

Indonesia - India: Shared Ancient Cultural Ties and Modern Geopolitical Values

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Abstract—The article highlights the presence of Indic culture in Indonesia which binds the people into a common identity. Indic culture made a pervasive impact to all over the region of Southeast Asia and particularly in Indonesia. The article also touches upon the responses and diplomacy of Indian government through the course of time in order to forge more cherished and stronger relationship by invigorating soft power.

Keywords: Indonesia, India, Ancient, modern, Cultural, Geopolitical Values

Introduction

We generally tend to define ourselves from culture to distinguish each society from another. The whole world is built on a range of cultures. Culture permeates every aspect of our lives from the most basic elements of living, eating, clothing, to the most developed art music, and philosophy. The Indic culture, what we see today in Southeast Asian countries and particularly in the Indonesian archipelago where it is pronounced most has been metamorphosed to a new form of a powerful cult which endows the entire archipelago to stay under the philosophy of “*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*”; unity in diversity, its inscribed in the Indonesian national symbol and is mentioned in the article 36 A of the Constitution of Indonesia “Pancasila” (*panchashee as pronounced in Hindi*). This symbol is gripped by the Garuda’s claws and Garuda is mythological bird and the mount of Lord Vishnu.¹

Bharat in Indonesia

Indonesia stretching from its westernmost province; Aceh till Bandar Lampung; Sumatra’s easternmost providence, then comes Java, Bali, Sulawesi and then West Papua, the regions are filled with Indic elements which an Indonesian native cannot perceive in a deeper sense until one studies about mainland culture. The innumerable cultural traits of Indonesians starting from the child birth till the death not only involve the family but the entire societies, villages and towns. The Indonesian community system which truly embodies the theory of *gotong-royong*,² *kejawen* or *kebatinan*³; the strong undercurrents and a key of cultural economic self-sustenance on the village and semi urban areas bind the entire nation into a common identity and this common identity I view is something which is different from Pan-Islamic ethos owing to that fact 88.2 per cent of the Indonesians. Not only that they take pride in associating themselves with Mahabharata and Ramayana, as an integral part of their daily lives and showcase their cultural heritage not only to attract tourists but to maintain an identity adhering to one common basic culture influenced by Indic elements.

There are mainly four cultural regions in Java namely *Kejawen* or Javanese heartland, the northern coastal region of Jav, the Sunda area of the West Java, and the easternmost part is known as *Blambangan*. *Kejawen* is Java’s most dominant and vibrant culture and most of the aristocracies of Indonesia arise from here. Indonesia’s top army, business and political elite are from here. The Sundanese; the second largest ethnic group in Indonesia has Bandung as central place. The *Kejawen* and Sundanese cultures deeply rooted in Hindu-Buddhist culture. Their traditional songs, handicrafts, rituals, puppetry are the live example of ancient Hindu-Buddhist culture.

¹Nyoman I Pursika, “Kajian Analitik Terhadap Semboyan ”*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*”
<http://download.portalgaruda.org/article.php?article=104795&val=1324>

²*Gotong Royong* is an Indonesian term which means to work together or to cooperate in order to get the desirable result.
https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gotong_royong

³*Kebatinan* or *Kejawen* is a Javanese religious tradition, which is mix of animistic, Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic elements, especially Sufi, beliefs and practices. Yyo. M. "Agama Asli--Aliran *Kebatinan Jawa* (*Kejawen*) Pangestu", https://www.academia.edu/9481673/Agama_Asl--Aliran_Kebatinan_Jawa_Kejawen_Pangestu

I remember listening Sundanese song:
Dewi Sinta
Dewa –
Kasasarmah Gan Di Alas Roban Alah Dewa Rama
Mika Cinta – Mika CintaKasasama
Hiji – Hiji Dasar Dasar Kabangsaan
*Hiji Dasar Da Kabangsaan*⁴

Historical Aspect

It's expected that the early Indian contacts were established with Indonesia some century back before the beginning of the Christian era. 'Suvarnabhumi' (Sumatra) is mentioned in the Jatakas, and in the epics and Mahavamsa. Indian traders who mainly traded with Indonesia for spices, sandalwood, pearls and *rudrakshas* (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus*, largely used as rosary and ornaments by Hindus) established links between the two states. A recent discovery of DNA analysis of a tooth found with imported pottery in Bali gives a strong evidence of Indian traders in the late first millennium BC.⁵

Starting from 9th century till late 16th century there were reigns of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms across the archipelago like Srivijaya, Sailendra, Mataram, Kediri, and Singasari which left the entire archipelago deeply rooted in the Indic elements.

