



Salience of Buddhism as an Instrument of Soft Power in India's Neighborhood

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeeks-03-09-002>

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Article Info: - Received : 03 September 2024

Accepted : 24 September 2024

Published : 30 September 2024



This research paper explores the salience of Buddhism as a potent instrument of soft power within India's neighborhood. Buddhism, with its profound historical and cultural roots in India, has transcended geographical boundaries to become an influential force that shapes diplomatic relationships and socio-cultural ties in the region. This study delves into the multifaceted dimensions of Buddhism's role in India's foreign policy and its impact on fostering closer relationships with neighboring countries. The paper begins by tracing the historical trajectory of Buddhism in India and its subsequent diffusion to neighboring nations. It examines how Buddhism has not only endured as a spiritual and philosophical tradition but has also evolved into a dynamic tool for international engagement. In this context, it delves into the significance of Buddhism as a cultural bridge that connects India with its neighboring countries, transcending linguistic and religious differences. The study also evaluates the geopolitical implications of Buddhism's resurgence in India's neighborhood. It assesses the impact of India's Buddhist diplomacy on regional stability, security, and economic cooperation. Special attention is given to India's relations with countries like China, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Myanmar, where Buddhism holds particular significance. In conclusion, this research underscores the enduring relevance of Buddhism as an instrument of soft power in India's neighborhood. It emphasizes the need for India to harness its rich Buddhist heritage and promote intercultural dialogues as essential components of its foreign policy toolkit, furthering its diplomatic objectives and fostering enduring bonds with its neighbors.

Keywords: *Buddhism, Soft Power, Foreign Policy, China, South-East Asia, Diplomacy, Neighborhood.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Soft power is a crucial element of diplomacy, as it relies on intangible allure rather than coercive means like force or money. It serves as a valuable tool for nations to engage with one another, fostering positive relationships and

gaining attention. Soft power leverages domestic assets such as culture and values, rather than relying solely on international policies, and is even employed by some countries to address domestic policy issues (Singh, J.P. & MacDonald, Stuart. 2004). The concept of soft power has its origins in

the Neoliberal and Constructivist viewpoints of power, a recognition dating back to E.H. Carr's 1939 insights. Carr divided international power into military, economic, and the power of opinion, the latter reflecting a nation's ability to attract and influence others through public opinion. Noteworthy social thinkers like Foucault, Bourdieu, Gramsci, and Habermas have discussed soft power, but it was Joseph S Nye Jr. who prominently introduced and advocated the concept in contemporary strategic discourse (Palit, Parama Sinha. 2017).

India has come to recognize the paramount importance of investing in soft power to augment its standing on the global stage. A nation's reservoir of soft power hinges on three fundamental pillars: the allure of its culture to others, the consistent championing of its political values both domestically and internationally, and the cultivation of foreign policies that are deemed both legitimate and morally righteous. Culture, in this context, encompasses the intricate tapestry of beliefs and customs that imbue a society with its unique identity, encapsulating the time-honored traditions and principles that a nation or its people personify. India is actively engaged in harnessing its soft power tools to shape the behavior and preferences of other nations towards it. Soft power is not a recent development for India; its application dates to ancient times within the country's political landscape (Kugiel, Patryk. 2016).

Buddhism has emerged as a significant and invaluable facet of India's cultural legacy, playing a pivotal role in shaping the nation's resolute foreign policy and fostering highly effective diplomatic ties. India's wholehearted embrace of Buddhism has afforded it a noteworthy presence, particularly within the realms of Asian nations. This research article delves into a specific aspect of India's soft power strategy: how it utilizes its historical connections to Buddhism in diplomacy and foreign policy. It situates this soft power approach in theoretical models, explores why Buddhism is conducive to this strategy, and analyzes India's initiatives in contrast to China's. The conclusion evaluates these efforts and provides suggestions, assuming that soft power is an effective tool for achieving foreign policy goals.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE EMERGENCE AND THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism had its beginnings in India as a tradition that opposed the caste system, Brahmin influence, and Vedic practices. In fact, some view Buddhism as an offspring of Hinduism. While it evolved into a distinct religion, many perceive it as a path to achieving inner peace and a way of life (Scott, David. 2016). Buddhism prioritizes personal spiritual growth as its central aim. Buddhists do not adhere to the belief in a deity; rather, they dedicate themselves to cultivating profound insights through meditation. The inception of Buddhism can be traced back to Lumbini, where, in the 6th century BC, a man named Siddhartha Gautama was born as a prince within the Shakya tribe.

