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Raden Adjeng Kartini : The Pioneer of Women's Education and Cultural Nationalism in the Dutch East Indies

Anowara Akter*

Abstract: *Raden Adjeng Kartini, a pioneer of women's emancipation in Indonesia, played a vital role in the movement for women's education, rights, and cultural nationalism of the Dutch East Indies. During the late nineteenth century, under the influence of Western education in the archipelago of Java (modern Indonesia), an educated and culturally conscious society emerged among the local population. Aware of the exploitation and oppression under colonial rule, this group initiated educational and cultural movements that later evolved into political nationalism. Kartini advocating for women's education and rights stood at the forefront of these efforts; Beyond her focus on gender equality, she was also a critic of colonial governance, expressing her aspirations for the liberation of the islands and promoting awareness of the differences between European aristocratic culture and local feudal traditions. Inspired by modern thought and humanism, she envisioned a society awakened from the dehumanizing conditions of colonial rule. Her progressive ideas are vividly reflected in her writings and letters, which were later compiled and published. Many studies have discussed her feminism, gender, equality, marriage, and emancipation. But Kartini did not only fight for feminism, she also played an important role in the field of women's education. Besides, she was a proponent of cultural nationalism in the archipelago. This article explores Kartini's contributions to the development of women's education and cultural nationalism in the Dutch East Indies.*

Keywords: *Dutch East Indies*, *Kartini, Women's Education, Emancipation, Cultural Nationalism.*

Introduction

The Southeast Asian region known as the Malay world was divided under the control of the Dutch and the British following the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824. The Dutch-controlled area, referred to as the East Indies, is now modern-day Indonesia. After establishing colonial rule over the islands, the Dutch introduced various governance systems aimed at economic prosperity, such as the Cultural System, Liberal Policy,

* Associate Professor, Department of Islamic History & Culture, Jagannath University, Dhaka.

and Ethical Policy. However, none significantly improved the lives of the islanders. The introduction of the Ethical Policy did bring some improvements to education, helping elevate the standard of living for some of the island's population. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this Western-introduced education led to the emergence of a small, educated, and culturally aware community. In the Dutch East Indies these individuals later spearheaded educational and cultural movements advocating for the liberation of the islands. One prominent figure in the early development of cultural nationalism was Raden Adjeng Kartini(1879-1903), a woman from Java. She was not only a trailblazer for women's rights in Indonesia, but also a guiding light for national liberation. Growing up in a conservative Indonesian society where women were secluded and denied fundamental freedoms, Kartini dared to speak out about women's rights and the nation's independence. This is why she is often regarded as the first feminist of Indonesia.

Kartini believed that education was the key to women's empowerment. She argued that through education women could become aware of their rights and rise above societal limitations, which she identified as one of the primary causes of women's backwardness. She played a pivotal role in advocating for the expansion of women's education and inspired women to fight for their rights. A woman of modern outlook, thought, and intelligence, Kartini reflected her progressive ideas in her writings. She has also been referred to as the first product of Dutch-imposed Western bourgeois values in the archipelago. Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of Western civilization, Kartini sought to learn from its positive contributions and believed that the archipelago would awaken one day. Although political nationalism had not yet emerged during her time, the word "freedom" deeply resonated with her. Kartini is thus considered a pioneer of cultural nationalism, with education being her primary tool. Her letters discuss feminism, nationalism, and education. While Indonesian history often highlights Kartini as a feminist, her writings and ideas also reveal the essence of Javanese nationalism. She critiqued the Dutch language, education, culture, governance, and exploitation methods, challenging the colonial state. For this reason, Kartini is recognized as a forerunner of Indonesian nationalism. The primary goal of this paper is to highlight Kartini's contributions to women's education and emancipation, and to the development of cultural nationalism. It also sheds light on her activities in fostering women's education and nationalism in the Dutch East Indies. This research paper started from two research questions: 1: What kind of contribution has Kartini made to the development of women's education? 2: Why is she called the pioneer of the development of cultural nationalism in the Dutch East Indies?

Literature Review

Kartini was a pioneer of women's emancipation, female education, and individual-centered cultural nationalism in the East Indies. As a pioneer of Indonesia's social

and cultural nationalism, her life and letters provide a unique lens into the transition from traditional Javanese values to modern nationalist aspirations. However, a critical examination of existing scholarship reveals that most study have focused predominantly on her role as a feminist educator, often overlooking the broader contribution as a visionary for the archipelago's political liberation. This significant gap in the literature serves as a primary rationale for the current study.

