

ABDULLAH ETENG: HIS STRUGGLES AND ACHIEVEMENTS FOR INDONESIA AND NORTH SUMATRA

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Abstract

This article discusses Abdullah Eteng, a local fighter from North Sumatra who was instrumental in securing the Republic of Indonesia's independence. This research employs a historical method. Because this study is centered on Abdullah Eteng, this article takes on the form of a biography. Abdullah Eteng is a fighter who demonstrates consistency in the pursuit of his ideals. The struggle spanned multiple eras, including Dutch colonialism, Japan, the Physical Revolution, the Old and New Orders. From the ground up, he forged himself to the pinnacle of his career. Throughout his life, he was involved in organizations and the news media and possessed a strong sense of responsibility. As a bureaucrat, he is accountable to political parties and members of parliament.

Keywords: *Abdullah Eteng; leader figure; nationalist.*

INTRODUCTION

On August 17, 1945, the news of Indonesia's proclamation of independence was actually not heard but was greeted simultaneously throughout the archipelago. The existence of limited communication channels and Mountbatten's strict supervision of the Japanese military were the causes. These troops were tasked with the responsibility of maintaining the prisoners' security and order until the arrival of the Allied forces. Under these circumstances, the most likely course of action is to convene a general meeting. This method is effective at communicating critical messages to the community and fostering an independent spirit. On the other hand, the Japanese continue to exercise control over major cities throughout Indonesia. This news also results in increased community surveillance (Rinardi, [2017](#), p. 143).

The community's enthusiasm for independence is palpable. This can be seen in the incident on September 19, 1945, in Jakarta's Ikada Square. People flocked to the giant meeting, despite being under siege by tanks and armored vehicles. This activity was initiated by the eastern Jakarta railway strike group leader, Muhammad Arif, alias H. Darih from Klender. He was a railway employee, a founding member of the BRI (*Barisan Rakyat Indonesia/Indonesian People's Front*), and a religious leader. Soekarno attended this meeting and delivered a speech on security and order. The populace heeded and followed Soekarno's advice, and following his speech, the populace was asked to disperse (Cribb, [2010](#), p. 82).

In Bandung, regardless of the situation. People require information. The afternoon newspaper *Tjahaja's* August 17, 1945 edition reported that independence was a gift from Japan but did not report on the Proclamation itself. The declaration of independence came as a shock. This event is analogous to "the sky collapsing to the earth," as Soekarno stated in his radio address on the 23rd night. This implies that the

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previous regime has crumbled and been succeeded by a new era. Initially, few people were willing or able to see into the distant future. Meanwhile, there is only simple joy following colonialism's demise (Pratama, [2018](#), pp. 94–95).

The absence of communication media impedes the publication and dissemination of independent news. This raises serious doubts, as the news has not yet spread throughout the country. Indeed, the echoed atmosphere of independence was perplexing, made worse by the absence of a declaration from the ruling government. Young people are skeptical and perplexed by this independence. They were subordinate to established people until August 26, 1945, when the BKR (*Badan Keamanan Rakyat/People's Security Agency*) was formed in its entirety (Limah, Utomo, & Suryadi, [2018](#), p. 36).

In Surabaya, the young leader Ruslan Abdul Gani used radio news to voice his advisory voice for their movement. Due to the curfew and power outages, the public was unaware of Japan's surrender. On August 23, the rule was repealed, and the city lights were turned on brightly to commemorate the occasion. This heralds the dawn of a new era, but doubts persist. Alertness can also be expressed in terms of being "prepared" or "ready." Surabaya remained safe during the first week of independence, which coincided with the fasting month when Soekarno appealed to be prepared and willing to fight for Indonesian sovereignty. However, everyone's primary concern was a sense of joy accompanied by order.

In Medan, Indonesian Domei radio marques have been deactivated since August 14. As a result, the Japanese army assumed responsibility for receiving and transmitting news. For the general public, this drama appears to be taking place in a distant land. Indeed, this is a sign of the Japanese regime's impending demise and the Anglo-Dutch regime that will succeed it (Prima, [1976](#), p. 88). This demonstrates that the public is skeptical of news of independence. Additionally, the Japanese army was extremely strict about information control in East Sumatra. Independent atmospheres cannot be achieved if they are solely based on the activities of the central figures who participate in the center. This undoubtedly stimulates and encourages the emergence of local figures who can help shape the atmosphere of independence on a smaller/local scale (Sumantri & Sipayung, [2018](#), p. 4).

