

Land and Labor in Java in The Nineteenth Century

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Abstract— As an agricultural country, land in Indonesia was a major source of survival for peasant. In the concept of agrarian kingdom, the land belongs to the king. Anyone who had the right to cultivate the land, had the obligation of mandatory work to support the hegemony of the kingdom. How then the colonial government used the concepts of the land tenure system to gain profit for the colonial government? This research was conducted in the context of the 19th century in Java using historical method. The sources used in this study were colonial sources, archives, and newspapers published in the nineteenth century. The findings indicated that colonial rulers utilized the concept of land which was applicable in the royal system for the exertion of labor. Land tenure was closely related to agricultural labor. Tenants or landowners were the object of labor exploitation. The wider the peasant cultivates the land, the more the workers were obliged to be mobilized. In addition, land tenure whose basis was communal land caused uncertainty in land tenure. Peasant can lose their land if they did not have the ability to carry out their obligations to carry out compulsory work that had been determined by the government.

Keywords— *Java, Land tenure, land and labor, 19th century*

I. INTRODUCTION

Land was the main source of peasant livelihoods. Land in the countryside cannot be separated from the life of the peasant. Land in the conception of traditional peasant communities belongs to the king. In Indonesian history, land ownership has been regulated in such a way by the village apparatus as an extension of the king. There was no definite source that mentions when village government was formed. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the system of village governance was formed since the days of Hinduism in Indonesia.

Under the VOC administration, village government was never taken into account because they only dealt with the regent. Even after the fall of the VOC, the Netherlands Indie government, which took over the VOC hegemony, paid little attention to the village administration. Daendels in his report only mentioned a little about the village paired when mentioning the district government system. Even then it was reported with the wrong mentioning that the small districts and

large villages were in the hands of the *demang* or the high mantri, small villages were handed over to the *mantri*, and the smaller villages were left to the *lurah* or the lower *mantri* [1].

The village began to get attention when the Netherlands Indie was under the British rule. Raffles as Lieutenant Governor General found the village which was an indigenous community, as a community that could stand alone. The village head was directly elected by the villagers as he saw a form of democracy known in the western world. Raffles then introduced the land tax system and made the villagers as land cultivators as tax objects. Existing bureaucracy at that time did not allow tax collection to be carried out individually. The village head was then made a tax collector agent.

The government of the Netherlands Indie governor general further wanted to make the region in this archipelago as a source in producing tropical plants sold well in the European market. The forced cropping system was a system that has been instrumental in bringing the the tropical plants crops of the archipelago to the European market. According to C. Fasseur, forced cropping was used to finance the 2/3 budget of the Dutch kingdom [2]. All came from the results of the hard work of farmers in Indonesia, especially in Java, who were forced to grow exportable crops in Europe. How did the Netherlands Indie colonial government exploit land and labor in Java to produce exportable salaries on the world market? This historical research paper will discuss on how the Netherlands Indie government obtained cheap land and labor in Java so that it could generate huge profits.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Land was so important for peasant' lives. Throughout his life, peasant struggle with cultivating the land. Land issues can be used as an issue to move peasant. Even the Diponegoro War according to Onghokham was moved by using the issue of land grabbing. Dissatisfaction with the problem of the distribution of land was used as a good breeding tool to mobilize resistance against the Netherlands Indie government. Land division was very closely related to labor. Landowners had an obligation to

pay taxes that can be replaced by labor. Mastery of land for rulers was a source of labor. Management of land was left to the village head who was the lowest structure in the colonial bureaucracy. By declaring the land owned by the village, community service as a substitute for tax was charged to the village. Village institutions can increase the number of peasants through a land distribution system so that labor needs were met [3].

As a source of livelihood for peasant, land should be able to meet the needs of peasant. For the colonial government, land was a resource that can be used to make a profit. But the government did not have the energy to work on the land. Peasant were then used as a tool to gain benefit from agricultural products. Therefore, the government felt the need to conduct research on land ownership issues. The Netherlands Indie Government carried out research on land ownership in Java in 1868-1969, which later resulted in the publication of *Eindresume van het onderzoek naar de rechten van den inlander op den grond*. This research was carried out by the statistical department *Algemeene Secretarie*. This total report was published in three volumes, volume I was published in 1876 by Ernt & Co. Volume II was published in 1880, and volume III was published in 1896. This report did not only present statistical data, but also described the socio-economic conditions of the Javanese peasant communities. The surveyed villages reached 808 villages, from the residency of Banten to Madura.

