



## The Abdul Rivai's thought of Nationalism in the Bintang Hindia Newspaper

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to examine and analyze the Abdul Rivai's thought of Nationalism in *Bintang Hindia* newspapers. This study uses historical research methods based on research stages described by Kuntowijoyo with stages (1) Selection of topics, (2) Heuristics (source collection), (3) Source criticism, (4) Interpretation, (5) Historiography. The results showed that the press had an important role in spreading national awareness of Indonesia in the early twentieth century. One of the press figures whose thinking was influential in that era was Abdul Rivai. The Abdul Rivai's thought of Nationalism was seen in a number of concepts or ideas written in the *Bintang Hindia*. Such concepts or ideas include, *bangsa hindia*, *bangsawan fikiran*, *kaoem moeda*, dan *perhimpoean kaoem moeda*. The thought of Abdul Rivai gave awareness to the indigenous people, especially the educated people to unite and glorify the indigenous people. The thought of Abdul Rivai is capable of being a stimulus to foster national awareness among the educated native so that it will be able to liberate Indonesia from colonial bondage.

**Keywords:** Abdul Rivai; Nationalism; Indonesia; Bintang Hindia

### **Introduction**

The study of the history of thought in Indonesia is very limited. National historical studies have been concentrated in historical narratives that legitimize central government authority (Purwanto, et al, 2013: 6). In practice, the government-backed official history actually turned off historical narratives that were considered irrelevant to the interests of the authorities. This was done by the New Order regime that put forward the history of the struggle of the Indonesian nation in the face of the colonial government. As a result, a number of genres in the study of history, including the history of thought marginalized.

The history of thought or sometimes referred to as intellectual history is a historical study that examines the influence of thought on historical processes or events (Kuntowijoyo, 2003: 189). The history of thought also learn the ethos, souls, ideas, or values that affect human life or society and even the nation and state (Agung S, 2016). Thus, the study of historical thought focus on the study of individual and collective thinking as well as its impact in a historical process or event.

One of the most important ideas in Indonesian history is nationalism. Nationalism comes from the word *nation* (English) or *natie* (Dutch). Nation is a group of people who inhabit an area that has the desire

to unite due to the same of fate, ideals, and goals (Agung S, 2016). Indonesian nationalism began to emerge in the first decade of the twentieth century and began to develop in later eras.

The press had an important role in the spreading of Indonesian nationalism in the first decade of the twentieth century. Almost all the key figures of national and nationalist movements are the figures of the press (Kebangsaan, 2008). One of the leading figures who spread Indonesia's national consciousness through the press was Abdul Rivai. Abdul Rivai wrote his ideas in newspapers such as *Bendera Wolanda* and *Bintang Hindia*. Through these writings Rivai was the embryo of Indonesian Nationalism began sowing and later developed in the years after.

## **Method**

This study uses historical research methods according to Kuntowijoyo, with stages (1) Selection of topics, (2) Heuristics (source collection), (3) Source criticism, (4) Interpretation, (5) Historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). The selection of topics is the stage for defining titles with certain considerations. Heuristics is the stage of collecting both primary and secondary sources for processing at a later stage. Source criticism is conducted to test the validity of physical and content resources. Interpretation is the stage of interpreting and understanding the sources that have been obtained. Historiography is the stage of preparation of all research based on the rules of historical writing.

## **Discussions**

### **Abdul Rivai's Biography**

Abdul Rivai is one of the national press figures from Minangkabau. He was born around 1871 in West Sumatra (Poeze, 2008). Abdul Rivai also actively involved in the national movement of Indonesia when he joined the *Indische Vereniging* (Nagazumi, 1986). From the beginning, Abdul Rivai was heavily influenced by Western education. This is in line with the policies of the colonial government in Minangkabau in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time many schools were founded by the colonial government. The establishment of these schools certainly affected some aspects of Minangkabau society life. Abdul Rivai's thought was strongly influenced by the cosmopolitan character of Minangkabau society in the late nineteenth century. This can not be separated from the efforts of the colonial government to modernize in various fields including the field of government bureaucracy and education (Graves, 2007).

