

## **A Fiddle, A Horse and A Bodhi Tree Sapling: The Role of Soft Power Diplomacy in Indo Mongolian Relations**

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### **Abstract**

The soft power diplomacy of India and its potential are fertile grounds for research and deliberations. Indian soft power has been of enormous advantage for its foreign policy. The prospect of India becoming a world power today is considered a possibility due to its vast and varied soft power elements and the Indian efforts to shed off the Third World tag. Though criticised at times for its social inequalities and poverty, India has successfully portrayed itself as a nation of rich culture, history, heritage and unique philosophy. Though blessed with necessary and essential tools to become the pioneer in the soft power arena, India yet has not fully explored its potential. This paper examines the role of India's soft power in Indo-Mongolian relations. This paper is divided into four sections. Section one deals with the sources of India's soft power in general. Section two examines the role of soft power in bilateral relations between India and Mongolia. The third and fourth sections look into the conclusion and policy recommendations in the discussed arena and suggestions for improving Indian soft power diplomacy.

**Keywords:** Mongolia, India, Culture, Buddhism, Soft Power, Diplomacy, Foreign Policy

### **Introduction**

Joseph Nye, the Harvard professor who proposed and propagated the concept in the 1980s defined soft power as 'the ability to attract people to our side without coercion' (Nye, 2004). Since then, the concept has caught on and much scholarly work has been done on it. If certain historical texts are to be believed Genghis Khan had dropped his aspirations for expansion into India following warnings of the scorching Indian summers. This Mongol dream was realized in the 14th century through Ghengis's son in law Timur's descendant Babur who had laid the foundations of the Mughal empire (Dasgupta, 2019).

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The Buddhist tendencies in Mongolia paved way to then renewed Indian interests in the region and over the years this has reinforced the Indo-Mangolian ties apart from the historical, economic, infrastructural, educational and cultural endeavours in bilateral ties in the more than 8000 years old Indo Mangolian relationship.

Many describe the Indo Mongolian ties to be more than 10000 years old and for them, ‘Indians from the Kangra kingdom in the Himalayan foothills migrated to the present territory of Mongolia’ (Nyamdavaa, 2015). The mission was led by Mangaldev, the prince of the kingdom. Their descendants are believed to have returned to India after 2000 years. Their hereditary leader is the head of the Katoch<sup>2</sup> dynasty, the descendants at present in Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. Former Prime Minister of Mongolia, Anandyn Amar in his book *Short History of Mongolia* showed references and stated that the ‘Mongolian forefathers came from south of the Himalayas’ (Nyamdavaa, 2015). Many words in the South Indian Dravidian languages have resemblances with the words and their edifice in Mongolian language. *Alikali* is an extraordinary manual of Sanskrit with Tibetan and Mongolian translations, which has served as a textbook in Mongolian monasteries for centuries’ (Nyamdavaa, 2015). For India and its neighbourhood, the first investigative assessment to evaluate Indian cultural, historical and literary links vis a vis Mongolia was initiated under the tutelage of Professor Raghu Vira and with the assistance of Mongolian language expert M Dugersuren. This association had set a strong base for the diplomatic ties between the states. Soft power diplomacy in Indo Mangolian associations was evident much before the diplomats and embassies were instituted.

### **Indian Soft Power**

Indian soft power is now finding larger application in public diplomacy. Elements of India’s art and cultural heritage and architecture involving aspects of films, dance, music, painting, philosophy, yoga, mysticism, traditional knowledge and literature have brought India closer to many world nations. Yoga has now become a way of life. In almost all the nations, the International day of Yoga, June 21st is witnessed not only as the means for physical well-being, but also as a celebration of the Indian art and culture. Indian political values and social concepts which promote equality, fraternity, social inclusion, and democratic values tend to boost the image of India abroad. India’s foreign policy that respects and promotes international co-operation and acknowledges the role of international organization in achieving the same and ensuring international peace has given it the image of a leader in the age of democracy. Even

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<sup>2</sup> A Rajput dynasty in India

though it was an underprivileged country, India became the leader of the third world and of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War mostly due to its soft power. The legacy of not entering in wars and violence and being a non-aggressive nation, made India a friend of many. The neighbours in the region were once part of India, while the extended neighbourhood, especially in South East India and Central Asia, were influenced by the Indian culture, history and heritage which got transported to the region through trade and political conquests. The similarity of cuisines of Central Asia and India is a demonstration of the same (Khanna, 2014). A major export item along the classical Indian Ocean trade routes was religious thought and philosophy, especially the ideas of Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism spread through the merchants and trade relations rather than missionaries and wars alone. These political, cultural, and economic advents turned to be effective in building relations with the immediate and extended neighbourhood in the region.

