

Raden Ayu Lasminingrat and Cultural Transformation

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Abstract

Raden Ayu Lasminingrat, the daughter of Chief Cleric Moehamad Moesa, was born to be a progressive and visionary woman. She was raised in a traditional Sundanese society and received Western education in a Dutch family. She then used the knowledge that she had acquired from the family to bring about transformation to local cultural structures which discriminated against the native people, especially women. Her first action was translating Western books so that the natives could learn from them. Furthermore, she sought to educate native females, something that women in that era had never imagined before. Because of her activities and agency in her society, she fits the criteria of an agent of change. Therefore, it is not surprising that Tirto Adisuryo deemed Lasminingrat as a woman ahead of her time.

KEYWORDS: agency, agent of change, education, and cultural structure

Introduction

“The son of the chief cleric, who is able to write and speak Dutch rather well, translates into prose the journey of Bontekoe, Robinson Crusoe, Marion’s travel to New Zealand, and a number of fragments from a companion for Javanese farmers, a book titled *Mitra nu Tani*. The daughter of the chief cleric, who married the Regent of Garut, accurately translated Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales, tales from the fantasy world (by Gouverneur), and other stories into Sundanese. The government has even issued a permission to print one of her writing collections”¹

The paragraph above is an excerpt from Karel Frederik Holle’s letter written on November 16th, 1874, which was sent to P.J. Veth (1814-1895), a highly renowned historian of the Dutch East Indies, especially Javanese history. At that time, he had just been appointed as a history professor (*hoogleraar*) at *Rijksuniversiteit Leiden*. Meanwhile, Holle, who always concentrated his study on Sundanese culture, especially its literature, had become a fairly successful tea producer. Because of these reasons, Holle’s letter becomes a very interesting data which deserves a more careful examination. Furthermore, Professor Veth was known as an expert in Javanese culture who also had a strong interest in Javanese literature.

There are at least two reasons why the letter can be considered suitable for further investigation. Firstly, it was written in 1874 in which there was a transfer of power from the Conservative group to the Liberal group in the Netherlands. This political transformation had some influence over the country’s policy regarding its

¹The letter of K.F. Holle to P.J. Veth, November 16th, 1874 in BPL Np. 1756, Leiden University Library.

colonies, especially the Dutch East Indies. The transformation was generally beneficial for Dutch private entrepreneurs, but not for the native ones. In reality, the governmental system in the colony remained autocratic and centralistic in character, not unlike the previous years or eras, which did little for the betterment of the native people.² Secondly, Holle's letter expressly mentioned that two of the chief's children, one of whom was a woman, were skillful at translating European literature works, which was a surprising fact since the colonial education system at that time still discriminated against the natives, particularly women. This situation was confounded by the fact that Sundanese and Javanese cultures generally regarded female education as unnecessary. With those two reasons in mind, which are in principle related to the contexts of "local realities and time"³, the accomplishments of the chief's two children, especially the daughter, must be regarded not only as an interesting phenomenon to investigate, but also as an important and necessary research topic. Based on such considerations, this paper seeks to reconstruct the identity of the children, especially the daughter.

A Woman Who Translated Grimm Brothers' Tales

In order to investigate the role of the chief's daughter in the translation of Grimm Brothers' tales into a native language, we have to trace and describe her parentage and her parents' names. One clue provided in Holle's letter is the fact that the daughter was married to the Regent of Garut. The information proves beneficial to our investigation, especially to researchers who have visited the central part of the capital city of Garut Regency. At the center of the city, not far from the great mosque, there is a cemetery for Garut noble families (*menak*). Amongst many graves there, two of them bear the names of Wiratanudatar VIII, a former Regent of Garut, and his wife, Lasminingrat, whose graves are not further apart. Despite the fact that Lasminingrat's name is inscribed on the gravestone, it is still doubtful whether she was really the person referred to by Holle as the translator of Grimm's tales.

Such doubt is natural during research; in fact, such critical attitude might even be necessary because it can encourage us to search for more data which can be scientifically proven as valid and relevant to our research questions. Based on the principles of critical thinking, our preliminary data must be further examined with regard to Holle's other letters. In his letter to the Governor General dated August 20th, 1873, Holle, among other things, mentioned that the Regent's second wife was a daughter of a local chief cleric who had spent her maiden life with Levyssohn Norman's family in Sumedang,⁴ while another source states that the daughter of the

²Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Etika Yang Berkeping-keping: Lima Telaah Kajian Aliran Etis dalam Politik Kolonial 1877-1942*. Jakarta: Djambatan, 1996, pgs 6-11.

³The concept of "locality-time" is derived from Hagerstrand's concept of "time-geography" which is used to study geographical aspects of everyday life of a local church community in Sweden; the notion was then transformed by Anthony Giddens into a more movable "locality". For more detail, see Anthony Giddens, *Teori Strukturasi: Dasar-dasar Pembentukan Struktur Sosial Masyarakat*. Translated by: Maufur and Daryatno. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010, pgs. 170-179.

