



The Indian diaspora in Thailand and Soft Power through Cultural Diplomacy

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Abstract

The influence of Indian civilization in Thailand began through trade, as Indian traders engaged with local rulers by offering gifts and goods, which sparked interest in Indian culture. Invitations extended to Brahmins from India shaped the Thai court's concepts, language, and culture, impacting both the elite and the general populace. During the Ratanakosin era, British colonization in India affected trade dynamics in Southeast Asia. King Rama V's open policies promoted international trade, attracting Indian immigrants to Siam due to its economic significance. The initial influx of Indians, known as the "first wave," occurred throughout the 20th century. A "second wave," characterized by "the new Indians" focused on international business, arose in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. India's soft power and favorable foreign trade policies continue to draw more Indian nationals to Thailand. The Indian diaspora in Thailand highlights this soft power through various avenues, including religion, culture, cuisine, textiles, music, and yoga, which enhance cultural diplomacy and strengthen people-to-people connections.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, Indian diaspora, Soft power, Thailand



1. A brief historical background of Indians in Thailand

Indian civilization entered Siam (Thailand) primarily through trade routes. When Indian traders arrived with their goods, they engaged with local rulers by presenting gifts to gain favor. This practice aimed to appease the rulers and sparked their interest in Indian culture. Consequently, invitations were extended to Brahmanas from India, and their arrival significantly influenced the Thai rulers in terms of Deva Raja concepts, language, and cultural practices within the court.

The infusion of these Indian ideas did not just stay within the confines of the ruling class; instead, they permeated throughout Thai society, blending with the existing beliefs of the local populace. However, it is noteworthy that Indian migrants who settled in Thailand differed from those who chose neighboring countries like Burma or Malaysia. Thailand offered greater liberties to these migrants, which attracted them and contributed significantly to their success in the country.

Ultimately, the key catalyst enabling the success and integration of Indian influences in Thailand was the robust trade connections established between India and Thailand.

The historical narrative of the India-Thailand trade traces back to the early days of Siam, starting with the Sukhothai kingdom, although scant evidence remains from this period. Subsequently, during the Ayutthaya kingdom, a prosperous phase of trade with India emerged. Forest products, notably elephants, were among the exports to India, while textiles and clothing were prominent imports from India.

The onset of the Ratanakosin era (since 1782) marked the expansion of British colonization from India into Southeast Asia. As a result, the Siamese government entered into trade relations with the British Raj established in the region. In the early 1900s, during the Middle of Ratanakosin (Reigns of King Rama V to King Rama VI), when King Rama V's visit to India led to the introduction of an open-door policy, inviting foreign businesses to operate at an international level within Siam. Individuals from various parts of East India, predominantly from Uttar Pradesh, migrated to Siam.

Moreover, Indian migration to work in the Siam bureaucracy was driven by limited opportunities in British colonies. Skilled laborers in fields like police, medicine, and engineering found improved living conditions and enhanced work prospects in Siam. This migration addressed Siam's manpower needs during King Rama V's reign. It also helped Indians establish a working-class



identity within the system, showcasing their skills and maintaining their Indian identity despite social constraints in British colonies. The consequences included the formation of a credible Indian identity in Siam, enabling pursuit of modern careers without succumbing to Westernization (NakarinPuangphu and SiripronDabphet, 2021, p. 60).

Factors such as drought and population growth in India drove increased Indian emigration to Siam, given its status as an economic hub without British occupation.

Formal diplomatic ties between the two nations were established in 1947. The partition between India and Pakistan led to a notable increase in Indian migration, particularly from Punjab to Siam, largely influenced by familial connections.

The initial influx of Indians into Siam took place over the course of the 20th century, and it is called 'the first wave'.

In the late 20th century and into the early 21st century, a 'second wave' of Indian business leaders, often referred to as 'the new Indians,' emerged. This group was marked by a strong focus on international expansion, with Indian industrialists extending their reach beyond national borders.

Key players in this trend include the Aditya Birla Group, which began with a textile plant in 1959 (Aditya Birla Group, 2019), and Indorama Ventures, a major producer of worsted wool yarns that was founded in 1994 (Indorama Ventures, 2024). Both companies have expanded their operations across various industries and countries worldwide.

Many individuals and corporations also diversified their interests across different sectors, including gems, jewelry, and real estate. Indian professionals became increasingly prominent in both Indian and Thai companies, particularly in fields like information technology and other professional domains. These professionals not only found opportunities in international organizations and the United Nations but also in multinational corporations, banks, financial institutions, and academic institutions. The Indian community migrated from diverse states across India, such as Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bengal, Maharashtra, the northeastern states, and various others.

In Bangkok, they primarily settled in areas around Silom, Pahurat, Sathon, Si-Yaek Baan Khaek, Yannawa, Sukhumvit, and the suburbs. Some also relocated to more distant places like



Chiang Mai, Lampang, Phrae, Pattaya, Phuket, Samui, Non Thaburi, Chonburi, Ratchaburi, KhonKaen, Songkhla and Ubonratchathaniprvinces.

Today, the Indian community in Thailand is estimated to be around 465,000 (Indians in Thailand, n.d.). They are from almost all major states of India and have made significant contributions to activities. The paper encompasses both 'the first wave' and 'the second wave.'

The objective of this article is to analyze the roles of the Indian diaspora in Thailand as contributors to Indian soft power, specifically through the lens of cultural diplomacy.

2. Literature review

Previous studies have explored the connection between the Indian diaspora and its impact on soft power as follows:

It is clear that India possesses significant soft power through the dissemination of its religion, culture, spiritualism, Bollywood, cuisine, literature, and intellectuals worldwide. The Indian diaspora, especially individuals of Indian descent, holds substantial influence in supporting Indian policies abroad. The Indian diaspora gathering in 2003 in New Delhi to celebrate "Pravasi Bharatiya Divas," marked an annual tradition recognizing the achievements of Indian communities abroad. This event displayed the various emotions and divisions within Indian society; nevertheless, returning expatriates were seen as prodigal children coming home, and India was prepared to welcome them. Then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee announced a form of "dual citizenship" for people of Indian origin, offering certain privileges within India but stopped short of granting full political rights (Mohan, 2003).