Abdul Rivai was one of Minangkabau's people who could study western education. He could even continue his studies to STOVIA. STOVIA was the highest level of education in Dutch East Indies until the second decade of the twentieth century (Latif, 2012b). This situation gave an advantage to the students who studied there. This made their mastery in education very strong. Many students of STOVIA graduated became important figures in promoting the indigenous people of the Dutch East Indies. This educational environment gave Rivai significant influence in conveying ideas that he had.

Abdul Rivai completed his studies at STOVIA in 1894 (Rahzen, 2007). Rivai then got a job as a government doctor in Deli, North Sumatra (Graves, 2007). Rivai then began his profession as a government doctor there. Unfortunately, Rivai was not satisfied with his job and decided to move to the Netherlands. He moved to Netherlands in 1899 (Poeze, 2008). The main purpose of Rivai was to continue his education at college level in addition to pursue the field of journalism.

Abdul Rivai began his journalism career in the Netherlands. He began writing actively in several newspapers such as *Bendera Wollanda*, *Pewarta Wollanda*, *Oost en West*, and *Algemeen Handelsblad*

(Rahzen, 2007). All the newspapers was published in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Rivai not only limited its activities to journalism only but also active as a Malay language teacher in a language course at Berlitz (Poeze, 2008). Various activities indicate that Rivai was educated person.

Abdul Rivai tried to spread his ideas through authorship. This method was commonly used in the early XX century. One of the supporting factors was the expansion of Western education through an ethical political program (Shiraishi, 2005). *Kemadjoean* (progress) who became the slogan of ethical politics to make the bumiputra (indigenous people in Dutch East Indies) had to adjust to the condition. They had to begin to open up with new knowledge that came from outside their greed.

Rivai's desire to disseminate his ideas met the appropriate environment. The indigenous people in the Dutch East Indies at that time was in transition from a traditionally-magical society to a rational-modern society. Such conditions made them increasingly in need of new knowledge and insight. Abdul Rivai correctly managed to meet those needs. The press then became the perfect medium for articulating these *kemadjoean* ideas.

Abdul Rivai then continued his efforts to develop the indigenous people through the press field. He then met an ex-KNIL officer named H.C.C. Klockener Brousson. Both of these figures had a common view that was equally supportive of ethical politics. The two then agreed to publish a newspaper aimed at promoting the indogenous people in the Indies. The newspaper was then given the name of the first published *Bintang Hindia* on January 1, 1903.

While in the Netherlands, Rivai also has much to do with fellow bumiputras who got education in the Netherlands such as J.E. Tahupeiory and Raden Ario Koesoema Joedha (Poeze, 2008). His association with his educated fellow bumiputras led to a sense of solidarity and a strong desire to develop the indogenous people of the Dutch East Indies. This awareness became the starting point for the emergence of Indonesian Nationalism. Rivai's writings in the *Bintang Hindia* gave an important role in spreading the idea. Abdul Rivai's career as an editor of the *Bintang Hindia* had a significance in the history of the national press. The press was able to serve as a medium to convey the idea of the progress of the nation of indogenous people in Dutch East Indies.

### ***Press and Awakening of Indonesian Awareness at the Beginning of the XX Century***

The development of the press in the Dutch East Indies could not be separated from the existence of the printing machine in the region. The first printing machine in the Indies was imported by Church missionaries in 1624 (Adam, 2003). The machine was not used for printing activities due to lack of skilled manpower. The use of printing machine for newspaper printing was done in 1744. At that time the Dutch East Indies was led by the governor-general of Gustaaf Willem Baron van Imhoff. The newspaper was named *Bataviasche Nouvelles* and was printed by the official colonial government printing office (Adam, 2003). The appearance of *Bataviasche Nouvelles* shows the colonial government's awareness of the importance of periodical publications as a means of conveying official information to the public. The appearance of *Bataviasche Nouvelles* also served as an early milestone in the emergence of newspapers in the Dutch East Indies. The newspaper then played an important role in its development in every age.

Broadly speaking the history of the press in the Dutch East Indies was divided into three stages (Kebangsaan, 2008). The first began in 1744-1854, the second lasted from 1854-1907, and last began 1907-1945. Each round had its own distinctive features that distinguished one from the other. The style of each of these rounds was also related to the spirit of the times and the socio-political dynamics that occurred at that time.

