

# Inggit Garnasih, Soekarno and the Age of Motion in Indonesia

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**ABSTRACT:** *It seemed relevant to discuss the role and figure of strong, tough and faithful woman in accompanying his husband's struggle to realize his social aspiration. Such a woman figure was Inggit Garnasih, Soekarno's wife since the period of national movement in Indonesia (1923-1943). In this context, it seemed relevant talking about the services of Inggit Garnasih not based on herself but according to other's acknowledgement closely related with her. The other whom I meant was Soekarno, as her husband, as had been stated in his autobiography and other reviewer of Soekarno's biography, especially when it was related to his relationship with Inggit Garnasih. However, Inggit Garnasih did not only encourage her husband to complete his study in THS Bandung but she was also faithful to accompany her husband – in happiness and sorrow – in national movement struggle. Finally, one of statements for reflecting here is that the Republic of Indonesia's government should give fair honor to Inggit Garnasih for her services in the age of motion in Indonesia with Soekarno's independence struggle.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Inggit Garnasih's roles, Soekarno's struggle, the age of motion, and Indonesia's independent.*

## INTRODUCTION

Studying the characterization of someone may cause the cultural awareness, which was an appreciation toward the service and sacrifice of related figures. In the context of history education, studying the role and service of a figure was also important because it could cause the historical awareness and pride on students as national future generation. The existing willingness and ability to follow good values

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from the historical figures, in one side, by the effort to avoid and not to repeat similar fault, in other side, were the principle mission in historical education of a nation-state or elsewhere in the world (Kartodirdjo, 1982; Wiriaatmadja, 2002; and Abd. Rashid, 2003).

Meanwhile, it had been general secret that talking about the role and service of historical figures was usually dominated by men. It did not mean that women did not have contribution in historical life of human being, but it was more due to perspective problem and study focus on historical study or research (Abdullah, 2002; and Ahmad, 2004). The example of good statement of this problem was when many American people were proud of the struggle of Martin Luther King Jr., in one side, and ignored the role of his wife, Coretta Scott, in other side. It was due to “*beside Martin Luther, it was his wife [...] whose name is not as popular as her husband's, who provided him with support and encouragement*” (Marching, 2008:7). In the context of our discussion, it seemed relevant to discuss the role and figure of strong, tough and faithful woman in accompanying her husband's struggle to realize his social aspiration.

Such a woman figure was Inggit Garnasih, Soekarno's wife since the period of national movement in Indonesia (1923-1943). In fact, talking about one's services was related to recall the kindness and glory of his or her attitude and behavior to be recalled and followed as a good model. One's services, in fact, were related to other's acknowledgment about the merit of his or her presence and role, either for individual or wider community. Therefore, in talking about one's services, it would be good if we recorded again what had been stated and recalled by others about the attitude and behavior of figure that would be the focus of discussion.

In this context, it seemed relevant talking about the services of Inggit Garnasih not based on herself – as had been elaborated in detail on her historical novel, *Kuantar ke Gerbang: Kisah Cinta Ibu Inggit dengan Bung Karno*, written by Ramadhan K.H. in 1988 – but according to other's acknowledgement closely related with her. The other whom I meant was Soekarno, as her husband, as had been stated in his autobiography (Adams, 1965); and other reviewer of Soekarno's biography, especially when it was related to his relationship with Inggit Garnasih (Legge, 1985; Dahm, 1987; and Hering, 2003). By this story style, we could be prevented from – according to Sundanese's terms – *goong nabeuh maneh*, a statement of one's excellence was not based on other's general acknowledgement, but it was based on the acknowledgement and prominence of oneself.

### **A FIGURE IN HISTORICAL STAGE**

The figure I would tell was Inggit Garnasih. This woman born on February 17, 1888 in Kamasan village, Banjaran, Southeast Bandung (Mayong, 2005) was not only a beautiful, cheerful and open Sundanese woman, but also a simple woman. Like common Sundanese woman, her adolescence was passed through happily and cheerfully. After graduating from religious education, equaled with *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* or Islamic Elementary School (Hering, 2003:124), she grew up and moved to live with her family in Bandung.