A prophecy foretold that Siddhartha's family would lose their kingdom if he left the palace, so he was confined to a life of luxury within its walls. However, Siddhartha, a deeply contemplative soul, believed that life held a greater purpose beyond opulence. Driven to seek answers, he renounced his throne, embarking on a nomadic quest for enlightenment. After rigorous ascetic practices and extended meditation, Siddhartha, now known as the Buddha, attained enlightenment, comprehending life's essence, which he then imparted to his disciples through the Four Noble Truths.

The era of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka played a pivotal role in the ascent of Buddhism, as it received substantial royal support during his reign. Ashoka's transformation into a devout Buddhist after the profound Battle of Kalinga marked a turning point. He propagated the Dhamma, encouraging his subjects to embrace virtuous living and renounce malevolent desires. While some argue his nonviolence stemmed from his territorial conquests, he blended material needs with Buddha's teachings. Nonetheless, he significantly expanded Buddhism's reach, dispatching missionaries to Central Asia, South India, Greece, Rome, and erecting inscribed stupas to convey his message effectively, ultimately finding a home for Buddhism in Sri Lanka. (Fig. 1)

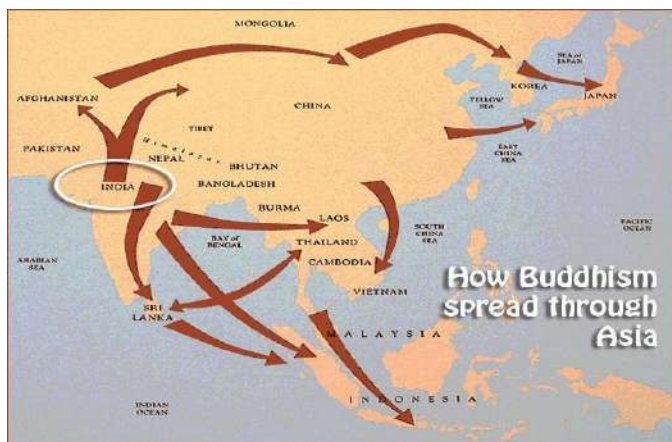


Fig-1: Spread of Buddhism from India in the Ancient Times.

(<https://www.worldhistory.org/image/1059/the-spread-of-buddhism/>)

India has played a pivotal historical role as a focal point for Buddhist learning and pilgrimage. Several iconic centers such as Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment, Sarnath, where he delivered his first sermon, Nalanda, a renowned ancient Buddhist university, and Shravasti, associated with numerous important events in Buddha's life, have solidified India's significance in the Buddhist world. These sites hold profound spiritual and educational value, drawing pilgrims, monks, and scholars from across the globe. India's rich Buddhist heritage, birthplace of Buddhism, and its status as a repository of Buddhist wisdom and history continue to make it a prime destination for seekers of Buddhist knowledge and spirituality (Bapat, P.V. 1956).

Buddhism experienced fluctuating periods of prosperity and decline, resulting in a unique and intricate Buddhist pilgrimage landscape distinct from other Asian nations. As Buddhism spread to different parts of the Asian subcontinent, it assimilated with local beliefs and indigenous customs. However, in India, it waned for many centuries, transforming the landscape into one primarily characterized by archaeological and historical significance, rather than active religious practice. Consequently, numerous sites associated with Buddha evolved into prominent pilgrimage centers for Buddhist devotees. India boasts perhaps the largest concentration of culturally and historically significant Buddhist sites (Singh, U. 2010).

Over time, Buddhism, as a faith, has adapted to evolving societal dynamics. In the contemporary era, Buddhism mirrors broader social realities, its observance influenced notably

by modern trends such as globalization, secularism, and humanism. Many regards Buddhism as one of the world's most progressive religions, leading individuals, and nations worldwide to incorporate it into their lives, transcending diverse cultures. The recitation of Buddhist scriptures (sutras) also enjoys popularity among Buddhist communities, believed to possess the transformative power to cleanse and pacify the body, mind, and spirit (Berkwitz, Stephen C. 2006).

For various reasons, Buddhism has gained popularity among diverse global communities, leading several nations to designate it as a primary state religion. Notably, in the late 20th century, countries such as Myanmar and Sri Lanka officially adopted Buddhism as their state religion. This widespread embrace of Buddhism enhances its role as a significant component of India's soft power, given its origin in the country, serving as an asset in furthering India's national interests. In recent international events, there is a noticeable increase in India's utilization of Buddhism as a crucial element in its soft power diplomacy. Buddhism, with its focus on promoting peaceful coexistence and its extensive presence across Asia, aligns effectively with India's soft power diplomatic efforts.

