

## **Socio-Cultural Relations Between India and Indonesia**

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**Abstract** India and Indonesia are two nations that from its inception, have a strong historical relation; cultural as well as intellectual. Both have some in common and similarities in many aspects. In India and Indonesia there are multiple religions, beliefs, ethnicities, languages, cultures that share and interact each other. The most interesting thing is both have shared cultural relations manifested in daily life. Some historians assumed that India's influence on Indonesian's culture is quite dominant, moreover, until the nineteenth century the Malay people received everything from India: their religion, their political system, astrology, medicine, literature, art and technical skills. Therefore this study is basically based on historical investigation and focuses on cultural analysis between Indonesia and India.

**Keywords:** *culture, shared, inception, ties*

### **Introduction**

The socio-cultural relations between India and Indonesia are very old. The Indian cultural impact has been seen in the all sphere of Indonesian's people life. They share lot of religious and cultural similarity with India. According to historical evidences the contact between India and Indonesia has been established during the beginning 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>1</sup>

The travelers introduce the great epics of Mahabharat and Ramayana to the Indonesian people, the hindu king's patronage motivated the scholars to translate these epics into Indonesian language, these epics translated, interpreted and integrated into the Indonesian culture. Now the new generation feels that these epics originated in Indonesia it's not form the India. "The two great epics – the Ramayana with the Mahabharata, and some of the celebrated eighteen Mahapurnas 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 onto four segments, and each was assigned a particular type of the 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*) has visited the great Buddhist University at Nalanda in India, a place in India famous in the world for its educational institutions, some time in eleventh century. This king referred to as *Devaputra*".<sup>2</sup>

1- *Phalgunadi, I.G.P., The Indonesian Mahabharata Udyogparva, p.1*

2- *Ibid, p.1,2*

The relation between India and Indonesia date back to Ramayanan period, in the Ramayanan we found lot of places names mentioned in this epic. "yawadipa (java) is mentioned in India's earliest epic, the Ramayna. Sugriva, the chief of Rama's army dispatched his men to *yawadvipa*, the island of java, in search of Sita".<sup>1</sup> the Ramayana, for instance, speaks of *Yavadvipa*, the island of gold and silver, and the *Vayu Purana*, while spelling the word *Yamadvipa*, mentions *Malyadvipa* also, Sir Roland Braddell, one of the most penetrating students of the historical geography of the area, equates

Malyadvipa with Sumatra, while Yavadvipa is interpreted by scholars as a regional name for javacum-Sumatra.<sup>2</sup>

The name Indonesia derived from the latin Indus, meaning “India”, and the Greek nesos, meaning island. (Due to the similarity of the culture in both regions)<sup>3</sup>. The name dates to 18<sup>th</sup> century, far predating the formation of independent Indonesia. Indanised Hindu-Budhiat kingdoms, such as Srivijaya, Medang, Sunda and Majapahit were the predominant governments in Indonesia, and lasted from to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with the last remaining being in Bali.

The shared history and relations between Indonesia and India were harmonious and peaceful, however there was one exception when the India and Indonesia were involved in warfare against each other. In 1025 Rajendra Chola, the chola king from Coromandel in south india, launched naval raids on ports of Srivijaya and wrested kadaram from Srivijaya and occupied it for some time.<sup>4</sup>

The Mahabharata and Ramyana played a key role between two cultures and history. Now the world witnessed around 90% of the population of Indonesia are Muslims, even after the adoption of Islam the elements and culture of Mahabharat and Ramayana still in the genes of the Indonesian people. The participation of javanes Muslims in Ramayanan dance during full moon nights is clear example of hindu and Buddhist influence on the life of Indonesian Muslims. India has the largest Muslim minority in the world, despite the direct interaction with Ramayana and Mahabharata they don't celebrate and enjoy these epics like Indonesian Muslims.

