

Sanskrit as a Vehicle for the Emergence of Cultural Relationship

by Ida Bagus Putu Suamba

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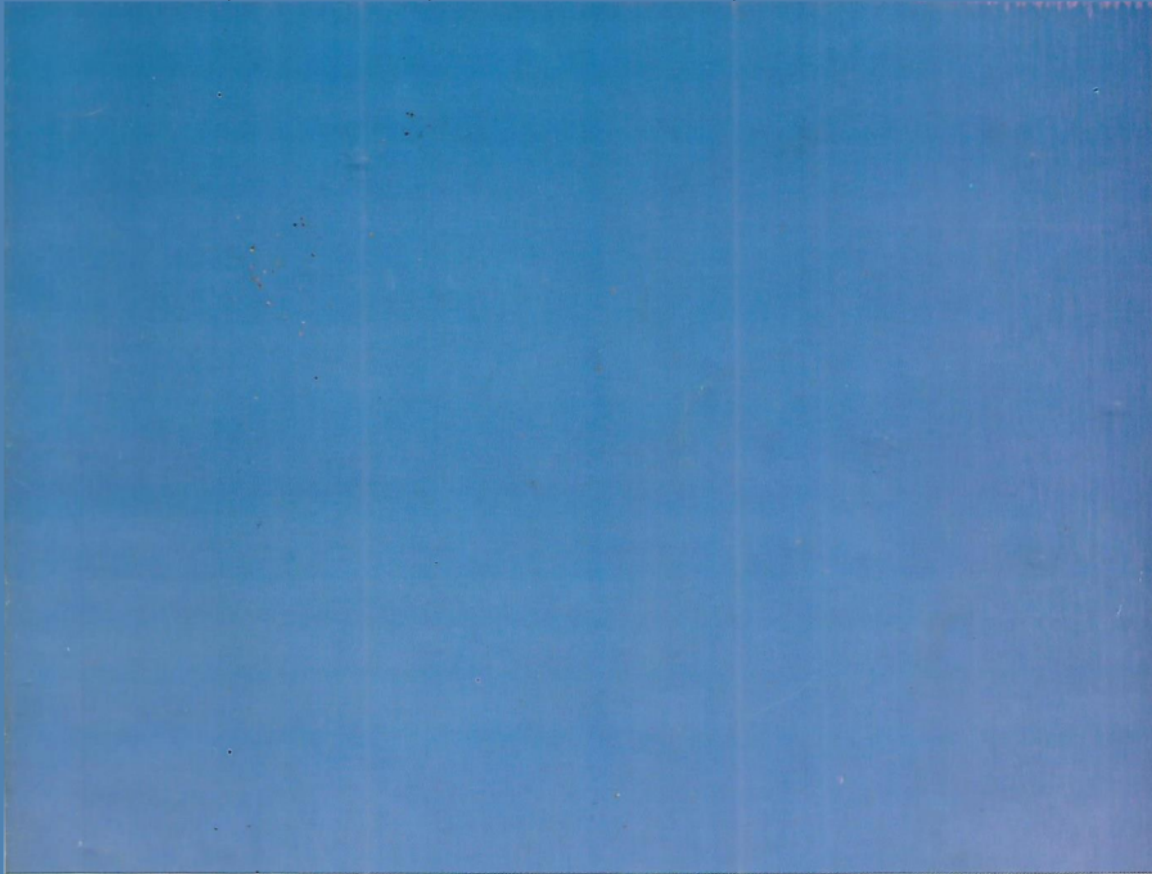
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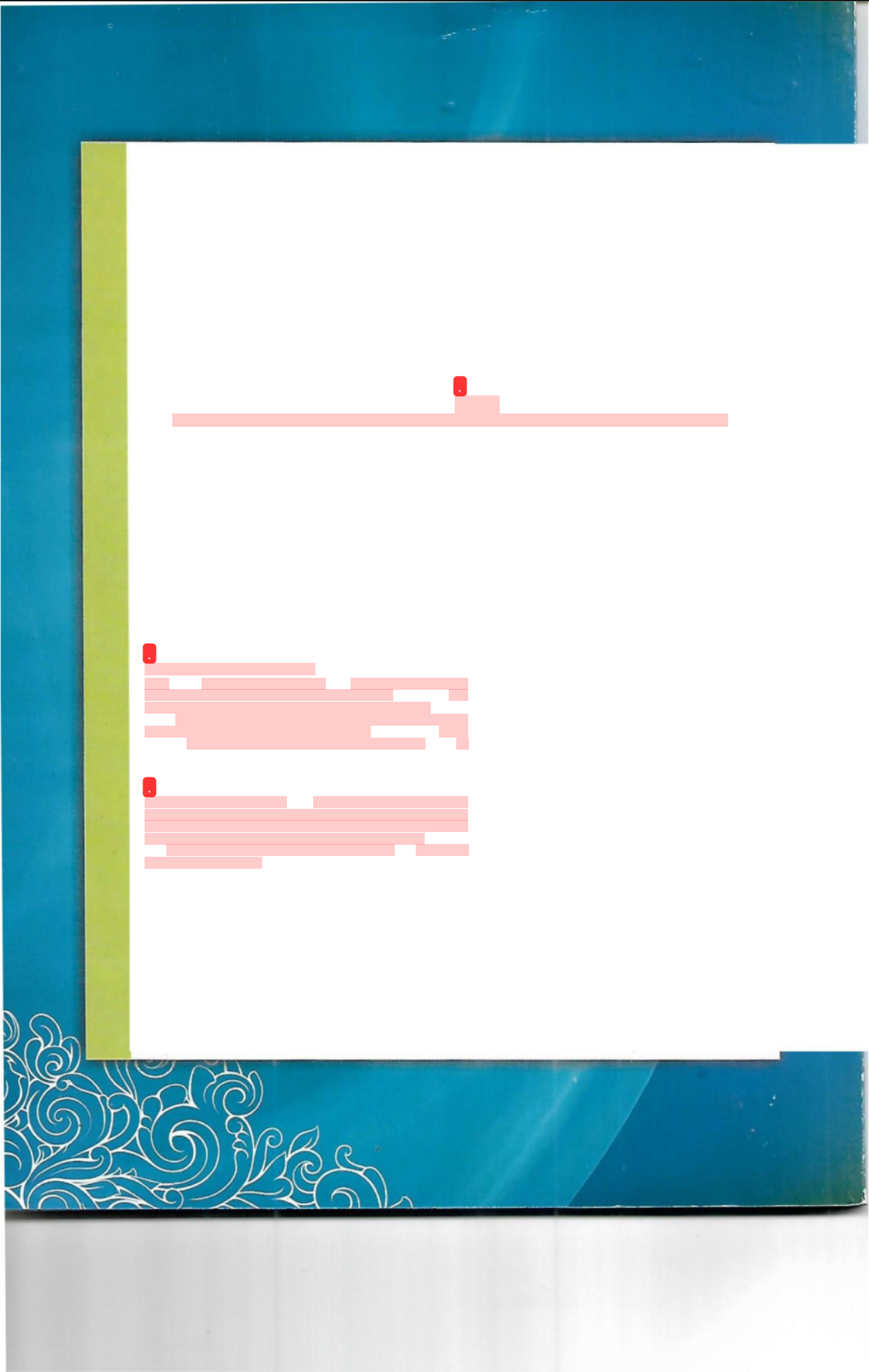
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SANSKRIT AS A VEHICLE FOR THE EMERGENCE OF INDIA-INDONESIA CULTURAL RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

