



THE ROLE OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH CENTRAL ASIA

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: Cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role in shaping the relations between India and the countries of Central Asia, serving as a bridge for mutual understanding, cooperation, and regional integration. This article explores the significance of cultural diplomacy in fostering bilateral relations between India and Central Asia. It examines historical ties, current initiatives, and future prospects, highlighting the role of cultural exchanges in promoting mutual understanding, soft power, and regional cooperation. Through analysis of cultural diplomacy efforts and their impact on various aspects of bilateral relations, the article offers insights into enhancing India's engagement with Central Asia in the cultural sphere.

HINDISTONNING MARKAZIY OSIYO BILAN MUNOSABATLARIDA MADANIY DIPLOMATIYANING O'RNI

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit so'zlar: ikki tomonlama munosabatlar, o'zaro tushunish, hamkorlik, mintaqaviy integratsiya, madaniy almashinuv, yumshoq kuch, geosiyosiy dinamika, Ipak yo'li

Annotatsiya: Madaniy diplomatiya Hindiston va Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlari o'rtasidagi munosabatlarni shakllantirishda hal qiluvchi rol o'ynaydi, o'zaro tushunish, hamkorlik va mintaqaviy integratsiya uchun

ko'prik bo'lib xizmat qiladi. Ushbu maqolada madaniy diplomatiyaning Hindiston va Markaziy Osiyo o'rtasidagi ikki tomonlama munosabatlarni rivojlantirishdagi ahamiyati ko'rib chiqilgan. Unda tarixiy aloqalar, hozirgi tashabbuslar va kelajak istiqbollari ko'rib chiqilib, madaniy almashinuvning o'zaro tushunish, yumshoq kuch va mintaqaviy hamkorlikni rivojlantirishdagi o'zni ta'kidlangan. Madaniy diplomatiya sa'y-harakatlari va ularning ikki tomonlama munosabatlarning turli jihatlariga ta'sirini tahlil qilish orqali maqolada Hindistonning Markaziy Osiyo bilan madaniy sohadagi aloqalarini kuchaytirish haqida tushunchalar berilgan.

РОЛЬ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ДИПЛОМАТИИ В ОТНОШЕНИЯХ ИНДИИ С ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИЕЙ

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: Двусторонние отношения, Взаимопонимание, Сотрудничество, Региональная интеграция, Культурные обмены, Мягкая сила, Геополитическая динамика, Шелковый путь

Аннотация: Культурная дипломатия играет решающую роль в формировании отношений между Индией и странами Центральной Азии, служа мостом для взаимопонимания, сотрудничества и региональной интеграции. В этой статье исследуется значение культурной дипломатии в укреплении двусторонних отношений между Индией и Центральной Азией. В нем рассматриваются исторические связи, текущие инициативы и перспективы на будущее, подчеркивается роль культурных обменов в содействии взаимопониманию, мягкой силе и региональному сотрудничеству. На основе анализа усилий культурной дипломатии и их влияния на различные аспекты двусторонних отношений в статье дается представление об усилении взаимодействия Индии с Центральной Азией в культурной сфере.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural diplomacy is pivotal in India's relations with Central Asia, fostering understanding and cooperation. Rooted in ancient trade routes like the Silk Road, it promotes mutual respect through art, literature, and cuisine exchanges. By showcasing Indian culture, it enhances soft power and builds connections. This diplomacy also highlights India's expertise, positioning it as a valuable partner in fields like science and technology. In a broader context, it strengthens India's presence in Central Asia, contributing to regional stability and prosperity. Overall, cultural diplomacy serves as a vital bridge, promoting harmony and mutual interests between India and Central Asia.

THE MAIN RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Existing research on cultural diplomacy between India and Central Asia highlights its role in strengthening diplomatic relations and fostering mutual understanding. A group of Indian scholars, including Balinder Singh, Dr. Jagmeet Bawa, and Sabhya Bhalla, have explored historical ties and common cultural heritage as foundational elements of this relationship. They emphasize that Samarkand, renowned for its historical significance, served as a hub for scholars who studied various aspects of Indian mathematics, astronomy, and literature. Two other researchers, Arun Sahgal & Vinod Anand assert that each country in Central Asia has its unique characteristics and strengths that are complimentary to each other and can be exploited to achieve a meaningful regional integration. For example, they elucidate that Uzbekistan occupies a unique position because of geo-strategic and geo-political factors. It stands as the only country bordering all four neighboring states, boasting the largest population and serving as the hub of transit corridors in Central Asia.

