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The Gods gave RICE

by W. PREGER

A BANYAN TREE PUBLICATION





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The Rice Goddess

„RICE“ means life in Indonesia. Like life itself it is a gift from the Gods. In particular, it was Batara Guru, Prince of all the Gods, who seems to have been indirectly responsible for its presence on earth.

The ancient Javanese legend tells us that he created a divine Princess. Her beauty was so dazzling that he named her — Scintillating Jewel. At first, his feelings for her were paternal, later, amorous. Her affection for him, however, was no more than filial. She was quite unresponsive to his ardency. Nevertheless, he wooed and tried to win her. He persisted in his suit and, at her wits' end to placate him, she thought of a plan. She promised to accept him. But only if he presented her with a threefold gift — a food that did not pall, a garment which did not wear out, a gamelan which made music without the touch of a musician's hand. Delighted at her complaisance, although conditional, he sent his ambassador and favourite, Kala Gumarang, down to earth in quest of these gifts. But he, like so many of the Gods, was over-susceptible. On reaching the earth he fell in love with the Goddess Sri, wife of Batara Vishnu.

His overtures were unwelcome. Indeed, they annoyed the fruitful divinity so much she changed him into a boar to be rid of his attentions. In the meantime, the Prince of all Gods, impatient at the delayed return of his favourite and unable to contain his ardency any longer, embraced Scintillating Jewel against her will. She expired in his embrace. Despite his divine powers he was unable to bring her back

The carbao, that patient animal, which replaces the tractor in Indonesia, sullen but strong and intelligent.



to life. So he had her buried in the land of Mendang Kamulan. Forty days later the Prince of that country observed a strange phenomenon. About her grave a glowing light appeared and from it grew plants hitherto unknown. From the head of the divine corpse came the palm tree, from her hands the fruit trees, from her feet tubers and other underground fruits, and from her body that life-giving cereal: rice.

In the meantime, Kala Gumarang like the swine he had become maintained his pursuit of Devi Sri. In despair she appealed to the Gods to make her disappear. Her wish was granted. And, on the spot where she had vanished the same growths appeared as on the grave of Scintillating Jewel. With this difference however: the rice which grew from the body of Scintillating Jewel was rice grown on dry soil, that from the body of Devi Sri was "Sawah" rice, rice growing on flooded fields.

Although Devi Sri had vanished from the earth she was still being molested by the attentions of the tenacious boar. He dogged her so persistently that her divine spouse, Batara Vishnu deprived him of his life. Yet even in death he continued to pursue the lady. This time, in the form of different pests and plant diseases. And it is he who is responsible for all the diseases to which rice is subject. However, Devi Sri and her spouse took pity on humanity. They reincarnated as the Prince and Princess Makukulan as one being, instructed mankind how best to cultivate rice, and taught it all the correct "Sidekahs" or appropriate offerings. In all these rituals to-day it is the Goddess Sri who is worshipped; it is she who is honoured by the men and women who labour in the rice-fields of Indonesia.

The Gods gave rice so that the gift of life bestowed by the Gods on man be sustained.

In the mind of the Indonesian farmer the Goddess Sri is not a vague divinity floating beyond the clouds somewhere in the skies. According to the legend, rice sprouted from her body, she and rice are therefore identical. Rice is Sri and Sri is rice. Both are one. In worshipping her he does honour to rice itself. His labour in the fields, the work of his womenfolk are a form of religious ritual therefore. This is less evident in the work itself perhaps than in the preliminary activities. Fashioning the wooden head which takes the iron shear of the plough is, for instance, sacerdotal work. It is an hereditary craft descended from father to son. Such a man selects the wood and carves and whittles it into shape with priestlike devotion. The time he spends on any given piece of work is not determined, as by us, by economic considerations. The quality of the material and the excellence of the work are the only factors he cares to consider.

Hinduism came and Hinduism went. So did Buddhism. To-day nine tenths of all Indonesians profess the faith of Islam. Yet, no matter what his adopted faith is or was, his devotion to the ancient gods of his remote ancestors remains. Thus, before he starts to plough his land or to harvest his crop of rice he erects a shrine to Sri. Great care is taken to construct it according to instructions handed down from father to son. Whilst the simple structure is being built certain prayers are said or magic formulae pronounced. It is decorated with young palm leaves, supported on bamboo poles and roofed in with a white cloth. For the refreshment of the Goddess several dainty dishes are

placed in the shrine. And, too, different salves and unguents suitable for use by a divine lady when making her toilet. Even a clothes rack made of sugar cane is added. A number of rice stalks bound together on a special manner and plaited into a fan is placed in front of the shrine. An offering of incense is made. It is placed at the foot of the shrine in an earthenware pot. And as soon as the incense is dissipated harvesting may start.

In different parts of Java and on different islands the ceremonial varies in its details. The essentials are the same. One of these ceremonials consists in partaking of a ritual meal or "slamatan". This, like the other rituals, is one of the "sidekahs" taught them by Devi Sri and her spouse Vishnu. Such a meal precedes the first step taken to prepare the soil for planting. After this meal which is punctuated by prayer and marked by piety the men proceed to the fields and harness their ploughs to their cumbersome buffaloes for the glory of Sri and in the service of man.

Shrine, erected to the honour of Sri, the Rice Goddess. In it are tiny dishes, containing palatable refreshments and other offerings.





Picture from the private life of the carbaо, always in a pleasant mood. And of an Indonesian youngster. For these todѕ too, life was unthinkable without father's animals.

The Buffalo

Your modern farmer in Canada, America, Australia would be lost without his tractor. On an Indonesian farm, or rather on a farm in Java, it would be the tractor that would in all probability be lost, bogged, most likely, in the soft mud of a "sawah".

Here in Java the farmers employ more efficient and more intelligent motive-power than that of a tractor. Twenty million farmers on almost as many farms employ about two million carbaos or water-buffaloes. The slow, heavy, automotive power, the self-propelling, massive bulk of the carbaos helps the farmer haul and plough. The animals pull and push, do almost everything a tractor can do and much more besides.

For one thing, it can extract its own treads from the clinging mud of any quagmire. It can also avoid roots and rocks and holes entirely on its own initiative. It comes or goes at the farmer's call. And no tractor yet assembled has ever been known to do any of these things. Yet the capital outlay for such a marvellous piece of mechanism is substantially less than for the cheapest tractor. Running expenses are quite nominal. As for depreciation, there is-n't any. Of course, a carbao wears out eventually, true. But by the time it is no longer fit to run it has reproduced itself several times over. A new generation or two of lumbering carbaos are at work already by the time the old generation is ready for the scrap heap. Even then its value is still considerable if only for its hide, horns and hooves.

If you think too that this helpful animal returns the cost of its upkeep in the form of manure alone, then, obviously, no tractor ever conceived can possibly compete for favour in the eyes of a Java farmer. It may be taken for granted that no high-pressure salesman, no matter how high his pressure, will ever succeed in selling a tractor to a "tani" or Javanese peasant. His preference will always be the carbao. And twenty million farmers can't be wrong.

That they are not wrong is evident from the fact that annually with the help of the carbaos about twenty million farmers cultivating over twenty million acres of land grow more than seventeen million tons of rice besides millions of tons of other food stuffs. This does not include export products and other commercial growths such as rubber, tea, coffee, coconuts (palm oil), tobacco and similar products.

The share the carbaos has in this prodigious amount of work and production is considerable. And his share in the domestic economy of the average farmer here is therefore of vital importance. In the production of the primary staple, rice, the following number of hours are spent on the cultivation of one hectare per harvest or about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres roughly:

Hours of man labour	285
Hours of woman labour . . .	674
Hours of carbao labour with one team of carbao	59

According to these figures women seem to work much harder than the men. But that is hardly correct. They work longer. That is all. The reason for this is that rice-growing is peculiarly a woman's



A carabao does not sweat. Therefore it is necessary to cool them off once or twice after hours of hard working.

occupation. The young shoots need careful nursing, delicate handling while being planted. Harvesting which is also a woman's job requires nimble fingers and a delicate touch. And thrashing is also done mostly by women. It is only the heavy work like ploughing and churning the mud into a smooth consistency which is done by the men. And by the carabao.