It was an ordinary thing to examining national figures on whom numerous historians have written. But, a single character can be a diverse discourse utilizing a variety of approaches and writing methodologies. The outstanding young people of North Sumatra also demonstrated non-physical political struggles through social organizations and political parties. Abdullah Eteng is one of them. Abdullah Eteng began his career as chairman of the Gerindo (*Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia/Indonesian People's Movement's*) Tanjung Balai-Asahan branch, editor of the *Suara Rakyat* magazine, and chairman of the *Kenkoku Tai Shin Tai* (Indonesian Defenders Movement) Asahan, Labuhan Batu branch from 1944 to 1945. He fought until Indonesia gained independence and served as a Regional Head/Regent, an Indonesian Democratic Party activist, and a member of the DPR (People's Representative Council) and MPR (People's Consultative Assembly) from 1977 to 1982 (Y. Tanjung, [2017](#)).

The biographical review examines the character's actions in order to ascertain tips for his career advancement. This character's struggle can serve as a model for shaping and nurturing character. Abdullah Eteng's activities prior to independence and during the New Order era deserve to be highlighted and documented. Many ordinary people are unaware of his existence. Additionally, historical studies have never introduced young people to indigenous figures, and thus many were unaware of Abdullah Eteng. The reason for this is a lack of appreciation from the government and a dearth of writing about him. As a result, it is critical to examine Abdullah Eteng's past struggle.

METHOD

Using historical research methods, this study looks at past events as an object of investigation. A heuristic search for historical sources is one of the first steps in historical research. Historical sources are sought after and gathered by historians' teams of investigators (Notosusanto, [1984](#), p. 11). There are also heuristic activities aimed at locating historical literature books. Critics are trying to figure out whether or not certain historical artifacts are authentic. The researcher's goal in this study is to discover and verify the veracity of any sources used by the researcher. They then compared and chose from among several works, including news and other sources that could serve as guidelines for writing this study. When the necessary facts have been gathered, we must put them together into a coherent whole for interpretation. Historiography is a research report writing activity that relies on the ability to quote from published works. As a result of the research and writing that went into this project, it has evolved into a well-organized historical narrative (Kuntowijoyo, [2003](#), pp. 89–105).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hacking the future's hope

It is necessary to reconstruct the actions of local leaders in order to understand the dynamics of their struggle. The highlighted character's career path reflects a realistic effort to locate the "struggle" character that is owned. Reviews classified as biographies are intended to be used as raw material for analysis and discussion leading up to the pinnacle of success. Local figures' persistent struggles may serve as role models in shaping and nurturing character (Purnaman, [2015](#), p. 129). Abdullah Eteng's character and activities during his time in Indonesia from before independence to the New Order era deserve to be highlighted. How he responds to events unfolding around him is a point of contention that is used as an excuse to revisit his struggle (Y. Tanjung, [2017](#)).

Abdullah Eteng was born on 12 March 1942 in the Kampung Masjid on the outskirts of the Sei Kualuh, Labuhan Batu Utara Regency. He is Sergeant Eteng and Kemalawati's first child. He grew up in his hometown and attended the Government Inlandschool or People's School until completing his education. He and his sister moved to Asahan after completing their education. They lived there in order to avoid housing costs by moving from *surau* to *surau*. To cover their living expenses and education costs, they are pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors by manufacturing and marketing cigarettes in Tanjung Balai.

Abdullah Eteng is a well-trained individual as a result of the autonomy he has pursued since childhood. This is bolstered further by a reasonably strong command of the English language, which serves as his capital for pursuing a career. As a young man, he was active and held prominent positions in a variety of associations. Abdullah Eteng was appointed Chairman of the Indonesian Committee for the Tanjung Balai Asahan branch of parliament in 1939. This committee urged the *Volksraad* and Indonesia's parliament to be democratically dissolved. He served as Chairman of the Gerindo in Tanjung Balai from 1943 to 1944 and was actively involved in the administration of the *Persatuan Pelayar Indonesia Asahan/Asahan Indonesian Seafarers Association*. He served as editor of *Suara Rakyat* magazine from 1944 to 1945. Abdullah Eteng echoes the struggle against the Colonial government's actions through this magazine (F. S. Pasaribu, [2020](#), pp. 27–28).

In 1944–1945, he served as chairman of *Kenkoku Tai Shin Tai* (The Defenders of the Fatherland Movement). This organization provides opportunities for the younger generation to get military education from Japan. The organization, with its training center in Bogor called *Jawa Bo-ei Giyugun Kanbu Resentai*, has spread to remote areas of the archipelago, including Asahan. This military organization is responsible for preparing fighter cadres for the war of independence. Following independence, this organization underwent several name changes, including BKR (*Badan Keamanan Rakyat/People's Security Agency*), TKR (*Tentara Keamanan Rakyat/People's Security Army*), TRI (*Tentara Republik Indonesia/Republic of Indonesia Army*), and TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia/Indonesian National Army*).

