

## CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper seeks to highlight and put forward a convincing Diplomatic approach that should be practiced by India to reach out to other countries across the globe through, "Culture Diplomacy". The Culture Diplomacy herein states an unconventional and dynamic way of diplomatic outreach strategy to be practiced by MEA considering the long rich traditional & cultural history of BHARAT i.e., INDIA. The paper explores the significance of "Indian" customs & cultural practices that are being followed by millions of Indians across the globe in different countries, and through this diplomacy a plethora of dormant opportunities can be unlocked by MEA establishing a strong & formidable relationship with these countries. This paper also examines the importance of having Cultural Diplomacy Soft Power to increase the Global stature of India and make it a regional power followed by global superpower.*

**KEYWORDS:** Traditional, Cultural Diplomacy, Soft power

### ORIGINS

Ancient Bharat was home to many civilizations and diverse diplomatic relationships were also part of various dynasties & kingdoms. One such Kingdom was the Mauryan Empire, the largest and first well-established Kingdom in Ancient India under the ruler, Chandragupta. The Guru to Chandragupta was Kautilya who wrote extensively about State Affairs & Foreign Relations with other countries as also described in his literature, the **ArthaShastra**. The fascinating discussions on Rajamandala i.e. 'The Circle of kingdoms', on the theory of Shadguna, i.e., sixfold policy or six measures, and on diplomacy, amazingly encompasses almost all the aspects of foreign policy, which can be found relevant even today. As stated in the Artha-Shastra, Foreign Relations should be based on Self Interest rather than on Ethical Considerations. Around 2,300 years old literature describes the nitty gritty of foreign relations & strategic geometries that one kingdom should practice to maintain an edge over other countries or her enemies.

The Mauryan Empire ushered Ancient India into new & tactful diplomatic maneuvers, like the establishment of three categories of diplomats (plenipotentiaries, envoys assigned with specific missions, and royal messengers) and their detailed rules & regulations with specific immunities and privileges. It not only includes monitoring system of spying on rulers and one's own subjects, but also includes sending out assassins to murder rival kings, gifting women to foreign nobles to gain their support. As the Mauryan Empire came to its end other empires started flourishing in Ancient India which continued the practice of Foreign Relations with countries across the globe through Trade, Science, Economy and most importantly Culture- Traditions & Religious diplomacy. Ashoka sent his emissaries as far as the Mediterranean, South Asia and throughout India to propagate the Buddhist Faith. Indeed, this propagation caught the

attention of many people across the countries resulting in diverse diplomatic relations with India in years to come and made intellectuals/scholars flock towards India in quest of knowledge & curiosity.

### PRAGMATIC & PROACTIVE APPROACH

In the year 2021 we are witnessing a dynamic world with changed world orders. India's diplomatic efforts therefore need to be pragmatic, unconventional, flexible, and responsive to safeguard its interests both Nationally & Internationally. India is also growing economically and to support its various schemes like Skill India, Make in India Digital India, Smart City Development, Infrastructure developments etc. India needs foreign partners, Direct Investments from abroad and transfer of R&D. In the recent years India has worked on these schemes extensively and have appropriately marketed them abroad to gain foreign traction resulting in "Diplomacy of Development", by incorporating Economical & Political diplomacy as well.

A further approach shall be integrating all these aspects with "Cultural Diplomacy". India has always believed in giving rather than taking, whether it was ancient teachings of Buddhism, Hinduism or Shastras which extensively influenced the world and made scholars/students flock to this land in search of more knowledge or substantial discoveries in the fields of mathematics and modern sciences. It was basically a trade between cultural practices along with other diplomatic efforts with the countries around the globe, hence rightly referring India as the "Golden Bird". Ancient India was able to capitalize on its rich culture & practices which made India the World Capital of Cultures, subsequently inviting several clans/fighters/armies/invasers came looking out for the "Famous India" as a result. Now the question arises, what in this 21st century Modern world is stopping India to capitalize & reuse its ancient traditions and practices

yet again in developing a stronger relationship with the West, East, North and the South? Can we not again use the “soft power” of our assets to re-establish a diplomatic approach with the countries of the world in addition to the already available channels of economy, policy, and trade to outnumber our enemies like China & Pakistan which are both morally & culturally corrupt as nations.