In the early twentieth century the Dutch East Indies experienced a complex social and political dynamics due to the adoption of ethical politics. The application of ethical politics could not be separated from the deteriorating condition of bumiputra society in the Liberal economy. The failure of the liberal economy was marked by the colonial government's budget deficit which made colonial government spending higher than its revenue (Furnivall, 2009). The deteriorating financial condition of the colonial government affected all levels of society in the Dutch East Indies including the bumiputras.

The failure of the Liberalism project in the Dutch East Indies affected the popularity of Liberal Party in the Netherlands. In the election of 1901, the Liberal Party defeated by a coalition of right-wing parties and Christian Parties (van Niel, 1984). The decline of Liberal party influence and the increasing influence of the Christian party provided a way for policy change in the Indies. The Christian Party sought to pursue a policy of moral responsibility to improve the conditions of the indigenous people of the Indies (Abdullah, Anzar, 2017). The proposal was later adopted by Queen Wilhelmina in her 1901 state address which emphasized the importance of realizing the welfare of the Indies bumiputra community. Since that time, the colonial government changed the policy orientation in the Indies. Changes in policy orientation from the original liberal and exploitative to a policy that concerns the welfare of bumiputra community become the starting point of ethical politics.

Education was one of programs in ethical politics besides irrigation and transmigration (Ricklefs, 2011). Before the nineteenth century, religious education system such as *surau* was the dominant education system in the Dutch East Indies (Abdullah, Anzar, 2017). When Liberal politics came into force in the Netherlands East Indies, Western-style schools began to be established by the colonial government. This led to a deep dilemma for the colonial government. The colonial government needs well-educated experts to support Liberal economic policy. On the other hand, educating the bumiputra with a Western educational model was tantamount to undermining the myth of Western superiority towards the native people (Abdullah, Anzar, 2017). The colonial government finally found a middle ground by applying discriminatory educational policies based on race as well as anti-assimilation. Thus, the need to acquire the skilled labor that underpins the Liberal economic system in the Indies could be fulfilled.

Western education was a major stimulus that ultimately encourages the emergence of educated bumiputras. Western ideas and knowledge taught in the schools of the colonial government led to the emergence of a new generation of educated, educated Bumiputras (Latif, 2012a). This new generation began to emerge in the late nineteenth century and grew as ethical politics prevailed in the Indies. This generation had similar work orientations, customs, languages, cognitive structures as well as the same responsibilities as binders among them.

These educated bumiputras played an important role in fostering the awareness of Indonesian nationalism in the early twentieth century. This awareness was a response to the repressive and exploitative colonial government policy toward the indigenous people (Latif, 2012a). Another factor that encouraged the emergence of the idea of Indonesian nationalism was the progress experienced by the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies (Elson, 2009). *Kemadjoean* was the improvement of the status experienced by a person or a particular community in important aspects of life such as education, economics, social, and culture (Adam 1994). These two factors encourage educated bumiputra to improve the condition of the bumiputra community as well as to create a new awareness of Indonesian-ness.

The press was one of the main media in the effort to disseminate the idea of Indonesia. Since the last decade of the XIX century the discourse on the progress of the indigenous society had often appeared in various newspapers (Adam, 1994). The number of letters from readers expressing concern for the condition of the bumiputra community indicated that the gradual awareness of Indonesian-ness began to emerge. For example, a number of newspapers such as *Soeloeh Pengadjar* and *Matahari Terbit* clearly showed his concern for the educational problems of the bumiputras (Adam, 2003). Both newspapers contained articles on education and other related topics.

The desire of educated bumiputras to achieve a better standard of living might only be articulated through the development of print capitalism in the Indies. The various products of print capitalism had evolved into the media spreading the idea of the progress of the indigenous people. Print capitalism is a capitalist venture in the field of printing that encourages the spread of printing products (including newspapers) as widely as possible to profit as much as possible (Anderson, 2008). The logic of Capitalism that found to meet the needs of educated bumiputras made newspapers with discourse of progress beginning to emerge and widespread in the Indies.

