

Indic Elements in Indonesian Arts and Literature: Shared Heritage between India and Indonesia

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Abstract

Indic-Belt or the Greater India is the geographical region where Bharat's knowledge tradition spread and influenced the local community in terms of language, culture, religions, practices and social values. Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia has been the region that received more Indic knowledge than any other parts of the world due to the easy accessibility to the land and sea routes. This Indic influence is visible in many art forms and folklore due to a long period of rules of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms. This study aims at exploring the presence of Indic elements in Indonesian artworks, old buildings and folklore. This paper is based on a qualitative descriptive study in which the data was collected through literature study. The study found that Indian epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata have greatly influenced the literary tradition in Indonesia, as it was present in the forms of puppets, woodcrafts, painting and batik. In addition, Indonesian-present vocabulary 'Esa' (singular) to describe the concept of oneness of God came from the Sanskrit word 'ish' which was carried out by the Indic permeate to Indonesia. The study suggests that with such influence of Indic culture and tradition to Indonesia, both Indonesia and India shared similar heritage and hence steps to strengthen the cultural bonds between the two nations need to be built and maintained.

Keywords: *Indic-belt, Ramayana, Mahabharata, heritage*

Abstrak

Indic-Belt atau Greater India adalah wilayah geografis dimana tradisi pengetahuan Bharat menyebar dan mempengaruhi masyarakat setempat dalam hal bahasa, budaya, agama, praktik dan nilai-nilai sosial. Asia Tenggara termasuk Indonesia telah menjadi wilayah yang menerima lebih banyak pengetahuan Bharat daripada bagian lain dunia karena aksesibilitas yang mudah ke jalur darat dan laut. Pengaruh India ini terlihat dalam banyak bentuk seni dan cerita rakyat karena masa pemerintahan kerajaan Hindu-Budha yang panjang. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi keberadaan unsur-unsur India dalam karya seni dan cerita rakyat Indonesia. Makalah ini didasarkan pada studi deskriptif kualitatif dimana data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara secara daring dan observasi. Kajian ini menemukan bahwa epos India seperti Ramayana dan Mahabharata sangat mempengaruhi tradisi sastra di Indonesia, seperti yang hadir dalam bentuk wayang, kerajinan kayu, lukisan dan batik. Selain itu, kosakata bahasa Indonesia hadir 'Esa' (tunggal) untuk menggambarkan konsep keesaan Tuhan berasal dari kata Sansekerta 'ish' yang dilakukan oleh orang India meresap ke Indonesia. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa dengan pengaruh budaya dan tradisi India ke Indonesia, baik Indonesia dan India memiliki warisan budaya yang serupa, dan karenanya langkah-langkah untuk memperkuat ikatan budaya antara kedua negara perlu dibentuk dan dipelihara.

Kata kunci: *Sabuk India, Ramayana, Mahabharata, warisan budaya*

Introduction

India and the Southeast Asian countries shared intricate and interwoven social values, which discerns from its heritage of numerous local wisdom and art forms. The historical factors and the shared cultural legacy which became the bridge between India and Southeast Asia are profound and strong enough to strengthen the concept of Indic-Belt, which embodies many common sociological aspects of these two regions at large (Ilham Juli 2020, pp.75.82).

Two Indian epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata are widely known, adopted and performed in Southeast Asian countries in various localized forms. Ramayana is known as different names in some countries, such as: Phra Lak Phra Ram in Laos, Reamker in Cambodia, Ramakien in Thailand, Kakawin Ramayana di Indonesia, Hikayat Seri

Rama in Malaysia, Maharadia Lawana (King Ravana) in the Philippines. The seventh century Ramayana stone pedestal in the Cham temple relief at Tra Kieu in Vietnam signifies the local adaptation of Ramayana epic.

The stories and plots of these two texts were and still are customized and adapted according to contemporary societies' prevailing traditions and norms. For example, the Buddhist version mentions that Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were sent to the Himalayas in order to get rid of the evil intention of Dasharatha's third wife, and the abduction of Sita is not referred to. Meanwhile, the Malay version gives the extra plenipotentiary role to Lakshmana, who is highly glorified; Thai version narrates and glorifies Hanumana as a devotee of Rama.