The most important and effective instrument for soft power is the Indian diaspora. The respect and command it enjoys in the resident countries can help the Indian government in the execution of policies. Canada, USA, Britain, and Ireland are a few of the nations where individuals of Indian origin playing influential and crucial roles in administration and governance. What makes the Indian diaspora unique and desirable is the skill and education that proves beneficial to the host country. Globalisation and the advancement of science and technology have further made the Indian diaspora appreciated by the international community.

The change in the economic aspirations and attitudes of India since 1991 has influenced the global acceptance of India as a partner in economic integration and development. The International Monetary Fund says India is on the road to become one of the top five economies in the world by 2030 (India's Strong Economy Continues to Lead Global Growth, 2018). Indian innovations, technology and scientific accomplishments have surprised the world. India's technological advancement— especially in the area of space and nuclear energy has been a shock for many and surprise for a few nations. 'It is emerging as the fifth or sixth of the leading space powers in the fifth or sixth of the leading space powers in the world' (Nayar & Paul, 2013, p. 134). The success of the Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) and Chandrayan has further ratified the Indian advancement in the field of astronomy. Dinshaw Mistry attributes the Indian rise in space science as one of toil, research and constructive criticism and believes 'only Israel and Brazil are likely to follow India's evolutionary route to advanced satellite-launch capability' (Mistry, 1998, p. 156). The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme initiated by the Ministry of External Affairs in 1964, should be seen as an Indian

attempt to harness power by aiming at economic growth of the South Asian region and beyond through mutual cooperation and trade (Chandavarkar, 1972). Though initially the programme was focussing on South Asian and Central Asian nations, the extended purview has now brought African and East European nations too under the programme which points at economic power used to establish relations and cooperation; a clear example of economic activities being transformed as agents of soft power.

With regard to Mongolia and Indian soft power, the trump card is Buddhism and faith diplomacy that is aligned with it. The faith diplomacy was effectively used while the bodhi tree sapling reached *Ulaanbaatar* and when Indian Prime Minister visited the *Gandan* and other Buddhist monasteries. The Mongolians reciprocated with introducing Narendra Modi to *morin khuur*<sup>3</sup> and the gifting the Mongolian horse *Kanthaka*<sup>4</sup>. India tried to recuperate the cultural and historical relations by also presenting the *Jamiat Tawarikh*<sup>5</sup>. The participation of Narendra Modi in the Naadam<sup>6</sup> festival and the dressing in the traditional Mongolian attire deal has shown the importance of including cultural diplomacy and soft power tools while engaging with foreign states. The Mongolian and foreign media encouraged these activities and images were widely shared from the official handles of Indian PM, the Indian ministers and Mongolian leaders. The present is easy because of the past. The next section points to the Indian soft power diplomacy in Mongolia from the earlier times.

### Indo Mongolian Relations

India is an example of a civilization having strong ‘Hindu-Buddhist foundations, centuries of Islamic influence, and integration with Western institutions and ideas’, thus equipping India with cultural elements to ‘deal with the diverse, globalized and complex realities of the twenty-first century’ (Thussu, 2019)

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<sup>3</sup> A traditional Mongolian two-stringed fiddle which is adorned with a carved horse head ( In Mongolia, Modi tries his hand on the morin khuur, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> This was the name of the horse of Prince Siddhartha (pre monastic name of Lord Buddha)

<sup>5</sup> This is a work of literature and history, produced in the Mongol Ilkhanate (Southern west empire in Mongolia). It was authored by Rashid-al-Din Hamadani at the start of the 14th century. The breadth of coverage of the work has caused it to be called “the first world history”. Mongolia had lost this resource narrating its past during the Communist regime. Professor Raghu Vira helped in attaining its copy and thus aided in the preservation of a rare piece of history. There are references to India also in the text.

<sup>6</sup> The traditional festival of Mongolia with a focus on three traditional games in the region — archery, horse racing and wrestling. It is also referred to as the called the world's second-oldest Olympics.