Notable historians like George McTurnan Kahin (1970) briefly mention Kartini's life and work, but they do not focus on her ideas or activities. In the work of Ansari (1993) there is a discussion of Kartini's contribution to women's education, her role in women's emancipation and her interest in Western education. However, he does not elaborate on her political ideas at a time of burgeoning nationalism. This is an area that needs to be addressed. Enjing and Mulatish (2019) discuss Kartini's school concepts and the western influences that shaped them.They illustrate how Kartini dreamed of education for women and of establishing schools for that purpose, describing what such schools would be like, the educational system they would entail, and the qualities teachers should possess. Nevertheless, the article does not include any discussion of her nationalism, leaving considerable scope for further research.

Meanwhile, Hurights (2009) portrays Kartini as a symbol of women's emancipation and highlights her contributions to female education. The study shows how, influenced by Dutch feminists, she played a crucial role in advancing women's education, preserving indigenous traditions, improving public health, and fostering economic development. Yet, while the researcher emphasizes her role in women's emancipation and in enhancing women's moral standards, Kartini's political consciousness as a visionary of the archipelago's liberation is not addressed. On the other hand, Sundari (2019) focuses on Kartini's contribution to both women's movement and education. The scholar analyses Kartini's thoughts through an interpretive study of her letters.. Its highlights Kartini's initiatives for women's education and emancipation while maintaining indigenous cultural values. However, across these studies on Kartini's life, work, women's education, and emancipation, there remains a reluctance to present her as a visionary of the archipelago's liberation and as a proponent of cultural nationalism. The present study emerges from this gap This research has utitilized both primary and secondary sources to examine and understand Kartini's life and contributions.

Research Methodology

This paper employs historical and analytical methods commonly used in humanities research. The historical method investigates past events through primary sources and secondary sources. It involves analyzing and critically examining sources to provide accurate accounts of historical events. This research focuses on Kartini's letters to her pen friends which have been published in *Letters of a Javanese*

Princess, translated into English by Agnes Louise Symmers in 1921, with a foreword by Louis Couperus (1863–1923), a renowned Dutch novelist. Content analysis of the letters were undertaken and the insights garnered from the letters are examined against the historical context of Kartini's lifetime. Futhermore, a feminist lens is applied to the analysis, since Kartini is a seminal feminist figure, thus attention has been given to her advocacy for women's rights, education and liberation from traditional patriachal constraints. By examining her letters and historical records, the study evaluates her contribution to gender equality and national identity.

Life of Kartini

Raden Adjeng Kartini[1] was born on April 21, 1879, into an aristocratic family in Mayong, a village in the Jepara Regency of Central Java. Her father, Raden Mas Adipati Ario Sosroningrat, served as the Regent (administrator) of Japara (Osaka, 2009). Both her father and grandfather, Pangeran Ario Tjondronegoro, Regent of Demak, were strong advocates of Western education and culture. Kartini, known in her early years for her liveliness and affectionately called 'Little Bird', grew up in a liberal family environment. This was notable, as Javanese society at the time was deeply conservative regarding women.

Encouraged by her father's admiration for Western education, Kartini was enrolled in a primary school established by the Dutch near her home. It is pertinent to state that the Dutch schools were primarily reserved for children of European descent and the local elite. Kartini was the first Javanese girl to attend such a Dutch school. A brilliant and gifted student, Kartini completed her elementary education at the Europese Lagere School (ELS) by the age of twelve, excelling in Dutch (Sundari, 2019).

However, she could not continue her studies because of the Javanese tradition of *Pingit*, where girls were required to leave school at the age of twelve to prepare for marriage and develop domestic skills. Despite being confined to her home, Kartini's intellectual pursuits did not wane. Her thirst for knowledge made her an omnivorous reader. With her father's support, she accessed books, magazines, and journals on subjects such as science, literature, culture, and women's rights. Her command of the Dutch language opened up vast avenues for learning, allowing her to delve into the intellectual world. Even in this secluded life, Kartini continued her self-education with the help of her brother, exploring topics that broadened her mental horizons and cultivated her critical thinking. Coté (2014) remarks that:

[1] The title "Raden Adjeng" was traditionally used for unmarried noblewomen in Javanese society, while "Raden Ayu" was the title given to married noblewomen. Accordingly, after her marriage, Kartini was known as "Raden Ayu Kartini". (Kartini, 1921).

