

India-ASEAN Relations: The Utility and Limits of a Norm-Based Approach

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Abstract

Central to India–ASEAN relations has been a consistent equivalence between their similar core principles and outlooks, which have served as a shared value-based footing upon which the two entities have built and enhanced their relations. These underlying sets of norms inform their diplomatic dealings with each other, and stem from principles and practices critical to their foundational identities and experiences. This article investigates and evaluates the historical roots of these norms and then utilizes them as an analytical vehicle with which to trace the growing strategic convergence typifying present-day India–ASEAN relations. Drawing upon constructivist accounts that emphasize the role played by history, culture, identity and learning, the article considers the key areas of agreement in relations, and how a value-based form of analysis provides an essential lens through which to better understand material factors structuring their relations. It also underlines the analytical value and empirical richness that a norm-based approach provides for analysing specific sets of norms in a specific state-to-multilateral interaction.

Keywords

India, ASEAN, constructivism, norms, narratives

Celebrating 30 years of dialogue relations in 2022, India and ASEAN ties are arguably stronger than they ever have been. Encompassing ever closer links within the realms of economics, security cooperation and development, their highly important strategic partnership is closely binding together the regions of south Asia and south-east Asia. Central to this relationship has been an initial—and ongoing—equivalence between their similar core principles and outlooks,

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which have served as a shared value-based footing upon which the two entities have built and enhanced their relations. These underlying sets of norms inform and temper their diplomatic dealings with each other, and stem from principles and practices critical to the foundational identities of both India and ASEAN. In particular, these norms ‘play a crucial role in determining ... interests and provide a subjective set of preferences formed by domestic context and external conditions’ (Ogden, 2017b, p. xviii), and are worthy of analysis so as to better conceptualize India–ASEAN ties. They also have a real-world significance, whereby the India–ASEAN partnership is argued by its elites to be ‘founded on congruent ideas and a common vision of the region and the world, under-pinned by strong civilizational linkages through the millennia’ (Krishna quoted in MEA, 2012, p. 413).

This article explores the utility of deploying norm-based analytical approaches from the field of International Relations by uncovering, examining and evaluating these common values and outlooks, primarily through the theoretical lens of constructivism. Such a theoretical perspective emphasizes the importance of history, experience and learning in the formation of values and identities, which act as the ‘building blocks of international life’ (Snyder, 2004, p. 60). These factors then engrain specific norms that ‘imply a particular set of interests or preferences ... with respect to particular actors, ... (showing how a) state understands others according to the identity it attributes to them, while simultaneously reproducing its own identity through daily social practice’ (Hopf, 1998, p. 175). Within the context of inter-relations between India and ASEAN, norms in our analysis are further defined as ‘intersubjective beliefs about the social and natural world that define actors, their situations and the possibilities of action’ (Wendt, 1995, pp. 73–74). Collectively, sets of these norms then produce ‘a matrix of intellectual and emotional bases’ (Jones, 2006, pp. 28–29) that provide value-based guidance concerning a specific relationship within a specific setting, which for us here is that of contemporary and historical India–ASEAN relations. Notably, this norm-centred approach informs the dominant understandings that typify India–ASEAN relations but does not seek to preclude or ignore where their interactions at times result in significant divergences.

Using this approach will allow us to question whether or not the security perspectives of both India and ASEAN can be seen to rest upon particular shared sets of norms specific to their international interaction, and the extent to which these norms orientate their joint policy preferences. It will also underscore how international affairs takes place ‘between various political *agents* (including individuals with specific needs and wants) and *structures* formed by social relationships’ (Lanteigne, 2013, p. 1), via an approach that encompasses several generations of political leaders and parties. This virtue permits a longitudinal analytical timeframe rather than looking solely at present-day interactions, and thus draws out the longstanding norms in India–ASEAN relations that act as deep-seated and constraining social ‘incentives which shape their behaviour’ (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 22). To unveil these norms, this article looks at the interaction between India and ASEAN over the past 50 years as recorded in the various meetings, dialogues, treaties and agreements between their leaders, and

utilizes such primary documents as its main empirical basis of investigation. It will also use three main forms of norm measurement in the India–ASEAN context concerning specificity, durability and concordance (Legro, 2000, pp. 419–432). Overall, implementing such an analytical viewpoint allows us to examine if; (Q1) India and ASEAN each have certain deeply engrained norms; and if (Q2) the interplay of these norms in India–ASEAN relations analytically represents a ‘evolving system of shared meaning that governs (their) perceptions, communications and actions’ (Hudson, 1997, p. 27). Due to word count restraints, we note that the analysis is more India-centric than ASEAN-centric in terms of the application of specific norms and resultant interests and policies.

While our analysis will display the clear utility of a norm-based approach for better understanding India–ASEAN relations, it is also cognisant of the potential limits of such a method. Central to such limitations is that norms themselves act as intervening variables that provide a *subjective* interpretation concerning the importance given to more material factors. Norms and identities therefore act as lenses through which to better comprehend how specific entities *understand* more tangible forms of power, such as economic size or military capabilities. This conceptual starting point means that our constructivist-centred account runs counter to realist and liberalist methods that ‘attempt to transcend the particularity of ... historical origins in order to place them within the framework of some general propositions or laws’ (Cox, 1986, p. 207). These theories largely reject historical and cultural influences upon international affairs (Mastanduno, 1997, pp. 49–88), taking a fixed and non-evolutionary viewpoint. Our analysis does not claim that purely focusing on norms and identities is superior to these material accounts but asks if; (Q3) their usage can *enhance our analytical appreciation of all factors* in a specific set of relations, especially across time.