In 2003, India's External Affairs Minister, Yaswant Sinha, emphasized the importance of Indian people in supporting foreign policies and recognizing India's growing soft power, fueled by its culture and diaspora. Since 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has encouraged their active involvement in India's development. Over 30 million Indians live abroad, preserving their culture and religious practices. The Indian government recognizes the importance of the diaspora in the nation's development and economic progress. Overseas Indians have invested in India's developmental initiatives, promoting Indian art, music, cuisine, and spiritual practices. The diversity and opulence of India's culture attract foreigners, contributing to the country's soft power



and international engagement. By effectively managing their contributions, India has managed to harness the advantages of its extensive and influential diaspora.

Despite the vast number of Indians residing abroad who have achieved considerable success, a significant cohort is actively engaged in fostering the growth of their adopted communities. These expatriate Indians ardently promote the ideals of Vedic Indian philosophy, emphasizing the concept of 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam' or 'World is a family')The People's University, n.d., p.46(.

In the 21st century, India's diaspora diplomacy has seen a significant shift in the government's approach, actively engaging the Indian diaspora in policy-making to enhance India's diplomatic influence. This strategy involves institutionalized engagement, public diplomacy, cultural exchanges, economic collaboration, and knowledge-sharing initiatives, yielding advantages domestically and internationally.

However, challenges persist, notably in establishing a robust permanent evacuation system. This leads to delayed responses during crises, creating a trust deficit among the diaspora. Additionally, despite economic proposals and initiatives like *Make in India*, India struggles to attract significant foreign direct investment (FDI) from its prosperous diaspora. Economic growth remains sluggish due to rising unemployment and a struggling banking sector, eroding trust among the business community. Addressing these issues requires prioritizing comprehensive economic restructuring to attract investments and garner support from the affluent diaspora.

The Indian government has overlooked the potential of the'returnee diaspora', a migrant community with valuable knowledge and skills for the nation's development. Despite initiatives like scholarship programs and internships, these are insufficient to attract talent. The government must focus on diaspora diplomacy, overcoming barriers of class, country, geography, and generation. Establishing connections at the grassroots level across all Indian states and prioritizing peace, socio-economic development, and political stability is crucial for continued support from the diaspora)Singh, 2020, p.7, 11-12(.

In terms of cultural diplomacy, the Indian government has been urged to develop comprehensive strategies to attract and harness the potential of its diaspora. This includes encouraging the diaspora to invest in rural development projects within India, such as the Foreign Currency Non-Resident Programme. The government has also set up initiatives to leverage the



diaspora's financial and knowledge resources, contributing technical expertise to domestic start-ups and enhancing education quality. Collaborative efforts between the government and private sector are crucial for initiatives like *"Make in India," "Skill India," "Digital India,"* and *"Start-up India."* The government can also leverage the diaspora's scientific knowledge to revitalize the agriculture sector. However, it is also a moral obligation for the diaspora to determine how they can contribute to India's development through their expertise, economic influence, political networks, cultural exposure, and global social advancements)Srinivas, 2019, p. 86-8).

India and Thailand share a longstanding relationship that traces back to ancient times. India's approach to building ties with Thailand emphasizes a strategic combination of soft and hard power elements. Modern diplomatic relations between the two nations were initiated through India's 'Look East' and Thailand's corresponding 'Look West' policies. According to Nye's concept of power as resources, leveraging religious, economic, and cultural assets has played a pivotal role in nurturing strong ties, promoting mutual understanding, and paving the way for deeper collaborations)SophanaSrichampa, 2015, p.121(.

The Indian diaspora in Thailand has migrated for various reasons, including seeking economic opportunities and as a result of the India-Pakistan partition. While they have preserved certain aspects of their cultural heritage, they have also seamlessly integrated elements of the host culture, leading to the emergence of a distinct hybrid cultural identity. Religion continues to serve as a significant cohesive force within the diasporic community, fostering enduring connections with their homeland)Agarwal, 2018, p. 139-140(.

3. Methodology

Data collection is grounded in documentary research, social media inquiries, and the researcher's first-hand involvement as an actor and participant in various events and activities within Indian diaspora communities, alongside interactions with the Embassy of India.

4. Conceptual framework

This paper analyzes using the frameworks of structuralism and cultural diplomacy, drawing upon the concept of soft power.



Soft Power: Joseph Nye is credited with popularizing the notion of "soft power" in the late 1980s. Soft power, as Nye describes it, revolves around the ability to shape the behavior of others in alignment with desired outcomes. This influence can be attained through attraction and persuasion to align the interests of others with one's objectives. Soft power operates on the principle of engendering a willingness in others to pursue shared goals rather than imposing these objectives forcibly, thereby fostering cooperation and alignment rather than coercion)Nye, 1990(.

While soft power has gained global recognition, discussions persist regarding the most effective methods to enhance it. This paper contends that leveraging cultural diplomacy focused on promoting culture can yield substantial soft power resources. Culture or civilization, in its comprehensive ethnographic scope, embodies the intricate amalgamation of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and all other capabilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of society)Edward 1871, p.1 cited in Zhou, 2022, p.8(

Cultural diplomacy is a longstanding tradition that involves the exchange of ideas, art, language, and various cultural elements between nations. Its roots can be traced back to explorers, traders, artists, and educators who acted as informal ambassadors. This practice spans diverse domains such as art, sports, literature, music, science, and business, reflecting a continuous interplay of influences.

Milton Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as the exchange of cultural aspects to foster mutual understanding. It encompasses a wide range of activities aimed at objectives like alliance-building, economic development, and the promotion of peace. John Lenczowski identifies several tools of cultural diplomacy, including the arts, exhibitions, education, literature, broadcasting, and interfaith dialogue.

