Some Observations on Indonesian Textiles

by

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Introduction

TO perceive the relationship between Microcosm, Macrocosm and Metacosm is a sign of metaphysical awareness; to project this awareness into daily life through the symbolism of architecture, music, drama, rites, modes of behaviour, artifacts and clothing—the total living environment—is, in traditional civilizations, its invariable concomitant. But it is perhaps in the matter of daily apparel that the quality of a people or civilization can be most immediately and surely gauged. This is particularly true of areas where, if only for climatic reasons, the appurtenances of life are simple and architecture is less developed, or at least less monumental; or where sensibility and tradition militate against large-scale architecture in stone, as, for example, the greater part of the Far East, the North America of the Red Indians or most of the world's equatorial regions.

In that area of South-East Asia which corresponds roughly with modern Indonesia—not, however, excluding Malaysia and the Philippine Islands[1]—an overall ethnic unity has produced, against a background of apparent diversity of cultures and religions, a tradition of craftsmanship and symbolism in textiles—and hence of apparel—which is remarkably unified and seemingly indigenous in inspiration and techniques.

This is not to say that the art of textiles is the sole manifestation of these people's

[1] For the sake of brevity and convenience we shall use the word "Indonesia" to describe the whole of this area. Modern political boundaries do not reflect either cultural or ethnic realities.

spirituality—their music and drama, to say nothing of the magnificence of the houses built by the peoples of Toradja and Minangkabau among others would disprove such an assertion—but their textiles are particularly fine and eloquent of a high degree of metaphysical awareness. Until comparatively recently, they were produced by traditional methods for the daily use of everyone; the symbolism of their manufacture and design was not only understood but also shared by each individual in the garments he wore—basically single strips of cloth draped around the body—the "sarong"—and this irrespective of whether he were nominally "Animist", Muslim or Hindu.[2]

This point is important. Most of the themes of South-East Asian music and drama are Indian, notably the great epics of the *Mahābharata* and the *Ramayana*, and are recognised as such; the same applies to the great monuments of architecture as, for example, Borobudur and Prambanan; similarly, the great majority of Indonesians are now Muslims and share consciously in the varied traditions of Islam; other areas are Christian. But the basic apparel of the Indonesians and the ancient tradition out of which their textiles came, preceded all these and, in a way, transcends them, clothing the outward divergences with a unity reflecting the fundamental ethnic homogeneity of the entire archipelago. At a particular level, therefore, and one pertaining to everyday life, the textiles of Indonesia manifest both the synthesising genius of the race and a fundamental spirituality which both preceded and absorbed influence from abroad.

Like Japan, Indonesia is a great storehouse of tradition; the islands of the archipelago lie in wait for whatever emerges out of the Asian landmass to the North and West, as if to catch it in a net, retaining it and transmuting it. Whatever cultural and spiritual influences have impinged on Indonesia from outside—and these include Hinduism, Buddhism, the Chinese Tradition and Islam—Indonesia has absorbed them and synthesised them into a cultural amalgam of great tolerance and richness. All have made contributions to textile

[2] The "sarong", draped around the waist, is the basic Indonesian garment. It has come to be used with other articles of apparel brought in from outside, for example over the jacket and trousers worn by the Muslims of Sumatra and Malaysia, but even in these cases it remains an integral part of formal costume. In the home, the jacket and trousers are frequently discarded in favour of the sarong alone—never, until very recently, the other way round. It remains the basic item of women's wear, even in modern dress.

design—to *Batik* prints in particular—but the basic concepts and techniques appear to be indigenous. This is indicated by the multitude of design motifs of a truly primordial nature, by the use of craft-techniques unknown outside Indonesia and of natural materials all found there and, in the case of the more important vegetable dyes, not found at all elsewhere. It is perhaps significant that the earliest recorded Javanese Kingdom (5th Century A.D.) was called Tarumanegara—"Kingdom of the Indigo Plant".

It is not possible to describe the origins of textiles in Indonesia, which are lost in the mists of time; cloth is perishable, especially in a humid, tropical climate, and the most ancient examples of the art have not come down to us; only the designs have survived. But we can start with a brief consideration of the symbolism of weaving, for this is common to a great number of traditions, especially in the East, and is fully reflected in various living customs and taboos still associated with the processes of spinning and weaving in Indonesia.