3. UTILITY OF BUDDHISM IN FOREIGN POLICY IN POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA

The potential value of Buddhism in foreign policy can be attributed largely to the way the religion experienced a revival following the Second World War. This revival displayed a strong international perspective and aimed to transcend existing sectarian and geographical divisions. This international approach was facilitated by the establishment of several organizations and the convening of numerous councils and conferences in the decades following the war, all of which emphasized the importance of transnational collaboration among different Buddhist sects. This effort started with a conference held in the newly independent Sri Lanka, leading to the formation of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. In 1952, during Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure as Prime Minister, India organized the International Buddhist Conference in Sanchi, which drew participation from more than 3,000 Buddhist nuns, monks, and scholars. This event marked one of the most significant congregations of Buddhist

clergy and adherents globally at the time. In 1954, the Sixth Buddhist Council was assembled in Burma (Zhang, Juyan. 2012). Over the subsequent decades, the practice of organizing conferences and councils has persisted, contributing to the growth and reinforcement of the worldwide Buddhist community.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, East Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea, as well as several former Soviet Union nations following the end of the Cold War, started to re-embrace and reconnect with their Buddhist heritage (Ibid). Currently, the vast majority, specifically 97 percent, of the global Buddhist community resides within the Asian continent. Moreover, several nations like Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka view Buddhism as an integral part of their national values and cultural identity, See: Table.1. India has long sought to leverage Buddhism as a significant aspect of its ancient heritage, aiming to establish itself as a global center for spirituality (Stobdan, P. 2017). Prior to Prime Minister Modi's tenure, previous

administrations also prioritized the use of Buddhism as a cultural instrument. Over the past ten years, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), a division of the Ministry of External Affairs, has arranged numerous conferences centered around Buddhism in East Asian nations like Thailand in April, 2010 and South Korea in May, 2010 (Lahiri, Swaroop. 2017).

In this context, it becomes clear why the Indian government is making efforts to incorporate Buddhist heritage into its foreign policy. This serves as a foundation for fostering diplomatic, economic, cultural, and strategic relationships with other nations. The existing international network centered around Buddhism and the significant role this faith plays in the lives of millions worldwide give it the potential to be an asset in Indian foreign policy. Its widespread presence across Asia, its significance in shaping national identities in the region, and its reputation as a peaceful religion make it an excellent tool for practicing soft power diplomacy, which emphasizes non-coercive influence.

Table-1: The demography of the Buddhists in the Asian countries.

Countries	Buddhist Population	Percentage of the Buddhist Population	Percentage of World Buddhist Population
China	244,130,000	18.2%	50.1%
Thailand	64,420,000	93.2%	13.2%
Japan	45,820,000	36.2%	9.4%
Burma	38,410,000	80.1%	7.9%
Sri Lanka	14,450,000	69.3%	3.0%
Vietnam	14,380,000	16.4%	2.9%
Cambodia	13,690,000	96.9%	2.8%
South Korea	11,050,000	22.9%	2.3%
India	9,250,000	0.8%	1.9%
Malaysia	5,010,000	17.7%	1.0%

Source: Swaroop Lahiri. <http://www.escijournals.net/JSAS> Accessed on 8th Sep, 2023.

4. AN APPRAISAL OF BUDDHISM AS INDIA'S SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY IN CURRENT TIMES: INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBORHOOD

Despite having a relatively small Buddhist population, India possesses several compelling factors that bolster its credibility in advancing Buddhist diplomacy. Firstly, Buddhism's origins in India grant it a distinct claim to historical

legitimacy. Secondly, India boasts numerous significant Buddhist sites, including Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Nalanda. Thirdly, India has built a reputation as an advocate for the oppressed, exemplified by its hosting of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Parliament in Dharamshala due to conflicts with the Chinese government. Notably, the historical connection between Buddhism and