Different characters are highlighted and emphasized in different national versions, i.e., Hanumana is main character in the version of Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand; Lakshmana as the main character in the epic version in Malaysia; and Ghatotkacha, Ravana, Hanumana, and Kumbhakarna are the prominent characters in the version of Indonesia. Hunumana or Anoman is pictured as a unique character in Java and Bali, depicting a great devotee, loyal to their master, great strategist, and robust. He has excellent wisdom representing other creatures of the earth who could co-exist with human beings (Gründ and Kathy 2012).

Under Indian dynasties like Palava, Gupta, Pala, and Chola starting from the 2nd century to the 12th century, many parts of Southeast Asia including Indonesia are influenced by Indian culture, which ruled over the essential social elements of the people in the form of culture, law, and governance. A substantial part of the Indonesian social system is

deeply influenced by Indic culture due to the direct trade route through Malacca and Sunda Straits (Wade 2009).

The article aims to investigate the Indic heritage in Indonesian art forms to understand the depth of Indic culture reflected in the social conscience of Indonesia. The Indonesian folklore is so much similar to Indian ones in a way that it respects and promote positive values as a guidance to humankind. This paper also explores the manifestation and representation of Indic elements in Indonesian handicrafts, fine arts, music, and other art forms, especially in Java and Bali.

Literature Review

This section presents some key concepts related to the study namely: the concept of Rudra Siva, the history of interaction between India and Indonesia, and Indian dynasties which influenced Indonesia.

The concept of Rudra Siva

“The Concept of Rudra Siva Through the Ages” by Chakravarti (year?) “The Religion of Java” by Clifford Geertz (year?), and Scientific Phenomena” in ‘The Rituals of Bali’ by di Kleen (year?) are main references that author has consulted. These references provide a basic concept of the oneness of the Indic culture, which pervaded Indonesia's spiritual and literary realm and other parts of Southeast Asia (di Kleen, 1923). Symbols of Shiva have evolved through Harappa civilization. The Shiva *linga* in Myson Temple, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia, for instance, indicated the Indic culture journey from the mainland 'Bharat' to other parts of the world (Chakravarti 1986).

The Religion of Java by Clifford Geertz has classified the people of Java into three classes; Abangan, Priyayi, and the Santri. Among these

three classes, the Abangan and the Priyayi are very close to the Hinduism concept of life, as they have syncretic practices. This present study, however, separates Javanese culture and tradition from the rest of the Indonesian Archipelagic culture. The evolution of Muslims of Java into various sects having numerous animistic and syncretic beliefs are a landmark work that helped other scholars to understand Javanism lucidly (Geertz 1960).

The concept of oneness exists in both Hinduism and Islam concepts of God. In Hinduism, oneness is related to *rudra siva* which is believed as a merger of eleven *rudras* (the power who manages the world consisting *buana agung* – the macro cosmos and *buana alit* – the microcosmos). Meanwhile, oneness in Islam relates to the single God of Allah who has no creator and no children. Allah regulates the *malaikat* (angels) who run some tasks in the world.

Interaction between India and Indonesia in history

The interaction between India and Indonesia dated back to the fifth century. Another source also mentioned that the interaction of India with Southeast Asia was already established during the Sunga in 187 to 78 BCE (Stadtner, 1975) and during Satavahana Dynasty in the third century BC to the second century BC (Sinopoli, 2001). Recounted in Ramayana epos that Sugriva sent his men to Java and Sumatra to search for Sita, which implies that Indians already frequented these islands (The Guardian Aug 23, 2008). Sanskrit language, Nagari script, and the Pallava script were introduced by the Indian Prince Aji Caka (78 AD) during the Caka period in Indonesia, as reflected in the copper inscriptions (*prasasti*). This profoundly influenced the Kawi language having words and phrases of the Javanese language (William 2002, p.100).

