

The historical and cultural connections between India and Thailand

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In news- India and the Southeast Asia region share a long history of cultural and commercial relations. India's External Affairs Minister's visit to Devasthan in Bangkok, Thailand is an example of it.

India & Thailand-

- In the early centuries of the common era, **Thailand, which was historically known as Siam, was under the rule of the Funan Empire.**
- Following the decline of the Funan Empire in the sixth century CE, **it was under the rule of the Buddhist kingdom of Dvaravati.**
- In the **10th century**, the region came under **Khmer rule**, which is also known to have **links with India.**
- As per the historians, **a Tamil inscription found in Takua-pa testifies trade links between the Pallava region of South India and southern Thailand.**
- **A mercantile corporation of South Indians called Manikarramam** had established a settlement here and built its own temple and tank, and lived as a **'self-contained' colony.**
- It is important to note that **Brahmanism and Buddhism existed alongside each other in Thailand** in the pre-Sukhothai period of the 13th century.
- **The Mon kings of Dvaravati and the Khmers had patronised Buddhism** and built several Buddhist edifices, but at the same time had also adopted Brahmanical customs and practices.
- The thriving coexistence of the two religions is evident

from the fact that while Thailand today is a Buddhist majority country, there are many temples in the country where Buddhist and Brahmanical Gods are kept side by side.

- Apart from the popular Brahmanical deities of Ganesha, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, those that are largely absent in Indian socio-religious landscape, such as Indra are also worshiped in Thailand.
- Author S N Desai, in his book 'Hinduism in Thai Life' (2005), notes that nothing of Hindu origin has more profoundly affected the tone of Thai life than the epic Ramayana.
- **The Ramayana – known in Thailand as Ramakriti (the glory of Rama) or Ramakien** (the account of Rama) – has provided an outlet of cultural expression in Thailand for both the elite and the common man.
- Episodes from the epic are painted on the walls of Buddhist temples and enacted in dramas and ballets.
- Although there is no archaeological evidence of the story of Rama in Thailand, **certain towns in the country have legends related to Rama's life connected with them.**
- For instance, **Ayutthaya in Central Thailand, which emerged in the 10th century CE, is derived from Ayodhya, birthplace of Lord Rama.**

India & other Southeast Asia region-

- **The classical Sanskrit and Pali texts from India carry references of the region using various names such as Kathakosha, Suvarnabhumi** (the land of god) or Suvarnadvipa (the golden island), **indicating that this was a region that attracted Indian merchants.**
- Trade in spices, aromatic wood and most importantly gold is known to have flourished.
- In more recent times, **European and Indian scholars have referred to Southeast Asia as 'Farther India', 'Greater**

India', or 'Hinduised or Indianised states'.

- **The first person to do an in depth study of the process of 'Indianisation' in Southeast Asian countries was a French scholar named George Coedes.**
- **He coined the term 'Farther India' to refer to those states that experienced "the civilising activity of India'.**
- Geographically, it refers to Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand.
- The Sanskrit, Buddhist, and Jain texts indicate that interactions between the two regions go back more than two thousand years ago, mainly through sea voyages and that trade played an important role.
- Coedes, in his 1968 book "The Indianised states of Southeast Asia", writes that from the beginning of the common era, these relations resulted in the formation of Indian kingdoms.
- In the early 20th century, the nationalist historians of India frequently referred to the ancient Indian kingdoms in Southeast Asia as its 'colony'.
- More recently, however, the colonisation theory has been rejected on the ground that there is very little evidence of conquest or direct political influence in the ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms.
 - **The first Indian kingdom to come up in Southeast Asia was Funan, which is the predecessor of modern Cambodia and Lin-yi in southern Vietnam, both of which came up in the second century CE.**
 - Contemporary Southeast Asian society carries several pieces of evidence of the cultural impact of these interactions.
 - **Many local languages in the region, including Thai, Malay, and Javanese contain words of Sanskrit, Pali and Dravidian origin in significant proportions.**
- **The Thai language is written in script derived from**

Southern Indian Pallava alphabet.

- Perhaps the most important influence of India on Southeast Asia was in the field of religion and how **Shivaism, Vaishnavism, Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism** and later Sinhalese Buddhism came to be practised in the region.
- “The political and administrative institutions and ideas, especially the **concept of divine authority and kingship, are largely shaped by the Indian practices.**
- The episodes of Ramayana and Mahabharata are regularly featured in puppet shows and theatre events.
- In terms of architecture, **monuments like Borobodur Stupa in Java, the Angkor Vat temple in Cambodia, My Son temple in Vietnam are some of the best examples of Indian influence in the region.**