The spread of progress discourse through this newspaper had significance in the formation of the consciousness of educated bumiputra. Newspapers published in the morning or late afternoon would be read by many at the same time. This reader's insight indirectly left newspaper readers connected to one another (Anderson, 2008). The readers of the newspaper consume the same ideas that indirectly formed a common mindset among readers. Newspapers allowed readers to connect with each other even though they never actually met in real life. Newspapers were able to form a collective consciousness for their readers. Thus, the collective consciousness of educated bumiputras in the Indies in the early twentieth century was only able to form through the product of print capitalism ie newspapers or the press. The collective consciousness of the educated bumiputras later evolved into Indonesia's national consciousness.

The role of the press in spreading the national awareness of Indonesia was not only limited to the dissemination of progress discourse but also to the spread of "Malay market" language. The spread of Malay market language could be regarded as an important contribution of the press for the development of Indonesian-ness awareness. Malay market language became a very practical language to be used to communicate by the majority of ethnic groups in the Dutch East Indies. The Malay market language had long been used in trading (Mrazek, 2006). The use of Malay market language was not only directed to an exclusive ethnicity, but also rather aimed at an inclusive indigenous community. Such inclusive character was also a starting point for the emergence of early awareness of Indonesian nationality. According to Daniel Dakhidai (in Anderson, 2008), the similarity of language usage became an important meaning in the projection of a nation's presence. The widespread use of Malay market language was part of the Indonesian nation-building process. This indicated if the press was one of the important foundations in fostering awareness of Indonesian-ness in the early twentieth century.

Since then the bumiputra press began to appear. The meaning of the bumiputra press was a press published by the bumiputra and contains about news and real issues related to the nation of bumiputra (Harsono, 2010). The emerging of Indonesian presses included *Medan Prijaji*, *Sarotomo*, *Oetoesan Hindia*, and many more (Rahzen, 2007). The emergence of this bumiputra press made socio-political conditions in the Dutch East Indies even more dynamic. The discourse that emerged was not only about the progress of the nation of bumiputra but also the national movement of Indonesia. Indonesia's national consciousness was gradually shaped through print tradition. The press proved to have a wide-ranging political force. This was one of the uniqueness in Indonesia national history treasures.

### ***The thought of Abdul Rivai's Nationalism in the Bintang Hindia Newspaper***

One of the educated bumiputras who actively built the idea of Indonesian nationalism in the early twentieth century was Abdul Rivai. Rivai widely disseminated his ideas through the *Bintang Hindia* newspaper. Rivai was not the chief editor of the *Bintang Hindia*. The position was held by his colleague, H.C.C. Klockener Broussons. In addition to them, the position of the *Bintang Hindia* editor was also held by J.E. Tehuperiorij and F. Wiggers (Adam, 2003). Nonetheless, Rivai had a wider authority to take care of the contents of the *Bintang Hindia*. The contents of the *Bintang Hindia* were heavily dependent on the thought of Abdul Rivai. This showed the important role of Abdul Rivai in the development of the *Bintang Hindia*.

The *Bintang Hindia* Newspaper was first published on January 1, 1903 (*Bintang Hindia*, num. 18, 1907). *Bintang Hindia* was published by publishing company N.J Boon in Amsterdam (Poeze, 2008) and therefore, the *Bintang Hindia* had to be sent from its publisher in the Netherlands before arriving in the Indies. The *Bintang Hindia* used high Malay language in 1903-1904 and 1906 as well as Malay market language in 1905 and 1907 (*Bintang Hindia*, num. 1, 1905). The use of Malay market language on *Bintang Hindia* was intended to reach the wider reader's layer. The *Bintang Hindia* was the most widely read newspaper in the first decade of the twentieth century. The circulation of the *Bintang Hindia* in 1904 reached 27,000 copies with the majority of readers being educated bumiputras (Poeze, 2008). By comparison, the *Soenda Berita* newspaper published at the same time has only 3,000 subscribers.