Inggit Garnasih must have experienced household life in relatively young age. First, she was married with Nataatmadja, an indigenous corporal who worked in *Karesidenan* in Bandung (Ramadhan K.H., 1988:29). This marriage was lasted in 1910s when Inggit Garnasih was 20 years old. The first marriage did not last for long because it was based on jealousy between both of them. Inggit Garnasih, then, was married with Haji Sanusi, a rich merchant who was actively involved in *Sarekat Islam* organization in Bandung. As wife and the member of SI (*Sarekat Islam*), Inggit Garnasih helped her husband's effort to advance the organization in Bandung. When NATICO SI (*National Congress Sarekat Islam*) held in Bandung in 1916, for example, Inggit Garnasih involved herself as the head of Consumption Committee to give accommodation service for well-known SI figures such as H.O.S. (Haji Oemar Said) Cokroaminoto, Haji Agus Salim, and others (Ramadhan K.H., 1988:31).

In 1923, Inggit Garnasih was divorced, but still in a good relationship, with Haji Sanusi, and then she was married with Soekarno alias Koesno, the student of THS (*Technische Hoogeschool*) in Bandung (Adams, 1965:80). The age of Inggit Garnasih at that time – if his birth year of 1888 was true – was 35 years old, while Soekarno was just 22 years old. They lived at Jalan Jaksa, Bandung, and as had been written by scholars studying Soekarno's biography, this marriage was lasting for long and they were a harmonious couple (Legge, 1985:82).

From 1923 to 1943, therefore, was an important period for Inggit Garnasih's life and struggle, and a focus of discussion in this working

paper.<sup>1</sup> At that time, Inggit Garnasih did not only encourage her husband to complete his study in THS (ITB, *Institut Teknologi Bandung* or Bandung Institute of Technology, now), but she was also faithful to accompany her husband – in happiness and sorrow – in national movement struggle. When her husband was caught, punished and imprisoned (1929-1931) by Dutch colonial in Bandung, then he was thrown away to Flores in eastern Indonesia (1932-1938) and Bengkulu in southern Sumatera (1938-1942), Inggit Garnasih was very faithful, tough and always accompanied him happily.

The explanation below was based on the acknowledgment of Soekarno himself in his biography, as written by Cindy Adams (1965), besides based on the statements of some reviewers of Soekarno's biography related to Inggit Garnasih's life and struggle.

### ***A. Helping and Encouraging Her Husband to Complete His Study, 1921-1926***

As had been stated previously that Inggit Garnasih was married with Soekarno in 1923, when Soekarno was studying in THS or ITB now. During Soekarno studied in THS, Inggit always encouraged, supported and helped "Koesno" (her intimate calling for Soekarno) to finish his study. Moreover, Soekarno was confused and even hopeless to finish his study – because H.O.S. Cokroaminoto was imprisoned by Dutch colonial due to his involvement in *Afdeling B* incidents of *Sarekat Islam* in Garut – Inggit Garnasih tried to convince Soekarno the importance of his study to reach his wish in the future (Adams, 1965:74).

Inggit Garnasih knew exactly food drink Soekarno liked. "She prepared 'tubruk' coffee, very dark coffee, that I could never miss", Soekarno recalled (Adams, 1965:74), beside that he liked *lodeh* soup cooked by Inggit Garnasih. Recalling his difficult and hard study times in THS Bandung, Soekarno praised the goodness of Inggit Garnasih who had played her role as a mother, lover and friend. The woman figure he yearned for was Inggit Garnasih. Then Soekarno said as follows:

[...] the happiness in new marriage would be reached if the wife had been a combination of a mother, lover and friend. I wanted to be cremated by my soulmate. When I got cold, I wanted to be massaged by her. When I was

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<sup>1</sup>This working paper was presented and discussed in National Seminar on Proposing Inggit Garnasih as Indonesia National Hero in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia on December 22, 2008.

hungry, I wanted to eat the meals she cooked by herself. When my cloth was torn, I wanted my wife repaired it (Adams, 1965:76-77).

