INDONESIAN SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

A STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

by

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Author's Preface

Some years ago I arranged with the International Secretariat of the Institute of Pacific Relations to write a social history of Indonesia, paying special attention to the impact of Western civilisation past and present and to the dynamic processes within Indonesian society.

In 1950 the Secretary General of the Institute suggested that I should write a preliminary report on *The Effects of Western Civilization on Indonesian Society*, with special reference to contemporary Indonesian nationalism, which report could later on become a part of the larger volume in preparation, and at the same time, could serve as a preparatory paper for the Eleventh Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, held at Lucknow in October 1950. I accepted the proposal and finished my report during the summer of that year. In that report, which was mimeographed and published as Secretariat Paper Nr 11, I paid in particular a good deal of attention to a number of social processes which the literature on the subject had so far tended to neglect. Thus, apart from economic developments (on which an extensive body of literature already exists) I also treated changes in class structure, urbanisation and the modernisation of Islam, subjects which have received far too little attention in the past.

The present book can be considered as an extension of the above report. Two new chapters have been added dealing with subjects not treated in the paper ('The Changing Pattern of Labour Relations' and 'Cultural Dynamics in Indonesia', Chapters IX and X). Moreover, the chapters already published have also been thoroughly revised and supplemented. I was enabled by a certain amount of research undertaken in the archives of the Indonesian Department of the State Institute for War Documentation at Amsterdam to deal in the chapters on 'Shifts in the

Economic System' and 'The Changing Status System' (V and VI) more extensively with developments during the Japanese occupation. Moreover, I thought it advisable to add some preliminary chapters (Chapters I–IV) providing a geographical and historical frame of reference for the chapters dealing with the social history proper. These chapters have no scientific pretensions whatever, but are intended solely to acquaint the reader with the background of the developments described later.

The following chapters (V–XI), dealing more strictly with Indonesian social history are an attempt to describe the social background of Indonesian nationalism, not unlike that which A. R. Desai provided for India.[1]

The processes described are mainly viewed in their social significance. As I am aware of being neither an expert in Islamic religion as such, nor an Orientalist in the traditional sense, I could not claim to give a full account of the history of religion with regard to Indonesia, still less a comprehensive cultural history of that country. But I think that a sociologist might be able to draw the attention of the specialist to a few social implications of these processes.

Most chapters have been divided into four sections. The general pattern, everywhere followed except in the introductory chapter I and the geographical chapter II, is as follows. The first section tries to establish as succinctly as possible the situation in the Eastern society before the advent of Western representatives. In some respects the impact of the West begins quite early, about 1600, in some other respects it makes itself felt about 1800 only. My view of early Indonesian society is based to a large extent on the analyses of J. C. van Leur.[2] The second section deals, somewhat more extensively, with nineteenth century developments. The main stress, however, is laid in this book upon the social

[1] A. R. Desai, *The social background of Indian nationalism*, University of Bombay publications, Sociology series Nr 2, Bombay, 1948.

[2] J. C. van Leur, *Indonesian trade and society. Essays in Asian social and economic history*, Selected studies on Indonesia by Dutch scholars, Vol. I, The Hague/Bandung, 1955.

history of the present century, which is my special field of study. The third paragraph deals, in general, with the period up to the Japanese occupation; sometimes the beginning of the crisis of 1930 is considered a turning point. The fourth section, dealing with the last period, tries to establish from the scattered materials available some of the most important recent trends.

I have sought to emphasise some of the main outlines of the history of Indonesia as I have discerned them. It may well be that others will not be able to perceive the same outlines as I have, but will have observed others which escaped me. Therefore, I have added to each chapter a bibliography in order to enable the reader to check my interpretation.

The reader will be well aware that this interpretation of facts is based upon a definite sociological concept of Asian social processes. This concept is related to my conviction that the present trend among sociologists and cultural anthropologists to visualise the various societies as separate entities, each of them showing its own cultural pattern is too static a view. In my opinion this concept lacks the historical perspective indispensable to a better insight into the real meaning of separate facts. Moreover, this sociological school of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead and others considers culture, as far as I can see, too much as a concept apart, without bringing cultural phenomena sufficiently into relation with the technical and economic bases of society.

Only a sociology giving full attention to the genesis of the various human societies and relating their present structure to their economic history and technical development, or, more generally speaking, to human dynamics, would be in a position to increase our understanding of human behaviour. Max Weber owed, to a high degree, his greatness as a sociologist to his mastery of economic history.

