India-Greece Cultural Relations

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In August 2023, India's Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, paid a visit to Greece, resulting in a joint statement released on August 25th. This statement pledged to elevate the bilateral relationship to a strategic level, encompassing various areas, including security, the economy, and culture, which are all highly relevant in today's world. While security and economic cooperation may appear to be driving factors in advancing this relationship, the common cultural ties provide a robust foundation for a lasting connection. This could potentially set a new precedent for India's relationships with other European nations and Central Asian Republics.The brief joint statement mentioned culture only briefly, without further elaboration. In a different context, the statement acknowledged India and Greece as 'two ancient sea-faring nations with a long-standing maritime outlook,' highlighting their historical links. Interestingly, Western and Western-influenced Indian literature shed light on Greek influences on India, particularly through the dominant Gandhar school of art. While the Gandhar school of art and Greek presence in India are recognized, India's influence is sometimes downplayed in literature discussing the India-Greece cultural relationship.Exploring deeper cultural interactions between the two countries could offer a fresh perspective on India's cultural connections with Europe, Central Asia, the Western world, and East Asia. The study of Greek literature related to India may reveal extensive cultural exchanges between these civilizations. Several books underscore the use of different Indian and Greek words to describe the same concepts. For instance, the Macedonian term 'basileus' and the Indian term'maharajah' both refer to a king in the same manuscript.Examining such manuscripts could provide new insights into this relationship. Some writings depict Buddhist dialogues, with 'Questions of Milinda' being a prominent example, shedding light on the spread of Buddhism in Greece and Europe. Notably, figures like Subhūti, the son of Nārada, are known as 'Sophytos,' and Nārada himself becomes 'Naratos' in the Hellenized version.Recognition of Indian influence on prominent Greek works, including the Hippocratic corpus, Natural Histories, Geographika, and Periplus Maris Erythraei, is gradually increasing among Western scholars. Linguists have identified Greek words derived from Indian origins, further highlighting the exchange of goods, ideas, and culture between the two civilizations. It is imperative to revisit these works and explore the different routes through which Indian influences reached Greece. Several Greek personalities, such as Megasthenes and Menander I (a king who embraced Buddhism), have strong ties with India. A thorough examination of inscriptions, gold coins, rock edicts, and other artefacts jointly commissioned or sponsored by India and Greece is necessary to fully grasp the depth of their cultural bond. Both Indian and Greek governments should consider establishing centres or chairs in honour of Demetrius Galanos, a Greek Sanskrit scholar who resided in Varanasi in the early nineteenth century. Galanos made significant contributions to the India-Greece cultural relationship by translating Sanskrit works like the Bhagwat Gita and Niti Sataka. Approximately twenty of his manuscripts can be found at the National Library of Greece in Athens.

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