> Equally important to understanding Kartini's intellectual context is an itemization of her library. An analysis of titles mentioned in her letters reveals she had read the core literary output of the late nineteenth century. The arts had reflected the upheavals in the material world in parallel with the political and social changes in the Dutch society. In particular, proponents of the cultural movement known as *De Beweging van tachtig* (the Eighties Movement) strove to break down institutionalized cultural and social barriers and focus on exploring the inner life and consciousness of the modern individual (p.181).

Coté's comment suggests that Kartini's personal library was a treasure trove of knowledge. Her collection included notable works by Dutch socialists, feminists, and colonial reformists, such as Vosmaer, van Eeden, Limburg Brouwer, and Multatuli (the pseudonym of E. Douwes Dekker, author of *Max Havelaar*) and one of the most influential nineteenth-century Dutch writers on colonial reform.

Although her father supported her exposure to Western knowledge and culture, he also ensured that Kartini remained connected to her own heritage. As Susan J. Naith observes:

> Her father gave her books on Javanese culture to balance her Western education and subscribed to a literary box—a collection of magazines, children's books, modern novels, and foreign news—which was exchanged weekly by a local library (Naith in Osaka, 2009,p.1).

Kartini's Letters

During Kartini's time, the women of the *priyayi* (noble) class in Indonesia lived a secluded life, confined by strict social norms. For instance, despite her desire to pursue learning. she had to discontinue formal schooling at the age of 12 due to social restrictions. Kartini, however, while living in seclusion, read newspapers and books, and she maintained correspondence with many individuals both in her country and in Europe, particularly in Holland. Among her pen pals were Rosa Abendanon, Mrs.Ovink-Soer, and Stella Zeehandelaar. In her letters to these correspondents, Kartini vividly depicted the contemporary social and cultural conditions of Java and the surrounding islands. She discussed the lifestyle of the Javanese elite, the process of its disintegration, the nature of European society in Java, Dutch-Javanese relations, and issues of education, particularly women's education. In her letters, she also highlighted the backwardness of women, the dynamics of her own mental transformation, and her rebellion against the stagnation and superstitions of Javanese society. Kartini's thoughts on women's emancipation, her admiration for Western civilization, her patriotism, and her hopes for the country's freedom are vividly reflected in these letters (Ansari, 1993). She focused on topics such as feminism, nationalism (in a socio-cultural rather than a political sense), modernity, education, Javanese arts and crafts, and religion (Kartini & Coté, 2014).

One of Kartini's key supporters, J.H. Abendanon, the Director of the Department of Education in the East Indies, compiled her letters. In 1911, he published a Dutch collection titled *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (*Through Darkness to Light*). In 1920, these letters were translated into English and published in a book titled *Letters of a Javanese Princess*. Subsequently, they were published in several other languages, including Malay (1922), Arabic (1926), Sundanese (1930), Javanese (1938), Indonesian (1938), and Japanese (1955) (Dangerous Women Project 2016). The English translation by L. Symmers in 1921, titled *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, became widely known. The book was also translated into Javanese under the title of *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (*After Darkness, Light is Born*) by Armijn Pane and later by Kartini's granddaughter, Haryati Soebadio. The ideals and thoughts expressed in Kartini's letters have served as a source of inspiration not only for Javanese women but also for women's awakening and movements globally.

Kartini's Role in Women's Education and Liberation

Kartini played a significant role in promoting women's education and advocating for women's rights in the Dutch East Indies. During her time, the women of Java were confined to strict seclusion, leading lives akin to imprisonment within their own homes. They were deprived of education and had no right to make decisions about their own lives. Even in matters as important as choosing a husband, they were not granted the slightest opportunity to express their opinions (Sundari, 2019). Child marriage and polygamy were prevalent in Javanese society, and Kartini herself was the fourth wife of her husband. In such a patriarchal society, women were expected to accept their circumstances unquestioningly. They were often oppressed under the pretext of Javanese traditions or religious justifications. Through her letters, Kartini shared the plight of women with her pen pals, bringing attention to Javanese women's struggles and suggesting ways to improve their conditions. She highlighted the need for education and emancipation for women, advocating for their empowerment. In her writing to Mevrow Abendanon (August, 1900), she remarked:

> Neither the mouth nor the pen can express it, but the eyes drowned in a flood of tears were raised on high as though to among the angels of God the ones who with tender wings came down to us who were sad and wept bitterly upon earth, to comfort, and fill us with heavenly joy (Kartini, 1921, p.52).

