

## **Buddhist heritage diplomacy and India's soft power strategy**

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This paper explores the teachings of Buddhism as heritage diplomacy in the context of India. Soft power and culture have become important tools of diplomacy for States as hard power. From the time of Jawaharlal Nehru's *Panchsheel* principles, India has been guided by the ideals of peaceful co-existence. Thus, Buddhism has long been a natural component of India's soft power. India's ancient links with Buddhism, its ancient philosophical and religious tradition in the form of Yoga, its popular culture etc can be vigorously used as a part of heritage diplomacy programme to gain acceptability in the international arena. This present study intends to discuss one particular aspect of Indian soft power prognosis: the leveraging of India's historical associations with the Buddhist faith in diplomacy. Indian Prime Minister Modi has made it a point to make Buddhism a regular feature of his diplomatic visits. In speeches made on official international platforms such as to ASEAN or UN or platforms in any other country, PM Modi has made a conscious effort to emphasise and share Buddhist heritage. The Pan-Asian presence of the religion and an image of a most peaceful religion makes it ideal for soft power diplomacy. India's soft power, as spread through its comprehensive cultural and civilization heritage, validates the values of secularism, tolerance and inclusiveness. Thus, it is more important than ever before in today's troubled world.

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