1- Kapur, k. (2010), *History of Ancient India*

2- Hall D. G. E.A *history of South-East Asia*, p.13

3- Tomascik, T; Mah J.A.; Moosa, M.K.(1996). *The Ecology of the Indonesian Seas- Part one*,

4- Craig, A. Lokard, *Socities Networks and Transitions: A Global History*, p.367

Giving a detail account on the historical ties between India and Indonesia, Sanjeev Nayyar argued in his article “Historical Ties India And Indonesia” that:

As we all know, India and Indonesia have been having trade and cultural links for the last 2000 years. The start was made by Indian Traders, who were the first to arrive there in the 1st Century. Hinduism and Buddhism were next to follow. Even today a ship starts from the port of Paradeep in Orissa to Bali. The voyage is known as Bali Yatra.

The earliest historical record is in Ujung Kulon National Park, West Java. An early Hindu archeological relic of a Ganesha statue from the 1st Century AD has been found on the summit of Mount Raksa in Panaitan Island. The next historical record is in the area of Kutai on the Mahakam River in east Kalimantan. Three rough plinths dating from the beginning of the fourth century are recorded in the Pallavi script of India. The inscription reads: “A gift to the Brahmin priests”.

This inscription is followed by the famous Batu Tulis (stone writing) near Bogor in Western Java. On a huge black boulder in, around 450 A.D king Purnawarna inscribed his name and made an imprint of his footprints, as well as his elephant's footprints. The accompanying inscription reads, ‘Here are the footprints of King Purnawarna, the heroic conqueror of the world’. This inscription is in Sanskrit and is still clear after 1500 years. This is the oldest archeological monument in Java.

These two historical monuments are followed by (Candi) Badut near Malang in East Java built in A.D 760. Candi is the name of the Hindu Goddess of Time and Death. This area is literally strewn with ancient Hindu temples and even today temples are being dug out from the ground.<sup>1</sup>

The old see voyage from Orissa to Bali still exist and known as Bali Yatra. In 10<sup>th</sup> century Indonesian students used to visit Nalanda University which was the famous Buddhist boarding school of that time. Indian dance, Indian food habits and Indian language especially Sanskrit also can be seen in the life of the Indonesian people. There is lot of similarity in dances the Chau (masked dance) dance of Orissa is very much similar to Topeng (masked dance) of Indonesia. The Sanskrit names are widely used in Indonesia. For example, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, former Indonesian president, has a Sanskrit-derived name: Susilo from sushila (good character); Yudhoyono from yudha (war or battle); and yana (epic story). Sukarno is derived from Sanskrit su (good) and karno (from Karna, a warrior in the Mahabharata). The national parks, monuments, religious places and museum of the Indonesia witnessed the strong cultural relation between India and Indonesia.

1- Nayyar, S., *Historical Ties India And Indonesia*.

## India- Indonesia relationships in Modern Times

In modern times the old relations become more cordial, India supported Indonesia's freedom struggle. India and Egypt were the only nation that supported and recognized Indonesian independence and started diplomatic relations. India invited the president of Indonesia Sukarno in her first annual Republic Day parade, and the president Sukarno was the first chief guest of the Republic Day parade of India in 1950.

In 1927, when the India's renowned poet, writer and Nobel recipient Rabindra Nath Tagore visited the Bali, he was mesmerized to see the culture and religious practices of the Balinese, he said: "Wherever I go on the island, I see the God".

During the freedom struggle Muslims of India who were serving in the British army deserted from the army on the call of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Muhammad Ali Jinnah encouraged the Muslim soldiers of the British Indian army to join hands with Indonesian against their fight against the Dutch Empire colonization of Indonesia. As a result around 600 Muslims soldiers of the British Indian army deserted the colonial forces putting their lot at stake, and allied with Indonesians.<sup>1</sup> on 3<sup>rd</sup> march 1951 India officially started the diplomatic relations with Indonesia, the president republic of Indonesia Sukarno and the prime minister of India Jawhar Lal Nehru were the among the five founders of the Non-aligned Movement.