In brief, a piece of woven cloth represents the fabric of the cosmos. The threads of the warp attached to the loom represents the inmutable and predestined elements of Being; the threads of the weft, carried by the shuttle backwards and forwards across and between the threads of the warp, represent its contingent and variable elements. If the interweaving of a piece of cloth represents the Macrocosm, the point at which a single thread of the warp crosses over a single thread of the weft is, as it were, a representation of the Metacosm, since the whole fabric derives from that point indefinitely repeated.[3]

It follows from this basic symbolism, that textiles in which designs are incorporated into the weave itself by a particular arrangement of the threads, and by dyeing the individual threads before weaving takes place, are a more complete reflection of the process of cosmic creation than those in which a design is later impressed upon the woven fabric. This type of manufacture, generically known as "*Ikat* weaving", is in fact a more ancient and "primitive" art than that of the perhaps more familiar *Batik* prints, and

[3] For a fuller exposition of the symbolism of weaving, see The Symbolism of the Cross, by René Guénon, Chap. XIV "The Symbolism of Weaving".

is widely diffused throughout Indonesia, particularly in those areas outside Java which retain most vigorously the traditions of pre-Hindu and pre-Muslim cultures. We shall accordingly deal with it first.

Ikat Weaving

The word "*Ikat*" means "to bind" or "to knot", and refers to the various methods of arranging the threads before dyeing and, finally, weaving. The threads, first mounted on a loom, are tied together (*Ikat*) in groups, following a pre-arranged pattern; certain places in these threads are wound with dye-resistant fibre before they are dipped into dye, with the result that the parts so protected remain uncoloured. The actual weaving begins only after all the dyeing is completed and the pattern outlined. Much time is taken up by the process of binding, dyeing and unbinding, which requires great artistic feeling, precise workmanship and untold patience. Intricate *Ikat* weaves require months or even years to finish. A typical feature is a kind of blurring; the designs flow gently into each other. The clarity of the design depends upon the binding which, if it is tight, produces a distinct design; if it is loose, the pattern becomes hazy and even dream-like.

Within the basic techniques described above, three main types of *Ikat* can be distinguished: warp *Ikats*, weft *Ikats* and double *Ikats*. Warp or weft *Ikats* have the design dyed either in the warp or in the weft before weaving; double *Ikats* are those in which design and colour are applied to the threads of both the warp and the weft in such a way as to combine, on weaving, into intricate patterns. In addition to these, there exist plain weaves, similar to Scottish tartans, in which the pattern is formed of intercrossing threads of various colours in simple stripes, or intercrossing stripes. Finally, there are many fabrics in which an ornamenting thread, often of silver or gold, is put through by needle on the warp (*Sungkit*). Further elaborations include supplementary embroidery and beadwork.

Because of the metaphysical and psychological analogies between *Ikat* production and the process of cosmic creation (i.e. Macrocosm) and of giving birth or nourishing new life (i.e. Microcosm), spinning and weaving are traditionally envisaged as female

functions, in Indonesia as elsewhere. On the other hand, men participate in the dyeing of the thread for reasons which are obvious on the analogy of the human process of conception.[4] It is for this reason that the occasion of dyeing is always one of secrecy and privacy. The total process of *Ikat* production symbolizes the process of creation as a whole, and of human birth in particular; the finished product is sanctified by these symbolic concepts.

Adherence to prescribed patterns symbolizes the dynamic continuity of heredity in the life of the tribe or village, and the freedom of design permitted within the prescribed patterns reflects the rich individualism which is nevertheless feasible within the bounds of custom (*Adat*). It is for this reason that textiles from a particular area will always have a "family" resemblance but will never be quite identical. The weaver, creating from memory and without written design or example before her, is free to embellish and beautify traditional designs, but is, at the same time, inhibited by instinctive sensibility from destroying or abandoning them. It is from this, and from the accumulation of techniques over countless generations, that the beauty of *Ikat derives*.

The finished cloth plays an important role in traditional life and is often made for ceremonial use and not for clothing alone. *Ikats* are used in particular in rituals, in ceremonies of birth and death, initiation into a new life, such as circumcision, the filing of teeth and other puberty ceremonies and in marriage, as well as in the various events of agriculture, such as the planting of seed and the harvest.

