

India and Indonesia - The Inseparables

By Ms. Vimala Nandakumar

vimalanandakumar4@gmail.com

Abstract

Hinduism spread across the world up to Europe on the West and as far as Cambodia and Indonesia on the East. Interestingly secular India has a huge Hindu population and surprisingly the largest Islamic country Indonesia has its influence of Hinduism still intact. My stay for three years in Jakarta, the Capital of Indonesia, has left a remarkable impact on me. I was impressed by the culture of the locals who respect all religions equally. That is the reason why I chose this topic for a wider audience. Information on this topic is available on the net accessible with a click. I thought of selecting a few of my personal experiences of lesser-known places I visited during my travels from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Gujarat to Meghalaya of our great country. Here are some of my diary notes for the readers. My account here only reveals the tip of the iceberg. So much lies underneath the Hindu Mythology of this wonderful and unique country in the world. Some have been discovered totally or partially and many remains yet to be unearthed.

Keywords

India, Indonesia, Hinduism, Buddhism

Indonesia and India have many historical facts in common. Indonesia was ruled by the Dutch, Japanese and Chinese while India by the Mughals and the British for long periods of time. We got independence on 15th August and they got theirs on 17th August, two years earlier.

The influence of Hindus and much later Dutch and Chinese on Indonesia are as significant as that of Mughals and the British on India. The influence of Hinduism and Buddhism in many parts of Indonesia is deep-rooted. The Buddhist temple in Borobudur is the biggest in the world, an epitome of Indonesian culture.

One cannot travel in India without witnessing the rich culture of our country residing within the legends. A trip to Badrinath and Kedarnath fills us with fables from Ramayana and Mahabharata. Some stories told by the local guide were incredible. Travelers stop at Hunuman Chhatti to seek the blessings of Hanumanji for their safe journey because Hanuman is immortal and lives there!

The confluence of the river Mandakini and Alaknanda at Rudraprayag has its own story. At the steps of the temple there Narad Muni is believed to have invented the Sapta Swaras on which music is based. The place of confluence of River Alakananda and Pindari river is called Karnaprayag. It is believed that Karna's wish was that Krishna should cremate him and this was the place his last rites were performed by Krishna.



Image 1: Rudraprayag

While our culture being visible in India is normal it is an important aspect of Indonesian culture. A huge statue of Arjun and Krishna welcomes you at the heart of the city of Jakarta. Jatayu and Garuda are names of their airlines. Ganeshji's picture is printed in every Rupaiya note. Among the many Ram temples in Bali, the biggest one is located in the palace of the Sultan.

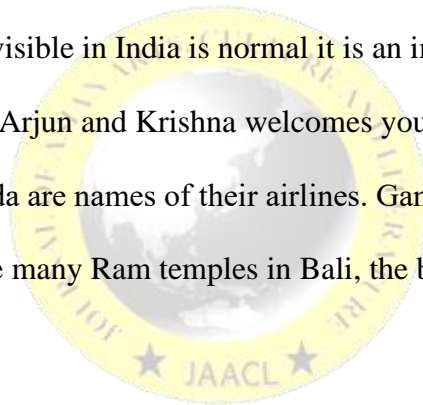




Image 2: Bali

Back in India, some interesting practices are followed both in Badrinath and Kedarnath. A Namboodiri priest from Kerala and a Lingayat priest from Karnataka are authorized to perform pooja at Badrinath and Kedarnath respectively. At Badrinath it is Badri darbar. Vishnu's darbar has Narad muni, Kuber, the richest one, and Sudama, the poor friend of Krishna. It is here that Vishnu is seen in Padmasan, but the face is nothing but a saligram. For six months the temple remains closed due to the severe winter and snowfall. The guide told us that with no human presence there, Narad does the pooja.

There are interesting fables about Kedarnath. It is here that the Pandavas prayed to Lord Shiva for his forgiveness for killing their own brothers, uncles in the Mahabharat war. To test them Shiva assumed the form of a bull and mingled with the herd. Bheem knew how to identify Shiva in the form of a bull. He stood with his legs spread out and let the entire herd of bulls pass between his legs. One bull that could be restricted thus ran in the opposite direction. He realized that it must be Shiva and tried to catch the bull by its hump. The bull

disintegrated and the hump of it fell at Kedarnath. The deity at the temple is a huge rock in the shape of the hump of a bull.