⁴Mikihiro Moriyama, *Semangat Baru: Kolonialisme, Budaya Cetak, dan Kesastraan Sunda Abad ke-19*. Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia and The Resona Foundation for Asia and Oceania, 2003, pgs.146-147.

local chief cleric who had lived with Levyssohn Norman was Soehara,⁵ the daughter of Moehamad Moesa. The information obtained from *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* states that the daughter of Moehamad Moesa who became the wife of Garut Regent, Wiratanudatar, was Raden Ayu Lasminingrat.⁶ If there was only one daughter of Moehamad Moesa who married with the Garut Regent, it can be concluded that the woman mentioned in Holle's letter was indeed Lasminingrat, whose maiden name was Soehara.

Our conviction that the wife of Regent Wiratanudatar VIII was actually Lasminingrat is strengthened by visual data which consists of a photograph, part of the collection of *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal, Land, -en Volkenkunde* (KITLV). The photograph was captioned "Lasminingrat, de echtgenote van Raden Adipati Ario Wiratanoedatar VIII, regent van Garoet".⁷ Furthermore, a collection of the translation of Grimm's tales published by *laandsdrukerij* under the title *Warnasari atawa roepa-roepa dongeng* (literally "Warnasari or various tales") expressly mentions the name of their translator (the exact term used in the book is *penyalin*, literally "scribe"), Raden Ajoe Lasminingrat. After her name has been ascertained, now we need to examine her biography in more detail, especially information related to Levyssohn Norman's family in Sumedang,

Born in Garut in 1843, Lasminingrat was the daughter of Moehamad Moesa and Raden Ayu Riya. However, there is no reliable data concerning her exact date and month of birth, while some experts are not even convinced that she was really born in 1843. In order not to create further confusion concerning her birthplace, we need to clarify that before 1913 Garut Regency was known as Limbangan. The name Garut began to be officially used in 1913 as the name of both the city and the regency. Therefore, it is not wrong if some people consider Lasminingrat to have been born in Garut City or Limbangan.

In his entire life, Moehamad Moesa was married to six women. They were Raden Ayu Perbata, Raden Ayu Banonagara, Raden Ayu Rija, Raden H. Djuhro, Raden Ayu Lendra Karaton, and Raden Ayu Tedjamantri. As an affluent Moslem, he was permitted by his religion to take up to four wives. This is to say that he was permitted to keep only four of his six wives at a time. However, there is no clear information about this marital arrangement, while Dutch officials often misrepresented polygamy, which was often practiced by Moslems. They treated it as a bad practice.⁸

From his six wives, Moehamad Moesa fathered 16 children as follows: (1) Raden Ayu Perbatabore Soeria Nata Ningrat, Soeria Nata Legawa (also known as Karta Winata), Domas (female), and Zainal Asikin; (2) Raden Ayu Banonagara bore Soeria Nata Manenda, Radja Bodedar, and Niswan Radjanagara (female); (3) Raden Ayu Rijabore Lasminingrat (female), Ratna Ningroem (female), and Lenggang

⁵H.D. Levyssohn Norman, *Hal Setiajanja Kepala Bangsa Anak Negri di Hindia Wolanda*. Betawi: Yap Goan Ho, 1888, pg. 20.

⁶*Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië*. S¹-Hravenhage: Nijhoff, 1923, vol.3, 22-23.

⁷See Lasminingrat's 1910 photograph in *Nederlands-Indië in foto's, 1860-1940*, *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal, Land, -en Volkenkunde* (KITLV).

⁸ Mohammad Iskandar, *Para Pengemban Amanah: Pergulatan Pemikiran Kiai dan Ulama di Jawa Barat, 1900-1950*. Yogyakarta: Mata Bangsa, 2001.

Kantjana (female); (4) Raden H. Djoehro bore Moerminah (female), Siti Rahmah (female), and Prawirakoesoemah; (5) Raden Ayu Lendra Karaton bore Ahmad Natalegawa and Moehamad Prawiradilaga; (6) Raden Tedjamantri bore Andu Surja Adi Widjaja.⁹

Moehamad Moesa showed great concern over the education of his children, both religious and general knowledge, especially those imported from the West, which he considered beneficial for his children's career in the future. This was remarkable since most Moslem clerics at that time forbade their children to learn Western knowledge which was considered as coming from the infidels. The result can be seen in his children's career. Of his sixteen children, two became regents: Raden Aria Adipati Soeria Nata Ningrat (Lebak) and Raden Aria Adipati Prawirakoesoemah (Serang); one became a *patih* (chief minister): Raden Aria Adipati Soeria Nata Legawa (Sumedang); two became *wedana* (district chief): Raden Ahmad Natalegawa (Singaparna) and Raden Moehamad Prawiradilaga (Cibeber); one became *hoofdpanghulu*: Raden Haji Zainal Asikin (Limbangan); and one became *hoofddjaksa*: Raden Andu Surja Adi Widjaja (Bandung). Besides those who worked as government officials or religious clerics, three inherited Moehamad Moesa's literary talent and writing skills: Raden Ayu Lasminingrat, Raden Karta Winata, also known as Raden Aria Adipati Soeria Nata Legawa, (who also became the Chief Minister of Sumedang), and Raden Ayu Lenggang Kentjana.¹⁰