The sacred nature of these usages complements the sacred nature of the same cloth when used for daily apparel; hence also the sacred aspects of its manufacture and the customs and taboos associated with it. In detail these differ from island to island, but in all areas not yet influenced by modern technology, the arts of spinning, dyeing and weaving are still accompanied by offerings, meditation and prayers which are deemed essential for success. Incantations are made to ensure good results; when the threads are

[4] From a cosmological viewpoint, the thread represents the materia prima, and its "vivification" by the process of dyeing represents the imposition thereon of form. The collaboration between men and women therefore symbolizes the interaction between Purusha and Prakriti, to borrow Hindu terminology

spun and pulled, incense is burned and offerings are made; certain prayers are believed to be efficacious in producing yarn of fine quality; meditation is practised before weaving.

Taboos include the rigorous exclusion of all persons, even within the family, not directly concerned with manufacture, and the punishment of those who infringe this, even unwittingly; it is forbidden to mention death or the names of dead persons, or of animals; the threads may not be mounted on the loom except on a day when there is a full moon and a high tide; if death is announced in the village, weaving must stop at once, lest the threads lose their strength and the weavers fall sick.

There is a remarkable overall similarity in the design motifs, despite the very broad diffusion of *Ikat*, and they can be divided broadly into (a) the geometric and (b) the representational. There is, of course, a tendancy for these categories to overlap when representational designs become stylized to the point of being unrecognizable and when geometric designs become elaborated into the semblance of plants and animals. There are, moreover, many designs which appear to have no recognizable symbolism at all, but have simply been adopted, rather like Scottish tartans, by particular communities and have come thereby to be traditionally associated with them. In many of these, the colours used depend primarily on the vegetable dyes available in each area. In any case, the sacred nature of cloth as such, which is fully reflected in the traditional rites and taboos of production, can be said to compensate for obscurities in the meaning of many of the traditional motifs, of which a large number may well be "pure" design employed not for reasons of symbolism but of sheer beauty, beauty itself being sacred.

Bearing these reservations in mind, some of the identifiable motifs which are found through Indonesia include the following:

a. Geometrical motifs

i. straight or intercoursing lines and bands of colour;

ii. wavy lines (probably representing water patterns);

iii. elaborations of the cross, representing the directions of space;

iv. stylizations of the human figure standing in "ancestral" attitudes of worship with the hands raised to the level of the head. This is one of the most frequently recurring motifs, in which the degree of stylization varies considerably from the nearly representational to a "geometric" backbone, some- times shaped like a lozenge, with arms and legs extended from it, and the head detached from the trunk and diamond-shaped. This figure is sometimes portrayed sitting;

v. Stylizations of actual objects, such as stars, sun, moon, plants and, in particular, symmetrically shaped sea-animals such as crabs, squid etc.

b. Representational motifs.

i. various plants, flowers, seeds and fruit;

ii. animal figures, especially the crocodile, snake, turtle, fish, frogs and crustaceans, and occasional domestic animals such as horses and buffaloes.

iii. various birds;

iv. distinctive parts of animals, e.g., the horns of the buffalo;

v. trees (frequently identifiable as the "tree of life");

vi. specific objects having a particular significance for certain communities e.g. the "ship" used in fabrics from Lampung, South Sumatra, which are used as shrouds and wall hangings in funeral rites, and symbolizes a means of passage for the souls of the dead.

Batik Prints

To move from *Ikat* weaves to *Batik* prints is to leave a morning world of primordial freshness for one of elaborate sophistication, for *Batik* cloth is associated chiefly with the civilisation implanted by the outward extension of Indian cultures, both Hindu and Buddhist, on the native traditions of Java, Madura and Bali. There are few areas of Indonesia that were not at some stage, directly or indirectly, influenced by ideas emanating benevolently from India; but in certain of these the pre-Hindu traditions

remained virtually intact, in others Hinduized Kingdoms emerged and have survived to the present day—notably in Bali and Central and East Java—, and in others, Islam, coming also by way of India, has subsequently become predominant. In all, there has always been in Indonesia a great spiritual plasticity in which different traditional perspectives come together, to merge or co-exist. There is little conscious exclusivity or animosity as between, say, Islam and Hinduism—at least until recent times and the corrosive influence of modern politics—and to determine the pre-dominant cultural colouring of each area is largely a question of emphasis and degree. One might summarize the situation by saying that many Indonesians have an "animist" soul, a Hindu frame of behaviour and an Islamic religious practice. This is particularly true of the *Batik* producing areas of Java and Madura, and is reflected in the symbolism and terminology of *Batik* design motifs. Javanese Muslims see no contradicition in wearing *Batik* cloths incorporating pre-Hindu or Indian symbolism.