The interconnectedness of arts, festivals, and geopolitics is important, emphasizing their role in shaping international relations. Cultural diplomacy is dynamic, rooted in history, and adaptable to contemporary challenges, providing a crucial means for nations to connect, understand, and collaborate beyond geopolitical boundaries.)Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, n.d.; UNESCO, 2022)

Throughout history, diverse group interactions have facilitated the exchange of languages, beliefs, ideas, arts, and societal systems, fostering improved cultural relations. Trade routes served as conduits for frequent exchanges among traders and officials, exemplifying early forms of



cultural diplomacy through intentional communication and the sharing of cultures, as evidenced by the ancient relations between India and Thailand.

5. Findings

In ancient Siam, before the arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism, the Thai people followed indigenous beliefs. Indian soft power influenced the region through religious syncretism, shaping the Thai political system and socio-cultural aspects. This influence continued until the establishment of diplomatic ties between India and Thailand. Subsequently, both nations actively engaged in cultural diplomacy, reinforcing their relationship through comprehensive initiatives, as discussed in the following sections.

5.1 Syncretic blend of Thai local beliefs with Hinduism and Buddhism

This section elucidates the syncretic blend of Thai local beliefs with Hinduism and Buddhism, examining their interconnection through various structures and positions in the following details.

5.1.1 Thai local beliefs

The belief in spirits in Thai is deeply ingrained in Thai society, evolving alongside the growth of social communities from villages to cities. This belief system reflects the complex evolution of human society, evident in spiritual practices within these communities. Archaeological evidence, like prehistoric burials, symbolizes community beliefs about the afterlife, showcasing a link between community development and their perception of life after death.

Spirits are not just a belief. There are also various ritual practices associated with such beliefs, such as paying homage to the spirits of ancestors. Making offerings to spirits in the village is a tool for building relationships in that society to attain harmony as a group based on shared beliefs. In addition, "Phi" also plays a role in building morale and healing, such as 'Phi Fa' (celestial spirits).

Spiritualism is a significant cultural element within Thai society, intricately woven into the fabric of daily life. Its roots run deep and resilient, persisting despite the advent of later religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. The reverence for spirits and ghosts endures, seamlessly intertwining with and complementing other belief systems. This enduring coexistence ensures that



animistic practices remain an integral part of Thai culture, an indelible element that withstands the passage of time.

5.1.2 Hinduism from India to Thailand

Indian interactions with Thailand have a deep historical legacy, evidenced by references in Chinese records dating back to the 4th and 5th centuries. Despite the perceived taboo of ocean travel, Indian Brahmanas began arriving in various Thai areas from the 3rd century AD onward. The earliest records of Hinduism in Thailand come from the peninsula. Historical sources mention that the people of Tun-sun)southern Thailand(embraced Hinduism introduced by immigrant Brahmanas and earnestly studied their sacred texts.

Records like the T'ai-ping Yu Lan, depicting events pre-9th and 10th centuries, note that the local population even offered their daughters in marriage, facilitating the assimilation of Brahmanas into Thai society. This gesture aimed to establish a permanent settlement of Brahmanas in the region, according to the T'ai-ping Yu Lan. The Wen-hsieh T'ung K'ao mentions that the kingdom of P'an-p'an in the isthmian region of Thailand boasted a population of 10,000 Indian Brahmanas. The followers of Indian Brahmanas in isthmian Thailand were typically fewer in number, yet their services were undoubtedly extended to both the ruler and the ruled. Additionally, Langkasuka, located in coastal Thailand and the Isthmus of Kra, stood out as another significant city-state)Lochan, 2006, p. 188(.

The Brahmanas within the royal court of Thailand persist in conducting ceremonies today, tracing their ancestral origins to Indians who migrated to Siam during the Ayutthayā period (1351-1767) or possibly earlier. Despite initial examination by Quaritch Wales before the dissolution of the absolute monarchy, where he delved into Siamese law, government, and these Brahmanas, his analysis was often biased by a reflexive assumption. This assumption tended to interpret all aspects of Thai culture based on Indian precedents, often overlooking the fragility of supporting evidence)Baker, et al., 2017; McGovern, 2017(.

Subsequent sporadic studies of Thai Brahmanas have surfaced since then, but they have either perpetuated the flawed model of Indianization or failed to adequately address their significance within the context of Indianization. The Indian Brahmanas held substantial roles in the administrative functions of pre-modern Thai royalty)Lochan, 2006, p. 187(.



The historical narrative of Thai Hinduism is challenging to reconstruct due to several factors. Scarcity of documentation before Bangkok became the capital in 1782, caused by the disruption of Siamese institutions after the sack of Ayutthaya in 1767 by the Burmese, poses a major obstacle. Additionally, early Rattanakosin period documentation is limited due to the absence of modern bureaucratic norms until reforms initiated by King Mongkut and his successor, King Chulalongkorn.

Thai Court Brahmanas initially held esteemed positions and conducted essential rituals within the court. However, following the 1932 government reforms, their presence dwindled in official capacities. Despite this decline, they diversified their roles, engaging in private ceremonies, founding shrines, and actively participating in the business realm.

Beyond their traditional court roles, they adapted by embracing various aspects of Thai society, contributing significantly to its cultural tapestry. Notably, their annual gathering, "Triyampawai-Tripawai," serves as a pivotal occasion fostering unity while bolstering their cultural identity within the broader Thai community)KanjanaSuwanwong, 1996(.

The Brahmanas themselves show little interest in exploring their long-term genealogies, despite its rhetorical significance in asserting authenticity.

Despite these hurdles, existing evidence supports the presence of Hinduism in Thai polities, especially in Siam, for many centuries.

In summary, while challenges like sparse documentation and lack of interest in genealogy hinder a clear historical trajectory, available evidence emphasizes the enduring presence of Thai Brahmanas in society and suggests connections with South India)McGovern, 2017(.

5.1.3 Buddhism from India to Thailand

The term 'Suvarnabhumi' was initially introduced in the Arthashastra of Kautilya, advocating its coastal route for Indian trade, destined to intersect with the port towns in southern Thailand. In the 3rd century BC, during the reign of Ashoka Maurya, a Buddhist delegation led by Sona and Uttara journeyed to a site that still persists as Nakhon Pathom. Significant archaeological discoveries showcasing early Buddhist symbols like the Wheel and the Deer further validate this historical connection)Lochan, 2006, p. 189(.