Gitesh Kumar has analyzed the impact of cultural diplomacy on India's soft power, emphasizing the influence of Bollywood, music, and yoga in Central Asia. He states that India has a unique soft power at the world stage to emphasize as an advantage in the favor of multipolar world. However, another scientist R. Mukherjee argues that India's inability to capitalize on its soft power resources is the result of three factors. First, the over-estimation of the cultural, ideological, and diplomatic assets by analysts. Second, the lack of sufficient hard power to undergird India's soft power ambitions. And finally, unresolved elements of India's identity that tend to undermine its efforts at soft power projection through public diplomacy.

According to D. Kurbanov, Acting Director of the Center for International Relations Studies in Uzbekistan, and Sh. Khoshimova, Chief Researcher, there is a growing interest in promising areas of mutually beneficial cooperation between Central Asian countries and India. These areas include: First, increasing mutual trade, attracting Indian investments and credit and

financial assistance in the development projects of the countries of region. Second, strengthening transport connectivity with India and South Asian countries. Third, the intensification of India's promotion of digital transformation and the growth of Central Asian digital economies. Fourth, cultural and humanitarian interaction with India will allow accelerating the modernization of the cultural sphere and the development of cultural diplomacy of our countries. Overall, research underscores the significance of cultural diplomacy in advancing shared interests between India and Central Asia. However, gaps persist in understanding its evolving dynamics and addressing contemporary challenges. Further research is needed to explore its role in promoting regional stability and addressing socio-economic issues.

In researching and analyzing cultural diplomacy efforts between India and Central Asia, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies was employed. Qualitative methods involve reviewing official government documents, policy papers, and cultural exchange agreements between countries. For instance, the adoption of resolution №893 by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on October 29, 2019 “On additional measures to further strengthen bilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and India, including the state of Gujarat”, confirms the importance of relations between these countries. The agreements reached between Uzbekistan and the state of Gujarat included a wide range of joint projects for 2020. These events covered the fields of trade, innovation, agriculture, healthcare, investment, energy, education, tourism and others, which testified to the deep and diverse relations between the countries.

Quantitative methods include statistical analysis of data related to cultural exchange programs, including participant demographics, program outcomes, and economic impact. Cultural exchange programs and initiatives play a crucial role in promoting understanding and cooperation between different nations. India has been actively involved in such initiatives, particularly with countries in Central Asia. For instance, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has been implementing scholarships and cultural exchange programs with Central Asian countries for several decades. The aim of these initiatives is to foster cultural understanding, enhance mutual respect, and strengthen the bonds between India and Central Asian nations. Through these programs, participants can immerse themselves in the diverse traditions, languages, and art forms of each other's countries, thereby promoting tolerance and appreciation for different cultures.

The Indian Cultural Center in Uzbekistan established in 1995, and after 7 years, it was renamed as Lal Bahadur Shastri Center for Indian Culture in 2005. This center organizes regular yoga classes. “The yoga is more popular action among the local people in Uzbekistan, who

regard it not only as a physical exercise, but also have accepted it as a way of life,” says the centre’s director Rajesh Mehta. It seems that India is providing for development of relations with Uzbekistan, and free classes on Kathak, Yoga, Hindi, and Tabla is highly appreciated through local government and the people.

Moreover, archival research was conducted to examine historical documents, manuscripts, and artifacts related to cultural exchanges between India and Central Asia throughout history. As evidence, Central Asian artists were exposed to the rich artistic traditions of India, including the intricate sculptures of the Gupta period, as well as the impressive cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora. Additionally, the transmission of literary works also played a vital role in cultural exchange. Buddhist texts, such as the Avadanas and Jatakas, were introduced to Central Asia and had a considerable impact on the development of Central Asian literature and art. This exchange of artistic and literary traditions illustrates the depth and breadth of cultural ties between India and Central Asia. Overall, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies provided a comprehensive understanding of cultural diplomacy efforts between India and Central Asia, informing the analysis and interpretation of findings.