There have been continuous cultural interactions between India and Indonesia up to the last Hindu-Buddhist empire, Majapahit, which declined in the early 16th century. Majapahit, led by Sri Vijaya, was an Indianized kingdom that existed from the 13th to 16th century and was one of the richest and mightiest empires in the history of Indonesia and Southeast Asia (Britannica, May 18, 2018). The names of Majapahit kings and their subordinates were all in Sanskrit, reflecting the profound impact of the contemporary knowledge tradition of India (Ricklefs, 1993). During this time, many Indian texts were localized and Indian traders were coming to Indonesia. During the Pallava and Chola dynasties, the Tamil and Kalinga guilds actively roamed around these regions through Malacca and Sunda straits trade routes. These trade activities through the sea routes had a profound influence near the littoral area of their trade routes (Hermann & Sakhuja, 2009:10). The influx of Indian settlers continued from the first to the seventh century AD. Peacefully and gradually, the Hindu religion spread throughout the archipelago. All layers of Java people classes and the upper classes on the other islands were exposed to this religion. Indian Kingdoms established trade, cultural and political relations with kingdoms in Indonesia.

Indian dynasties and their influence in Indonesia

Some of the powerful Indian dynasties had very active trade and cultural links with the then Hindu and Buddhist empires of Southeast Asian countries (Jha, 2019), such as:

1. Maurya Dynasty (c. 321 BCE – 185 BCE)

The Mauryan empire (483 BCE-400 BCE), particularly during Ashoka the Great's reign, became instrumental in spreading Buddhism in

Southeast Asia. It established a single currency with strong statecraft, military and economy across India. The empire spread into four provinces, each governed by Kumara as the king's representative. Buddhism also spread the contemporary knowledge traditions associated with the life and teaching of Gautam Buddha. Ashoka the Great, the most powerful king of the Maurya dynasty, was influenced by Buddhism's philosophy. He felt the need to spread Buddhism to South Asia, the Far East, and the Southeast Asian region (Thapar 2009, p.104).

During this dynasty's reign, there was Kalinga who had excellent knowledge of maritime activities as the spread of its kingdom covered a sizeable coastal area stretching from Orissa to the northern part of modern Andhra. Their trade links extended to the region of East, Far East, and Southeast Asian nations beside Arabian littoral countries and European nations. India's profound knowledge of the monsoon wind helped it actively trade with the Southeast Asian region. During the eastern monsoon wind, they sailed through Malacca and Sunda straits and returned home during the western monsoon wind.

The prospering trades of essential commodities carried out by Kalinga merchants in the Southeast Asian region, particularly in Indonesia, describe its outstanding achievements in the history of maritime activity. A Chinese scholar called a Hindu kingdom in Central Holinga as Kalinga had many synonyms due to various pronunciations, i.e., such as Talaing, Telinga, Kling, and Keling words are still in use in Sumatra and Malay peninsula for the people of Indian origin.

2. Gupta dynasty (c. 240–605 CE)

Gupta strongly connected with Sri Lanka, Burma, and Southeast Asian locales. Shri Gupta established the Gupta empire and was considered as the Golden Age of India. In this period, scholarship arose and some outstanding figures were: Kalidasa who composed the great Sanskrit literature and Aryabhata, the incredible mathematician, gave the hypothesis of pi, geometry, the pivot of earth, cosmic work, gravity, zero, and so on. The best Indian epics: Mahabharata, Ramayana and Puranas were composed during Gupta period. Early chess was developed during this period. Under Chandragupta II, the Gupta period advanced Hinduism, Buddhist and Jain societies. It impacted East and Southeast Asia as a dynamic exchange among locals. Fa Hien, who visited India from China during the time of Chandragupta II, began his excursion in 399 CE and arrived in India in 405 CE. He made his perception of this period by generally making a trip from upper east to additional northwest India. Accordingly, the serene and prosperous realm of Gupta became one of the wellsprings of motivation for different nations to receive the Indian style of monarchism (Schober 1995).

3. Pallava Dynasty (275 CE to 897 CE)

The Pallava dynasty impacted most of the scripts and the contemporary architecture of the Southeast Asian region. The blocks carved out of stone used in the temple were first used during this period. Several ports in Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia became a hub of settlement of Indian traders (Kamalakaran, October 26, 2021), (Christie 1998).

