

Buddhist heritage of Eastern India: A gateway to soft power diplomacy

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Buddhism is one of the world's great religions and has deeply influenced the character and evolution of Asian civilization over the past 2,600 years. India has some deeply revered Buddhist sites closely linked to every phase of the life of Lord Buddha. Places from where he began his journey to seek enlightenment, place where he got the enlightenment and how the journey evolved to spread the lessons to the entire world. Faith took over the world, filled people with dignity and encouraged them to engage themselves in the right conduct in daily life. India's leverage over Southeast Asia on account of its Buddhist heritage and the prospect of establishing this influence as a steady soft power has been recognized. Cultural diplomacy is not new to India. Its modern nationalism has been shaped by the rich self-discovery of its cultural heritage as well as global reach. The first cultural diplomacy was started during the Mauryan period (3rd Century BCE) when the Great King Ashoka, dispatched nine mission to not only n India but abroad as well and had close diplomatic relationship with European countries also. To enhance its outreach through diplomatic relationships, even in modern times, India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru understood the importance of cultural diplomacy and set up the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in 1950 to project India's civilizational heritage. Religion made its way to diplomacy, and since then, several diplomatic initiatives have been categorized by experts under the heading of faith or religion-based diplomacy. This diplomacy is embedded in religion, texts, Buddhist sites, practices and traditions. The proposed paper entitled “Buddhist Heritage of Eastern India: A Gateway to Soft Power Diplomacy” will be focussed on the exploring of the significance of vast Buddhist heritage of Eastern India and its importance in projecting the same as India's soft power response to a diplomatic relationship with Buddhist countries of the world. Eastern India is a vast geographical area that includes Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the modern Indian States of Bihar, Jharkhand, etc.

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