India also has a strong diaspora population of 20 million staying abroad in various countries, particularly in countries which are of great significance to India both strategically & economically which may act as facilitators & promoters of “Cultural Diplomacy”. India's large diaspora is mainly distributed across the United Arab Emirates (3.5 million), the United States of America (2.7 million) and Saudi Arabia (2.5 million). Other countries hosting large numbers of Indians include Australia, Canada, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Kingdom. The countries mentioned above control a significant amount of the world's GDP, advanced military weapons, R&D and can benefit India in several ways if used appropriately. The major objective is to engage with the large Indian diaspora and reap maximum benefits from their presence abroad, while at the same time protecting their interests to the extent possible. The expats bring along countless benefits to the host countries they are living in, mainly, stimulating economy, expat entrepreneurs create job, expat taxes & contributions, multiculturalism, and others, so the host country simply cannot afford to upset their Indian expat population in any way, particularly with any move which is not in India's interests.

#### THE ROAD TAKEN & NOT TAKEN

“Temple Diplomacy” or Diplomacy through “Traditions & Culture” shall play an important part in India's soft power globally. Not only India should capitalize its rich heritage but also make this as an integral part of its Diplomacy campaign with any Country it engages with. The global influence of India's soft power through Tradition & Culture was experienced by the world long before the term found place in popular parlance in the 21st century. The Government of India realizes the importance of this diplomatic approach which is also partially evident in its foreign policy for a few years. The Government of India has incorporated some aspects of this soft power in its diplomatic channels through Five Pillars, such as, Samman (dignity), Samvaad (dialogue), Samridhi (shared prosperity), Suraksha (regional and global security), and Sanskriti evam Sabhyata (Cultural and civilizational links). These are interwoven with India's broader political-economic goals and aspirations. It was India which first believed & exercised on the concept of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ derived from its ancient Vedas, and in her 10,000 years of history India has never attacked any country. It has therefore become a precursor for Global

governments & agencies as it is understood today – the concept that all individuals are collectively responsible towards each other and their shared future. It also forms the basis of UNESCO's ongoing dialogue between cultures, religions, and civilizations. India's soft power as characterized through her vibrant cultural and civilizational heritage and through her Diaspora spread worldwide, serves as an influential tool that India's values of secularism, tolerance, inclusiveness, and cross fertilization of cultures which are an intrinsic part of our civilization, are more relevant than ever before in the uncertain international scenario of today.

#### THE ROAD TAKEN

Cultural integration will not only intensify India's status and stature globally but will also prevent conflict and promote harmony, particularly in the Southeast Asian region. The advocacy of Soft Power & Cultural Diplomacy are already practiced by India, some of the exemplary situations are as follows,

1. Religious spirituality from India has had an international presence for centuries and taking this one step further is India's gift to the World, “YOGA”. Yoga today has spread in more than 180 countries across the globe, particularly after the Government of India took it as a personal initiative to promote this ancient India practice in global spheres. The UN General Assembly recognizes 21st June every year as International Yoga Day.
2. Religious tourism has also been practiced by India lately, such as the opening of “Buddhist Circuit” which will lead to integration & establishment of close ties with the Southeast Asian Countries. Another example is the inauguration of “Ramayana Circuit” with Nepal. As evident from the past few events, Nepal seems to slide towards China and their growing diplomatic relationship is a worry for India. To counter China, India needs to engage with Nepal on Cultural grounds on priority basis. A joint remembrance by both India & Bangladesh of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birth anniversary and Nazrul's 100th birth anniversary is also a welcoming step towards establishment of a unique cultural diplomatic friendship.
3. Renovation & Restoration of religious places in the neighborhood is another milestone approach undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and an appropriate step towards establishing Cultural Diplomatic ties with its neighbors.
  - a. India helped restore Bagan Pagodas in Myanmar, these were damaged during an earthquake in 2016 and a joint effort of ASI and the local authorities of Myanmar restored the culture old monument.

- b. Likewise, the conservation & restoration work of a 17th Century Mosque in Maldives was undertaken by the Government of India as a move in-line with Cultural Diplomacy of India with its neighbors.

### THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

India, at present is encompassed with a plethora of problems and faces some challenges in the international arena. India therefore needs friends now more than ever to combat these challenges and take the regional countries into confidence that India can only provide peace, prosperity, and stability in Southeast Asia. One more emerging threat to India's sovereignty both economically and militarily is the People's Republic of China. The lawmakers & politicians should now acknowledge this fact that China is an aggressor and can go up to any extent to dominate itself over other countries. Likewise, what we saw in Doklam, recently on LAC and other small incidents in N-E India is just for starters, a lot is yet to come from the Dragon's side. Not only it plays the role as an aggressor but has also dominated India in its neighborhood. China has by far established good diplomatic ties with Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives through its economic temptation/lending/suppression. Although most of the countries have fallen into China's trap, it has also successfully managed to corner India in its own region.