Another prospective limitation is that our investigation applies a norm-based analysis to a relationship between a unitary state—India—and a multilateral institution—ASEAN. For many scholars, especially those from realist and liberalist traditions, doing so appears to be highly counter-intuitive in that the basic unit of analysis is not consistent. While we acknowledge such an issue, we note how multilateral regimes can be understood as ‘particular human-constructed arrangement(s)’ (Keohane, 1969, p. 291) based upon common norms, principles and interests. They thus rely upon shared understandings to bind their constituent actors together around a shared vision of a particular region—as is true for ASEAN and its founding refrain of ‘One Vision, One Identity, One Community’ (ASEAN, 2020). ASEAN’s foundational principles thus arguably highlight a normative consistency, in the same way that is evident for India at the state level, and underscores how multilateral regimes have a ‘relative durability of a distinctly social sort’ (Keohane, 1988, pp. 379–382). We thus ask if; (Q4) a norm-based approach can be used to fruitfully analyse and enhance our understanding of a specific set of state-to-multilateral regime relations.

Our analysis proceeds as follows: in the first section we uncover the different sets of norms manifest in both India and ASEAN and show the processes by which they have developed over time, as well as their noteworthy overlap and

commonality. The second section then explores evident India–ASEAN strategic congruence through an examination of the development and progression of their historical and contemporary relations, economic dealings and security ties. The article concludes by drawing together these different analyses to determine the value and efficacy of utilizing a norm-based approach to investigate India–ASEAN relations, uncovering its important and wider analytical value.

Delineating India and ASEAN’s Orientating Norms

Highlighting the key orientating norms and principles specifically structuring India and ASEAN’s internal identities and attitudes to the world, this section reveals the guiding structures of meaning central to their past and present interaction. In this way, it serves to uncover the constant norm-based backbone to their relations, and hence the analytical basis for the latter sections of our analysis on specific aspects of India–ASEAN relations. By delineating how these norms have come about—primarily through their highly frequent iteration and re-iteration over an extended period of time—we will be able to isolate ‘the cultural context of actor behaviour—(that is) the dominant ... understandings that characterise a society’ (Kowert & Legro, 1996, p. 459). In turn, this section also shows how, indicative of the historical evolution of both norms, and the various interactions upon which they are founded, ‘interdependence also affects the character of power; ... (which) because of increased complexity power will tend to vary by issue area’ (Herrera, 2006, p. 19). We will thus be able to see how increasing and decreasing sources of material power impact upon the formation of norms in both the Indian and ASEAN contexts. This point further explicates how multilateral regimes function as the collective ‘product of power, resources and beliefs of important actors’ (Caporaso, 1993, p. 79), showing the value of a norm-based approach and the influence of other factors beyond just material power but also their innate collective *interplay*.

The Case of India

From its independence in 1947, India’s elites wanted to ensure an independent India that was ‘largely free from external dangers’ (Pant, 2009, p. 95). This desire for self-determination coupled with principles of self-reliance, as well as highly established and engrained anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist sentiments. The desire to preserve Indian territory—and re-absorbing any parts held by foreign powers, notably in Goa and Pondicherry—also directly fed into these strategic priorities, and through their historical repetition would become core norms within India’s diplomatic and foreign policy outlook. From this basis, India’s leaders projected their country to be ‘a unitary state that would neither devolve power nor encourage schismatic behaviour from its provinces’ (Ogden, 2009, p. 222).

Protecting India's perceived dominance over the Indian Ocean Region was also a key strategic concern and bolstered the urge for wider territorial control in south Asia. This norm gained increased significance as India's economic clout increased from the 1990s onwards, primarily in terms of protecting and controlling its many essential trade and energy security routes. The promotion of democracy (ostensibly only within India's borders) together with the enshrined principles in the Indian Constitution concerning equality, social and religious tolerance, and liberalism, underpinned these strategic concerns. They also served as a means by which India's highly diverse, pluralistic and multicultural basis could be safeguarded. Collectively, these policies further aimed 'to fully preserve the country's freedom of independent thought and action' (quoted in Michael, 2011, p. 32) even as it emerged from the colonial period as a materially weak yet highly self-confident actor.

Apart from their frequent reiteration and durability, what was critical to all of these specific norms was the foremost realization that their preservation of India as an independent state 'would suffer a serious setback if India indulged itself consciously or unconsciously in the Cold War conundrum' (Jain, 2009, p. 21). Distancing themselves from the highly military based machinations typifying the bipolar faceoff between the United States and the Soviet Union, India's new elite therefore also emphasized core principles of non-violence (*ahimsa*), economic self-reliance (*swadeshi*) and positive neutralism in great power politics. Complimenting many of these understandings, India's elite also avowed the country's 'role as conscience-keeper of the world' (Sikri, 2009, p. 298). It is from this basis that India's leaders promoted a form of 'globalist soft power morality' (Scott, 2011, p. 120) that was more concerned with upholding norms and values rather than with gaining military prowess.

In this regard, India's international stance would become summed up by the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence' (known as *Panchsheel* in India). These principles were: (a) respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; (b) non-aggression; (c) non-interference in another state's internal affairs; (d) equality and co-operation for mutual benefit; and (e) peaceful co-existence. Such beliefs, as well as the institutional creation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) encapsulated an alternative to great power Cold War bipolarity. Openly critical of Western 'aggression' in Korea, Congo, Suez and Vietnam, the values promoted by India resonated with other (developing) states, drew them to New Delhi and indicated their global resonance.

