

## **Leveraging Buddhism for Channelizing India's Economic and Geopolitical Interest : A Practice in Soft Power Policy**

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### **Abstract**

*A new world order is emerging , wherein, India as a country , has a major role to play geopolitically and economically, in the current dispensation of the world order. The aim of the study is to 'analyse attributes and tenets of soft power and role of Buddhism to leverage India's Historical Buddhist Legacy and Unique position for its strategic and economic goals.*

The primary importance of the study lies in providing strength to on going policy towards Asia, particularly South East Asia and finding appropriate ways and means not only to overcome the threats of the potential commercial/ non commercial use of South China sea but also to extend a strategic alternative of soft power rooted in the depths of Buddhism and it's constant updating to ever increasing challenges of policies of neighbouring nations led by China.

In the current political dispensation the world over it is galore that the hard power or the brute force with piles of weaponry and the nuclear arsenal with motley nations, is a great threat to the mankind. The world has realised the implicit danger of such weaponry.

In the United Nations every hand raised counts despite steep gradient in the physical force capability available with individual nation state. The soft power or the cultural, economic or any other influence of one country over the other, has been in prominence and found wide acceptance amongst the family of nations. In this background the current study is all the more pertinent as it is deciphering the national security issues linked with the national soft power *per se*.

First we have to analyse the soft power components of Indian polity. Indian civilisation being one of the oldest has rich soft power components. Buddhism and its international acceptance and influence may be analysed in this perspective. Particularly the growing influence of China in the South China sea being countered by the other nations and also the world bodies. Through soft power diplomacy bringing more nations practising Buddhism in the region supporting the stand taken by India, will be a great boost to the Indian initiatives in this regard.

The other important aspect is exposing and bringing forth the long term veiled objectives of One Belt One Road (OBOR) and soft peddling of Buddhism to keep the real pursuit of India's

initiative of Panchsheel at bay. In the same vein the initiative of the OBOR of china has to be analysed in this perspective. The endeavour has a number of objectives, inter alia, underpinning of fostering cultural diplomacy in Asian region leading to reaping of economic benefits through soft power diplomacy also.

'Foreign Policy' published a proposal in the 1990s by American political scientist and ex-official in the Clinton administration Jo-seph Nye. His term for it was "soft power," meaning it was non-coercive. The term originated when the United States solidified its position as the world's leading power. Ever since then, the concept has been considered at international policy meetings all across the globe.

To what extent a country controlled power in the international system would no longer be determined only by traditional hard-power strategies based on military force, according to Nye. The sheer presence of nuclear weapons is a powerful deterrent, especially in light of the increasing number of nuclear-armed nations; the quantity of conventional weapons, however, is mostly irrelevant. Take North Korea as an example; with nuclear weapons, it may pose a serious threat to the United States.

When it comes to foreign policy, soft power is a valuable instrument for getting things done. Daya Kishan Thussu, author of "Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood," and others have referred to this global religious phenomenon as the "Indic civilisation." This civilization has not only spawned many influential faiths but has also absorbed countless others into its social fabric. India accumulated a great deal of "soft power" long before the word was ever invented, thanks to its centuries-old scientific knowledge, spiritual practices, artistic creations, and religious beliefs that spread around the globe.

Soft power in India encompasses several things, including the spirituality and ethos of Indian culture, the impact of Bollywood, the perfection of democracy, and Buddhism as a whole. Using India's diplomatic and foreign policy ties to Buddhism to its advantage. Buddhism is still largely seen as an important part of Asian identity and a phenomena that has far-reaching Pan-Asian significance, particularly when considering the spiritual connections across countries and their long-lasting effects.

Monastic organisations were heavily funded by merchants, dealers, and artisans; Buddhism and commerce had become interchangeable terms. They provided aid to pilgrims and monks, who were instrumental in spreading the ideology they followed as they journeyed to other parts of Asia. Peace and prosperity were guaranteed by the thousands of monasteries that were scattered over the Eurasian Continent in past times. Buddhism Tourism, a subset of soft power diplomacy, has enormous potential as a tourist attraction. About 1.6 billion people, or 22 percent of the global population, practise Buddhism. India, on the other hand, receives less

than 1% of the share due to tourism associated to Buddhism. In this aspect, the potential for an inflow of tourists is enormous. Lord Buddha's eight major sites of worship are all located in India. As a matter of fundamental reality, this is a historical heritage. Nalanda and Taxila, two of the world's most illustrious institutions, are hallowed sites for their historical scholarship. The nation is perched on top of a tourism mine that dates back millennia. Incorporating many of India's Buddhist sites—which are interconnected with the spiritual fates of millions of Asians—into Buddha-Industry has the potential to change the lives of millions while offering many young people attractive job opportunities.

The Indian government's tourism ministry has been enhancing Buddhist circuits. This includes enhancing the infrastructure for tourists and connecting different areas.

By facilitating mutual cultural advancement rather than the export of cultural goods, India's multifaceted soft power diplomacy has broadened the reach of soft power rhetoric. When it comes to Buddhist diplomacy, nevertheless, the Indian government falls short in terms of tangible results. While discussing India's old geopolitical instrument, Ambassador P. Stobdan said, "Buddhism could still be employed to meet the challenges of the new millennium." Although the government has made noises about this, they haven't done much to really take advantage of it. Coincidentally, there are many different kinds of Buddhist beliefs in India, whereas China lacks similar religious diversity.

When it came to China's demands concerning the Dalai Lama in 2017, the Indian government was unwavering in its stance. Because of its transient character and lack of long-term commitment, this, nonetheless, may be the most amenable sector to swift intervention. Although there is no sign that it will happen, the most essential thing to do about the Dalai Lama is to include him intimately in the establishment of Nalanda University. There is a lot of power that comes with having the present Dalai Lama, so how India reacts to China choosing the future Dalai Lama will be important in the years to come.

Right now, India has a lot going for it: plenty of pilgrimage sites, the Dalai Lama, a lot of worldwide goodwill, and good intentions. When it comes to global projects, the government should not limit itself to Tibetan Buddhism but instead try to foster ties with different schools of thought within Buddhism. It is not enough to rely on the Nalanda project to generate Buddhist scholarship; there needs to be a national push for Buddhist studies at prestigious universities and a thorough revision of the Nalanda University project to include a wider range of perspectives beyond Tibetan Buddhism. A more complete evolution of Buddhist academics would also need the study of old languages, such as Pali, the original language of many Budd-

hist writings. Research on Nagarjuna Buddhism and other schools of Buddhist thinking is still in its infancy, thus there is a lot of room for growth in this area.

International recognition of India as a Buddhist pilgrimage destination requires marketing of Buddhist tourism in the style of the "Incredible India" initiative. Advertising isn't enough; tourism attractions also need good management. We must demonstrate sufficient determination to strengthen India's standing in the Buddhist global community.

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