The most popular epic of India; Ramayana began its journey at the end of the first millennium towards Southeast Asia. The Ramayana relief at Pramabanan and Panataran, the largest Hindi temples of ancient Java which were built during the Majapahit kingdom, depicts substantially the most popular Indonesian Ramayana today; that is Kakawin and according to Prof KapilaVatsyayan, the Kakawin Ramayana is very close to Bhatti Kavya, and Hanuman Nataka and Bhusundi Ramayana.⁶

Even today, an oral narrative of SujivoTejo, a well-known puppeteer, who recites the story of Ramayana during his *wayangkulit* (leather puppets) performance⁷ on *RawanBadha: (Killing of Rawan)*. Below is excerpt from one of the SujivoTejo's recitations during a leather puppet performance in India on 2014).

The ancient Indonesian traditional Ramayana is presented here using the art of shadow puppets. The topic is the "Fall of Kumbhakarna" Ravana wakes Kumbhakarna to fight Rama. Kumbhakarna advises Ravana to return Sita and seek peace. If despite that there is war, he will fight. Kumbhakarna brings Rama to Ravana by stealing him away from his camp. Hunamuana, Rama's protector on waking finds Rama missing and flies out in search for him. Kumbhakarna brings Rama and Ravana together and advises peace after return of Sita to Rama. Rama refuses peace saying that the return of Sita was only one of the objectives of his war. He really was there to destroy the arrogance of Ravana. Ravana tries to attack Rama in his anger, but Kumbhakarna restrains him. Hanuman reaches in the meantime and rescues Rama. With the failure of the talks Kumbhakarna goes to battle. Kumbhakarna conveys to Bibhishana that he wants to die in battle at the hands of a great saint. Vibhishana knows that the greatest saint in Rama's army is Laxman. In the end Kumbhakarna dies at the hands of Laxman.

Ramayana and Mahabharata based music and performing arts in Indonesia have more audience than in India itself. There is not a single big city in Indonesia where these kinds of shows are not a part of daily entertainment.

There is strong reference of this unique assimilation of cultural transition in the Sanskrit inscriptions 4th century AD.⁸ It's evident that Indian kingship and the contemporary state

⁴<http://smpn2sukamantri.blogspot.in/2011/07/naskah-prosesi-perpisahan-paturay.html>

⁵<http://antiquity.ac.uk/ant/078/Ant0780287.htm> Consulted at 18.30 hrs, 8 Nov. 2013, Delhi

⁶<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penataran>

⁷https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sujiwo_Tejo

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administration system were very attractive and appealing to the kings of Southeast Asia and probably these two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata became a strong medium for its permeation.

Java, the most populated and culturally vibrant islands of the country of Indonesia witnessed decline of Hinduism as Islam pervaded forcefully during 13th Century and making pervasive impact over the entire archipelago. Hinduism started cornering itself in Bali where it remained untouched as the aboriginal people remain firm against letting any other religion to sneak.⁹ The most important parts of this shifting process of Javanese-Hindu migrants were the artists and craftsmen, who were not welcomed in Java for their unique craftsmanship as it was against the ethos of Islamic practices, made Bali as their home and contributed richly to the local prevailed cultural practices.¹⁰ These all gradual changes made Balinese to consider themselves as the protector of the holy land of the gods and they devoted much of their time in a continual series of colourful religious observances, offerings, purification rites, temple festivals, processions, dances, mass cremations and other religious ceremonies and the substantial part of the traditions remained till date.

