

Cross-Cultural Diplomacy between India and Indonesia: Analyzing India's Role in South-East Asia through Soft Power Politics

Anwesha Hazarika^a, Samikshya Madhukullya^b, Anurag Hazarika^{c,*}

^a Cotton University, Assam, India.

^b Tezpur University, Assam, India.

^c St. Xaviee's College, Assam, India.

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* Corresponding author:

Anurag Hazarika 
E-mail:
id-anuraghazarika2@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The cross-cultural diplomacy is a new tandem in the arena of International Relation which has brought the nation-states all over the world to shift from traditional diplomatic negotiations to a naïve yet innovative approach of national interests. Soft power politics through cultural exchanges between India and Indonesia is historically a political statute. Both the state's share a 'Mosaic of Culture', which indeed, facilitates India's influence in South-East Asia. Present day, neo-liberalist agenda in International Relations has widened the scope for India, to be a socio-cultural influencer in Indonesia. However, India's reach as a strategic partner in affairs related to South-East Asia is bleak compared to its immediate East Asian neighbors. India is struggling to be the first preference of the ASEAN nations, as a solid power of strategic influence. This paper shall explore, if soft-power politics can be gainful for India, in its visions towards South- East Asia, by understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural relations between India and Indonesia and its impact on India.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The sphere of International Relations is a juggernaut in shifting international politics towards an unimaginable yet an achievable reality. Common socio-cultural history and political interests are the magnets for establishing or strengthening bi-lateral relations.

In this context the relation between India and Indonesia bears a long mutual history beyond strategic and political interests. In this changing world, India and Indonesia's relation is one of fine example of India's strategic Act East Policy. The past decade of the bilateral relation between them, strengthened due to the geo-politics related to the Indian Ocean, which is the shared

water source for both the countries. The convergence of Maritime interests, economic engagement, shared cooperation in science and technology, with regular visits by both state leaders, has burgeoned their diplomatic ties recently [1].

The shift in the diplomatic outlook of India from Look East Policy to Act East policy is intended to connect and promote economic, strategic and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels. Earlier, in 2011, Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), was signed in between both the countries. Moreover, Modi government extended the narrow jargon of the erstwhile Look East policy from only economic gains to strategic political, economic, cultural, educational and technological exchanges, in the Act East policy [2]. India being a strategic partner with ASEAN, and Indonesia as a founding member of ASEAN, has benefited India, as Indonesia turned out to be the second largest trading partner of India in the ASEAN Region. On the other hand, India is a major investor of Indonesia, where there are about 30 investors, 4750 projects, during 2022-23. The geo-politics regarding the Indo-Pacific commonness between India and Indonesia, intensified after the rise of China and growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean [3].

Narrowing down the focus, India-Indonesia has a common colonial history. India secured its independence from the British two years later than Indonesia, who was under the Dutch rule. Moreover, the Cold War politics brought the two countries closer for the first time when Nehru and Sukarno initiated to form NAM, in 1961 [4,5]. The geographical proximity between the two nations, due to the common continent of Asia, might have fostered a common cultural affinity with each other.

The cultural exchanges in between the two Asian nations are noteworthy and striking, with regard to the fact that Indonesia bearing a Muslim majority state of 87.20% of Muslim population (Ministry of Indonesian Religious Affairs data, 2022), has smooth adoption, respect and exchange of trust, loyalty towards celebrations and occasions of Indian values.

2. IMPEDIMENTS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA AGAINST INDIA'S RISING FOOTPRINTS

Indo-Pacific lately, has become the hotspot of geo-politics and foreign policy, with great power competition between US, China, Japan, Australia, member countries of European Union (EU) and ASEAN. Today, India is a big party of the security alliances like QUAD, IORA or ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), because of the common security gaps and willingness to work with the individual ASEAN states on a bi-lateral level [6]. With specific regard to the ASEAN members, the rising economic GDP of India have bolstered to ponder upon issues like disaster management, capacity building, resource sharing, trade connectivity etc.

But a major impediment lying on the part of India's noticeable presence in the South- East Asia is China and USA. Over the past few decades, ASEAN has considered China as the primary security partner and USA as the primary security guarantor. Although today, USA has been chalking out efforts to isolate China, but China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner since 13 years in a row. Moreover, the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), boosted its relations with ASEAN nations further [7].

