

## THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF INDONESIA DURING DUTCH IMPERIALISM

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Europeans penetration in Indonesia Islands began with the invasion of Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They entered the strategically located Islamic regions and trading Centre of Malacca in 1511. After maintaining the naval and commercial control of Malacca, they went on to extend their suzerainty to Moluccas. From the very beginning Portuguese had concentrated their major resources to maintain their dominance in these Islands to extract the maximum benefits out of it. They had "involved themselves in the constant conflict between the two major and rival Sultanates of Ternate and Tidore in Moluccas."<sup>1</sup> Later on Spaniards had entered in Philippines, continued their attempt to gain a foothold in Indonesia but Portuguese forces defeated them decisively in 1545. In spite of the external threats to their rule, Portuguese established trading posts in these areas. The downfall of Portuguese began when they murdered the Sultan of Ternate in 1570. This act provided an opportunity to Spaniards to intervene the Indonesian Islands against the Portuguese. The six years bitter war ended with the virtual elimination of the Portuguese from the Moluccas Island. When Portuguese fell under Spanish rule, their holdings in Indonesia were "reduced to the eastern half of the Islands of Timor and Malacca which were later on captured by the Dutch forces."<sup>2</sup>

In 1602, the Dutch East India Company planned to vacate the other foreign powers from the Indonesian Islands. They began to attempt to exclude European competitors from the Indies, and to control the trade carried on by the indigenous traders. The company's commercial monopoly later formed the basis of the Dutch Empire in East Indies.

Actually European domination began in the years 1511 - 1600, which lasted until 20<sup>th</sup> century. Europeans had enlisted the major share in shaping the Indonesian history from 17<sup>th</sup> century and onwards. Dutch had made at first a little change in traditional and commercial patterns and within three years of their

establishment in this peninsula they controlled the trade of coffee, rubber and spice. Dutch established Batavia as headquarter and established factories in the spice Island. Thus company gradually became the territorial power of that area. The company itself represented a new type of trade organization across the vast area which had come under its influence, possessed superior military force and also employed a bureaucracy to look after the vested interests in the Indies. In sum, it could impose its will upon other rulers and forced them to accept their trading conditions.<sup>3</sup> Under the Governor General Jan Pieters-zoocoen and his successors particularly Anthony Van Diemen and Joan Maet Suyker, the company laid the foundation of Dutch commercial empire and became the paramount power of this peninsula.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the company went far towards establishing its monopoly. It captured Malacca from the Portuguese in 1641, confined the British after a period of fierce rivalry to a factory at Ben Coolen in South Western Sumatra and established a network of factories in the East Island. At the outset of the establishment of Dutch company in Indonesian Islands, their design was to limit their activities to trade only but company soon involved into local politics of Java and other Islands. They "extended their influence to that extent that they became the arbiters in the dynastic disputes or in the conflict between rival rulers, it inevitably emerged them as the main political entity in the Island."<sup>4</sup> In 1600s Sultan Agung ruler of the Central Javanese Kingdom of Mataram and representative of the old and highly sophisticated Hindu Javanese civilization sought to extend his power over Bantam in the West Java. This brought him into conflict with Dutch. He led to seize the Dutch fortress at Batavia. Though Sultan Agung's forces were eventually compelled to withdraw, the result of the confrontation was inconclusive, and left both the Dutch and Javanese warily respectful to each other's strength. But the following years of the 17th Century, internal dissensions in the Mataram Kingdom led to increase of Dutch involvement and in early 18th century a series of wars of succession among the pretenders to the throne of Mataram, almost destroyed the power-image of this great kingdom. The Dutch took the opportunity to involve themselves in their internal disputes and helped those throne-contenders who could serve



their vested interests. "In return to their services to Amang Kurat - Sultan Agung's successor and to his successor Amang Kurat II, shortly after their accession to throne, the Dutch received the prize in the form of the cessation of regions of West Jave."<sup>5</sup> This was the first of the series of major territorial advances.

In 1704, Dutch forces assisted in replacing Amang Kurat III with his uncle Pakubu Wono I and in return they got further territory. In this way almost all of Java gradually passed under Dutch control and by 1755 only a remnant of the Kingdom of Mataram remained. Their suzerainty remained until the end of Dutch rule in two divided principalities of Jogjakarta and Surakarta. In the 17th century the Dutch East Indies Company attempted to establish pool lands in Western Sumatra and Palambang for pepper trade, but the complete suzerainty of Dutch expansion in these Islands could not take place until 19th century. By acquiring these territorial responsibilities, the company did not a first established its own administrative system. In fact, they continued the inherited existing structure of authority of indigenous aristocracy. They found no reason to alter its as the prevailing system itself was serving their vested interests. "They recruited indigenous administrators and sought to reinforce an already creditable bureaucratic apparatus."<sup>6</sup> This system placed the greatest burden on peasants, as they were to work for harsh local masters who have to remain in the good graces of the Dutch administration. Thus, creating a system of indigenous landlords who merely reinforced the authoritarian character of political relationship in archipelago. This privileged class used to administer the collection of tributes on behalf of the company and gradually this system was converted into a formalized bureaucracy. Before this Dutch organized Royal court which used to collect the revenues in the form of products from the peasantry within its domain.