In 1947, Nehru organized a conference of Asian nations in Delhi to support Indonesia's struggle for independence and to fly Sutan Sjahrir through the Dutch blockade for the conference. Later when India experienced famine, Indonesian nationalist forces collected rice. Nationalist posters at the time cried out, "Help Mother India!" During the struggle for independence our founding fathers shared common goals, values and visions for India and Indonesia.<sup>2</sup>

During independence struggle of India and Indonesia, the relation between the leaders of two countries was very cordial, Nehru and Biju patnayak visited Indonesia, Sukarno made Biju Patnaik an honorary Bumiputra. It was Biju Patnaik who named the Meghwati. Megawati, Soekarnoputri, the daughter of Soekarno became subsequently president of the Republic of Indonesia in 2001. In 1947, Biju Patnaik came to visit Soekarno in Indonesia. Soekarno's wife had just given birth to a baby girl. It was raining heavily and Biju Patnaik suggested the name of "Meghawati" (Megha in Sanskrit means rain cloud).<sup>3</sup>

1- *Pakistan aims for better relations with Indonesia beyond politics, the Jakarta post, 24 June 2008*

2- *India-Indonesia strategic partnership, May 21st, 2010*

3- *Chandiramani G.L., Bridge To Indonesia.*

In 1951 Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru visited Bali he poetically described Bali as 'The Morning of the World' for the genuine and timeless beauty of its nature, culture and people.<sup>1</sup>

## Cultural Relations

To cement and strengthen the bond between two countries, both countries open the embassy to nurture the old ties. There is an active cultural exchange between two countries. The Jawaharlal Nehru Indian Cultural Center (JNICC) run by the mission offer dance and languages course, the center hold regular classical dance and classical music classes, the center also teaches yoga and Hindi language.

The Indian embassy played a key role to promote and preserve the old ties. The Embassy produced two You Tube video's titled "Old Heritage New Partnerships" and "India-Indonesia-An Enduring Relationship" and brought out various publications on India highlighting our strengths. A special publication titled "Studying in India" in Bahasa language was also brought out to facilitate Indonesian students wishing to pursue higher studies in India. The list of publications brought out by Embassy of India.<sup>2</sup>

1. Scripting Future Histories – English & Bahasa (General Publication on India)
2. India-ASEAN in Focus- English- (Brought out during India-ASEAN 20 years commemorative events in Indonesia)
3. India-ASEAN Partnership ( English) -Commemorating 20 years (Brought out during India-ASEAN 20 years commemorative events in Indonesia)
4. Yoga for Beginners & Intermediate Level- English

5. Weave of Friendship- English ( Publication brought out during Centenary year of Indian Cinema celebrations)
6. Studying in India-English & Bahasa
7. Essential Elements of Kathak- English & Bahasa
8. Women by Women Exhibition Catalogue ( Brought out during Women on Women Exhibition)
9. Gandhi's outstanding leadership- Bahasa
10. India-Indonesia Economic Engagement –Challenges and Way Forward-English
11. India-Indonesia: Meningkatkan Kerjasama Pembangunan, 50 years of ITEC (India-Indonesia: Development Cooperation Partnership, 50 Years of ITEC)- Bahasa ( December 2014)
- 1- *Bali - The Morning of the World*
- 2- *India-Indonesia Bilateral Relations*
12. India Menulis Sejarah Masa Depan ( India: Scripting Future Histories) – Bahasa ( New Edition January 2015)
13. India: Sebuah Perjalanan Spritual ( India: A spiritual Journey)- Bahasa ( January 2015)
14. "Wanita India" ( Indian Women) in Bahasa in cooperation with Public Diplomacy Division of MEA
15. Perjalanan Menelusuri Sejarah: Cerita Indonesia Dan India - a comic book focusing on the historic India Indonesia relationship ( 21 June 2015)

## Conclusion

The two great nations have shared the 2000 years of strong cultural ties, traders of India introduced the Buddhist and Hindu religion, later on Gujarati traders brought the Islam to the Indonesia. Now the Indonesia holds the 13% of the Muslim population of the world and the largest Muslim population in the world. During the freedom movement of the Indonesia, India played an active role to liberate from the Dutch. It was India who recognized and supported the independent Indonesia and established diplomatic relations. Around 10,000 Indians living in Indonesia's different part and there is a need to bolster strong ties between the two countries.

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