state diplomacy dates to Ashoka and his embrace of Dharmavijaya. India is also strategically leveraging Buddhism to strengthen its relationships with Asian nations and contribute to broader foreign policy objectives like the "Act East" and "Neighborhood First" policies. Following its independence, India has deliberately steered away from depending solely on military strength in its foreign policy approach. Instead, it has adopted various concepts, including the Panchsheel Initiative, to underscore its role as a global influencer and a compass for its foreign policy. One of these enduring guiding principles is the Panchamrit principles. The fifth principle, 'Sanskriti evam Sabhyata' (culture and civilization links), reflects the government's intent to leverage India's historical connections with other nations as a crucial aspect of its non-coercive soft power strategy (Mohonto, Ankit. 2018). At its most fundamental level, the current government has prioritized the inclusion of Buddhism in its diplomatic engagements. During official international visits, such as those to Sri Lanka and China, Prime Minister Modi has consistently emphasized the common Buddhist heritage that India shares with these nations. Furthermore, when traveling abroad, the prime minister ensures that he dedicates a day to visiting Buddhist temples whenever feasible. Domestically, PM Modi has frequently spoken about the significance of the Buddhist faith in fostering the development of India and the global community (Chauhan, Rishika. 2015).

In the current scenario, the work of balancing the position of a nation on a right track goes with so many challenges and for India it is China which always looked like a formidable opponent but India under the PM Modi's leadership looks good on the foreign policy front. The scary thing is the involvement of China in India's close neighbors where China expanding its imperial practices, and always creating challenges for India. Nepal has historically maintained a pro-India stance in the Himalayan region. However, since the dissolution of the Hindu monarchy in

2008, Chinese officials have shown interest in leveraging Buddhism as a diplomatic tool in the new post-Hindu Nepal: The enduring friendship between our two nations has deep roots. During the Jin and Tang Dynasties, renowned Chinese monks Fa Xian and Xuan Zang embarked on pilgrimages to Lumbini, and today, Chinese, and Nepalese people continue to cherish the Miaoying Temple's white pagoda in Beijing, constructed by the Nepalese architect Aniko. This pagoda serves as a symbol of the enduring friendship between our countries. The current Chinese president Xi Jinping has strategically incorporated Buddhism into his public portrayal of China's role in the contemporary global landscape. During his presentation at UNESCO headquarters, Jinping shared the following narrative: Buddhism has its roots in ancient India, and upon its introduction to China, the religion underwent a prolonged period of amalgamation with the native philosophies of Confucianism and Taoism. Over time, it evolved into a form of Buddhism that reflects distinct Chinese characteristics. The Chinese people have contributed to the enrichment of Buddhism by aligning it with Chinese culture and nurturing unique Buddhist ideologies. Furthermore, they have played a role in disseminating Buddhism from China to countries like Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and beyond. In essence, Xi Jinping emphasizes how Buddhism, after being introduced to China, has adapted, and integrated with Chinese culture, resulting in a version of the religion that is uniquely Chinese and has had a significant influence beyond China's borders. Meanwhile, India has a distinct advantage in its public diplomacy due to its historical connection with the founder of Buddhism, Gautama/Shakyamuni. While he may have been born in Nepal, specifically around Lumbini, India proudly embraces him as a "son of India" (bharata ka beta). It was in India, specifically at Bodh Gaya, that he attained enlightenment, earning the revered title of the Buddha, meaning the "Enlightened One." Moreover, India holds significance as the place where the Buddha delivered his first sermon in

Sarnath, continued to impart his teachings, and established an enduring community known as the Sangha. Ultimately, it was in India, at Kushinagara, that the Buddha passed away. These sacred sites are interconnected as part of the "Buddhist Circuit," a concept organized within India by the Ministry for Tourism and strategically employed in India's external diplomacy efforts (Scott, David. 2016).

The Prime minister of India Narendra Modi has played a prominent role in emphasizing the significance of Buddha and Buddhism, which reflects a combination of cultural and faith-based diplomacy. Even during his tenure as the chief minister of Gujarat, Modi demonstrated a personal commitment to the exploration and restoration of ancient Buddhist sites. He also made it a priority to attend Buddhist gatherings and events. During the Buddhist Heritage Seminar held in Gujarat in January 2010, Modi highlighted the contemporary significance of Buddhism, which garnered attention. What particularly irked China was Modi's praise for the "authority" of the Dalai Lama, a figure China views with skepticism and has tensions with (Chauhan, Rishika. 2015). In addition to its domestic promotion and integration of Buddhism, the Modi government has noticeably incorporated the Buddha and Buddhism into its external diplomacy efforts. Government representatives have asserted that the Modi administration is actively seeking to establish a Buddhist connection as part of its "Look East, Act East policy." BJP officials have gone on to suggest that Prime Minister Modi recognizes the profound historical and cultural connections that Buddhism has throughout the entire region. They argue that India, as the birthplace of the Buddha, is ideally positioned to foster these connections and strengthen ties with neighboring countries.¹⁶ India's utilization of its soft power through Buddhism was prominently highlighted during Prime Minister Modi's visits to Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Japan. In contrast, Chinese President Xi Jinping's visits to these countries did not include such references to Buddhism. It is

