

## The Cultural and Heritage of South Asia: A Historical Analysis of Soft Power India

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**Abstract:** *Mainly people believe that Buddhism first appeared in India in the sixth century BCE. A Sakya prince named Siddhartha Gautama set out on a quest to discover life's truths and realities. After being bathed in the holy light of explanation, Gautama chose to enlighten others rather than keep it to himself. Many people embraced the teachings that Gautama Buddha preached and propagated with great affection. However, a few individuals developed a new school of thought, Buddhism, which later became a significant religion of the globe and the Buddhist relics found by archaeological research assist us in rebuilding our history. (Shakrabarti, 2006, p. 315) It is well-known that after the Buddha's par nirvana, numerous monarchs from different kingdoms, including Magadha, Vaisali, the Sakayas, the Bullis, the Koliyas, the Mallas, the Moriyas, and Kalinga (ancient Odisha), searched for his remains. Kern (1989: 46) the merchants, commoners, emperors, and kings extended patronage and constructed monuments, preserved artefacts, and presented presents as a way of honouring the Master Teacher. However, this historical evident is in many types of Buddhist structures erected in India. The state of Odisha's geographical region in South Eastern India is blessed with a substantial amount of Buddhist landmarks and artefacts. The purpose of this essay is to provide an overview of various Buddhist monuments that have been found thus far, including monasteries, charities, and stupas.*

**Keywords:** *Soft Power, Cultural Diplomacy, Act East Policy, Cultural, Heritage*

**Received :** 08 July 2024

**Revised :** 24 August 2024

**Accepted :** 30 August 2024

**Published :** 30 December 2024

### TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Nayak, B.C. 2024. The Cultural and Heritage of South Asia: A Historical Analysis of Soft Power India. *South Asian History, Culture and Archaeology*, 4: 2, pp. 209-214.

## Introduction

Substantiation from the first century BC to the second century AD strongly implies that the stupendous brick- or stone-enclosed funeral mounds known as stupa, which in most cases held the relics of the Buddha, were a major focus of early Indian Buddhism. However, virtual Buddhism disappeared from the Indian peninsula starting in the twelfth century AD. Ritual monuments gradually vanished from view. But ever since the finding and subsequent revelation

throughout the previous nearly two centuries, a great deal of scholarship has met the Buddhist stupas in colonial India. This has not only helped us comprehend these monuments better, but it has also given us a greater understanding of early Buddhism, to which these monuments fundamentally belong, and its larger cultural and historical context. This book brings together a diverse range of current research on stupas in ancient India offers novel theories, ideas and methods for examining this hallowed site that integrates information from archaeology, art, and history and epigraphy that significantly advances our comprehension of these monuments in its more comprehensive historical, cultural, architectural, and archaeological context.

India has always relied on its non-aligned foreign policy, dynamic democracy, and rich culture as the cornerstones of its soft power. India views Southeast Asia in particular as a crucial location from where it receives its archaeological context. Soft power is derived from a common culture that has been developed over more than two thousand years. Buddhism is included in this historical interaction, and India receives a steady influx of pilgrims from Southeast Asian nations. The significance of religious tourism in India is examined in this special report. Analyzing travel trends to project soft power in Southeast Asia Buddhist temples and historic routes in the plains of Indo-Nepal India's northeast. It examines government programs, both domestic and worldwide to support Buddhist circles, and offers Soft power has never been more relevant thanks to global connectedness. "The ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment," according to Joseph N. Nye, is the definition of soft power.<sup>1</sup> Nye distinguished three factors that contribute to a nation's "attractive" power: its culture (where it draws attention from outsiders), its political principles (where it upholds them at home), and overseas), as well as its foreign policy (when perceived as genuine and possessing moral superiority.<sup>2</sup>