Batik is, however, essentially the art of applying designs to finished cloth, and does not, therefore, directly embrace the symbolism of weaving as such. Nevertheless there is an underlying awareness that cloth is sacred by its very nature, and although the *Batik* worker starts not with weaving but with finished cloth, often imported from abroad, the splendour and symbolic richness of design exceeds that of *Ikat* in its systematic elaboration.

The fundamental method of imprinting *Batik* designs is to dip the cloth repeatedly into cold vegetable dyes, covering both sides of the cloth with wax, or other dye-resistant materials, in such a way as to restrict the dye to those parts of the cloth taking a particular pattern, in a single colour at a time. The process has to be repeated for each colour. This technique is used not only in Java but also in other parts of Indonesia, such as the islands of Flores, Halmahera, Sulawesi and Irian which were not traditionally subject to foreign influence, and there is every reason to believe that it is both ancient and indigenous. The traditional vegetable dyes such as those produced from the indigo plant Tarum, and the Mengkudu tree, come partly from areas of Indonesia outside the island of Java, notably Sulawesi and Sumbawa. The wax came traditionally from the islands of Sumatra, Timor

and Sumbawa, long famous for their bee-keeping. The "pen", called Tjanting, employed to apply the wax in firm, fine lines, in order to block out the elaborate traditional motifs is not found anywhere outside Indonesia.

The various design motifs described below are now executed in many colours, but the Batiks of Surakarta (Solo) and Johjakarta in Java, now regarded as the twin "capitals" of *Batik* and almost certainly the repositories of ancient traditions, rarely use colours other than dark brown, blue and white. The white is the "ground" on which the other two colours are placed, i.e., the "ether", the blue and brown represent respectively "heaven" and "earth" or, in Hindu terminology, "*Purusha*" and "*Prakriti*", the male and female principles. More ancient designs used only blue, which is the colour of contemplation and divinity.

As in *Ikat* design, the motifs themselves can be conveniently divided into (a) the geometric and (b) the representational. The main geometric motifs include the following:

(i) *Tjeplok*: this is a cosmic symbol based on a central point from which radiate sometimes four and sometimes eight directions of space. The original term could well be Tjiptaloka meaning "the created world", though this is speculative. The geometric motifs combined within typical Tjeplok patterns are extremely varied and complex consisting of squares, rhombs, circles, stars, etc., but the arrangement of the components around a central point from which they radiate outwards, in a form reminiscent of a Mandala, is unmistakeable even when these components take the form of plants, seeds, flowers and fruit-stones;

(ii) *Bandji*: this is a Swastika with the arms moving clockwise. The word "bandji ", taken from the Hokkiên dialect of Chinese, means simply the "swastika". It is, in fact, the fourth of the auspicious signs on the foot of Buddha, but is considerably more ancient than Buddhism, being a world-wide symbol of the cosmos based on the directions of space;

(iii) *Ganggong*: this is frequently regarded as a sub-category of Tjeplok, and indeed the spatial symbolism is identical. It is characterized however, by the fact that the

directions of space are indicated not by separate shapes arranged, as in Tueplok, around a central point, but as extension of the centre drawn out into long coils like the stamen of a flower;

(iv) *Nitik*: this is a variant of Tjeplok in which the design is picked out in dots (as the name Nitik, "dotting", indicates) giving a fragile effect almost like a lace pattern. It is possible that Nitik, started out by being actually worked into the weave of the cloth;

(v) *Grinsin.*: this consists of small circles with dots inside, arranged rather like the scales of a fish. Since the circle is regarded, in all symbolism, as being the most pefect shape, complete in itself and having neither beginning nor end, it is a representation of that stage of Being which precedes spatial and directional manifestation. The central dot, or dots, represent latent, divine possibility. Before inscribing this pattern, the Batik maker is traditionally required to undergo a period of silent meditation;

(vi) *Kawung*: this motif, consisting of touching or intersecting circles, larger than those found in Grinsing, and generally arranged around a central point in the manner of Tjeplok is of great antiquity and, because of its particularly sacred nature, was forbidden in Jogjakarta to all but the members of the Sultan's immediate family;

(vii) *Lereng*: this is a generic name for a large category of designs moving diagonally across the cloth. It is thus quite separate from the cosmic and spatial motifs described above which are based, roughly, on the cross or the circle and run horizontally and vertically. The general significance of Lereng motifs appears to be that of specifically "human intervention" across the cosmic pattern. This is particularly true of the various Parang motifs which form the most important sub-category of Lereng.

