

INDIA AND INDONESIA: ADVANCING REGIONAL HARMONY THROUGH VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

Vanshika Sharma & Animesh Mishra***

Abstract

This essay examines the development and characteristics of the connection between two ancient civilisations and dynamic democracies—India and Indonesia—through the lens of the Indian principle Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (“the world is one family”). It analyses the harmonic confluence of this ancient Indian philosophy with Indonesia's founding concept of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (“Unity in Diversity”), emphasising how these common values provide a conducive environment for collaboration in tackling regional and global concerns.

The research assesses the EnVisionpects partnership as a modern representation of these principles, concentrating on critical aspects such as marine security, sustainable development, cultural interaction, and economic integration. This article contends that India and Indonesia may collectively cultivate a peaceful regional order by using their common philosophical and cultural paradigms, so transcending limited nationalism and promoting a larger ethos of global togetherness.

This study highlights the possibility for improved cooperation between the two countries via the analysis of pertinent policy frameworks, bilateral agreements, and cultural initiatives. This asserts that such interaction is both strategically advantageous and philosophically rooted in the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, providing an ideal trajectory for sustained peace, mutual respect, and inclusive growth in the Indo-Pacific area.

Keywords: India-Indonesia Relations, Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, Regional Order

* M.A., Delhi University, Vanshika25901@gmail.com

** Research Scholar, Political Science, Delhi University.

Introduction

In the ever-changing international relations of the 21st century, we have made a paradigm shift from a focus on power politics to inclusivity, interdependence, and collective well-being. Philosophical concepts, including Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, may benefit the establishment of ongoing regional cooperation and harmony in light of this. The ethos of universal brotherhood goes back to ancient India and is rooted in the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which literally means 'the world is one family', irrespective of narrow boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, or religion (Bapat, 2010). Likewise, Indonesia would be inspired by the country's national piece of advice, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, symbolising unity in diversity or harmony in multiplication, especially in the expression of pluralism (Ricklefs, 2012).

The civilizational linkages go back a long way with the spread of Hindu-Buddhist influence, the Islamic connections and even modern times with a high level of dramatic contacts between the two nations. In fact, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is the precursor to the contemporary idea of global citizenship. Also, through these philosophical ideals, this paper will analyse their evolving relationship with respect to areas of cooperation such as maritime security, sustainable development, cultural exchange and economic integration. Through this effort, it seeks to emphasise the continuing importance of these eternal principles in tackling modern-day problems and their role in building a peaceful regional order.

Literature Review

There is a lot of research on the theory and practice of relations between both states. For example, researchers such as Bapat (2010) and Sharma (2018) have examined Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam as a philosophy with a universalist scope that holds modern-day significance. Such studies point at its potential in promoting global citizenship and combating inequality. Likewise, Ricklefs (2012) and Hefner (2001) have considered Bhinneka Tunggal Ika in their

understanding of it being not only a slogan of Indonesian multiculturalism but also a fundamental principle of Indonesian identity addressing a unique form of unity-in-diversity that Indonesia has offered for over seventy years.

Gupta (2020) and Sahgal & Anand (2020) present country-specific studies on bilateral relations on the economic and maritime fronts, respectively. The materials emphasise both the geostrategic significance of the Indo-Pacific and the necessity of cooperative structures based on soft-power-driven cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool: do shared heritage works projects?" Pradhan (2021). That said, there are still gaps in our understanding of how philosophical frameworks play into practices of policy-making and regional governance. This paper aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice in order to create a harmonious integration of both the ideal and institutional aspects of India-Indonesia relations.

Methodology

The research takes a qualitative approach, utilising historical analysis, policy review, and case study methods. The primary data sources are official policy documents, joint statements, bilateral agreements and multilateral frameworks like the IPOI and AOIP, and the secondary sources are articles, books and reports from think tanks. The theoretical framework through a comparative analysis of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and case studies on maritime security, sustainable development, cultural exchange and economic integration represent the practical sides of this projection. It uses thematic coding to give patterns and insights to ensure the subject is well covered and depth-based.

Historical and Cultural Ties between India and Indonesia

India–Indonesia relations have a history spanning over 2,000 years, facilitated by maritime routes and cultural exchanges. Hinduism and Buddhism were initially spread in the 1st century CE from India to Southeast Asia, and they subsequently formed the foundation for much of Indonesia's

culture and its people. Indonesian art forms of wayang kulit (shadow puppetry) and traditional dance forms (Majumdar 2013) have been imbued with ancient Indian texts such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

After their independence, both India and Indonesia were at the forefront of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and championed decolonisation and more balanced global governance together. Their cooperation found a landmark event in the Bandung Conference of 1955 in Indonesia, which emphasised the importance of solidarity between Asian and African countries (Sukarno, 1955). Such a history forms a sturdy basis for modern-day diplomacy.