Land tenure issues combined with labor returned to bloom in the early days of the New Order. Sediono M.P. Tjondronegoro and Gunawan Wiradi in 1984 published edited work entitled *Two Centuries of Land Tenure: The pattern of Control of Agricultural Land in Java from Time to Time*. According to Tjondronegoro [4], land issues and their relationship to socio-economic problems have accumulated since the 19th century. Exploitation of land carried out by the Netherlands Indie government was carried out in guided ways. Due to the exploitation, the peasant' cultivated narrow lands. Conversely, the need for labor to work on Dutch plantations continued to increase. Peasant communities in the countryside are not only lack land, but also did not have time to work on their agricultural land.

The study of land and labor control in Java was also carried out by Jan Breman in 1983, which was later published in the Indonesian edition by LP3ES. The focus of this research was the Cirebon area in the early 20th century with the 19th century as a background which was later reflected in the post-colonial period. According to Breman, the distribution of land ownership in Cirebon was a part of the agrarian regime's transformation plan, which had an impact on the development of post-colonial agriculture [5].

III. DISCUSSION

A. Land Ownership System

Land was the only source of income for people living in an agricultural country such as Indonesia. According to the agrarian tradition, the king was the ruler of the land. Land was the main source of income for the kingdom. The king cannot possibly work on his land alone. Therefore, he distributed the land to his assistants or princes as a land of true (apanage). Land was often also referred to as land salary or land title. Therefore, the land will indeed return to the king if the official who was granted the real estate dies or was fired.

Every state official will get real land as an inherent right in their position. According to Onghokham, the land was not determined by the size of the area, but by the spread of the population (count). The strength of an official was not determined by the extent of the territory under his control, but by the size of the records held. This illustrated that counting provided political and economic power [3]. Mastery of chapters provides benefits because counting was basically a source of tax revenue and a source of human power that can be used by war or rebellion against the central authority. The land was indeed given from high officials to the lowest officials, namely the village head.

The size of the land given to the village head was the percentage of the land that becomes the work of the villagers. For example, the Resident Decree of Jepara No. 5007/8 1892 article 7: set the area of land for each village as follows:

- The first 100 *bahu* (1 *bahu* more or less = 7000 m²), 10% or at least two *bahu* the village head, and 20% or at least 4 *bahu* for the village government.
- The second 100 *bahu*, 7% for the village head, 15% for the village government
- The third 100 *bahu*, 5% for the village head village, 10% for the village government [6].

Land ownership was initially carried out for generations from people who first opened agricultural land. For the benefit of the workforce, the land was then divided equally with all household heads in the village. Land in the village that was originally a hereditary property of the land-opening family, was converted into communal land. The village head annually regulates ownership for all villagers. The agrarian system in Java was communal in character. When the colonial government needed a lot of labor which was mass for large-scale indigo and sugarcane planting, the government needed to distribute the land to the entire population. To describe the condition, there were two testimonies of community leaders from different villages and districts in East Java.

The first testimony came from Kyai Nurwahid, 60 years old from Tulungrejo village, Sukorejo district, Kediri Regency and Residency in February 1868:

I was born in Yogyakarta. My father took me to a boarding school in Dosemo, near Surabaya because his teacher had a very good reputation. This boarding school (*pesantren*) had around 5000 students (*santri*). One of them will later became the regent of Mojokerto. In childhood we were good friends and when he occupied the high position, he called me to open land in the village of Majapahit, which was located in his district. I went there to settle. I lived a few years and opened a lot of land. I was also busy as a teacher serving the spiritual interests of students; But when my wife died, I no longer lived there and moved within 20 kilometers further south to the village of Kamambang. Over there I also established a *pesantren*. Together with my students in the morning we were busy clearing the land and, in the afternoon, continued to study. Slowly I have opened 20 *bahu* fields. One day the village head told me that I had so many fields while there were some villagers who did not have or only had little land so that the mandatory workload was too heavy, and I had to give up most of my land to others. Even though I thought the action was unfair, I had to give in because I wanted to do good to the village head [7].

The second testimony was given by Rasmo in Sumberingin Village, Pakis District, Malang Regency, Pasuruan Residency in 1868 :

I was born in Solo. 35 years ago with my father moved to Celep village, close to Sidoarjo. Why my father leaved the village of his birth, I never knew while at that time I was a child and never told about that. After living there for three years, with a fulfilled life, he heard that the inhabitants of this area enjoyed great benefits from the coffee plant and he again decided to move. He went to live in the village of Gaga Asinan which was about three pals from here. Several years after that, I married a girl from the village of Sukorejo, and I initially lived with my in-laws. But I tried to find an independent life and no longer wanted to depend on my parents-in-law, went to look for a land that was suitable to open a new land for agriculture, and choose a place that later became this village. I started to build a small house and when it finished, I took my wife and child. A year later following Mr. Rukidin from Konang village who managed to open 2 *bahu* 370 roed, then Mr. Makijo 7 *bahu* 15 roed who became my son-in-law and still some others like Mr. Arun 3 *bahu* 138 roed, Mr. Sermin 4 shoulders 385 roed, Mr. Ramso 4 *bahu* 233 roed. We can open the village rice fields to 50½ *bahu*. By the village head, the land was then divided among 36 people, each of whom had only 1 *bahu* 175-195 roed [7].