With the ending of the Cold War, the significance of this core set of norms continued to significantly influence the prevailing attitudes of India towards international relations (Ogden, 2017a, pp. 14–34). So too would an emphasis upon India's importance to the world as a rising great power, which led to a norm of pragmatism also became more evident, as the need to gain access to markets and investment became evermore critical through its ongoing economic liberalization (Wolpert, 2011, pp. 36–39), as well as stronger links with the US (Ogden, 2017a, pp. 144–164), ever-greater military modernization and the acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1998 (Ladwig, 2010, pp. 1162–1183). This pragmatism somewhat tempered the idealism and moral voice of India. The

ascendancy to power of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) in 2014 led to an evolution of *Panchsheel* to now rest upon oft-repeated—and hence largely normalized—principles of respect, dialogue, cooperation, peace and prosperity (Modi quoted in MEA, 2018).

The Case of ASEAN

Established in August 1967, ASEAN aimed to ‘marshal the still untapped potentials of this rich region through more substantial united action’ (Ramos quoted in ASEAN, 1997). Emphasizing collectivism and solidarity, the grouping reflected how ‘the motivation for our efforts to band together was thus to strengthen our position and protect ourselves against Big Power rivalry’ (Khoman, 1992), particularly as the incremental withdrawal of colonial powers from the region left a power vacuum ripe for the involvement of exploitative external actors. The recent historical experience of subjugation and occupation by Japan during the Second World War emboldened such perspectives, and served to enshrine anti-colonial and anti-imperial perspectives within ASEAN elites.

Self-reliance, autonomy and a fear of outsiders thus became central precepts in the formation of ASEAN, as its constituents sought ‘to defend itself against any negative influence from outside the region’ (Malik quoted in 1997). These motivations were very similar to those expressed by India after its independence. Such sentiments were further reflected in the words of one of ASEAN’s founders that its members ‘want to be master of their own house and to enjoy the inherent right to decide their own destiny’ (Khoman quoted in ASEAN, 1997). Similar to India, leaders noted that ‘we are not against anything ... not against anybody’ (Rajaratnam quoted in ASEAN, 1997), a stance akin to the positive neutralism of the NAM. Further binding members together was the common aim of development to ‘accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, ... to promote regional peace and stability ... (and) to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance’ (ASEAN, 2023). This norm clearly overlapped with the norms of autonomy and economic modernization as frequently evidenced in India.

The ‘Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia’ (TAC) of 1976 institutionalized many of these norms and confirmed their durability and concordance among ASEAN members. The TAC stated the following core norms: ‘(a) mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; (b) the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; (c) non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; (d) renunciation of the threat or use of force; and (e) effective co-operation among themselves’ (ASEAN, 1976). Article 12 also highlighted ‘principles of self-confidence, self-reliance, mutual respect, co-operation and solidarity’ (ASEAN, 1976). The normative similarities of these core principles with those of India—especially through *Panchsheel*—are striking. This similarity is highlighted by this article’s analysis concerning how their shared experience of world affairs led to the mutual realization of *largely*

compatible sets of norms and principles. Some decades later, the 1995 ‘Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone’ (SEANWFZ) further deepened ASEAN’s rejection of military power in the region. In turn, the ASEAN Vision 2020 also confirmed key understandings to be ‘outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, (and to be) bonded together in partnership in dynamic development’ (ASEAN, 2023).

Subsequent developments added a tone of largely post-Cold War pragmatism, as we witnessed earlier in the case of India. Thus, in 2007, the ‘Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015’ created three key community pillars—political-security, economic and socio-cultural. The most pertinent of these pillars to this article, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), states a commitment to the ‘shaping and sharing of norms ... (specifically) regional norms of good conduct and solidarity’ (ASEAN, 2009). Further institutionalizing ASEAN’s key founding norms, the APSC focused upon political development, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict peace building and implementation mechanisms (ASEAN, 2009). In turn, it envisaged ‘ASEAN to be a rules-based community of shared values and norms; a cohesive, peaceful, stable and resilient region with shared responsibility for comprehensive security’ (ASEAN, 2016b). This latter development echoes that within India, whereby a strict focus on autonomy was tempered by fulfilling wider economic and development needs in a globalized world.

The APSC also included assertions to ‘initiate preparatory work for the development of practical co-operation programmes among the militaries’ (ASEAN, 2009) of ASEAN members. This assertion marked an evolution of earlier norms that had decried military power means. Such a progression further evidenced the presence of a norm of pragmatism within ASEAN, and which—just as for India—confirmed not only an evolution but also the influence of the benign post-Cold War context. Moreover, the enhancement of military-to-military cooperation in ASEAN mirrors that of India’s own military modernization and expansion, both of which became normalized after the Cold War. Furthermore, the ‘ASEAN Charter’ of December 2008 also served to collectively ‘codif(y) ASEAN norms, rules and values’ (ASEAN, 2007a), and provided a legal institutional framework that basically enshrined the dominant ASEAN principles of the prior 40 years. All of these mechanisms evidenced key processes concerning how norms are formed via a process resting upon a specific principle, that is durable and has concordance across a long period of time. Confirming the importance of ASEAN to India’s foreign policy ambitions, as well as ASEAN’s centrality to the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi opened its new Indian Mission in Jakarta in 2015.