Its share of labour in rice production is important, but not greatly expressed in the number of hours worked. It becomes greater in the production of secondary staples or supplementary foods such as corn or maize, soya beans, potatoes, peanuts and similar products. In the production of these crops the carabao's share of labour is some 35 % as appears from the following table:

Products	Man Hours	Woman Hours	One team Buffalo Hours
Corn or maize	67	10	59
Soya Beans	25	24	19
Sweet potatoes	93	4	35
Peanuts	50	5	31

At its best the carbaо is a tall, imposing animal of impressive girth with horns having a span, at times, of six feet. Its hide is extremely thick and not porous. The animal cannot sweat. This makes it necessary to let it cool off for a certain period every day. This is done by letting it wallow in streams or mud. Should this be neglected the beast is apt to die in a high fever. Throughout the island it is a common sight to see a huge carbaо ambling quietly down to a stream with a diminutive Indonesian boy perched on its mighty back. Or a herd of them wallowing in a wayside pool or river, little boys splashing and playing with the cumbersome but mild mannered beasts.

Large buffalo herds do not exist in Java. In some areas breeders may have as many as 100 head, but rarely more. The number owned by the average small farmer, and all farmers in Java are small farmers, ranges from one to eight head of cattle. One family can employ at most no more than two to four animals. The rest are a form of investment. They are hired out for work in exchange for a small fee plus their keep.

Besides working as a draft animal the carbaо also serves as food. It is slaughtered for its meat. And for its hide. Buffalo hides are an important export commodity. Prior to the war some 250,000 carbaо hides were exported annually. The beautifully fretted, gilt and painted Wayong puppets and the exquisite headdresses, collars and other adornments of the dancers of Bali and Java are made of the hide of the carbaо. Its horns are cut and carved and turned into handsome articles of use or ornamentation. In life and death the carbaо's uses are many. Certainly more so than the tractor's.

Unlike the tractor, the carbaо needs grazing only, in his leisure hours, to keep alive. He is the Indonesian peasant's best friend.





The plow, primitive, but adequate. This type is being used on flooded fields, the „sawahs”.

In Middle and East Java hundreds or thousands of water buffaloes are used as draft animals. On the sugar plantations too, where the cane is carried to the mills by the carbaos harnessed to carts or sleds. This patient and gentle animal is a feature of the Javanese landscape. It has many uses in many ways, among them, the way elephants are used in Burma. For, in Indonesia too, forests are cleared, roots torn up and timber lugged not by petrol-run tractors but by the grass-fed tractors of Indonesia, the carbao.

Without the buffalo the Indonesian farmer would feel as futile as he would without a plough.

The Plough

The implements used by the Indonesian farmer are extremely simple yet quite adequate. The most important of them all is the plough. This, though primitive, is effective. The one used in Java consists of four parts — the yoke, the shaft the plough-head to which the ploughshare is attached, and the tail or handle. The yoke to which a pair of water buffalo or, in some parts, zebu are harnessed is made of different kinds of light wood, frequently of bamboo. The plough-head is made of hard wood shaped like a propeller blade curved in such a way as to turn up the furrow to the right of the ploughman. In



The Indonesian farmer ploughs in concentric spirals. The corners of his field are being turned over with a mattock.

Sumatra the furrow is ploughed left. The iron ploughshare is V-shaped and fits over the tip of the ploughhead. In Java the ploughman holds the plough-handle with his left hand and guides his buffalo with reins held in his right. For other kinds of ploughing different ploughs are used such as the Chinese plough or the Hindu plough. For the former only one animal is necessary, the ploughshare is more pointed and not curved so that the earth is merely turned superficially. This is not suitable for rice lands and is restricted in its use for turning up the soil of vegetable gardens. The Hindu plough contains more metal, ploughs deeper and is employed largely in dry rice fields.

Next in importance is the harrow. This consists of a wooden beam provided with a number of wooden teeth. A split bamboo shaft to which a couple of buffaloes are yoked at one end is fitted at right angles into the middle of the rake at the other end. This end of the shaft near the peasant protrudes beyond the beam below it. On it the peasant seats himself to weighten the rake. As the animals draw it across the flooded and ploughed field it straightens out the furrows and emulsifies the mud to a smooth consistency.

His other implements consist of a mattock, tipped to its handle at different angles in different parts of the archipelago; a spade, a billhook, a sickle and the "ani-ani" or the small harvesting knife used by women harvesters for cutting off the ears of rice. In some of the islands the rice is harvested with sickles and severed close to the ground.



It's time for planting. The ploughed fields are flooded in order to get a smooth consistency of mud on the surface.

Not so in Java. There, with the "ani-ani", only the head of the rice plant is nipped off, stalk by stalk. This rice knife consists of a short length of stick, about 6 to 8 inches long. An inch or two from its head a slightly curved blade fitted into a piece of wood about two to three inches long is attached crosswise to the longer piece. The stalk is caught between the blade and the thumb and is nipped off by pressure. In other parts a ring is worn on the index finger, a short blade attached to it. It serves the same purpose and is used in the same way as the "ani-ani".

The Land

More than half of the Indonesian archipelago is made up of mountain, forest and jungle. About one seventh consists of rivers, lakes, fish ponds and built-in areas. The rest, that is, about one third of the total area, is arable land. This comprises an area of some 82 million acres in Java and Madura alone. About 3 million acres consist of European Estates devoted to the production of export crops such as rubber, sugar, tea, tobacco, fibres and coconuts. On the remaining arable area enough food is produced to feed the population amounting to-day to about 72 million people. Minor food crops are grown on

42 million acres. The major food crops such as rice, maize, potatoes, cassava, soya beans and peanuts are grown on 30 million acres.

The most important of these major food crops is rice. It is the staple article of food for almost all Indonesians. During the ten years preceding the war the average amount available to each person was 175 lbs per annum or some 8 ounces a day for every man, woman and child. This was augmented by other foods such as those mentioned previously and supplemented by fish, fowl, buffalo and goat's meat, a little mutton, different vegetables and a variety of fruits. In Java and Madura alone about 9 million tons of rice were produced annually on an area of about half of the 20 million acres owned by some 20 million farming families.

Two main forms of proprietary rights are discernible in Indonesian rural communities. The one is known as "inherited, individual ownership", the other as "communal ownership". Individual ownership entitles a man to transfer his rights to an other Indonesian. That is, it can be let, leased or mortgaged. But only the rights of usage may be sold, not the land itself. The rights of land held in communal ownership is vested not in an individual, but in the members of a given rural community. Two forms of such communal ownership exist. The one is characterised by communal ownership with permanently fixed shares, the other by communal ownership with shares periodically redistributed. Neither of these forms of ownership are absolute. But both entitle the holders of the land to use it in the interest of the community. These rights, however, do not include the right of alienation.

All such rights are laid down by "Adat" or the ancient, traditional laws of the Indonesians. All, that is, except the law prohibiting alienation. This was promulgated by the Netherlands Indies Government in August 1875. It prohibits the sale of land by Indonesians to non-Indonesians. This measure was taken as a protection of Indonesians who are not yet money-wise against themselves and against foreign Asiatic and European money-minded businessmen. Two or three exceptions to these forms of ownership exist. But they are of minor importance.