Land in Java in the 19th century was largely communal land. The right to cultivate communal land was determined by the village head. The right to cultivate communal land was given to people that became compulsory work, called *kuli keceng*, *gogol kencen*, *kraman*, and various other names [8].

B. Labor

The basic nature of the colonial government was exploitative. The Netherlands Indie Government exploited the lands in Java to plant various export crops, such as sugar, coffee, indigo, and even quinine. To work on these lands, a large workforce was needed. To get a large profit, the government used compulsory labor or labor that can be paid cheaply. Workers must be mobilized by utilizing traditional systems applied in society. In the Javanese royal tradition, the people had various obligations as a form of remuneration from the right to cultivate land [3].

As mentioned above, that in the traditional concept, land belonged to the king or ruler. Every person who worked on the land, must pay rent in the form of tax, crops, or compulsory work. Work must be charged to landowners. The obligation to cultivate land in the village was generally divided into two categories, that is, permanent and incidental. Permanent obligations included the night patrol (*ronda*) and *pancen* (compulsory work for the village head), and the maintenance of the tomb. Incidental obligations included maintaining roads, bridges, culverts, waterways, and dam construction.

Every year, landowners, usually called *kuli kenceng*, or *gogol kenceng*, on average got a mandatory workload for 56 days. If one district had 150 villages, and each village had 100 compulsory workers, the district can provide 15,000 workers. They must do compulsory work each day for 56 days [9]. Thus, in one district it can provide a workforce of 2,330 every day.

State Gazette of 1885 number 211 verse 4 expressly said that communal work other than supervision which remains within fair limits must be subject to the direct rules of the government, but it cannot be denied that in every village was always arbitrarily changed [10]. In order to avoid the arbitrary actions of the village head in exploiting the right to Pancen, many compulsory workers were required to do *pancen* work for the village head and other village officials in one day. For example, Resident regulation of Banten No. 4284/38, July 30, 1892, concerning the division of the *Pancen* tasks was as mentioned in table 1 [11].

TABLE I.

No.	The number of compulsory workers	The number of <i>pancen</i>
1	< 20	2
2	20-40	3
3	41-60	4
4	61-100	5
5	101-150	6
6	151-200	7
7	201-250	8
8	251-300	9
9	>300	10

Pancen's work for village heads was carried out in rotation compulsory workers. By paying attention to the table above, the number of working days of farmers for village heads and officials was minimal. In villages where the number of mandatory workers was large, it was possible that in one month they only got one day's share. Thus, in other days they were used for agricultural work or the construction of bulk dams. As an illustration of the form of mass work that can be conveyed here was the construction of dams in Pasuruan, namely Amprong and Surak Dams.

Both of these dams were built using compulsory labor without wages. Every worker was obliged, every day they received 1 cattice (six ounces) of rice and 1/40 kati

of salt. This large dam was built through the Metra river in Sengara district under the supervision of the regent himself. According to a report, the number of workers deployed was 1521 people. They consisted of 400 people working with hoes, 400 people work with axes and 400 people dragging tree branches. The supervisor consisted of the regent, *wedana*, five *bekel*, ninety village heads, one hundred fifty head assistants, lawn mowers, horsemen, 40 gamelan musicians, 20 dancers and 12 trumpets. They had to work for 100 days. The next hundred days, the other villagers were mobilized in turn [12].

IV. CONCLUSION

The Dutch East Indies colonial government exploited land and labor in Java by utilizing the traditional concept that land belonged to the king. People who cultivated the land must pay a rent that can be replaced by compulsory work. To get a large workforce, the Netherlands Indie government changed the land ownership that had been hereditary into communal lands. The right to use communal land was determined by the government through the village head. Every peasant who cultivated land on communal land had an obligation to do compulsory work both for the village head and for the needs of the colonial government. Mandatory work for the colonial government included building roads, bridges, dams, irrigation channels.

Within one year, the land cultivator had an obligation to compulsory work for approximately 56 days. They were called *kuli kenceng or gogol kenceng*. In each region, the designation of them varies. Coordination in the deployment of labor was carried out by the village

head. The village was thus a source of land provision and labor deployment. If the amount of labor was reduced, the village head can invite residents outside the village to live in his village. The reward he will get was land that was cultivated. Therefore, the cultivated area for all villagers was reduced.

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