To maintain its commercial monopoly, the company established factories for the collection of products from the local raw material and controlled the sources of supply of particular products for company's business. In 18th century they introduced a system of forced deliveries and contingencies. By term contingencies they meant a form of tax payable in kind in the

areas, which were under the direct control of the company. The forced deliveries were the products that native cultivators were compelled to grow and sell to the company at set prices. In fact, "the whole system of their trade was designed to extract tribute from the indigenous produces. The local traders were pushed aside as company gained control of more and more of export trade of the land."<sup>7</sup> Thus, resulting in the decline of the spice trade of north-coast Javanese who had been channeling this trade with outer world since 15th century. In this way the traditional pattern of trade was checked and distorted.

During the 18th Century, the company ran into financial difficulties from a variety of causes such as the breach of company's spice trade monopoly by smuggling, the growing administrative costs as they had extended their responsibilities of the government, the corruption in company's administration and the increasing pressure of British competition culminating from Paris Treaty of 1784, which allowed British to expand its trade in East Indies waters. Thus, collapsed Dutch East India Company in 1798. Consequently, in 1799, five years after the French invasion of the Netherlands, the new Dutch government of Batavian Republic wound up the affairs of the company.

In 1811, Java fell to British East India Company. Thomas Stanford Raffles was appointed as Lieutenant Governor, He approached his task in conviction that British administrative principles could liberate Javanese from tyranny of Dutch. They "introduced their own system of partial local self government to get support of the masses, that was the first sign of development that any colonial power had given concession to the local people."<sup>8</sup> Britishers remained in this region in between 1811 to 1816, as a consequence of the Napoleonic wars raging in Europe. As soon as the French forces left Holland, the Dutch government showed its great interest in reoccupying Indonesian Islands. Britishers agreed to handover the power back to Dutch colonial regime through an agreement signed on August 13, 1814. A few years later of their restoration of the power in Indonesian Island, Dutch were engaged to, suppress the uprising of local people popularly known as Padri war in western Sumatra Under Imam Boudjol, the Padri forces resisted Dutch' pressure from early 1820 to 1837.



Initially it was the religious more than the socio-political struggle of the Muslim leaders to curtail the interference of Dutch government in Adat (customs) and religious affairs. The impact of this war resulted in strengthening the administrative power of the Dutch colonial government in Western Sumatra.

In pre-colonial period and even today, Adat-the law of social custom is vital to an understanding of Indonesian society. It is the most significant unifying factor among the people of Indonesia. Each locality or region has adopted its own Adat, which reflect their socio-cultural heritage; it is argued that "Adat or customs are far more instrumental in Indonesian behaviour than religion."<sup>9</sup> It is supposed to produce harmony through cooperative endeavours, and mutual aid, has been an age-old principle guiding the operation of the village communities. Family elders make up the village council and all powers revolve upon them. No government can be successful without giving special importance to Adat. The Dutch who pressed their 'Cultural System' in order to squeeze higher yields from the village cultivators exploited a modified aspect of Adat.

In 1850, Dutch devised "a new cultivation system by which government could collect the resources of the Indies. This system pressed the peasants of the villages to utilize one-fifth of the cultivable land for the cultivation of the export crop determined by the government. These crops were to be given to the government in lieu of the tax."<sup>10</sup> The peasants normally used to cultivate rice crop was set aside for cash crops under government control. Dutch administration made this system workable with the help of the rural aristocracy, who seized the opportunity to expand their power. In this way they had created a system of indigenous landlords who merely reinforced the authoritarian character of political relationship in archipelago.

By 1877, cultivation system came under attack not only from humanitarian quarters but also from private business interests in Netherlands. As Dutch administration expanded beyond Java and Sumatra into Celebes, Borneo and other smaller Islands, which were important for their mining resources and other commodities, for this they needed big capital investments.

They introduced liberal economic policies in order to attract foreign companies to invest in East Indies. This free trade policy affected the cultivation system. The hard-pressed peasants started "migrating to metropolitan areas as non-Indonesian landlords and local rural aristocrats had made their lives miserable and as a result an Agrarian Law was adopted which prevented non-Indonesian from purchasing of arable land."<sup>11</sup> The cultivation system, though, had not remained effective continued for contribution to Dutch treasury.

Indonesia's inter-insular trade between Makasar, Mollucas, Mataram, Banten etc. as well as foreign trade was crippled by the ruthless Dutch policy, which ultimately forced Indonesia to become merely an agricultural nation and area gradually became the centre of Dutch exploitation. Meanwhile Chinese were more and more used as middlemen in the trade between the Dutch and Indonesians.