Exploring Apparent India–ASEAN Strategic Congruence

As the previous section has shown, there is solid and consistent evidence to show—as per our proposed Q1 and Q2—that both India and ASEAN display specific and durable sets of engrained norms concerning the formation and

continuance of their particular identities. Moreover, there is significant overlap within the interplay of these two sets of norms that suggest a possibly concordant understanding of the world. This possibility is denoted by specific norms including self-determination and self-reliance, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, a positive neutralism away from involvement with great powers, and a focus upon development and modernization. Through their frequent reiteration these norms were shown to be highly durable and consistent. Notably India's *Panchsheel* and ASEAN's TAC displayed a high degree of concordance and similarity, and further demonstrated a deep shared normative consistency and common experience and outlook of global affairs. Both entities also went through a similar evolution with their policies being tempered by a newer norm of pragmatism, especially in military affairs, after the end of the Cold War. The formation of these norms was shown via their specificity, durability and concordance.

This section now extends this analysis to explore the wider presence and analytical value of these norms in both historical and contemporary India–ASEAN relations. Confirming how India–ASEAN relations have fluctuated over time, our analysis seeks to confirm how—even as they continue to gestate and broaden in new material ways—their relations are significantly influenced by the shared bedrock of their highly common sets of norms. This recognition underscores how norms are intervening variables that critically influence how material factors—primarily economic and military—are understood, and that they have an ongoing analytical and real-world significance to India–ASEAN relations. Our analysis also shows the *un-evenness* with which norms are applicable in different realms of India–ASEAN relations, and how their relevance can be dependent on wider geopolitical power balances. From this basis, this section analyses three areas—(a) the development and progression of India–ASEAN relations; (b) economic ties and (c) security relations.

The Development and Progression of Relations

Although the foundational norms structuring India's security perspectives and those of ASEAN appear to display clear mutual resonance, in the earliest days of the regime there was a degree of strategic dissonance between the two sides. Thus, while New Delhi was offered the opportunity to become a founding member of ASEAN, India's first Prime Minister and key foreign policy architect—Jawaharlal Nehru—rejected this offer as he regarded ASEAN to be a surrogate Western security regime (Ogden, 2017b, p. 137). ASEAN extended an offer again in 1980 for India to be a dialogue partner, which New Delhi again turned down. Furthermore, India's 1970s strategic tilt towards the Soviet Union, and its ambivalent stance towards Moscow's support of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979 (and Hanoi's subsequent 10-year occupation), further complicated any nascent diplomatic possibilities, as did ASEAN concerns over India's maritime expansion into the Indian Ocean and development of a naval base at the Andaman Islands. Overall, 'during the Cold War period India was regarded by the ASEAN members as politically suspect, economically unimportant

and at times even militarily threatening' (Indian analyst quoted in Ali & Pardesi, 2003, p. 2), with New Delhi's more immediate security concerns appearing to overshadow any shared value-based ties resting on common sets of norms.

However, with the end of the Cold War and New Delhi undertaking a process of economic liberalization from 1991, links with south-east Asia became more attractive, primarily as ASEAN was based within a stable region on India's periphery (compared with West Asia, which had been beset by the Iran–Iraq war, and India's historically toxic/highly unsettled relations with Pakistan). India also wished to surmount its economic and political isolation that had arisen as a result of the demise of the Soviet Union, which had previously been New Delhi's vital ally and key trading partner. Thus, from 1992, Indian leaders sought to explicitly create military, economic and diplomatic ties with south-east Asia through its 'Look East' policy that aimed to build upon India's various religious, artistic, linguistic and political legacies with the region. Furthermore, New Delhi was concerned about the influence of China in the region, as 'a country in control of the Indo-China region would threaten India's security' (Anand, 2009, p. 4). Via its norms of self-determination and self-reliance, and also stressing historical commonalities concerning norms of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, India sought to use enhanced relations with ASEAN as a way to gain greater economic and political capabilities, whilst also emphasizing both sides' geopolitical vulnerability after the Cold War vis-à-vis the rise of China.

Closer links with ASEAN became the lynchpin of India's 'Look East' policy, and from January 1993 New Delhi became a sectoral dialogue partner in regard to tourism, commerce, investment and science and technology. At the first meeting of the ASEAN–India Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee in January 1994, India's Foreign Secretary noted how 'the context of the ongoing and irreversible trade and economic liberalization of India, and India's large and growing market ... (would) facilitate a quantum leap in Indo-ASEAN co-operation' (ASEAN, 1996). This statement highlighted the mutual benefits possible through such an interaction, as well as aiding the realization of their common development and modernization goals as shown in the norms underpinning *Panchsheel* and TAC. In 1996, India then joined the wider ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) designed 'to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern' (ASEAN, 2022a). From this foundation, diplomats then set out 'a vision of a shared destiny and intensified co-operation in all fields' (ASEAN, 1996), which underscored 'the importance of ASEAN and India to the geopolitical complex to which they belonged' (ASEAN, 1996). Some of these embryonic links also involved a re-imagining of India's overall geographical scope/scale, with the then Indian Minister of External Affairs stating that 'India's parameters of security concerns clearly extend beyond (the) confines of the convenient, albeit, questionable geographical definition of South Asia' (quoted in Anand, 2009, p. 7).