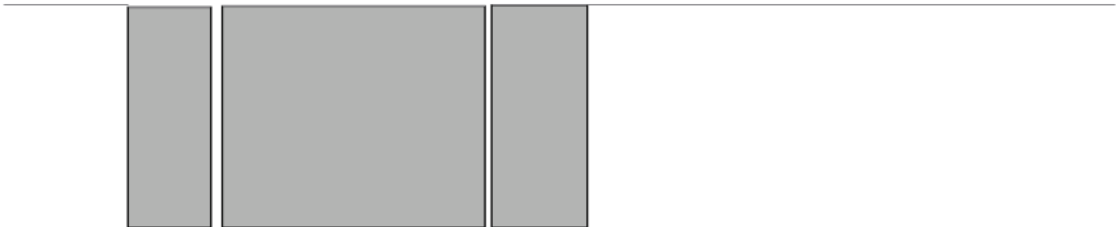
Significant influence of Indian culture in the archipelago was due to the role of Sanskrit played in addition to strategic position the archipelago has in the world. When the encounter between Indian cultures with local culture happened in ancient times, there were some rooms for Sanskrit to be used as medium of expressions. The result was the emergence of textual traditions producing a huge number of inscriptions and texts. In comparison with Indo-China region, it is only in Indonesia Sanskrit and Old Javanese have produced a huge number of literatures covering various subjects of life both religious and non-religious. It has been studied in an intensive manner in teaching and learning tradition in a long span of time. It has a force that can harmonize various differences exist in society. However, the decline of Sanskrit learning perhaps due to the conversion of the people into Muslim in 15th century; and cultural contact between the two cultures got lessened till faded away in the post Majapahit period. Sanskrit as a vehicle of culture covers various aspect of life, like art, science, literature, etc.