Here, she is expressing her deep emotional turmoil and the overwhelming sadness she experienced while reflecting on the lack of freedom for Javanese women. Kartini stood out as an exceptional figure in Javanese society. Growing up in a noble and progressive family environment, she had the opportunity to study at a Dutch school where she learned the Dutch language. This enabled her to read European books, newspapers, and magazines, sparking her interest in European

feminist thought. Inspired by these ideas, she critically observed the conditions of Indonesian women and sought to bring about change. Kartini's focus extended beyond women's liberation to addressing broader social issues affecting the general population. Kartini viewed the struggle of women as part of a larger movement for freedom, autonomy, and equality before the law (Sundari, 2019).

During her time at the Dutch school, she became aware of the stark contrasts between European bourgeois culture and the declining feudal traditions of her homeland. This understanding drove her to advocate for the liberation and rights of women in her country. Her friend and home tutor, Mavrow Ovink-Soer, the wife of the Dutch Resident of Jepara, was a fervent socialist and feminist, who had authored a book titled *Women's Life in a Javanese Village*. Kartini was deeply influenced by her tutor's social and political ideals (Geertz, 1964). Ovinik-Soer also encouraged Kartini in her pursuit of liberation and of women's rights in the Dutch East Indies. Kartini recognized that the cornerstone of women's emancipation was education, and she made it her life's mission to promote education among women, despite the sacrifices it required. When she decided to pursue higher education in Holland with the encouragement of her pen pals, she even secured a government scholarship through the assistance of H.H. Van Kol, a prominent socialist leader and Dutch parliamentarian. However, she ultimately chose not to take this opportunity. Under the advice of her patron J.H. Abendanon and other well-wishers, she decided to remain in her homeland to focus on the promotion of education among women of the feudal class (Ansari, 1993). Her advisors believed that her absence would hinder the advancement of women's education in her society. Respecting their advice, Kartini abandoned her plans to study in Holland.

Kartini's Endorsement of Female Education

Kartini was a fierce critic of Javanese traditions that hindered the progress of women, as reflected in her letters. She firmly believed that educating women was essential for nurturing future leaders of the nation. Her writings reveal her growing confidence and determination. In a letter to Mejuffrouw Stella Zeehandelaar, dated May 25, 1899, she expressed her thoughts vividly:

> Day and night I wonder by what means our ancient traditions could be overcome… ….An ever growing longing for freedom and independence- a longing to stand alone (Kartini,1921,pp 3-4).

This letter shows that Kartini passionately believed in women's freedom. She considered that the freedom to pursue education would help women to determine their destiny. She often wrote with great fervour about the need to improve education, public health, economic welfare, and traditional arts in her country. In 1903, she presented a well-thought-out opinion on women's education in a memorandum titled *Give the Javanese Education*, addressed to a senior official of

the Dutch judiciary. She believed that women's education was essential not only for securing women's rights and liberation but also for reducing social inequality and ensuring the overall development of the Javanese society. Furthermore, Kartini argued that the government's primary responsibility was to enhance the awareness of Javanese women, providing them with the necessary education and training to shape them into knowledgeable mothers and capable caregivers for their children. For the broader progress of society, she emphasized the importance of institutional education for girls from elite families. According to her, educating elite girls would enable them to take effective steps to spread education among ordinary women in society. Kartini firmly believed that an educated, knowledgeable, and ideal mother could illuminate society. She wrote to Soer in 1900 expressing her thoughts in this issue:

> And who can do most for the elevation of the moral standard of mankind? The women, the mother; it is at the breast of women, that man receives his earlist nourishment. This child learns there first, to feel, to think, and to speak. And the earlist education of all foreshadows the whole after life. (Kartini, 1921,pp.48-49)

This excerpt shows her concern for women and education. Kartini did not merely advocate for the necessity and expansion of women's education; she also took concrete steps to achieve it. The dream she cherished of establishing schools for girls eventually came to fruition with her husband's help. She founded Rembang Girls' School in Jepara the first indigenous school established for Javanese girls (Osaka, 2009). It is worth noting that Kartini once took a firm stance against marriage, believing it to be an obstacle to women's personal freedom. Moreover, she was a strong critic of polygamy. However, under pressure from her family, she could not remain steadfast in her position and eventually married Priangan Regent Raden Adipati Joyoadiningrat. Ironically, despite condemning polygamy as sinful, she became a victim of it (Sundari, 2019).

