

My grandfather's name was Sastradipura. Sastra means language and pura means palace, so the name possibly means "beautiful language" but I am not aware that my grandfather had any particular aptitude for language at all. In those days, when my grandfather and my father as him, were young, it was customary for someone to change his name when he married, choosing freely in keeping with his own taste and wishes. So Sastradipura is that my grandfather chose.

My father chose Ranasudirdja. Rana means war and dirdja means the activity of a hustling crowd. So, according to my father, his name means a hustling crowd at war, just like the Bratayudha war that ends all strife between the heroes and villains of the Mahabarata epic used in the wayang stories. I don't know what my father and grandfather were called when they were children. And I don't really understand why my father chose such a name. Very likely he was influenced by the wayang stories of the Mahabarata, for he was a lover of wayang and had a great admiration for a dalang from a far away village, whose name was Pa' Sungging. When I was circumcised, it was this Ki Dalang Sungging who provided the entertainment at the circumcision party.

According to what my father told me, my grandfather on his side of the family was a civil servant with the rank of demang. These days the position would be that of a wedana or comat, the administrative head of a district, neither at the top nor yet at the bottom of the ranks of local government. My father said that, in keeping with what in those days was considered fitting for his position, my grandfather had four wives; one of them, I don't know which, was undoubtedly from the nobility, or else my grandfather would not have got his position, because the colo

government insisted upon a clear aristocratic strain in the higher ranks of its Indonesian officials, with a view to ensuring unhesitating obedience by the people at large.

Well, my grandfather's four wives had an over-all total of children, one of them being my father. Not all were boys, there was a pair of identical twins who were girls. I knew those twin aunts as it was certainly difficult to distinguish between them. Even my grandfather, I heard, sometimes couldn't tell them apart. The only people who could do so easily were their respective husbands and some of their elder brothers and sisters.

Another of my aunts once told me that in the Karangsumbung, Karangsumbung area, not far from Cirebon, the family numbered no less than 600 people, enough to fill a kampong on their own ! Although my aunt had never been to school – what for ? people would have said her calculation was certainly not far from the truth. Let's just calculate from my grandfather with his 18 children. If each of them had 5 children a modest number for those days, when families often numbered more than a dozen and sometimes even above 20 there were already more than 100 people, 36 parents and 90 children. And if these 90 children also had an average of 5 children, then there were certainly well over 5550 people all told. And we haven't yet counted the families of my grandfather's siblings ... My aunt said she was talking about just the family members living in or close to the kampong where she lived, not including all those members of the family who had scattered all around Cirebon and who also had children and grandchildren.

Due to the size of the family and because of the custom of time of keeping marriages within the family circle, it was often a puzzle to work out, relationships and to know whether some one of one's own age was cousin, aunt or uncle or someone from a younger rung in grandfather's family tree. This situation was not so very unusual at that time, but it was always something of an embarrassment because of Indonesian custom of addressing each other by the title of one's relationship. Thus younger sibling so and so, elder sibling, aunt or uncle older than my father, aunt or uncle older than my father and so on. It wasn't quite so awkward as it sounds in English, for there are specific titles for each degree of relationship, for instance, for the relative I've just mentioned, adik, kakak, bibi or paman and uwa respectively.

Sometimes it felt very odd to be addressing someone as elder sibling when, in fact, he was half my age, or, conversely, when I was addressed as elder sibling by someone with grey hairs. As I began to grow up, I cut myself loose from this custom of careful regard for relationship and would address a girl as neng, even if I ought to have shown respect for her senior position as the daughter of one of my father's older siblings by calling her kakak. I observed that the younger members of the family, especially those who had received some degree of education, had no objection to my deviations, even when they still felt themselves to be senior.

Certainly, the time of my childhood was a time in which many changes were taking place. As I discovered later, I wasn't the only person to believe that it wasn't possible to maintain any longer the "standard behaviour" of my grandfather's day. That old system could be applied only to regions where

conditions were static, where the population were not mobile. These were the conditions of my grandfather's day a rot of mine, when the increasing population was beginning to spread albeit still within such an area as that around Cirebon, for inkstand. As the population grew and as the economy developed with modern condition slowly seeping in from outside, changes were, bound to come to the come conditions under which ordinary people lived, and the family ties that at first bound large numbers of people would slowly come tome to be felt increasingly smaller numbers. Possibly the term "family" would come be applied only to the line of direct descent in parents, children a grandchildren, possibly the distant relatives called misan-mindo would not be regarded as belonging to the family any longer. I could see : was certainly more rational for the large family to split up into some units where the relationship is felt to be close and where the number are easily counted.