Keywords: Indian culture, Sanskrit, Old Javanese, inscription, and literature

I INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times Indonesian archipelago had become the confluence (*saEgam*) of various foreign influences, like Indian, Middle East, Chinese, and European in modern times. Each of them had exercised its influence over the others in a long span of time; some were dominant and still the others were less dominant even faded away leaving no imprints in the course of time. Some of them had undergone adaptation, assimilation or even fusion causing the emergence of new modes of expression different from that of their origins. In this case, the role of local or indigenous people along with local culture, tradition, and custom to assimilate between external and internal cultures was significant, especially in the Old Javanese period. On the arrival of them - one factor seems to be responsible - was due to the strategic position of the archipelago vastly spreading in between two continents, viz. Asia and Australia, and two oceans, viz. Indian and Atlantic causing this region as an interesting meeting point. This is obviously a challenging phenomenon in cultural studies.

According to historians, the spreading of Indian culture in South East Asian region started in the beginning of Christian era or even earlier than that period; trade was perhaps the main motif of Indian sailors went off shore embarking from ports along eastern coast including those in Bay of Bengal. It is still doubted the manner of Indian culture had arrived in the archipelago;



whether it was mediated by the Indo China region or directly came from India sub-continent. The imprints of it can be seen in various forms of expressions either tangible or intangible in some islands, like Kalimantan (Borneo), Sumatra, Java, Bangka, and Bali. Not only reaching the culture of this region, but also enriching the culture of it and promoting pluralism in various aspects of life; a treasure, which have been cultivated by the persons living in it. For a Sanskrit lover, he/she can easily identify Sanskrit loan word, which can be found in local languages, names of concept, building, institution, people, road, etc. despite the fact some changings in spelling, writing or pronunciation may happen due to locality or dialect. When he/she has a chance to travel along the road in cities, Sanskrit is noticeable. The numbers of Sanskrit words in local languages even *Bahasa* Indonesia is significant.

This paper attempts to study the existence and role of Sanskrit in the spreading of Indian culture in Southeast Asia region, especially in Indonesia since the beginning of its course. A question may be raised in the stage that why such massive Indian influence penetrated almost all regions of this vast land when system of communication and/or transportation was still traditional. What is the role of Sanskrit in introducing Indian culture in ancient archipelago? The imprints of it are available in various aspects of life and culture of those people living in this region. Sanskrit is reflected in various local languages, including Old Javanese (known as *'kavi'*).

II MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study used some texts and works that have been completed by researchers' in the concerned areas. They give sufficient information, which can be profited to analyse the existence, and role the Sanskrit played in introducing Indian culture in the archipelago. The data are taken from texts, inscription, local languages and religious tradition of Indian influence as still alive. The data are gathered, classified, and analysed in a qualitative way as to reach a conclusion, which will put at the end portion of this article.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 SANSKRIT AND CULTURE