Fortunately , Kartini's husband was a reformist feudal leader who supported her initiatives. In the school she founded and taught, she offered not only academic education but also practical and vocational training for girls, including household skills. She believed that women's freedom and empowerment could only be ensured through economic independence (Kartini, 1921). Kartini herself developed the curriculum and teaching methods for her school. Regarding the purpose of Kartini's school, Geertz (1964) comments:

> Character development of young women, while at the same time providing them with practical vocational training and general education in art, literature and science (p.23)

The curriculum was a combination of European and Javanese traditions. Alongside teaching language and literature, students were trained in needlework,

crafts, and cooking. However, schools were not the only place of learning and Kartini placed great value on the family because that was where the moral lessons, the most significant form of education, was acquired.

Kartini followed an unconventional educational approach that set her school apart from other institutions. In her view, "a teacher is like a parent to their students, a parent who inspires their soul,"(Kartini, 1921, p.72). She discouraged teachers from being biased, recalling the bitter experiences of Dutch schools. In her experience, Dutch teachers treated students based on family rank. whereas she believed in equality:

> I should teach my children, boys and girls, to regard one another as equal human beings and give them always the same education; of course following the natural disposition of each (Kartini,1921, p.72).

Kartini succeeded in establishing two schools in Japara and Rembang. She devoted all her efforts to educating women. Although she failed to realize her goal of establishing a government-recognized official school, she obtained a permit to operate the school in a limited capacity. In the beginning there were doubts about Kartini's success as Indonesian society at the time held strong prejudices against women's education. As a result, nearly all regents in Java were reluctant to send their daughters to school. However, the situation gradually began to change, and the number of students in Kartini's school started to increase. By 1904, the number of students in Kartini's school reached 120 (Jayawardena, 1994, p.145). Influenced by Kartini's school and inspired by her example, women in the later period established several girls' schools in Semarang, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Malang, and Medan. These institutions played a significant role in the promotion of women's education in the Dutch East Indies.

Kartini emphasized the importance of women's education. She believed that a society could not progress while keeping its women uneducated. Through education, women would learn to think critically, feel deeply, and understand the philosophy of life. She posed a vital question: how can a mother educate her child if she herself is uneducated? Observing the societal structure of her time, she raised these issues. Kartini not only led the movement for women's education and rights but also served as a voice for the overall liberation of Indonesian women. She realized how oppressive and detrimental the Javanese traditions and customs were. In letters to her literary friends, she exposed the backwardness of Javanese women in the field of education and the gender discrimination they faced in a patriarchal society. She highlighted the need for urgent initiatives to eliminate such inequalities.

Additionally, she protested against the societal practices of forcing women to marry unknown men and the prevalence of polygamy. She questioned the

religious justification for polygamy allowed for men (Kartini,1921). Witnessing the subjugated lives and misery of married women, Kartini did not want to marry herself. She resolved to fight against the superstitions and injustices prevalent in society, shaping herself through her sacrifices (Kartini, 1921).

Kartini's Nationalistic Spirit

Before 1912, nationalism in Indonesia primarily followed a cultural trajectory, with education serving as the central medium for nationalist movements. Here Kartini played a pivotal role in developing education and fostering nationalism. During her school years, she was particularly drawn to European culture, which she saw as a source of emancipation for humanity. Proficient in Dutch, she believed mastering the language would unlock the doors to Western civilization and its vast knowledge base. However, she also observed that Javanese aristocratic women, after learning Dutch, merely imitated Europeans' behavior and etiquette, failing to embrace the cultural ideals of freedom and enlightenment (Osaka, 2009). She therefore proposed an educational system that combined elements of Western and local traditions (Kahin, 1970). Her goal was the holistic emancipation of her people. She believed this could be achieved with the support, sympathy, and cooperation of the colonial Dutch authorities. Inspired by European ideals, Kartini often expressed her desire to bring about changes in Indonesia in letters to her Dutch pen friend Soer. In 1902 she wrote that:

> Oh I am so proud of my people , they are capable of so much, but you Hollanders must lead us. And you will do that will you not? We are like children, and you are our protectors, who must guide us and help us to be grown up men and women. (Kartini,1921, p.201)

In this letter, she seems to seeking help and guidance from the West. However, Kartini remained deeply attached to her country's traditions and culture. With her husband's support, she made significant efforts to revive the declining traditional art of wood carving. She also planned to collect and publish elements of Javanese folklore and cultural traditions. Unfortunately, this endeavour remained incomplete due to her untimely death.(Ansari, 1993)