4. Chola Dynasty (c. 300 BCE – 1279 CE)

The Cholas expanded their colonies from Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Sumatra, and other parts of Indonesia. The glory of the Pallava dynasty profoundly affected the kingdom of Keda under Rudravarman-I in the Malay Peninsula, Champa during the reign of Bhadravarman-I, and the kingdom of Funan in Cambodia (Sen 2013). Rajendra Chola-I (971 CE-1044 CE) or the Rajendra Chola Great was the most daring king of the Chola dynasty and probably paved the way for large-scale trading activities and widely explored Southeast Asia. He was considered as India's most potent marine explorer. He invaded the territories of Srivijaya in Southeast Asia, the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand, Sumatra, and Java. In his book "Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium" Ronald Findlay describes the special relationship between Chola and Srivijaya, which lasted for an extended period (Findlay 2009, p.25-30). However, the relations declined when Shrivijaya dominated the nearby trading transit routes. Chola empire was great maritime travellers, honed trade activities and enjoyed autonomy in the trade routes carried out by Tamil merchant guilds. Nagapattinam port was well established and was the hub for maritime trade activities. During 1012-44, Rajendra-I attacked the Srivijaya empire, which became a historical epoch for the declination of the Srivijaya empire in the region (Thapar 2003, p. 364-65).

Method

The article is based upon a qualitative descriptive study with primary and secondary data resources available in Bahasa Indonesia. The author has consulted the related craft sellers, artisans, temple priests, musicians and *dalang* (the puppet master) of Java and Bali online as primary sources. The secondary sources are in the forms of the

artefacts, monuments, and national heritage like Borobudur, Prambanan, and Mendut temples' architecture, graffiti. Personal interviews with the sculptors and Puppeteers were analyzed to conclude.

Result and Discussion

The following sections discussed the findings of the study, which can be summarized into themes such as: the projection of Indian epics in Indonesian arts, the influence of Indic beliefs and culture in Indonesian religious rituals, the evolved conception of Shiva in Indonesia and the position of Java as the center for Indic scholarship in Indonesia.

The projection of Indian epics in Indonesian arts

Two most popular epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata have permeated in Indonesian art forms and were adopted and adapted according to the local contexts. Some art forms that are much influenced by these Indian epics are: shadow puppetry (*wayang*), classical ballets, woodcraft, stone-crafting and batik painting.

1. Shadow Puppetry (*wayang*)

The images of different characters of Ramayana and Mahabharata come alive when a puppeteer manipulates them and exploits the stories. *Dalang* (puppeteers) do not only resemble as real characters of these epics but also take the audience to a very romantic world where they find the world free from all worries. The relevance of these images or puppets becomes more seductive, and the audience gets engaged and stunned when they listen to the numerous voices of different characters of the puppeteer (deBoer, Bandem, and & Madra, 1992, p. 141).



Figure 1. Wayang Golek (Photo taken during a performance by UNINDRA PGRI in JNU in 2019)

There are more than six schools of puppetry in Java, Bali, and other few islands thriving mainly due to its agility and relevance carried out by Indian epics even when the entire world is engrossed in the digital media. Just like Indian classical music schools, this art of puppetry is not considered very simple and takes years to learn. It also has to be done under an expert guru. An important character in Indonesian *wayang* is Semar, who is understood to be the reincarnation of Shiva. Semar, a lead clown, plays a vital role in the folklore by conveniently solving complex issues. Semar is a synonym of Vidushak as characterized in the *Natyashastra* of Bharat Muni (Bharadwaj, June 27, 2016).

In his article in *Asian Theatre Journal* entitled 'The Death of Kumbakarna', I Ketut Madra gives an excellent account of the agility of the Balinese puppetry based upon the Indian Epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He finds out the origin of these epics and explains the role of Hanumana more extended in the Balinese version of puppetry.

It also provides ground-level information on how the local responses against the Indian epics reciprocated into the localization and customization of the texts. Kumbhakarana is the original name of the younger brother of Ravana, the antagonist character of Ramayana. Puppeteers often find certain characters have more potentials to be filled with their emotional and romanticism, and expansionism to get the audience more engaged. These imparted imprints in the conscience of the common mass reflect in their various art forms.

2. Classical Ballets

The best example of ballet performance which is influenced by Indian epics is Ramayana Ballet performed in front of the Prambanan temple in Yogyakarta. The uniqueness of this Ramayana ballet lies in its remarkable ballet performance, the excellent gamelan music ensemble and the no-dialogue performance. High-pitched Javanese classical songs also accompany this ballet. Ramayana's story is profound among Indonesians in its symbolic forms.