12<sup>th</sup> century saw the influence of Indian political system in Mongolia as during this period the Mongol rulers preferred to be greeted as *Chakravartin*<sup>7</sup> Khan. There is a Sanskrit influence witnessed in many Mongol names even today. Though Buddhism reached Mongolia through Tibet, the Indian associations with Buddhism have been effective tools in establishing soft power diplomacy between India and Mongolia. The Mongol Buddhists heading to Nalanda<sup>8</sup> for lessons and honouring India as the land of Buddha was an impetus for opening the doors of public diplomacy in Mongolia. ‘The incarnate of the last Mongol theocratic ruler Khalka Jebdtsundamba<sup>9</sup>’ whose identity was kept a secret by even Dalai Lama, had lived in India working even in radio stations until he died in 2012 (Stobdan, 2015).

India struggled for Mongolia’s UN membership and independence in 1961. Krishna Menon, who was the then Indian ambassador to the United Nations said, “Mongolia was founded not today, but existed as an independent state over many centuries” (Wangchuk, 2018). India had engaged in diplomatic endeavours with Mongolia since 1955. Reciprocating the Indian values of friendship and relations, Mongolia along with Bhutan began the UN resolution for the cause of Bangladesh’s independence. The actions by India and Mongolia were detrimental to the interests of China and Pakistan respectively.

‘The Mongolian equivalent of the ‘colour revolution’ was inspired by Indian wisdom; people then chose the Buddhist path for transforming Asia’s first Communist state into a democratic society’ (Stobdan, 2015). This led to initiation of new diplomatic strategies by India to engage with Mongolia. Kushak Bakula Rinpoche of Ladakh served as India’s envoy to Mongolia for a decade from 1990, and was engrossed in convalescing Buddhism for Mongolia that was coming out of the communist regime. Mongolia considers Buddhism as ‘the link between its past and present and exists as an upholder of the Mongolian way of life’ (Dasgupta, 2019). The best illustration for this is the relevance of Genghis Khan as a figure of Mahayana Buddhism in Mongolia. They see him as the reincarnation of the *Bodhisattva Vajrapani*<sup>10</sup>. Genghis Khan who similar to the fellow herders in the region, worshipped natural elements especially the blue

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<sup>7</sup> A term in Sanskrit/ Hindi/ Dravidian languages meaning Emperor in English

<sup>8</sup> A historic university at Bihar built during the Gupta period that had housed Buddhist scholars from abroad and parts of India alike, destroyed by Khilji dynasty and now revived and functioning at Rajgir. To know more about the history of the institution refer <https://nalandauniv.edu.in/about-nalanda/history-and-revival/>

<sup>9</sup> Is the salutation for the theocratic leader of Mongolia; similar to Dalai Lama of Tibet. He is the third highest Lama in Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>10</sup> Buddhist saviour from the seventh century or soon after. *Vajrapani*, the “holder of a thunderbolt” (vajra), shares his origins with the Vedic deity Indra, God of storms (MET, n.d.).

sky and Mount Burkhan Khaldun<sup>11</sup>( Religious and cultural parallels can be drawn in India during early Vedic era and Indus valley civilisation). This is an example that attempts to connect to the pre-Buddhist Mongolian culture. This has been effective for Indian soft power. The elephant-headed Ganesh, Saraswati and Yama represented by two walking skeletons were some of the references from this era (having parallels with Indian culture) that have been revived due to this. The pet eagle of Genghis Khan was named *Garid*<sup>12</sup>. The prehistoric cultural ties have been thus revived.

Indian literature is highly appreciated in Mongolia. Kalidasa's *Meghdoota Astangahridaya Samhita* of Vagbhata is translated in Mongolian and they follow it (Chandra, 2016). Texts like *Panchtantra*<sup>13</sup>, *Ramayana*<sup>14</sup>, *Shakuntala*<sup>15</sup>, *Ritu Samhara*<sup>16</sup>, *Kamasutra*<sup>17</sup>, *Godaan*<sup>18</sup>, *Gaban*<sup>19</sup>, important Indian Buddhist scriptures and even *Kati Patang*<sup>20</sup> and have been published in Mongolian language. Amitabh Bachchan is loved dearly in the land of Genghis Khan. Bollywood had a strong fan base in Mongolia, though the young generation now prefers Hollywood movies dubbed in Russian to the Hindi movies poorly dubbed in Russian. Indian movies and shows dubbed in Mongolian are appreciated as Russian as a language is losing its prominence in Mongolia. Mahabharata, being broadcast on Ulaanbaat TV dubbed in Mongolian has decent viewership (Report, 2013). The Changezi Chicken<sup>21</sup>, named after the celebrated father figure of Mongolia is very popular in India especially in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi (Daniyal, 2015). This

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<sup>11</sup> The mountain in Northern Mongolia and its locality is believed to be the birthplace of Genghis Khan as well as his tomb.