The family genealogy shows that Lasminingrat's mother was Moehamad Moesa's third wife. She had two full-siblings from the same parents and 13 half-siblings from the same father but different mothers. When she was a maiden (*mojang*), Lasminingrat was known as Soehara, a name given by her parents immediately after she was born.¹¹ Ever since tender ages, Soehara had already been introduced to education and literature by her father. Therefore, she developed a strong interest in literature, knowledge, and education. During adolescence, her interest in literature and knowledge grew even stronger, especially because his father often took her to visit his European colleagues and acquaintances, particularly the Dutch whose cultural background was markedly different from her family.

Her intelligence and yearning for knowledge, as well as her ability to express her opinion without hesitation, went beyond her gracious appearance. These qualities attracted the interest of one of his father's Western colleagues, Levyssohn Norman, who at that time worked as the chief governor's secretary. Looking back at the past, Levyssohn Norman's acquaintance with Moehamad Moesa started in 1860. In that year Levyssohn Norman came to Garut to accompany Governor General G. F. Pahud during his work visit. The Governor General needed somebody who could give information about Garut, and almost everybody he met recommended him to meet "the Chief Cleric", who happened to be Moehamad Moesa. Therefore, he asked the local people to take him to meet the cleric. Ever since their first meeting, Levyssohn Norman was impressed by Moehamad Moesa's appearance.

⁹ Moriyama, *Semangat Baru: Kolonialisme, Budaya Cetak, dan Kesastraan Sunda Abad ke-19*. Jakarta: KPG, 2003, see footnote no.8, Chapter 3. A different account is given by Deddy Effendie who reports that the number of Haji Moehamad Moesa's children is seventeen. However, the data source is not clear, while most of his book relies on Moriyama's writings.

¹⁰ *I b i d.*

¹¹ Levyssohn Norman, *Op.cit.* pg. 20.

“Then we all entered the house; I was astonished when I saw a native man who had a round and wide face, with thick mustache and fully attired, resembling the clothes worn by the Hollanders, sitting and drinking tea with his wives and children, while reading chronicles.

Gladly he greeted me and said: “My friend, Holle, who is really my friend”

Then, not so long after that, we were conversing about the conditions of the lands in *Priangan* (West Java), which at that time was under great hardship,”¹²

For this Dutch official, Soehara’s appearance was outstanding and rarely found amongst other girls about her age. She was not hesitant to meet new people, especially the Dutch. She was swift and adjusted herself very well. Her ability in speaking Dutch instantly made her an agreeable partner to have a conversation with. Because of that, Levyssohn Norman did not refuse when Moehamad Moesa, a man who had become his friend, asked him to help improving his daughter’s Dutch, both writing and speaking. However, Levyssohn Norman was busy with his job as the Governor’s Secretary General, so Soehara was taken to his brother’s house who worked as a comptroller in Sumedang. According to a Sundanese expression, Soehara was “*dipundut dikukut*” (temporarily received as a family member) by Levyssohn Norman’s family.¹³

The practice of entrusting children to the care of other people in order to educate, improve, and prepare them for a better life in the future was not unusual. Further back in history, at the first stages of the growth of Islam in Java, King Sri Baduga Maharaja of Pakwan Pajajaran raised a foster child who would become his successor. The same was also true for the King of Pajang (Joko Tingkir) who raised a foster child, Senopati, who would become the founder of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom. Another factor which drove parents to adopt the practice of entrusting their children to the care of Dutch families was the lack of Western formal education institutions. As an illustration, throughout the Island of Java, in 1903 there were only 14 first-class schools in provincial capitals and 29 in regency capitals or *afdeling*.¹⁴ Due to this condition, Moehamad Moesa had to choose the alternative of entrusting his children to other people, as was common amongst the native elites. This was reflected in Holle’s letter to the Governor General dated August 20, 1873, as quoted by Moriyama,

“The Regent’s second wife, one of the daughters of *Hoofdpanghulu* (chief cleric) who lived with Levyssohn in Sumedang for a long time before she was married, does not only speak Dutch and is used to sophisticated practices like discipline and hygiene, but also translates Dutch books into Sundanese for the purpose of educating the natives. A daughter of the cleric was raised by the assistant resident’s wife, a daughter of the chief minister was raised by the

¹²Levyssohn Norman, *I b i d*, pgs. 16-17.

¹³Nina H. Lubis, *Kajian Tentang Perjuangan Raden Ayu Lasminingrat*. Bandung: Pusat Penelitian Kemasyarakatan dan Kebudayaan-Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Padjadjaran, 2007, pg. 6.

