

India's Buddhist Diplomacy: A Historical Perspective

Dr. Karmveer Singh*

As Edwin Arnold recorded Buddhism, "the great faith of Asia" has influenced millions of people for over twenty five centuries and its spiritual dominions extended "from Nepal and Ceylon over the whole Eastern Peninsula to China, Japan, Tibet, Central Asia, Siberia, and even Swedish Lapland" (Arnold 1885: xi). Buddhism had been a key anchor for socio-cultural transformations in the lives of millions in Asia for these centuries. The Pan-Asian presence of the Buddhism and the remarkable role played by it in the formation of national identity as well as in the lives of millions across the continent, coupled with its association with the principles of universal love, peace and non-violence makes the faith an ideal for soft power diplomacy. As far as India is concerned, Buddhism lies at the core of its identity as the homeland of the Doctrine and also provided the nation with a unique image of being an embracer and enlightener rather than being a conqueror. Buddhism may be an important component of Indian diplomacy in promotion of connectivity between people and countries by leveraging its historical Buddhist legacy. This paper aims to understand the historical development of India's Buddhist diplomacy as well as to explore how transnational Buddhist networks have promoted cultural exchange and diplomacy.

Buddhist diplomacy: Historical Development

Buddhist diplomacy is not new to the Indian subcontinent or the broader Asian region. The Buddha himself was a diplomat of peace and harmony. In his lifetime, Buddha resolved conflicts and several times prevented wars between the neighbouring kingdoms. After attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, Siddharta Gautama, the Buddha, spread the message of Dharma (in Pali, Dhamma) for forty-five years and travelled across the

*Assistant Professor, Department of History and Indian Culture, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan, Email: karmveerjnu@gmail.com