After 1900, Dutch control increased in both range and depth so that by about 1930 Indonesia had been carried up to the highest peak of colonialism in Southeast Asia. Rice production expanded rapidly and sugar export reached to the highest levels of output. The level of exports rose steadily until the coming of the inter-war slump of 1930 restricted many of Indonesia's world markets. This was the end of the golden age of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. The steady growth of population out paced economic development, thus, preventing a general rise in living standards.

The nationalists reaction against Dutch rule was strongest in the very region island of Java where Dutch influence had penetrated most deeply. The nationalism in Java was fairly moderate movement aimed not at the overthrow of the Dutch but at greater participation by people of the country in socio-political life. "The major object at that time was to break the combined grip of Chinese immigrant traders and Dutch merchants and officials on Indonesia's commerce administration."<sup>12</sup> The number of rebellions was suppressed but that resulted in speedy rise of nationalism and from then on Dutch policy became ruthless and repressive.



The Second World War brought an abrupt major change in Indonesian power relationship. The colonial administrative structure developed by the Dutch was almost abolished by the Japanese seizure of the Indonesia in 1942. The Japanese were regarded as liberators by most of the Indonesian People. "In order to destroy the Dutch authority, Japanese fully supported Indonesian people and started anti-Dutch campaign to develop hatred among peasant masses against rural aristocracy established by Dutch."<sup>13</sup> Indonesian nationalists, who were prevented from working in the villages, were given opportunity to weaken the rural power structure. In this way, Indonesian nationalism crystallized into a mass movement.

The Japanese occupation gave Indonesian leaders an entry into government they did not enjoy under the Dutch rule. When the Japanese were put to defensive in 1943-44, they were compelled to lean heavily on these Indonesians. In the hope to secure the loyalties of the Indonesians during the World War the Japanese government showed its willingness to declare Indonesia as an independent state after the end of the war, and provided important governmental posts to local people. This was the first occasion that nationalists were appointed to high-level government decision-making bodies. Japanese also organized their paramilitary force (Peta) under indigenous command mainly to undertake the internal security affairs of Indonesia.

In Indonesia more than in any other Southeast Asian country, Japanese produced a new sense of national unity. The Japanese themselves did little to encourage it, but it grew underneath their feet."<sup>14</sup> As soon as they knew of Japan's defeat in 1945, Dr. Sukarno and his colleagues declared Indonesian Independence on August 17, 1945. The Netherlands (Holland) which was herself occupied by Germany during World War II, was unable to send her forces immediately back into Indonesia until months later. Then followed a series of negotiations punctuated by several outbreaks of violence and battles between strong nationalists and Dutch forces. At last after four years of rivalry~ Holland finally recognized the Independence of Indonesia on December 27, 1949. Thus, bringing the long era of Dutch imperialism in Indonesia to an end.

## CONCLUSION

The impact of Dutch colonialism on the socio-political sphere of Indonesian people had been immense and visible looking from the poor economic chaotic situation of indigenous people. In order to protect their political and economic hegemony in East Indies, Dutch rulers adopted deliberate policies, which were bitterly against the interests of the local people. Their basic rights were grabbed by inducting a new rural aristocracy comprised of indigenous bureaucrats who directly served the vested interests of the Dutch imperialism. The implementation of the trade and agriculture policies were entrusted and carried out with the help of migrant Chinese and puppet feudal lords, who were working exactly in the lines of the Dutch administration, and forced the peasants to cultivate commercial crops such as coffee, sugar, rubber and spice for export, in addition to their own rice requirements.

There is no doubt that Dutch rule brought considerable sufferings to the living conditions of the Indonesians as a whole, but they cleverly did not touch the culture, Adats (customs), religion, and way of life of indigenous people. The position of the native rulers, chieftains, though weakened, was retained within Dutch administration and self-governing institutions in villages remained largely intact. The rivalry among native rulers had provided good opportunity to Dutch imperialists to interfere in their internal affairs and virtually had become mastermind in their dynastic disputes. Their influence was so great that it inevitably turned them as the dominant political force of the peninsula.

The forced cultivation of crops and scarce representation in political affairs resulted in gradual wide spread nationalism among indigenous people to get rid of the colonial power from their homeland. The large numbers of nationalist movements were organized to voice against the Dutch, but almost all were suppressed until the capture of Indonesian peninsula by the Japanese in 1942. Holland was itself captured during the war and could not sent back its forces immediately to recapture Indonesian Islands after the defeat of the Japanese.



The trained army of Indonesian nationalists, who were well equipped during Japanese occupation, took the golden opportunity of Japanese defeat and declared the Independence of Indonesia and brought the entire peninsula under their command. After having four long years of bitter battles and tough negotiations, the Holland government finally agreed to recognize the Independence of Indonesia that officially brought an end to Dutch imperialism in entire Indonesian archipelago. In this way World War II turned to be the blessing not only for Indonesians but many other Asian and African states that brought the glory of independence to their nations.

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