With the rise to power of the BJP in 1998, India's new leaders stressed India's historical, cultural and ethnic (especially Hindu) heritage in south-east Asia, and aimed to reassert and extend India's 'Look East' policy across the region that was now deemed to be part of New Delhi's 'extended strategic neighbourhood'. The

new Prime Minister, Atal Vajpayee, thus asserted that the ‘region is one of the focal points of India’s foreign policy, strategic concerns and economic interests’ (Anand, 2009, p. 8). Underscoring this policy, Vajpayee visited Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos and Vietnam during his term as leader, while the BJP injected security concerns into these relationships (and with ASEAN), as reflected in cooperation on transnational terrorism and via explicit bilateral defence ties (including some military/maritime exercises). Such an emphasis again pointed to key commonalities in terms of specific security perspectives and their wider resonance in terms of norms relating to self-determination, self-reliance, anti-imperialism and ensuring territorial integrity. The importance of India’s links with ASEAN was further shown after the Pokhran II nuclear tests, when Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh visited most of the ASEAN capitals in July 1998—a tour that led to these states only moderately censuring India’s actions. Via notions of ‘positive asymmetry’, better ASEAN links helped to also physically connect India to the region (and, by extension, to the wider Asia-Pacific) (Ogden, 2014, p. 87), and strengthened India’s norm of territorial integrity in its unsettled north-east.

After extensive diplomatic activity, India then became a summit-level partner with ASEAN in 2002, matching the status of other major regional actors such as China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The relationship was consolidated by the first ever India–ASEAN summit in late 2002, at which officials observed ‘that the strengthening of relations, which were rooted in close historical and cultural ties, serve the fundamental interests of their respective peoples and peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region’ (ASEAN, 2002). Here the ‘pluralistic nature of their societies’ (ASEAN, 2002) was also celebrated together with a joint iteration of the *Panchsheel* Principles as the main basis of their interaction, which evidenced the shared basis shared by their different sets of foundational norms. In November 2004, the ‘ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity’. Again, collectively adhering to *Panchsheel* and TAC, leaders highlighted the ‘multi-religious and culturally diverse nature of our respective societies’ (ASEAN, 2012), and utilized the clear concordance between these specific shared norms to enable a shared vision designed to actively ‘promote a long-term co-operative partnership based on equality, shared ownership and mutual respect’ (ASEAN, 2012).

By the sixth ASEAN–India Summit in 2007, ASEAN leaders furthermore ‘recognised that India’s engagement with ASEAN was a pillar of India’s “Look East” policy, and that ASEAN’s leading role and centrality in all ASEAN-related architecture facilitated India’s rapid development of ties in the region’ (ASEAN, 2007b). This acknowledgement thus highlighted further synergies and overlap between the key sets of norms structuring their security outlooks, as well as the continued positive outcomes garnered from shared economic growth. For analysts, these developments indicated how India’s ‘Look East’ policy had become ‘institutionalised’ (Limaye, 2002, p. 7) via New Delhi’s greater links with ASEAN, and in many ways constituted an ‘ASEAN+1’ multilateral regime. Also evident were further indications that relations had now coalesced in terms of their shared core norms, principles and even basic geographic identification. As a leading

Indian diplomat subsequently asserted; ‘our relationship with ASEAN was the natural pivot in this deepening collaboration, ... India is as much a South-East Asian nation as a South Asian nation, given the rich linguistic and ethnic mosaic of our north-east, and the fact that we share borders with a large ASEAN nation, Myanmar’ (MEA, 2011, p. 54).

Reworking other strategic principles, this time in conjunction with New Delhi’s perceived (and desired) domination of the Indian Ocean, the same official later stated that both sides ‘recognised that maritime security is an indispensable and fundamental condition for the welfare and economic security of the region’ (Rao quoted in MEA, 2011, p. 69). Within the context of India’s expanding economic prowess, the greater contemporary projection of Indian security into the Indian Ocean now rested upon naval deployments and maritime diplomacy, particularly the protection of trade routes to the east and energy supplies from the west. This importance underlined how 90% of Indian trade and 70% of the state’s oil needs were dependent upon sea access (Ogden, 2014, p. 92), including to and from south-east Asia. In August 2001, India resultantly established the Far Eastern Strategic Command on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Emblematic of these converging strategic norms, by 2013 relations were raised to that of the ‘ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership’, with the Indian Prime Minister tellingly avowed that ‘we believe that ASEAN centrality is essential in the evolving regional architecture for peace, stability, development and prosperity’ (MEA, 2013, p. 449). Collectively, these perspectives underlined common India–ASEAN interests, which were seen by both sides through the essential lens of shared norms of development and modernization, which bound them closer together.

Fostering Economic Ties

Confirming the importance of greater economic growth within the context of New Delhi’s norm of development and modernization (Ogden, 2014, pp. 36–38), and the concurrent mutual benefits for south-east Asia, initial India–ASEAN ties firmly rested in this domain. Such a common concern was also bolstered by shared norms of augmenting mutual self-reliance. Relations were also based upon the assertion that in the current era ‘economic strength, rather than military prowess, will be the real measure of state power’ (Ladwig, 2010, p. 1182), which can be seen as the most translatable/fungible source of power within the international system. In the initial stages of their interaction, India also wished to benefit from interacting with south-east Asia’s and ASEAN’s more developed and globalization-savvy economies, and to learn from them for the benefit of the India’s wider global economic engagement. Marked by the institution of the ‘India-ASEAN Business Summit’ from 2002, India also gave tariff concessions to some of the less developed states in the region (mainly Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam). These steps incrementally led to the October 2003 ‘Framework Agreement for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership’, which was signed ‘in order to forge a closer economic partnership in the twenty-first century’ (ASEAN,

2003), and which set in motion negotiations and efforts to create an India–ASEAN Regional Trade and Investment Area between the two entities.