Reflecting on our history, a profound interconnection emerges between Buddhism and the Thai nation. The trajectory of the Thai nation seamlessly intertwines with the narrative of



Buddhism. With roots extending over 2,000 years, the Thai nation firmly established itself in what is now Thailand. Concurrently, Buddhism took root during that era and has remained an integral element of Thai history.

Around 700 years ago, the Thai nation settled definitively into present-day Thailand, coinciding with the adoption of the current manifestation of Buddhism. Notably, Buddhism continues to hold the position of the state religion in Thailand. Per the Constitution, while the monarch stands as a symbol of the nation, tasked with safeguarding all faiths, adherence to Buddhism is a prerequisite)PhraBrahmagunabhorn[P. A. Payutto], 2012, p.14(.

Buddhism has deeply influenced Thai society, impacting arts, customs, education, and the collective mindset of its people, contributing to the country's identity as the "Land of Smiles." Thai rulers have actively supported Buddhism by building and maintaining monasteries, aiding monks, and promoting educational initiatives like revising scriptures and governing the Sangha. Since 1903, laws have been enacted to establish a constitutional framework for the self-governance of the Sangha, demonstrating Thailand's enduring dedication to preserving and advancing Buddhism)PhraBrahmagunabhorn)P. A. Payutto(, 2012, p.14(.

According to recent census data, Thailand's population exceeds 60 million, with approximately 92.52% identifying as Buddhists)Religious Information Center, 2021(

5.1.4 Syncretism of Spirits, Hinduism, and Buddhism

The ancient belief system of spirits considered the religion of our ancestors, marks the origins of spiritual beliefs worldwide. Belief in spirits is viewed as a component of collective unconscious, with archaeological studies revealing common symbols and practices across diverse cultures. Spirits are believed to possess greater strength and depth than commonly perceived)KhomkritUytekeng, 2021(.

Before the Sukhothai Kingdom, several prosperous kingdoms existed, notably the Khmer kingdom and the Dvaravati kingdom, etc. These kingdoms were deeply influenced by Indian culture, and Siam (Thailand) received elements of Indian culture through these historical entities. Consequently, a blend of beliefs and practices emerged, intertwining Buddhism and Hinduism.

During the Sukhothai kingdom era, the predominant religion was Sri Lankan Buddhism. However, traces of Shiva idol worship, reverence towards Lord Narayana)Vishnu(, and the



practice of spirit worship were also present, reflecting the amalgamation of the indigenous cultural beliefs)Kusalasai,2000, p. 15-16(.

The syncretism of local beliefs mixed with Hinduism and Buddhism is a process of integrated phenomena in Thailand. Therefore, the ‘Thai religion’ is an animist religion that integrates aspects of Buddhism and Hinduism, emphasizing elements that harmoniously coexist with beliefs in spirits, as KhomkritUytekeng notes.

5.2 From ‘syncretism’ to ‘cultural diplomacy’

Cultural linkages between India and Thailand, rooted in Hinduism and Buddhism, form essential foundations for the relationship between the two nations. The interconnected cultural diplomacy of India and Thailand supports various activities undertaken by the Indian diaspora and the Thai stakeholders in Thailand, as elaborated below.

5.2.1 Roles of the Indian diaspora related to religious promotion and interconnection with India

According to the 2022 Constitution of Thailand, discrimination based on religious belief is prohibited, and religious liberty is protected, provided that the exercise of religious freedom does not pose a threat to the state's security. The law officially recognizes five religious groups: Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians.

The contributions of the Indian diaspora in preserving, promoting, and upholding cultural and religious traditions are analyzed here according to social structure and position¹.

The Department of Religious Affairs in Thailand holds the responsibility of overseeing and supporting all five official religions under its umbrella. Thai Brahmanas, who are associated with other religions under this Department, operate under the royal court and maintain their distinct internal structure. Hindu mandirs and Sikh gurudwaras in Bangkok have their own internal committees, serving as the primary bodies of their associations and establishing connections with similar entities across provinces throughout Thailand. Thai Buddhist monasteries and monks, on the other hand, fall under the jurisdiction of the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand, encompassing the entirety of the Thai Buddhist community.

¹ Social position is the position of an individual in a given society and culture... Social position together with social role determines an individual's place in the social environment and social organisation. A group of social positions will create a social class and a social circle)Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 348(.



5.2.1.1 Roles of Thai royal Brahmanas in the coronation ceremonies

The concept of Hindu Deva Raja was adopted and adapted by the Thai kings. One of the important Thai kings' coronation ceremonies is influenced by the Hindu concept of the five sacred rivers in India. According to ancient Hindu texts, the water utilized for the abdication ceremony must stem from the "Pancamahānadi," denoting the five great rivers in the Indian subcontinent: the Ganges River, Mahi River, Yamuna River, Aciravadi River, and Soraphu River (pronounced in Thai) which are believed to flow from Mount Kailas, the revered abode of Lord Shiva, making their waters sacred. This holy water holds significance in various Thai royal ceremonies, serving as the bathing water for royal coronations, consecration rites, and as sacred water used in rituals for Buddha)Museum Thailand, 2019(.

Water from five rivers in Thailand: Bang Pakong, Pa-sak, Chao Phraya, Ratchaburi and Petchaburi Rivers, called 'Benjasuddha Ganga' in Thai, are revered similarly to the Pancamahānadi in India, considered sacred in their own right)Museum Thailand, 2019(.

During King Rama V's journey to India in 1872, he obtained water from the sacred site of Pancamahānadi as described in the Hindu texts, and consequently, for the royal coronation during the 2nd Royal Ceremony in 1873, a combination of Pancamahānadi water)India(and the revered Benjasuddha Ganga water)Thailand(was used)Museum Thailand, 2019(.

The collected water underwent a consecration ceremony officiated by the Patriarch, the Prime Minister, a team of royal court Brahmanas, and Buddhist monks. This sacred water was used in the bathing ritual during His Majesty the King's Coronation Ceremony, signifying a complete transformation in his royal status to that of a King. The Thai royal court Brahmanas performed the rituals)MCOT, 2019(.

