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THE AUTHOR

RICHARD CRITCHFIELD received a B.A. in Far Eastern Studies from the University of Washington and an M.S. from Columbia University School of Journalism, and has done postgraduate work in history at the Universities of Innsbruck and Vienna. He formerly covered Asia, based in New Delhi, Hong Kong, and Saigon, and later the White House, for *The Washington Star* (1963-1976). He was the recipient in 1967 of the Overseas Press Club Award, an Alicia Patterson Fund award in 1970, and a Ford Foundation Grant and Study award (1972-1976). His books include *The Golden Bowl Be Broken*, *The Long Charade: Political Subversion in the Vietnam War*, *Shahhat, an Egyptian*, and *Villages*.

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THE CHANGING PEASANT: Part IX: The Urban Migrant

by Richard Critchfield

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The number of jobless Javanese villagers crowding Jakarta is growing ever greater. One way to stem the flow is to modernize the villages themselves.

In a letter sent from the Javanese village of Pilangsari not long ago, Widgna Tarma Husen, a 42-year-old peasant, wrote that a plague of mice had completely destroyed his rice crop. "But it is not a problem for my life," he explained, "because in one and a-half moons again is harvest. I hope I am not hungry, Dick."

The calamity caused Husen and his 22-year-old wife, his fourth, to go to her village, 17 kilometers away. He described the experience (in English) as follows:

I think my waves [wife's] village very important for writing book, Dick. Because village is large but not irrigation so dray. If you come to Indonesia you can see. Village is wonderful but dray. And land is verry not much money. One hectare only \$830. If at Pilangsari one hectare is \$5,833. I am at new village stay one month already. Many friend so for eat not difficult. I am macul [to hoe in Java's sticky but fertile volcanic soil] with another people. From 7 o'clock morning until 12 o'clock he pay me Rupiah 200 [about 50 cents], eat two time. Eat first at 9 o'clock morning and I am go home 12 o'clock, sand to me nasi [lunch] at my house. And after macul with another people I am work again at my waves garden. If evening, I am visit to peoples house for looking for new friend at new

village. And I am interview with village peoples so one month also I am many friends. Oh, ya, Dick, you don't forget. Send me one seet [seed] Levais Borman. I hope you come to Indonesia again so you can visit at my waves village for new book. About me, Dick. Give my best to your family. My best.

So life for Husen, as for most peasant villagers the world over, remains precarious.¹ For like most of us, villagers live under pressure, from the weather, from pests like the mice who destroyed Husen's rice crop, from the state demanding larger surpluses, even from fluctuations in Chicago's grain market or OPEC prices. Yet poor and powerless as he is, a villager is resilient. To

1. My fullest earlier accounts of Husen's life in Pilangsari village and Jakarta, and changes in Java itself, have appeared in: "Hello, Mister! Where Are You Going," *Papers*, Alicia Patterson Fund, 1971, 250 pages, 74 photographs; "Husen," from *The Golden Bowl Be Broken: Peasant Life in Four Cultures* (Indiana University Press, 1974), pp. 218-312, 7 photographs; *Village Java 1979*, Agency for International Development Mission to Indonesia, 18 reports, 510 pages; and Chapter 14, "Pilangsari Village, Indonesia," from *Villages* (Doubleday, 1981). Husen has been the subject of numerous newspaper articles by me, beginning with "The Life of a Jakarta Betjak Man," *The Washington Star*, December 1967; and, most recently, "Java: Can big-city progress make it to the villages?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 28, 1981. In 1972 Husen was the subject of an Indonesian-made television documentary.

me Husen's life has been something of a modest success story. He has prevailed.

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"Hello, mister! Where are you going?"

The cry, in English, came from one of the *betja* men, or pedicab drivers; I glimpsed flashing white teeth in a bronzed, beaming face and a floppy hat and shirt soaked with rain. It was twilight, a December evening in 1967. A monsoon storm had washed away Jakarta's oppressive heat and fumes; the air was fresh, smelling of frangipani and jasmine and of the sweet, peculiarly Indonesian *kretek*, clove-spiced cigarettes. I stood in the entrance of the Hotel Indonesia, which as one of the few modern buildings in Jakarta in those days, seemed truly luxurious. Shiny black cars with diplomatic flags splashed past the rows of *betjas*; somewhere high up in the hotel there was the faint drumbeat of a dance band.

The rains had ended but everything looked wet; hedges, palms, buildings, and people dripped with rain. Across Welcome Circle the rusted girders of an unfinished skyscraper glistened in the oil lamps of the vendors who then crowded along Jakarta's main boulevard, Jalan Thamrin. Overhead, Christmas-style colored lights lined the street; below water surged through the open drainage canals. Jakarta in 1967 was less a city than a vast agglomeration of village-like *kampungs*, with their thatched bamboo huts and open canals, their dirt or mud roads, and their lack of electricity. People called it "The big village." And it was. There was little automobile traffic, you went everywhere by *betja*, because the drivers seemed to know everyone from their home regions of Java, including those among the vendors that lined most streets, the city had a village's sense of mutual support and community. There was crime; near the hotel in broad daylight I was once set upon by five men carrying *parangs*, or bolo knives. It was frightening, but after taking my billfold, their leader said, "Sorry, uncle, we have no money."

Jakarta was a strange place. I'd arrived as the member of a press party accompanying Vice President

Hubert Humphrey. What struck me as we drove in from the airport was how ragged and poor, if healthy, the people looked and how individualistically they behaved. In Kuala Lumpur or Singapore, the waving crowds seemed uniform and anonymous. But in Jakarta, one man might stand and mutely stare, his neighbor wildly cheer with arms upraised, and the next just stand and grin. It was a city of villagers—hicks and hayseeds, maybe, without any urban sophistication—but it seemed unlike any city I'd ever been in.