<sup>12</sup> A reference could be made to the mystical bird 'Garud' in ancient Indian scriptures. Garid is also the rank given in ancient Mongolian wrestling.

<sup>13</sup> The Panchatantra is an ancient Indian collection of interrelated animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose, arranged within a frame story, written by Vishnu Sharma between 1200 – 300 CE (Tale, n.d.).

<sup>14</sup> Ancient Indian epic written by Valmiki describing the life Lord Ram.

<sup>15</sup> A character from Indian epic Mahabharata on whom Kalidasa based his work *Abhijanashakuntalam*

<sup>16</sup> The work of Kalidasa mentioning seasons

<sup>17</sup> The Kama Sutra is an ancient Indian Sanskrit text authored by Vatsyayana dealing with sexuality, eroticism and emotional fulfilment in sex life.

<sup>18</sup> A famous Hindi novel authored by Munshi Premchand

<sup>19</sup> A major Hindi novel by Munshi Premchand

<sup>20</sup> A Hindi novel by Gulshan Nanda. A Bollywood movie is also present with the same title.

<sup>21</sup> A dish having roasted chicken in a tomato gravy

was found fascinating by the Mongolian President Khaltmaagiin Battulga when he visited India in 2019. He came with a ‘high-level delegation comprising of senior officials and businessmen with a rich itinerary and interactions’ who partook in the India –Mongolia Business Forum (Trigunayat, 2019). Along with investments and business opportunities ‘Mongolia also hopes to be a hub for some Indian companies and would like to benefit from rural communication technologies to connect its sparsely located population’ (Trigunayat, 2019). Mongolia wants to explore its solar power potential and as India has emerged a major player and leader of the International Solar Alliance<sup>22</sup>, assistance is expected in this arena too.

There are evidences of shared heritage between India and Mongolia. A coin excavated from Mathura belonging to the second century BCE has an inscription of the Mongolian word *Khagan* meaning emperor. The well-known linguist and cultural studies scholar Prof Raghu Vira along with Mongolian professor Rinchin, tried to revive Mongolian literature, culture and the Indo-Mongol historical and cultural ties. As a result the International Congress of Mongolistics (Mongolian Studies) was held in 1959 in Mongolia. In 1956, when Mongolians celebrated Buddha Jayanti in India, they returned to Mongolia with the water from Ganges, thus commemorating the 17<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist teachers who reached Mongolia not only with water from Ganga (which was later added to Lake Baikal), but also tales of Lord Krishna, King Bhoja and Vikram-Betaal.

The India-Mongolian Agreement on Cultural Cooperation signed in 1961 also put forward a Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) between the two countries. Indo Mongolian relations have witnessed a surge since 1973, ‘when it signed an eight-point joint declaration, which became the basis for cooperation between the two countries’ (Ananth, 2015). The Treaty of Friendly Relations and Cooperation signed in 1994 on the backdrop of Mongolian president Ochirbat’s visit, further strengthened this new found thrust in the bilateral ties of these states strengthened further by joint declarations in 2001, 2004 and 2009. In June 2019 at the Asian Buddhist Conference on Peace (ABCP), a Laddakh Mask Dance troupe performed. ‘There are regular exchanges of cultural troupes and performances of Indian performing groups that are well appreciated in Mongolia’ (Report, 2021). ‘The CEP was renewed in 2003, 2005, 2009 and 2015 and most recently in September 2019 during the visit of Mongolian President until 2022’ (Report, 2021). Since 2000 an Indian dance competition titled ‘*Melody of Ganga*’ for Mongolian school

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<sup>22</sup> It was conceived as a coalition of solar-resource-rich countries (which lie either completely or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn) to address their special energy needs in 2015 with headquarters in Gurugram, India (ISA, n.d.).

children is being organized by Indian Cultural Centre and the Indian embassy at Mongolia. The event was not conducted in 2020 owing to Covid -19.

The government of India deserves special appreciation for curating the cultural ties in Indo Mongolian ties. The act of conferring an honorary doctorate on former Mongolian Prime Minister Nambariin Enkhbayar in 2004 ‘for his role in promoting democracy and Buddhism’ is just one among examples of the same (Stobdan, 2015). Through such strategic moves India opened its avenues for engagements in Northeast Asia. The first Mongolian Buddhist Monastery saw its foundation being laid in Bodh Gaya during the regime of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. This is sustained in the engagements of Modi government.