¹⁴MarwatiDjoenedPoesponegoro and Nugroho Notosusanto, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia*. Jilid V, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2008, pg. 28.

comptroller's wife, while another daughter of the *Hoofdpanghulu* and a daughter of the cleric were raised by Stam's (a teacher) family ..."¹⁵

Holle clearly mentioned some daughters from *menak kaum* (*hoofdpanghulu* or chief cleric) and *menak paseban* (*patih* or chief minister) families who were raised by Dutch families.

The friendship of Moehammad Moesa and some Dutch officials or families was not always welcomed by other members of his community. In particular, his decision to entrust a teenage girl to the care of Levyssohn Norman's family was considered "divergent" by some clerics and Sundanese cultural figures. However, Moehamad Moesa had his own considerations which Holle considered as an advanced and visionary way of thinking, and this might not be sufficiently understood by other clerics or his native friends.

Moehamad Moesa's "sacrifice" and hopes for his daughter eventually paid off. While she lived with Levyssohn Norman's family, Soehara learnt enthusiastically; in just a few years, she was able to write and speak Dutch fluently. Her diligence, discipline, and meticulousness in her daily life were the subject of Holle's praise.¹⁶ She owed her achievements to the support of many individuals, but it is undoubted that her most important benefactor besides her family was Levyssohn Norman who happened to be very interested in culture and education. Soehara also benefitted from the fact that Levyssohn Norman did not have any children; her presence in the Dutch family was so desirable that she was considered not merely as a "temporary guest", but also as their own daughter. Levyssohn's family even called Soehara using an endearment style "Saartje" (Little Sarah) everyday, because the word was easier for them to pronounce than her real name "Soehara".¹⁷

The name Sara was considered so special amongst the Dutch that it gave rise to an expression used amongst Dutch ladies at that time, such as "ik ontmoette Sara" ("I will meet Sara"). The name Sara (Siti Sarah) was also the name of the wife of the Prophet Ibrahim a.s. (Abraham), who is reputed to be a responsible and considerate wife towards her husband. Therefore, it is not surprising if Levyssohn Norman's family called Soehara with an endearment style "Saartje" (Little Sarah) because for Dutch ears the name "Soehara" sounded much like "Sara". More importantly, Soehara's personality, being a highly-spirited and committed young lady, has brought her closer to the female character in the Bible: Sara, the Prophet Abraham's wife.

The nickname "Saartje" and the meaning associated with it turned out to suit Soehara's character. Soehara grew to be a strong-willed, dedicated, and intelligent woman, just like Sara or Siti Sarah. During his tutorship, Levyssohn Norman observed that this daughter of Moehamad Moesa never squandered her time for excessive entertainment. Her passion for learning was so high that she did not find any problem absorbing all the knowledge taught to her; she even took the initiative to learn by herself from the books that were provided for her. Levyssohn Norman himself came to consider Soehara or Saartje not only as a foster daughter or pupil, but also as a pleasant discussion partner.

¹⁵Mikihiro Moriyama, *Op.cit.* pgs.146-147.

¹⁶See Holle's letter to the Governor General, August 20th, 1873, and see also *Volksalmanak Soenda 1919*.

¹⁷Moriyama quoting Levyssohn Norman, *I b i d*, pg. 244.

One interesting thing about Soehara is the fact that, in spite of her being raised in a Dutch family, she still loved the art and culture of her Sundanese predecessors. According to Nina Lubis, Soehara's talent (Nina Lubis refers to her as Lasminingrat) in art and culture was frequently performed in special events, such as during family gatherings or when her father invited his guests. She was often invited by Holle or Levyssohn to sing *dangding*, among other accomplishments.¹⁸

Under the care of Levyssohn Norman's family, Soehara or Saartje frequently received presents in the form of books containing Western fairy tales, both from the Netherlands and from other European countries such as Great Britain and Germany. The tales quickly caught her interest not only because their plots and narrative development were very different from usual Sundanese or Javanese tales, but also because she saw in them many moral lessons which can be applied for the benefit of the society. In this regard, her attitude towards books and fairy tales was strikingly different from native men of letters and intellectuals in that era, which included her own father, Moehamad Moesa. Books, especially fairy tales, were generally considered merely as a form or medium of entertainment, but Soehara or Saartje thought that books and tales could be used as resources and materials for education.

This idea encouraged her to translate the Western works into Sundanese in the hope that future Sundanese generations might read the Western tales, understand the moral lessons, and apply them to improve their own lives. Under the tutelage of Levyssohn Norman's family and his colleagues, Soehara continued honing her proficiency in Dutch, especially by translating Western tales into Sundanese, whose soul and structure are significantly different from those of European languages.