So I climbed into the *betja* and told the driver I just wanted to see the sights. He first pedaled down Jalan Thamrin, its unpaved outside lanes giving it the feel of the country, to Merdeka Square, a huge open field where cows still grazed. In the center rose Sukarno's gigantic National Monument, a pillar of Italian marble with a floodlit flame. The driver said there were 40 kilos of solid gold up there, worth a third of a million dollars. We drove past the glittering white presidential palace where the government of General Suharto had been newly installed (Sukarno, old and ailing, a broken man, was living up in the nearby mountain city of Bogor where it was cooler) and past a vast steel skeleton of what the driver said would someday be "the biggest mosque in the world." Then he pedaled on to the West Irian monument, a huge bronze giant bursting his colonial chains. Finally, we rode back to Jalan Thamrin.

Sukarno's legacy to Jakarta might have been bankruptcy and a useless pile of hollow and half-finished monuments—giant bronze statues, leaping, jumping, wildly waving their arms. In a big village that seemed to belong to its *betjas* and its poor, they made a perfect setting for a guided tour.

We visited a Chinese crocodile-breeding farm—they also made women's handbags—and took in part of a soccer game at Sukarno's fantastic national stadium built for the Asian Games. Caught in another monsoon downpour coming back, we took refuge in a roadside tea-house, and ordered hot tea. The driver said his name was Husen, that he sometimes went home to his

village to plant and harvest rice, and that he had been pedaling a *betja* in Jakarta for 12 years.

There was a soldier in the teahouse and I started to converse with him, asking how much he made, the price of rice and such. He became very agitated and began talking rapidly with Husen in Javanese. Husen, too, looked grim and I suddenly found myself back in the *betja* with Husen pedaling furiously in the drenching rain.

"Hey, what is this? I'm getting all wet!" I shouted, the little plastic sheet he pulled across the front of my seat being poor protection. Husen laughed and laughed and kept pedaling. At last he explained in his broken English, "Better we go, uncle. The soldier say you ask too many questions and must be 007 or *kommunis*. But I say, no, you are people from another people's country and so must ask many questions."

"How can I see a village?" I asked, feeling like a drowned rat as we neared the hotel. "Would you like to see *my* village, *tuan*?" Husen asked. He didn't mention until we were on the bus the next day that his village was 210 kilometers from Jakarta, halfway across Java. The trip on a decrepit bus took five hours, but outside the city Java was beautiful. Everything was green, every shade of green. Along the narrow highway were houses, some of brick but most of whitewashed bamboo; their picket fences seemed to stretch in an almost unbroken line. The houses all had red tile *atap* roofs, as protection from the rainy season downpours. They were surrounded by trees: fat, stumpy bananas, soaring palms, feathery bamboo, and occasionally a big *waringin* tree, what the Hindus call the banyan.

When darkness fell, the bamboo shacks along the road were lit with kerosene lamps; these were little shops which sold tea, coffee, cakes, and clove cigarettes. Crowds had gathered in a few villages for a performance of some kind. There were no electric lights, and the orange glow of the lamps gave the Javanese countryside a mysterious look. In those days, Husen liked to join other young men who rode on the bus's luggage rack. The wind



Husen with author, Java 1971.

was cold and the roof piled with tin suitcases and wicker baskets, but Husen didn't mind. He enjoyed the sensation of being free, rushing through space, and the jokes of the other youths who preferred the wind and the jolts from the road's many potholes rather than sit for hours inside, cramped and hot.

It was 3 or 4 A.M. when we arrived at Husen's home, a thatched hut on the Cimanuk River's banks, surrounded by dark thickets of trees and facing a big open expanse of rice paddies, which, in the moonlight, looked like the sea. As I was to find in many countries, accompanying an urban migrant back to his village, having seen the terrible conditions of the city slums, I was always surprised at how well the villagers lived—when there was enough food or money.

At such times, after the harvests, life in a Javanese village can be idyllic. In Pilangsari, against a backdrop of the misty volcano, placid river, bright green paddies and clumps of bamboo, mangoes and bananas, steamy equatorial days drift into balmy nights. After dark, as the oil lamps twinkle on and the haunting *ning-nong* sound of bamboo *gamelan* orchestras floats over the treelines, the countryside becomes alive with shadow plays, folk dramas, classical dance, and acrobatic performances.

* * * * *

So began what has become a rather long journey with Husen; I stayed in his village for six months in 1970, and revisited it in 1973, 1978, 1979, and 1980. Because of so many return visits, Pilangsari village, Jakarta, and even Indonesia itself do not seem places fixed in time and space but societies in flux, constantly changing. It is another reminder that life—all human life—is a process, not a condition, a voyage, not a harbor.

Java matters because two-thirds of the world's fifth most populous nation live on this small 50,000-square-mile island. In parts of north-central Java density reaches 5,000 people per square mile, the world record for a rural area. Average holdings are less than an acre and some 30 to 50 percent of rural Javanese own no land except their house site and yard. Another 10 or 20 percent own just a tiny plot. Husen's father, with almost two acres, is better off though, with 9 surviving children and their families, still very poor.

Java also matters because, together with Bali, it possesses what is probably the world's most distinctive artistic and mystical village culture.²

2. The best introduction to Java's unique culture is Clifford Geertz's *The Religion of Java* (The Free Press, 1960). Geertz's later work, *Agricultural Involvement: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (University of California Press, 1963) is harder to follow,

Although Javanese are nominally Muslim, converted by Arab sea traders long ago, Islam is strong only in a few regions, especially near the big ports or on the island of Madura, just a few miles off the Java coast. Most Javanese are described as *abangan*, or possessing religious beliefs deeply influenced by medieval Hinduism and pagan animism. They love theater, especially the shadow play, *wayang kulit*, the most pervasive spiritual influence. It sets their standard of ethics, a strong belief in authority, the idea that good and evil spirits must be placated, and general ideas about life.

One of Husen's most vivid childhood memories of his village, with its beautiful view of the distant cloud-wreathed volcano across the wide, muddy Cimanuk, was the gamelan's *ning-nong* as darkness fell. As a small boy, hearing it, Husen would slip away from his parents' bamboo hut, hurrying through the evening with his friends in mounting anticipation as the music grew closer and louder. In the paved courtyard of some prosperous peasant, the boys would dart past the glowing orange tea-stall lamps. Their long shadows flowed behind them as they converged on the large coconut oil lamp of the village *dalang*, or shadow play puppeteer. Sometimes they would pause behind the big white cotton sheet and watch entranced as the *dalang* unpacked his flat, gaily painted leather puppets, some grotesque, some regal, others comic; all seemingly came to life when their shadows were viewed from the other side of the lamplit screen.