As the ancient Javanese legend tells us, there are two ways of growing rice in Java and on some of the other islands. There is rice grown on dry lands and rice grown on "sawahs" or flooded fields. The latter is by far the most general. Of this two forms exist. There is rice grown on "sawahs" which depend on the rains for their water supply and "sawahs" independent of rains. These are watered by irrigation, either from rivers, lakes or springs in their vicinity or by modern irrigation works. Fields dependent on rain can produce no more than one crop of rice annually, irrigated fields grow two or three crops every year.

The Indonesian farmer distinguishes several sorts of fields and soils. Thus he speaks of "fat land supplied with living water"; "lean land supplied with little or no living water". He also distinguishes between "lowland sawahs", "mountain sawahs" and "marshy fields". And several others, such as "crumbly sawahs", "heavy clay sawahs" and "clay and sand sawahs"; "black earth sawahs", "red earth sawahs" and "white sawahs". Nor do these distinctions exhaust the differences.

One of the most obvious distinctions is that between the ricefields in the plains or lowlands and those cut into the sides of hills forming staggered terraces along their slopes. The amount of work involved in cutting these terraced rice fields out of a sloping hill-side is monumental. It would be that even if done by bulldozers. Done by the patient, tireless and industrious hands of millions of men and women, the achievement is prodigious.

Clever irrigation works enable the farmers to grow two or three crops annually. If they were dependent on rain, only one crop could be grown.





In the far away mountain areas, where no modern irrigation systems exist yet, the farmers build their own aquaducts, simple, but effective.

Water

The first thing done after the "Slamatan" is the preparation of the soil for planting. This initial procedure consists of attending to the water supply. And this means repairing dykes and dams. Both are usually necessary. The dykes which consist of banked earth have generally suffered from the effects of burning suns and tropical rains so that they will have dried and crumbled in parts and have been washed away. The same is true of the dams. And as these too are made of stamped earth, reinforced by palm-tree logs, branches and, at times, by baskets filled with earth, they usually also need repairing.

Dams of this type although primitive are adequate for irrigating small complexes of rice fields. Where the water supply is drawn from big rivers more substantially built and more modern dams are necessary.

After repairs have been made the next step taken by the "tani" or peasant is to dig a channel from some point in the dam at a level higher than his fields. As he proceeds the water trickles down to them.

Before increasing the flow he strengthens the dykes. This he does with sods of earth, rocks or stones and branches.

In some areas the fields are too distant from a modern and technically controlled water supply. Every peasant therefore taps as much water as he thinks he needs from whatever source his water is drawn. He does this, however, with consideration for his neighbours' needs. Notwithstanding his consideration dissension does sometimes arise, for it is inevitable that the more modest man and he whose fields are more remote from the dam is at a disadvantage and receives less water than the others.

The irrigation of such rice fields although primitive is effective though not completely efficient according to modern standards. Much use is made of bamboo for the purpose of irrigation. Bamboo poles are converted into hollow conduit pipes or lengths are split into halves and used as drains. These bamboo conduits are carried not only across rice fields, but they sometimes also span wide rivers and canyons, other bamboo pipes tapping the water flow along its route.

Where it is supplied from modern water works under government control the water although provided gratis is not free. That is, the supply is free of charge but the quantity is determined not by the peasant but by government engineers who apportion water to the "sawahs" according to precise calculations. These are based on the area to be irrigated, the nature of the soil, rainfall and the different stages in the growth of the rice plants. This regular and controlled water supply enables the "tani" in certain parts of Java to grow three crops where previously he harvested but one.

As soon as he has repaired the dam and reinforced his dykes, the "tani" increases the flow of water and allows his fields to be partially flooded so that the soil becomes thoroughly soaked. Only then does he start to work on the soil itself. Is his field a small one or covered with slime, he uses a mattock to turn the soil. Otherwise he employs a plough. His plough does not follow straight parallel lines but a concentric spiral. He starts to plough close to the dykes, follows a circular course and ends up in the centre of the field. In those spots which a plough cannot reach, such as the corners of the field or the parts alongside a dyke, he uses a mattock or hoe. He then ploughs his field again, this time across the first furrows. As a result the soil is thoroughly broken up.

After ploughing, the fields remain untouched for a time to allow the soil to grow sweet. During this period a little water is allowed to flow across the fields. This keeps them from drying out. A constant flow of water is maintained as this hastens the process of eliminating sourness from the fallow earth.

The farmer knows how much depends
on the care he spends for his field. This
keeps him busy all day long.





Standing on the toothed beam of his harrow, the farmer rides over his field to smoothen the mud before planting.

Mud

"Sawah" rice grows in mud. Furrows are ploughed not with the purpose of planting seed in them but merely to break up the soil so that when the flow of water saturates it, it can be turned into mud. And the smoother and the more emulsified the mud the more suitable it is for planting rice shoots. To bring this condition about the fields are broken up by mattocks, ploughed, flooded, harrowed and trampled by the teams of heavy, massive water-buffaloes. And when the mud is as smooth as the peasant can make it, he replaces the harrow by a beam or plank of wood to which he harnesses his team of buffaloes. And, standing on the beam he rides across the fields of mud to level them out.

After some 55 days of this preparatory work the soil is ready to receive the young rice shoots. In areas where the water supply is plentiful this work does not take that long. Once this work is completed, planting is proceeded with. Unless of course the seedlings are not yet advanced enough. In this case the fields are kept moist by a constant flow of water until the rice shoots are ready to be transplanted.

* * *

The remnants of the previous harvest and weeds are being turned under to decay. This fertilizes the soil.



Twenty inches deep the farmer and his buffaloes splash through the heavy mud. Much depends on the smoothness of the earth.





Bringing home the harvest. There is something solemn in carrying the first bunches of rice home for drying.

Seed and Seedlings

Three ways of obtaining seed are employed in Java. The peasant either selects his seed from his own plants before or during the harvesting; he buys or borrows it from others or he obtains it from the "dessa lumboong". A "dessa" is a group or complex of "kampongs" or villages cohering as a collective by virtue of territorial proximity or because of consanguinity. A "lumboong" is an institution established by the government to protect the Indonesian farmer against his ignorance of money values and against exploitation by foreign Asiatics. The institution functions almost precisely as a bank does among us. Instead of depositing money or borrowing money from it, the Javanese peasant deposits rice or borrows rice from it. After a harvest he will, if he is thrifty, deposit his crop at the "lumboong" and draw on it as required. Should his deposit be exhausted he can borrow against his next harvest. So too with rice seed. He can either draw seed for planting from his own rice deposits or borrow it from the "lumboong". Both for seed and for rice he pays interest but pays it in kind not in money. He needs little money but craves it, mostly, to indulge his pride, conceits and vanities. Very much as with us.

Having obtained his rice sheaves he removes the seed from the ears. He does this either by rubbing the ears between his hands, between his feet or by combing the seed free with the help of the serrated edge

of half a coconutshell. They are then sifted, subsequently placed in a dish of water and stirred up by hand. Seeds which float to the surface are removed. Only the "sinkers", that is the full and heavy seeds are used for planting. Where running water is available, the seeds are placed in baskets and these deposited in the stream for two or three days. By then the seeds have started to germinate. They are dried a couple of hours before planting. Some farmers scatter wood ash over them and across the nursery bed. This acts as a disinfectant or insecticide.

By then a nursery bed has already been prepared. This, in precisely the same way as the "sawah" itself except that the mud is reduced to still finer consistency if a somewhat more solid one. The reason for this is that in its early stage of germination the seed may not sink into the mud but merely adhere to it. The ideal method of planting is to place each seed separately on its bed. This is economical as nothing is lost. And efficient as it allows each seedling to grow freely and develop fully. Seed by seed planting is economical as only some 10 lbs of seed is required for about $1\frac{3}{4}$ acres.

A nursery bed demands much more care than a rice field as weeds flourish more abundantly and the beds, therefore, need more frequent and more careful weeding. In plucking the shoots from their beds great care must be taken to extract them gently as their roots are not yet entangled.