Asian societies are, moreover, precisely those where social conditions are intertwined in such a way that it would be impossible, without damaging our total insight, to attack them with specialised scientific disciplines such as economics, social psychology, cultural anthropology or the study of religious systems. Those

societies are in a need of a more embracing historical approach shunning any one-sidedness. Anyone tackling social reality in that area in terms of theoretical economics, as they have been refined in the course of time in connection with the realities of the Western capitalist world, will never be able to understand the agrarian base of Eastern society and the phenomena related to it. Anyone attempting to deal with Asian society in terms of theoretical sociology born, too, in the West and adapted mainly to the structure of Western societies, incurs the danger of taking too static a view of conditions in Asia. Anyone using exclusively the tools of cultural anthropology risks overlooking the quick processes of modernisation, in particular in the Asian cities.

Generally speaking, anyone trying to reduce Asian developments to regularities and causal processes registered elsewhere overlooks the novel element, characteristic in each development of human society even when events go largely parallel with processes known from the past.

Only a sociological concept viewing humanity as a dynamic entity which has taken its fate, within certain limits, in its own hands and whose history never completely repeats itself, may help us to a better understanding of present happenings in Asia. Processes from the past are lessons to be studied most seriously. They are not, however, irresistible laws to be accepted passively by humanity. They are no more than regularities applying only within a social pattern, at a given historical period.

Human history is a constant interaction of repetition and novelty, the repetition ever appearing in a new garment and the novelty ever fit for a repetitional scheme.

I sincerely hope, in this way, to have contributed to a better understanding of present difficulties and seeming contradictions in Indonesia. It seems, if one takes a superficial view, that the force of nationalism should have lost much of its vigour, now that political independence has been achieved. This book tries, however, to show that nationalism was, before the Pacific War, an amalgam of various social movements, taking their origin in

different strata of society. As the desires underlying nationalism are far from being satisfied, it is clear, that nationalism is still in full swing, directing itself against other aspects of foreign interference and foreign power.

The purpose of this book is also, to demonstrate the way dynamic forces in Indonesia have throughout its history expressed themselves in various, often veiled forms. It would be a mistake for those in power to speculate that it might be possible to avert those forces from their revolutionary course.

Finally, the purpose of this book is to deflect the attention of those interested in the Indonesian scene from externals to essentials. There is far too much concern about such things as the parliamentary system, political parties, leading personalities, elections, as if these were the motive forces in society. This book attempts to pay due attention to basic processes and facts such as competition between social strata, rural discontent, hunger, human bondage, class strife, which are decisive for future developments. It is understandable that the daily worries near at hand are so numerous that many of the new political leaders have insufficient time to reflect upon the basic problems which affect the society as a whole. This book attempts to help them to recover their grasp upon realities. At the same time it tries to give foreign observers a better understanding of why many Indonesians react to foreign influences, such as technical assistance, economic incentives or political advice as they actually do.

The report on *The Effects of Western Civilization on Indonesian Society* published in 1950 has been translated from Dutch into English by Mr. James T. Brockway. Its revision and the new chapters are, however, largely my own work, except for some re-editing by the International Secretariat of the Institute of Pacific Relations, for which I express my deep appreciation. I hope I have not spoilt too much Mr. Brockway's good English and beg indulgence from him and the reader, in view of the difficulties faced by the inhabitant of a small country obliged to express himself in a world language in order to attain a wider audience.

I am further much indebted to my assistants, first Mr. A. van Marle, later on Miss Lily E. Clerkx, Miss Mady A. Thung and, last but not least, Mr. The Siauw Giap for various kinds of invaluable help. In the last stage of preparation, also Messrs. S. B. Martokusumo, L. E. L. Sluimers (who was entrusted with the index) and S. E. Wrazlowsky have afforded a good deal of 'technical assistance', for which I gladly express my thanks. I am also very grateful to the publisher and his staff for the excellent cooperation. A few colleagues, Messrs. C. C. Berg, G. J. Resink and G. H. van der Kolff have been so kind as to read, upon my request, one or two chapters in the original form and to convey me their frank criticism on several points. I was glad to take into account their remarks; the final version remains, however, fully my own responsibility.

Moreover, I have to express my acknowledgements to the librarians of the Royal Institute of the Tropics at Amsterdam and their staff and to the Indonesian Department of the State Institute for War Documentation at Amsterdam for much help afforded in the course of my studies; and to the Institute of Pacific Relations, and especially to its Secretary General Mr. William L. Holland, for the grant to make the completion of this work possible, and for much encouragement and assistance received. I have to express my gratitude to many Indonesians from various social strata for providing me, in the course of many years, with the knowledge and insight needed to achieve a work like this. I am quite aware of the fact, that any treatment of human beings – or of human societies for that matter – as an object may be felt as an infringement upon the human personality. This feeling may be enhanced, if a former colonial society is being analysed by a national from the previous colonial power. I have tried to avoid such sentiments by viewing the Indonesians not as objects, but as dynamic subjects of their own history. My interest in their society is not purely an impersonal, scientific approach as of a surgeon to his patient, still less it is the cumbersome meddlesomeness of the former colonial ruler who cannot forget his 'responsibility' towards his former pupil. My attitude

