Gajah), I turned right, crossed the canal which runs behind the museum, and found myself in Jalan Tanah Abang II. Two blocks further down the road I arrived at the "Pertjetakan Ekspres," Express Printers, where Peter Britton had said I could probably stay. As I had no other contacts in Jakarta, the problem of finding accommodation for an extended period was uppermost in my mind. I found the printing press and the house next door, a large old Dutch villa with a huge mango tree growing between the house and the printing business. I introduced myself to Buddy who said I was welcome to stay in his spacious room. Little did I realize it at the time, but "Tanah Abang Dua," as the house was affectionately called, was to be my physical as well as a kind of spiritual home whenever I was in Jakarta for the next three years.

This was entirely due to Buddy Prasadja. Buddy seemed to be in charge of the household which consisted of semi-permanent foreign researcher guests like myself (working on the revolution), Peter Britton (researching the Central Java Diponegoro Division), and later Lea Jellinek (whose friend Bu Sum, a food seller, became the central focus of her book *The*

¹ My thanks to Harold Crouch, Patrick Guinness, and Chris Manning for their comments, suggestions, and own reminiscences about Buddy Prasadja which they kindly contributed to this In Memoriam.

Wheel of Fortune) and Patrick Guinness (teaching Anthropology at the University of Indonesia under the Australian Volunteers Abroad scheme, who later wrote a book about a poor Yogyakarta community called *Harmony and Hierarchy in a Javanese Kampung*), who lived in Tanah Abang II for the second year of his program. All of us benefited enormously in many different ways from our friendship with Buddy Prasadja.

Buddy was always interested in our research and we often had informal discussions about our field work and about Indonesian politics with him, as well as with his friends, mainly students and recent graduates from the Department of Political Science at the University of Indonesia. Buddy and his friends also took us to eat *nasi uduk* in their favorite warungs and entertained us with their wit, eloquence, and their Jakarta style of humorous personal relations, continuously ribbing each other. Soon we became the butt of their hilarious jokes as well.

Buddy's intellectual energy and his great generosity and humor were felt by all who visited Tanah Abang II. That Buddy really cared about the household and looked after us in every way was typical of his generosity and kindness (except to dogs and cats). Buddy was the center of life of this circle; because of him everyone used to turn up at Tanah Abang II, especially on *malam minggu* (Saturday night). Nothing was an interruption for Buddy; we all somehow became his concern. Not that he couldn't be critical or quite acerbic at times, if necessary. He was disparaging about his own relatives (one of whom lived in Tanah Abang II) who did not share his sympathy with the *rakyat* (poor people). *Sombong* (stuck up) foreign researchers got short shrift, although not to their face, because he was a polite, gentle man. Researchers who had just arrived, or were trying to adjust and learn Indonesian ways, were a source of constant, but compassionate, amusement. Buddy always brought people as well as discussions down to earth; he was as scathing about studies of elite politics as he was impatient of people with elitist views, or who acted in elitist ways.

Harold Crouch writes:

I always remember how Buddy would go far out of his way to help people in need of assistance. I also remember how understanding he often was of the difficulties of household servants, gardeners, cooks, etc. I liked the way he could talk to servants in a way that was not at all condescending—unlike many others. I remember him talking about family planning researchers at Serpong [see below] who were asking completely insensitive questions to village women about very sensitive matters and then being surprised at the poor responses they were getting. In their Introduction to *Pembangunan Desa dan Masalah Kepemimpinannya* [see below] Alfian and Mely Tan say that “pengalaman penelitian ini telah memperkaya Saudara Buddy, karena pengalaman tersebut telah menambah perasaan cinta kasih [compassion] dan setia kawanya dengan sesama manusia, terutama mereka yang dilihatnya sebagai manusia-manusia yang hidup dalam keadaan serba sukar dan terbatas.”²

One of the reasons Buddy took so long to finish writing his thesis, according to Patrick Guinness, was not because he couldn't write well, or because he was lazy, but because he always seemed to be fighting battles for the community where he had done his thesis field work, near Cirebon. While complaining that the government was always imposing develop-

² Personal communication with Harold Crouch, August 9, 1993. The Indonesian reads: “His thesis field work experience has enriched Buddy Prasadja, it has strengthened his feeling of compassion and solidarity for those people who are living under great difficulties and in economically limited situations.”

ment from above, Buddy was trying to help them get their own village institutions to work better, a more bottom-up approach.³

Buddy often spoke about Herb Feith and Harold Crouch, who had both taught him at the Political Science Department at UI while it was still at Salemba. Herb spent a sabbatical there in 1967 and was replaced in 1968 by Harold, who remained there until early 1971. When he returned to Jakarta in 1973 to finish his research for his book *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, Harold's base was also Tanah Abang. By then Buddy had moved out of the old Dutch villa under the mango tree to a flat on the hot asphalt rooftop above the printing press, quite a different existence, to make way for another relative who had been installed as manager of the Express press. By then also Buddy had acquired a small black and white dog, which seemed to adjust to her rooftop existence quite happily. After arriving back in Tanah Abang II from an absence in Pekalongan, I inquired about the dog. "She had become lame after an accident," said Buddy, "so I took her to the local Batak restaurant and gave her to the cook [dog dishes are a Batak specialty]. It was kinder than keeping her alive lame."