As part of the 2003 Agreement, India accorded Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) status to all those ASEAN members who were not in the World Trade Organization. With economic ties deepening between both sides, August 2009 then saw the completion of the ASEAN–India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA), which entered into force in January 2010 after protracted negotiations on tariff concessions and the service industry. As one of the world’s largest FTAs in terms of potential consumers, trade between the two sides grew exponentially, with two-way commerce amounting to over US\$ 78 billion in 2021, which was a 13-fold increase since 1996 (ASEAN, 2022b). Between 2000 and 2019, the cumulative level of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from ASEAN to India was US\$ 90.8 billion (accounted for by Singapore at US \$88.4 billion), while India’s total investments into ASEAN stood at US\$ 2.1 billion in 2020 (ASEAN, 2022b). However, India remained far behind China, the United States, the European Union and Australia, indicating that currently India is not ASEAN’s most critical economic partner.

More broadly, in 2010 both sides pledged to co-operate within other international regimes, in order to ‘foster collaboration and consultations ... on the issues of common interests in the international arena, including the United Nations, international financial institutions, WTO and G20, among others, so as to articulate the aspirations of the developing countries for equitable treatment and representation of their views’ (ASEAN, 2012b). Common heritages—as espoused in their anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist, as well as self-reliance and development, norms—were at the heart of these commitments. Further marking a greater synergy of purpose, in 2015 India announced a US\$ 1 billion line of credit for ASEAN members, while ASEAN recognized the importance of New Delhi’s new ‘Make in India’ campaign (ASEAN, 2015a), which was now a central policy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had evolved the longstanding ‘Look East’ policy into the more proactive—and pragmatic—‘Act East’ policy (Ganapathi, 2019, pp. 195–206). In turn, both sides also began to realize their mutual energy security needs via the ‘ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation’, which included giving India the ability to variously access the region’s energy resources via pipelines and power grids. Overall, norms of (mutual) development and modernization continued to be the benchmark of these economic ties.

In more recent years, during the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated India’s vision for the Indo-Pacific that advocated free, inclusive and open maritime order, and vitally encompasses ASEAN at the centre of such a formulation (MEA, 2018). Such an articulation is also central to mutual trade and energy security concerns in the region, and the 2020 ‘India-ASEAN Plan of Action (2021-2025)’ has been argued to be ‘a formidable geopolitical construct that has the power and capability to ensure maritime security, shared progress, territorial integrity, and international-rules based system in the region’ (Bhattacharya, 2020), all of which reflect shared India–ASEAN norms. The Plan of Action also linked to Modi’s SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region) programme launched in 2015 (Maniyar, 2021). When regarded in conjunction with New Delhi’s ‘Indo-Pacific Oceans’

Initiative’ of 2019, this policy—and hence normative—confluence is seen by many to harmonize India’s Act East Policy with ASEAN’s ‘Outlook on the Indo-Pacific’ policy (Singh, 2021) that the region is one ‘of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry’ (ASEAN, 2019).

Whilst such synergies are apparent, there are also significant divergences between India and ASEAN in the economic domain, which suggest a limit to taking a purely norm-centred understanding of their relations. Foremost among these was New Delhi’s decision in 2019 to opt out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement due to concerns about its impact upon India’s agriculture and domestic industry (Gurunathan & Moorthy, 2021, pp. 560–578), as well as a fear that Chinese products would flood the Indian markets and affect local businesses (Marjani, 2019). As External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated at the time, ‘we took a call given that the way (RCEP) is currently, that it is not in our interest to enter this agreement as it would have fairly immediate negative consequences for our own economy’ (HT Correspondent, 2020). More recently, observers have noted that India is seeking a review of the AIFTA, which may signify a further schism concerning the true shared contours of their broader economic and development ambitions, especially versus their other major Indo-Pacific partners (Singh, 2021).

Consecrating Security Relations

Within the sphere of security relations, further commonalities are evident that have drawn the two sides together with regard to shared security interests, and as bolstered by commonalities in their shared sets of norms. Central to these interactions, in October 2003 at the second ASEAN–India summit in Bali, India acceded to TAC, marking a formal acceptance of the overlap of *Panchsheel’s* norms with those of TAC. At the same time, India signed the ‘Joint Declaration for Co-operation on Combating International Terrorism’, and mutually acknowledged with ASEAN elite that ‘acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed wherever, whenever and by whomsoever ... (are) a profound threat to international peace and security’ (ASEAN, 2003). Heightening intelligence sharing, liaison, capacity-building and border control measures all critically underpinned such declarations. So too did ‘recognising the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states’ (ASEAN, 2003), which acted as a further reiteration of the core mutual norms shared by India and ASEAN concerning territorial integrity, self-determination and self-reliance. Officials would later link together the terrorist attacks in Bali on 1 October 2005 and those in New Delhi on 29 October 2005 as a shared negative experience that further strengthened and emboldened this normative commonality. At the Sixth ASEAN–India Summit in 2007, both sides furthermore declared having ‘shared common interests in managing transboundary issues such as maritime security, counter-terrorism and disaster relief’ (ASEAN, 2007).