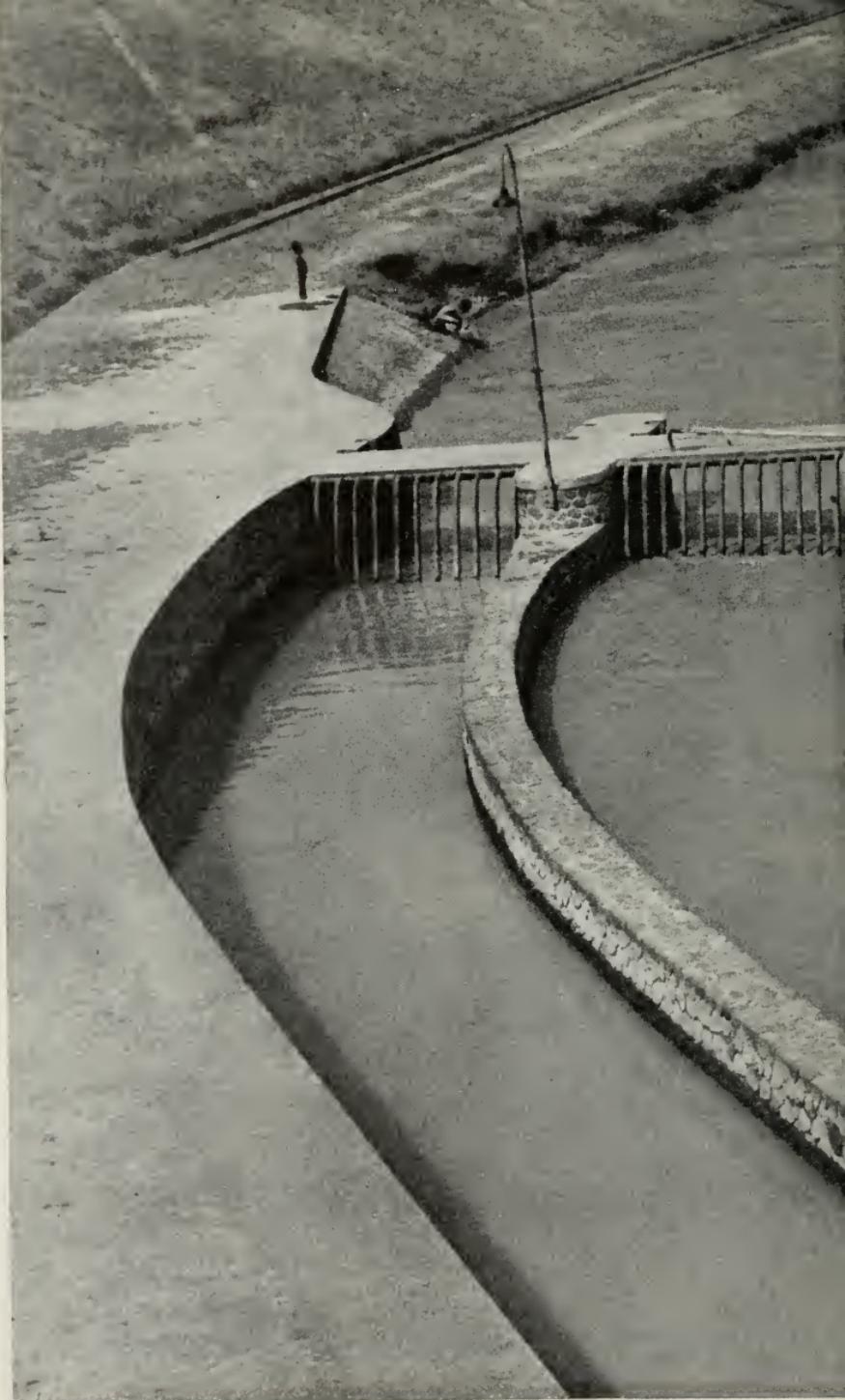
In swampy areas this method of growing seedlings is not possible as the soil is always covered with a layer of slime. Beds are therefore laid out on floating islands of water plants. These are covered with a layer of rice straw over which soil is scattered.

As soon as the rice fields are ready to be planted and, provided the seedlings have reached a stage of development advanced enough for transplanting, girls and women pluck them carefully from their beds and men transfer them to the adjacent fields of mud. There they lay them out on the surface of the mud in regular rows shoot by shoot.

All these preparations and activities are so regulated that transplanting does not begin until the wet monsoon is imminent. This is the case more especially in areas dependent on rain for their water supply and not on government controlled water reservoirs.

A couple of days before the seedlings are plucked the beds are flooded so that the plucking can be effected with ease and without damage to the tender shoots. As each plant is plucked its roots are immediately rinsed in water and a few plants bound together. Usually, they are topped with the help of a special knife. Topping reduces evaporation and is conducive to speedier and fuller foliation.

There is no more delightful scene in Java than that of troops of women and girls tripping along a country road at dawn on their way to plant "bibit" or rice shoots. Gaily coloured sarongs encase their slender bodies, highly coloured gauzy scarves on their heads or draped about their shoulders, wheel-cart hats surmount their gleaming black hair or their white turbans. And the giggling and the chatter make one think that a flock of exotic birds has escaped from an aviary. Arrived at their destination, the "sawahs", they wade calf deep in mud and set about planting the "bibit". With the left hand they pick up a bundle of shoots laid out ready for planting, extract two or three with



Scientifically calculated amounts of water are being lead to the different rice fields, so that each farmer gets his share.





Only women's soft fingers can satisfactorily replant the seedlings from the nursery beds to the fields.

the right and plant them upright in the mud in parallel rows. Between each two or three plants a distance of some 8 to 12 inches is allowed. And seen from a distance the rows of plants look as if they have been measured off by a foot rule and planted with the help of a tee-square. The work continues until an hour before midday. Should all the laid out "bibit" not have been planted the ladies return late in the afternoon and continue planting until sunset. To watch them at their work is to marvel at the speed and nimbleness with which they plant their rice shoots; at their precision and at the regularity of the rows. A full acre is planted by about 25 girls working no longer than 4 hours.

After the seedlings have been planted nothing is done to the "sawahs" for a couple of days except to allow a little fresh water to flow across them. This is done with great care as otherwise the young shoots might be damaged or uprooted. A week or two after having been planted the rice shoots change their colour from pale-yellow to a fresh tender green. The water is then drained from the fields and replaced with fresh water. This is the most important part of rice growing — renewing the water supply at precisely the right moment and in the correct quantities.

Planting rice shoots is a delicate job, but the women are experienced in doing it. Shoot by shoot, nevertheless amazingly quick, the seedlings are stuck in the soft mud.





A scarecrow, attached to a master string. Pulling the string causes all attached scarecrows to flap their palm leave hands and the birds are scared away.

Scarecrows

As soon as the rice begins to bloom it attracts large flocks of marauding birds. To scare them off scarecrows are erected in the fields. These differ somewhat from those in western countries. In Java the peasants build small huts in the rice fields in which little boys are put on watch. There they guard the crops against these destructive marauders. Different kinds of scarecrows are used. In some fields they consist of very simple contraptions. A flexible bamboo rod is stuck into the ground, banana leaves attached to it.