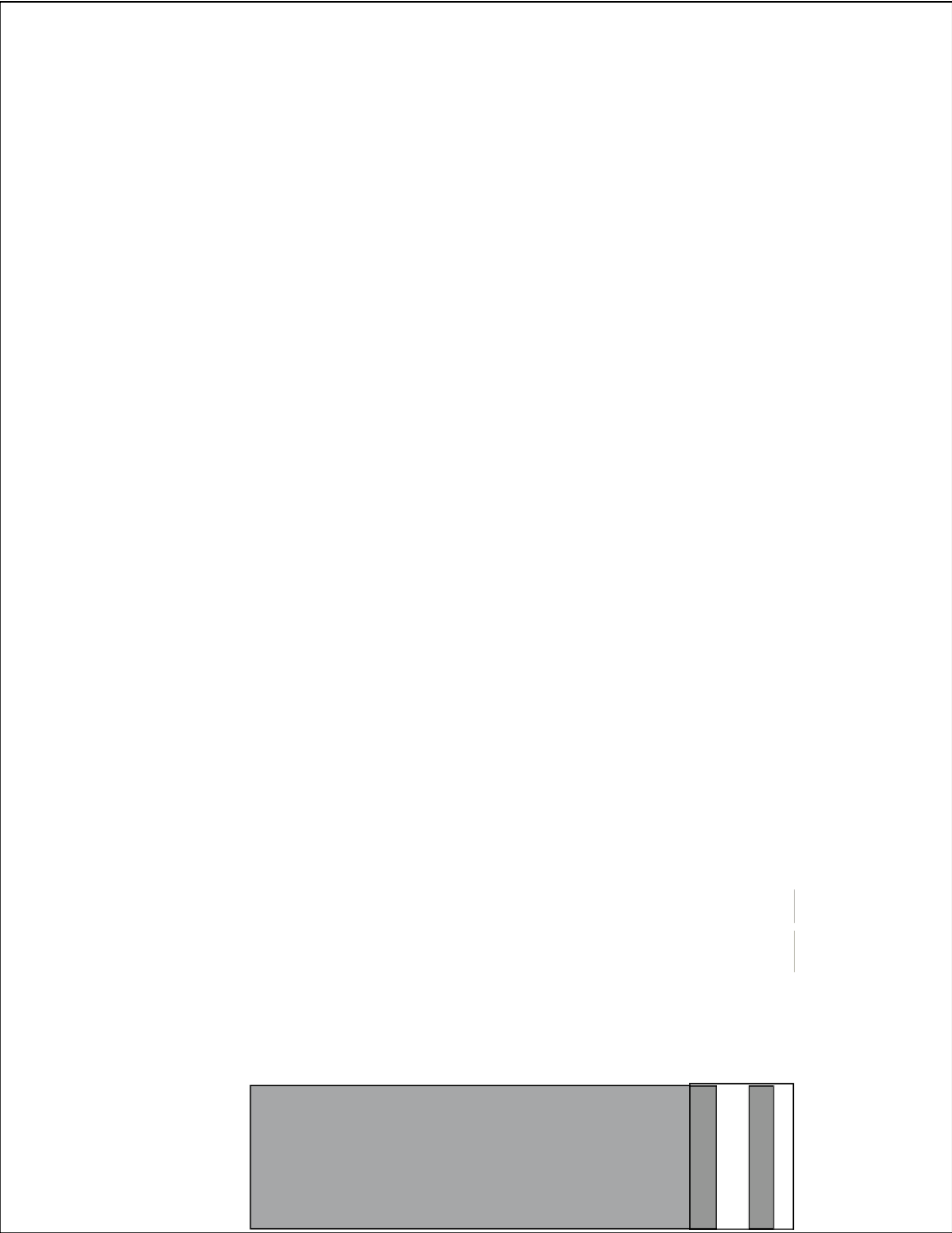
Sanskrit as a language of culture was not only confined to India (*BhArata*) as it was used in Vedic literatures in ancient times, but its way was also extended beyond the Indian frontiers; reaching almost the whole Asian region. H.B. Sarkar opines that the impact of the classical Sanskrit literature of India on Southeast Asia was felt, in appropriate cases, between the third-fourth century A.D. and the fourteenth". For Indonesia, the finding of seven inscriptions in Kutai in Kalimantan in the form of *yupa* testify that in 4th century A.D. Sanskrit was already used at least in royal circle. No doubt, Sanskrit also gives a significant influence to local languages within the Indian sub-continent. It is because there are plenty number of Sanskrit words in Hindi, e.g. the most widely used of modern Indian languages in India. Some studies had attempted also to look at similarities between Sanskrit and Indo-European languages like

German, English, etc. as to see whether both came from the same origin. Being culture, its scope is vast to be cultivated in order to look at ideas or thoughts capsulated in various forms of expressions, like arts, drama, literature, etc. No doubt, Sanskrit is the medium by which Indian ideas/thoughts/principles were expressed in various modes.