The eastern region of India mainly consisting West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha has a lot of common linguistics characteristics.¹¹ Mughal attack and further invasions during 13th century weakened the Hindu kings and Buddhists, and consequently most of them were compelled to convert to Islam.¹² Bihar and West Bengal remained partly under the Mughal Empire during 16th and 17th centuries. However, Odisha remained powerful Hindu dynasty under the rule of the Somavamsi/Keshari dynasty and the cultural exchanges between Odisha and Indonesian archipelago remained till late period.¹³ That's why Odisha claims its deep cultural impact on Indonesian archipelago till the present time. There are a lot of similarities between the Lingaraja temples of Bhuvaneshwar, Odisha and the Prambanan Hindu temple of eastern Java.¹⁴

Socio-Religious

The partial Pan-Islamic impact which is discernible mainly these days among Javanese and Sumatrans is the use of headscarf while going outside of the home among Muslim women. Islam adhered by the majority of the people does not strongly mirror radical Pan-Islamic views. The important aspect in Indonesian societies today is that the international tourists get attracted towards day-to-day cultural practices which are very dominant in every Indonesian's life. Java is the home of the majority of the Indonesians and it has influenced the entire archipelago (even the island i.e. Sulawesi is thousands of kilometre far) with its strong cultural impact through the course of time.

Millions of tourists across the globe visit Bali and other parts of Indonesia every year and get fascinated and imbibe themselves in the heavenly cultural atmosphere which they don't find in other island countries. Bali, in his words by Ravindranath Tagor: "wherever I go on the island, I see God", because there are thousands of Hindu temples all around Bali that makes it one of the most attractive tourist places across the globe.¹⁵¹⁶

Bali, constituting majority of Hindu communities has witnessed a flux of 275,617 foreign tourists, an increase of 15.7% month-on-month as per the data till June 2012.¹⁷ A general survey shows that one of the main reasons behind this continuous inflow of international tourists in Bali is its culture based services it provides to the tourists. A culture based tourism industry spontaneously necessitates the social inclusion where all types of communities participate within their cultural framework and that attracts the tourists most. This has not only helped them realizing their potentials of the cultural power of the society but also institute a continuous source of revenue generation.

⁹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Indonesia Consulted at 18.30 hrs, 8Jan. 2014, Delhi

¹⁰http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Javanese_people Consulted at 18.30 hrs, 8 Jan. 201, Delhi

¹¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_India, consulted at 14.30 hrs, 10Nov. 2013, Delhi

¹²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Hindus, consulted at 17.30 hrs, 10Nov. 2013, Delhi

¹³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bihar_and_Orissa_Province, consulted at 18.30 hrs, 10 Nov. 2013, Delhi

¹⁴<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20011130/cth1.htm> consulted at 18.30 hrs, 10Oct. 2013, Delhi

¹⁵http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balinese_temple Consulted at 13.24 Hrs on 05/02/2014 in Delhi

¹⁶<http://www.baliorti.com/2012/06/how-many-temples-in-bali-indonesia.html> Consulted at 17.57 Hrs on 06/02/2014 in Delhi

¹⁷<http://www.eturbonews.com/36592/bali-tourism-9-percent-2013> Consulted at 13.24 Hrs on 05/02/2014 in Delhi



Fig. 1. Bali

As the world recessed economically during the period of 2009-2010 countries having diverse cultural communities fought the recession with great resiliency and the impact was not as it was pitiable in some of the developed countries. Indonesia; the largest archipelagic country has more than 300 ethnic groups successfully overcame the recession to a certain extent by promoting culture based tourism.^{18,19} This was mainly due to the self-channelled economy of culturally strong and diverse societies and this theory befits with Indonesia.²⁰

Every Balinese considers representing oneself a common culture which is imbibed in mixed Hindu culture that is a veneer of Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism. They considered themselves belonging to one of the nine Hindu sects existed in ancient Bali i.e. Pasupata, Bhairawa, SiwaShidanta, Waisnawa, Bodha, Brahma, Resi, Sora and Ganapatya. Starting from worshipping gramdevata (the village god) Balinese Hindus are not less practitioners than the main land Indians. The main Gods; Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha (the creator, protector and destroyers) remain on the top besides numerous gods and goddesses of the mountains, seas, the rivers and of the entire individual natural and empirical phenomenon. The main four castes system also migrated to Balinese Hindus however it could not remain very strong as migration from other islands continued leaving the system weak. Therefore the loose cast system has been disintegrating fast.