5.2.1.2 Roles of Hindu mandirs, Sikh gurudwaras and Buddhist monasteries and their activities for the benefit of people

Religious sites function as central hubs for spiritual enlightenment, the preservation of religious-cultural legacies, community gatherings, healthcare provisions, educational institutions, and the facilitation of a wide range of social services for both adherents and visitors. Additionally, many Buddhist monasteries serve as economic spaces for the surrounding communities. None of these three faiths actively engage in proselytizing; instead, embracing their beliefs is entirely driven by individual inclination and personal choice.



The management of their sacred spaces is overseen by committees comprising both men and women. Furthermore, leaders and followers from diverse faiths are encouraged to join gatherings periodically, nurturing mutual learning and understanding among various religious communities. The doors of these establishments warmly embrace outsiders, fostering an inclusive environment of openness and acceptance.

The Phra Sri Maha Uma Devi Temple, also known as Wat Khaek, in Bangkok, Thailand, stands as a significant symbol of Hindu cultural diplomacy from India. Built during King Rama V's reign around 1910-1911, it venerates Mother Mariamman, an avatar of Goddess Uma Devi, Lord Shiva's consort. Annually, from the 1st to the 9th night of the 11th lunar month (usually October or November), the temple hosts a Navratri ceremony, an ancient Hindu ritual spanning ten days. This ceremony, tracing back to the Vedic era, honors Goddess Uma Devi and mirrors similar practices found in South India.

The temple's Brahmanas hail from South India, highlighting the enduring religious connections between India and Thailand. The rituals performed here resemble those in South India, emphasizing the religious continuity between the regions.

A highlight of the ceremony involves a procession of Goddess Uma Devi's idol and other deities along Silom Road, starting from the temple on Pan Road. This procession attracts numerous devotees, with households preparing young coconuts for a symbolic act of coconut smashing, signifying the purification of the road for the deities' passage (True ID, 2022). This event serves as a unifying celebration, drawing individuals who share reverence for Goddess Uma Devi to worship together.

Beyond its religious significance, temples like Thep Mandir (Hindu Samaj) in central Bangkok have adapted to embrace social changes. Apart from being a place of worship, the temple also functions as an educational center, providing affordable language classes in Hindi, Thai, and English to the public. Languages are taught by volunteers. This initiative fosters unity within both the Indian community and the Thai society. Furthermore, the temple's main hall is available for rental, extending its services to the broader Thai public.

In essence, these temples in Bangkok serve as hubs for religious worship, cultural exchange, and community engagement, showcasing the enduring ties between India and Thailand while adapting to modern social needs. In addition, the Indian-Thai community actively engages



in and provides support for a wide array of religious formalities and informal ceremonies. Further, the recent migration of the Indian diaspora to Thailand, known as the 'new wave,' is notably involved in business activities that uphold mostly Hindu principles. Some establish religious associations linked to their headquarters in India, exemplified by organizations like Vishwa Hindu Parishad Thailand)VHP(, Durga MandirSamaj, Geeta Ashram Thailand, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangha Thailand)HSS(, etc. One person may belong to various associations.

The VHP, as an example of the 'new wave' actively association, participates in organizing significant Hindu religious and cultural ceremonies and events aimed at fostering Hindu unity. They conduct the current Hindu ways of worship and rituals, which involve members of the old and new waves cooperating, with each other and learning from each other. These events showcase various ceremonies, and Thais are invited to participate in celebrations, including Ganesh Chaturthi, pujas dedicated to the main gods and goddesses, and festivals like Holi and International Yoga Day among others. Volunteers from the committee, comprising men, women, and youth, dedicate their time and skills to drive their mission of religious and socio-cultural activities within Thai society. Their primary goals are to preserve, maintain and promote their religion and culture while sharing some of their prominent religious and cultural elements with the Thai public.

In the context of Buddhism, certain segments of the Indian diaspora residing in Thailand blend elements of their Hindu or Sikh traditions with Buddhist rituals. For instance, they engage in practices like offering food to monks in the mornings, accruing merit by providing food, following the eight requisites for Buddhist monks, and contributing monetary offerings to monks during specific occasions. Additionally, many Indian-Thais living in various provinces harmoniously intertwine their religious customs with the activities and ceremonies conducted within Buddhist temples situated in their regions.

The above examples are performed by Indian-Thais and Indians in Thailand in accordance with the Vedic philosophical concept of 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam' or 'World as a family'.

5.2.1.3 Supporting religious education and practices

The Indian diaspora communities consistently play a crucial role in preserving and perpetuating religious teachings and practices. They actively pass down ancestral wisdom,



scriptures, languages, and cultural values within their families and temples. This commitment ensures the transmission of knowledge to younger generations, thereby safeguarding and perpetuating the rich religious traditions. Additionally, many Indian diaspora families take their children to visit religious sites in India, fostering a deeper connection with their ancestral land and facilitating learning about their heritage.

Additionally, certain members of the Indian diaspora provide valuable support to Buddhist monks pursuing Sanskrit Studies in Thailand by offering scholarships. This assistance enables these monks to successfully complete their degrees with financial backing. Subsequently, equipped with their qualifications, they can effectively serve in their designated roles and locations.

Moreover, numerous monks and laypeople actively engage in pursuing advanced education in Buddhist studies, philosophy, Sanskrit Studies and other related subjects in India, often supported by ICCR scholarships of the Government of India and from other various sources of funding. Following graduation, many monks and laymen further enhance their skills, and offer their expertise to Buddhist universities and other educational institutions, where they teach both fellow monks and laypeople. The gratitude extended to the Government of India and its institutions has significantly empowered Thai human resources for over 50 years, benefiting Thailand in diverse ways. This collaborative endeavor stands as a testament to India's soft power through cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, certain Indian diaspora-owned tourist businesses, along with Thai students who are alumni of Indian institutions, collaborate to coordinate the itineraries of devotees of these three religions on pilgrimages to India.

5.2.1.4 Facilitating interfaith dialogue and harmony

Representing three of the five national religions in Thailand—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism—leaders of these communities are regularly invited to participate in dialogues, meetings, and conferences at both national and international levels. These platforms aim to share their religious principles and work towards resolving conflicts, particularly in specific areas such as the unrest in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand. Additionally, Indian diaspora groups frequently participate in interfaith initiatives, fostering dialogue and understanding among various religious communities.