Sanskrit is sometimes identified as the language of Veda, and so Vedic or Brahmanical tradition was mediated to be spread through Sanskrit despite the fact later systems of thoughts and religions as well as spiritual traditions used Sanskrit to convey the message. *Sutra* literature e.g. was written in Sanskrit. Interestingly almost all inscriptions and/or literature found in the archipelago used Sanskrit either in grammar or in vocabulary. There are written purely in Sanskrit and in later period some combinations of Sanskrit loan words and local languages came into existence. H.B. Sarkar (1971) in his monumental works, *Corpus of the Inscriptions of Java* (2 vols.) demonstrates how massive the use of Sanskrit in the field of inscription issued by various kings or rulers and in various periods belong to Old Javanese period roughly was between 7th-15th century A.D. Of the fact some local languages of South India has reached this region, Sanskrit was used for literature and sciences as depicted in textual traditions not only in the archipelago but also in mainland of Asia, like Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, etc. What obvious is that South East Asia region was overwhelmed with Indian values and cultures as testified by so many evidences both tangible and intangible. The propagation of Indian culture in ancient time in Indonesia was carried out on mainly through Sanskrit as it was depicted by a plenty of inscriptions and texts both religious and secular in nature and inscriptions. The biggest number of inscriptions was issued by the rulers during the East Javanese period between 10th to 15th centuries A.D. Sanskrit was considered as a "*lingua franca*" amongst people in this vast region, especially for elite or scholars. They preferred to use Sanskrit in expressing subtle ideas or thoughts.

As observed by Budya Pradipta (2001) Javanese society treats Sanskrit in high esteem entering their culture. Sanskrit is a language much respected amongst Javanese society. There are several fields of life in which Sanskrit are treated well, like in (a) holy or religious words, (b) devices to strengthen a narrative or story, (c) signs of the intellect or learning of a person, (d) symbols of pride for persons, groups, communities or of the nation, (e) as instruments of beauty in general in giving certain names and terms, and (f) Sanskrit has been given a place of honour in in Javanese culture'. This situation is perhaps similar with Latin in English.

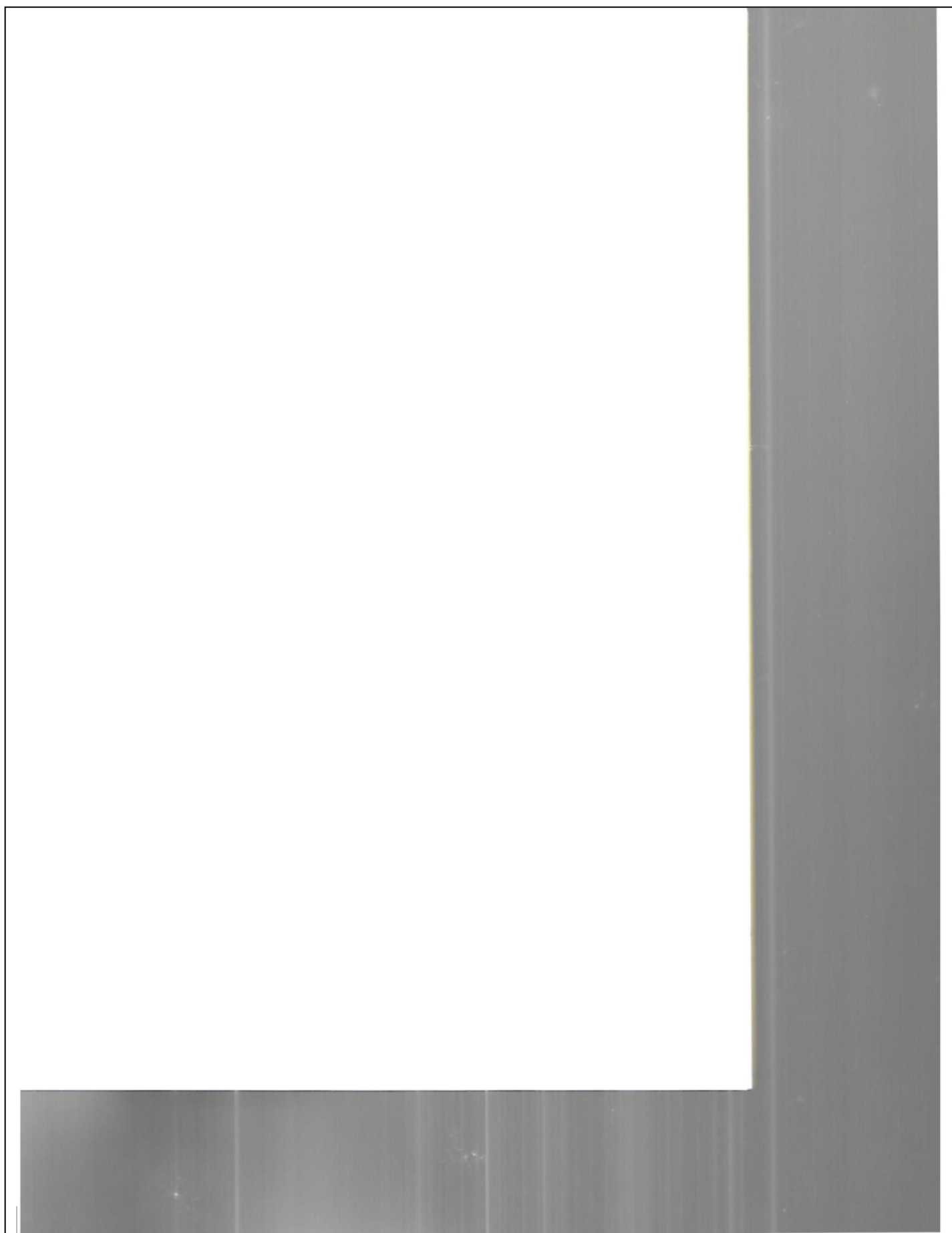
With reference to Southeast Asia, R.C. Majumdar noticed evidences of the use of Sanskrit in various usages, like original Sanskrit text, Sanskrit inscription, literary texts and inscription composed in local dialect, literary text in local dialect, and Sanskrit loan words". For Indonesia, the study was mainly conducted from archaeological and literary perspectives exploring various inscriptions and texts available. Sylvain Levi (1933) was able to publish his book entitled *Sanskrit Texts from Bali* discussing the existence of Sanskrit use, especially in religious practices in Bali. The Sanskrit can be classified into