India although have secured the status of Comprehensive Security Partnership(CSP) with ASEAN, but there is a lot many to achieve for it to secure its economic and political goals South-East Asia [8]. However, building of bi-lateral relations on the grounds of common civilization and cross-cultural linkages, and soft-power diplomacy can thicken the plot for India to sustain and influence, the South-East Asia [9]. As mentioned before, the way to weaken China's dominance and emerge as a reliable partner of ASEAN, through garnishing the India-Indonesian cross- cultural relativity through diplomacy could be an approach towards India's benefit.

2.1 Objectives of the study

- To determine the cultural commonness between India and Indonesia.
- To explore how the soft-power diplomacy between India-Indonesia will benefit India's national interests towards South-East Asia.

2.2 Research Questions

- What are the Indian cultural composition that has swept into the life of the Indonesians?
- How has India-Indonesian relation in the post Cold War period, will turn the table in favor of India's diplomatic interest?
- Will soft-power diplomacy be successful in brewing up India's relation with South- East Asia?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theory of soft-power of Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, as 'the theory of complex independence', determines how the neo-liberalist world politics has ameliorated the possibility of wars and created a zone of cooperation and power of ideas, as a facet of establishing bi-lateral relations [10]. Since, in soft power diplomacy there is no absolute or relative gains, where both the parties would be at a gain-gain situation, therefore, in this paper, an analysis shall be conducted for understanding how could cross-cultural diplomacy between India and Indonesia, be beneficial for India, in the recent time and whether this approach will be a helping hand for India in its aim for developing influence in the South-East Asian nations.

3.2 Sources of data collection

The purpose of the study shall be to develop an understanding of how soft-power politics is relevant to India, in context of India-Indonesia relations. Therefore, the study shall be proceeded on the basis of the available secondary sources-like, Government reports (both India and Indonesia), research works of designated scholars, and newspaper or any print media published from Jakarta Post (Indonesia) and New Delhi (India). Since it would be an exploratory research, the proposed study implies to employ relevant exploratory models whichever is applicable during the process of research conducting.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Early ties and legacies

The term 'Indonesia' has its roots in the Indus River, which is a sacrosanct river of India and its civilization. The Hindu Epic literature 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' plays an important role in Indonesia's culture and history. Mention of Java, the Indonesian island is there in Ramayana, although 90 percent of Javanese population are Muslim by their religion. Evidence of the transfer of the Sanskrit and the Brahmi script, could be seen in Sanskrit loanwords in Indonesian language.

Speaking about architectural style, Islam is the primarily followed religion in Indonesia and draws connectivity to the architecture of Mosques in India variedly. The temples at Bali, Borobudur and Prambanam bear testimony to the Indian presence in Indonesia [11]. The process of acculturation between Indonesia and India could be found by the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism, where the existence of the world's largest Hindu complex in Prambanam, near Yogyakarta in Central Java and the world's largest Buddhist complex near Borobudur, are there.

This link in the architecture strengthened after visits of Indian archaeologists to the specific sites bearing Indian traces.

In the realm of popular drama, 'Wayang' is a form of Indonesian theatre depicting the stories of Mahabharata with settings and characters molding it to the Indonesian cultural settings. The puppet shows have become politico-economic and social life of the Indonesians. One of the popular music in Indonesia, 'Dangdut music', also shows the influence of Hindustani / Indian music [12].

Indonesian Archipelago is famous for the rise of the Dharmic Civilization which has its origin in India. The largest bastion of the Hindu religion rested in the fabulous Indonesian Island State, Bali. There an Indonesianized manner of Indian dharma, called 'Agama Hindu Dharma', developed which is a mixture of Shaivism and Buddhism.

ISCON (International Society Dharma Parishad in Indonesia. ISKON is one of the largest branch of Gaudiya Vaishnava and is widely practiced in

Bali. An area catering to such religious practices led to the formation of New Gita Nagari in Indonesia.

To draw a study regarding Indonesian history with Indian mythology, or sites of mutual importance, institutional centres of excellence like Jawaharlal Nehru Centre in Jakarta and Nalanda University in India, are set up [13].