For Soehara, the City of Sumedang did not only serve as a destination for pursuing education (*mumara*), but it also had an important meaning in her entire course of life as a woman. It was in this city where she first met Raden Tamtu, the son of Pangeran Sugih, the Regent of Sumedang at that time. The meeting soon flourished into amorous friendship, which brought them to the bliss of marriage. As was the custom among Sundanese *menaks* (members of nobility), a married woman was bestowed with a new name: Raden Ayu Lasminingrat. Since that time, she was no longer called Soehara, but Raden Ayu Lasminingrat. However, her happiness did not last long because her husband died, while she had not conceived a child. Being a widow, Lasminingrat returned to her parents' house in Limbangan, Garut.¹⁹

In Limbangan, Lasminingrat's widowhood did not last long. She quickly caught the interest of a local regent, Raden Aria Adipati Wiratanudatar VIII. She was proposed and became the Regent's second wife. It must be noted here that in colonial ages it was common and acceptable for a high *priayi* (official) or *menak* (nobleman) to have more than one wife. The practice of having more than one wife was also not unusual amongst religious leaders and clerics. In 1871 Lasminingrat was taken by her husband R.A.A. Wiratanudatar VIII to his *pendopo* (a regent's official house) of

¹⁸Nina H. Lubis, *Op.cit.* Bandung: Pusat Penelitian Kemasyarakatan dan Kebudayaan-Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Padjadjaran, 2007, pg. 7.

¹⁹Nina H. Lubis, *Op.cit.* pg. 8

Limbangan Regency. From her second marriage, Lasminingrat gave birth to two daughters: Cicih dan Mojaningrat.²⁰

Lasminingrat's decision to marry the Garut Regent Wiratanudatar VIII proved to be a fortunate one. As a government official, Wiratanudatar fully understood his wife's characters and work ethos. He gave her much freedom to achieve her own dreams. The result was, as was reported by Holle in his letter and quoted here earlier, Lasminingrat was able to finish several translations of Grimm's tales which were then collected and printed as a compilation of fairy tales. Properly speaking, this was not her first work because, before translating Grimm's tales, she had published another translation of tales by Christoph von Schmid under the title of *Carita Erman*, 6,015 copies of which was printed in 1875 (the translation was reprinted in 1911 and 1922).²¹

Paving the Road to Success

As mentioned earlier, Moehammad Moesa showed great attention to the education and knowledge of his children, both male and female. All of his children had the privilege of enjoying a Western style education. However, of all his children, only three shared their father's passion for literature and writing. They were Lasminingrat, Kartawinata (Lasminingrat's half-brother), and Lenggang Kentjana (Lasminingrat's full-sister).

As mentioned earlier, Lasminingrat began writing since she lived under the care of Levyssohn Norman's family in Sumedang. She was determined to translate because she thought that the books that she had read were not mere "fairy tales", but contained valuable lessons for the native people. Her earlier translations were written in Javanese alphabet because they were intended to be read by all Sundanese people—until mid-1850's Sundanese writers and noblemen mostly produced their works in Javanese alphabet.

The importance of the translations produced by the two siblings is reflected on several policies issued by the government of East Indies in the years following their publications. Two decades before the end of the 19th century, the government required many reading materials for first-class schools opened for native students which used local languages as medium of instruction. Because of that, the translations produced by Kartawinata and Lasminingrat became ever more important, at least in Sundanese speaking regions.

It was true that at that time many Western education experts doubted the quality of Sundanese as a good medium of instruction, but Holle, who was very sympathetic towards Sundanese culture, was able to convince government officials to choose Sundanese as a medium of instruction. At the same time, Sundanese school books were also introduced. Considering the fact that local reading materials were hard to obtain, the works of the Chief Cleric Moehammad Moesa and his children were indispensable to the development of education system for the native people, especially for those who spoke and wrote in Sundanese.

²⁰Nina H. Lubis quoting *Rundayan R.H. Moehamad Moesa, Penghulu Bintang Limbangan. I b i d.*

²¹Moriyama, *Op.cit.* pg. 246.

The translated books were printed by a government press, *Landsdrukkerij*. The first copies of the translations were printed in Sundanese or Javanese alphabet. The next copies were printed in Latin alphabet, which was known amongst the natives as *Hollanda* letters (literally “Holland Letters”).²² This measure was taken because there remained only a small portion of Sundanese people who were able to read Sundanese or Javanese alphabet. Lasminingrat’s translation works which were printed for this education purpose consisted of (1) *Carita Erman* which was translated from works by Christoph von Schmid; the first edition was printed in 1875; (2) *Warnasari atawa roepa-roepa dongeng* which was translated from works by Märchen von Grimm and J.A. A. von Goeverneur; the first edition was printed in 1876; and (3) *Warnasari* Volume 2; the first edition was printed in 1887. *Warnasari* Volume 2 was published at almost the same time as *Warnasari* Volume 3. However, this third volume was not Lasminingrat’s translation, but her younger sister’s, Raden Ayu Lenggang Kencana. In this way, the translations of the Garut chief cleric’s daughter became official reading materials for school children, not just in Garut but also in other areas in West Java and even Sumatra, after being retranslated into Malay. It is also important to note that some of the translations were still used in *Sekolah Rakyat* (SR) and *Sekolah Dasar* (SD)—both are two forms of elementary education—well into the period of Guided Democracy after the independence of Indonesia.

