

Rizal and Kartini

Noel Teodoro

In Island Southeast Asia, the second half of the 19th century saw the development of a native elite who were the beneficiaries of colonial education and therefore conversant in the languages of the colonial masters — Spanish and Dutch. Yet this native elite was by no means estranged from the indigenous cultural milieu and traditions. Writing from within the loci of colonial power, Jose Rizal of the Philippines and Raden Ajeng Kartini of Indonesia showed great concern for the upliftment of the status of indigenous women. Both sought their emancipation and empowerment through modern education.

THE IMMEDIATE HISTORICAL SETTINGS ARE THE ISLANDS OF Luzon and Java, the birthplaces of Jose Rizal and Raden Ajeng Kartini, respectively. Rizal was born on 19 June 1861 in Kalamba, Laguna, one of the southern Tagalog provinces of Luzon; Kartini on 21 April 1879 in Mayong, a village of the *kabupaten* or regency of Jepara in Central Java.

The broad historical time frame is therefore the last half of the 19th century when 'a new sense of change and purpose was in the air' (Steinberg 1989), 'an age that witnessed the transition of the old into the new' (Symmers 1976). Kartini (1976) described the government of the time to be one that 'care[d] so much about the people of Java, but alas it allow[ed] them to be burdened by heavy taxes, under the load of which they can move but slowly.' In the Philippines, the tobacco monopoly, instituted during the time of Governor José Basco y Vargas, was abolished in 1883 (Pelzer 1974). Changes in economic policies and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 increased commercial contact between the Philippines and the rest of the world. There was an increase in foreign trade and a rising influx of foreign merchants and commercial agents in the country. In the Dutch East Indies, on the other hand, the *Cultuurstelsel* or Forced Cultivation System began to decline in the 1860s.

The writings of Eduard Douwes Dekker (Multatuli), which were familiar to both Rizal and Kartini, were directed against the abuses and excesses of the system. Dekker's novel, *Max Havelaar or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company* (1860), was received with much acclaim in the Netherlands. The Forced Cultivation System was dismembered slowly. By 1870, the major products and plantations had been placed in the hands of private entrepreneurs, but the last vestiges of the system were not swept away until 1917 (van Niel 1984; Teodoro 1996).

After about 1870, the Dutch government implemented what came to be known as the Liberal Policy whereby the island of Java — and eventually the entire Indonesian archipelago complex — was opened to the penetration of private capital (van Niel 1984). Troubled by reports of the declining welfare of the Javanese, the leaders of the so-called Ethical Movement were determined to create a new class of modern-educated natives. To this end, they developed a substantial Dutch-language school system and launched a series of welfare programs that thrust the government into much more direct involvement with the affairs of its subjects (Steinberg 1989).

The period witnessed the emergence and development of a modern-educated elite from the ranks of the *priyayi* and the *principalia*, beneficiaries of economic prosperity and improvements in education and communications after the opening of the island world of Southeast Asia to foreign trade. Members of this class, although conversant in the languages of their respective colonial masters — Dutch and Spanish, were by no means completely detached or dissociated from the indigenous traditions of the archipelago.

INDIGENOUS INTELLIGENTSIA

RIZAL's works have been published, translated, and studied here and abroad. His novels, in particular, have been translated into the languages of Southeast Asia, notably Bahasa Indonesia/Malaysia.¹ Ramadhan KH (1996), in his introduction to the Indonesian translation of *Noli Me Tangere*, tells us that Rizal is a hero for all Asian nations. The writings of Rizal, he says, allow us to appreciate the past when attempts were made to break off the shackles of colonial rule in the struggle for freedom, justice and prosperity. Syed Hussein Alatas (1996), a Malaysian national and author of sev-

eral books including *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977) and *Corruption: Its Nature, Causes and Functions* (1991), considers Rizal as an *orang agung* (great man) and a truly great hero and thinker (*benar-benar seorang wira dan pemikir yang agung*). To him, Rizal was the new and modern Southeast Asian who, with so much sacrifice, endeavored to set free and build up his country. All of Rizal's writings, according to Syed Hussein Alatas, revolve around the question of freedom, oppression, and education in their true sense and meaning.

Rizal was the new and modern Southeast Asian who endeavored to set his country free.