(vii) *Parang*: this word appears to mean "sword" or "knife" or, again, possibly "war". In appearance it resembles a line of slanting knife-like ornaments running across the cloth in diagonal stripes. If, as we have suggested, the designs based on elaboration of the circle or the directions of space are cosmological and have a "brahmanical" significance the Parang motif has a functional significance associated with the administrative and warrior classes, i.e., the Ksatriyas in Hindu-Javanese society. It is not surprising,

therefore, that there is a large number of Parang motifs, many of which were traditionally restricted to the use of members of the highest court circles. The size of the Parang and its combination with other motifs vary to denote age and rank.

To turn now to the representational or non-geometric motifs, it would be quite impossible to attempt an exhaustive list, for they are innumerable and represent mostly natural objects, clouds, mountains, stars, water, plants and animals, frequently highly stylized and often arranged in the geometrical patterns, referred to above. They thus form a natural complement to the metaphysical and spatial symbolism serving, as it were, to fill with mineral, vegetative and animal life the abstract worlds designated by the centre, the circle, the directions of space, and heaven and earth. As such, the best and most ancient Batik cloths, far from being simply beautiful designs to please the eye, are representations of the cosmos both as regards its celestial origin and its living content. If many display the vibrant and luxurient profusion which only a tropical landscape could inspire, others are marked by a more restrained elegance suggesting the sobriety of nature in which the principal design components are water, rain, rock or cloud patterns. The makers of *Batik* recognize that all natural objects are, in the nature of things, symbols of a higher reality, and have used those objects in which this is most tangible as, for example, flowers whose petals form a spatial symbolism or seeds, which, when cut open, suggest the *Grinsing* referred to above.

The most frequent representational designs include the following:

(a) *Semen*: a dense profusion of leaves, birds, tendrils, seeds and half-open flowers; these are often combined with animals and insects frequently so highly stylized as to suggest plants rather than animate life, thereby emphasizing the intrinsic unity of the living world. They are frequently arranged in the Tueplok pattern.

(b) *Alam*: a collection of plants, insects, birds and animals arranged fairly sparsely across the cloth. Alam means "the natural world".

(c) *Lar*: a stylized representation of the wings of the mythical eagle Garuda, the King of Birds in Hindu mythology and a symbol of divine revelation and creative force. Of the

three variations, namely Lar proper (a single wing), Mirong (a pair of wings) and Sawat (two wings with extended tail feathers), the latter is traditionally reserved for the use of the highest nobility.

(d) *Naga*: a stylized serpent, snake or dragon representing divine energy;

(e) *Siddha* motifs: these all incorporate the lotus, a symbol of growth, purity and spiritual realization. These motifs, featuring the lotus in various stages of growth, are used in specific designs, the half-open lotus for adolescents and the full-blown for older people of rank;

(f) *Merak*: the peacock, symbolizing beauty and nobility;

(g) Peksi or Sawunggaling: the phoenix, symbol of regeneration;

(h) *Wadas*: rocks;

(i) *Megamendung*: storm-clouds;

(j) *Udan Liris*: fine rain. This diagonal design (Lereng) seems to be apart from the others, but its inclusion in the Parang has made it a design reserved for the aristocracy;

(k) *Mahameru*: the sacred mountain;

(l) *Segara*: ocean life, including various kinds of fish and crustaceans, rocks and coral;

(m) *Kapal*: the ship;

(n) *Singa-Barong*: lions guarding the palace gates;

(o) *Taman Arum Suniaraga*: "The Perfumed Garden of the Soul at Rest", a stylized garden pattern, probably of Islamic and Hindu inspiration, but also incorporating Chinese motifs such as buildings, tables and lamps within a context of vegetation and animals. The design has an unworldly and dreamlike quality caused by the extreme stylization of both the man-made objects and the animals all of which are transfused and transformed to ressemble plants and rocks.

All of the above motifs, both geometric and representational, are found in specific

combinations in designs too numerous to mention, each having a specific name and each being considered appropriate for particular age-groups, ranks and occasions. One component however, which is frequently found in many designs of no particular hierarchical significance, —frequently in *Desa* (village) cloth—is the *Kepala*, which means simply "frontal design". This consists of a striking separate pattern in the centre of the cloth arranged within an enclosed oblong running from the top to the bottom somewhat reminiscent of a barred-gate. The bars, drawn out in elongated triangles, *Tunpals*, are alternatively in light and dark colours. The dark sections frequently have small stars impressed on them and the light sections stylized birds, flowers and insects. They appear to represent the alternations of night and day, a symbolism reinforced by their being in facing groups of seven "day and night" sections. The older *Kepalas* were in sections of twelve or five. The former reflect Islamic symbolism, which has seven days in the week, and the latter reflects Hindu-Javanese time divisions; the temporal significance remained constant. The "gate" is frequently surrounded by stylized *Naga* designs and the rest of the cloth is usually of a luxuriant flower and plant pattern. The whole is therefore symbolic both of time, i.e., the alternations of day and night, and of space filled with life, i.e., the world.