The rapid development of the *Bintang Hindia* was inseparable from the help of the colonial government. Governor General van Heutsz granted a soft loan of 20,000 guilders and freed postal shipping costs for the distribution of the *Bintang Hindia* (Adam, 2003). Van Heutsz reasoned if the *Bintang Hindia* was a tool that could be used to attract the sympathy of educated bumiputras in the Dutch East Indies. Van Heutsz used the *Bintang Hindia* to convince educated bumiputras to support the ethical policy of the colonial government. Whatever the motive of van Heutsz's support, it greatly facilitated the circulation of the *Bintang Hindia* so as to reach thousands of readers throughout the Dutch East Indies. It shows the enormous influence of the *Bintang Hindia* among the educated bumiputras of the early twentieth century.

The idea of Abdul Rivai's nationalism in the *Bintang Hindia* was closely related to the discourse of progress that became the dominant discourse in the public sphere of the Dutch East Indies in the early twentieth century. Progress discourse often appeared in newspapers published in that era. In addition to newspapers, progress discourse was also articulated in various clubs belonging to educated bumiputras (Latif 2012b). The clubs, mostly composed of priyayi or educated bumiputras who share the same profession. Issues that develop in these clubs revolved around educational issues or modern lifestyles. Emerging intellectual discourse was also closely related to the interests of the common profession. The development of progress discourse in the Dutch East Indies was an early embryo of national educational development of educated indigenous people.

*Bintang Hindia* had an important role in fostering national awareness of educated bumiputras in the early twentieth century. At the beginning of its emergence, educated bumiputras had not had a collective identity that united this group as a whole (Latif, 2012b). In that era, the number of educated bumiputras was still very limited. On the other hand they also had not been separated from the shadows of the old *priyayi*. Therefore, a new collective identity was needed to unite the educated bumiputra so that they could stand as a separate class apart from the shadows of the old *priyayi*. Through his writings in the *Bintang Hindia*, Abdul Rivai was able to provide a new collective identity to the educated bumiputra.

The thought of Abdul Rivai's Nationalism in the *Bintang Hindia* was seen in the various terms used in the newspaper. For example, Abdul Rivai popularized the term "bangsa hindia" (indies nation) in various writings in the *Bintang Hindia* (Elson, 2009). The term he used to distinguish the indigenous people with the *koelit poetih* or the Europeans (*Bintang Hindia*, num. 11, 1906). The use of the term was surprising because the imagine of the unity of the bumiputras was still very strange in the Indies in the early twentieth century. The use of "bangsa hindia" term in the *Bintang Hindia* gave awareness for the indigenous people to unite beyond the boundaries of race, ethnicity, and geography for the common progress of the indigenous people.

Abdul Rivai divided the "bangsa hindia" into three groups such as the common people, the *bangsawan oesoel* and *bangsawan fikiran* (*Bintang Hindia*, num. 14, 1905). Common people were many of the indigenous people who did not have modern education. *Bangsawan oesoel* was an old *priyayi* class (nobility) who became a noble because of heredity (*Bintang Hindia*, num. 11, 1906). Meanwhile, the *bangsawan fikiran* was an educated indigenous people and glorifies itself with science. The term

*bangsawan fikiran* had in common with educated indigenous people because both got honorable position thanked to the level of education and intelligence possessed.

The collective identity that Abdul Rivai paid to the educated bumiputra was *kaoem moeda*. *Kaoem Moeda*, according to the Rivai was all of people in Dutch East Indies who didn't use the old rules and wanted to advance themselves with knowledge. (*Bintang Hindia*, num 14, 1905). Abdul Rivai wanted *kaoem moeda* in the highly educated Indies. The aim was that the *kaoem moeda* had a common consciousness to promote the fellow indigenous people in the Dutch East Indies. In addition, Abdul Rivai also found to unleash educated bumiputra from old habits and customs that impeded progress. Thus, *kaoem moeda* were people with a public responsibility to develop the indigenous people of the Dutch East Indies.