mantra, stuti, stave, and stotras chanted by Balinese priest in officiating *yajna* (sacrifice). Gonda (1952) published *Sanskrit in Indonesia* showing the existence of Sanskrit in the archipelago in various uses including in modern Indonesian language. T. Goudriaan and C. Hooykaas (1971) published their works entitled *Stuti and Stava (Bauddha, Taiva, and VaiOlEava) of BAlinese BrAhmaLEa Priests*. These works have proven the existence of Sanskrit in Indonesia.

3.2 SANSKRIT IN OLD JAVANESE AND BAHASA INDONESIA

R. C. Majumdar states that the study of Sanskrit was probably as intense and as popular among the elite of Indonesia as those of Indo-China. However, the local dialects in this region were sufficiently advances to become the vehicle of literature much earlier and in a far greater degree than in Indo China. As a consequence of this, while in both these regions, Sanskrit was the court-language and used in official records in the beginning, the number of Sanskrit inscriptions in Indonesia was much less and its place was taken by local dialects much earlier^v. This submission can be illustrated by a number of inscriptions using Old Javanese or Balinese even in the Old Javanese or Old Balinese period. The very first inscription testifying the existence of Bali (or Balidvipa) and king or the ruler Varmadeva known as Blanjong inscription located in Sanur Bali show us an interesting fact that the inscription uses two languages, viz. Sanskrit and Old Javanese. The use of Old Balinese in Old Bali period is obvious as plenty number of inscription issued by the rulers, like Udayana, Jaya Pangus, etc. using Old Balinese language. Majumdar continues, but the influence of Sanskrit continued and is clearly evidenced by the extensive use of Sanskrit loan words, rhetoric, prosody, and almost exclusive use of themes furnished by Sanskrit literature. This process lead to the growth of the vast Indo-Javanese literature to which there is no parallel in Indo-China^{vi}. As observed by Sarkar that of the existence of Sanskrit abroad, it was only in Java, Sanskrit had produced huge numbers of literary tradition as testified in numerous inscriptions, texts of various genres, etc. Sarkar further states that of the people in South East Asia, the Javanese and the Balinese have an old literature of their own, though there is hardly any doubt that several countries of Southeast Asia had also substantial literature in the ancient period^{vii}. Unless there were good Sanskrit learning traditions, the existence of huge textual tradition would not come into existence. Of the hundreds of languages of the Malay-Indonesian world only Javanese has an old literature of its own, dating perhaps from the ninth century A.D., though extant literary works with definite dates do not go beyond A.D. 996. The classical period of this literature spanned about five hundred years and then made from for Middle-Javanese. The Old Javanese language was called *Kavi* even in the Majapahit period, because we come across in the _text of *NAgarakatAgama* (25: 2) composed in A.D. 1365 the expression *vidagdeE Agarna vruE kavi*, i.e. he was proficient in the *agama-lore* and knew the *kavi* language. The term *kavi* is now taken to mean traditional literary idioms in general, whether it is written in Old Javanese or in a later form. The works in *kavi*-poesy are designated *kakavin* and they are composed in about a hundred Sanskrit metres^{viii}. Despite the fact that Old Javanese literature tradition faded