Budi Prasadja's family was involved on both sides of politics in the 1960s. An older brother had worked with Subandrio's Badan Pusat Intelijen before 1965, but his sister, Boedilestari had close ties with Ibu Tien Suharto. It was through his sister that Buddy became involved with *Indonesia Magazine*, which was run by Col. (later Brig. Gen.) Dwipayana, a kind of *abdi dalam* (literally palace servant) and unofficial private secretary to the president. "Mas Dipo," as he was usually called, later became chairman of the National Film Board. *Indonesia Magazine*, printed at the Express printing press in Tanah Abang II, was published by Ibu Tien Suharto's Yayasan Harapan Kita, which also published a Javanese-language magazine called *Kunthi*; *Indonesia Magazine* also listed "Ibu Siti Hartinah Soeharto" as "adviser" and Buddy Prasadja's sister Boedilestari as the manager of the magazine. Published monthly in both Indonesian and English until well into the 1980s, *Indonesia Magazine* and *Kunthi* had their office in Jalan Merdeka Barat no 20, an old Dutch villa facing the fountain at the end of Jalan Thamrin on the northwestern corner of Merdeka Square. Boedilestari's boutique shared the same office space, as did the office of the Yayasan Harapan Kita. It was a prime piece of real estate (the site has since been redeveloped).

Indonesia Magazine, which solicited articles from prominent social scientists and government officials, focused on what were then the priorities of the New Order government, such as political reform, industrialization, the Green Revolution, Indonesia's first Five-Year Development Plan, the exploitation of natural resources such as timber and oil, and the development of "backward" regions such as Irian Jaya. It was a magazine to publicize the achievements of the government in these areas to a growing foreign audience, and to promote foreign investment in the framework of the New Order development ideology. But *IM* also included cultural articles on *wayang*, *angklung*, and *batik*, etc. Buddy Prasadja's name appears as a member of the editorial board from the earliest issue I have (No. 7, 1971) until the latest (No. 31, 1975), when he is listed as an "overseas correspondent." Patrick Guinness's name was also there, as initially he did all the English translations. The Yayasan Harapan Kita paid all the magazine's production costs during this period, including wages, via Mas Dipo.

Unlike his colleagues in the Political Science Department at UI before or since, Buddy Prasadja was totally absorbed by the village dimension of Indonesian development. An admirer of Professor Sajogya, Indonesia's foremost rural sociologist, Buddy did his thesis

³ Communication with Patrick Guinness, August 14, 1993.

field work in a village called Gegesik near Cirebon on the role of local leadership in village development. Sajogya's high regard for this research was reflected in the printing of Buddy's thesis in 1974 by the prestigious research center Sajogya headed in IPB, the Bogor Agriculture University. In 1981 it was published by the Yayasan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial, with the same introduction by Alfian and Mely G.Tan.⁴

After his thesis research was finished, interest in rural development led Buddy Prasadja to work as co-researcher with Lida Zuidberg in one of the first family planning projects in Indonesia, located at Serpong in Tangerang regency in West Java. Funded by Leiden State University, the project, which opened a health center at Serpong in 1972, carried out research into traditional methods of family planning, traditional medicine, the role of mobile family planning clinics, and the role of traditional midwives in family planning. Over twenty-one data papers were published, including one entitled "The Value of Children in a Rural Islamic Community" written by Buddy.

In 1974 Buddy Prasadja went to America for postgraduate study at the New School for Social Research in New York, and subsequently at the University of Wisconsin at Madison where he gained his Master's degree. Finding the academic environment not conducive to further graduate study there, he returned to the University of Indonesia to do a stint as vice-chairman of the Department of Political Science, to teach, and to do more village-level research. During the 1980s he spent much time at the University of Leiden. Returning in mid-1991, already ill, he spent the remaining months of his life with his sister in Jakarta, and was buried in the family graveyard in a village south of Klaten in Central Java.

⁴ Buddy Prasadja, *Pembangunan Desa dan Masalah Kepimpinannya* (Jakarta: C. V. Rajawali in association with the Yayasan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial, 1981).