Hindu Kush Himalayan region is often referred to as the third pole, — the first and second being north and south poles, — as it is the world’s largest storehouse of snow and ice after the polar region. The World Meteorological Organisation has indicated its faith in the Indian cause of climate protection when it has requested for Indian action in the region, sharing the supervisory role with Pakistan and China (Koshy, 2019)

Narendra Modi in his 2015 visit to Mongolia signed the declaration of ‘Strategic Partnership’, ratified a 22-point Joint Statement, announced USD 1 Billion Line of Credit for Infrastructure advancement in Mongolia (building of 1<sup>st</sup> Oil Refinery) and inked 13 agreements<sup>23</sup> in diverse fields. The Memorandums of Understanding signed in 2019 between India and Mongolia in the fields of ‘cooperation and usage of outer space for civilian purposes’ and disaster management further validate that the bilateral ties are to be further pursued (Express, 2019). India has initiated a pitch for enhanced economic cooperation with Mongolia, aiming to stymie the Chinese interests and influence in the region developed primarily due to the economic assistance from China. The Indian Prime Minister by addressing the Mongolian Parliament (in 2015) on a Sunday became the only foreign dignitary to address the State Great Khural<sup>24</sup> on a holiday. Mongolia had supported India’s proposal to Yoga’s inscription into the list of UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage while India reciprocated by voting for the ‘Mongolian Traditional Custom to Worship

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<sup>23</sup> Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners, Revised Air Services Agreement, Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Animal Health and Dairy, MOU on establishment of a Joint India-Mongolia Friendship School, MOU on cooperation in the area of Traditional Systems of Medicine, Cultural Exchange Program for 2015-18, MOU on Cooperation in the field of Border Patrolling & Surveillance, MOU on cooperation between National Security Councils, and MOU on gifting a Bhabatron-II Cancer Therapy Machine (implemented) to the National Cancer Centre in Ulaanbaatar (Report, Brief on India-Mongolia Bilateral Relations, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> The Mongolian Parliament

Mountain and Ovoo<sup>25</sup> to be included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Indian Prime Minister Modi on the day of Buddha Purnima stated “without Buddha, the 21st century would not be the Asian Century” thus again invoking the traits of faith diplomacy (Soni, 2016).

Polo in its latest form could trace its origin back to India, to be precise, modern day Manipur. The British discovered the princes of Manipur playing a game similar to hockey on horsebacks and were entranced by it. This led to the setting up of first polo club in the world, the Silchar Kangjei Club in Assam. This had taken Polo further to its present popularity, now widely played and recognised across more than 70 countries. The polo matches between women players of India and countries like US, Australia and Kenya were conducted in 2018 under the supervision of Indian Polo Association and Huntre! Equine<sup>26</sup> (Bahl, 2019). Mongolia with his vast steppes and love for horses has the perfect setting for Polo. Genghis Khan had stimulated his cavalry to engage in the sport, a prototype of Polo, which later dwindled in popularity. Since the past decade attempts by the Mongolian Polo Club and Genghis Khan Polo Club has promoted polo among Mongolian youth. Competitions at international level in Polo were conducted by these clubs in Mongolia. India and Huntre!Equine can align with Mongolia to revamp Polo and thus start new trajectories in sports diplomacy.

Jawaharlal Nehru and now Narendra Modi have proudly reinforced and accredited the ‘cultural ownership of the shared Indo- Mongolian heritage’ (Stobdan, 2015). Narendra Modi’s visit to Ulaanbaatar to celebrate the diamond jubilee of Indo-Mongolian ties and 25 years of Mongolian democracy in 2015 is yet another effective step in endorsing the Indian soft power diplomacy in the region. The ‘Nomadic Elephant<sup>27</sup>’ and the expected increase in uranium imports are outcomes of the soft power endeavours to an extent.

The aim of the Nomadic Elephant exercise, for the Indian Army ‘is to boost inter-operability between the two armies and strengthen cooperation in the areas of counter insurgency and counter terrorism’; which is in prospective of keeping Chinese interventions along Mongolian borders at bay (Parameswaran, 2016).

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<sup>25</sup> There are ten mountains recognised by the Mongolian government for worship as a part of commemorating the ancient ‘Mongolian culture and tradition of protecting, loving and worshipping the mother-nature’ and to live in high awareness of essential bonds between the nature and human being’. (Studio.M, 2016)

<sup>26</sup> Huntre! Equine is an organisation that has aimed towards finding close links between sports and culture and encouraging policy framers for using the same as tools for constructive diplomatic endeavours (Huntre! Equine, n.d.)