Abdullah Eteng founded Laskar Rakyat Asahan-Labuhan Batu in September 1945 as the vanguard of the struggle for independence. This Laskar is affiliated with the Laskar Rakyat, also referred to as Napindo, Pesindo, and Hizbullah. In 1946, he assisted Lieutenant Colonel Nugrohadi, Nata, and M. Syukur Siregar in the construction of a Naval Base in North Sumatra. This base was constructed to deter the Dutch from returning to the east coast of Sumatra via Asahan. This formation occurred following the Dutch acquisition of the North Sumatra Naval Base (Fahrunnisya, [2014](#), pp. 32–35).

In 1946, the atmosphere in East Sumatra became increasingly chaotic. The emergence of a movement demanding the monarchy's abolition was the catalyst. The United Struggle group, which included the leadership of Pesindo, PNI, and PKI, attempted to abolish the sultanate system during this movement. On March 3, 1946, thousands of people gathered at Tanjung Balai in response to the Dutch about to land. This infuriated the populace, who already lacked trust in the sultanate due to suspicions that they were conspiring to reclaim power. Within a few days, approximately 140 people were killed, including nobles, penghulu, and employees with a Dutch education (Reid, [2012](#)). Abdullah Eteng was powerless to intervene when this incident occurred. The reason was that he was under house arrest. He was only released on Mr. Luat's recommendation to attend a meeting with center representatives. As a result, he was named Asahan's government representative (Reid, [2012](#)).

Pioneering Career Bureaucracy

Abdullah Eteng is a responsible character who is committed to defending Indonesia's independence. An ambush on the headquarters of the Punggempur Legion Command at Gunung Melayu in 1947 exemplified this. General Major Timur Pane led this legion, which was tasked with disrupting security in Asahan and Labuhan Batu. Major Manaf Lubis and Major H. Dahlan put an end to the terror perpetrated by these troops. Meanwhile, Abdullah Eteng was fighting alongside Asahan fighters against the Dutch, who were attempting to reassert their influence.

Due to the unfavorable security situation, government offices and their staff were relocated from Tanjung Balai to Bandar Pulau. On August 10, 1947, the Asahan District Defense Council was formed, chaired by Abdullah Eteng and his deputy Saidi Muli. This council was tasked with the responsibility of reuniting the dispersed TNI and Laskar. They were subsequently merged into a single unit under the command of the Asahan District Defense Council in Bandar Pulau (Rahmawati, M, & Basri, [2014](#)).

To fend off Dutch attacks in Air Joman, Si Paku Tinggi Raja, Tanjung Balai, and Sei Kepayang, the fighters constructed defenses by creating artificial ponds and destroying the People's Island bridge. This action is taken to prevent state property from falling into the enemy's hands. They were considering the Asahan region's economic importance, which is comprised of oil palm, tea, and tobacco plantations. These plantations were later destroyed to evade Dutch annexation. Abdullah Eteng led the movement that sought to eliminate the Dutch interest in returning to Asahan (Nasution, [1978](#), p. 502).

Recognizing the scorched earth of Asahan's plantations, the Dutch committed extremely inhumane acts. When they occupied the plantation, they coerced the workers into informing the mastermind of the action. Those who keep their mouths shut will receive immediate shooting action. This situation isolates this area. To help stabilize the economy, the local government issued its own currency, which Abdullah Eteng signed. This policy was also implemented in Batu Bara, where Ja'far Nasution signed the money issued. Making money in the Asahan area is part of Abdullah Eteng's motivation for defending the Asahan/Tanjung Balai area against Dutch exploitation (F. Tanjung & Tanjung, [2014](#), p. 76).

The Dutch defeated Abdullah Eteng, Asro Effendi, and Lieutenant Jamaluddin during the Second Military Aggression in March 1948. They were arrested and held as political prisoners on Simardan Island until sovereignty was transferred. They were subjected to physical and psychological torture during their detention. They isolate themselves from outside influences by not reading books or newspapers. Abdullah Eteng participated in the establishment of the Shadow Government of the Republic of Indonesia in Asahan following his release from prison in January 1949. This formation was made to balance the State of East Sumatra, which was formed in January 1948 and was led by Dr. Mansoor from January 1948 to August 1950 (Reid, [2012](#)).