This is not to say that I regarded the large family of my going father's day as purely negative. One positive element in it was that drew people from one particular circle close together, even though the lived far apart. It is nor a bad thing to be trained childhood close relations with a large number of people from a very varied spec in the modern world, new concepts of family relations have arisen, wilt a universal basis released completely from the idea of common descent. We often strive today for a sense of family among the members of a community, or a state, and we old the ideal of the family hood of a the nations of men, and we need training in such relationships. I live this concept of universal family hood, for it will relieve many social tensions, and especially the tensions

between the different families are societies and nations, where one confronts another and the wars with it. By all means, let us have “the family of man”.

But here I am, sailing ahead, talking about international family relationships, whilst I haven't got around to being born myself to telling about my father, except to talk about his name and to say he was one of 18 children.

My father never told me which child he was in order of birth nor did he say from which of my grandfather's wives he was born. And never bothered to ask him. I know only that there were several male uwa (uncles older than my father) and several paman and bibi (uncles aunts younger than my father) who often came to our house. Out of my father's 17 siblings, I actually know only 6. I don't even know the names, let alone the faces, of the other 11. My father never spoke them to me, possibly because they were the children of a different mother. I don't know what other reason there would be. I suspect the my father's brothers and sisters with whom I was acquainted were full siblings from the one mother, my grandfather's children by his first wife. And possibly that first wife was not the aristocratic one and maybe the aristocratic lady did not have much sympathy for the lower ranking women who also had a claim upon my grandfather's affections. Polygamy is frequently the cause of rifts in families. I guess that this was the situation for these 7 children and I think it is the reason why they were always so close, even though they lived quite far away one another, because the work of each of family had taken them a from the original kampong.

My father himself was a civil servant who was frequently removed from place to place. Up to the time I was 15 years old, my was moved seven times from

one place to another, all around the Ceremon Mountain with its dense forests. My father was a forestry. Police off (Mantri Polisi Kehutanan). So I was a child of the forest, brought villages, sometimes lying far out of the way on the shoulders of the mountain.

My father had 5 children, all of them girls except he, who was the youngest. My first. Second and third sisters came from a different mother, but my fourth sister, who died in 1931, was my mother's daughter. This doesn't mean that my father was a polygamist, though, even today that is still far from unusual in Indonesia. No, that wasn't it, my father was a progressive man in his thinking and didn't like the idea. My father first married my mother's older sister, but she died after her third daughter was born. At that time, my mother had been divorced from her first husband, from whom she had a son. It was this divorce whom my father then married, and so his second wife was the younger one of his first wife "turun ranjang" as we say of this not so very unusual Indonesian situation.

So I came to have four elder sisters sharing one father with me and an older brother sharing a single mother. The six of us usually live together as closely as any other siblings with just one mother father between them.

My mother was the daughter of another civil servant, who worked as an Irrigation Officer (Mantri Irrigasi). It seemed as though my father had looked for a suitable balance in the matter of marriage. As a civil servant, he married the daughter of a civil servant, he a Forestry Police Officer and his father in law was an Irrigation Officer so they came from the same rank.

According to my eldest sister, my mother was the first woman in the Cirebon area to speak Dutch. The reason was that her father, irrigation man, lived in a house next door to a Dutch Irrigation Inspector. My sister even told me that my mother could be said to have been “taken” by the Dutch wife. I understood that what she meant by being “taken” was that, when she was a girl, my mother helped in the Dutch household and was taught the Dutch style of housekeeping by the irrigation inspector wife. The correct term for this sort of employment was not sery but “ngawula” meaning that, as the daughter of a lower-ranking civil servant (the Irrigation Officer), she “served” his superior (the Irrigation Inspector).

In my grandfather’s day and in my father’s also, the custom ngawula was widely practiced, generally in the ranks of the civil se with lower ranks “serving” their superiors. Such a custom had been entrenched in the community since the old days of the kings in the era before the Dutch came. It certainly had a positive element, in the girls who performed such “service” obtained practical experience in running a household. There was another beneficial factor in this custom. In those days, it was still customary for the young daughter of the aristocracy to be isolated until they married, once the days, childhood were over. They were kept inside the house and allowed no further field than, perhaps, the confines of a walled garden. Under the conditions of this custom, the pingitan as it was called, it was naturally not possible for girls to learn anything of the world around them, let alone to read and write, for even young girls were not sun school, even if their parents were “eligible” and might send their to the schools in the major Indonesian cities that were intended for Dutch and Eurasian children.