There is a firm reference for this unique assimilation of cultural transition in the Sanskrit inscriptions from the 4th century AD. It is evident that Indian kingship and their state administration system were very attractive and appealing to Southeast Asia's kings. These two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, probably became a powerful medium for their permeation. Java, the most populated and culturally vibrant island of Indonesia, witnessed the decline of Hinduism as Islam pervaded during the 13th Century and made a pervasive impact over the entire archipelago. Hinduism started cornering Bali, which remained untouched as the local people remained firm against letting any other religion to permeate. The artists and artisans were the most important parts of this shifting process of Javanese-Hindu migrants. They were

not welcomed in Java for their unique craftsmanship against the ethos of Islamic practices, made Bali their home, and contributed richly to the local prevailed cultural practices. These gradual changes made the Balinese consider themselves the gods' holy land protector. They devoted much of their time to a continual series of religious observances, offerings, purification rites, temple festivals, processions, dances, mass funerals, and other religious ceremonies. A substantial part of the traditions remained to date.

3. Woodcraft, Stone-crafting, and Batik painting

Indonesia exported woodcraft products worth some US\$129.91 million in the year 2014 (Fatmayanti. 2015). One of the significant artworks of wooden craft is a depiction of stories of Ramayana, particularly the woodcraft industry of Jepara Regency, Java. It is understood that the tradition of wooden art based on the Ramayana dates from the 16th century (Artdian, 2022). The entire story of Ramayana in a concise form highlights main plots such as Sita Harana or the kidnapping of Sita, the killing of the demon Maricha, Ravana's access to the hut of Rama, abduction of Sita by Ravana, and his fight with Jatayu (vulture/eagle), a demigod. Jatayu tries to rescue Sita and Ravana clips his wings. These are depictions of Ramayana epos which in the exported woodworks of Indonesia. In a similar pattern, Indonesian batik painting and stone carving on fabric have also been developed over the ages (Sujana 2022).

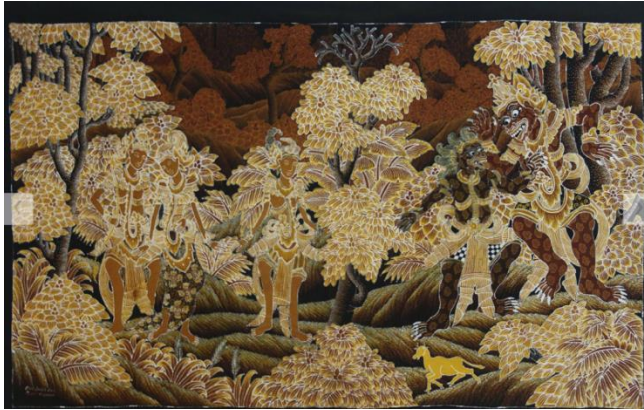


Figure 2. Batik painting with Ramayana depiction
(source: <https://www.novica.com/p/signed-batik-painting-of-hindu-ramayana/295948/>)

Indic belief and culture in Indonesian religious rituals

Hinduism as brought by the Indian settlers in Indonesia is referred to by various synonyms, i.e., Agama Tirtha, Siva-Buddha, Agama Hindu Bali, or Hindu Dharma. The rituals and traditions are mixed with the elements from Shaivism and Buddhism. Religious ceremonies in Java and Bali are evident to this, as shown in the artwork, music, settlement and housing. Five sacrificial rituals are associated with the Hindus of Indonesia, known as *panca yudha* or five holy ceremonies.

1. Dewa Yadnya –Balinese consider this ritual very important because everyone on this earth has accumulated particular debt to Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, who has created the universe including the humans. This debt is called Dewa Rna. On that basis, Hindus are obliged to worship the Sang Hyang Widhi (God) by making offerings in the form of Dewa Yadnya.

2. Buta Yadnya –This ritual is performed to control the spirits and demons that may sometimes increase lives' hostile forces. Butha Yadnya essentially maintains harmony and cares for the five elements

of nature called *panca maha butha*. When the five elements of nature function naturally, plants are born from the five elements. These plants are the basic ingredients of food for animals and humans. Similarly, when the harmony of the five elements of nature is disturbed, its function will not be working well. Earth, fire (sun), air, and ether also function to grow plants, and the circulation of these five elements give births to climate, day and night.

3. Resi Yadnya – This ritual is to please the clergy or the priest. Balinese consider that priests are those who are in touch with the God frequently and have pious thoughts. Their minds are pure, and therefore they may get revelation from the God/ Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa.

