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## Reconnoitering India- Indonesia Socio-Cultural Relations

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### ABSTRACT

India and Indonesia shared a longstanding historical and socio-cultural relationship. They are similar in many ways and share certain things in common. Many religions, ideologies, ethnic groups, languages, and civilizations coexist and interact in India and Indonesia. The most intriguing aspect is how their common cultural relationships show themselves in day-to-day interactions. Certain historians believed that India had a significant cultural effect on Indonesia, and up to the eighteenth century, the Malay people acquired everything from India, including their political structure, literature, art, astrology, and medical knowledge and technological proficiency. As a result, the study primarily draws on historical research and examines the cultural ties between Indonesia and India.

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### Introduction:

**Historical Background:** There is no two opinions about the fact that cultural mingling over thousands of years has led to the evolution of nations and civilizations all across the world. However, there have also been several stages of mutational changes, depending on the current socio-political dynamics of a given nation. A culture is not born, Minerva-like, armed at all; rather, it is a complicated phenomenon fed by streams from diverse regions at different times in varied ways through numerous agencies. This is the



argument put forth by H.B. Sarkar. The method is passed down from generation to generation and remains ongoing.<sup>1</sup>

In this sense, India's situation is peculiar. India, a synthesis of many different civilizations, is notable for having had a significant impact on the development of South East Asia's sophisticated culture. Over sixteen hundred years, Indo-Aryan civilization found its way into Southeast Asia, sometimes in a gush and other times in a trickle. In each century, it acquired greater nuances and meaning, but it never lost its vernacular.<sup>2</sup>

The mixing of cultural specificities also occurred because Southeast Asia, in terms of its social and cultural milieu, has been incredibly diverse yet culturally adaptable and accommodating, which has aided in assimilation. Historian George Coedes, who was much struck by the Indian influence in the area, dubbed the states of Southeast Asia "les etats hindouise," or "the hinduised states of Southeast Asia."<sup>3</sup> So it has been attempts to evaluate India's cultural exchanges with Indonesia, the biggest ASEAN member, within this framework.

From the Neolithic era, India and Indonesia have maintained a cultural bridge that functions on a number of levels. These levels include art, architecture, popular drama and literature, Indian communities living in Indonesia, and even Indonesia's societal structure and the country's fight for independence from colonialism. Java and maybe Sumatra (known as the Suvarnadvipa) are described as having abundant gold mines in the Ramayana. Early in the fifth century, Fa-hien felt compelled to visit these islands since they were significant hubs for the Mula-Sarvastivadins school of Buddhism.<sup>4</sup> There were two big Hindu empires that rose and fell in the Malay Peninsula and the Indian archipelago. The first covered practically the whole archipelago, including the islands of Sumatra, Java, Bali, and Borneo. It was established in the seventh century AD by the Sailendra dynasty. The Sailendras were closely associated with India and adhered to Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>5</sup>

For two millennia, India and Indonesia have maintained close cultural and commercial ties. From the Indian coast, followers of the Hindu, Buddhist, and eventually Muslim faiths made their way to Indonesia. The stories from the great epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata serve as the inspiration for Indonesian folk art and theatre. Bilateral ties are brought together by common cultural heritage, colonial past, and post-independence aspirations of political sovereignty, economic self-sufficiency, and autonomous foreign policy. There have always been sociocultural ties between Indonesia and India. Every aspect of Indonesians' lives has been impacted by Indian culture. They are very similar to India in terms of religion and culture. Historical evidence indicates that communication between India and



Indonesia began at the start of the Christian era. “Traders from India, particularly from its eastern and southern coastal regions, travelled far and wide in the pursuit of trade and established trade relations with the countries of the region, which is now known as Southeast Asia, and then was known as Dvipantara of Suvarndvipa. With the passage of time, these relations were strengthened and firmly established. Consequently, there was an all-round cultural exchange which not only affected the economy, but also contemporary society, politics, and culture.”<sup>6</sup>

The great epics of the Mahabharat and Ramayana are introduced to the Indonesian people by the travellers. The scholars were inspired to translate these epics into the Indonesian language, interpret them, and incorporate them into Indonesian culture due to the patronage of the Hindu Ruler. The younger generation now believes that these epics are not from India, but rather from Indonesia. “The two great epics – the Ramayana with the Mahabharata, and some of the celebrated eighteen Mahapuranas were introduced to the people of Indonesia, and as a result of the patronage provided by the Hindu kings of Indonesia, Indonesian authors were encouraged to compose works based on the same themes in kawi. Similarly, the hierarchical four-varna Hindu system, the core component of the then Hinduism, divided society into four segments, and each was assigned a particular type of function to be performed. This socio-cultural interaction was not confined to the field of culture and literature alone. Physical contact between the two civilizations also took place. Historical evidence proves that one of the kings of Sumatra (Svarndvipa) visited the great Buddhist University at Nalanda in India, a place in India famous in the world for its educational institutions, sometime in the eleventh century. This King is referred to as Devaputra.”<sup>7</sup>