important to note that Buddhism is not the sole or most crucial aspect of India's relationships with these nations. Instead, the strategic invocation of Buddhism within a geo-cultural context serves as a tool to advance India's geopolitical interests. Specifically, it aids in efforts to pull Sri Lanka and Myanmar away from China's sphere of influence and bolster security cooperation with Mongolia, Vietnam, and, most notably, Japan. These countries share concerns about the growing power of China. Therefore, the soft power connections contribute to the kind of hard power balancing behavior that is in line with expectations from international relations realism theory.

Discussions about developing infrastructure links to facilitate "Buddhist tourism" routes from China into Nepal, possibly through an extension of the Qinghai-Lhasa railway line to Lumbini, have raised concerns for India. In response to these concerns, Narendra Modi, during his official visit to Nepal in August 2014, put forward a significant counterproposal. He offered assistance for the development of Janakpur, Baraha Chhetra, and Lumbini in Nepal, including the idea of connecting Lumbini with the Buddhist Circuit of India. This counterproposal aimed to not only address India's concerns but also enhance regional cooperation and promote Buddhist tourism in the area. The divide over Tibetan Buddhism is notably deep in the ongoing territorial disputes between China and India. This divide extends beyond their border issues and can be observed in their competition for influence in countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. Both China and India have strategically invoked Buddhism in various ways in their foreign policy relations and diplomatic interactions with these nations. Furthermore, India utilizes Buddhism as a cultural and civilizational link in its strategic partnerships with Vietnam, Mongolia, South Korea, and Japan, partly as a means of soft balancing against China's influence in the region. In contrast, China tends to emphasize economic incentives and investments in its relations with these same Buddhist countries (Haidar, Suhasini.

2015). Competition between China and India can also be observed in the realm of international Buddhist organizations, where both nations vie for influence and support, reflecting the broader geopolitical competition between the two countries. Sri Lanka has become another arena for the ongoing rivalry between China and India. In the 1980s and 1990s, India appeared to support the Tamil Hindu minority rather than the majority Sinhalese Buddhist government in Sri Lanka. In contrast, China provided military assistance to the Sri Lankan government, enabling them to quell the Tamil Tiger insurgency in 2009. Sri Lanka's alignment with China deepened during Mahinda Rajapaksa's ten-year presidency from 2005 to 2015. During this period, Sri Lanka embraced Chinese infrastructure projects in Hambantota and Colombo, wholeheartedly supported China's Maritime Silk Road initiative (which India viewed with skepticism), and allowed Chinese submarines to dock in Colombo in 2014.

The competition between China and India for influence in Sri Lanka saw resurgence with the unexpected victory of Maithripala Sirisena in the Sri Lankan presidential election in January 2015. India responded by invoking Buddhism to regain diplomatic influence in Sri Lanka. When Sirisena visited India in February 2015, Prime Minister Modi emphasized the historical ties dating back 2,300 years to the mission of Prince Mahindra (known as Arahat Mahinda in Sri Lanka) and his sister Sanghamitra, who were sent to Sri Lanka as emissaries of Buddhism. In his speech to the Sri Lankan Parliament, Modi emphasized the common Buddhist connections, pledging to strengthen the bond of our shared Buddhist heritage with you (Scott, David. 2016). The same happened in the case of Myanmar too another Tharveda Buddhist nation, where in 2010 China sent relic of Buddha (teeth) for the exhibition for two months. Later of that event Myanmar signed a MoU with China on keeping friendly relations between Beijing's Lingguang Temple, where the Buddha's tooth is kept, and the Shwedagon Pagoda of Myanmar. To counter it, India has also used Buddhism as a

diplomatic tool in its relations with Myanmar. During Senior General Than Shwe's five-day goodwill visit to India in July 2010, an agreement was reached, leading to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding Indian support for the restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan, a well-known Buddhist sanctuary located in central Myanmar (Chand, Manish. 2014).

