

India and the Czech Republic: More Alike Than We Think?

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Abstract. At first glance, India and the Czech Republic may seem like two distant worlds. Yet beneath the surface they share an invisible thread, woven from wisdom, resilience, and the love of beauty and learning. Both nations have lived through hardship and renewal, and both carry within them a deep respect for culture, education, and the moral strength of ordinary people. This article invites the reader on a journey through the many ways these two countries, though far apart in geography, meet in spirit. It explores how their histories echo one another in the pursuit of freedom, how their languages carry traces of the same ancient roots, and how their traditions celebrate life through festivals, music, and craftsmanship. It also reveals how both India and the Czech Republic have shaped their national identities through creativity, education, and conscience. From the philosophy of Patanjali to the moral voice of Václav Havel, from the delicate art of Indian embroidery to the brilliance of Bohemian glass, from the rhythms of raga to the harmonies of Dvořák, both cultures express one truth, that dignity, knowledge, and beauty can outlast even the hardest of times. To read about India and the Czech Republic together is to see not contrast but kinship. It is to recognize that despite their differences, they share the same moral imagination, the same reverence for learning, and the same belief that freedom is both a right and a responsibility. These are not only the threads of history but also the fabric of humanity itself. Come and explore how these two distant cultures reflect one another and discover how much they already share.

Keywords. India-Czech Republic relations, Cultural kinship, Indo-European connections, Nonviolent resilience, shared humanistic values, cross-cultural bridges

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Historical Rhymes: Struggles, Resilience, and Bridges of Exchange

The histories of both countries tell stories of endurance and the persistent search for freedom. India, after centuries of foreign rule, transformed the idea of non-violence into a moral and political strength that led to independence in 1947. The Czech lands, too, passed through long periods of occupation and control, from the Habsburg Empire to the Nazi regime and later the Communist period, until the peaceful Velvet Revolution restored democracy in 1989 (Kizeková, 2018) [1].

In both cases, the people held onto their sense of identity through culture, education, and community life. When political power silenced voices, literature, art, and philosophy kept the memory of freedom alive. This belief that culture can outlast domination became a quiet yet powerful form of soft influence long before the concept of “soft power” was named (Wille, 2019) [2].

India's ideas and artistic traditions travelled through Asia and, in modern times, across the world through philosophy, literature, yoga, and film. The Czech lands built their own moral strength through education, music, and craftsmanship. Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius) defined schooling as an act of humanity; composers like Dvořák and Smetana turned national feeling into universal music; and the craft of Bohemian glass reflected both skill and beauty as civic values.

Between the two nations, cultural and industrial bridges appeared naturally. The Czech shoe company Bata opened factories in India as early as the 1930s; Jawa motorcycles became a beloved part of Indian roads, and Škoda and Tatra cars signaled decades of engineering cooperation. These examples are more than nostalgic memories. They show how both nations value precision, usefulness, and aesthetic harmony in work (Embassy of India, Prague, n.d.) [3].

Linguistic Kinship: Indo-European Roots and the Music of Grammar

One of the most fascinating connections between India and the Czech Republic lies in their languages. Both belong to the Indo-European family, which means that, at a deep structural level, they share the same linguistic roots. Sanskrit and Czech may sound distant to each other, yet they carry echoes of a common origin that is still audible.

For instance, the Sanskrit word *bhrātṛ* corresponds to the Czech *bratr* (brother), *māṭṛ* to *matka* (mother), *dvā* to *dva* (two), *daśa* to *deset* (ten), and *śata* to *sto* (hundred). The pronunciation and endings changed over centuries, but the family resemblance remains clear (Liu, 2023) [4].

Beyond vocabulary, both languages share a rich grammatical system. They are highly inflected and flexible, allowing speakers to play with word order without losing meaning. This linguistic structure cultivates sensitivity to detail, rhythm, and precision. It also shapes how people think, listen, and speak. Both Czech and Sanskrit, in their own ways, teach that language is more than a tool. It is a craft that deserves care, discipline, and respect (Mishra, 2023) [5].

Translation has also been a bridge between the two cultures. Czech scholars have been among the pioneers of Sanskrit studies in Europe, translating classical Indian texts with great devotion. Indian readers, on the other hand, have long admired Czech fairy tales and modern literature. Both nations value words not only for communication but for building understanding and friendship across cultures (TransLinguist, 2025) [6].