One interesting thing about the works of the Garut chief cleric’s two children was the fact that they introduced some breakthroughs in Sundanese literature. At that time, most of Sundanese literary works were written in the form of *dangding* or *pupuh*, which is exemplified in some works by Moehamad Moesa, a cleric who was highly esteemed by Dutch scholars as the greatest writer of that time and mastered various forms of Sundanese literature.²³ As a writer he was aware that Western works were the product of a culture so different from Indonesian native cultures such as Sundanese. Therefore, he did not consider it suitable for Western tales to be translated into *dangding* form. In the foreword of one of his books, *Dongeng-dongeng Pieunteungeun*, which was first published in 1867, he explained why he did not write in the usual poetic form of *dangding*.

Eta dongeng anu reja,
Teu dinggit make dangding,
Ngan make pada kalimah,
Lain soesah njieun dangding,

Ngan eta leuwih hasil,
Tara kasedek keo lagoe,
Tjarita bisa kebat,
Tara katarik koe dangding,
Didangoena ngeunah, gampang
kahartina

Most stories
are not written in *dangding* form,
but in prosaic form,
not because it is difficult to produce a
dangding,
but because it would work better,
if they are not hindered by rhymes,
Stories can be told more easily,
not bound by *dangding*,
nice to hear, easy to understand.²⁴

²²Moriyama, *Op.cit.* pg. 246.

²³*Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië*. S’-Hravenhage: Nijhoff, 1923, vol.3, 22-23.

²⁴Mikihiro Moriyama, *Op.cit.* pgs. 64-65 quoting Moehamad Moesa, *Doengeng-dongeng Pieunteungeun*. Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1867, pg. 5.

Moehamad Moesa was still hesitant to produce proses, but his two children, especially Kartawinata, were not. He wrote his translation directly in the form of prose. This indicates that he had brought new innovations to the development of Sundanese literature. Because of his valuable works, he was appointed as the government's official translator since February 1874. The colonial government in Batavia regarded Kartawinata as a good translator and bestowed him with a silver medal for his service. Amongst his Dutch colleagues, Kartawinata was renowned because of his ability to write in perfect Dutch. In addition to being an official translator, Kartawinata was also elected as the Chief Minister of Sumedang in 1883 and then as *Zelfstandig Patih* of Sukabumi Regency (1892-1904). He died two years after the end of his term.

Lasminingrat, who was Kartawinata's older half-sister, was praised by Dutch scholars in Sundanese culture as a highly talented woman, quite an equal of her half-brother in Sundanese language and literature, especially in their ability to translate Dutch and German books or articles. However, as a woman, Lasminingrat did not have as much freedom as her brother did. The structure of the Sundanese people and Dutch colonial society in general at that time required her to work harder than her brother to achieve her dreams. She was fortunate enough to live in a family whose lifestyle was quite different from the lifestyle of other *menak kaum* or *menak paseban* families. As the head of his family, Moehamad Moesa gave her much support and freedom to develop herself, especially by learning and communicating with his educated Dutch colleagues. Lasminingrat made the best use of the opportunity to continue expanding her knowledge and broadening her horizon.

As mentioned earlier, just like Kartawinata, Lasminingrat also acquired Dutch acquaintances and friends such as Levyssohn Norman who dearly called her "Saartje".²⁵ It was Levyssohn who gave her books, educated her, and made her a discussion partner. This fortunate condition enabled her to broaden her minds and encouraged her to take an active role in improving the lives of the native people, especially women. It seems that she was thoroughly inspired by the phrase "*taal is macht*" ("language is power"), which was told to her by K. F. Holle, a Dutch expert in Sundanese who was also her father's colleague.

Like her brother, Kartawinata, Lasminingrat also wrote her translation in the form of prose. She went even further by using the word *kula* ("I") to refer to herself in the foreword of her book, *Warnasari atawa roepa-roepa dongeng*, which was published in 1876. Such thing was rarely done by Sundanese writers, and this even led Moriyama to think that Lasminingrat was the first Sundanese writer to use the first person pronoun when writing in Sundanese.

*Ari eta mah karangan bujangga baheula bae, nu ngarang eta dongeng di nagara Walanda. Barang kula ilo eta buku datang inget tanda salin kana basa Sunda, supaya urang Sunda milu suka maca, tina karameanana. Malih mandar kapetik acina, kaalaranana, katurut wurukna.*²⁶

²⁵ *I b i d.* pg. 244 quoting Levyssohn Norman, *Ter Herinnering*, *Eigen Haard*, pgs. 93-96.

²⁶ R.A. Lasminingrat, *Warnasari atawa roepa-roepa dongeng*. Disalin tina Basa Walanda kana Basa Soenda. Batavia: *Landsdrukkerij* (Kantor Tjitak Goepnemen), pgs.1-2.

These are the tales made by writers of old in the lands of the Dutch. When I was thinking about the books, an inspiration came into my mind to translate them into Sundanese, so that Sundanese people might be able to read them as entertainment. At the same time, I also hope that they might get some moral lessons from the contents.