Like water seeking its level, the boys would scramble to the front of the men, falling upon each other in a heap like pups until the play began.

but useful in showing that the more intensively rice is cultivated, the larger is the crop. The writings of Dr. William Collier, an agricultural economist with a decade's experience in Indonesia, are also recommended. In 1979, Dr. Collier took strong exception to my findings in *Village Java 1979* and his interpretation of agricultural development in Java is much more negative, though we share a common position when it comes to the need for small-scale rural industry.

For a time they would watch the puppet gods and nobles in their interminable court debates and philosophical discussions which begin the plays—but often the children fell asleep until it was time for the battles and the clowns. (A shadow play begins in late evening and usually lasts until about 4 A.M.)

Sometimes they sat up and watched everything and gradually, as the years wore on, the shadow play came to seem to Husen, as it does to most Javanese, a truly sacred drama. A Hindu king wrestled with demons, a holy man fought evil spirits. The leather bodies of the puppets, hidden by the screen, came to seem an illusion, and their shadows, which trembled and breathed with life in the dalang's skilled hands, a reflection of that illusion. And somehow, unconsciously, as Husen grew into manhood, he absorbed the Hindu belief that soul, shadow, spirit, and ghost are one. Although he says he is a Muslim, his deepest beliefs are Hindu and animist.

Most of the shadow plays depict stories from the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, a great war between kinsmen—the five Pendawa kings and the one hundred Korawas—portrayed as an endless struggle, not so much between good and evil as between base animal passions and detached, effortless self-control. Since this struggle never ends, the final battle is never shown.

I was amazed at the sophistication of the wayang kulit. In those I saw, one Pendawa king, Judistira, symbolized the inability to act if drained too much by kindness and compassion; in another, his brother Bima, human vitality and the dangers of passionate commitment; in a third, Ardjuna, cool capability and merciless justice. Or in Husen's English:

Judistira is very alus, kind. If somebody say to him, "Judistira, I kill you," he say, "Okay, please go ahead." If somebody say, "Judistira, I take your wife"—but he have no wife—he say, "Please." He has white blood, not red blood. Now, Bima, his brother, is hot-blooded, many fighting. He sleeps standing up with his fists doubled. He has many wife and stabs people with his

very long thumbnail. Ardjuna, the third brother, he's very slow, very cold. He likes girls the best and is the nicest looking man in the whole world, with many, many wives. If nice girl, beautiful girl, okay, he is like to make love to her, even in the Astina Kingdom which is the enemy. The other two Pendawa kings are twins, Nakula and Sadewa.

The play's real heroes were their clown-servants—above all, the fat, physically repulsive Semar, with a black, ugly face, who is full of crude talk and action. He breaks wind to chase away his comic children or throws feces at an opponent. Rare among villagers, the Javanese enjoy the crudest barnyard humor.

At the same time, to Husen and all Javanese villagers, Semar was the father of all men and, rather like Jesus in Christianity, was actually a god come to the world, if in all-too-human form. He was regarded as the kind, all-knowing guardian spirit of all Javanese from their first appearance to the end of time. (Pilangsari's dalang sold me some of the puppets, but refused to part with any of Semar.)

The shadow play is a complex dream world inhabited by gods, kings, priests, princesses, warriors, giants, buffoons, and fantastic animals. The performance is accompanied by gamelan music, which reaches a frenzy during the battle scenes as the puppets crash against each other. The first time I sat through one was an excruciating experience, all the squeaky, strange voices in an unknown language. But with Husen at my side translating, the wayang kulit became an acquired taste and nowadays I will travel miles to see one.

Pilangsari had other cultural performances such as *genjrung* (high-wire acrobats) and classical dancing. There were also the popular *sandiwara* plays, performed by traveling theatrical troupes from the surrounding villages. Unlike the elegant, spiritually lofty shadow plays, *sandiwara* were like old-fashioned melodramas; they usually portrayed episodes about Java's conversion to Islam, with gentle Muslim missionary heroes who preached Islamic sermons; the villains were invariably

Hindu, holy men and nobles, portrayed as buffoons or crazed tyrants.

Once Husen and I joined up with such a troupe, led by a marvelous old comedian called Pa Lojo. We went about the countryside on top of a rickety old truck piled high with tarpaulins, canvas scenery, trunks, and electrical apparatus and some 30 young men and girls, most of them farmers, soldiers, petty officials, and pretty girls from surrounding villages. Pa Lojo performed all-night plays at weddings, births, circumcisions, and harvest celebrations. (Shadow plays are regarded as having religious significance, while a *sandiwara* play, despite its Islamic character, is viewed more as popular entertainment.) Usually the plays began at nine in the evening and went on until dawn. The 40 or so dramas in the troupe's repertoire were so familiar to cast (and audience) there were few rehearsals. Sometimes the sponsor chose a play just before curtain time. There was a lot of ad-libbing.

Husen had performed with a *sandiwara* troupe as a younger man, always as a soldier who did the *pentjak* (a half-dance, half-fight in which two men strike at each other with hands, feet, and knives, but withdraw the most violent blows at the last possible moment so they don't land). While the troupe's gamelan beat drums and the audience clapped with excitement, the two fighters would throw each other to the ground, the victim cooperating in exact rhythm with the attacker and leaping around in formal, menacing poses. Husen, a born actor, had loved it.

The girls in the troupe usually did not act in the plays but performed classical dances as curtain raisers. Usually a gorgeously dressed young girl, with the painted moustache and gilded paper helmet of a Hindu god, would begin by fluttering her hands downward and then suddenly turn and twist them as if they were detached from her body. Every move was intricate—a pointed flipping of a sash with long-nailed tapering fingers, a kick of the sarong train, the bend of the hands back almost to the wrists, the movement

of the head horizontally along the plane of the shoulders. With every movement, the troupe's orchestra would strike out a series of clear tones, following one another in a flowing rhythm. Now there would be a limpid boom of a big gong, then the furious beat of a double-ended drum, finally the loud bamboo sound of the full percussion orchestra.