Raden Ajeng Kartini was younger than Rizal. She was an ethnic Javanese, a *wong Jowo*. What I know about Kartini derived primarily from Pramoedya Ananta Toer's multivolume study of Kartini's life and works, *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja* (Call Me Simply Kartini, 1962). But only the first two volumes of Pramoedya's work are available since volumes III and IV were destroyed in the aftermath of the abortive coup of 1 October 1965.² Another work, *Kumpulan Karja Kartini* (Collection of Kartini's Works), suffered the same fate. The letters of Kartini, originally written in Dutch and collected under the title *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Through Darkness Into Light), were first published by JH Abendanon who was the director of the Department of Education, Religion and Industry and was one of the proponents of the Ethical Policy. Kartini's letters were translated into English by Agnes Louise Symmers (1976).

In 1960, Louis Charles Damais of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO, Paris) translated the letters into French. In 1959, Cora Vreede-de Stuers, author of *L'Émancipation de la femme indonésienne* (The Emancipation of the Indonesian Woman), made extensive use of Kartini's letters as well as other sources in Bahasa Indonesia such as Nani Soewondo's *Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia dalam Hukum dan Masyarakat* (The Status of the Indonesian Woman in Law and Society, 1955) in her attempt to reconstruct the history of what she calls *mouvement féministe moderne* or modern feminist movement. Another source is Armijn Pane's preface to *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (After Darkness Comes the Light, 1951), the Indonesian translation of Kartini's letters.

Kartini may have exemplified the modern-educated and Dutch-speaking elite, yet she had not completely severed her ties to her own indigenous culture. For example, some of the ethical precepts of Javanese religion appear in Kartini's letters of 1902 (Geertz 1976). Her letters also show that she had a deep understanding of the Javanese gamelan music, the Javanese marriage ceremony, and the highly symbolic shadow play or *wayang*, a widespread form of entertainment in the Javanese world. Indigenous terms are also found in the letters of Kartini, terms that cannot perhaps be rendered faithfully in another language such as Dutch. Some examples of these are: *pulau kapok* (kapok island, i.e. the bed), *bendoro* (master), *nganten* or *penganten* (bride or bridegroom), *pangulu* (mosque official who keeps a record of marriages and divorces), *kain* (cloth, i.e. the large strip of cloth which forms the Javanese skirt or *sarong*), *widodareni* (the evening before the wedding), etc. In reading the letters of Kartini, the cultural dimension cannot be set aside and should therefore be taken into consideration along with social and historical settings.

In her letter dated 25 May 1899 addressed to Juffrouw Stella Zeehandelaar, a socialist democrat and active member of the radical feminist movement in the Netherlands, Kartini (1976) said:

Call me simply Kartini; that is my name.... As far as "Raden Ajeng" is concerned, those two words are the title.... as for writing *Mejuffrouw* (the Dutch equivalent of "Miss"), or something of that kind, I have no right to it; I am only a Javanese....

I am the eldest of the three unmarried daughters of the Regent of Japara, and have six brothers and sisters.... My grandfather, Pangeran Ario Tjondronegoro of Demak, was a great leader in the progressive movement of his day, and the first regent of central Java to unlatch his door to...western civilization. All his children had European education; all of them have, or had... a love of progress inherited from their father.... Many of my cousins and all my older brothers have gone through the Hoogere Burger School (HBS, European/Dutch secondary school) — the highest institution of learning that we have here in the Indies.... We girls, so far as education goes, fettered by our ancient traditions and conventions, have profited little by these advantages. It was a great crime against the customs of our land that we should be taught at all, and especially that we should leave the house every day to

go to school. For the custom of our country forbade girls in the strongest manner ever to go outside of the house.

When I reached the age of 12, I was kept at home — I had to go into the “box”. I was locked up, and cut off from all communication with the outside world, towards which I might never turn again save at the side of a bridegroom, a stranger, an unknown man whom my parents would choose for me, and to whom I should be betrothed without my own knowledge.

To Kartini, the Javanese custom of arranged marriages (i.e. without the prior acquaintance or consent of the young couple) and polygamy must have been abhorrent, the words of Hildred Geertz. At one point, Kartini said that she was determined to remain a spinster in order to keep her individuality and autonomy. In 1903, however, she had to give in to her father's desire that she marry the regent or *bupati* of Rembang.

In Kartini's letters, it is clear that the search for love is intimately connected with the individual's desire for freedom and fulfillment which then represents a challenge to a rigid social order and certain 'mechanisms of power' (van Leeuwen 1995) in Javanese society which sees tradition as a source of authority. Various forms of discipline regulating the body and the mind serve to strengthen a hierarchical categorization and division of individuals and groups into ranks, functions, classes, etc.