Through this prism, and with New Delhi additionally signing up to the 'ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism' in January 2007, as well as the 'ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism' of November 2009, India and ASEAN were able to find further areas of mutual concern. Moving beyond the sphere of transnational terrorism, diplomats from both sides also began to work together to 'jointly address the common challenges to our comprehensive political and economic security, including food, human and energy security' (ASEAN, 2012). To these concerns, and reflective of a shared comprehensive security focus and their common norms of development and modernization, were added co-operation on issues such as migration and human rights, as well as transnational crimes such as drugs, arms and people trafficking, cybercrime and economic crime. All of these represented shared threats to their relative national security, and thus norms of self-reliance and autonomy, as well as territorial integrity and political freedom. Naval exercises to protect key sea-lanes and assuage mutual economic/energy security apprehensions were also started at this time, as well as efforts to maximize their information exchange and capacity-building capabilities. The attraction of India's elite to ASEAN's consensus-based approach and its members' (broad) adherence to a norm of democracy helped to enhance its burgeoning security involvement with ASEAN members.

In December 2012, a joint 'India-ASEAN Vision 2020 Statement' was released, which committed both sides to great security co-operation, and included discussions on 'non-traditional security challenges and response strategies; (and) the evolving security architecture in the Asia-Pacific' (ASEAN, 2012a). These efforts complemented the annual 'ASEAN-India Delhi Dialogue' which commenced in 2009, and through which political and economic leaders, officials, academics and opinion-makers from ASEAN and India meet to discuss their political, strategic, economic and civil society interactions. Against this backdrop, both sides also significantly deepened their co-operation in the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), whose aim is to 'promote political development in adherence to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for, and promotion and protection of human rights' (ASEAN, 2009). These all had particular resonance with deep-seated norms in India. In turn, New Delhi was supportive of the APSC as it moreover sought to 'maintain the centrality and proactive role of ASEAN in a regional architecture that is open, transparent and inclusive' (ASEAN, 2009).

Based on the core norms central to both Indian and ASEAN security perspectives, APSC summed up these interlinkages via its pledge to 'preserv(e) regional peace and stability, adopt a comprehensive approach to security challenges, and develop friendly and mutually beneficial relations' (ASEAN, 2016a). The APSC rules-based approach (which is clearly based upon norms convivial to New Delhi) further drew the two sides together, in particular because it 'is bound by fundamental principles, shared values and norms, ... embrace(s) the values of tolerance and moderation, and share(s) a strong sense of togetherness, common identity and destiny' (ASEAN, 2016a). In many ways, these foundations encapsulate their shared mutual normative basis and world views. Concrete co-operation and strategic dialogue across defence and security issues is central to

the APSC, specifically heightening links concerning maritime security, peacekeeping operations, military medicine and counter-terrorism. It has also deepened India–ASEAN consultations and co-operation through a variety of ASEAN-led forums. Again, the shared norms and security outlooks of India and ASEAN served as the value-based benchmarks for these greater security linkages, and were aided by a growing convergence in their mutual security interests—primarily relating to trade and energy but also terrorism and borders. The creation of so many advisory groups based upon such shared sets of norms, further validated and legitimized them as the concrete founding basis of India–ASEAN relations.

In 2015, both sides also pledged to heighten their involvement in security issues, which included a reasserted aim to collaborate in other multilateral frameworks and forums—a process which mirrored developments on the economic realm (as detailed above). ASEAN’s elites also sought to ‘encourage India to actively participate and co-chair joint exercises and activities, ... (and to) strengthen co-operation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and technology’ (ASEAN, 2015b). Military-to-military ties were also seen as essential and now encompassed the need to ‘promote maritime co-operation, including maritime security’ (ASEAN, 2015), as well as to continue combating transnational crime and terrorism. Such aims were again related to their shared norms of self-determination and self-reliance in political, territorial and economic terms. One remaining difficult issue concerned SEANWFZ, which prohibits member states from developing, manufacturing, acquiring, possessing or controlling nuclear weapons, and thus is a major stumbling block in India–ASEAN relations, given India’s acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1998. As a result, India’s elite have heralded SEANWFZ as contributing to the process of global nuclear disarmament—a long-term aim that New Delhi concurrently supports, despite currently having such a military capability.

Underlining their importance, the heads of state/government of all the member states of ASEAN were invited as Chief Guests to India’s 2018 Republic Day Parade. Subsequently, when unveiling India’s ‘Indo-Pacific Oceans’ Initiative’ in 2019, Modi emphasized multilateral cooperation between India and ASEAN, stating that ‘we should recognise the imperative for all states in the regions with interests in it, to work collaboratively to safeguard the oceans; enhance maritime security; preserve marine resources; build capacity and fairly share resources; reduce disaster risk; enhance science, technology and academic cooperation; and promote free, fair and mutually beneficial trade and maritime transport’ (Bhattacharya, 2020). It also noted an adherence to the resolution of outstanding maritime disputes in accordance with international law and in conformity to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Bhattacharya, 2020), which is of particular significance for ASEAN states engaged in territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Kerr, 2021, pp. 224–252). In light of this confluence of interests—and underlying norms—in 2022, leading officials noted ‘that India and ASEAN converge on security and is not caught between China and the US’ (Chaudhury, 2022). New Delhi has also been attempting, through providing enhanced COVID-19 relief as part of a ramped up public

diplomacy programme, to mitigate a ‘credibility deficit at both the institutional and popular levels in Southeast Asia’ (Choudhury & Nagda, 2020) in comparison with the more active—and successful—diplomatic efforts of China, Japan and South Korea with ASEAN.