The female roles in the plays were portrayed by men, husky local farmers and soldiers garishly done out in wigs, lipstick, and padded costumes, speaking in falsetto. This gave the sandiwara performances the titillating air of the illicit and forbidden, especially in Pa Lojo's troupe because the leading "lady" was a *bantji* (transvestite) who even flirted backstage with the village farmboys. Husen often teased the *bantji*, waving his thumbs between two fingers in the universal obscene gesture, or pushing his body roughly against him, in a kind of horseplay he would never engage in with a real girl.

Once a year Pa Lojo took his troupe to Jakarta, where they rented a theater in Kramat Tunggak, a huge center of prostitution near the waterfront. Since you had to pass through Tanjung Priok, the pier area where gangs of armed criminals hung out, we often stayed until the final curtain at 4 A.M. and went home at first light. (Dr. Hanna Papanek, a noted sociologist, served as my interpreter for some weeks and I can remember the three of us, Husen, Dr. Papanek and myself, seated crosslegged in the wings through one of Pa Lojo's all-night plays. It was about a *kuntil anak* or ghost of a prostitute, a Javanese horror show of sorts).

As a boy, Husen had loved to pretend he was a *dalang*; he'd improvise little theaters out of bamboo, and fashion puppets of Hindu gods and nobles and Javanese clown-servants out of mango leaves. Even today he loves to tell wayang kulit stories to the village children. He is at his best with Semar, the great low clown. He will say,

On the inside, his batin, Semar is very nice, but his lahir, or outside life, is not good. If look at Semar, is very bad, very fat, very ugly with a black face. Now before, this earth

was empty and Togog, he was the first man out. But Togog sees the earth is empty and so he goes inside again. And Semar is out from the earth. Then Togog calls Semar, "Hello, little brother, you are second after me." "No," says Semar, "Hello, little brother, you are second after me." "No," says Semar, "I am the first." "You only think so because the earth is empty," says Togog. "I am out first, take a look and go back. So you are little brother from me."

I asked what about Adam and Eve. How did they square with the Togog-Semar version of the creation? Husen laughed. "I don't know. Adam and Eve, earth and sky, left and right, east and west, man and woman, all two-by-two. The meaning is peoples must marry. Sometimes queer, *bantji*. But all else is two-by-two. Only Allah is one. That is why Semar has only one tooth. He is god but his children are very naughty. Semar says, 'Oh, you must go to work in the garden.' But Semar's children—Gareng and Petruk and Bagong—are lazy. Many going to answer the call of nature." Then Husen would give his infectious chuckle.

Since Pilangsari village lies in the borderland between the Sundanese language and culture of western Java and the true Javanese spoken on the rest of the island, Husen also enjoyed making plays on words that sounded the same in the two languages but had different meanings. This was easy since the Javanese words for "kiss," "sit," and "water" mean "drink," "go home," and "feces" in Sundanese. In the village, Husen's sallies never failed to keep his friends laughing, no matter how often he repeated them.

Husen was unusual for a *betja* driver; he had been educated to be a primary school teacher. He had run away to Jakarta in 1955, at 16, just a year before completing his training. He told his dismayed father, "I want to go everywhere, to see many places, to make many friends in my life. I do not want to be just a teacher in the village, always books and papers, quickly become old." (Later I was able to help Husen travel, taking him as my interpreter when I did a village study in Bali in 1973 and again in 1979, when I spent

five months surveying 35 Javanese villages for the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID). Husen was to spend 20 years as a seasonal migrant to Jakarta; he did not return to Pilangsari to farm his father's land for good until 1976, too old—he was then 37—to pedal a *betja* any longer.

His life in Jakarta's squalid, crime-ridden slums was not without adventure, and before *betjas* were gradually banned from the city center, he truly loved showing tourists the sights. At the same time, he never lost his longing to return to the tasks and values of the village; to Husen, the real bright lights were back in Pilangsari. "I am a villager," he once told me, "and wherever I go, I must follow the ways of my village." Now married four times, with three divorces behind him, Husen has one surviving child, a boy of 14, who lives with a grandmother and is studying to become a Muslim teacher. He left the boy's mother, Taminah, after she abandoned him for dead when he was stricken with yaws 12 years ago; Husen lay delirious for 7 days on the floor of a bamboo hut in one of Jakarta's worst slums before he was found.

His second wife, Karniti, was the only one I knew well. In 1970, after four years of marriage, with her long black hair falling over her shoulders and her flowered sarong, she still looked the 15-year-old she had been on their wedding day—despite the death of a one-year-old son from fever and two miscarriages. During the six months I stayed with them, mostly in Pilangsari, but also in a tiny three-cubicle shack they rented in a hellish hollow in Simprug, a Jakarta suburb, Karniti was tortured by fears that Husen would leave her if she proved barren.

As a goodbye present, I financed the construction of a modest bamboo house so Karniti, who hated Jakarta, could stay in the village and open a *warung*, or small shop. And Husen's father gave him a small plot of land by the road, 10 meters by 10. With some of Husen's friends we dug drainage ditches, raised an earth platform, jogged back and forth to the banks of the Cimanuk with baskets of clay (I got a terrible callus on one shoulder but Pilangsari's people still talk about *tuan* jogging back and forth to the

river with the baskets), hired a boat to bring sand, cut down six of the family's *djati* trees for lumber, bought red bricks, brought them back by betja, and finally hired carpenters. The house and warung were built as Husen planned them: brick foundations, waist high, topped with bamboo walls; an atap roof; a small kitchen with an open hearth and a brick washing platform behind; a large front room for the shop, with a big open window to serve customers; a narrow front porch with a long bench; and a bedroom for him and Karniti. Time enough, Husen said, to add a room for their son.

For Karniti had once more become pregnant. When I left Pilangsari it seemed like a happy ending. Karniti, glowing with health, adorned the big glass counter with jars of cakes, candies, and cigarettes wrapped with yellow paper; she kept ready a kettle of boiled water for hot tea and coffee, a pot of vegetable soup, freshly cooked rice, a basket of mangoes and papayas, and pink drinks with plenty of ice. Karniti thrived on activity; the warung was a success.