Having been translated by the two children of Moehamad Moesa, the books were then recommended by Holle as reading materials for schools in West Java. Holle, who put great values on moral and didactic aspects of tales, showed great appreciation for Lasminingrat and Kartawinata's works because of their fine language, in addition to their valuable moral messages. The books and articles that they translated were also popular amongst children in their respective countries of origin. The interesting thing is that, in her translations, Lasminingrat attempted to combine the two aspects which Holle described as entertainment and education. In this regard, she did not share her father's view which considered books not as a means of entertainment, but as tools for expanding knowledge.²⁷

A tract written by Raden Mas Tirta Adisoerjo on native literature, which was quoted by Pramudya Ananta Toer, suggests that, if R. A. Lasminingrat is not fictitious, she must have been a real woman whose thoughts were ahead of her time, considering the general attitude towards female education in Java at that time.²⁸ It is not surprising that Tirta Adisoerjo had some doubts concerning the existence of Lasminingrat, despite the fact that he had read her works, because he took account of the education system at that time. However, the abundance of factual data concerning the lady's existence, mostly in the form of translated works, led him to admire Lasminingrat and to regard her as a woman ahead of her time: somebody who might otherwise have lived only in people's fantasy or imagination.

Lasminingrat's active role in native education was acknowledged by the Dutch East Indies government, as reported in *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* which was published in 1921. In the encyclopedia, she is described as a woman who sought to provide education for native females in Priangan Residence (*Preanger Regentschappen*) by establishing an elementary school or *sekolah dasar (het eerste miesjesonderwijs)*.²⁹ This suggests that she had initiated actions to educate native females, even before R. A. Kartini and Dewi Sartika envisioned it. Some people think that the benefits of Lasminingrat's works were only felt in Garut area, and therefore it must be considered only as a local endeavor. Such assessment is misleading because Lasminingrat's works became influential reading materials not only in Garut Regency, but also in other regencies in and outside Java.

According to sources quoted by Nina Lubis and Deddy Effendie, Lasminingrat actually did something brave by trying to improve female education. One of such actions washer attempt to persuade Raden Ranga Martanagara, the Regent of Bandung, to give permission to Dewi Sartika to establish a female school at the

²⁷Moriyama, *Op.cit.* hal. 251.

²⁸Pramudya Ananta Toer, *Sang Pemula*. Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1985, pg. 108, endnote no.3.

²⁹*Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië*, vol. 3, 1921, pg. 766.

pendopo of Bandung Regency. Thanks to Lasminingrat, Martanagara, who had been suspicious towards Dewi Sartika because of her status as a daughter of a rebel (her father was Raden Ranga Soemanagara, the former Chief Minister of Bandung), eventually permitted Dewi Sartika to open a female school called *Sekolah Keutamaan Istri* (literally “School of Wives’ Virtues”). The school was officially opened on January 16th, 1904. Lasminingrat herself was not able to open her own school until 1907 (although its legal documents were not issued until 1913), when she was no longer young.³⁰

Even though she lived in a society surrounded by government officials who were closely associated with the Dutch colonial government, Lasminingrat did not share colonialist attitude and viewpoints. To the contrary, the knowledge that she acquired from the Dutch made her realize that the development of the native people in Indonesia had to be striven for by the natives themselves. One way to achieve such development is by expanding knowledge, especially Western knowledge. Therefore, she, in her own ways, tried to do her best to improve the lives of the native people, including her indigenous language and literature (especially Sundanese). Guided by such vision, she developed in her heart the spirit of nationalism, a legacy which she bequeathed to her children and grandchildren.³¹ It was the spirit which emboldened her to support the Republic of Indonesia (RI) rather than the State of Pasundan whose establishment was proclaimed by Raden Aria Adipati Muh. Musa Suria Kertalegawa, one of her own kinsmen. Without the slightest hesitancy, she granted her own residence to the National Army of Indonesia (TNI) to be the headquarters of the Army and other fighters who sided with the Republic of Indonesia. She even chose to leave Garut City when it fell to the hands of NICA. However, her physical weakness and ailments, due to her advanced age, forced her to return to her native city. Not long after her return from the exile, she died on April 10th, 1948.

Even though Raden Ayu Lasminingrat’s accomplishments were outstanding for a woman of her era, she was not as fortunate as other female agents who came after her, such as Dewi Sartika (December 4th, 1884–September 11th, 1947) and Raden Ajeng (April 21st, 1879 –September 17th, 1904), the daughter of Raden Mas Sosroningrat, the Regent of Garut. These two women, especially Raden Ajeng Kartini, are famous as the pioneers of women emancipation in Indonesia, while Lasminingrat’s name was relatively unknown in spite of her lasting legacy and

³⁰See Nina, *Op.cit.*, and Deddy Effendie. “Penelusuran Riwayat R.A. Lasminingrat: Tokoh Wanita Intelektual Yang Pertama di Indonesia”, in *Proceeding Dialog Pengusulan Raden Ayoe Lasminingrat Tokoh Intelektual Pertama di Indonesia sebagai Pahlawan Nasional*. Garut, 2010.