4.2 Impact of Diaspora Linkages between Indonesia and India(Post cold war period)

In the 21st century, a forbearing conundrum towards strengthening of bi-lateral relations is played by the Diaspora on the host country. Globalization has reduced the world into a small village, where prospects of jobs, trade, academics and governmental foreign affairs led to permanent settlement in the host country and thereby, influencing for adoption of the native culture. According to Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, there are around 8500 NRI's, 111500 Persons of Indian Origin and 1, 20,000 Overseas Indians currently residing in Indonesia. However, it is also true that it is not after the advent of globalization that has drawn many Indians to Indonesia but there is a long history of the Diaspora exchange between both the countries.

In the early history around 1st century, venture into Indonesia was made by the Indians who settled there and transformed themselves beyond recognition. By 5th century, Buddhism is believed to have reached Sumatra. Indian missionaries too were integral in spreading Islam there [5].

Second, influx of Indians happened when Indonesia was a colony of the British rule, as indentured laborers, which again settled there permanently.

During pre and post war years, in order to save the lives, many Indians moved to Indonesia where later they tried to assimilate with the Indonesian culture with a cultural exchange policy, and thus cemented their place into Indonesian society with intermarriages. For instance, an area called 'Passar Baru' in Indonesia is also called as 'Little India', from where many Indians has flourished as big Industrialists and IT professionals. In politics of Indonesia too, the

emergence of H.S. Dhillon is extraordinary with the pivotal positions he held in the Indonesian government.

Thus, the Indian Diaspora in Indonesia has made the country itself Indianized in its customs too. The rituals of 'Anjali Mudra', eating with hands, offering and incense burning are some familiar customs practiced by some Indonesians today regardless of their religion. The culinary similarities between both the countries has developed in the recent past by the influence of the new Indian Diaspora in the use of spices in almost every Indonesian and Indian dishes [8].

The Indian community in Indonesia are also trade dealers dealing with textile and sports goods. People there maintain amiable relationships with assimilating attitude with each other in spite of having different origin or belongingness [14].

4.3 Symbolism of Acculturat on between India and Indonesia

The national motto of Indonesia bearing the tagline 'Bhineka Tinggal Ika' denotes the meaning of 'Multiple but One'. It somewhere resembles India's national motto of 'Unity in Diversity', because both the countries has the essence of diversity and variedness in its demography and their religious beliefs and practices.

The Jayatu Airline, based in Jakarta, Indonesia, although is non-functional now, has been named after the mythological bird mentioned in Ramayana, 'Jatayu'. Even after this, the national airline of Indonesia is named as 'Garuda Airlines' bearing its name after another mystical bird which has reference in Hindu and Buddhist mythology [1].

Although being member states of G20 and ASEAN, like political organizations, the government of both the countries prepare regulations and policies which can attract tourists either by establishing cooperation or through diplomacy. In the recent years, movement of people and their settlement in foreign lands, has eased the government roles in facilitating bi-lateral relationships. According to Bali's Central Statistics Agency (BPS), India contributes the fourth most foreign visitors to Bali after China, Australia, and Japan. It

contributes 4.43% of total international visitors to the 'Island of the Gods'.

International Yoga Day is widely celebrated in Indonesia on June 21st, apart from initiating interests in different Indian sports and acting as a host country for games purpose.

Facebook page of India to connect with the youth of Indonesia "Old Heritage, New Partnership", is an initiative to draw the foreign students to India and foster cultural assimilation as a driving way to attract the youth. In 2005, the two countries agreed to establish the Indonesia-India Friendship Association, facilitating people-to-people cultural linkages. However, the cultural arena of Indonesia, favors India to strengthen its 'soft power' [14]. India also reciprocated when Rabindranath Tagore, an Indian poet was so enamored to Bali and said, "Wherever I go on the Island, I see God". Even Pandit Nehru, hailed Bali as the "Morning of the world".