<sup>27</sup> The Military exercise between India and Mongolia focussing on countering terrorism

Indian Council for Cultural Relations is providing scholarships for Mongolian students to study in Indian universities and thereby encouraging opportunities for cultural exchange. This is an effective step towards creating a conducive public opinion for India among Mongolians and generating future Mongolian leaders with Indian alignment and interests. ICCR has also donated 14 sets of *Kanjurs*<sup>28</sup> (*Urga & Narthang*) to the Mongolian government. All the 108 volumes of the Mongolian Kanjur are expected to be similarly completed and published by 2022. Apart from these '21 volumes of Indian classic literature have been translated into Mongolian language by Dr. Gendendarm and were published with financial assistance from ICCR' (Report, 2020). In 2019 Dr Shirendev, a Mongolian Indologist 'translated 8 volumes of 'Dhammpada'' from Pali into Mongolian language'. (Report, 2020). Every year four students are selected from the students studying Hindi at the classes conducted by the Indian mission at Mongolia to study Hindi at Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra on scholarship

The establishment of Rajiv Gandhi College for Production and Art (Turbat, 2020) and the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Centre of Excellence (ABVCE) in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) initiated in Mongolia named after former Indian prime Ministers, aiming at skill enhancement and training in various fields is an illustration of science diplomacy; an effective variant of Indian soft power diplomacy.

Modi has become the political leader second to Barack Obama with highest followers in social media, especially Twitter; providing the Indian government enhanced reach to an enormous global audience, as per the June 2021 survey of the leaders with most number of followers in Twitter (Boyd, 2021). The appearance of Indian diplomats and politicians in twitter and social media platforms is an added catalyst to twitter diplomacy. While meeting the Mongolian President Battulga on background of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation<sup>29</sup> in 2019 and after few months during the 5<sup>th</sup> Far Eastern Economic Forum<sup>30</sup> in Vladivostok, the friendship and personal quotients were again strengthened. The friendships of national leaders would reflect in the bilateral ties too. PM Modi took to twitter and posted "Engaging with a cherished

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<sup>28</sup> It is the most important religious text in Mongolia. It is held in high esteem by the Mongolian Buddhists and they worship the Kanjur at temples. It is kept almost in every monastery in Mongolia. The Mongolian Kanjur translated from Tibetan to the Classical Mongolian is a source of Mongolian culture too. During the communist rule, all these were destroyed by Soviet Union and it was Professor Raghu Vira who had obtained a microfilm copy of the rare Kanjur manuscripts in 1956-58, and brought them to India. This is now being translated, printed and given to Mongolia (Culture, 2020)

<sup>29</sup> The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation focussing on the economic development Asian nations especially Central Asian countries and its neighbours which was formed in 2001 and has headquarters at Beijing, China (SCO, n.d.).

<sup>30</sup> The Eastern Economic Forum was established by decree of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin in 2015 to support the economic development of Russia's Far East and to expand international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region (EEF, n.d.).

spiritual friend and developmental partner. Held talks with Mr Khaltmaagiin Battulga, the President of Mongolia. We reviewed the full range of bilateral ties and deliberated on ways to enhance cooperation for the mutual benefit of our people” (PMO, @narendramodi, 2019). In his 2015 visit to Mongolia during the Naadam festival, the cultural symbols of both Mongolia and India were very evident in his tweets. Dressed in the traditional Mongolian attire — ‘deel’ and posing with a Mongolian horse, he tweeted “With Kanthaka, a gift from Mongolia” (PMO, 2015). “Steppes pe charcha! PM and PM Saikhanbileg deep in conversation during the Mini-Naadam Festival” is how described the photo of the Mongolian Prime Minister Chimed Saikhanbileg and Indian Prime Minister in the backdrop of Mongolian mountains in traditional Mongolian deel was described by Arindam Bagchi (MEA Spokesperson) through the twitter handle @MEAIndia. The photos of the visit to the vital Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia, presenting the Bodh Gaya tree sapling and the copy of *Jamiat Tawarikh* apart from the selfies with Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj were frantically shared across social media from the official @narendramodi twitter handle. All the above mentioned tweets and social media presence have received encouraging responses from majority of the citizens of Mongolia, other Central Asian countries and India. The Indo Mongolian relations has received a constructive impetus under twitter diplomacy, selfie diplomacy and hug diplomacy— all novel variants of soft power.