It is important to note that both Thai and non-Thai students, at secondary and tertiary levels, regularly visit and engage in learning experiences at mandirs, gurudwaras, and monasteries on-site. These visits provide invaluable opportunities for individuals to witness and gain a deeper understanding of various religions. Encouraging and fostering such enriching exposure should be promoted nationwide.

Additionally, onsite and online religious teachings and ceremonies are shared within each temple and association. Indian priests or experts facilitate these gatherings, extending invitations to the Indian diaspora and their broader networks to participate in these spiritual activities.

5.2.1.5 Contributions to philanthropy and social causes

Many members of the Indian diaspora in Thailand actively participate in philanthropic endeavors, drawing inspiration from their religious teachings and facilitated by various associations and groups. Their contributions span diverse charitable causes, encompassing education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and disaster relief efforts. These efforts extend support not only within their host countries but also towards initiatives in India, often directing resources towards bolstering religious institutions and fostering community development projects.

Example associations like the VHP extend their support to Indian-Thais or Indian expatriates by actively engaging in various social services. They conduct monthly 'sewa' (selfless service) sessions where they provide food and essential items to those Thais in need. Additionally, they actively participate in blood donation drives for the Thai Red Cross several times a year, demonstrating their dedication to making positive contributions to the broader Thai community. Similarly, the Thai-Sikh Club contributes monthly donations to rural schools in need. Moreover, followers of the Sikh faith engage in 'sewa' within their gurudwara and regularly distribute drinks to the public. This showcases their commitment to serving both within their community and beyond.

In addition to these collective efforts, organizations like the VHP as an example, conduct charitable programs aimed at aiding underprivileged individuals in rural areas of India. Notably, during critical periods like the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indian community of Thailand and the Indian Association of Thailand IAT, alongside its network in Thailand, played a crucial



role. They contributed enormously by donating essential medical supplies such as oxygen tanks with the help of the Indian Embassy to bolster the Government of India's pandemic response.

5.2.1.6 Promoting bilateral relations and cultural exchange

The Government of India has implemented various mechanisms and initiatives through the Embassy of India in Thailand as part of its policy objectives. Additionally, the Thai government actively engages in reciprocal cultural diplomacy, involving various stakeholders in the process.

It has recognized the importance of cultural promotion to the world by setting up the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in India. The ICCR was established in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, independent India's inaugural education minister. Its core objectives are to actively engage in formulating and executing policies and programs related to India's external cultural relations. Furthermore, the ICCR aims to cultivate and reinforce cultural ties and mutual comprehension between India and other nations. Its mission includes promoting cultural exchanges worldwide, fostering connections with diverse countries and their people, and nurturing diplomatic relations between nations.

In 2009, an expansion took place with the establishment of the "Swami Vivekananda Cultural Center, Embassy of India," reaching out to Bangkok. This official platform has been instrumental in recognizing and engaging Thai nationals, the Indian diaspora, and foreigners in various Indian cultural pursuits. Participation in these events serves to showcase specific facets of Indian cultures and heritage, religions, philosophies, and select comparative aspects between Indian and Thai cultures.

Numerous cultural short course training programs offered by ICC in Thailand have piqued the interest of both Thais, Indian-Thais, and foreigners alike. These initiatives encourage a dynamic exchange of ideas and traditions, nurturing mutual understanding and fostering an appreciation for diverse cultures.

In particular, there are several main events at the international level to national level. These are:

i) (The International Day of Yoga has been globally celebrated every June 21 since its UN declaration in 2004 and inaugural event in 2015. Yoga, a practice originating from ancient India, encompasses physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Indian Prime Minister Narendra



Modi proposed June 21 for this observance during his 2014 UN address as it coincides with the longest day in the Northern Hemisphere, holding significant cultural relevance in various regions worldwide)International Day of Yoga, n.d.(.

The Embassy of India to Thailand collaborates with Chulalongkorn University annually to co-organize this major national event held at the university's expansive playground located in the heart of Bangkok. The event attracts a large number of participants, including Thais, Thais of Indian descent and foreigners.

Before the launch of the International Day of Yoga, the practice was primarily embraced and pursued by urban working-age groups in Thailand's major cities. However, following the International Day, there has been a surge in Yoga's popularity, resulting in significantly higher course prices. Additionally, Yoga has been integrated into other tourist programs exploring Thailand's picturesque tourist destinations like islands, coastal areas, and the mountainous regions in the north.

This evolution has seen the emergence of entrepreneurs within the Indian diaspora, as well as Thai and Indian individuals, engaging prominently in the wellness industry. Within this burgeoning sector, Yoga teachers or trainers hail from diverse backgrounds –Thai nationals, individuals of Indian-Thai descent, native Indians and foreigners.

)ii(The International Day of Non-Violence, observed on 2nd October, honors Mahatma Gandhi's birthday and his advocacy for non-violence in the Indian independence movement. Established by a General Assembly resolution in 2007, this day aims to promote the message of non-violence through education and public awareness. It emphasizes the universal importance of non-violence in fostering a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding, and a non-violent society.

In Bangkok, an annual event is organized at the United Nations Thailand's office. Inside the building, there stands a statue of Mahatma Gandhi. Every year, the Embassy of India acts as the host, along with the UN as co-host and a Thai guest speaker. VIP guests of the Embassy of India, the Indian diaspora, and Thai participants actively engage in commemorating this significant day.

(iii) The Embassy of India commemorates World Hindi Day on January 10 by inviting institutions, scholars, students, and representatives of the Indian diaspora to participate in



the event. Additionally, various universities and associations, such as the Thai Bharat Cultural Lodge, organize events where diverse groups participate in and engage in activities.

Additionally, in Thailand, seven universities have officially established Indian studies centers. These centers have received some grant-in-aid from the Government of India via the embassy. They function as partners and collaborate closely with the embassy. One of their primary objectives is organizing events focused on cultural programs to enhance mutual understanding between India and Thailand through diverse activities.