Faith is absolutely powerful. We witnessed old ladies bent double who had traveled from Rajasthan to Kedarnath by foot. They were high-spirited enough to encourage fellow young travelers to continue the strenuous climb. In the peak summer at 49⁰ C degrees and above in Rajasthan compounded by lack of basic facilities these women had managed to reach the place which is at a height of 11700 ft above M.S.L!!! We heard that sadhus live in the caves at subzero temperatures wearing only a loincloth! Many seers and sadhus wearing a loincloth were seen camping in tents in the cold winter during the Ardh Kumbh at Triveni Sangam.

It is faith again that drives the Hindus who inhabit the Bali Island to practice the Hindu customs diligently. One can witness *neivedya* being offered in temples of Bali. The inhabitants wear a tilak on their forehead and sport flowers in the head and chant the Gayatri mantra. Some of the Indonesians believe that after death the soul remains in the house for 13 days. The Island Bali itself is named after Vali, the brother of Sugriva. There is a temple in Bali where a large monkey population can be seen.

One the way to Varanasi from Prayagraj we visited a place, Sita Madi, which is etched in our memory. When we went searching for the place, an old man near the road spoke in lyrical Bhojpuri and gave us directions to the peepal tree which covered a small temple of Sita. We could visualize Laxman, his face covered in shame for abandoning the pregnant Sita at that place. The temple is believed to be where Saint Valmiki took care of Sita where she gave birth to Lav and Kush. There was something indescribable about the place.

Further down we saw the place where Sita Mata disappeared into the peaceful arms of Mother Earth.



Image 3: The Place of Sita's Disappearance

Ramayana is part of their culture in Indonesia as much as it is part of ours. Sugriva was supposed to have sent an army in search of Sita to Indonesia. A proof of this influence can be witnessed in the form of the opera depicting scenes from Ramayana performed at Prambanan temple of Yogya karta in Indonesia in the evenings. The interesting part is many actors and instrumentalists of the mega troupe of 250 artists are Muslims. The sight of Hanuman actually setting Ravana's Palace on fire on the stage is spectacular and not to be missed.

Hanuman carried the Sanjeevini buti from the Valley of flowers in Uttarakhand to save Lakshman. People cannot travel by horses to the Valley of flowers to save the environment

from the havoc that it might create. Either they trek or take the services of being carried by porters in baskets. Hemkund Sahib is the place where Lakshman did penance. There is a small temple dedicated to him. The beautiful lake by its side has a commanding presence. Hemkund Sahib is sacred to Sikhs and has a Gurudwara dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru.



Image 4: Hemkund Sahib

Yogyakarta is a living example of how Hinduism was deep-rooted in Indonesian culture. Three huge temples are dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. This shows how secular Indonesians are. In a district near Jakarta Muslims avoid beef because of the large Hindu population that lives there. The best part of Indonesians is their secular practices. They believe in peaceful coexistence.

Some words in Bahasa Indonesia have their roots in Sanskrit.

Putri is for the daughter, Putra for the son, Swami is for the husband, and Stree for the wife.

Kings from Southern India conquered and ruled parts of Indonesia. Many words of Urdu and Tamil can be heard as part of Bahasa Indonesia.

Kappal for ship.

Kondai for judah

Kamar for house.

Manga for Mango

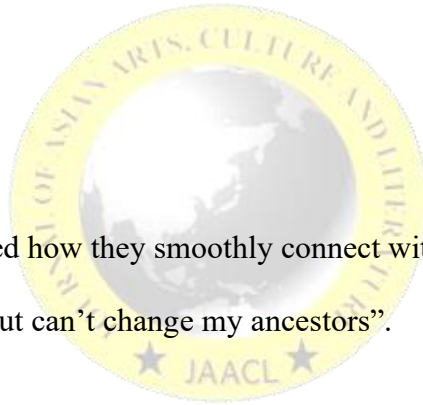
Guru for teacher

Masla for problem

Sura for shark

Baya for fear (bhay)

One Indonesian when asked how they smoothly connect with other religions, remarked, “I can change my religion but can’t change my ancestors”.



Acknowledgement

Image 2 from pixabay.com

About the Author

Ms. Vimala Nandakumar is MSc, MPhil, BEd

She has been the Principal of schools in India and abroad. Vimala has more than five decades of experience in teaching mathematics.

She is presently the Chairperson of the NGO -Shaktii Girl’s Education Trust for underprivileged girls.

She has travelled extensively in India and to 33 countries.