India's cultural attraction, democracy as a political system, Bollywood, the common term for the Mumbai film industry, and a foreign policy founded on values are all frequently brought up when discussing India's soft power.<sup>3</sup> Among India's initial initiatives to project soft power were the establishment of the Public Diplomacy Division inside the Ministry of External Affairs in 2006 and the tourism campaign "Incredible India!" introduced in 2002.<sup>4</sup> One recent example of a successful use of soft power diplomacy is the United Nations' declaration of June 21 as International Yoga Day, which received unanimous backing from 175 nations.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Southeast Asia is more receptive to India's soft power. Throughout their two millennia of contact, India and Southeast Asia have developed numerous complementary religious and cultural traditions, as evidenced by language, way of life, cuisine, artwork, and building design. Buddhism's introduction to Southeast Asia was and still is a significant component of these two cultures. Current ties between India and the Association of South East Asian Countries (ASEAN) have expanded into several cooperative fields with significant geopolitical and economic implications. India's fourth-largest ASEAN region India ranks as ASEAN's sixth-largest trading partner.<sup>6</sup> India's "Act East Policy" encompasses cultural, political, economic, and strategic measures aimed at fostering relationships with the Asia-Pacific area.<sup>7</sup> The potential for religious tourism to strengthen India's soft power projection in Southeast Asia is discussed in this special study. It makes use of official and non-official sources, conducting research utilizing the descriptive analytical approach. Documentation, stakeholder interviews, and site visits. The paper investigates the potential for religious tourism in the Northeast region of the nation by looking at current patterns. The study also examines actions made by the federal and state governments to promote religious travel; including offering recommendations for enhancing India's Southeast Asian soft power projection South Asia.

## Rising Indian Soft Power

Over the past twenty years, India's soft power resources have seen a significant transformation. It has come to appreciate its ancient civilization's profound philosophical, cultural, and spiritual values, particularly in the twenty-first century. In recent times, India has endeavoured to resurrect this cultural or civilization bond by utilizing Ayurveda, Buddhism, Yoga, and Hinduism. Mark Twain's words here aptly capture the latent potential of India's amazing diversity and magnificent cultural richness:

"This is indeed India! The land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendour and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the country of hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods... the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the world combined." (Twain, 1899: 26) (Mahapatra, 2016)

Rich and varied Indian culture, spirituality and philosophy, Ayurveda and yoga, Indian cuisine and Diaspora, Indian cinema and traditional art forms, tourism and cricket, Indian democracy, peacekeeping operations, direct investment and economic assistance, the potential of Indian ancient knowledge system and contemporary Indian universities, etc. are some examples of Indian soft power instruments. Southeast Asian nations maintain close ties to India in terms of history, culture, and religion; the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata continue to have a lasting impression on people's thoughts. The Ramayana is present in the local society and culture in a variety of ways. Strong civilization linkages to India can be seen in anything from city names to myths, folklore, traditional art forms, and even modern lifestyles. These Southeast Asian nations continue to live out numerous incarnations of the Rama and Ramayana, even though the stories, forms, and dramatization have changed during the transfer process. This indicates the close ties these nations have to Indian culture, religion, and society.

Hinduism is thought to have first arrived in the area before Buddhism did, in 20 BCE, when traders from the ancient Indian coast, particularly from the eastern state of Kalinga (modern-day Odisha), travelled there by sea. Hinduism still has a strong influence on modern-day Indonesia and Malaysia, and the idea of "Greater India" is supported by the myths that include Java and Sumatra.<sup>8</sup> Concurrently, the Khmer dynasty in Cambodia is thought to have embraced Hinduism, which eventually became wholly Indianite, incorporating Sanskrit names, the Ramayana, and the initiation of Hindu temple construction.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of this section is to examine how soft power has been translated into a tangible state policy to assess the shift in Indian foreign policy. Joseph Nye categorizes soft power into three groups: foreign policies, political ideals, and culture. The latter two also apply to the Indian situation. India's rich culture, which dates back to one of the world's oldest civilizations, is the primary source of its soft power. Since at least Alexander the Great's reign, it has captivated outsiders. India is the birthplace of Buddhism, which has had a significant cultural influence on Southeast Asian nations. Nehru leveraged these ancient civilization ties and shared religious traditions to promote a single Asian identity (C. Raja Mohan, 2007, page 99-115), and they are still a vital resource today. India is known worldwide for its art, classical music and dance, yoga, Ayurveda, nonviolent philosophies, food, fashion, and spirituality. In (Dr. Shashi Tharoor's) summary,