Traditions in Conversation: Festivals, Folk Arts, and the Handmade

If we look beyond language, daily life reveals more shared patterns. Festivals in both countries celebrate light, renewal, and gratitude for life. In India, the fire of Holika Dahan before Holi marks the victory of light over darkness and the arrival of spring. In the Czech Republic, the April tradition known as *Čarodějnice*, or Burning of the Witches, celebrates the end of winter through bonfires, songs, and laughter. Both express the same longing for renewal, community, and joy (Sharma, 2025 [thesis]) [7].

Agricultural festivals also reveal similar values. Indian celebrations such as Baisakhi, Onam, Pongal, or Makar Sankranti express gratitude for the harvest, while the Czech *Dožínky* festival honors the completion of the farming cycle. In both cultures, gratitude toward nature is not only a ritual but a moral act that acknowledges our dependence on the earth.

Folk art tells another story of kinship. Indian puppetry, known as Kathputli, and Czech marionette theater share a love of craft, humor, and allegory. Both have served as mirrors of society, teaching lessons through storytelling and laughter. Similarly, the delicate art of glass and textiles connects artisans across continents. Bohemian crystal and Indian

bangles, Moravian embroidery and Indian silk, each tradition shows patience, precision, and beauty born from human hands.

Values and Everyday Ethics: Dignity, Learning, Humor, and the Sacred in Daily Life

Beyond art and festivals, India and the Czech Republic share a deep sense of dignity, learning, and kindness as guiding values in everyday life. Both societies see respect not as a formality, but as a natural way of being with others. In India, respect is often expressed through gestures such as *namaste* or through the thoughtful way people address each other. In the Czech Republic, it is reflected in sincerity, modesty, and the preference for calm and honest conversation.

Family life is another meeting point. Indian families often live across several generations, while Czech families tend to be smaller, yet intergenerational bonds remain strong. The presence of grandparents, godparents, or close family friends plays an important role in moral education and emotional support. Both cultures understand that wisdom comes not only from books but also from life experience.

Education is a shared cornerstone of both societies. In India, the teacher or guru is seen as a guide who helps remove the darkness of ignorance. In the Czech Republic, education has long been regarded as a civic value, shaped by the legacy of Jan Amos Komenský, who saw learning as a lifelong and humanistic mission. For both cultures, learning is not simply preparation for work. It is a path to freedom and the foundation of democracy.

Humor is another bond that unites the two. Indian humor thrives on wit, mimicry, and playfulness. Czech humor leans toward irony and quiet resistance, best represented by Jaroslav Hašek's *Good Soldier Švejk*. In both places, laughter is a form of resilience, a way to stay human when life becomes complicated.

Both nations also share a sense of the sacred that goes beyond religion. In India, pluralism has allowed many beliefs and traditions to coexist side by side. In the Czech Republic, one of the most secular countries in Europe, the sacred often lives in culture itself: in music, art, and moral values. People may not use the language of religion, yet they live by a quiet spirituality grounded in authenticity and care.

Finally, both cultures connect well-being with the care of body and mind. The Indian traditions of yoga and meditation have found a natural home in Czech cities and spa towns, where people practice self-care with balance and discipline. Historically, the Czech

Sokol movement linked physical strength with civic responsibility. Today, yoga continues that legacy, reminding both cultures that taking care of oneself is not selfish. It is an act of love that allows us to be more present for others.

Democracy and Shared Ideals: Freedom, Conscience, and Responsibility

When we look at the modern histories of India and the Czech Republic, we see two nations shaped by struggle, but guided by conscience. Both have experienced periods of oppression and both have reclaimed their freedom through movements grounded in moral courage rather than violence.

India's path to independence, led by Mahatma Gandhi and others, was founded on *ahimsa*, the power of truth and nonviolence. The Czech Republic's Velvet Revolution followed a similar moral rhythm. It was not born of force, but of integrity, embodied by figures like Václav Havel, who believed that living in truth was the highest form of resistance.