When the wind blows the rods bend with the wind and cause the banana leaves to flutter or flap. This scares the birds off. But this type of scarecrow is not very effective as it depends on the wind which does not blow very often in Java. More effective is a somewhat more complicated contrivance. This consists of long strips of bamboo bark which serve as ropes. To these, rags or banana leaves are attached. The ropes lead from the little hut where a couple of bronze skinned youngsters hold a master string. From it these other strings lead to different parts of the rice field or to different fields. As the crows descend on a field the boys pull their master string, the rags and leaves are agitated and this movement frightens the birds away. In other parts, especially West-Java, the scarecrows are made not of rags or leaves but of "Angklungs" or bamboo pipes fitted into a groove in a bamboo frame and mounted on flexible bamboo rods stuck into the ground. These are attached to the strings. As the master string is pulled the bamboo rods are bent to and fro. This movement causes the bamboo pipes of the "Angklung" to glide against each other. The impact produces a musical sound and this scares the flocks of birds away. Similar musical instruments not manipulated but depending on a passing breeze are erected in some fields to frighten not birds but evil spirits.

On his scaffold the guard sees to it, that winged marauders keep away from his rice fields. When a flock descends, he pulls the master strings and causes the scarecrows to sway.

The kids like to sit in their "gubuks", high in the air, to keep the birds away.





It looks like the ears are ripe for harvesting, aren't they?

The Harvesters

As the rice plumes turn yellow and leaves and stalks loose their green colour the people of Java know that harvest time is approaching. And as the time approaches girls, eager to set about garnering the crops, trip down to the fields, now dry, and examine the heavy ears of rice to see whether the time has indeed come for them to pick up their "ani-ani" and set about nipping the rice from their slender stalks. They are eager not only because the crops mean food but also because harvest time is a gay, a happy period in their lives. As it is in the lives of all peasants no matter their creed or country, the colour of their skins or the kind of crop. Or whether sickle, scythe, harvester machine or "ani-ani" is used. No, not the harvester machine. That turns farming into an industry and in that there is perhaps a lot of money but little joy.

The day arrives at last and after the customary "slamatan", prayers and offerings to Devi Sri, the girls and women troop down to fields, each with an "ani-ani" in her hand. Although each stalk is cut separately, the speed with which the crop is gathered is quite incredible. They nip the stalks about 8 inches or so from the top, place it in the crook of their left arm and when this is full, they bind the sheaves with strips of banana-tree bark and deposit it at a pre-arranged spot. After the day's work these sheaves are bundled into larger ones



Reeds in a pond? No, young rice shoots on a flooded field.

weighing about 7 lbs each. The paddy is laid out in the field to dry and when dry it is collected and piled up into small ricks.

Except in North Sumatra where the sickle or scythe is used the "ani-ani" is universally employed throughout Indonesia with which to harvest the rice crop. In Java and Sumatra, in Borneo, Celebes and the Lesser Sunda Islands, in the Molluccas and everywhere else, nothing but the "ani-ani" is used and has been used since prehistoric days. Millions of Indonesian women have wielded it for thousands of years and still do. Yet a more inefficient instrument for the job can hardly be imagined. What it amounts to in Java and Madura is that ten or eleven million acres of land are harvested twice a year, if not oftener, with an instrument less effective than a pair of blunt nail scissors. And yet this little instrument is known not only in Indonesia but far beyond the frontiers of the Archipelago; in the Philippines and deep in the heart of French Indo-China. For such constancy and application to a prehistoric instrument and so ancient a custom there must be very sound reason. And there is.

Is not rice the body and the flesh of the Goddess Sri? And does it not therefore contain the soul, the essence, the "sumangat", the life-force of Sri? And wherein does the virtue, the life-giving nourishment of rice reside if not in this essence? To wield a mighty blade in harvesting rice would simply mean that this essence would be scared off. Then of what value would the rice be? To what purpose harvest



Rice terraces cut in the mountain slopes: a monumental piece of work, even if it was done with bulldozers.

Harvesting: the ears are being cut one by one with that curious tool, the "ani-ani".





The harvesters receive their wages in rice, which they carry home in bamboo baskets on their heads.

it? Therefore, the "ani-ani", a small blade easily hidden in the hand is used and not a murderous looking weapon such as a sickle or a scythe. The essence may not be frightened away. And it is for this reason too that the harvesters at their work labour in silence. No shouting is permitted or loud noises made. Every kind of disturbance is taboo. And the blade of the "ani-ani" must at all costs be kept hidden. No greater faux pas is conceivable for a harvester than to drop her "ani-ani" whilst on the job. Such clumsiness is sure to frighten the essence away. Nor may the rice-knife be taken home if the field is not yet completely harvested. If it is, the blade having been in contact with the essence might well withdraw the essence with it as it is carried away from the field. Not only is everything possible done to avoid frightening the essence, steps are also taken to fortify it. This is achieved by stuffing the hollow bamboo handle of the "ani-ani" with wholesome, strengthening herbs and grasses.

The handle of the "ani-ani" is sometimes shaped like a bird in flight. Its normal form of a cross is probably a simplified stylization of this. Or the handle is decorated with a horse or a horse's head. This is a very simple piece of magic whereby the "ani-ani" is egged on to



The way home after a day's hard working.
But harvesting is satisfactory business.

work as swiftly as a flying bird or with the speed of a fleet footed horse.

There are many taboos and prescriptions relating to the proper harvesting of rice, too many for the simple daughters of a simple farmer to remember. Or, for the flighty to respect. An older woman, functioning in fact as a priestess, is usually in charge of the harvesters. She sees to it that the rituals are observed. The onus is on her that the harvesters deport themselves with the necessary propriety. Her responsibility is great, for on her depends whether the harvest turns out to be a rich one or not. And whether it be rich or poor is determined by the strictness with which the rituals and prescriptions, as laid down by Devi Sri and her spouse for all eternity are observed.

Bringing Home the Harvest

Harvesting like planting is a communal activity. And as each harvester leaves the field she receives her pay for the work done. She receives it not in money but in kind. And during harvest time in Java

the country roads and lanes are filled with happy girls and women strolling back to their kampongs each carrying her wages for the day under her arm. Wages for harvesting are more or less equal to those for planting and represent 5% to 35% of the quantity of rice harvested. The difference between 5% and 35% is accounted for, as in our own economy, by supply and demand. The less hands there are available the higher the wages. Members of the farmer's family are of course in a favoured position and the highest wages go to them.

Drying

The sheaves of wages are taken home and dried in the sun. And during harvest time in Java wherever one goes one sees neat little

In their gardens the farmers lay their rice to dry in the sun. From the quantity one can conclude his wealth.





A wealthy farmer's house in the Padang district, Sumatra.

sheaves of golden rice drying on the ground in front of a cottage or on fences. In Bali the weather beaten brick walls which surround every family complex of houses are buried beneath these golden mounds of rice and the ground in front of the homes of the more prosperous is carpeted with these precious rugs of gold gleaming in the sun.

Storing

The ricks in the fields are collected and brought home to be stored in barns, big and little, simple or elaborate. These barns vary from place to place. In Java they are usually built of bamboo. In Bali they are handsome red brick edifices at times elaborately decorated by geometric designs carved in the bricks at the eaves, corners, entrance, and centre. In Sumatra among the Bataks and Minangkabaus the barns are constructed of hard woods elegantly proportioned, erected on piles, their roofs the shape of buffalo horns similar to those of their houses.

The legendary reason for this is interesting. It is told that at one time in the dim and distant past the rivalry between Sumatrans and Javanese was excessively keen. The two peoples taunted each other.

This picture clearly shows an elaborately carved and stained Toradja barn, which is, like the houses, built on piles.



Each claimed to be the stronger, the more valorous. To settle the dispute, it was decided, let the two animals, symbolical of the two regions, fight it out between them. The tiger fought for the Javanese, the buffalo for the Sumatrans. The buffalo won. The victors condemned their beaten adversary ever after to wear a sarong, a feminine garment. Thus they proclaimed their weakness to the world at large. And they, the strong and victorious, who wear trousers, fashioned the roofs of their buildings ever since in the shape of the horns of that strong and victorious animal, the buffalo. Thus they honour the national symbol and proclaim to the world their strength and their victory.