The history of relations between India and Indonesia dates back to the Ramayana, which has numerous references to named locations. Java, or Yamadipa, is referenced in the Ramayana, the oldest epic in India. The commander of Rama's army, Sugriva, sent his soldiers to Yawadvipa, an island in the Java, looking for Sita.<sup>8</sup> For example, the Vayu Purana mentions Malyadvipa while spelling the word Yamadvipa. The Greek word *nesos*, which means island, and the Latin word *Indus*, which means "India," are the sources of the name Indonesia. (Because the cultures of the two areas are similar)<sup>9</sup>. The name was first used in the eighteenth century, long before Indonesia gained its independence. The majority of Indonesia's governments were Indianized Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, which ruled over regions like Srivijaya, Medang, Sunda, and Majapahit until the 16th century, when Bali became the last such kingdom. With one notable exception—when India and Indonesia engaged in hostilities—the common history and relations between the two countries were cordial and amicable. The Chola monarch Rajendra



Chola of Coromandel, south India, invaded Srivijaya's ports in 1025, taking control of the city and occupying it for a while.

### **Cultural Relations:**

The two nations are actively exchanging cultural ideas. The mission runs the Jawaharlal Nehru Indian Cultural Centre (JNICC), where regular classes in yoga, Indian classical dances (Bharatnatyam and Kathak), and classical music are offered, and also teaches Hindi and Tamil languages. The Embassy of India has set up a Facebook page and a Twitter account in an effort to reach out to the younger Indonesian population, who are among the world's biggest users of social media. The Embassy released several publications on India that showcased our advantages as well as two YouTube videos named "Old Heritage New Partnerships" and "India-Indonesia-An Enduring Relationship." To help Indonesian students who aspire to pursue higher education in India, a special magazine named "Studying in India" was also released in Bahasa. To reach the vast majority of Indonesians, the Mission has released sixteen publications in Bahasa Indonesia covering a range of contemporary topics, including trade, culture, yoga, bilateral ties, etc.<sup>10</sup>

**Sahabat India:** The Festival of India in Indonesia 2015: The Festival of India in Indonesia, known as Sahabat India, was officially opened on January 26, 2015, by H.E. Ms. Megawati Soekarno Putri, the former President of Indonesia. The event took place 2015 from January 26, 2015, to August 15, 2015. More than 35 activities, including folk dances, dance dramas, puppet plays, musical performances, exhibitions, seminars, mall promotions, Bollywood film screenings, documentaries, and the like, were held in a number of esteemed Jakarta venues during the Festival of India. Additionally, the Embassy arranged festival portions in fifteen additional Indonesian cities, including Medan, Surabaya, Surakarta, Bali, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya<sup>11</sup>

This promoted a deeper understanding by giving Indonesians living in various cities a peek at India. Three YouTube videos about various facets of "Sahabat India - The Festival of India in Indonesia-2015" have also been prepared by the Embassy.

### **Architecture And Linguistic Influences:**

Indonesian temples at Bali, Borobudur, and Prambanan attest to the existence of Indian settlers. These are also excellent illustrations of the shared architectural abilities between the two nations as well as cross-cultural influences in the realm of architecture and temple design.<sup>12</sup>



Central Java is home to Borobudur, Indonesia's most popular tourist destination. The Sailendras constructed this Buddha-focused Mahayana Buddhist monument in the ninth century. Perched atop a hill, the structure is comprised of nine terraces that gradually recede from one another. The central terrace is topped with a bell-shaped stupa. Historians claim that the empty space in the sanctum sanctorum of the Balinese temples functioned as a gathering place for the Hindu trinity and the mountain spirits, with Siva-Girisa, the ruler of the mountains, holding a dominant position. This is also seen in Javanese temples. An inscription on a fifth-century A.D. east Javan boulder has the first mention of the lord of the hills. The early Buddhist missionaries who sailed from this region through the ports of the Palura-Apheterion complex on the Orissa coast are clearly represented in the sculptures of Amravati that have been discovered at numerous sites throughout the region. In the later stage, there also seems to be a strong link with the Amravati school of art.<sup>13</sup> The best representations of Indo-Javanese art can be seen in the sculptures and pictures, particularly in Borobudur.<sup>14</sup>

The two most significant languages in Indonesian history have been Sanskrit and Pali. This impact can be seen in the common names and even in the names of many Indonesian cities. In addition, a lot of cities in Southeast Asia and India have names, like Pandurangapura, Amravati, Ratnagiri, Kurukshetra, and Vijayanagar.<sup>15</sup> There are numerous terms in Indonesian Bahasa that are likewise related to Sanskrit and Hindi. Nonetheless, despite their obvious parallels, Bahasa Indonesia is practically foreign to India, where language schools continue to emphasise European languages. The exception is a small number of institutions, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi.

### **Wayang – A Popular Drama:**

The Wayang is another fascinating aspect of the cultural ties between Indonesia and India. Theatre is referred to in Indonesian as wayang. In Java and Bali, respectively, gamelan and gender wayang are used to accompany wayang performances. Wayang has endured for almost a millennium in Java, Bali, and other Indonesian islands. The Mahabharata serves as the inspiration for the plays, but Indonesian cultural contexts have been included into the storylines, characters, and locations. Puppet shows are now more than just a component of theatre; they are an integral element of Indonesian social, political, and economic life.<sup>16</sup> Even though the Wayang is sponsored by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations on Indian cultural platforms, not much is being done to actively promote art in India.