The school fee of Soekarno in THS Bandung was 300 *Gulden* a year. He was able to pay it, besides his daily needs cost, not only being helped by his parent and sister (Adams, 1965:75) but also being helped by his wife. In such case, Inggit Garnasih was always ready to help and encourage her husband to finish his study as soon as possible, and also she was always diligent and ready to work by selling *jamu* and face powder made by herself and selling *batik* to earn for living with Soekarno (Hering, 2003:124-125). Soekarno, then, recalled the good services of Inggit Garnasih economically in helping him by saying: "*Inggit earned for living by selling face powder and cosmetic made by herself in our kitchen*" (Adams, 1965:115).

By the encouragement and help from his wife, Soekarno could pass his study well. Even when there was no assignment – such as in holiday or at night – Soekarno actively attended the political discussion, especially with the figures of *Indische Partij* who were well-known in Bandung, such as Dr. Douwes Dekker (Setiabudhi), Dr. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat (Ki Hadjar Dewantara). His intensive activities such as reading books, having lecture, doing assignments and attending political discussion made him yearn for the existence and the role of woman who could understand and respect him. And Inggit Garnasih, in Soekarno memory, could play that role, by saying:

Inggit who had round eyes and wore bracelet in her hand did not have brilliant past time. She was not educated at all, but her intelligence for me was not important in the self of woman. What I respected was her humanity. This woman loved me much. She did not give opinions. She just looked at and waited for me, she encouraged and praised me. She gave me all things that could not be given by books. She gave me love, warmth and did not care about her. She gave everything I needed that I could not be get since I left my mother's (Adams, 1965:81).

Soekarno graduated from THS in Bandung on May 25, 1926 (Adams, 1965:91). His future was in front of him and there were a lot of choices: did he want to be Lecturer assistant in his university, work in General Employment Department, or open private service agency in architecture field? Soekarno ignored those chances and he preferred to choose political movement world he was interested in as the

consequence of reading result, discussion and his experience of life in Bandung. Soekarno was very certain about his choice, moreover his wife, Inggit Garnasih, always encouraged and helped him. Soekarno recalled the critical times in his life and related it to the existence and role of Inggit Garnasih, as following here:

Inggit, in succeeding period in my life, was very nice to me. She was my inspiration. She was my supporter. And I needed it all [...] with Inggit beside me, I stepped forward to fulfill the trusteeship toward his wish (Adams, 1965:81).

As the figure of movement who had “Ir.” degree, of course, Soekarno’s house at Jalan Jaksa Bandung was frequently visited by his friends to discuss and hold some political meeting. In such case, Inggit Garnasih was an open, warm and ready host. She welcomed the guests, listened to Soekarno and his guests discussing and debating about movement political problems, and sometimes could calm down the hot debat situation that was always done sell, readily and appropriately by Inggit Garnasih (Legge, 1985:119; Ramadhan KH, 1988:36; dan Hering, 2003:125).

Soekarno was very glad and respected such her attitude. Moreover, when Soekarno found the inspiration about the suitable ideology name for the *Partai Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesia National Party) in 1926/1927, which was “Marhaenisme”, the attitude and response of Inggit Garnasih was as stated by Soekarno: “*I talked, she listened to. I talked happily, she respected*” (Adams, 1965:78).

