

Nov 04, 2016 by **Abhay K**

India: A Great Soft Power ^[1]

India is an ancient civilization with five thousand years of recorded history. Over these long years Indians have perfected many cultural attributes that may be appealing to the rest of the world - what Joseph Nye likes to call 'soft power'. Some good examples of Indian soft power are Yoga, Bollywood, Ayurveda and the great Indian cuisine (including curry and chicken tikka).

India has produced some great personalities during the past three thousand years who continue to shape our modern world with their great vision. Non-violence, respect for other people and cultures, respect for other viewpoints and scientific query have always been at the heart of Indian tradition since the ancient times.

Prince Siddhartha (who became Gautama Buddha after he attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya) was the first great figure in Indian history to advocate non-violence, and in the process shaped the history of the whole of Asia. Buddhism reached different parts of Asia and had a great influence on these societies.

Emperor Ashoka, also known as Ashoka the Great for his kindness and generosity adopted Buddhism after the Kalinga war and renounced violence. Akbar the Great, grandson of Babur, founder of Mughal empire in India married a Hindu princess and founded a new religion Din-e-Ilahi based on the syncretic traditions of India.

Mahatma Gandhi with his non-violent movement did not only change the course of India but of the entire world. President Barack Obama had the following words to say while addressing the joint session of the Indian Parliament in 2010: "I might not be standing before you today, as President of U.S., had it not been for Gandhi and the message he shared with the U.S. and the world."

Today India is world's largest functioning democracy and second fastest growing economy on the planet. Over a billion people in India enjoy the power to change their government if they are not happy with it; they have freedom of speech and the right to practice any religion they want guaranteed by Indian constitution.

India has large numbers of adherents of all possible religions living side by side in harmony. It has given shelter to Persians, Afghans, Tibetans and several other communities since ancient times.

India has a long running tradition of scientific inquiry. The decimal system in modern mathematics is based on the invention of 'Zero' by the ancient Indians, without which neither modern computing nor space exploration would have been possible. India has over 700 R&D centers and has one of the largest pools of skilled manpower in the world. Some Indians are leading figures in the development of modern computing. Vinod Dham, inventor of the Pentium Chip, is one such example. Indian companies such as Infosys and TCS are some of

the largest IT companies providing software solutions to the world.

In art, music, entertainment, there is no parallel for India. Bollywood is the largest entertainer in the world and its movies reach unimaginably remote corners of the world. Indian Art has come of age in the past decade. Anish Kapoor, Kiran Kher, Subodh Gupta, M.F. Hussain are some of popular names globally.

Pristine and balmy Indian beaches of Goa, Kerala and Andaman & Nicobar along with the golden triangle of Delhi-Agra-Jaipur attract a huge number of foreign visitors. India has always been a global spiritual capital. Since the Beatles took a dip in the holy Ganges at Rishikesh, Hollywood big wigs often visit Himalayan resorts. Kumbh Mela, the greatest gathering on the planet that takes places every 12 years, attracts a large number of foreigners. Indian spiritual leaders such as Swami Vivekanand, Sri Aurobindo, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi (who taught Transcendental Meditation to Beatles), Osho, Sathya Sai Baba of Puththaparthi and recently Sri Sri Ravishankar, have great followings all over the world.

Jaipur Literature Festival has become the largest literary event of its kind in Asia where Nobel laureates, writers and poets as well as literature lovers gather in large numbers (60,000 this year) every January. India Art Summit in New Delhi brings together famous art galleries, art critics, artists and art lovers from different parts of the planet. This year's India Art Summit held in January brought thousands of visitors from India and abroad.

The Indian Space program is one of the most inspiring examples for developing countries. India is planning to send a manned mission to the moon by 2015. India launches satellites for several countries at very reasonable costs. It is a leader in research in non-conventional energy.

India has a great entrepreneurial skill pool that goes back centuries. India was a leading trading nation for most of the past two millennia. Today some Indian companies such as Tata, Reliance, Arcelor-Mittal, Infosys are some of the leading Fortune 500 companies. India is not only a great market but also a great investment destination. Last year leaders of all the P-5 countries visited India to seek greater and deeper trade and commerce ties with India.

Indian soft power is rooted in ancient Indian culture and tradition. With its vision of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbhakam* (the whole world is a family) and great soft power assets India could easily be an example for the whole planet in the twenty-first century.