4.4 Bi-lateral gains of Indo-Indonesian relations

The soft-power approach as a foreign policy mechanism has led to success story of solidarity and prosperity in the relation between India and Indonesia. India being a member of BRICS and Indonesia as an ASEAN member country can benefit each other in tackling common political challenges by negotiations and adjustment within their respective inter-governmental/.regional organizations. The visits of the political leaders between each other ushers signing of trust through Memorandum of Understanding (MoU's) in the year 2011 and 2013 especially, which have flourished some massive South-South cooperation in the South-East Asian region. The two nations have agreed to strengthen their cooperation on space, research, training, and education.

Indonesia shares international borders with India through the maritime trade route of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, for security and safety potentiality [15]. Indonesia has emerged as the second largest trading partner in the ASEAN region. Bilateral trade has increased from US\$ 4.3 billion in 2005-06 to US\$ 17.4 billion in 2020-21 (US\$ 14,371.47 from April 2021 to October 2021). Both the counties are members of G-20, E-7, NAM, and UN. Joint Naval Exercises of

both the countries Naval forces, 'Samudra Shakti', in 2018, is a remark of the pre-existing operational engagement since 2002, 'Indo-Indo Corpat' [7].

It is seen in Indonesia today that due to its cultural similarity with India, half of the country's GDP is earned from the tourism sector. Many tourists from India visits Java, Bali and Sumatra every year to attend workshops and seminars held on the role of Hinduism and Buddhist (India & Indonesia should establish RICH, theme-based tourism plan, 2023).

Moreover, the rising China's influence politically and economically as an Asian superpower, has led both India and Indonesia to adopt cautious approach towards China. The 1962 Indo-China war and strikes between Indonesia and China from 1960's, brought the two countries closer. The support from Indonesia in several India's stance in the global issues has been indispensable (How India, Indonesia are joining hands to counter China's aggression, 2023). This has reinforced the arena of complex-interdependence further strong.

The remittances received by India annually from Indonesia is 4.270 billion, as per the report of the Pew Research Centre, 2019.

Lastly, 'Sahabat India: Festival of India in Indonesia', is an event like India Observation day which is celebrated regularly by Indonesians, on a large scale to promote cultural interaction and tourism [5].

4.5 India's fate in soft-power diplomacy

The cultural outsourcing in the diplomatic relations is a depiction of neo-liberal magnum of 'complex-interdependence'. Since, the access to South-East Asia smoothed after ASEAN's formation and India's Look East and Act East policies, however, its geo- strategic areas are yet to be ventured fully by India [16]. By this, it can be referred that, despite of having friendly, cooperative and cordial relations with the ASEAN nations, the amount of India's influence it had to have in South-East Asia, is still minimum. Through the centuries, India has been a source of inspiration of art, architecture, culture, family values, customs and traditions, for the South-East Asian nations, through its firm roots of trade,

migration, common socio-cultural and religious history.

But here arises the question, if India would succeed in becoming one of the strongest and reliable, partner of the South-East Asian nations, in the future? (India - the bridge linking South and Southeast Asia, 2017). However, the dominance of the neo-liberal approach in establishing relations for mutual benefits, would certainly add bonus to its desire, as it had in context of India-Indonesia relations [3]. The Indian cultural penetration through peaceful and non-political means has successfully spread its net in South-East Asia, but as a beneficiary of this dimension of cultural influence, India has to establish bi-lateral relations on the grounds of soft-power politics, which could be a gradual approach to get hold of the lion's share as a trustworthy and powerful partner of ASEAN members [16,17].

5. CONCLUSION

Cultural interactions has been the bedrock of engagement between India and Indonesia. Carving out cross-cultural principalities in favor of one's national interest is possible due to the era of neo-liberalism. The relation between India and Indonesia are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural aspect firstly compared to the political strategic cooperation. They share a multi-track diplomacy, but the cultural bond is comparatively stronger than the rest diplomatic factors. Their relation exemplifies India's historical role in the cultural affairs of not only Indonesia but South-East Asia. Thus, viewing this bi-lateral connection from the point of how India could be beneficial from the entire ASEAN complex, it could be determined that Soft-power diplomacy is the sole instrument in the hands of India, to maintain its sustenance, impact and a participant decision maker of the Indo-Pacific region. Overthrowing of the competition from China in the South-East Asian front can help India to get prioritized by the ASEAN nations.

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