In Jakarta, as I worked on their story, Husen wrote that the village was experiencing a bad drought. The news worsened and he came to Jakarta. He was distraught. The rains had come but Karniti had caught a chill. About noon the day before, she had told Husen, "I am not happy for eat." He took little notice until an hour later he heard her utter a sharp cry. She told him she was experiencing acute, stupefying pains in her stomach. Husen carried her to bed and fetched his mother and the village *dukun* (midwife). Then he had come to Jakarta, hitching a ride on the first truck he could.

We left immediately for the village. Husen was numb with panic. We reached Pilangsari in a pouring rain. Karniti lay on her bed, her face flaky with fever. Her eyes were shut and her magnificent black hair twisted over the pillow. Rain whipped against the thin bamboo walls. I said I'd go fetch a doctor, and headed for the nearest town, Jatibarang, a mile away. We were too late. As Karniti lay consumed by fever and pain, the old *dukun* did the best she could, and Husen held his young wife's

hands and whispered over and over, "*La illa haillah...la illa haillah...*" But their son was born too soon.

Husen wrapped the handful of bone and skin and blood and flesh in an old newspaper. "It's only blood," he told the doctor. "It's a little boy," the *dukun* said. "No, it's blood," Husen insisted.

"Husen, Husen," the old woman said, "it's a baby."

He took a hoe and buried the package deep in the garden by the river. When he got back, Karniti's eyes were closed and her face the color of ashes. Husen lay down beside her and put his arms around her and sobs shook his body. When she opened her eyes he sobbed, "It was only blood."

That night Husen's mother made up a bed for me in the outer room. But Husen and Karniti asked me to sleep on a floor mat by the side of their bed. They were like children afraid to be alone.

In my book, *The Golden Bowl Be Broken*, I ended their story with this paragraph:

A few days after Lebaran, the joyous celebration of the Javanese new year, Husen's parents forced him to divorce his young wife. A woman doctor in Jatibarang had said she could have more children, but the old village dukun disagreed and his father threatened to disown him and send him off the land if he did not. The parents quickly arranged his remarriage, to a plump, healthy girl from Kliwed village, whom he left after three months. Floods damaged the next rice crop, the warung failed, and Husen was obliged to return to the city and drive a betja once more. One evening a year later he encountered Karniti in Pasar Senen. She was selling rice at an all-night stall. He scarcely recognized her. She was heavily made up, her cheeks rouged to the eyes, her eyebrows and eyelashes thick with mascara, and her mouth scarlet with lipstick. He told her to go back to the village, and tried to give her train fare. She refused. He told her he loved her and would go on loving her until the day he died, and then he went away and did not see her again.

In 1973, after a long search, Husen and I found Karniti in Tandjung

Priok, Jakarta's tough waterfront area, a terrible slum. She had remarried, to another seasonal betja man and part-time village cultivator, who was out working during our visit. She had given birth to a baby, but while she seemed very glad to see us, did not bring the baby out to show us, which made me wonder if it was healthy. And Karniti was still heavily made up.

Then, in 1979, Husen said Karniti was staying with her family in a village on the opposite bank of the Cimanuk. We went to see her and I was happy to find that she looked just as she had in the old days. She seemed terribly pleased to see us, said she now had two children. She brought the oldest over and pointed to his little tassel; Karniti had finally had a son.

Today Husen realizes leaving Karniti was the biggest mistake of his life. He is middle-aged now and has started to look it. "When I was young," he told me on my most recent visit, "I felt life was going up, up. Now it is going away down." He quoted the Javanese proverb, "*Makin lama, makin tunduk*," an allusion to rice, which, the more it matures and ripens for harvest, the heavier hangs its grainhead.

Rice, of course, is the basis of everything else in Java. In 1970, Abu Djauhari, a young agricultural worker sent to work in Pilangsari and the surrounding villages, told Husen his father's land could feed and support 16 people instead of the 5 it then did. This would have enabled Husen and several brothers to give up betja driving in Jakarta. But the father feared and resisted change. A proud, conservative man, a rigid Muslim, deeply superstitious, the father had always worked hard, tilling his paddies and mango orchards with a hand hoe, a back-breaking task in the sticky volcanic soil (as I found out when I almost cut my left big toe off and was forced to spend some weeks in bed in Jakarta). As an ambitious, young, completely landless peasant, Husen's father had struggled for years doing coolie labor to save up enough to buy his land and educate Husen. Husen, by dropping out of school, had been the father's biggest disappointment in life. Although in 1970 a few of the more progressive farmers were doing well

with new Philippine-bred high-yield dwarf rice, the father adamantly stuck to the old ways.

"Your father does primitive agriculture," Abu, the extension worker, told Husen. "He only opens the soil and drops the seed. No wonder he is poor. Your land is good. All you need is modern farming methods."

In 1973, at Husen's urging, the father, then in his 60s, reluctantly planted one crop of C-4 high-yield rice. I provided some money for the nitrogen fertilizer and chemical insecticide he would need to grow it. The father tripled his normal yield, harvesting six tons on his two acres of paddy. But as soon as we left, Husen to Jakarta, me to another country, the father went right back to his traditional methods, scattering leaves from the *jowar* tree on the green shoots of his next crop and relying on Muslim prayers and fasting to keep insects away. The harvest once again fell below two tons.

By then Jakarta was well on its way to becoming a modern Asian city like any other. The kampungs still existed but Jalan Thamrin had been transformed into an avenue of glass-and-concrete skyscrapers, office buildings and luxury hotels. It had lost its semirural air and become a kind of Potemkin inner city, one of Asia's new ghettos of affluence. At night Jalan Thamrin, ablaze with neon signs, had all the fizz and glitter of Singapore or Hong Kong. The betjas, like the former multitudes of street hawkers, were now banned from this area during the daytime and evening. But every night at 10 o'clock Husen and perhaps 50 more betja men would wheel their pedicabs to one end of the Blora Bridge that linked the downtown to the road to their squatters' settlement. In the shadow of the bridge, the drivers, impatient to enter forbidden Jalan Thamrin after 10 and hustle what few late-night fares they could for tomorrow's food, confronted a line of policemen.