Convergence, Restrictions and the Analytical Value of Norms

The year 2022 has been designated as the ‘ASEAN-India Friendship Year’ to commemorate the 30th anniversary of ASEAN India relations. As reflected in our analysis, myriad common norms and interests have positively structured this friendship. These overlapping sets of norms have included a common outlook based upon anti-imperial, anti-colonial and anti-outsider tendencies, combined with a mutual desire to enhance the modernization and development of their pluralistic, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies. Accompanying these norms have been evidence of others relating to self-reliance, equality, non-intervention and non-interference, which have been periodically engrained through treaties, declarations and public pronouncements. The most vivid example of this concordance was the joint elucidation of the *Panchsheel* Principles in 2002, which has resulted in a frequently norm-based security union between the two sides. Overall, these norms have been essential lenses—as per the principles of our constructivist-orientated theoretical approach—through which both sides have viewed their political, economic and military relations.

The recurrent repetition of these norms, as well as their formative understandings/experiences, led to the creation of the strong norm-based foundations through which India–ASEAN relations now function. These norms have resulted in relations defined by harmony not dissonance, and by convergence not divergence. In their formation, these norms all displayed the qualities of specificity, durability and concordance as per our chosen methodology. Despite their omni-presence, the importance of these norms has also fluctuated over time, becoming more evident once both sides were freed from the strategic constraints of the Cold War. They have also displayed a certain un-evenness in terms of importance, as was seen in the economic and military spheres. As such, Indian–ASEAN relations can be seen to be undergoing a simultaneous ‘reinterpretation of past events, current conditions and future goals’ (Berger, 1996, p. 317). Such a process typifies a constructivist form of analysis in that it is constantly gestating, evolving and developing through interaction, selectivity and praxis, and is reflective of wider material conditions. In this way, norms are highly context-specific concerning both a specific relationship but also a specific geo-political time period, as well as a specific geographical/spatial basis.

In the Introduction to this article, we asked four key questions. The first two of these—(Q1) *if India and ASEAN each have certain deeply engrained norms*; and (Q2) *if the interplay of these sets of norms influences India–ASEAN relations*—have both been confidently affirmed, with consistent evidence that they are

present and delineate their interactions. The third of these—(Q3) *can the use of norms enhance our analytical appreciation of all factors in a specific set of relations*—can also be seen to be answered positively. As such, if we had conducted a solidly realist or liberalist analysis of India–ASEAN relations, we would not have been able to isolate, analyse and elucidate the way that, say, their common historical experiences of colonialism or great power politics were essential influences upon their identities and worldviews, which in turn affected their policy proclivities. From a units of analysis perspective, a realist approach would have also dissuaded a norms-based analysis of India–ASEAN relations, as they would be seen as too different and thus essentially incompatible—one being a state and one being a multilateral institution.

The final question asked if (Q4) *a norm-based approach can enrich our analysis of a specific set of state-to-multilateral regime relations*, to which our analysis has also provided a highly positive answer. As our investigation showed, a norm-based form of analysis provided rich grounds for understanding their inter-relations and for casting light on the interplay between values and material factors in their relationship. Importantly too, from a units of analysis perspective, if one considers that states are made of many sub-units (such as different political persuasions, as well as business, media and other groupings), then they engage with norms at a similar point of abstraction to a multilateral regime which is also made of inputs from different sub-units (the individual state actors, and their own sub-units). This equivalence validates the pertinence and intrinsic value of Q4. Such an approach also has the potential to be applied to studying the common norms structuring ASEAN's relations with China, Japan, and the European Union (see for example, Le Thu, 2019; Ying & Chan, 2021; Satake, 2019; Murray, 2015), so as to better understand their shared identity- and value-based foundations. Doing so could provide a better comparison of ASEAN–India relations versus other states, especially concerning various issues such as trade, investment, climate change, the environment, science and technology, and education, and can therefore inform New Delhi's wider global diplomacy.

Furthermore, even though India's bilateral relations with certain states within ASEAN—such as Vietnam, Singapore or Indonesia in both military and economic terms—may be stronger than others, our analysis has shown that shared norms are relevant within *the specific context* of relations between India *as a state* and ASEAN *as a multilateral regime*. These common norms are clearly present, bind the two entities together, influence their formal relations and permeate official discourse between them. Such an observation is apparent, regardless of whether ASEAN's overall foreign and security policy is frequently regarded as being inconsistent, or if ASEAN members arguably do not all share the same normative basis, which was not the analytical, empirical or theoretical aim of this article.

As relations move forward, their relevance and mutual value to both sides looks set to prosper. Central to such understandings, is the view in New Delhi of ASEAN's importance to giving India wider access to the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions, and the new markets, trade possibilities and investment that such ties have the potential to bring. With material factors more greatly intertwining the two entities, and as their relations continue to also blossom via heightened

security links via the APSC, better understanding their cultural values and norms will remain essential. Having such an analytical stance will produce a more nuanced, specific and sophisticated appreciation of their relations. It is of importance for all actors from both sides, as well as for actors further afield and for scholars in International Relations concerned with the region. It is also central to India's attitude towards ASEAN, and straddles both the value-centric and the material-centric domains: as an Indian official stated to ASEAN:

if you fancy the game of football or hockey, consider us as the goalkeeper, a keeper of our shared cultural heritage and a preserver of peace and tranquility in our region. If you fancy cricket, consider us as an opener, a country that wants to open a long innings of prosperity, peace and tranquility in our region, in the new millennium. (Ahamed quoted in MEA, 2012, p. 274)

Such relevance, commonality of norms, identity and values, and also flexibility, look set to remain the hallmark of India–ASEAN relations.

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