towards the Indonesians is mainly one of sympathetic warm interest in their uniqueness and their specific way of responding to the challenges of the modern era and of solving universal human problems. It is perhaps inevitable that in a sociological study remarks must occur which could be taken for criticisms by individuals, social groups or even by an entire nation. This may especially be the case for a young nation still very sensitive to criticism. The only thing an author can do is to express his hope that no offense shall be taken at such critical remarks and that they be considered as signs of his genuine interest in the actual conditions and in the future of the population or group concerned.

I dedicate this work to her, to whom acknowledgement would be out of place, as my indebtedness to her exceeds any tribute which could be paid.

W. F. WERTHEIM

Amsterdam, January 1956

PREFACE TO THE SECOND REVISED EDITION

The revisions in this second edition are of a limited scope. Most of the changes, which affect primarily the sections dealing with the post-war period, have been necessitated either by developments after the conclusion of the first edition, or by publications in recent years. I have also been able to utilise a number of critical appraisals of the original volume, both those published and those brought to my personal attention. It was impossible to include within this volume the results of the field investigations in several areas of Indonesia in which I had the privilege of participating, and the materials I was able to collect, during my year as a visiting professor at the Agricultural Faculty of the University of Indonesia in Bogor, from October 1956 to October 1957.

As such an attempt would have been irreconcilable with the historical character of this work, it seems more appropriate for me to present my findings in a separate volume concerned specifically with present problems and characteristics of Indonesian society. Even so, in so far as my recent investigations have brought to light definite errors of fact or of judgement in the first edition, I have now been able to correct them.

The original 'Postscript', dealing with the period from July till December 1955, has been replaced by a new chapter entitled 'The Latest Phase', which brings the story up to the end of 1958.

Because of their demographic significance, I have included in an appendix the figures on voters registered for the elections held in 1955, figures which to my knowledge have not yet been published elsewhere.

The short bibliographies at the end of each chapter have been brought up to date. Acknowledgements are due to the Amsterdam office of the Indonesian National News Agency *Antara* for the regular supply of their News Bulletins, which formed a useful basis for the survey of recent events to be found in the final chapter; to Messrs. L. E. L. Sluimers and M. P. S. Tjondronegoro for their help in analysing these bulletins and other kinds of cooperation in preparing this second edition; to Madame H. van Weel-Frankenhuis for her tireless assistance in typing the additions to the manuscript and revising the index; and to Messrs. James S. Holmes and A. van Marle for their valuable comments and suggestions.

W. F. W.

Amsterdam, January 1959

Contents

Chapter One

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika

1 Unity and diversity in early Indonesia

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which means 'unity in diversity', is the official motto of the Indonesian Republic. It expresses a strong desire, not only among political leaders but among broad layers of the population as well, to achieve unity despite the heterogeneous character of the newly built state. This common will presupposes, in its turn, the existence of common cultural characteristics underlying the apparent heterogeneity.

In order better to understand this interplay of unity and diversity we need to go back to a time when a common political will was fairly absent. Such a situation was in evidence during the sixteenth century, at the time when the first European sailors visited the archipelago in search of spices and other Oriental luxuries.

Indonesian geography makes for diversity. The numerous islands, large and small, which are scattered over a sea surface exceeding the total land area of the United States of America, foster a cultural isolation, even though the cultures of the different islands have a common root.

A second cause of diversity may be found in the ethnic field. It is not primarily a diversity in a racial sense. Though other racial elements are discernible among some of the Indonesian tribes, the Malayan element is strongly dominant. Anthropologists sometimes include this Malayan stock, which is akin to the other peoples of Southeast Asia, with the Palaeo-Mongolid sub-race. It is accepted, at present, that these Malayan peoples penetrated the islands by waves from the Asian continent. On the other

hand, however, these Malays are generally subdivided again by anthropologists into Early and Late Malays. According to this division the Early Malays are mainly to be found in the interior of the large islands: they are held to include the Bataks on Sumatra, the Dayaks on Borneo and the Torajas on Celebes. Beside the population of Java and Bali, the inhabitants along the coasts of the three big islands are considered as Late Malays.

However, this difference between Early and Late Malays belongs to the field of cultural (rather than physical) anthropology. It was mainly the Late Malayan stock, which underwent the impact of Hindu civilisation. For the rest, this influence was largely restricted to the western part of the archipelago, the Strait of Macassar forming the borderline.