It was always a tense, ugly scene. The drivers, pushed from behind as their numbers grew, slowly edged forward. The police cursed them, raised their truncheons, and threatened to hit those in front. This nightly confrontation would go on

until all at once, it being past 10, all the betjas would surge forward together, swarming like a locust army into Jalan Thamrin. The policemen could not stop them and did not try.

Husen was staying in a shed with about 40 other drivers at the time, most of them from Pilangsari and neighboring villages. Many slept on an open platform on stilts, sarong-wrapped and so closely packed the air was thick and suffocatingly hot. I always felt grimy and bug-bitten in the morning and could hardly wait to pour cold water over myself in an improvised shower. Below the platform a dank, narrow corridor opened out on the banks of one of Jakarta's brown, rubbish-strewn canals, where an open privy had been erected on stilts over the water. The bamboo walls were mildewed. Ragged, dripping laundry was always overhead, and the bare earth was slimy underfoot. Some of the betja men's wives and children lived in dim, foul cubicles on the lower level. It was a terrible place.

Finding a place to go to the bathroom is *the* big problem in doing village studies. The worst had been the three-cubicle shack of Husen and Karniti in the swampy, mosquito-infested hollow in Simprug. Our Javanese neighbors all used a communal wooden privy, built high over a canal on stilts; you climbed up on a ladder. Privacy was sketchy but adequate as long as you were Javanese, because nobody looked. Not so for me; every time I climbed that ladder, a crowd would collect on the canal bank to watch. In desperation I took to rising each day, showering and shaving, gulping down a glass of tea, running for the bus and riding a couple of miles downtown to the swanky Hotel Indonesia and making a rush for the men's room. The doorman got to thinking I was some eccentric tuan who stayed there. The where-to-go dilemma occurs in all villages or city slums, the biggest cultural problem for your hosts—where will he go?

In 1973 one could look across the roofs of the squatters' colony where we stayed and see the sun glittering on the windows of the new downtown skyscrapers. With a small, modernizing Indonesian elite frantically pursuing North American lifestyles, the streets were starting to fill

up with new Fiats and Datsuns; new shops were filled with television sets, air-conditioners, and other consumer amenities. The rest of the city was beginning to change but was still a vast conglomeration of atap-roofed, bamboo kampungs, mostly held together by a network of dirt roads, and lacking pure water, electricity, sanitation, and schools. These were to come slowly in the next few years. With the paved roads came minibuses, probably the fatal blow to the betjas in Jakarta.

I remember one of Husen's friends, Raskim, asking me, "Do you think the time of being free on the roads will ever come again?" One of the women, Bibi, said her husband had told her it was getting too dangerous to pedal a betja with so many new cars and motorcycles about. Raskim disagreed. "No," he said, "one just has to be more careful. But," he went on, "the police are very strict. If they catch you at anything, they stomp you. I'm just waiting until harvest time. There's too much trouble in Jakarta now. They move us poor people here and there. Once the governor makes a place nice and comfortable, the prices go up, somebody buys the land, and we have to get out so that richer people can build their houses."

"We'll have to leave here too if they pave the road," Bibi sighed. "People are unhappy. But what can we do? We are only poor people."

Husen was caught between a village that could not feed him and a city that no longer had any use for him. I blamed his father, yet he had tradition on his side. The father still borrowed and gave loans without interest; he shared one-sixth of his rice crop with even poorer neighbors, mostly elderly women who harvested and planted it. He would rather have died than mortgage his land for credit at a bank in order to buy insecticides and fertilizer. Mutual aid had always had a healthy leveling effect, and the father did not like the way some villagers grew richer and others poorer with the new rice. Husen's old mother was equally opposed to contraception. To the elderly couple, value had always been attached to large numbers of children, and to all-night shadow play performances and

religious ceremonies and feasts, which impoverished them but gave joy.

Husen's parents did not seem to perceive the dangers of overpopulation but instead suspected, probably rightly, that if they gave in at all to innovations, there was no telling where it would stop. Husen himself did grasp that Java had so many people it was just as futile to resist modern agricultural technology and birth control as it was for the Indonesian government to try to keep the poor from flooding into Jakarta. But, instilled with shadow play values, Husen would no more rebel against his parents or authority than Semar would turn against the Hindu gods. (One day Jakarta's governor, a general, when asked what would happen to the betja men now that they were being progressively banned from Jakarta, replied, "Let them go back to their place of origin." And do what, I thought angrily, starve? Husen's friends just shrugged and said, "It is the will of God," as if half of Jakarta were divinely meant to live in utter squalor, day unto stinking day, hand to mouth.)

Husen clung to his village values but among some of the others the old ties were starting to snap. Some seemed to have a nagging wonder of what they were really living for, others drifted toward violence and crime, still others seemed totally defeated. Day after day I watched them pedal their betjas, strain their legs and backs until the muscles stood out like ropes, eat hungrily of their un nourishing food, and voice a vague, baffled sense of being taken. I feared the worst and was glad when it was time to go.

In mid-1978, in Manila, I got a letter from Husen. He was back in Pilangsari to stay, the rice crops were better than ever before, and there were more wayang kulits and sandiwara dramas than ever. Everything was going fine.

So I went back to Pilangsari and found something of a miracle had taken place in the five years I'd been away. Contraception had become accepted, and yearly population growth in Java had dropped from 2.5 percent (1967) to 1.4 percent (1978). The spread of new high-yield dwarf rice and the use of fertilizer, multiple-cropping, improved

irrigation, and pesticides had nearly doubled village output. Large numbers of former urban migrants—almost everybody we knew—had come home again to stay. As Husen put it, with his customary grin, "We have come onward." (His father would not admit to ever opposing the new rice technology, and I was amused to note, probably because its acceptance had become the village's social norm.)

Jakarta has also changed radically. Heavy traffic in the streets had made the betja obsolete in all but Jakarta's outskirts. Paved roads, schools, sanitation, and electricity (60% of the city was served) had transformed most of the old kampungs beyond recognition. The hordes of ragged, impoverished people one saw everywhere in 1967 were gone.

