



Mains Practice Question

Q. Buddhism constitutes a bridge between India and South-East Asia. Comment. (250 words)

24 May, 2019 GS Paper 2 International Relations

Approach

- Describe briefly Buddhism as soft power available to India.
- Bring out factors that make Buddhism bridge between ASEAN and South-East Asia.
- Give conclusion

Introduction

The Buddhist faith, due to its emphasis on peaceful co-existence and its wide pan-Asian presence, lends itself well to India's soft-power diplomacy, through which India can establish strong relationship with South-Asian nations.

Body

Factors that make Buddhism bridge between ASEAN and South-East Asia

India's historical link with Buddhism: Buddhism originated in India and spread to South East Asia and other Asian countries. Spirituality, art, culture and faith that found their way across other regions, earned India a considerable amount of soft power.

Mutual cultural experience: The Buddhist aspect of soft power relies not on the export of a cultural product, but on promoting certain shared religious and cultural associations, thereby creating a mutually erected platform upon which further relations are based.

Large Buddhist population: Today, 97 percent of the world's Buddhist population lives in the Asian continent. It is within this context that one can understand the efforts of the Indian government at incorporating Buddhist heritage in order to form a basis for further diplomatic, economic, cultural, and strategic associations within its foreign policy and building bridges with ASEAN

Buddhist sites: India has numerous sites of importance to the Buddhist faith, such as Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Nalanda which provides cultural bonds with Buddhist communities in South-East Asia.

Protection to Tibetan Buddhist community: India has nurtured an image of being a protector of the persecuted because of the presence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan parliament-in-exile in the city of Dharamshala following their failed insurrection against China.

Conclusion

Buddhism is gaining a strategic dimension and, India needs initiatives like reviving Nalanda University, promoting spiritual tourism across Buddhist circuit, initiating spiritual activities in partnership South-Asian nations, to further strengthen its soft power diplomacy..

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