

The need for building public diplomacy to strengthen regional cooperation – The case for South Asia

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial, India is acclaimed all over the world for its peculiar culture that celebrates diversity, plurality and tolerance and that strives for peace and harmony and progress of all human kind. It is these incredible features of Indian culture that led Indian cultural identity to be revered as the Adhyatmik Vishwa Guru (spiritual world teacher) who guides and leads each person on the earth to work for the development of all and establish peace in the world. The holy scriptures of India such as Vedas, Upanishad, Bhagvad Gita, and afterward rise of Buddhism, Jainism in addition to sufi Islam- all of them reflecting on the Indian wisdom and sanctity constituted in the multifaceted cultural heritage of India that has immense influence on the development of the features of the culture of other countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Nepal, Bhutan as evident from the high level of veneration of Buddhism and increase in number of Buddhist monks, nuns and temples in all these countries. This kind of diffusion of culture in the neighbouring countries has not only deeply affected socio-religious life of the people of the region, but also greatly contributed in ushering mutual cooperation among them in economic, political and social spheres. In this backdrop of cultural legacy, the paper aims to explore the ways and means of strengthening the cultural ties through people to people diplomacy with its South Asian neighbours aiming for economic and political cooperation. The stupendous task in this direction played by Ambassador Madanjit Singh is not out of the scope of this presentation.

Keywords: Public diplomacy, regional cooperation, cultural identity