My positive impressions were so at odds with what USAID was hearing elsewhere, the agency mission to Indonesia hired me to spend five months visiting a cross section of 35 villages scattered across Java to see if my findings in Pilangsari could be considered representative. USAID provided a car; Djuhayet, the driver, and Husen acted as my investigators, going about and talking to the poorest villagers while I interviewed the village leaders. Traveling up and down the length (620 miles) and breadth (never more than 125) of Java, we found a few pockets of poverty—wherever there was too much water (floodplains) or too little (dry upland plateaus and brackish coastal flats). With these very few exceptions, village Java had prospered dramatically, largely during the previous five years. When asked, "Are you richer or poorer than you were 10 years ago?" every villager of several hundred interviewed by me, Husen, or Djuhayet replied that he or she was better off—though for the landless poor, not all that much better off. Daily field wages had gone up, on average, by a quarter to a half kilo of rice per day since 1967—not much, but something. Family incomes had risen much more. With irrigation spreading as new systems were built or old ones repaired, the introduction of multiple cropping of high-yield dwarf rice meant more work and income for everybody. New techniques were also being applied to other crops.

Here again, if the story stopped at a fixed moment—1979—we might have something approximating a happy ending. But Java's development is too complex for that.

On my most recent visit to Pilangsari, one of the many changes I found was that a young Chinese from Jatibarang, the nearest small town, was building a small factory in the village to make ice and soda pop. Husen was pleased because it meant about 30 men and women in the village would get jobs. This was happening just as anti-Chinese riots were erupting in Solo, Semarang, Cirebon, and other Javanese towns, following similar attacks against prospering Chinese merchants in Sulawesi a year earlier. In both outbreaks, hundreds of Chinese shops, factories, homes, and cars were burned or wrecked.

The difference, Husen said, must be that the rioters had no jobs. People, he felt, would not burn down a factory that gave them their livelihoods. I noticed, and Husen agreed, that around Pilangsari there seemed to be a lot more betjas plying the country roads than before. He also said some of the landless men in the village, with prices going up, were having a hard time finding enough continuous work to pay for their food.

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Two years ago at a Jakarta conference on increasing rural employment in Java, President Suharto told the assembled technocrats and economists, "What I want to know from you is *how*."

He's never gotten an answer. The Indonesian government blamed left- and right-wing extremists for the anti-Chinese rioting. Although Marxist or Muslim agitators are probably only too glad to stir the pot, most rioters have come from the huge, floating mass of jobless young Javanese village migrants who still form an ominous underclass in every city.

In 1967, when it was still a big village and a villager who knew only farming could survive as a betja man or street peddler, they were the essence of Jakarta. Then the spread of modern farming allowed many to go back, like Husen, to villages that could once more feed them. The rest, like the men on Blora Bridge,

were pushed out of sight and out of mind—but they are still there, maybe 300,000 in Jakarta alone. In late 1980, growing press censorship, xenophobia among top officials, and harsh crackdowns against students all seemed prompted by fears that this urban army might get out of hand.

Joblessness among the 30 million landless Javanese remained the 14-year-old Suharto government's biggest problem. And the government seemed to have run out of ideas on what to do about it. Indonesia's technocrats, once known as the "Berkeley mafia" because several of them earned their Ph.D.s at the University of California, had produced some major economic success stories since they took over in partnership with Suharto's soldiers in 1966 amid 600 percent inflation and the economic wreckage left by Sukarno. Despite wholesale corruption, sudden ups and downs in the oil trade, and the collapse of Pertamina, the national oil company, in 1975 with \$10 billion in debts, Indonesia's economy in 1980 looked the healthiest in years. Oil and commodity prices were way up. So were foreign exchange reserves. Oil exploration was again booming.

The rice crop, which was 17 million tons in 1980, was expected to reach a record 21 or 22 million tons in 1981, thanks to the adaptation of scientific methods by millions of villagers like Husen and his father. With 37 percent of eligible couples using contraceptives in 1980, birth control was doing well, and East Java and Bali were moving toward zero population growth.

The limits are evident, too, however. In villages like Pilangsari, agriculture can do only so much. With 65 percent of the 142 million Indonesians jammed onto Java, population density has reached an elbow-to-elbow 1,725 people per square mile. In Indonesia's present five-year plan, Suharto's economists give strong new emphasis to creating more jobs and distributing income more evenly. Yet inequity in Indonesia has grown steadily since 1967. As recent history in post-revolutionary Mexico or in India under Jawaharlal Nehru shows, compassionate rhetoric about peasant masses can go hand in

hand with policies that chiefly benefit the urban middle class. Jakarta has become a city of this new middle class, with little place anymore for the village migrant.

So, what's to be done? The villagers themselves know. In the 1979 USAID survey of the 35 villages, about 250 men and women put their needs in a descending order of priority: better irrigation, better highways, rural electrification, more schools, credit for small-scale industry and workshops, and technical training.

In 1980 I happened to go to Java straight from South Korea and Taiwan. The contrast was obvious. In South Korea a 6-lane superhighway zooms down 350 miles from the demilitarized zone to Pusan; in Taiwan another zips 240 miles from Taipei to the island's southern tip. These highways link villages that are almost totally literate, electrified, and dotted with smokestacks from decentralized small-scale industry. In these villages you find TV sets, refrigerators, and all sorts of other electrical appliances, power tillers, and other modern farm tools. Many are made by farmers' sons or daughters who also spend some of their wages to buy these consumer goods from the local factories and bring them home. Here, the whole rural economy surges forward.

In Java, superhighways radiate in all directions from Jakarta—and suddenly end. One reaches Bogor, a hill town an hour away, another a third of the way across West Java. To go the 620 miles from one end of Java to the other, you have to risk life and limb on bus-truck-car-betja-bicycle-pedestrian-clogged two-lane highways. Java's villages are 55 percent literate but only one percent have electricity. Transmission lines soar over Java's 35,000 villages but supply power just to industry, government installations, and the urban and rural middle class. (In 1980 Java had a significant power surplus.)