'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' is a Sanskrit phrase meaning 'the world is one family' from the Maha Upanishad, which reflects our hope of a world based on shared values and mutual respect. Such a philosophy refutes exclusivism and upholds the best interest of all beings, echoing the present conversation on global citizenship and sustainable development (Sharma, 2018; p.3). Japan has its own being other—the phrase "Unity of Diversity" is embodied in Indonesia's national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. This principle, popularised throughout the Majapahit Empire, refers to the need to tackle differences within the framework of national unity. Today it is more than just a national slogan; it has become a guiding principle for dealing with Indonesia's multireligious society and its regional disparities (Hefner, 2001). Today, the convergence of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* provides an inspiration for India-Indonesia collaboration from a philosophical perspective. You can see this synergy in several ways:

Maritime Security

Both India and Indonesia have a vested interest in the Indo-Pacific region, which contains critical sea lanes of communication. As states situated at sea, both countries have worked with each other on maritime security initiatives like the Indian-Empowered Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the

ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) to uphold international law (Sahgal & Anand, 2020).

Notably, new major agreements to strengthen cooperation in the fields of health, defence, digital technology, and maritime affairs have been signed on the side-lines of the latest visit of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to New Delhi to meet Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Prime Minister Modi signs agreements to enhance cooperation in areas of defence production, maritime security, and cybersecurity. Meet the Press [pic.twitter.com/D7VMc3S3Of](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7VMc3S3Of) <https://ift.tt/WLadhba> President Subianto also expressed appreciation for India's support in Indonesia's becoming a full member of the BRICS bloc and underscored the need to expedite economic partnerships by reducing bureaucratic barriers.

Indonesia is deliberating on whether to purchase the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile developed by a consortium of India and Russia. The deal, estimated at between \$200 million and \$350 million, would cover both the shore-based version and the version mounted on the warships. A deal of such size would considerably strengthen Indonesian defence capabilities and reflect the continued defence relationship between the two states.

Sustainable Development

India and Indonesia face similar challenges in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. Collaborative efforts, such as joint research on renewable energy technologies and disaster management, highlight their commitment to sustainable development. The India-Indonesia Green Partnership, launched in 2022, aims to enhance cooperation in this domain (Ministry of External Affairs, 2022). This partnership aims to address shared environmental concerns that threaten food security, water resources, and overall economic stability through collaborative efforts and mutual support.

However, securing adequate funding for large-scale green projects remains a challenge. The annual cost of infrastructure resilient to climate change is

estimated at around \$1.2 trillion to \$1.5 trillion for developing countries, resulting in a yearly \$700 billion financing gap.

Cultural Exchange

Cultural diplomacy has played a key role in India-Indonesia relations; initiatives like the Festival of India in Indonesia and reciprocal cultural festivals have strengthened people-to-people flows. Such interactions demonstrate the lasting value of common heritage in building mutual understanding and trust (Pradhan, 2021). Enduring reminders of this shared heritage are monuments, such as Prambanan and the Borobudur temples, which echo Indian civilisation's massive imprint on Indonesian society.

The cross-hybridisation of textiles or textile techniques like the Indian patola or the Indonesian batik further bears testimony to the age-old tangible links between the two countries. Both societies have a long history of these art forms being intrinsically linked with the other, thus making them more than just forms of identity and artistic expression.

Concerts as part of the annual Festival of India in Indonesia showcase India's rich diversity through multifaceted performances, exhibitions, and workshops, aiding both nations to be more aware of and appreciate each other's cultural heritage. Allows for artists/audiences to interact/celebrate/learn crafts from one another India also runs cultural centres in Jakarta and Bali, where yoga, classical dance and music are promoted. International Yoga Day would also be jointly celebrated, and the conduct of conferences on shared heritage also reflects the civilisational linkages between the two countries.

The spirit of Gotong-Royong, the mutual cooperation of state and society in Indonesian social philosophy, is akin to Sahakar (cooperation), the Indian value that is naturally and deeply ingrained in our social fabric.