### **Conclusion and Way Forward**

‘With a double-digit growth, Mongolia today is one of the fastest growing economies in the world’ (Soni, 2016). The recently received pseudonym *Minegolia* owing to the sudden boom in the mining sector - especially in uranium, gold, coal and copper, Mongolia is listed among the top ten countries with respect to its natural resources. Indian engagements with Mongolia should be conceived and designed keeping these in mind. India could start by deliberately concentrating on aiding Mongolia in its ‘broad-based inclusive growth, which demands sustainable and effective management of the vast natural resources’ which is already practiced by Indo Mongolian policy makers (Soni, 2016). For Mongolia India is not only one of the most trusted partners but also a ‘spiritual neighbour’. The faith diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are the best forms of soft power variants that should be sharpened while India engages with Mongolia.

It is evident that the Indian interests and aspirations are encouraged by Mongolia. India can be a probable successful market for ‘Mongolia’s evolved cashmere knitwear industry, and they can benefit from India’s information technology services and scholarships to students

(Dasgupta, 2019). It is crucial that the ‘soft power linkages between the two civilizations must proceed autonomously’ encouraging the foreign policy to concentrate on a ‘civilizational dimension’ (Dasgupta, 2019)

Indian and Mongolian scholars must be encouraged to absorb in research focussing on the legends, traditions and archives recording the bilateral ties of the countries and the acquired knowledge should be taught in colleges and universities (Nyamdavaa, 2015). “India for world Buddhism” is a successful approach for diplomatic and cultural outreach pursuits. It is apparent that the ‘current economic, political and people-to-people relations between Mongolia and India are based on old links’ has established a compact ground for the future of Indo Mangolian relations. This could be better incorporated if the Indian and Mongolian younger generations are introduced to the cultural, historical and literacy associations between the two countries. An Asian cultural forum or centre could be set up ‘based on similar cultures, traditions and ways of thinking shared across the continent’ (Nyamdavaa, 2015).

Mongolia is an emerging power with strategic relevance in the region. There are many reasons facilitating this finding. Mongolia is a ‘good neighbour’ as it does not indulge in territorial or border disputes, and has amiable relations with the immediate and extended neighbourhood including with the two Koreas. The Mongolian proverb ‘a duck is calm when the sea is calm’ guides the Mongolian policies and hence Mongolia believes that its interests are ‘best served when the environment is predictable and stable’ (Enkhsaikhan, 2014). This is what prompts Mongolia to initiate deliberations and discussion forums among the countries in the region. To display that ‘small states can be active players and can make a significant contribution to strengthening regional peace and security’, Mongolia is adamant to uphold its nuclear weapon free status (Enkhsaikhan, 2014). Mongolia is striding towards being a strong soft power and India should leave no stones unturned in being a partner in the process.

Mongolia is India’s most accessible and robust pivot to the Eurasian affairs. The ‘third neighbour policy<sup>31</sup>’ of Mongolia has been fruitful for Indian interests in Central Asia. Though acknowledged that the Chinese speedy expeditions have public incompatibilities in Mongolia giving rise to strong anti-Chinese feelings in the state especially over ‘China’s major resource development projects, extraction of minerals like coal and copper in Tavan Tolgoi and Oyu

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<sup>31</sup> In 1990 the then US secretary of state James Baker in his speech to the Great Khural, used the term “third neighbour doctrine”, which initially applied to the United States and the West at large, reflecting to the idea of engaging with countries out of the immediate neighbourhood. Mongolia has used this doctrine as a base for its increased associations with India, Germany, Australia and Japan in the past decade apart from the US.

Tolgoi in Gobi deserts’, yet the Mongolian government is convinced of the economic and infrastructural developments that China provides as there is no possible replacement for the same (Stobdan, 2015). India should focus on the initiations started earlier in 2006 between Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and the Mongol General Authority of Border Protection (GABP) with added attention and emphasis on buttressing the Mongolian capabilities to check its Chinese borders. The situation is aptly explained in the following lines

*The Mongols may not like the Chinese, but in reality they cannot live without the Chinese. And while the Mongols love Indians, they can live without India. That is why Modi should just work on strengthening Indian influence in Mongolia because that is something the Chinese cannot buy through their money.*

- In Modi's Mongolia Pivot, a Test of Indian Soft Power (Stobdan, 2015)