### ***B. Accompanying Her Husband in Happiness and Sorrow in Indonesia National Movement, 1929-1943***

The activity of Soekarno in political movement had been a problem for Dutch colonial. His attitude that did not want to compromise with Dutch colonial always criticized the Dutch political policies and asked Indonesian community to support the power and unity, made him as national movement figure assumed to be dangerous. Then, after Soekarno gave speech in Solo and went to Yogyakarta, in December 29, 1929, he was imprisoned, then taken to Bandung and sent to “Rumah Penjara Bantjeuy” (Adams, 1965:125-126). For Soekarno, prison was very irritating place, not only physically but also psychologically and mindly. Public knew that Soekarno was an individual who could not stand in facing quiet situation (Legge, 1985:165; Dahm, 1987:218; and

Hering, 2003:251-252), and in such condition the role of Inggit Garnasih should be praised due to her loyalty, toughness and tried to comfort and proed to her husband, Soekarno.

On June 16, 1930, Soekarno had just been taken to the court. His judicial process took long time and lasted for months. After Soekarno delivered speech of his famous plea, *Indonesia Menggoegat*, then on August 18, 1930 – after eight months he was in Bancuey prison – Soekarno was sentenced by the court at Jalan Landraad Bandung being punished by 4-years in prison and sent to Sukamiskin prison in Bandung (Adams, 1965:136-142). Then again, Soekarno was thrown away to the quiet place that he hated much and had irritated his composure.<sup>2</sup>

Only Inggit Garnasih and his adopted child, Ratna Djoeami, could cheer him up and made him stronger. The loyalty, composure, toughness and cheering attitude of Inggit toward her husband fate was highly praised and recalled well by Soekarno (Adams, 1965:142-144). Moreover, Inggit in Soekarno's eyes was brilliant wife and could play the role as spy taking the secret news of the events outside the prison. Soekarno remembered these events when Inggit Garnasih visited and took him some foods for his needs in Sukamiskin prison. Soekarno stated as follows:

In case of bad news, Inggit sent him salt-egg. [...] If my wife brought usual egg, I would examine first its crust before I ate it. One stab of pin meant "good news". Two stabs "a friend was caught". Three stabs meant "massive attack, all leaders were caught" (Adams, 1965:144-145).

Soekarno was released from Sukamiskin prison in Bandung on December 31, 1931, by Ducth colonial with his hope that there was a change in his political movement and attitude (Adams, 1965:154). But eight months later (August, 1932), Soekarno was re-caught by Dutch colonial because there was no change in his political attitude and himself (Adams, 1965:166). There was no chance for him anymore.

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<sup>2</sup>About the story of Soekarno whou could not stand in facing quiet situation and isolation, it was proved also 10 years later, which was in 1948, when he was isolated by Dutch soldier to Brastagi, Prapat, North Sumatera in which he fought with Soetan Sjahrir, the figure of movement who was also allergic to the quiet situation. Moreover, 20 years later, in 1968 when Soekarno was isolated by New Order government in Wisma Yaso, Jakarta, and was not allowed to be seen by his family and wives that made him truly hopeless and Soekarno passed away tragically and lonely in 1970.

Without judicial process, he was caught and given internir punishment to far and quiet place, which was Ende in Flores Island, Nusa Tenggara Timur.

At this time, the role of Garnasih was very vital. She was faithsul and tough in accompanying her husband in passing through internir punishment that almost killed Soekarno's life, inspiration and future (Dahm, 1987:218-219). To cheer him up, Inggit also brought her widow mother (Mrs. Amsi) and her adopted child (Ratna Djuami). Sundanesse community then recalled the services of Soekarno's wife in this critical period by saying: "*Indonesia was independent due to the sacrifice of Sundanesse woman, which was madame Inggit Garnasih. She defended her husband who was thrown away every where, greatly suffering*" (Waluya, 2004).

In such case, Soekarno also respected the role, services and glory of his wife, mother-in-law and adopted child (Adams, 1965:168). Moreover, Inggit's attitude during accompanying her husband in Ende, Flores, was praised by Soekarno as stated following here:

Inggit never moaned and complained. It was her fate in this life to give me thinking composure and give me help lovely, not complicate my problems. But I also felt that she was suffering. [...] it was very irritating for a wife to see her husband taken away from his living strength, from his wishes and his happiness (Adams, 1965:171).