The confining rules of Javanese etiquette which accentuate the differences in social status among all persons, even within the family, annoyed Kartini so much. This can be gathered from her letter to Stella Zeehandelaar dated 18 August 1899:

In order to give you a faint idea of the oppressiveness of our etiquette, I shall mention a few examples. A younger brother or sister of mine may not pass me without bowing down to the ground and creeping upon hands and knees. If a little sister is sitting on a chair, she must instantly slip to the ground and remain with head bowed until I have passed from her sight. If a younger brother or sister wishes to speak to me, it must only be in high Javanese, and after each sentence that comes from their lips, they must make a *sembah*; that is, to put both hands together, and bring the thumbs under the nose.

If my brothers and sisters speak to other people about me, they must always use high Javanese in every sentence concerning me, my

clothes, my seat at the table, my hands and feet, and everything that is mine. They are forbidden to touch my honorable head without my permission, and they not do it even then without first making a *sembah*.

The Javanese affirmed the culture of *tepo sliro* (knowing one's place), where one knew one's position in the social hierarchy, from the family up to the highest echelons of power. According to Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1995b), who is an ethnic Javanese himself: 'The usage of euphemisms (*krômô*, in Javanese) developed into an intricate system of language, having seven different levels. This reflects how stunted the traditional culture had become. We will see that in Javanese literature there has never been any authentic evaluation or reevaluation. Such an evaluation can only be done in Bahasa Indonesia, which, when necessary, can deny all euphemisms.' The Javanese language consists of several distinct 'levels', that is, sets of vocabulary which are quite different from one another. The level spoken depends on the social status of the person addressed — whether he is of nobler blood, higher education, older, or of higher office than the speaker. The number of words that change with each level is so great that they sound like different languages (Geertz 1976).

In an article written by Soepomo Poedjosoedarmo (1968) we are told that

politeness within the Javanese culture involves showing the proper degree of respect to those who are of higher rank and using the proper degree of formality in addressing those of an older generation and those with whom one is not on intimate terms. It is expressed by the Javanese in their gestures as well as through their speech. A complicated etiquette dictates the way a person sits, stands, directs his eyes, holds his hands, points, greets people, laughs, walks, dresses, and so on. There is a close association between the rigor with which the etiquette or movement is observed and the degree of refinement in speech. The more polite a person's language, the more elaborate are his other behavioral patterns; the more informal his speech, the more relaxed and simplified his gestures.

To Raden Ajeng Kartini, however, what is important is 'Freedom, Equality and Fraternity!' (Symmers 1976), even in matters concerning language and speech:

For my little brothers and sisters, towards me, and towards each other are like free, equal comrades. Between us, there is no stiffness — there is only friendship and hearty affection... we speak the same language. At first people smiled in amazement at the free, untrammelled relationship between us brothers and sisters of unequal ages. We were called children without any upbringing, and I was a *kuda korè* (wild colt) because I seldom walked sedately but went skipping along... I often laughed aloud! And allowed my teeth to show.

The Javanese speech levels were perhaps ignored within Kartini's family. Her brothers, however, spoke in high Javanese (*krômô*) to their superiors, who answered them in Dutch or in Malay. Kartini herself understood and spoke Malay very well, but only high Malay, not the *Melayu rendah* or *bahasa pasar Melayu*.³ At one point, she noticed that in the schools of the second class, the children learned only Javanese and no Malay was taught (Symmers 1976).⁴ Was it because Malay was thought to be more democratic, that it conformed more to the ideals of freedom, equality, and fraternity? Or is it because, to a Javanese, 'Malay' simply means an ethnic group?⁵

WOMEN AND COLONIAL EDUCATION

RADEN Ajeng Kartini was one of the first Indonesian girls ever to enter a primary school intended for Europeans (ca. 1885-1891), and her Dutch friends were *trekkers* such as the wife of the Assistant Resident of Jepara, Mevrouw Ovink-Soer, and JH Abendanon. *Trekkers* were the Dutch who came out to the Indies, usually with Dutch wives, for a career of specified length. They went home periodically on leave, and planned to retire in Holland. *Trekkers* differed markedly from the older, smaller group of Dutch *blijvers* (stayers) who thought of the Indies as their home. By the early 1900s, Kartini had become known to small circles of liberal Dutchmen and Javanese aristocrats through her articles in Dutch-language journals and through her open confrontation with Javanese tradition.