Both histories remind us that democracy is not just a system of governance. It is a way of being, rooted in the dignity of every person and the belief that freedom must be renewed through responsibility. In both countries, the constitution became not only a legal text but also a moral document that enshrines rights, values, and the hope that public institutions can reflect the best of human nature.

What connects these two democratic traditions is the conviction that leadership must serve, not dominate. In India, the ideal leader is the one who unites wisdom with compassion. In the Czech Republic, the most respected public figures have been thinkers, educators, and artists who stepped into public life without losing their moral clarity. Both cultures understand that the strength of a nation lies in the conscience of its people.

Education and civic participation remain the lifeblood of both democracies. Schools, universities, and public debates are seen as spaces where freedom is practiced and learned. The shared belief is simple yet profound: a society that values knowledge and critical thinking will always find its way back to truth, no matter how dark the times.

Everyday Wisdom: Beauty, Creation, and Human Brilliance

India and the Czech Republic share a quiet but powerful reverence for beauty and creation. Both cultures understand that to create is to honor life itself.

In India, the world breathes in color. Spices, fabrics, temples, and homes are painted in vivid hues that celebrate the divine in everyday life. Every object carries a human touch, everything is shaped, carved, or woven by hand. The rhythm of work is sacred, and beauty is not a luxury but a way of expressing gratitude for existence.

The Czech Republic, in its own way, holds the same truth. Lacework, ceramics, glass, and woodcraft reveal patience, precision, and imagination. Czech art, design, and architecture combine elegance with soul. Even traditional food carries this artistry, the aroma of spices in goulash, the golden crust of bread, the harmony of colors on a Sunday table. Creation here is also a quiet act of love.

Both cultures trust the process of making. They teach that when we create something beautiful, we also create meaning. Whether through a song, a line of poetry, a dish prepared with care, or a hand polished piece of glass, the message is the same, beauty belongs to everyone who looks with attention.

India and the Czech Republic also share an extraordinary intellectual tradition. India has given the world some of its greatest thinkers, from ancient philosophers like Patanjali and Chanakya to modern visionaries such as Rabindranath Tagore and A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. Each of them connected wisdom with compassion and reminded humanity that knowledge without empathy is incomplete.

The Czech Republic, though small in size, has gifted the world with minds of remarkable depth. From Jan Amos Komenský, who reshaped education, to scientists like Otto Wichterle, the inventor of contact lenses, and Gregor Mendel, the father of genetics. From Václav Havel, who taught the moral power of truth, to Miloš Forman, who brought Czech sensitivity to world cinema.

Alongside them stand writers and artists whose influence reached far beyond Europe. Karel Čapek, the visionary author who gave the world the word robot, reminded humanity of the power of conscience and responsibility. Alfons Mucha, master of Art Nouveau, turned beauty into philosophy, while Franz Kafka revealed the complexity of the modern human spirit. Composers Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana gave voice to Czech emotion through music that remains timeless, blending national soul with universal harmony.

Czech genius also lives in movement and courage. The legendary runner Emil Zátopek taught the world that perseverance can be poetry in motion, and gymnast Věra Čáslavská became a symbol of grace and quiet resistance. Czech hockey players have long carried the country's spirit onto the ice, where skill,

teamwork, and courage continue to inspire generations.

Across all these fields, from science to sport, from philosophy to art, Czech people have proven that greatness does not depend on size, but on the depth of the heart and the strength of imagination.

Conclusion

India and the Czech Republic may stand on different continents, yet they share a common heartbeat. Their histories tell stories of courage, resilience, and the constant search for freedom. Their languages carry echoes of the same ancient roots. Their cultures reveal a love of beauty, learning, and moral strength that transcends geography and time.

Both nations have given the world art, wisdom, and creativity that reach far beyond their borders. At the same time, each has its own rhythm, its own color, its own song. Where India flows with vivid energy and spiritual depth, the Czech Republic balances precision with quiet reflection. Together they remind us that harmony does not mean sameness, and that the most beautiful connections arise where differences meet.

The story of India and the Czech Republic is one of both convergence and divergence, of two cultures that mirror and complement each other. Their shared values invite us to learn, to listen, and to celebrate the many ways in which humanity expresses itself.

And perhaps that is where this conversation truly begins, in the space between similarity and uniqueness. But that, as they say, is a story for another article.

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