Apart from natural geography and race, however, there were still other factors making for diversity. The impact of human technology has led, during a process of many centuries, to a number of strongly differing kinds of civilisations. Among these types, there are three which deserve special mention.

(*a*) Large parts of Central and East Java had already, for many centuries, been intensively cultivated. Rice cultivation on irrigated fields was known for over thousand years. The density of the population was, in the irrigated plains, very high. Village life was largely based on a closed economy. Though there was some trade and some circulation of copper coins in the markets interconnecting a number of adjacent villages, the peasant used to produce the normal necessities of life within his household.

Contact with distant regions was generally slight. Roads were scarce and usually not fit for rapid transport. The sole link connecting the isolated village communities economically and socially, was the authority of feudal chiefs or provincial governors. These political units, in their turn, were over-arched by imperial rule. The mansions of the chieftains and the palaces (*kratons*) of the princes (*rajas*) were the centres of Javanese civilisation. Numerous artisans and traders, largely of foreign origin, were to be found there. These centres were the cradle of court dances and court literature. They were the places where a leisure class,

with a large retinue of parasites, house slaves and body-guards, flocked together to amuse themselves night and day.

These centres were fed from the surpluses provided by the villages. The rural population had to contribute tithes, men liable for forced labour or capable of bearing arms, and beautiful women to please the high and the mighty. They received in return hardly more than the sacral, magic power radiating from the royal dynasty. The prince, surrounded by the feudal or official aristocracy representing him, was significant in the eyes of the rural population more by what he was than by what he accomplished. In times of crop failure or penury the population turned to those with supposed magic powers, who were thought to be in communication with the gods. Among such persons the prince was prominent. Court literature tended to strengthen his magic omnipotence and to safeguard its use against any criticism.

The power of the princes and chiefs over the rural population was, in theory, all but absolute. But hardly a beginning had been made with what is at present understood by administration. Centralised upkeep of roads, the construction of irrigation works, storing of grains, care of general security, all this was princely charity rather than public duty.

(*b*) Along the coasts of Java, Sumatra and Malaya, on the mouths of the broad rivers of Borneo, scattered over the eastern islands, the harbour principalities flourished. They presented a picture quite different from the rural hinterland of Java. These coastal towns stood in close contact with the coasts of Hindustan, Further India, China and Japan. From immemorial times precious linen and silk, chinaware, gold and silver, spices, sandalwood, camphor and all kinds of petty luxuries were traded along the sea-roads. Javanese script was generally known among the Javanese merchants.

The rulers of the harbour principalities were the princes assisted by an aristocracy related to them and by high officials, some of whom were, quite often, foreigners. These rulers were actively engaged in sea-trade, as ship-owners or participants in cargoes, though the actual trade was carried on by pedlars crowding the

ships and the ports. Further income of the harbour principalities was derived from customs and harbour dues, from tribute and piracy. The social structure of the early Indonesian towns was, despite a large number of foreign traders, rather stable. Dwellings of the ordinary urban population were poor and primitive, and there was no bourgeois prosperity in evidence. The social distance between the aristocratic rulers and the urban population was hardly less pronounced than that between the rulers of the Javanese inland-states and the rural population.[1]

(*c*) The hinterland of the harbour principalities in Sumatra and Borneo was quite different from the densely populated irrigated areas of Java. The population of those huge islands was very sparse. It had available vast tracts of land and was able to cultivate pepper in addition to food crops. In this respect most of Western Java was, about 1600, still a continuation of the Sumatran jungle. In the neighbourhood of Batavia (the present capital of Jakarta, known as Jakatra in the first Dutch diaries) it was about the end of the seventeenth century still possible to shoot rhinoceri. The Preanger peasant was not yet a sedentary farmer – he moved from one place to another, cleared a stretch of jungle, burned it and planted some rice and pepper. As a rule, the peasantry of these *ladang* (shifting cultivation) areas did not actively participate in the pepper trade, as they had to deliver the crop to their chiefs. It was traded by the chiefs to the *raja* of Bantam, in exchange for linens, chinaware or metals from overseas. In the same way the harbour princes of Acheh and Palembang secured the pepper, cultivated in the Sumatran hinterland.

Though the harbour princes thus succeeded in economically exploiting the population of the *ladang* areas, there was no integration of the rural regions into larger political units, comparable to the larger kingdoms formed in the *sawah* (irrigated field) regions of Java.

[1] Both the 'bureaucratic inland-states' and the harbour principalities of Indonesia have been brilliantly described by J. C. van Leur, *Indonesian trade and society. Essays in Asian social and economic history*, Selected studies on Indonesia by Dutch scholars, Vol. I, The Hague/Bandung, 1955, p. 104 ff.