5. KEY COMPONENTS FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA'S FOREIGN DIPLOMACY

Religious tourism and academic initiatives can be vital components for bolstering India's Buddhist diplomacy in its neighborhood. Religious tourism, a widely embraced trend, is seen as a promising avenue for growth. Despite India being the location of seven out of the world's eight major Buddhist sites, it attracts less than one percent of global Buddhist tourists. In contrast, Southeast Asian countries like Thailand and Indonesia are the main beneficiaries of this type of tourism. To address this issue and emphasize India's significance in the Buddhist community, the Ministry of Tourism is actively advocating for the development of tourist routes that extend beyond national boundaries. In a press release issued by the Ministry of Culture in March 2015, it was highlighted that they have identified a Buddhist tourism route that includes visits to different sites in Nepal, including Lumbini and Kapilavastu. On a grander and more visionary scale, the joint declaration released after the 2016 BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat included provisions for the establishment of a Buddhist circuit within the region (Kishwar, Shantanu. 2018).

As previously mentioned, the resurgence of Buddhism was bolstered by international gatherings and councils that facilitated interactions among participants from various sectarian and national backgrounds. To harness this trend, several conferences with a global reach are orchestrated, such as the aforementioned 'Buddhism in the 21st Century' conference held in Rajgir in 2017. In October 2016, the Ministry of

Tourism organized the '5th International Buddhist Conclave' in Varanasi, attracting more than 240 delegates from 39 different countries. The conclave's schedule encompassed business discussions involving both international and domestic tour operators, thereby providing additional momentum to the proposed tourist routes ([The Times of India, 2016](#)). In 2015, the 'Hindu-Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance' took place in Bodh Gaya, organized jointly by the Vivekananda International Foundation and the Tokyo Foundation, with the inauguration ceremony attended by Prime Minister Modi himself. This conference held special significance as it emphasized the harmonious relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism, promoting mutual growth rather than rivalry. One of the notable academic endeavors in this context is the Nalanda University project. It was initiated during the previous UPA government and has been continued by the current administration. The establishment of this university was a collaborative effort involving numerous countries across Asia, symbolizing a shared commitment to its success. The creation of a highly effective and globally recognized research institution could significantly elevate India's position within the international Buddhist community and enhance its reputation in Buddhist academia ([Kishwar, Shantanu. 2018](#)).

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, India's diverse soft power diplomacy has broadened the discourse on soft power by fostering collaborative cultural growth rather than simply exporting cultural goods. However, in practice, the Indian government falls short in its execution of Buddhist diplomacy. Ambassador P. Stobdan, in an interview, highlighted that Buddhism represents India's ancient geopolitical asset that could still be effectively utilized to address the challenges of the modern era. The Indian government displayed resolve in 2017 by resisting China's demands regarding the Dalai Lama. However, this aspect of

their stance might be considered the simplest to address because it pertains to short-term issues and does not demand prolonged government effort. The more significant and impactful step related to the Dalai Lama would involve close engagement in the development of Nalanda University. Unfortunately, there are no signs that this collaboration will materialize. What will be of utmost importance in the years ahead is India's response to China's selection of the next Dalai Lama, considering that the current Dalai Lama holds considerable authority.

The Modi government should move beyond symbolic gestures, such as official visits to temples and Buddhist shrines, as these actions can only yield limited results. India possesses several advantages now, including a wealth of pilgrimage sites, the presence of the Dalai Lama, international goodwill, and good intentions. On the global stage, the government should not focus exclusively on Tibetan Buddhism but instead strive to foster connections with various Buddhist traditions. To effectively revitalize the Nalanda University project and promote Buddhist studies in established universities across the country, a diverse range of Buddhist thought should be encouraged, extending beyond Tibetan Buddhism. The Nalanda project should not bear the sole responsibility for generating Buddhist scholarship. The study of ancient languages like Pali, in which numerous Buddhist texts are written, is essential for the comprehensive development of Buddhist academia. Furthermore, there remains significant untapped potential in exploring entire schools of Buddhist thought, such as Nagarjuna Buddhism, within academic research. This presents opportunities to expand research initiatives with adequate funding and support.

To enhance India's global reputation in relation to Buddhism, a promotional effort akin to the 'Incredible India' campaign, specifically targeting Buddhist tourism, is essential. Beyond advertising, it is imperative to ensure the well-organized management of tourist destinations. While the current government has demonstrated its commitment to elevating India's standing in

the Buddhist community, the critical hurdle lies in executing these intentions effectively. Successfully addressing this challenge is of paramount importance in countering China's influence, solidifying relationships with Asian nations, and advancing India's regional and global ambitions of power.

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Cite this article as: Manjul Mishra and Keshav Mishra (2024). Salience of Buddhism as an Instrument of Soft Power in India's Neighborhood, *International Journal of Emerging Knowledge Studies*. 3(9), pp.530-538. <https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeks-03-09-002>