In 1903, J Slingenberg of the Dutch Ministry of Colonies sent to Raden Ajeng Kartini a series of questions on the aims and types of education that should be introduced to natives. Kartini's answers summed up her assessment of the condition of the Javanese people at the close of the 19th century and set out concrete proposals for change. True, Kartini's frame of

reference was Java (home of the ethnic Sundanese of west Java, and Javanese of central and east Java), which she often equated with the Indies, the seat of Dutch political authority in the archipelago. But it was not a rigidly parochial view. In fact, Kartini had urged the Director of Education to transfer a scholarship awarded her by the Dutch government to 'a young Sumatran', Haji Agus Salim who came from an upper class family from the Minangkabau region of Sumatera Barat (West Sumatra) and later joined the *Sarekat Islam*.⁶

In her memorial to the Dutch government titled *Geef den Javaan Opvoeding!* ('Educate the Javanese!', 1903), Kartini publicly addressed herself to social problems of the archipelago and underscored the role of women in their resolution. The educative, 'moral foundation of the Native community' (Indonesian: *Masyarakat Pribumi*), according to Kartini, 'must be improved; one will be able to sow and nurture with the utmost success once such a moral basis has been laid.'

Kartini cited the addiction to opium as one of the major social problems of the Indies. Indeed, 'Opium is the pest of Java... It is protected by the Government.' Another problem or 'evil' that existed at the time was the taking of goods belonging to the peasant farmer. Among the natives, however, gift-giving was thought to be a mark of respect, a declaration of homage, a custom mores. The colonial government had forbidden officials from receiving presents even though many native officials had meager salaries. In the words of Kartini to Stella Zeehandelaar (12 January 1900): 'If a district clerk is offered something, perhaps a bunch of bananas, he may refuse it the first time, the second time he may also refuse it, but the third time he accepts it reluctantly, and the fourth time the present is taken without hesitation.' In analyzing the 'habit' of gift-giving, Syed Hussein Alatas (1991) made an important point by saying that 'gift-giving is not the source of large-scale corruption although the gift can easily be converted into a bribe,' something adverse to the collectivity of moral and ethical standards or judgments.

In this particular cultural and social setting, Kartini saw that the woman had a great role to play in shaping society morally: 'She is precisely the person for it; she can contribute much, if not most, to raising society's moral standards.' For Kartini, the education of women has always been an important factor in civilization. Yet she also argued that even though

women should not neglect their own tongue they must also devote equal attention to Dutch so as to have greater access to modern knowledge and information at a time when a new century was about to be born. The language of instruction in the schools should be Dutch since 'knowledge of the Dutch language is the key that opens the treasure chest of western civilization and science; one must train oneself so as to be able to make these treasures one's own.'

Kartini, however, was aware of the chauvinistic mentality of the Dutch as shaped by their belief in the superiority of their race, by their fanatical patriotism perhaps. Hollanders simply found it unpleasant to converse with the natives in their own language. 'Was Dutch,' Kartini once asked, 'too beautiful to be spoken by a brown mouth?' (Symmers 1976). Or was Dutch, just like the two other Indo-European languages — Spanish and English — in the Philippines, simply too remote from anything characterized by spontaneity and freedom from hierarchy, artificiality, affectation, or inhibitions?

'Was Dutch,' Kartini once asked, 'too beautiful to be spoken by a brown mouth?'

On the other hand, Jose Rizal, who frequently made use of Spanish as his medium of literary expression, penned his famous letter 'To the Young Women of Malolos' (1889) in Tagalog and discoursed learnedly on the various aspects of Philippine history and culture including folklore/folk literature. The letter is significant in that it drew attention to the constant, indeed inevitable, role that women play in the development of nation, society, and family. It opens with this statement:

When I wrote *Noli Me Tangere*, I asked myself whether bravery was a common thing in the young women of our people. I brought back to my recollection and reviewed those I had known since my infancy, but there were only few who seem to come up to my ideal. There was, it is true, an abundance of girls with agreeable manners, beautiful ways, and modest demeanor, but there was in all an admixture of servitude and deference to the words or whims of their so-called 'spiritual fathers' (as if the spirit or soul had any father other than God), due to excessive kindness, modesty, or perhaps, ignorance (*kamangmangan*). They seemed faded plants sown and reared in darkness, having flowers with-

out perfume and fruits without sap (*anaki'y mga lantang halaman, sibul at laki sa dilim: mamulaklak ma'y walang bango, magbunga ma'y walang katas*).

The letter is inclined to teach as can be seen in the following segments of the work:

....Let us be reasonable and open our eyes, especially you women, because you are the first to influence the consciousness of man.

....The cause of the backwardness of Asia lies in the fact that there the women are ignorant, are slaves; while Europe and America are powerful because there the women are free and well-educated and endowed with lucid intellect and a strong will.

....Open your children's eyes so that they may jealously guard their honor, love their fellowmen and their native land, and do their duty. Always impress upon them they must prefer dying with honor to living in dishonor. The women of Sparta should serve you as an example in this...

....If the Filipina will not change her mode of being, let her rear no more children, let her merely give birth to them. She must cease to be mistress of the home, otherwise she will unconsciously betray husband, and all.