4. Manusa Yadnya – Every new development in human life is a blessing from God; therefore, all the different phases of life, i.e., wedding, childbirth, growing up, and starting a family, must be marked by certain rituals.

5. Pitra Yadnya – The ritual is for death and reincarnation. The *pitra yadnya* ceremony aims to honor and worship ancestors. The form of the *pitra yadnya* ceremony varies in each region, but the purpose and meaning remain the same (di Kleen 1923, p. 216-23).

Like Indians, Balinese Hindus observe a chain of religious observances of one kind or another throughout the year. Some of the important observances are the ceremony to drive away from the evil, special prayer day for the dead, thanksgiving to Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth), or Devi Sri (the goddess of rice), the ceremony for safety and prosperity, the birth anniversary of each important deity, etc.

The representation of Shiva in Indonesia

Shiva has been pervasive across the Indic Belt or the greater India. The image of Shiva reflecting from its Shiva-linga or lingam is an aniconic representation of Lord Shiva found in various sizes and shapes throughout the Indic Belt region. Shiva represents all the classes in society. In Indonesia, *Tuhan yang Maha Esa* is popularly used as a daily proverb for acknowledging the power of God. The God who is the Great. Esa refers to the Sanskrit word "Ish/ इश." This Means God or the Ish - the supreme authority.

Also appeared in scriptures, Shiva is considered as the lord of creation. It is also known as Mahadeva in Indonesia. It represents various deities in the form of the Moon, Ganga, Snakes, Animals, etc. Shiva is the destroyer within the concept of Trimurti. Because he represents the Kala or the destroyer, he is equally omnipresent in different unseen forms of the black-magic tradition of Java and Bali. The indigenous traditions conveniently adopt his various images as a great power source, suiting their animistic beliefs.

Mahadeva is known as the representation of Shiva in eastern and central Java, and his different forms find their expression in Kejawen tradition and other ethnic rituals in Indonesia. There is a cult of Agastya in Java. Agastya, a powerful sage and a priest, became popular in Indonesian folklore. Even the Buddhist monument in Borobudur presents Agastya in an honored place towards one end of the water-craft in an illustration of the Jataka story where the scene is one of the people traveling by ship. Agastya is regarded in Java as the guiding genius of Javanese culture and worshipped under the name of Batara Guru. He is the most revered or the supreme God in Indonesian Hinduism. The word Batara comes from the Sanskrit word Bhattarak

which means 'noble lord'. Numerous stone images of Agastya were discovered, establishing the cult of worshipping Agastya under the Shiva guru. Similarly, on the mainland, Agastya is revered widely as a guru through whom one can reach Shiva and is most famous among the non-Brahmin castes. It is said that it is Agastya who is known as Śrī Agastiyar in South India, one who led a migration of the Dravidians to Java and Cambodia, and Central and South America (Shanmuganayagam, May 15, 1996).

Shailendra dynasty in Java adopted the Shaivism by erecting the earliest Hindu temples in Java in the eighth and ninth centuries. About thirty-five miles north of Borobudur is a group of temples on the table and at the foot of mount Prahū. The focus of these temples, known as the Prambanan temple, is the Siva shrine, which consists of a central chamber surrounded on three sides by subsidiary chambers housing images of Shiva, Ganesha, and Durga. Prambanan is also well known for relief carvings from Ramayana in an open ambulatory passageway (Cœdes 1983, p.96).

Java as the centre for Indic scholarship

Java became a centre for scholarship and Sanskrit learning for overseas students. There are pieces of evidence of Chinese scholars visiting Java on the way to India and staying temporarily in Java. In 144 CE Fa Hien, the famous traveler and scholar from China stayed almost five months in Java and learned Sanskrit before he voyaged to India (Simon, 2000:104). He was reported as caught in a storm and landed in Java Dwipa. He gave chronicles stating that the northern part of the Java was already a Hinduism-influenced kingdom with Hindu kings, i.e., Deva Devawarman, Aswawarman, and Mulawarman consecutively (Buswell & Lopez, 2014: 297).