According to a Professor Jan Hendrik and WisnuWardana who have recently authored a book “Tri-Hita Karana” a Balinese Hindu philosophy that says peace and liberty are obtainable in our lives only when we appreciate three harmonious entities; the Gods blessed life and created nature, the nature offers needs of human beings and, to build temples to worship, to hold various Hindu ceremonies, to make daily offerings, to preserve nature, and to discuss and solve problems together. If Balinese leaves its culture it may become one of the cash based tourist destinations like Phuket or Pattaya in Thailand says WisnuWardana.

Indian scholars i.e. RavindraNath Tagore, R.C. Majumdar and NilakantaSastryhighlighted Indonesia in their writings and the glory of Indonesia was well rooted among the think tanks of contemporary India. This was the main reason why India supported Indonesian cause during its struggle for independence from Dutch by convening a special conference in 1949 which was attended by 19 nations and later it took the case to the UN. The bilateral ties between the countries were so strong that Sukarno the first President of Indonesia became our chief guest during the first Republic Day celebration of India in 1950.

Later in 1955 the bonhomie reflected into the foreign policy of India which resulted into convening Asia Africa Conference in Bandung which gave birth to Non-Align Movement, a strong pillar for the newly independent countries which discarded the hegemony of the then superpowers.

The bilateral relations grew but amid slow speed we had security agreements with all the three military wings during 1956, 1958, and 1960, respectively. India supported Indonesia in its counterinsurgency during 1950s and both the countries had first joint naval exercises in 1960. However, the bonhomie could not last very long, this was the most unfortunate moments when Sukarno started siding with Chou En-lai; the first Premier of China and he supported Chinese

¹⁸<http://www.eturbonews.com/36592/bali-tourism-9-percent-2013> Consulted at 13.24 Hrs on 01/01/2014 in Delhi

¹⁹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Financial_crisis_of_2007%E2%80%932008 Consulted at 13.24 Hrs on 01/01/2014 in Delhi

²⁰<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/priority-areas/sids/culture-tourism/culture/> Consulted at 13.24 Hrs on 01/01/2014 in Delhi

aggression on India in 1962, demanded Indian Ocean to be named as Indonesian Ocean and even staked claim on our Andaman Nicobar islands are an extension of the Indonesian chain of islands. Becoming Chinese centric Sukarno partially also supported the consolidation of political power of communists in the country which irked the other stake holders i.e. non-communist army, religious authorities and the right wing of government officials, and later it took a big toll resulting the changing of power and Sukarno who was ousted by the then General were also witnessed the decline of Sukarno who was ousted by the Suharto in 1967.

The bilateral ties further soured when India entered into a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Soviet Union during the war with Pakistan over Bangladesh. Now, relationship remained standstill till the ouster of Suharto in 1998. India also kept itself engaged in all the major international activities of ASEAN with its Look East Policy in the early 1990s. After the ouster of Suharto suddenly there is rejuvenation in the foreign policy of Indonesia, it started reengaging itself in defence engagement with India with our armed forces, maritime cooperation is one of the most important aspects which includes coordinated patrol, joint bilateral and multilateral exercises, disaster relief and management.

The maritime security cooperation is perhaps the most significant, as both countries share a common boundary as littorals of the Indian Ocean. Such cooperation includes coordinated patrols, joint bilateral or multilateral exercises, as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The cooperation also resulted into their first ever joint training exercise which was named as “Garuda Shakti at the Indian Army’s elite Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS) in Mizoram in March 2012. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s visit to Delhi as India’s most-honored state guest during Republic Day celebrations in January 2011 became a milestone in our fast growing bilateral relationship which simply indicates that.

Hindu Pantheon

Starting from worshipping *gramadevata* (the village god) Balinese Hindus are not less practitioners than the main land Indians. The main Gods; Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha (the creator, protector and destroyers) remain on the top besides numerous gods and goddesses of the mountains, seas, the rivers and of the entire individual natural and empirical phenomenon. The main four castes system also migrated to Balinese Hindus however it could not remain very strong as migration from other islands continued leaving the system weak. Therefore the loose cast system has been disintegrating fast.²¹



Fig. 2. India

²¹<http://gampingnews.yolasite.com/gampingnews/java-oral-tradition>, Consulted at 18.30 hrs, 12 Dec. 2013, Delhi

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