These centers actively encourage Thai students in these universities to explore subjects such as languages)Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi(and offer them opportunities for training or pursuing higher education in India through various schemes facilitated by the Government of India.

Furthermore, in Thailand, there exists a significant non-profit organization known as the Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge)TBCL(, originally established in 1939 by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore to foster cultural connections between Siam)Thailand(and India. This initiative aimed at promoting cultural exchanges, language studies, and religious understanding. Swami SatyanandaPuri, recruited from Bengal, became a pivotal figure within this organization, serving as a professor at Chulalongkorn University. Remarkably, he swiftly mastered the Thai language within a mere six months. The formal founding of the Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge took place in 1940 under SwamiSatyanandaPuri's guidance. Swami SatyanandaPuri was its inaugural founder-president, succeeded by eight Thai presidents, maintaining the tradition that the president must be Thai, while vice-presidents are individuals from the Indian diaspora and other committees comprising a mix of Indian-Thais and Thais, all serving on a voluntary basis. The membership includes both Indian diaspora members and Thais.

Over the years, TBCL has stood as the oldest non-profit organization dedicated to enriching Thai-Indian cultural exchanges within Thailand. It serves as a crucial cultural nexus, fostering interactions between Indian diaspora, Thais, and Indians, facilitating the sharing, learning, and exchange of religious, cultural, and societal aspects from both countries. Additionally, the organization engages in charitable activities jointly, uniting its members for common benevolent causes.



Moreover, TBCL periodically extends its support from donation to two schools, Sri Nehru in Sukhothai Province and Mahatma Gandhi Memorial School in Chiangmai, by providing materials, room construction, computers, and science and sports equipment, etc. Recently, TBCL's network has introduced Hindi and English language courses at these schools. This initiative showcases the organization's dedication to fostering educational endeavors and promoting cross-cultural experiences.

The Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge warmly welcomes individuals from all backgrounds, extending both physical and virtual access to those keen on engaging in Indo-Thai cultural programs and activities. Serving as an inclusive public space, it actively fosters cultural appreciation and exchange among diverse communities intrigued by the abundant heritage of both nations. Participants span across various age groups, including Thais and Indian-Thais, who actively engage in the manifold offerings at TBCL. Additionally, the Indian diaspora assumes a crucial role in uniting India with their adopted countries, serving as facilitators for cultural exchange programs, as previously mentioned.

5.2.1.7 Shifting from local to global prominence: Is 'Little India' evolving into a renowned global destination?

The Indian diaspora in Bangkok has observed a distinct contrast in global recognition between the "Little India" located in the Pahurat area and Bangkok's neighboring Chinatown, Yaowarat, unlike what is seen in many other countries. Consequently, an organized effort has been launched to raise awareness about the historical settlement and identity of Indians in Pahurat, intricately intertwined with the Ong Ang Canal areas. These locations hold profound historical significance for the Indian communities residing in Thailand, serving as vibrant testaments to the enduring cultural exchanges and close-knit relationship between Thai and Indian societies. Furthermore, they vividly depict the lifestyle of the Indian community, leaving behind a palpable and resonant legacy that continues to thrive in the present era.

In a dedicated effort to highlight and celebrate this vibrant cultural heritage, the "Diwali Festival" is being organized as a significant event and in a grand scale in Bangkok since past two years.



During the Diwali celebrations, the India Thailand Association Bangkok, along with its network collaborators, invited attendees to partake in a walking tour of Little India. The tour included immersive experiences such as exploring the vibrant Sikh way of life at the local gurudwara, visiting a renowned Indian restaurant, and discovering essential offerings and idols central to the Diwali festival. Participants were encouraged to join in for a leisurely stroll and savor Thailand's first-ever samosa—an exquisite triangular pastry filled with delightful ingredients, expertly fried to perfection. The grand Diwali Festivals are being impeccably organized and graced by the presence of prominent leaders, including government representatives, Bangkok's governor, and various VIPs representing numerous India-Thailand organizations and associations.

While a substantial number of the Indian diaspora reside in Thailand, they identify as Thai citizens while also aspiring to elevate awareness of the 'Indian identity' on both a local and global scale, mirroring initiatives undertaken by other nations. This endeavor holds the potential to significantly amplify recognition in cultural and business domains on a broader spectrum.

Additionally, several universities and Thai organizations collaborate with the Indian diaspora communities to curate cultural events. These events showcase various aspects of Indian culture such as its diverse cuisine, vibrant music, traditional dances, captivating fashion shows, intricate henna paintings, and more. Moreover, they aim to impart socio-cultural knowledge regarding Indian markets for trade while also hosting networking events. These initiatives strive to enhance understanding of India's cultural wealth and foster stronger economic connections between nations.

5.2.1.8 Indian movies through streaming and digital platforms

Indian movies represent one of the oldest and most influential forms of soft power, resonating deeply with global audiences and garnering widespread appreciation. In today's digital landscape, individuals from both Indian and Thai communities, as well as foreigners, have easy access to Indian cinema through various digital platforms and streaming services, often at an affordable cost. This diverse array includes different genres and regional films, catering to specific language preferences.

An intriguing instance of this cultural impact was witnessed in Thailand with the release of the Indian film "Gangubai" on platforms like NETFLIX. This movie had a profound influence, particularly on Thai women, who were inspired to emulate Gangubai's iconic look by



adorning themselves in white sarees called 'Gangubai's fever'. Consequently, the saree shops in Pahurat, also known as 'Little India,' experienced a significant surge in demand for white sarees following the closure due to the Covid pandemic. Gangubai's portrayal not only captivated audiences but also played a pivotal role in revitalizing the economic prospects of Pahurat (Today Bizview, 2022).

Nevertheless, some Thai women might not associate the white saree with its traditional meanings; instead, they could wear it for enjoyment or to make a fashion statement, often complementing it with sunglasses and red lipstick for their social media uploads.