The RIS (*Republik Indonesia Serikat*/Republic of the United States of Indonesia) was formed as a result of the KMB (*Konferensi Meja Bundar*/Round Table Conference) session held on December 6-15, 1949, in The Hague. This republic is made up of sixteen

countries, East Sumatra being one of them. The Dutch made this effort to preserve oil-producing areas as well as tobacco and rubber plantations. On October 8, 1947, the Dutch established the Special Region of East Sumatra, led by Governor Dr. Tengku Mansyur, an Asahan Sultanate nobleman. According to Nationalists, the formation of the RIS is part of a strategy to weaken the Indonesian nation. Demonstrations were held in response, calling for the disbandment of the NST (*Negara Sumatera Timur/State of East Sumatra*) and its reunification with the Republic of Indonesia.

Abdullah Eteng initiated the East Sumatran Indonesian People's Congress in Tanjung Balai on August 17, 1950. In this meeting, it was announced the dissolution of the NST and the return of the government of the Republic of Indonesia in East Sumatra. He was appointed as a member of the NKRI (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia/The Unity of the Republic of Indonesia*) recovery committee in charge of rearranging the civil apparatus, and all-important positions were in the hands of the Republicans. Subsequently, the Preparatory Committee for the Unity of the Republic of Indonesia appointed him as Regent of Asahan Regency and concurrently Mayor of Tanjung Balai. Abdullah Eteng's activities after becoming the Regional Head became increasingly difficult. The task that must be done is to reorganize the government and condition security so that people can carry out their activities properly (Sinar, [2006](#)).

Abdullah Eteng is also known as a responsible individual. His involvement in eradicating the PRRI movement (Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia/Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia) led by Colonel Simbolon in 1958 demonstrates this. Along with Major Selamat Ginting, Captain Eben Ezer Sinuraya (Commander of 137th Battalion, Kabanjahe), and Captain Nas Sebayang (Military District Commander), he assisted in arming the Karo people against the PRRI movement (Sinar, [2006](#)). This movement is a rejection of the centralized government, which frequently disregards regional interests. Everything must be based on central government policies, particularly economic policy. As a result, economic disparities between regions and the central government are created, giving rise to resistance movements in various regions (Leirissa, Kleden, & Bethan, [1991](#), pp. 9–11).

Abdullah Eteng's role in politics is demonstrating increasing competence. This became apparent during his tenure as Chairman of the KNI (*Komite Nasional Indonesia/Indonesian National Committee*) for the Asahan district in Tanjung Balai from August 5, 1946, to January 19, 1954. This is a Presidential Assistant Body comprised of community leaders representing various groups and regions, as well as members of the PPKI (*Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia/Indonesian Independence Preparatory Committee*). Additionally, this agency has expanded to almost every region in Indonesia (Fahrunnisya, [2014](#)).

Treading Bureaucratic Institutions

This figure's career trajectory continues to evolve in lockstep with local and national political dynamics. Abdullah Eteng was promoted to a high-ranking employee at the Governor of North Sumatra's office in 1954 after serving as Regent of Asahan and Mayor of Tanjung Balai. Following his appointment as Regent of Karo Regency from January 20, 1954, to March 31, 1958, his bureaucratic career continued to soar. He was

culturally astute in Tanah Karo. People who primarily subsist on agriculture. He promotes agricultural growth and development in order to ensure farmers' welfare. His interaction with the community has engendered sympathy, despite the fact that he is not a Karo.

Abdullah Eteng then served as Regent of Deli Serdang from April 1, 1958, to March 4, 1962. This appointment was based on the Decree of the Governor of the North Sumatra Regional Head and the Decree of the Minister of Home Affairs and Regional Autonomy No.UP7/8/30-992 dated April 7, 1960. Ethnically, this area is inhabited by various ethnic groups, including Karo, Malay, Simalungun, Toba, Minangkabau, Banjarese, and so on. At first, this area was the territory of the Deli Sultanate, which was centered in Medan and the Serdang Sultanate in Perbaungan. During his reign in this area, he fostered and managed Deli Serdang so that it developed into one of the potential districts in North Sumatra (F. S. Pasaribu, [2020](#)).

He is widely regarded as a humanist, socialist, and philanthropist official who elicits widespread public sympathy. His popularity can be gauged by the activities he undertook from pre- to post-independence. He performed his responsibilities flawlessly and was even promoted to various positions. However, as a populist leader, simply socializing with the community is insufficient. There are only stumbles that cause this character to falter.