It is possible to bring a modern highway system, literacy, rural electrification, credit systems, a free market, and 10,000 small factories and workshops to the villages across Java in the next 10, 15, 20 years. Too much time has been lost already. Admittedly such ventures have been stalled because the government first put its priorities on

growing rice and population control. But gross corruption has also bitten deeply into revenue that should have gone into these projects.

Rural electrification could come quickly. A \$2 billion project, assisted by loans from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, calls for massive power generation from Sumatra's Bukit-Asam coal mine and Java's Surabaya steam plant, a far-reaching grid-transmission system, and local distribution of power by substations. By spending an extra \$350 million to \$400 million a year, it would be possible to light up all 35,000 Javanese villages in 10-15 years. Indonesia has the money to pay for it from its oil revenues. It will take much more time to electrify the outer islands of Indonesia, but they are generally developing more vigorously and lack Java's crushing population pressures.

Indonesia's four to five million ethnic Chinese seem ready to invest. Yet the Suharto government has imposed restrictions on the Chinese in favor of *pribumi*, Javanese businessmen. (Such restrictions, however, backfire because only the Chinese can figure out how to get around all the red tape. Moreover, most Indonesian generals have strong ties with the Chinese community which largely manages their business affairs—what's good enough for generals ought to be good enough for villagers.)

Americans or Europeans are another possibility but their past foreign aid has focused on agriculture, curbing population growth, or creating infrastructure such as roads, dams, schools, and such. They have little experience in transferring technical skills for small-scale industry. Possibly the best way to industrialize rural Java in a hurry would be to let the Japanese do as they did in South Korea and Taiwan; a good many of the electrical appliances in Korean and Taiwanese villages bear Japanese trademarks.

In an interview, Japanese Ambassador Masao Sawaki told me a modest start would be made in 1981. Three experts from Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry were assigned to the Ministry of Industry in Jakarta, one each for small-scale industrial technology, finance, and management. Ambassador Sawaki also said that

starting in 1981, Japan's 200-plus joint ventures in Indonesia would try to develop small workshops to do the larger assembly industries' subcontracting and outwork.

Said Sawaki:

In the past, we've sent so many teams of experts on small-scale industry out to make studies and advise and so on. Nothing comes of it. Nor is small-scale industry in Japan willing to invest abroad; it's too risky for them. The new program of having the Indonesians make more and more parts and to decide themselves which parts to make and then we'll teach them—especially in automobiles and electrical appliances—will be a contribution of practical value.

What we'll do is transfer the parts for assemblage, one by one, to local small-scale industries. For example, some of our transistors used in these joint ventures are imported from Taiwan. They're quite simple. We'll teach the Javanese to make them. Give them the raw material and say, here, you make it. If they bring in a product that is not acceptable, we will teach them again.

Such small-scale subcontractors could be crucial for the 35,000 Pilangsaris of rural Java, combining both Japanese investment-based component manufacture with small-scale engineering shops employing a dozen or so people in small towns or villages. These workshops could serve as the missing link between the large variety of cottage and handicraft industries Java already has and its modern highly-capitalized industry.

Because small-scale industry is self-generating and can't be planned or imposed from above, the Indonesian government needs to end its restrictions and red tape, not add more. Indeed, the cumbersome and unwieldy government administration in itself is a big obstacle to development.

The Japanese, like everybody else, are naturally concerned the 1980 anti-Chinese riots might signal a new mood of xenophobia. The political test in Indonesia is whether Suharto's government has the drive, imagination—and, indeed, the time—left to give the villagers what they want and need, or embarks instead on a probably futile, and possibly doomed, attempt merely to keep the lid on.

The drift of events during my 1980 visit was not reassuring. Fifty prominent Indonesians who signed a petition critical of the government increasingly found themselves targets of official retaliation. One, a general, had his popular TV show on Hawaiian music yanked off the air. Press censorship was heavyhanded³ and several foreign correspondents were expelled from the country. There were unpublicized episodes like one in October 1980 when soldiers wounded 14 students, some with bayonets, as they broke up a university meeting in Jakarta. Almost weekly there were bloody fights in Jakarta's high schools.

None of these government actions will take anybody anywhere useful. Censorship, crackdowns on students and other political critics, and other forms of official overkill fail to get at the roots of the trouble. Only

3. The December 24 issue of *The Asian Wall Street Journal* was denied entry into Indonesia in 1980 for carrying the second part of a two-part series I wrote titled, "A Perspective of the View of the Future by the Villagers of Java" and "Give Java's Villagers What They Need and Take Their Common Sense." After the American Embassy protested this censorship, the Indonesian Information Ministry provided it with a copy of the banned issue and allowed the story to be duplicated and widely circulated within the Indonesian government. This series did not deal with Husen or Pilangsari but rather broader development issues in Java.

economic advance can provide the jobs the rural landless need.

At diplomatic gatherings one heard talk of "rising xenophobia" among top government officials, but Indonesian xenophobia needs to be defined. It may be true of city mobs, without food, jobs, or hope. It also may be true of Indonesia's Westernized elite, with their imitator's complex of admiration and contempt. It is this elite, which has prospered the most in the 14 years I've been going to Java and which, still pursuing the lifestyles of a rich consumer society, has the hang-ups about foreign cultural influences.

Java's villagers are not xenophobic. No rural society was as open, friendly, and welcoming as Java's was in 1967 when a very weak central government had little voice in the countryside. These villagers have not changed.

They know what they need. If those who run things from Jakarta are not to look like yesterday's men, it is to the common sense of the Javanese villagers themselves they ought to be turning.

Suharto's biggest problem is also his greatest untapped resource: the energy and dynamism of these people. They grasp what technology has done for them in agriculture and are naturally eager for all the industrial skills they can get. It's a new spirit, élan, one finds in every village. They could give Suharto the answer he needs if he'd only go, ask—and listen.

Husen puts it all into a charming folktale: a Jakarta king once invited all Pilangsari's people to a feast. But he grew angry when he saw all they brought him as a gift was a bunch of bananas. He sent the villagers home and threw the bananas away without peeling them. Had he done so, he would have found that each was solid gold.

(February 1982)