The year of 1935 was a miserable year for Inggit Garnasih and Soekarno in their exile place. On October 12, that year, Mrs. Amsi passed away in Ende due to *arterio-sclerosis* disease. Soekarno and Inggit Garnasih should bury the body of their parent in the quiet exile place. Then, Soekarno remembered the services and sacrifice of his mother-in law by saying that Mrs Amsi was illiterate woman, simpler that her daughter, Inggit Garnasih, but she was very honourable woman (Adams, 1965:172).

Miserable days and gloomy future should be experienced by Soekarno dan Inggit Garnasih in exile. Moreover, when Soekarno got malaria, Inggit Garnasih always cheered him up, took care and treated him faithfully, toughly and diligently. Although she was suffering and sad, but in exile she always encouraged Soekarno by giving promising prediction in the future. Soekarno remembered and recalled what she had predicted, by saying: "*Inggit always convinced me that she felt on day I would be the one who played the role*" (Adams, 1965:182).



Due to malaria disease and pressure from national movement figures who struggled cooperatively with Dutch colonial – especially, Mohamad Hoesni Thamrin – then, Soekarno on February 1938 was moved to new exile, which was Bengkulu in southern Sumatera (Adams, 1965:184-185). At this time, Inggit Garnasih was still faithful and tough accompanying her husband to Bengkulu. Although, it was recorded that in Bengkulu, the relationship of Inggit and Soekarno worsened. The main cause was that Inggit Garnasih was not able to give him baby after long time marriage. Other cause was that Soekarno fell in love with other woman, Fatimah alias Fatmawati, Bengkulu woman and the daughter of local Muhammadiyah organization figure.

But his marriage life still maintained, at least until the Japan army occupied Indonesia dan defeated Dutch in 1942. The important note of Inggit Garnasih in Japan occupation period was her tough attitude in defending her husband when facing danger. Japan was fascist and cruel government toward those who made mistake, including Soekarno who should get strike on his face (*tempeleng*) because he forgot to turn off the lamp at night. Soekarno remembered well that bad time and recalled how Inggit Garnasih defended her husband from the attack of Japan army, as following here:

Seeing that incident, Inggit bended on her knees and shouted, “Ouw ... ouw ... don't slap him. I will responsible. It is not his fault. Oh, forgive him. I was careless ...!” (Adams, 1965:275).

Japan periode was seen as *force majeure* by Soekarno and other national movement figures, such as Mohamad Hatta. By that view, there was no choice for Soekarno, except collaborating with Japan. Meanwhile, 1943 was an important year the life of Soekarno and Inggit Garnasih. At that year, Soekarno did not only lead the PUTERA (*Pusat Tenaga Rakyat*) organization, but also he expressed his willingness to marry with Fatmawati to have children. Although Soekarno had tried to explained logically and rationally his willingness,<sup>3</sup> but the attitude of

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<sup>3</sup>The attitude of Soekarno who always said the truth and gave logical and rational reasons if he wanted to marry another woman, would be recalled by his wives as open and not hypocrite man (Ardhiati, 2005:118). Moreover, in case of approaching the divorce with Inggit Garnasih, Soekarno had asked for opinions from Ratna Djoeami and his lover, Asmara Hadi (coming from Bengkulu). Soekarno remembered the objection from his adopted daughter and his mother-in-law to be, in which they said: “*What our people say if you divorce Mrs. Inggit when she had been old and who had been faithful*

Inggit Garnasih was very clear and strict, “*Oh, being co-wife? If I must be co-wife, I never wanted!*” (Galikano, 2006).