Although Kartini appreciated the Dutch, she was not blind to their exploitative practices. She strongly protested against the colonial behaviour of Dutch officials and elites towards the Javanese people, and she criticised racial prejudice and other forms of discriminination. Kartini condemned the colonial education system, arguing that it deprived the majority of Indonesians of access to knowledge, deliberately keeping them in ignorance. She pointed out that the Dutch colonial government feared that educated villagers would abandon farming, a vital source of revenue for the colonial administration (Kartini,1921). Through her writings, Kartini offered an unprecedented critique of colonial governance, reflecting an

emerging and evolving nationalist consciousness. Despite belonging to the *priyayi*, or aristocratic class, which generally aligned with colonial authorities, she did not hesitate to challenge their policies. In a letter to Stella, she mentioned how the concept of 'freedom' had captivated her since childhood, fuelling a growing desire for independence. Witnessing the socio-political conditions around her, she felt deep anguish and strengthened her resolve to awaken her nation. She firmly believed that her motherland would awaken someday. She said, "We are alive, we must live; and life always goes forward"(Kartini,1921, p.228). She also expresses her pessimism in this way:

> A change will come in the whole native world the turning point is fore-ordained; it is coming. But when it will be? That is the great question. (Kartini,1921, p. 20).

Kartini's writings reveal a broad perspective on individual, social, and cultural transformation. Her letters not only depicted vividly the colonial administrative system but also her efforts to challenge the colonial state. Thus, it becomes evident that Kartini challenged Dutch colonial power by fostering a grassroots political consciousness.

The proponents of the Indonesian cultural movement sought to dismantle institutional barriers to culture and to explore the inner life and consciousness of the modern individual. Those with whom Kartini corresponded were, in one way or another, associated with colonial rule and possessed progressive and intellectual ideologies. While many progressive thinkers of her time envisioned a restructured and more 'civilized' colonial society, Kartini's ideals centered on the emancipation of women and the liberation of her country. Although some view her ideology as an expression of political nationalism, this characterization is incomplete. At that time, anti-colonial political nationalism had not yet emerged in the Indonesian archipelago. Instead, the era marked the formative stage of political nationalism and the rise of cultural nationalism. Kartini stood as a pioneer of this cultural nationalist movement, laying the groundwork for future political and social transformations of Indonesia.

Conclusion

Kartini is considered the first modern Indonesian woman to challenge and transcend the limitations of her era. In the late 19th century, within the conservative society of Dutch-controlled East Indies, she emerged as a leading figure advocating for women's education, rights, and empowerment. Today, in the 21st century, where issues such as feminism, gender equality, and women's rights remain central to global discourse, Kartini's early efforts in these areas are nothing short of revolutionary. Kartini worked tirelessly to improve the condition of women in her society, particularly those left behind due to a lack of education and

systemic patriarchy. Despite her short life of only 25 years, this self-educated and exceptionally talented woman dedicated herself to uplifting marginalized women, enabling them to become confident and self-reliant. She established schools for girls and inspired them to pursue education as a pathway to empowerment. Kartini's voice was a strong protest against gender discrimination in a patriarchal society. She was a vocal critic of polygamy, even though she herself became her husband's fourth wife. Her life's mission was the holistic emancipation of women, envisioning a society where women could make their own decisions and realize their full potential. She also emphasized the importance of economic independence for women, reviving dying local industries and integrating women into them to provide opportunities for self-sustenance.

Kartini's dream was of an enlightened, equitable society free from ignorance, superstition, and parochialism. While she admired the progressive aspects of Western society, she did not hesitate to criticize the colonial system of exploitation imposed by the Dutch. She found the subjugation and exploitation of her people intolerable and used her writings to awaken her compatriots to fight for liberation. The word 'freedom' resonated deeply with her, and she became a forerunner in the awakening of her nation. Kartini's contributions to her nation are honoured annually on April 21, when *Kartini Day* is celebrated as a day of national reflection and gratitude. In 1964, President Sukarno recognized her as a national heroine and symbol for Indonesian womanhood for her invaluable role in Indonesia's cultural and social awakening. Like all pioneering women, Kartini's legacy is being analyzed, debated, contested, and reimagined. She is also prominent figure in popular culture with the production of movies and novels on her life .Thus, she has been introduced into the nation's mythology and history as a precursor of the nationalist revolution (Tylor, 1989). Her life continues to serve as a potent reminder that change is possible, and her example inspires efforts toward social progress even today.

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