

## EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

09-05-23

### Buddhism, India's soft power projection tool

- Source: The Hindu

**Context:-** The two-day **Global Buddhist Summit 2023** concluded successfully in New Delhi recently with the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration.

#### Buddhist Summit

- It was organised by the **Ministry of Culture** in collaboration with the **International Buddhist Confederation**.
- Key figures from the global Buddhist community, including the Dalai Lama.
- The Prime Minister laid emphasis on the continuing relevance of the Buddha's teachings in today's world.
- It saw a diverse group of **171 foreign delegates** from **South Korea, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, and Taiwan, along with 150 delegates from Indian Buddhist organizations**.
- Attendance of **prominent scholars, sangha leaders, and dharma practitioners**.

#### India's efforts so far

- The Indian government has been actively investing in its **Buddhist diplomacy efforts**, with a focus on promoting tourism through the development of the "**Buddhist tourist circuit**".
- Against the backdrop of the **Russia-Ukraine** crisis, the **PM said: "India has not given 'Yuddha' to the world but 'Buddha'."**
- The **Delhi summit's theme, "Responses to Contemporary Challenges: Philosophy to Praxis":** It highlights India's attempts to provide an alternative to contested global politics, with morality as the guiding principle.
- Government's guiding principles for foreign policy, **Panchamrit principles** include "**Sanskriti Evam Sabhyata**" which means **cultural and civilizational links**
- By laying an emphasis on cultural and civilizational ties, India seeks to promote greater understanding and cooperation between nations.
- During the Cold War, China effectively used Buddhist diplomacy to engage with its neighbouring countries, and it continues to employ this approach to gain legitimacy for its Belt and Road Initiative.
- India recognises the importance of Buddhism as a means of conducting public diplomacy and has utilised it to its advantage. However, to maintain its edge over China, more action is needed

## Buddhism and Indian diplomacy

- **Ties with East and Southeast Asia:** India's historical and cultural ties with East and Southeast Asia, where Buddhism is widely practiced, have helped to strengthen diplomatic relations with these countries through initiatives such as the Look East Policy and the Act East Policy.
- **Relationship with China:** Buddhism has been a significant factor in India's relationship with China. Buddhism originated in India but spread to China and became a major influence on Chinese culture. The annual India-China Buddhist Dialogue and the China-India Yoga College promotes Indian culture and yoga in China.
- **Cultural Diplomacy:** India has established several Buddhist study centres and universities in different parts of the world to promote Indian culture and Buddhism. India also hosts several international conferences and seminars on Buddhism.
- **International Cooperation:** India has been a strong supporter of the United Nations International Day of Vesak, which celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, and has hosted the event several times.

### Issue:

- Despite being home to a number of **key Buddhist sites**, such as **Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar**
- India has struggled to attract Buddhist tourists, who tend to favour sites in Thailand and Cambodia

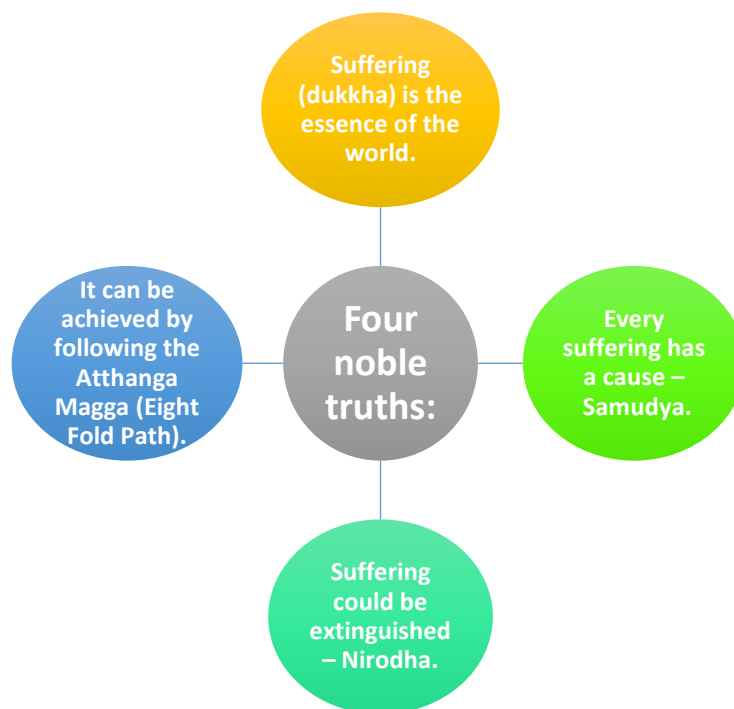
## Need of the hour

- India recognises the importance of Buddhism as a means of conducting public diplomacy. However, to maintain its edge over China, more action is needed.
- With its **strong historical and cultural ties to Buddhism**, India is well-positioned to play a leading role in shaping the discourse around Buddhist issues on the global stage.
- India should continue promoting Buddhism at the highest levels of government. The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** could play a significant role in promoting such events within and outside India.
- India should work to strengthen its ties with key Buddhist institutions and leaders around the world. The **Delhi summit was a step in the right direction**, providing a valuable opportunity for cultural exchange and the sharing of ideas.
- India also needs to utilize the reach of Bollywood in promoting its Buddhist heritage.
- India's **G-20 presidency** this year could be used to **promote Buddhist diplomacy** on a bigger scale through various cultural meetings.
- The Buddhist teachings align with the motto of India's G-20 presidency, '**One Earth, One Family, One Future**'.

**Conclusion:-** As **Buddha** was the **first diplomat of peace**, his teachings of peace and cooperation in these tough times can become the **guiding light of Indian diplomacy on the world stage**.

## Buddhism in India

- Buddhism started in India over **2,600 years ago** as a way of life that had the potential of transforming a person.
- It is one of the important religions of South and South-Eastern Asian countries.
- The religion is based upon the teachings, life experiences of its **founder Siddhartha Gautam, born in circa 563 BCE.**
- He was born into the royal family of the **Sakya clan** who ruled from **Kapilvastu, in Lumbini** which is situated near the Indo-Nepal Border.
- They are encapsulated in the basic concept of **four noble truths or ariya-sachchani and eightfold path or astangika marg.**



- **Eight-Fold Paths:** It consists of various interconnected activities related to knowledge, conduct, and meditative practices.