The Toradjas in Celebes store their rice in beautiful little barns built on piles. The walls and eaves are beautifully and elaborately carved and stained. The roof too has a shape peculiarly its own. This resembles the curve of a prao or canoe. It is said that when the ancestors of the Toradjas first settled on Celebes they arrived in praos. As they had no houses in which to shelter they lived at first in temporary homes the main and most substantial part of which consisted of an inverted prao. Ever since they have built their houses so that the roof of each house resembles the canoes of their ancestors. Indeed on their fishing expeditions the praos they use are identical in shape and construction to those used by their early ancestors.

Harvest Festival

As with us harvest-time is celebrated by feasting, dancing and rejoicing communally and individually. A farmer who has had a bumper crop will express his gratitude by a little celebration at which he shares his good luck with his neighbours. The customary feast is prepared and although a diversity of foods is copiously appreciated by the guests, the supreme moment of the celebration is the appearance of the "dalang", the tale teller with his little stage not unlike our own Punch and Judy show. To speak of his appearance and performance as the supreme moment is to be somewhat misleading. His performance lasts considerably longer than a moment. It goes on for hours. Sometimes it may last the whole night.

In the courtyard of the host's home or in the house itself, the tale-teller sets up his little stage. The front consists of a screen. Behind it he places a brass lamp and between the light and the screen he adroitly manipulates his actors and actresses whose silhouette is thrown on the screen. This is a purely Javanese cultural form. The actors consist of figures in the flat cut out of buffalo hide, beautifully fretted and painted with purple, blue and other pigments, in parts overlaid with gilt. Each figure is attached to a long stick, other sticks being attached to arms and legs. This enables the "dalang" to manipulate them something in the manner of marionettes. Although the form of entertainment is Javanese in origin the characters of the play are largely drawn from Hindu sources, from the epic tales of the Mahabarata and the Ramayana with characters and elements of distinctly Javanese origin.

It would be completely wrong to imagine that these performances occupy a position among the Javanese people similar to that of the Punch and Judy show with us. Although farce and comedy and wit as broad as that of the Restoration stage, are not missing. If anything, the life and destiny, the trials and tribulations of the main characters for Indonesians combine the qualities and significance of a mystery play to us plus those of the ancient Greek drama to Athenians. The tale-tellers intonation, enunciation and inflection of the Kawi tongue in which these tales of heroes, villains, Gods and devils are told are prescribed by tradition. Any modification, however slight, is resented by his audience. And his audience although composed largely of unlettered peasants are nevertheless well versed in the finesse and subtleties of these matters. And among the lettered men of Java the classical Wayang plays are perhaps better known and more thoroughly appreciated than Shakespeare among us. Or the Bible.

The ladies of the audience are seated or grouped in front of screen. They see shadows only. The male and, of course, the more important section of the dalang's audience, sit with him and watch the play of the marionettes themselves. They see too with what deft hands he manipulates the beautiful Queen Satyavati, or Prince Ardjuna "quiet and wellmade with half closed eyes"; the "proud and slender" Citraksa "his eyes lentil shaped", his body gilded, his face pink, his nose held high and proudly in the air. And Bhima the terrible must, in posture and features, reveal all the traits with which tradition has invested him. Every detail is prescribed and from these the "dalang" may not depart.

Before the play starts, the wayang puppets are being sorted out in sequence of their act.





The profound devotion of the
dancers is expressed on their faces.
For the dances are closely
related to religion.



In some districts visitors are invited to join the dances during the harvest festivals and usually become the laughing stock of the villagers . . .

He has no freedom for his artist's soul except where the purely Javanese characters are concerned. These are generally the comic relief. And of this his wit takes full advantage.

As the endless tale proceeds, and the endless drama, sweet beverages, highly coloured, and sweet cakes technicolour in appearance, are passed round for the refreshment of the audience. In the meantime they watch the complicated affairs of the Gods and devils and listen to the musical accompaniment supplied by gamalan players or to sound-effects only, produced by the clash of cymbals or gongs.

In more civilized districts the picturesque ancient oxcarts made room for railway carriages and lorries.





In rural districts thrashing and winnowing is done the ancient primitive way, prescribed by tradition.

Thrashing

Before the harvested rice is ready to be cooked it must be thrashed, winnowed and husked. This takes place, usually, every five or ten days according to the condition of the peasant larder. Then the tani's wife sets about the work with the willing help of a few neighbouring house-wives. Their performance of this household task lends the Indonesian countryside a character all its own. Wherever one goes whether in Java, Bali, Lombok or Celebes, or the different parts of Sumatra and in some parts of Borneo one is almost always greeted by the sound made by the women as they wield their long wooden or bamboo poles thrashing or husking rice. "Tamp-tamp, tamp-tamp" is the rhythmic sound heard when a couple of women are busy stamping their poles into the hollowed out wooden or stone husking trough. If three or more are employed at the same block the rhythm changes and becomes "ta-ta-tamp, ta-ta-tamp, ta-ta-tamp". Or it may be—"tamp-tamp-tamp, tamp-tamp-tamp". It is not a dominating sound but subdued. Its rhythm, however, lends it a dominating quality more insistent and prevailing than the spasmodic sounds of cocks crowing, pigs grunting, dogs barking and children bawling. Especially in Bali. The sound is as characteristic of the kampongs of Indonesia as the smell of scorched lard is characteristic in the Chinese



The way of thrashing differs in various areas of Indonesia, though only in its details.

towns. Or fish in a fishmarket. It is, however, more pleasing than either and as beatific a sound as the humming of bees. Or that of childrens' voices on a summer's afternoon in some village school droning out in chorus the exciting information that C-A-T spells cat. And when her supply for the ensuing week is ready the peasant-wife still continues to thrash, winnow and husk. But this time it is the rice of one of the neighbours who helped her thrash, winnow and husk her own week's supply.

In some parts of Indonesia as among the Toradja's this task is performed by the men.

The thrashing of rice is unlike the same procedure with wheat. No flails are used. The bundles of rice are placed on the edge of the husking block the ears of rice hanging over the trough. The women then proceed to thrash the ears until most of the rice has fallen into the hollow. Any seeds of rice are then stamped lightly and subsequently winnowed on trays, stamped again and sifted and finally thoroughly husked. Throughout these activities all the feathered fowl in the neighbourhood, more especially high legged scrawny chicken, are having the time of their lives snapping up every grain of rice that happens to miss the receptable. The siftings are mixed with water and fed to chickens and other domestic animals.

The thrashed rice as it appears on the table of the "tani" or rather



The farmer's wife is proud of the rich harvest. Comprehensible, for she has had a major part in cultivation.



A simple water mill accelerates production. There are many forms of thrashing and husking in Indonesia.