Likewise, some recent events, such as the India-Indonesia Cultural Conference 2024 and exhibitions like "The Indonesian Odyssey of

Rabindranath Tagore", which become a media to re-challenge and delve deeper into debates on the intertwined historical and cultural relations between the two, can be a great opportunity to fuel further research and bridge academic collaboration.

Economic Integration

India and Indonesia, among the ascending powers, have witnessed many decades of changing dynamics towards their economic integration, as bilateral trade has grown exponentially from less than \$3 billion in 2000 to \$38.85 billion in 2022–23. This expansion demonstrates a diversified range of trade sectors, particularly in relation to palm oil, textiles, and pharmaceuticals. For India, Indonesia is the largest source of palm oil, fulfilling a bulk of its domestic edible oil needs. This trade is essential for food processing in India. Nevertheless, trade imbalances are to be fixed, and new fields of collaboration, like digital technologies, are still focus points of the agenda (Gupta, 2020).

The two countries trade in textile products, with India exporting garments and fabrics to Indonesia, while Indonesia exports raw materials and finished products to India. Further, it is also significant to mention here that India has been exporting a number of medicines to Indonesia, making both countries crucial outer pillars to build a healthcare industry. New Delhi/Hokkaido: As the two sides negotiate on a crucial free trade pact, contemporary developments show how deep the economic engagement between the two nations has become, with India's Bharat Petroleum Corp investing \$121 million to develop the Nunukan oil and gas block in Indonesia.

The ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA) was established in 2009 to promote economic cooperation in the form of tariff reductions for goods traded between India and ASEAN countries, including Indonesia. Though the pact has increased trade flow, it has also resulted in expanding the trade gap of India with the ASEAN countries. India's trade deficit with ASEAN, for example, increased from \$5 billion in 2010-11 to \$43.57 billion in 2022-23.

With a heart full of hope that is infused with the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, India and Indonesia can tackle regional and global challenges together towards an inclusive order that goes beyond narrow nationalism. Future studies and policy initiatives could exploit these norms to further broaden bilateral relations and a more inclusive Indo-Pacific.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

Notwithstanding their shared history and cultural affinity, India and Indonesia currently face several contemporary challenges which influence their bilateral relations. These two nations are striving to chart their own course amidst regional rivalries and shifts in global power dynamics. Indonesia, emblematic of this complexity, was engaged in negotiations to buy Russian-Indian supersonic cruise missiles at the same time as President Prabowo Subianto visited New Delhi. Twenty-five years ago, each country had to balance domestic economic development, social welfare, and political stability with international commitments, resulting in a nearly equal distribution of resources. However, this delicate balance can lead to conflicting priorities, potentially hindering the progress of bilateral cooperation.

The high-stakes competition for Indo-Pacific predominance among great powers could have strategic implications for both India and Indonesia, as the two countries currently share a common strategic approach and are deepening their defence ties. Diplomacy and foresight will be necessary to align their interests while this competition between powers continues.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for deeper collaboration between India and Indonesia:

- Both nations can collaborate on sustainable ocean-based economic activities, such as fisheries, marine biotechnology, and renewable energy. The Fourth ASEAN-India Workshop on Blue Economy, held in New Delhi in December 2022, exemplifies such collaborative efforts (Sharma & Sutrisno, 2021).
- Engaging the youth through educational and cultural exchange programs can foster mutual understanding and build a foundation for long-term bilateral relations. Initiatives like the YSEALI Blue Economy Workshop, which includes participants from both countries, are steps in this direction.
- Collaborative research in areas such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and biotechnology can drive innovation and economic growth. Joint efforts in these fields can position both nations as leaders in technological advancement and sustainable development.

By leveraging their shared philosophical values, India and Indonesia have the potential to lead in promoting a harmonious and inclusive regional order, contributing to peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion

The reciprocal link between India and Indonesia, based on cultural commonality, paradigm foundations, and historical connections, provides an inspiring basis for bolstering regional harmony in the Indo-Pacific. Rooted in the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—"the world is one family"—and in tune with Indonesia's Bhinneka Tunggal Ika—Unity in Diversity—this partnership is a case in point of how time-honoured wisdom can serve as a compass in contemporary foreign affairs.

The India-Indonesian tie-up is proving to complement similar regional and global challenges amongst the partners but also provides a model effort in facilitating dialogues between nations. As the world becomes more polarised

and conflict-ridden, the India-Indonesia relationship appeals to the power of partnership, diversity, and shared purpose: creating a stronger global community by uniting over our secular strengths, democratic values, and cooperative spirit.

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