Abdul Rivai also conveyed an interesting new idea. He argued if *kaoem moeda* needed to be contained in an organization in order to carry out its duties to develop the Indian nation. The idea of the *Perhimpoean Kaoem Moeda* had proven the visionary thought of Abdul Rivai concerning the struggle of the Indian nation to achieve *kemadjoean*. His idea of the formation of this *Perhimpoean Kaoem Moeda* was still very strange at that time. Unfortunately, this idea failed to come true due to the rejection of Clockener Broussons (*Bintang Hindia*, num. 23. 1905). Rivai who was still living in the Netherlands also have difficulty to realize his thoughts

Although it didn't came to reality, the Rivai's idea regarding with the establishment of *Perhimpoean Kaoem Moeda* was certainly an important point that inspired the national movement of Indonesia. In those days, the idea of forming an organization for the Indian nation was still hard to find. The Indian nation still had no desire to join a modern organization. The existing organizations were generally very limited to certain occupations only. The lack of common goals was the main reason for this. The first modern bumiputra organization that stood in the archipelago only emerged one year after Rivai conveyed his idea. The organization was *Sarikat Prijaji* founded by R. M. Tirta Adhi Soerjo (Toer, 1985).

The thought of Abdul Rivai in the *Bintang Hindia* newspaper showed the early pattern of Indonesian Nationalism. Indonesian nationalism was a long and tedious process of identity formulation to glorify human beings (Kebangsaan, 2008). The process culminated in the consciousness of the bumiputras about the subordinate relationship between the ruling colonial master and the backward bumiputra. This awareness reawakened the collective memory of the old cultural and political networks in the archipelago that were cut off by colonial intervention (Abdullah, Taufik, 1999). The memories of the unity that were reawakened by Abdul Rivai through the concept of the Indian nation. The Indian nation was an identity that bound the diversity of ethnic groups in the Indies in the early twentieth century.

The spirit to formulate identity as well as to glorify human beings was also evident in Abdul Rivai's concept of *kaoem moeda*. For Abdul Rivai, the educated bumiputra had to have the responsibility to promote and glorify fellow bumiputras. Abdul Rivai's desire was clearly aimed at breaking the old order as well as uncovering the subordinate relationship between the colonial master and the bumiputras. Abdul Rivai was clearly idealizing equality among the natives with the Europeans. Educated indigenous people was the main actor in realizing these ideals of equality.

The *Bintang Hindia* had however given new awareness to the indogenous people to rise up and soon to improve their standard of living in order to make progress. Abdul Rivai's writings generally emphasized on the importance of education, as well as the spirit to pursue progress for the natives. Politically the writings of Abdul Rivai provided a stimulus for the development of political awareness of indigenous nations. The influence of Abdul Rivai's thought in the *Bintang Hindia* greatly influenced the educated native political consciousness. Slowly, their consciousness as *kaoem moeda* as initiated by Abdul Rivai began to materialize.

This collective consciousness became the forerunner of the emergence of Indonesia's national consciousness. Later *kaoem moeda* in the era after Abdul Rivai like, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta was able to articulate the idea well. They managed to build political relations with the masses. The combination of *kaoem moeda* and the masses of these people ultimately succeeded in liberating Indonesia from the shackles of colonialism. This would have been difficult if Abdul Rivai with the *Bintang Hindia* had not appeared to ignite the awareness of an educated bumiputra to become a *kaoem moeda* which then liberated the Indonesian nation from Dutch colonialism.

## Conclusion

Indonesia's National Awareness began to emerge in the first decade of the twentieth century. The press had an important role in generating and disseminating that awareness. One of the newspapers that facilitated in the process was the *Bintang Hindia* which contained many of Abdul Rivai's thoughts. Abdul Rivai's thoughts in the *Bintang Hindia* newspapers had a fairly strong nationalistic pattern. The style was seen from various concepts or ideas that he wrote in the newspaper such as the *bangsa hindia*, *kaoem moeda* and *perhimpunan kaoem moeda*.

The thought of Abdul Rivai in the *Bintang Hindia* newspaper showed the early pattern of Indonesian Nationalism. Abdul Rivai's thought provided a stimulus for the educated political consciousness of the educated bumiputra. This group that played an important role in initiating the national movement of Indonesia at the same time later liberate Indonesia from Dutch colonialism. Awareness of educated bumiputra to promote and liberate the Indian nation from colonial bondage was impossible if they didn't get adequate stimulus of thought. This was the significance of Abdul Rivai's thoughts in the development of Indonesian Nationalism.

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