In order to counter the growing influence of China in this region India needs to come up with a well-orchestrated plan integrating Economy-Technology-Public-Cultural Diplomacy in its foreign policy. The best untested tool is Cultural Diplomacy countering Dragon's influence over other Countries and placing India as their "old friend" with deep spiritual, cultural, linguistic, and traditional ties. All of India's neighbors (except Pakistan) some way or the other have had traditional links with India. The reason Pakistan is being excluded even though it formerly was India's part is because it sees India as its enemy and has fought three wars with India. Moreover, Pakistan is a lapdog to China's CPC. So, the possibility of taking them on-board with us is not advised any day.

### SRI LANKA

The Ceylon, modern day Sri Lanka shares the same spiritual awakening of Buddhism as India saw it at the time of Buddha and beyond. The holy scripture of "Ramayana" dated 7,000 years old also mentions Sri Lanka as "Lanka" where Shri Ram went all the way from India to rescue his wife abducted by Ravana, the King of Lanka. India therefore should rejuvenate its ties with Sri Lanka through Cultural Diplomacy roots, enforcing and elucidating the need of strong cultural ties and exercising the people-to-people diplomacy at the same time.

### MYANMAR

Relationship with Myanmar has been a significant part of India's "Look East", and now "Act East" Policy. Myanmar has a strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region and its proximity to both China & India geographically has also captured global attention. India therefore needs Myanmar to counter China regionally, and through the deep cultural & historic relationship these two countries share it is achievable. The cultural linkages between India & Myanmar dates to prehistoric days through the Buddhists who propagated Buddhism to the lands of Myanmar. Indian kings settled there which is also verified by both Sanskrit scriptures and Buddhist inscriptions present in Myanmar.

### NEPAL

India and Nepal share a special relationship and are strongly interlinked by culture and religious traditions. Recently, Nepalese administration has not been kind towards India, releasing the Kalapani & Lipulekh pass map did not go well with Indians and the Indian Government. It is quite evident that behind this move it was China's role to play, and to counter this growing influence of China on Nepal Government India need to strongly reverberate its close cultural ties with Nepal which will not only make the Nepal Government careful of taking any Anti-India steps but also help reconstruct a people-to-people bond which Indians and Nepalese share for centuries. Shri Ram, the crown prince of Ayodhya was married to the daughter of Nepal, Sita has an extraordinary place in the hearts of Hindus living in India and elsewhere.

Hence, establishing a cultural & people-to-people connect with its neighbors will not only be beneficial to India in years to come but also will give a jolt to China in regional diplomacy. India shall also play a greater role to integrate South Asia with regions like Southeast Asia and Central Asia. Entire region including Vietnam, Cambodia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, Laos, Sri Lanka share deep cultural ties mostly through Buddhism rather than just a regional threat from China.

### CONCLUSION

Every country internally recognizes its feeble & strong points particularly when addressing the Foreign Countries through its diplomatic channels. The United States of America is aware that it can play well with its power of influence in the top bodies of the world like the UN, IMF, World Bank etc., China plays its debt trap diplomacy, Russia plays with its military procurements and defense sales, similarly other countries across the world are aware of their unassailable strengths. India should also realize that it is its Soft Power, precisely through Cultural Diplomacy which will help it play its part well in the world. India's soft power is

multidimensional, based on our rich historic cultures & traditions which will also be India's gift to the world. India should act as the facilitator between the Developed & the Developing world and as rightly addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is the "Vishwa guru". India as a Vishwa guru shall strongly put forth its old cultural & traditional views of tolerance, love which in today's world is more relevant than ever where the forces of extremism, fundamentalism & expansionism are rising.

Cultural Diplomacy practitioners in India need to acknowledge that India's rich culture and civilization shall not only be practiced effectively across global spheres but also its Young Indians & large Indian Diaspora staying abroad should consume & absorb it at the same time. The Indian Diaspora & Youth should embrace this culture and it can only survive if nurtured and strengthened by successive generations and our "Cultural Ambassadors" staying abroad. Presenting the "Hindustani Itihaas" and "Sabhyata" to the young generation which represents 80% of India in a manner which is both comprehensive & catchy shall be practiced on priority.

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