The letter ends in this manner: 'May your desire to educate yourself be crowned with success; may you in the garden of learning (*halamanan ng karunungan*) gather not bitter, but choice fruit, looking well before you eat, because on the surface of the globe all is deceit, and often the enemy sows weeds in your seeding plot'. Like Kartini, Rizal underscored the need to emancipate and empower women through modern education.

The historical background of the letter can be summarized as follows: On 12 December 1888, 20 young women of Malolos (Bulakan), petitioned Governor General Valeriano Weyler for permission to open a night school at their own expense, with Teodoro Sandiko as the teacher. Sandiko had been secretly teaching Spanish to several young women of prominent Malolos families for some time (Zaide 1968). The parish priest of the town, Father Felipe Garcia, a Spaniard, opposed the petition. But the Malolos women, undaunted by the friar's hostility, continued their campaign for a night school. They finally succeeded in obtaining government approval on

condition that the class be conducted in the daytime and that the teacher would be a woman, a certain Guadalupe Reyes.

News of the Malolos women's defiance against the arbitrary action of Father Garcia, and their courage to establish a school at any cost, aroused the admiration of the Filipino propagandists in Europe. Jose Rizal, was then in London annotating Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de la islas filipinas* (1609). Upon the request of Marcelo del Pilar who was then in Barcelona, Rizal wrote his letter to the young women of Malolos. Rizal commended the Malolos women for their desire to acquire an education with Spanish as medium of instruction.

Yet the political and social awareness of Rizal and Kartini did have some limitations. In his poem *Mi Ultimo Adios* (1896), Rizal stressed the word *patria* (fatherland, *patrie* in French, from the Latin *patria*, 'pays du père'). In doing so Rizal can be said to have marginalized the ancient concept of *Inang Bayan* (Motherland), an act contrary to his earlier use of the concept as an underpinning argument in his letter to the young women of Malolos. Insofar as language was concerned, Kartini firmly believed that Dutch (Nederlands) could effectively serve as a vital weapon in the struggle for women's emancipation, especially in Java where the nativistic world of the speaker of Javanese merely promotes conformity and obedience to social custom (including *adat*) and passes unfavorable judgment on oppositional behavior. In this instance Kartini showed herself to be incognizant of the possible negative consequences of such a western-oriented setup. Nonetheless, the comments and suggestions of Rizal and Kartini about the conditions of women in colonial society remain credible. They both advocated that women, notably those from the elite *principalia* and *priyayi* sectors, be transformed into intellectually active beings. For that alone, Rizal and Kartini emerge as the more progressive thinkers of their colonial societies.

NOTES

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1. See Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere (Jangan Sentuh Aku)*, translated into Indonesian by Tjetje Jusuf and edited for Malaysian readership by Ajikik (1996) and *El Filibusterismo (Bermaharajalelanya Keserakahan)*, translated into Indonesian by Tjetje Jusuf and edited for Malaysian readership by Hj Zubir Hj Ismail (1996).

2. According to the publisher's note to Pramoedya's *Arus Balik: Sebuah Epik Maritim Nusantara* (1995): "Panggil Aku Kartini Sadja, III dan IV jadi kurban vandalisme 1965."

3. 'Bahasa pasar Melayu or market Malay was the crude, highly simplified dialect spoken in the marketplaces and in European kitchens (in the Indies). It contrasted sharply in richness and expressiveness with the true classical Malay which has an ancient and fine literature of its own (Riau, Johore). Both *pasar* and classical Malay provided the basis in the early 20th century for Indonesian' (Symmers 1976).

4. On Malay, see also Goenawan Mohamad (1994).

5. Goenawan Mohamad (1994): 'To others, it may even be a type of insult, as in Jakarta when people tease others as "Malay spies", or "having the mentality of a Malay".' He says further that 'tourist-bus anthropologists describe the Malays as a friendly race of people, always smiling and laughing; people who enjoy an easy life and who are not familiar with hard work; basically inefficient people with no spirit of perseverance, creatures who are easily swept away by sudden emotion. The English word *amok* is of Malay origin for the Malays can suddenly draw their *kris* and start stabbing wildly.' However, Goenawan believes that this description of the Malays is arbitrary and agrees with the comment of Eric Hoffer: 'There is a tendency to judge a race, a nation or any distinct group by its least worthy members.' And that people finally believe only what they want to believe.

6. One of the first so-called 'positive measures' resulting from Haji Agus Salim's influence was the eradication from the *Sarekat Islam* mentality of all dependence on messianic *ratu adil* ('just king') appeals (van Niel 1984).

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