### **Diaspora attachment:**

Four main groups of Indian migrants to Indonesia may be distinguished. First are the people who travelled to Indonesia in antiquity, settled there, and underwent radical self-transformation. Since ancient



times, Indians have been moving to regions like Java and Sumatra in the first century's dawn. Buddhism is thought to have reached its peak by the fifth century AD in the region of Indonesia. There are indications that Indian traders settled throughout the archipelago, including Indian missionaries in Southeast Asia from the 16th century onward were essential to the Islam's expansion in Indonesia.<sup>17</sup> Those who came as labourers during the colonial era make up the second category.<sup>18</sup>

This group correctly believes that it is now Indonesian and that it is no longer Indian. The pre- and post-war periods saw the arrival of the third group of Indians in Indonesia. Their position in Indonesian society was solidified by their capacity to blend in with the locals by picking up dialects and getting married. Pasar Baru, also known as "little India," is a designated enclave for Indians.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the corporate sector, Indonesian Indian-owned companies have become more prevalent in the entertainment scene. Ispat Indo, the largest privately owned steel company in Indonesia, is owned by steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal, another example of the Indo-Indonesian community's success. H.S. Dhillon's rise to prominence in politics has been significant.<sup>20</sup>

The current generation of professionals who have settled in Indonesia make up the fourth group of Indians there. The majority work as academics, IT specialists, and business advisors. There are a number of Indian-run institutions in Indonesia that could aid in educating Indonesians about India, Indians, and Indian culture. The Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre, Amar Jyoti, the Economic Council of Indonesia and India (ECII), and the India Club are a few of these<sup>21</sup>

### **Relations between India and Indonesia after Independence:**

The historical ties have improved in the present era, with India supporting Indonesia's fight for independence. The only countries to acknowledge and support Indonesian independence and establish diplomatic ties were Egypt and India. In 1950, India held its inaugural Republic Day parade and invited President Sukarno of Indonesia to participate. President Sukarno was the celebration's first principal guest. Muslims in India who were serving in the British army during the independence movement left the army at the invitation of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who urged the Muslim soldiers to cooperate with the Indonesian soldiers in their struggle against the Dutch Empire's colonisation of Indonesia. Consequently, over 600 Muslim men serving in the British Indian army abandoned the colonial forces, risking everything, and formed an alliance with the Indonesians.<sup>22</sup> The Non-Aligned Movement was founded by Jawhar Lal Nehru, the Indian prime minister, and President Sukarno of the Republic of Indonesia on March 3, 1951, when India formally established diplomatic relations with Indonesia.



In order to assist Indonesia in its fight for independence, Nehru called a summit of Asian countries to Delhi in 1947. Sutan Sjahrir was flown there via the Dutch blockade. Later, when there was a famine in India, nationalist forces in Indonesia gathered grains. At the time, nationalist posters exclaimed, "Help Mother India!" Our country's founding fathers had similar aspirations, beliefs, and ideals for India and Indonesia during the war for independence

The leaders of India and Indonesia had highly friendly relations during their respective countries' independence struggles. Nehru and Biju Patnaik visited Indonesia, and Sukarno named Biju Patnaik an honorary Bumiputra. Biju Patnaik travelled to Indonesia in 1947 to see Soekarno. A newborn girl had recently been born to Soekarno's wife. Biju Patnaik proposed the name "Meghawati" since it was pouring hard; the Sanskrit word megha means "rain cloud." The Meghwati was given its name by Biju Patnaik. In 2001, Megawati, Soekarnoputri, Soekarno's daughter, was elected president of the Republic of Indonesia.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The two big countries have had close cultural relations for 2000 years. Indian traders brought Buddhism and Hinduism to Indonesia, and later Gujarati traders brought Islam. Recently, Japan, Singapore, and India have worked together to revive Nalanda University, an old Indian seat of learning. In a similar vein, India and Indonesia might work together to revive old educational institutions in Indonesia. To investigate the possibilities of reviving educational institutions with Pali, Sanskrit, and Bahasa as centres of excellence, a collaborative working group must be established. Currently, Indonesia is home to 13% of the world's Muslims and the largest global Muslim population. India has a significant role in the Indonesian independence movement. A proactive part in the liberation from the Dutch. India was the one to acknowledge and back the independent diplomatic ties with Indonesia. Approximately 10,000 Indians reside in various parts of Indonesia, in addition to the necessity of strengthening the close relations between the two nations. Each year, following the India-ASEAN annual meeting, India ought to designate an ASEAN member nation as the "focus country." That is where the year-long sequence of exchanges ought to begin. This should involve communication between diplomats and officials as well as between educators, learners, cultural activists, non-governmental organisations, and small business owners. It appears that MNCs and large businesses are the main focus right now. Naturally, this has aided in the growth of bilateral trade, but not in the interpersonal contact that is essential to fortifying bilateral relations.



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