### **Recommendations for Augmenting Indian Soft Power in General**

The productive economic standards and ‘a youthful demography’ along with the democratic practices and ideals ‘makes India a valuable partner for the world’ (Mohan, 2015, p. 195). Indian democracy should be viewed and studied as a success model. India has also encouraged the introduction and implementation of democratic practices in international organizations. Many theorists like M. Gomichon and S.W. Lee express the view that democracy can only be expressed as a soft power if it has a credible support of hard power. This is mostly because ‘powerful actors tend to ignore options that are not congruent with their interests’ (Nayar & Paul, 2013, p. 155). India still maintains its legacy of being a successful democracy without the use of coercion and military. The democratic credentials of India are underutilised as a soft power.

It should be realized that engagements with art and culture facilitates a good understanding of the morals, ethics and values which are essential to frame solutions to the rising pressure and tensions in day-to-day life. It is thus inferred that an ‘early engagement also helps the young find and channelise innate talents and overcome negativity’ (R.K., 2017).

India as a responsive country should work with academia, the private sector and government agencies to improve the quality of citizens’ lives which would benefit people all around the world (India rises in global innovation ranking, 2019).

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Ministry for Human Resources and Development should engage with Indian embassies abroad and foreign embassies in India to initiate more exchange programmes for students and academicians.

Cricket, hockey football and such popular sports offer varied dimensions to diplomacy. It is equally important to include indigenous and local games and sports to promote diplomatic engagements and international ties.

It is evident that in contemporary times ‘space and cyberspace both break the historical constraint of domination through control of physical territory’ (Kaul, 2016, p. 362). It is thus of utmost priority that a common protocol for safe and secure cyber space and outer space is developed and India with its expertise would be welcomed as a partner in such endeavours by major powers. In such a scenario, India can also guide developing and smaller states in this regard. Indian government should develop its Department of Science and Technology and Department of Space to engage in probes and experiments in this regard.

India has 36 UNESCO world heritage sites, which takes it to a 6th ranking in the index; it is in 13th position for average tourist spending; bagging 22<sup>nd</sup> spot for international tourist arrivals; and 23<sup>rd</sup> position for participation in major international film festivals (McClory, 2019). Tourism under various heads and specializations should be promoted.

The AYUSH Ministry and pioneering Indian chefs in the field could reach out to the global audience through Indian cuisines and cite its significance in maintaining health. When life style diseases are gripping the world, a change of diet plan is necessary. If the state governments and Union government could devise a proposal through deliberation to ensure food safety and food diplomacy, it could work magic for the Indian foreign relations. The Indian embassies across the world could be roped in for introducing Indian cuisines. The Indian government could extend support to authentic Indian restaurants abroad. A new quality standard should be devised with the backing of Indian government dictated by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare that validates the authenticity of Indian cuisine served by Indian restaurants abroad, or a body like the FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) could be established towards this purpose.

To be better deliverers of soft power, it is necessary that the diaspora is more enlightened in the values, culture, and ideas representing India. Special focus should be given on how the philosophy and literature of India could be transmitted to younger generation of the diaspora community.

Indian languages, and culture could be imparted to the world if centers are established for this. China has ensured that the Confucius Centers established in different parts of the world help sustain an interest in Chinese culture and language. India should try and develop centres with similar parameters. A focus on developing India's multicultural attributes is essential for enhancing the soft power attributes of the country. ICCR should engage not only in setting up centres promoting Hindi language and the associated culture (24 have been set up so far till August 2020), but also encourage research and promotion of the classical languages and other regional languages and associated cultures of India. Like China, India should not focus on a monoculture trajectory to propagate the culture of India. India's diversity projects the acquiescent attitude of India towards cultures, languages, religions and societies. Therefore, more importance should be placed on promoting India as an advocate and custodian of multiculturalism.

Being an influential force in the institutions and organizations of international reputation will have a better standing for India. India should act as a responsible stakeholder in more global platforms and portray itself as a negotiator aiming for global welfare. This aspect of diplomacy could enhance the Indian soft power. Courses encouraging diplomacy and policy analysis and international relations should be promoted with government interventions towards this end. The image of a naysayer and a mediocre negotiator should be no longer a baggage to India while participating in international platforms and forums. As discussed in the earlier chapters, soft power should be engaged to achieve the same.

In soft power, it is to be understood that the country that can attract others by framing better chronicles and anecdotes from its past and present experiences is better equipped in the race for establishing a world order suiting its interests and demands than a country that has better military strength.

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