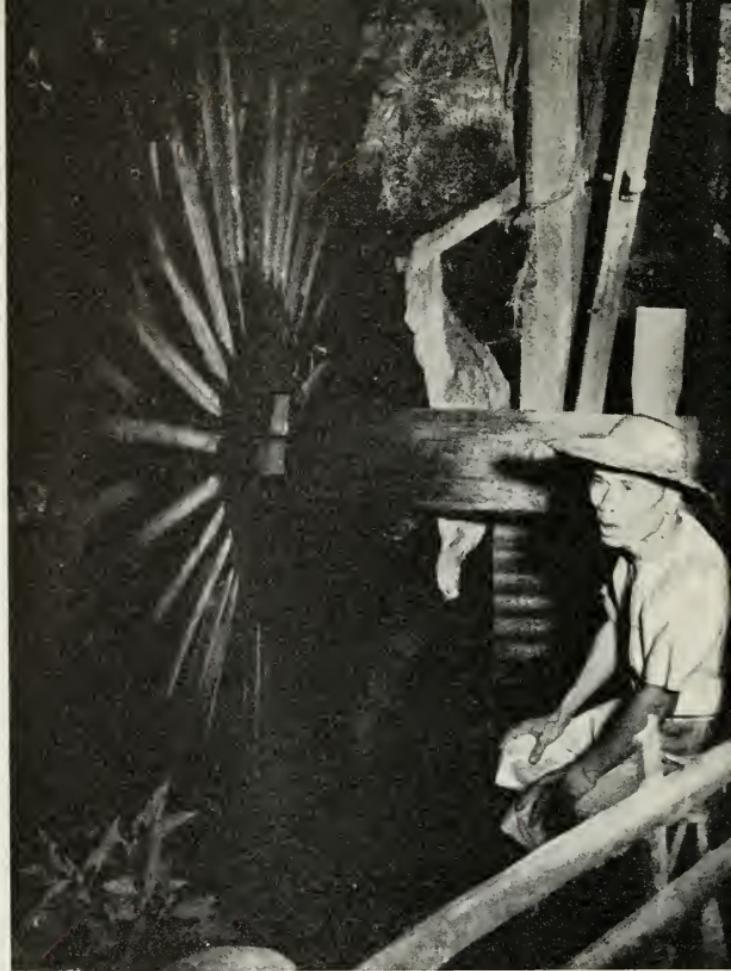
on the banana-leaf cloth spread out on matting on the floor has a different appearance from the rice we know. Instead of being white or off white it is a dark red in colour. This, because the membrane enclosing the grain has not been removed. This is of considerable importance, for some of the more valuable nourishing elements are contained precisely in this membrane. If, however, the "tani" entertains a guest, the rice served to him is more thoroughly husked and its colour when served resembles that of the rice eaten in Europe and America.

A comparison of the chemical composition of rice as husked and eaten by Indonesians and by Europeans is enlightening.

	Albumen	Fats	Starch	Fibres	Ash
Indonesian	9.05	2.80	74.93	1.12	1.10
European	7.65	0.30	78.18	0.21	0.36

Polished rice as eaten by Europeans loses therefore 10 % of its albumen content, 85 % fats, and 70 % of the nourishing salts. In other

An intermediate form between thrashing by hand and in modern mills. A water mill delivers the power to pull wooden blocks, which pound in wooden blocks, like those used in ancient times.



words all the vitamin B1 is lost, the content of vitamin A and B2 substantially if not completely reduced, small as the quantity is of these vitamins contained in rice. C vitamins the population obtains from its fruits and green vegetables; its proteins it augments with fish, fowl and other animal foods.

Mills

Rice intended for consumption in the towns or for export abroad is milled and polished in accordance with the requirements of the different markets. This process, however, reduces its food value. In fact, it is reduced to a mere starch and the original nourishing salts, fat and albumen to insignificant proportions whilst its vitamin contents are completely eliminated. The mills however must mill according to the wishes of the buyers and they supply the consumers with what they want.

Rice mills in Indonesia vary from simple, primitive contrivances employing buffaloes or water wheels as a source of motive power to those in which elaborate modern machinery is installed driven by steam. Yet, no matter how simple or how elaborate these mills might be, the rice crop is received by the mill-hands with something of the same spirit of delight which marked its harvesting, a spirit lacking

Customers of a popular credit bank: farmers and retail traders.





Bank clerks visit faraway villages by jeep and do their business in the veranda of the burgomaster's office.

in wheat mills. But then we have forgotten that wheat too is a gift from the Gods. We take such gifts for granted. Our farmers no longer erect a shrine to Devi Sri in her European aspect as the Goddess Ceres. Commerce and industry have deadened the spirit somewhat and turned divine gifts into merchandise. Wheat, unlike rice is merely a food and not like life — a gift from the Gods. And yet, it is not so long ago that "harvest-home" was as joyous a celebration among us as it is among most Indonesians. And, still is, to some extent, in the remote areas of rural Europe.

Many of the rice mills throughout Indonesia are run by Chinamen and the mills themselves are often similar to those used in China.

Bank on Wheels

Rice is subject to many afflictions and all because of Kala Gumarang's infatuation with the Goddess Sri. Boars, rats, birds and insects are responsible, at times, for a great deal of damage to the rice crops. Wild dogs are also apt to be a nuisance and too the "Sawah" python. Cats and owls no less. And all these enemies of the rice crops are but different aspects assumed by the protean lover of Devi Sri in his pursuit of her. He even changes himself into bugs, lice and other



Oftenly the bank's customers are illiterate and therefore their thumbprint is taken for a signature.

wogs. But Devi Sri is not unmindful of the welfare of her devotees. She therefore sends lady-birds to destroy the insects and inspires rats to destroy the "Sawah" snakes. One affliction, however, she cannot cope with — money-lenders and speculators in rice. The Government therefore took the matter out of the hands of the Goddess and into its own. The rice crops to-day are well protected against the ravages caused by human greed.

Not that the "tani" is so very greedy for money. But he does need a little. He was therefore compelled to sell his rice or to borrow money or pawn some of his possessions to obtain a few guilders. Until the end of the last century he could do this only by putting himself in the hands of foreign Asiatics. And once he fell into their hands they exploited him with callous indifference. Fortunately he could not lose his land to them, for the law protected him against such a tragedy. But in every other respect he was vulnerable and reduced at times to abject servitude. Most of everything he produced went to pay exorbitant rates of interest and his pledges were often not retrievable.

To protect the rural population against such extortion the Government established Government Pawn-shops, Popular Credit Banks and "Loomboongs" or Rice Banks. These projects were started in 1900 and they have turned out to be something of a blessing to the farmer

and his family. He can pawn his wife's trinkets or what-not at a reasonable valuation; his pledges are properly taken care of; he can borrow money at reasonable interest; and he can draw cash against his rice deposits or borrow rice or seed against repayment in kind.

At the end of 1939 there were 462 Government Pawnshops throughout Indonesia. They held between them over 43 million pledges. Against these a total amount had been advanced of 75½ million guilders. At the same time the Popular Credit Bank had loans outstanding amounting to over 30 million guilders. Loans advanced by the village Banks to 1,152,200 borrowers amounted to over 22½ million guilders. And the 5,561 Rice Banks scattered throughout the archipelago at the end of the same year had advanced 232,470,000 lbs of rice during that year.

The Popular Credit Bank is a semi-Government institution with branches everywhere. In the large towns they cater to the needs of small tradesmen, merchants and small industrial concerns. Here banking is carried on as in any bank in Europe, America or elsewhere. A visit to such a bank, however, reveals a clientele somewhat more colourful than in Lombard Street or Wall Street. Indonesian women in gay sarongs and bare feet or shod with sandals stand around waiting their turn to transact their financial business; men in sarongs or trousers or both, some with the characteristic modern black velvet cap or the older batikked turban on their heads, mix with Chinamen wearing sun-helmets and Indonesians dressed in European clothes.

How much do these farmers spend on cock-fighting? Officially this form of gambling is prohibited, but you know how things go . . .



The Dessa or Village Banks cater to a different class of borrowers. Usually he is a farmer, sometimes a small trader. Business is transacted in the spacious veranda of the Bank, where its clients await their turn squatting on the tiled floor. And as not many of them can write, a thumbprint serves instead of a signature to cheques or other documents.

Most interesting of all these banks are the banks on wheels. These cater to the financial needs of the remoter rural population living in distant kampongs, kampongs too far away from city or Dessa banks. To cope with this situation mobile banks were introduced. These made regular rounds among the kampongs and effected whatever financial transactions that were necessary. Before the war these mobile banks consisted of special trucks. To-day any and every vehicle is pressed into service; cars of every description or jeeps. Books, papers and cash box are loaded into a Jeep and bank clerk and cashier go off on their rounds of the villages. It usually stops at the house of the local "Wedana" or village-head. And the business of the day is transacted on his veranda. Here the villagers line up, make their deposits, draw cash or take up loans or repay them.