Around 502 CE, Chinese annals have described the existence of the Buddhist Kingdom Kanto Lim, and it was Gautama Subhadra and someone Pyrawarman of Vinayawarman in the South Sumatra who also established diplomatic relationship with China. Scholars converge that Kanto Lim was Srivijaya because of its pronunciation by Chinese scholars. One of the most crucial pieces of evidence of the Buddhist and Hindu scholarship of Java was a Chinese Buddhist monk, I Tshing, who visited Shrivijaya in 671 CE to study the Sanskrit language for 18 years. He narrated the scholarship of Shrivijaya and said that the kingdom had well-known scholars of philosophy like Sakyakirti, Dharmapala, and Vajabudhi. Shrivijaya established diplomatic relations with the kingdom of Chola in South India and also established schools for learning Buddhist philosophy. They also introduced molding bronze statues, and probably he might have brought the art from the Chola empire as they produced one of the finest bronze statues in India. Shrivijaya kingdom also partly funded Nalanda University.

During the Sailendra Buddhist kingdom (750-to 850 CE), the biggest Buddhist temple and shrine, Borobudur, was built beside Mendut, Kalasan, and Pawon. Later, a Pallava stone inscription says that a king named Sanjaya, known as Mataram, replaced Sailendra in Central Java. At the end of the 10th century in East Java, a prosperous and powerful kingdom known as Singasari led by the king Dharmawangsa emerged. During his reign, he arranged and systematized civil laws. He ordered Mahabharata and Bhagvat Gita to be translated into Javanese language (Helen, 2004:253).

Later in the 13th century, the Srivijaya empire started declining due to the frequent attacks by the Majapahit kingdom and the Chola kingdom

from South India. Consequently, Mataram overtook the Shrivijaya and expanded itself towards West Sumatra. Its powerful king, Hayam Wuruk, emerged as the mightiest king in the history of Indonesia under Mataram 1331-1363 CE. He expanded Indonesian territory till Champa in South Vietnam, Kampuchea, and the Philippines towards the north (Ancient Origin, Oct 29, 2015). In this period, a Buddhist monk Mpu Prapanca wrote a eulogy of the King Hayam Wuruk known as *Nagarakretagama*. The poetic repertoire describes the importance of Hindu–Buddhist culture in the Majapahit empire by placing temples and related ceremonies, i.e., *shraddha karma* (post-death rituals). Other works, including Indian epics like *Arjuna Wiwaha*, *Ramayana* and *Sarasa Muschaya* were written in the old Javanese language, which gives chronicles of contemporary society which imbibed itself Hindi-Buddhist culture deeply (Cœdès 1968, p.38-48).

Christopher Miller, an independent linguist and scholar says that all the scripts of Southeast Asia have originated from the Indic family script, whether they are from Sumatra or far east Sulawesi, or even the Philippines (Miller 2010). Miller's research is a significant milestone that complements the present research's objective of the Indic-Belt Society. Most of the *prashastis*, an Indian genre of inscriptions composed by the court poets in praise of their rulers. This inscription originated in India and were easily adopted by the contemporary kings, and later it helped the Indic elements to get metamorphosed with the locals.

Conclusion

Indian epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have portrayed how Indic arts and culture have influenced Indonesian literature and arts, as well as the religious rituals. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are greatly

found in Indonesian's *wayang* stories, classical ballet performance (*wayang orang*), woodcrafts and batik painting. These two epics were so long performed, rewritten and reproduced by Indonesians, making it to be a part of Indonesian cultural identity that Indonesia is proud of. While Indonesia is being proud of this cultural identity, India who shared this heritage is not much aware of this fact.

Indonesia is an integral part of the Indic-Belt society, where Indic elements are visible in the numerous patterns of the social traits. Java became a transit point for the Sanskrit scholarship for the local and international scholars before reaching India. This deep interaction between the present Bharat and Southeast Asia reflects in the shared culture and traditions. The centrality of Indonesia in the IBS reflects in its many-fold shared cultural practices as shown by this present study in Java and Bali, in addition to many other regions in Indonesia.

Being an integral part of the Indic-Belt society, India and Indonesia are the largest democracies in the region and share strong maritime borders. Having common civilizational and heritage links, Indonesia exhibit numerous Indic elements in its artifacts and performance. Being a Muslim majority country, Indonesia does not shy away from exhibiting its cultural heritage to the outside world. Rather it is keener to preserve the Indic elements present in the form of monuments, artifacts, and folklore.

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