

India-Indonesia cultural relations

Vivek Kumar Mishra*

Located in the Indo-Pacific Ocean, Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago with the fourth largest population. In the past decade, the island country has emerged as a leading regional middle power in Southeast Asia. As a member of the G20 and the biggest market in the region, Indonesia is a major player in the global economy.

Historically, the island nation shares close cultural bonds with India, dating back to the time when epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata were compiled. The name *Yawadwipa* (modern Java), for instance, finds mention in the Ramayana, where *Sugriva*, chief of Rama's army, dispatched his men to *Yawadwipa* in search of Sita. The Ramayana, indeed, remains an important source of Indonesian literature, art, culture, and religion. The ancient Indian epic has not only influenced the moral conduct of life but also acts as a thread connecting the island nation with the Indian subcontinent.

Indian culture was acquired through epics, ancient texts, manuals, and, above all, Sanskrit literature, which particularly facilitated the penetration of Indian culture in Indonesia. For example, tales of the Ramayana were spread in Bali through various art forms such as storytelling, theatre, dancing, painting, and other theoretical genres. Balinese *ramakavaca* and Javanese *kakawin* Ramayana are termed as Indonesian adaptations of the Ramayana. Balinese Kecak dance of Java and Wayang Wong Javanese dance retell the character of Ramayana, and various stories, like an episode of the burning of Lanka by Lord Hanuman, reflect the synchronisation of Indian culture in Indonesia.

Likewise, Prambanan, Bali, and Borobudur temples are examples of India's cross-cultural influence in the field of architecture and temple design in Indonesia. Indian languages, Sanskrit, and *Pali* have also influenced Indonesia. The Ramayana has traversed Indonesia with a variety of interpretations. Another interesting example is the *Ayu Balan* dance troupe from Bali, which seeks inspiration from Sita in the Ramayana.

Indians have been part of Indonesia since ancient times. The imprints of Hinduism in Indonesia are found in local literature, architecture, culture, lifestyle, traditions, art, and artefacts. The religion of Indonesia has been influenced by the practices of Hinduism, which spread to Indonesia when Indians came into contact with the local people through maritime trade links. Many temples of Hindu deities can be found in Indonesia, and several architectural sites reveal the extent to which Indonesia shares a cultural bond with India. All this has survived the geopolitical jerks and jolts since the two countries attained independence and continues to serve as a strong and stable base for an enduring relationship.

In contemporary times, what has reinforced the bond is the growing popularity of Bollywood movies. Interestingly, bollywood songs are found to be very similar to Indonesian music, such as *dangdut*, which is the music of Indonesians. The cultural activities organised by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) have also not only popularised Indian music, art, and dance but also helped promote the shared values and beliefs between the two nations. Besides, the two sides have also established the Indonesia-India Friendship Association (IIFA), which aims to engage community leaders of both countries in enhancing connectivity and cultural linkages.

***Dr Mishra is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida.** The views and opinion expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the CSIR.