So, if a girl was “taken up” she naturally learnt a great more than her sisters who were subject to the pingitan custom. Thus my mother was a very well educated woman for her day, not only because spoke Dutch and could read and write Latin characters in a fair hand also because her outlook was much broader than the four walls of her home.

There was negative side to the ngawula customs that I she mention, now that I’ve brought the matter up. Among the ranks of the old-style bupati prior to 1900, the daughters of civil servants take by Mrs Bupati were often not permitted to leave the house, just as the they were subject to the seclusion of the pingitan. At times, not requests to visit their parents were granted. Mrs Bupati, who manag the household, would sometimes look for a match for the girls she controlled, such as some police officer, camat or wedana from amongs those who customarily came to the shire residence on business. Whatt was bad about this was that the sihes of Mrs. Bupati had necessarily be followed by the girls, and so it often happened that the match for a girl was an old man, or one with several wives already, or a civil servant who was a gambler.

Giving training in home economics to a teenager is certain a useful activity, but gaining mastery over a girl and depriving her the freedom to choose her partner was a threat to the continuity and happiness of her own household, and so the outcome of the home economic training itself was negated. Such customs as this were one of the things which Raden Ajeng Kartini foughtk, and Kartini could not have much older than my mother, if at all.

Childhood

I arrived into the world almost simultaneously with a family visitor from the Village of Bondan, some here in the direction of Indo mayu, 60 or 70 kilometres to the north of where I was born in the of Susukan. So I was named Mohamad Bondan, and that name I have ney changed.

My eldest sister told me that my father was overjoyed when was born. He held a seven days and seven nights party to express satisfaction at getting a son. It seems my father was not in the acquainted with economic trinciples, for such a party as that must have cost him a pretty penny. However, it is likely enough that he did not have to consider economic factors at that time. In 1910, a man like my father, who had been to school, who spoke Dutch fluently though Sundanase was the family language and who came from the lower ranks of the Seseputh branck of the Sultans of Ceribon, was assured of good employment. As a forestry officer, my father was amongst those Indonesians who never knew what was to live in poverty. His salary and then his pension assured his family of comfort and when he over-spent, as happened later on, he possessions that he could sell or pawn. It was only 30 years later, during the Japanese occupation of Indonesian in World War II, that he ever went short of anything. And even then, he and my sisters never actually starved, as so many did.

I can understand how happy my father was to have the some hoped for so long : four daughters coming one after the other two wives ! Yet I myself wasan unlucky child, for I never knew my mother : I cannot recally her face nor remember her loving care. She died, my sisters say, when I had just begun to

crawl, and so I was yet one year old. After her death, I was cared for by a servant and eldest sister, almost a dozen years my senior. Once, when I was in primary school, I was overtaken by a longing to see my mother's face and I searched the house for the portrait which, y father said, had once been taken. But it was never found.

These days, many people know the date of their birth. That is to say, they know what their parents tells them, they know what recorded in the Registry Office, they know what some doctor or midwi can report. But when I was born, peole were hardly acquainted with the idea of recording the birth date of a child. This might be done in the families of the high mobility, but was certainly never thought of in the villages. Even today, most of the population of Indonesian over about about 20 years of age have no record to show exactly when they were born. It is only recently that there has been any requirement register births and deaths in Indonesia. People simply calculate the age approximately either in reference to some family incident or to great event or natural catastrophe.

It often happened when I was young that a single individual was accustomed to having to or three "ages" one age would be that of the approximate family calculation, another age would be that usually for school while a third was still possible, being that which was considered advantageous for obtaining employment. The sole limit was the age that would appear to be within the grounds of credibility.

The school entrance age when I was a boy was 7 or 8. so parents would say 8, though they knew that their son must be 10, or they would say 6 years and 9

months, when they knew he would turn 6 only some time next month. After 6 years schooling, the ages of those children would be recorded on their school certificates as either 13 or 14, whereas in fact their ages were really 16 and 12 respectively when they sought employment, they could choose the most advantageous age from either that of the school certificate or their real age the latter, saying simply, that their age had been wrongly reported to the school so they might enter it. This was acceptable, since this was a very general practice. The old thing was that those who stipulated age requirements, whether schools or employers, just believed what were told, without any attempt at control. What could they do, any. The only possible "control" for age applied to young children. It was widely known that when a child reached 6, and not before, he was able to touch his left ear with his right hand with his arm stretched across top of his head. In the more remote parts of the country, this "age test" is still applied even today, and is also used by parents with their children as a preventive, if they want to go to school too soon, or as incentive, if they are reluctant! But the latter seldom happens.