³¹According to Deddy Effendie, quoting Colonel Mamun Saleh’s testimony, one of Lasminingrat’s grandchildren was Latief Hendaningrat, a former PETA soldier who became one of the hoisters of the first Indonesian flag during Indonesian proclamation ceremony on August 17th, 1945, on Jl. Pengangsaan Timur, Jakarta. However, Nidjo Sandjojo (Latief Hendaningrat’s son-in-law) says in his book that Latief’s parents were Raden Mas Moh. Said Hendaningrat and Raden Ajeng Siti Haerani. Meanwhile, Deddy reports in his book that Lasminingrat’s marriage with Wiratanudatar produced two daughters: Raden Cich and Raden Mojaningrat who married Raden Demang Suria Tanuningrat. No indication is given as to whether Raden Cich and Raden Ajeng Siti Haerani were actually the same person (?). See Dr. Nidjo Sandjojo, M.Sc., *Abdul Latief Hendaningrat: Sang Pengibar Bendera Pusaka 17 Agustus 1945*. Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 2011, pg. 61. See also Deddy Effendie, *Op.cit.* pg. 7.

evidence of her lifelong dedication to female empowerment. Her legacy survives in the forms of a school building on Jalan Ranggalawe, Garut, which now has become Public Elementary School Regol, and her translations which are now preserved in several museums such as a library in K.I.T.L.V. Leiden and the Australian National Library. Interest in Lasminingrat and her works revives and provokes discussion amongst many people in *Priangan*(West Java) after the publication of a book by Mikihiro Moriyama, which mentions Lasminingrat's name. The Indonesian version of the book was published in 2003 by Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.

Conclusion

Historical figures do not usually have the opportunity to ensure that their names would be famous in the future, or that their accomplishments would be written in history. Their names' inclusion in history books strongly depends on how the next generations view and interpret past events in which they participated. The interpretation and assessment of historical events are not the monopoly of historians, even though generally they are considered as more academically competent in the area than other people. However, in practice, the criteria of heroes or heroines in Indonesia are mostly influenced by political considerations, not the actual quality or importance of their contributions. Such tendency is markedly observable in books such as *Wajah dan Perjuangan Pahlawan Nasional* (literally “*Images and Virtues of National Heroes*”) which was published by the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.³² In addition to that, there are many other factors which may cause a historical event to fall into oblivion or to be forgotten by the next generations, such as lack of reliable data source and the general circumstances in a particular era.

In Lasminingrat's case, we are confronted by the fact that there are few comprehensive sources of data which record the lady's accomplishments. It is possible that government archives containing data about Lasminingrat have been missing or lost forever, because several months prior to the arrival of the Japanese army the Dutch East Indies government ordered the burning of archives which may bring dangers upon the Dutch should they fall into the hands of the Japanese.

In terms of general circumstances, we can fairly say that the sociocultural systems in her era were less advantageous for her than in the era of Raden Ajeng Kartini. Lasminingrat lived at a time when the native people still considered Western sciences as heathenish knowledge not worth learning. Meanwhile, the Dutch East Indies government provided education for the natives only to produce skillful but cheap workers.

Her situation was starkly different from that of Raden Ajeng Kartini who lived in an era when education was provided as part of the Ethical Policy promoted by the Dutch East Indies government. J. H. Abendanon, as a Dutch government official who was in charge of the application of the Ethical Policy in the colonial lands, needed some prominent local figures to serve as examples. He, of course, could not choose Lasminingrat because, despite her being the respected daughter of a chief cleric, she was not the product of the Ethical Policy.

³²See Kementrian Sosial RI, *Wajah dan Perjuangan Pahlawan Nasional*. Jakarta: Departemen Sosial RI-Direktorat Jenderal Pemberdayaan Sosial dan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan – Direktorat Kepahlawanan, Keperintisan dan Kesetiakawanan Sosial, 2012.

This observation suggests that, even though Lasminingrat is not widely known by the generations after her, it does not follow that her contribution is meaningless and insignificant for the people of Indonesia. If we examine the writings of Tirto Adisuryo and Moriyama, we can find that the two authors share many views on Lasminingrat and her accomplishments, in spite of the fact that they live in different ages. Both authors describe Lasminingrat as a progressive woman who was ahead of her time. She had the ability and willingness to implement her ideas by making use of existent structure, resulting in a process which Anthony Giddens calls structuration. Through her translations, Lasminingrat did not only provide reading materials which served as a medium of change, but also preserved Sundanese cultural structure, as Sundanese became the official medium of instruction in government's schools in Sundanese-speaking regions. Such accomplishments must suffice to establish and uphold Lasminingrat's status as an agent of change.³³

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³³For more information concerning agent, agency, and agent of change, see Christopher Lloyd, *The Structures of History*. Oxford: Blacwell, 1993 and Anthony Giddens, *Op.cit*, pgs. 7-24.

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