Picture 1. Abdullah Eteng as Regent of Deli Serdang in 1958-1963

Source: https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah_Eteng

Abdullah Eteng was charged with embezzlement twice during his career in the bureaucracy. The first time, he embezzled up to 73,003 kilograms of rice that belonged to the government. The second time, embezzled funds were totaling up to Rp150,000 from the government's rice purchase foundation. This fund is used as a down payment on the rental of a vehicle for the transportation of government rice. These two issues are a result of the provincial government's policy of prioritizing funding for the North Tapanuli Regency's critical needs. Deputy Governor Raja Syahnan directed that rice be distributed in accordance with the Regents' decisions. Abdullah Eteng, on the other hand, was accused of corruption due to the diversion of rice distribution to other regions.

This case of alleged corruption resulted in him being withdrawn to the North Sumatra Governor's Office from March 5, 1962 - March 4, 1968, as a High Administrative Officer. His dismissal letter as Regent was issued by the Minister of Home Affairs and Regional Autonomy with No. U.P.7/8/30-992 dated 07 April 1960 signed by Ipi Gandamana. In connection with the dismissal letter, Abdullah Eteng submitted a memorandum of defense which stated that it was not true to commit acts of corruption by embezzling rice and embezzling money from the Government Rice Purchase Foundation. However, these efforts still did not change his status as a suspect. As a result, he was detained by the North Sumatra High Prosecutor's Office on January 12, 1963. Not only that, he again submitted a defense which was addressed to the Minister of Home Affairs on April 10, 1969. The letter also clarified the case and proved that he was innocent. It is this defense that clears his name from the alleged case (Y. Tanjung, [2017](#)).

Entering the Parliament

Abdullah Eteng's role in the legislature began with an assignment by the Governor as the Chairman of the Level II DPRD (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*/Regional People's Representative Assembly) for Deli Serdang Regency. This position is based on the Decree of the Governor of North Sumatra No. 143/I/G.S.U dated September 26, 1961, signed by Secretary M. Syahil Sitompul. Subsequently, he was elected as chairman of the DPD (*Dewan Perwakilan Daerah*/Regional Representative Assembly) North Sumatra to represent PNI (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*) in 1968-1973. The PNI grew rapidly in North Sumatra under his leadership and became one of the most powerful parties in the Republic of Indonesia. This party was effectively and deftly used to spread Nationalist parties based on their ideology.

After the fusion of the PNI, Parkindo, Khatolik, IPKI, and Murba parties, the Development Democracy group was formed on October 28, 1971. Since then, the PNI has become a socio-political force in the country and was merged into a new socio-political force. The parties based on the one-party nationalist ideology were called the PDI (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*/Indonesian Democratic Party) on January 10, 1973. In its development, this party continued to increase towards a more concrete integration based on Pancasila. Nationally, the party is led by Muhammad Isnaini and Prof. Muhammad Sunawar Soekowati from the PNI. The position of Secretary-General is held by Sabam Sirait from Parkindo. The position of treasurer is held by Wiknyo Sumarsono from Catholicism. Meanwhile, the position of chairman was held by Sukarmadijaya from IPKI and Murbantoko and Murba.

The New Order era's political dynamics were dominated by two parties: the United Development Party and the Indonesian Democratic Party plus the Working Group. The structural consequences of this fusion extend to areas such as North Sumatra. As a result, Abdullah Eteng was elected chairman of the DPD-PDI of North Sumatra in 1977 and a member of the DPR/MPR RI in 1982. His career path began in Kampung Masjid Village and ended in Jakarta, the capital city of the Republic of Indonesia. He eventually settled in his position as a member of parliament (Fahrunnisya, [2014](#)).

As a member of the central legislature, he is regarded as a critical figure. His political statements frequently shook the New Order government and the PDI's central leadership. Although his relationship with Drs. Suryadi as the central leadership figure is excellent. Abdullah Eteng must assert his constitutional rights as a member of the DPR/MPR. The criticisms are directed at land ownership, which should be democratically controlled. He dealt with both the PDI leadership and the parliament. His actions, which frequently defended the interests of the people on land issues, resulted in his resignation from Parliament. This withdrawal is authorized by Presidential Decree No. 163/M/1981 dated September 14, 1981 (N. F. Pasaribu, [2013](#)).

CONCLUSION

Abdullah Eteng is a fighter who demonstrates consistency in the pursuit of his ideals. The struggle spanned multiple eras, including Dutch colonialism, Japan, the Physical Revolution, the Old and New Orders. With a responsible personality, he remains steadfast in defending the people's interests. The dynamics of the struggle for human values suggest that Abdullah Eteng is a genuine populist figure. He was choosing to resign from an honorable position due to a conflict between the public interest and the wishes of a ruling party. Additionally, the political party to which he devoted his body and soul was incapable of accommodating the values he promoted. Withdrawing from parliament did not dampen his enthusiasm as the people's mouthpiece. Politically, the struggle to speak for the people was hampered by the New Order government's strict security approach to power.

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