marriage, cremation, birth ceremony, etc in Balinese social and religion traditions. Artists, like, choreographers, dancer, painters, sculptors, musicians, etc. take ideas and get spirit from this _epic and other literary works. The great epics, viz. *RAmAya.lEa* and *MahAbhArata* in Indonesia, especially in Bali are living epics, which almost everybody knows the story, characters, the antagonist and protagonist in the story. *RAmAyalEa*, is the epic of ideal. The story of *RAmAyalEa*, was sculptured beautifully in the form of relieves on the wall of a laivite temple of Prambanan (probably from 'para brahmA) located close to the royal city Yogyakarta/Ngayogyakarta (probably from 'ayodhya), in central Java. It gives inspiration to kings/rulers, politicians, artists in their creative endeavour, hence born a culture with the spirit originated from this great epic. This is so because the story of RAma shows us the idle of life: of husband-wife (RAma-SItA), of bothers (RAma-LakOmana and others), servant (RAma-Hanuman), father-son (DaDaratha-RAma), etc. It shapes the minds of the peoples and helping in building national character. Thence, it is obvious that the spreading of Hinduism and Buddhism were almost facilitated by the Sanskrit. Goyal (2006) states that in the tenth century, literature, drama and music developed in Java rapidly to produce an Indo-Javanese, or more accurately a Javanized Hindu world-view, that included both Buddhism and Taivism. Old Javanese literatures continued to develop with the writing of epic poems and Javanese versions of stories based upon episodes in the *MahAbhArata*. During the SiEghasari era in East Java the process of Javanizing non-indigenous cultural influences progressed in both poetry and bas-relief sculptures. The cultural basis for Majapahit era was laid at this time'. *Parvas* of *MahAbhArata* were translated into *kavi* prose in the regime of DharmavaEDa Teguh Anantavikrama (900-1007 A.D.) and his son-in-law AirlaEga (1010-1049 A.D.).

Mishra (2006) was able to trace the *kakavin* work to its Sanskrit sources. For example, *SahasrArjuna* theme parallels to *Arjunavijaya kakavin*, *LokapAl kakavin*, and *Arjuna SastrabAhu kakavin*.' These Sanskrit-based *kakavins* are plenty in number produced in different period in Java as well as in Bali in post Majapahit era.

Unfortunately, the present condition of Sanskrit learning in Indonesia, even in Bali is very poor. Only a few people, especially priests of Brahmin family (called *pedanda*) who use to chant *Vedic mantras* or *Dlokas* in his morning prayer called *SURyasevana* or *pUJa* are well verse in this language. The condition is a little bit promising as there are at least six formal institutions keep thousands of manuscripts in Sanskrit-Old Javanese literatures; one is in Jakarta, i.e. the National Library; and six others are in Bali: Gedong Kirtya' located in Singaraja, North Bali, Faculty of Letters Udayana University, Hindu Indonesia University (formerly Institute of Hindu Dharma), Dvijendra University, Balai Bahasa, and the Centre of Documentation of Balinese Culture under local government of Bali, all are located in Denpasar (South Bali). There are still thousands of manuscripts kept in private library of Brahmins family or commoners around Bali and Lombok islands. Plenty number of them are also kept in foreign libraries like that of Leiden University Library.

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