Although intended primarily for the use of farmers and to encourage their agricultural activities loans, as often as not, serve other purposes too. Thus, Noonoo borrows a few guilders, not to replace her husband's worn-out mattock, but to restock her little "warong" or way-side restaurant. And it is just possible that Sina, whose husband is sick with malaria, counts her small loan carefully to see whether over and above household expenses and the medicine she has to buy, the sum will also suffice to provide her with a new "sarong" for the coming festive season — the "Lebaran".

Yes, under the skin, all men are kin.

At the outbreak of war there were 12,000 Dessa Banks and Rice Banks in Java and Madura alone. By the middle of 1948, 7,000 of these had been reopened and were functioning again. Others have been re-opened since. Advances increased steadily from month to month. By January 1948 loans advanced amounted to almost 7 million guilders, in April it increased to 12 million and by May it had reached 14 million. Without these financial loans the rural population could hardly carry on its agricultural activities. They have become a vital part in its economy.

By the Way

You who have hitherto relished the dishes prepared according to the culinary arts of Europe and America have a new and exceptionally palatable experience awaiting you during your sojourn in Java. The roast beef of Old England — which comes from Scotland (or is it the Argentine?) — is unexcelled. Fried chickens as served south of the Dixie Line, clam chowder and apple-pie are incomparable. The fried steaks and pea-soup of Holland, the stuffed calf's-breast of Czechoslovakia, the "Ausgezogener Apfelstrudl" of Vienna, the paprika chicken of Hungary, the raviolis of Italy, the roast sucking pig of Yougo-Slavia, the kous-kous of the Near East are incontestably a



Rice — for the millions and for the “gourmands”.

gourmet's delight. So too are some of the dishes of Spain as Aroz Valenciana and Jamon Serrano. The Bouleebaisse of Marselles and the other multitudinous delights of the French kitchen, the endless variety of Scandinavian savouries, the complicated delights of an Argentinian puchero, the savoury stew of a Brazilian canja, the crisp and tender joy of Australian roast lamb are, all in their way, perfection. The intricate extravaganzas of the Chinese kitchen, boiled or fried, go rather beyond perfection. But supreme delight of all such delights await the discerning gustatory adventurer here in Java. He will find it in eating a "rijsttafel" or rice-table.

Be your gourmet? You will certainly gratify the sensibilities of your spoiled but susceptible palate. Gourmand? Indulgance in it cannot but satisfy. For you must know that this meal is compounded of the entire gamut of exotic flavours of this exotic land. And its range of delicacies is so wide, the portions served so generous that gratification for the one is inevitable, satiety for the other certain.

Assuming you stay at the best hotel in Djakarta a "rijsttafel" will be served you by an apparently endless queue of "djongos" each boy bearing a platter containing a different dish, a different morsel, a different delicacy, another splash of colour, another dish of fragrance, piquant, succulent, savoury, spicy or — at times — obscure. Excellent as such a meal is served at a good hotel it will most likely be but an expurgated edition of the real thing, emasculated by a considerate management, to spare — shall we say — your Anglo-Saxon innocence or your simple if fastidious taste. A better idea — for the daring only — is to get yourself invited to Sunday lunch at the home of one or other of the Indonesian friends you are sure to make.

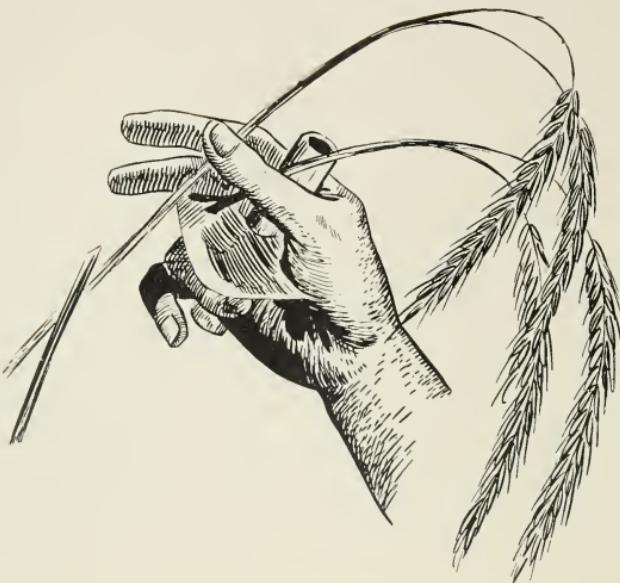
The first thing that you will probably notice is your table napkin. It will seem to have assumed the shape of some mythical monster with, so it seems, a flower between its jaws and another decorating its stern. Be reassured — you will actually be seeing it. It is no product of alcoholic vapours. Indonesian servants pride themselves on this art of folding napkins into every species of phantastic creature. Their love of colour, however, prompts them to temper the weird with floral beauty.

First, a bowl, a huge bowl of "nasi" or rice, boiled and as white as driven snow, each grain a separate and distinct entity its individuality not submerged in the inchoate cogginess of a parboiled mess. Then follows "Sajoer" or a steaming vegetable soup. The idea is that you help yourself to the rice, then pour a little of the soup over it to moisten its dryness. Subsequently a bewildering variety of dishes are passed round. You help yourself to a little of each surrounding your mound of rice with all the colours and fragrance of the East. Chicken curried and chicken roast; balls of minced meat prepared with different herbs; tropical fish in a savoury sauce; "tempé" or fermented soyabean cakes; dessicated coconut plain and dessicated coconut fried in coconut oil; banana fritters and pink tomatoes the size of cherries served with a sauce too wonderful for description; fried eggs, egg pancakes shredded, duck eggs of ancient vintage, bamboo shoots and vegetables galore. Among them aubergines and twisted beans, midget cucumbers, each vegetable soused in its own sauce, pungent, bitter, sweet and sour, hot, cold or queer. And hovering over all,

fragrant memories of all the spices of the East. No more than memories, for nothing is allowed to dominate. Not until we come to the "sambals" or peppers. Different kinds are prepared differently each with its own flavour and all of them hot. But beware of "trassie" made of dead and buried fish disinterred from its grave. It is a delicacy of the East best left to Orientals. Place the "sambals" on the side of your plate and, like a wise man partake of them sparingly. Bamboo skewers are served on which dainty morsels of grilled chicken, pork, beef or even goat's meat are speared, each served with a different sauce. The one is made of peanut butter and some other mysterious ingredients. In another you recognise soya sauce or tomato catsup. A third, a heavenly one, resembles nothing you have ever yet tasted, yet it pleases for all that. But I give up. It needs a major poet to do literary justice to such a meal. One other delicacy must however be mentioned — „kroopook". It is known as fish-cake in some countries. But there is as much resemblance between it and fish-cake as there is between the pronunciation of "fish-cake" and "kroopook". I prefer the latter. It is really something quite, quite marvellous. It consists of cooked prawns pounded together with tapioca flour and water and kneaded into a dough. The dough is rolled and kneaded and rolled again until it is paper thin. Small discs are stamped out of it and these are placed in the sun to dry. In the process the moisture evaporates and the discs shrink. To prepare them for table they are flung into boiling oil. Then a miracle happens. These small, shrivelled discs swell into monstrous shapes many times their original size. Succulent, crisp and flavoured with prawn, "kroopook" is eaten with your rice. It does not feed, perhaps, but it is delightful to dally with, for it neutralizes the palate so that it can again respond to the flavours of all the dishes which go to compose the culinary symphony called a "Rijsttafel" or "makanan nasi", dishes too many to enumerate, too subtle to describe, too exquisite to grow ponderous about. They are to be relished by the palate not described by the tongue. This, by the way.

* * *





THE GODS GAVE RICE

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