### **THE END OF STORY**

In 1943, Inggit Garnasih divorced well with Soekarno and became common people and lived at Jalan Ciateul (now Jalan Inggit Garnasih) No.8 in Bandung. The role of she had played for 20 years in accompanying her husband was described as “leading to the independence gate”. As stated in this quotation:

[...] in his 40 years, Soekarno arrived in independence gate. Inggit Garnasih took him safely there. She was not predestined to come to Istana Merdeka with Soekarno. Soekarno should start his new life at that age (Poeradisastira, 1988:ix).

Entering the revolution period of Indonesia (1945-1950), Inggit Garnasih’s life in Bandung, as other common people, her house in Jalan Ciateul No.8 had been destroyed and flat with the ground when Bandung became fire sea on March 1946 (Galikano, 2006). Like other common Bandung people, Inggit Garnasih followed to flee to southeast Bandung, it might be going home to her hometown during childhood, which was Kamasan village, Banjaran.

After Indonesia was independent, Inggit Garnasih passed through normal life as usual. The work that always be done since a long time was making *jamu* for beauty and other concoction that had cure ability (Legge, 1985:82-83). Inggit Garnasih went through her life normally, without any complaint and anger or even revenge to anyone, including to her ex-husband, Soekarno alias Koesno.

One of the most prominent characters of Inggit Garnasih was her attitude to protect a good name and honor of her husband. Since her

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*accompanying you during in prison and exile?”* (Adams, 1965:197-198). But Soekarno was still firm on his stand that he wanted a baby, he wanted descent. See also other interesting article in the newspaper of *Utusan Malaysia*, Monday edition, in 2001, with the title of “Kehebatan Sukarno Menakluk Hati Wanita”, in which the article concluded, in one side: “*Sukarno was not only remembered as prominent Indonesia leader who had devoted to Indonesia people for almost 22 years, but he was also known as the most excellent ‘woman conqueror’ in the country*”. But in other side, the article gave also advices for men to behave well to women, by saying: “*It was as Soekarno said, ‘a wife will forgive and forget the bad attitude of her husband, but her husband had affair with another woman [...] his wife will never forget it’*” [available at [www.utusan.com.my](http://www.utusan.com.my), accessed in Bandung: 10 December 2008].

marriage with Haji Sanusi (Inggit usually called him “Kang Uci”), she never defamed her ex-husband. Moreover, when Soekarno, in 1960s, gave bad image of Haji Sanusi as “old people and never care about his wife. A gambler with his hobby to play billiard” (Adams, 1965:77), Inggit always had good perception toward *Kang Uci* as rich merchant and *Sarekat Islam* organization’s activist in Bandung.

The similar thing prevailed, when the image and good name of Soekarno was talked badly in 1980s related to amnesty letter to Dutch General Attorney (Ingleson, 1983), then Inggit came forward by saying “*It is taboo, it is impossible*”, meant that such thing was impossible and never be done by Soekarno (*Kompas*, 7.10.1980).

Inggit Garnasih passed away in 1984 in her 96 years age. The simple, faithful and tough woman passing through her life was still regarded as the woman who had services in leading Soekarno to the independence gate. Sundanese people generally stated two things about Inggit Garnasih. First was the statement in Sundanese language of “*Moal aya Soekarno nu hebat, upama teu aya ibu Inggit*” or there is no such great Soekarno, if there is no Mrs. Inggit”. It is meaning that inarguable acknowledgement about the role of Inggit Garnasih in Soekarno’s struggle to reach independence. Second was the statement also in Sundanese language of “*Basa anjuenna pupus [...] urang Bandung sanajan henteu aya nu miwarang, masang bandera satengah tiang sapanjang jalan nu kaliwatan ku layonna, kulantaran terang jasa-jasa anjuenna ke Republik ieu*” or when she passed away [...] Bandung people, although they were not instructed, raised half-pole flag along the street that was passed through by her corpse, because they knew her services for this Republic (Waluya, 2004).

Finally, one of statements for reflecting here is that the Republic of Indonesia’s government should give fair honor to Inggit Garnasih for her services in the age of motion in Indonesia with Soekarno’s independence struggle.

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