Indeed, the historical narrative between India and Central Asia is marked by significant moments that have shaped their cultural ties over the centuries. The Silk Road, serving as a conduit for the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures, established enduring foundations, while Buddhism's dissemination during the Mauryan and Kushan empires nurtured cultural hubs along its route. The 8th-century Islamic conquest merged Persian and Turkic elements with Indian traditions, enriching both societies. The expansion of the Mughal Empire into Central Asia facilitated cultural dialogues, fostering collaboration. British colonialism conveyed Indian cultural influences to Central Asia, leaving a lasting imprint. India's post-independence endeavors, including cultural centers and exchanges, deepen ties with Central Asia, reflecting shared heritage and mutual enrichment across epochs, thus emphasizing the narrative of cultural diplomacy and the enduring connections between India and Central Asia.

The current state of cultural diplomacy between India and Central Asia reflects a dynamic landscape marked by ongoing initiatives and collaborations aimed at fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. Recent cultural exchange programs and collaborations have seen a proliferation of artistic exhibitions, music festivals, and academic exchanges between India and Central Asian countries. These initiatives serve as platforms for showcasing the rich cultural heritage of both regions and promoting dialogue and cooperation at various levels. While cultural diplomacy efforts have contributed to strengthening bilateral relations, challenges and obstacles persist. These include linguistic barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, and socio-political

complexities that hinder the smooth implementation of cultural exchange programs. Moreover, the lack of direct transport corridors is the biggest problem today in boosting Indian trade and investments in Central Asia. At the first India–Central Asia Summit, which took place on January 27, 2022, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev also noted that the lack of direct land transport routes between India and Central Asia remains the main factor hindering the rapid development of economic relations. In this regard, the development of a new corridor through the port of Chabahar has begun. This port can and should become an important link in the supply of goods between our countries within the framework of the North-South initiative. To address these challenges, stakeholders must prioritize efforts to enhance cultural infrastructure, streamline administrative processes, and promote people-to-people interactions. Investing in language training programs, cultural exchange scholarships, and collaborative research projects can facilitate greater cultural understanding and cooperation between India and Central Asia.

Looking ahead, the future of cultural diplomacy between India and Central Asia holds promising opportunities for further enhancing bilateral ties. According to Bloomberg analysts' projections, as relayed by Uzbek political scientist Suhrob Buronov on his social media channel, by 2028, India is expected to emerge as the world's premier economic powerhouse, surpassing China based on its regional position. India's GDP growth rate is expected to soar to 9% by the end of the last decade, while in China, it will hover around 3.5%. In reality, the shifting of the global order towards the South and the widening of hypotheses about India's influence are increasingly gaining momentum. Additionally, the growing emphasis on sustainability, inclusivity, and diversity in cultural diplomacy initiatives presents avenues for promoting cross-cultural dialogue and fostering mutual respect and understanding. By harnessing these trends and opportunities, India and Central Asian countries can deepen their cultural ties and forge stronger bonds of friendship and cooperation in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of cultural diplomacy between India and Central Asia reveals a nuanced narrative of historical connections, contemporary collaborations, and future possibilities. The article has underscored the pivotal role of cultural exchange in shaping bilateral relations, fostering mutual understanding, and promoting regional cooperation. In the present-day context, cultural diplomacy initiatives continue to strengthen bilateral relations, with recent collaborations ranging from artistic exhibitions to academic exchanges. These efforts not only showcase the rich cultural heritage of both regions but also promote mutual respect, appreciation, and understanding. The significance of cultural diplomacy in India-Central Asia relations cannot

be overstated. It serves as a catalyst for deeper engagement, enhancing soft power, and fostering people-to-people connections. By nurturing cultural ties, India and Central Asian countries can unlock new avenues for regional cooperation, economic development, and socio-cultural exchange. In conclusion, cultural diplomacy holds immense potential to shape a more interconnected and harmonious world, where mutual respect and understanding transcend borders and differences. As custodians of this shared heritage, India and Central Asian nations must continue to invest in cultural exchange, building bridges of friendship and cooperation for generations to come.

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