Therefore, India's soft power is increased when its cricket team wins, its tennis players win Grand Slams, an Indian choreographer creates a fusion of Kathak and ballet, Indian women win Miss World and Miss Universe, Monsoon Wedding impresses critics, and Lagaan receives an Oscar nomination when Indian writers win the Booker or Pulitzer prizes. (Pages 32–35 of (Shashi Tharoor, 2008). In the realm of sports, India is also making strides. The establishment of the Indian Premier League, a professional

cricket league, in 2008, the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, and the 2019 Formula 1 race in Noida are just a few examples. India's cricket prowess is significant because "cricket diplomacy" has been particularly influential in South Asia. This section looks into how India's relationships with its neighbours Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have benefited greatly from the use of soft power. The tools include genuinely broadening social discretion and one-to-one interactions, providing grants and planning initiatives, improving plans for trip and exchange, enticing financial formative assistance, significant dedication, empathetic assistance, and conciliatory support.

### **Impact of India's Soft Power on China**

Since ancient times, India and China, the two centres of Asian civilization, have maintained close historical relations and exchanges. Many academics have explained the mutual exchanges as a circulatory movement in which India imported silk, tea, and other tangible items and finished goods, while China imported more intangible materials, such as spiritual knowledge, from India in addition to spices, sugar-making techniques, coal, iron ore, and some other raw materials. China has emphasized the historical ties, as stated in the Bilateral Brief on India-China Cultural Relations on the official website of the Indian Embassy in Beijing:

Someone would find this experience extremely stimulating, especially given how different and rich the Hindu culture is. "The contact with poets, forest saints, and the best wits of the land, the glimpse into the first awakening of Ancient India's mind as it searched, at times childishly and naively, at times with a deep intuition, but at all times earnestly and passionately, for the spiritual truths and the meaning of existence," We cannot comprehend India until we recognize the depth of the Hindu intellect and its fundamental spirituality. (Page 219 of Agarwal, 2013) (Page 28 of Tiwari & Kalam, 2012) (Pages 3-4) Lin Yutang, 1942

He adds,

"India was China's teacher in religion and imaginative literature, and the world's teacher in trigonometry, quadratic equations, grammar, phonetics, Arabian Nights, animal fables, chess, as well as in philosophy, and that she inspired Boccaccio, Goethe, Herder, Schopenhauer, Emerson, and probably also old Aesop." This further emphasizes the profound influence of ancient Indian knowledge and wisdom on the Middle Kingdom. (Pages 3-4) Lin Yutang, 1942

Indian culture is also subtly influencing the area. However, with a renewed focus on civilization and culture, the current government is attempting to rekindle the 'India tale' by fostering connections with nations throughout the globe. Through the application of different diplomatic instruments and soft power strategies, together with the encouragement of people-to-people diplomacy, cultural diplomacy can once again become popular among Asians who share Oriental culture and values. However, furthermore, the long-standing spiritual ties that bind the nations in the area to India provide further leverage to unite and guide these states. However, given China's expanding economic sway over the area, it is imperative that it responsibly utilize its potential and make full use of its soft power in both a diplomatic and strategic capacity.

### **Conclusion**

India is specifically mentioned under "rising soft powers" even if it was not able to rank among the "Soft Power Index 30" (2013). It shows the untapped potential that India has, which must be effectively tapped into and put to use. The Indian government has actively used its cultural soft power to improve its relations with China and the Southeast Asian nations through its Look East and Act

East policies. In today's globalized world, popular cultures throughout the world are easily conveyed across geographic boundaries, as are ideology, culture, and other soft power resources. As a result, Indian culture is also subtly influencing the area. With a renewed focus on civilization and culture, the current government is attempting to rekindle the 'India tale' by fostering connections with nations throughout the world. Through the application of different diplomatic instruments and soft power strategies, together with the encouragement of people-to-people diplomacy, cultural diplomacy can once again become popular among Asians who share Oriental culture and values. Furthermore, the long-standing spiritual ties that bind the nations in the area to India provide further leverage to unite and guide these states. Given China's expanding economic sway over the area, it is imperative that it responsibly utilize its potential and make full use of its soft power in both a diplomatic and strategic capacity.

### Notes

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