The above remarks do no more than touch the fringes of the subject, and the meaning of many frequently recurring motifs is now forgotten, though few are entirely beyond conjecture, because of the universal nature of symbols. More recently however, symbolism has been frequently subordinated to mere design, both as regards shapes and colours. This is particularly true of those areas, such as Pekalongan on the North Java coast, where Chinese motifs and colours have come to be widely used. On the other hand, these latter have done much to produce designs of striking variety and beauty. The same can be said of the influence of Islamic design, particularly that originating in Persia and Muslim India, which in its rich elaboration of natural forms, particularly of trees, flowers, stamen, tendrils, and leaves, and of many geometric motifs, has a great deal in common with the concept underlying the pre-Islamic art of Indonesia, including that derived from Hindu concepts. This can be verified from a glance at any "Persian" carpet, and it needs

to be emphasized in order to correct the impression, widely propagated by certain scholars, that the impact of Islam was artistically deadening. As regards *Batik*, the reverse is true.

Finally, it must be said that even today one will find very few batiks that do not contain certain of the ancient symbols, however much these may now be obscured by modern or non-Indonesian innovations or even, as in many batiks, from *Pekalongan* for example, by sheer love of fantasy and the ebullient elaboration of a multitude of disparate design concepts; meanwhile in those great centres of *Batik* production, where a living tradition has been reinforced by the presence of societies strongly attached to their cultural values as a whole, such as *Solo*, *Jogjakarta*, *Banjumas*, *Tjirebon* or *Indramaju*, adherence to rigid cannons of both design and rank, has succeeded in preserving intact many batiks containing symbolisms that are both rich and precise.

Conclusion

The above remarks may have served to illustrate, through the single example of cloth, used for both apparel and ritual, the high quality of the spiritual ambience prevalent in the traditional societies of Indonesia. Until recently, despite the impact of Westernization through colonialism, it has remained surprisingly intact and inviolate to change. However, this is no longer true. Neither *Ikat* nor *Batik* can survive for long in societies which no longer practise, or understand, the traditions out of which they sprang. The adherence to traditional techniques and designs requires nothing less than an adherence to Truth, for it is Truth that both demands and justifies dedicated skill, patience, time and loyalty to "ancestral" concepts. All these have been reduced by the accelerated application of modern ideas, particularly during the last twenty years. Every outside influence that has impinged on Indonesia has enhanced the beauty of its tradition with the single exception of Western technology, the results of which have been thoroughly bad. Chemical dyes and industrial methods are taking over, not only in Indonesia but notably also in Japan, to flood the market-places with garish counterfeits of *Batiks* and to oust the traditional craftsmen from their livelihoods. Genuine *Ikats* are becoming rare, and are coming to be treated not so much as appurtenances of daily life as

collectors' pieces. To see the old fabrics, and even many of the newer ones that still carry the old designs, is to catch a glimpse of a vanishing paradise.

One can only note that this decadence is still less pronounced in Indonesia—and particularly in the remoter or more conservative areas—than it is in many parts of the world, or even of the Far East, but that trend towards decadence is unmistakeable.

This is a sad note on which to conclude, not only because of the obsolescence and possible loss of craft traditions of great beauty and nobility, but even more because it reflects an accelerating loss of spiritual awareness in the widest sense. To lose Beauty is to lose Truth.

The disciples then inquired if they could engage in worldly duties, in a small way, for the benefit of others, and Jetsun said, "If there be not the least self interest attached to such duties, it is permissible. But such (detachment) is indeed rare; and works performed for the good of others seldom succeed if not wholly freed from self-interest. Even without seeking to benefit others, it is with difficulty that works done even in one's own interest (or selfishly) are successful. It is as if a man helplessly drowning were to try to save another man in the same predicament. One should not be over-anxious and hasty in setting out to serve others before one hath oneself realized Truth in its fullness; to be so, would be like the blind leading the blind.

Milarepa.