The Indian people may be surprised as to why Gangubai was popular in Thailand. In Thailand, the profession of 'sex work' remains illegal, a fact that many consider unjust. Consequently, there is significant interest among the populace in advocating for the legalization of sex work in Thailand, emphasizing issues of rights and fairness. This includes receiving protection as citizens of the country. Many people want society to gain a better understanding of this profession (www.Prachachat.net, 2022). Gangubai's story struck a chord at the right time in Thailand.

Moreover, social media platforms serve as a virtual meeting place for Indian movie enthusiasts in Thailand, allowing them to gather and share their love for Indian cinema. Furthermore, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a Thai company named JKN imported Indian series for broadcast on television channels, drawing the attention of both Thai and Indian-Thai audiences. This initiative sparked a resurgence of interest in Indian movies within the Thai community. However, the trend has somewhat weakened over time due to the extended duration of each series. In today's fast-paced world, people lead busy lives and might not have the time to follow such lengthy narratives. In addition, consumers now have numerous alternative channels to freely access a wide array of entertainment options, unlike in the past. Consequently, the intense competition among productions, content, and actors creates a saturated market, often referred to as a 'red ocean'.

6. Discussion

We acknowledge that religions, cultures, and their interconnected issues form the cornerstone of India's soft power, contributing significantly to the cultural diplomacy between



nations. The Indian diaspora has been pivotal in assuming roles as agents, actors, supporters, participants, and organizers in these spheres.

However, the influence of the Indian diaspora in Thailand may not be substantial, limiting their active involvement in Thai politics or their role as a significant link between Thailand and India in terms of foreign investments in both countries. The number of Indian diaspora or returnee diaspora members from Thailand investing in initiatives like *Make in India* remains low, consistent with the findings of Srinivas (2019) and Singh (2020). Instead, the majority of investors from Thailand are non-Indian Thais who are attracted to and interested in the various schemes promoted by the Government of India.

Hence, the soft power of India, propelled by the Indian diaspora in Thailand and fostered through the cultural diplomacy efforts between the two nations, has made a significant impact both within Thailand and emanating from India.

Despite the enduring historical and cultural ties between India and Thailand, this study underscores the successful deployment of India's soft power through cultural diplomacy, fostering a seamless acceptance between the two nations. It highlights India's significant role as a principal source of heritage and cultural influence in Thailand, persisting from ancient times to the present day. Consequently, there exists untapped potential to further elevate and enrich certain remarkable facets of Indian soft power within Thailand.

7. Conclusion

Throughout the extensive historical connection between India and Thailand, Indian traders played an active role, often accompanying Brahmanas to Siam (Thailand). This interaction led to a deep syncretism of specific Indian elements into Thai society, a process meticulously adopted by rulers and common citizens alike. As a result, a multitude of Indian religious and cultural influences, encompassing concepts like Deva Raja, languages, literature, administrative practices, arts, astronomy, architecture, tools, attire, and more, seamlessly integrated into Thai society.

These exchanges, deeply rooted in the social positions and available structures of the involved individuals, facilitated a deliberate syncretism. This syncretism was not imposed but rather embraced, marking a remarkable example of Indian soft power within this historical context, emphasizing choice and mutual cultural enrichment.



The initial influx of Indians into Siam occurred throughout the 20th century, referred to as 'the first wave.' In the late 20th century and extending into the early 21st century, a 'second wave' known as 'the new Indians' in business emerged, characterized by a notable focus on international expansion.

Siam (Thailand) had a welcoming policy that attracted many Indians due to being a free-colonized country in Southeast Asia. Numerous Indians migrated to Thailand, drawn by the opportunities it offered. Many of these migrants had Indian relatives already residing in Siam, which initially facilitated their transition. Additionally, King Rama V played a significant role by designating a settlement area named Pahurat, located close to the Grand Palace, for Indian migrants. This area is now known as 'Little India'. Some also moved to other provinces in the north of Thailand.

The Indian diaspora primarily engages in business activities while adhering strictly to their respective religions. As a result, three religions that originated in India—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism—have gained official recognition as three of the five national religions in Thailand. The Department of Religious Affairs, operating under the Ministry of Culture in Thailand, oversees and supports these religions. Each of these religions has its own highest governing body for supervision, which is structured as follows:

Buddhism is overseen by the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand

Hinduism is overseen by the Hindu Samaj and the Hindu Dhamma Sabha

Sikhism is overseen by Sri Guru Singh Sabha and Namdhari Sangat of Thailand

Islam is overseen by the Central Islamic Council Thailand

Christianity is overseen by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand, the Church of Christ in Thailand, and other sects.

While Buddhism is the majority religion in Thailand, its practices are intricately interwoven with local beliefs known as 'spirits' and infused with select elements of Hinduism, collectively referred to as the 'Thai religion'.

Thai Brahmanas hold significant positions within the Thai Royal Court, maintaining connections with India through their Vedic education in Tamil Nadu, supported by key figures from the RSS. Moreover, Thai Brahmanas also provide ceremonious services to laymen. Various



religious groups collaborate during formal functions, meetings, and conferences in Thailand. Notably, there is a lack of direct conflict among religions within the country.

Numerous significant Hindu rituals involve the use of idols representing various gods and goddesses, alongside ceremonies and festivals actively organized and encouraged by committees within Indian associations. Embracing these opportunities to learn, share, and participate as hosts fosters a sense of internal unity among Indian-Thais, Thais, and foreigners in these religious rituals and ceremonies.

Religions serve as a potent component of India's soft power, transcending boundaries of time and space. Strengthening these religious ties can extend beyond spirituality, potentially linking to other economic spheres. For instance, fostering the development of inter-religious tourist routes connecting India, Thailand, and specific ASEAN countries could be a promising endeavor. These routes, such as 'Hindu routes' or 'Buddhist routes,' could promote wellness tourism by integrating select religious practices like meditation, Yoga, and Ayurvedic treatments.

It is intriguing to note that numerous Indian diasporic women, irrespective of their religious backgrounds, establish wellness sanctuaries within their homes, places of worship, social networks, and workplaces, a departure from the findings of Kaur et al. (2018). Despite Sikhism's egalitarian ethos, patriarchal cultural norms frequently shape women's perspectives on their roles and status. The authors advocate for bolstering gender equality within the Sikh community, particularly within religious settings, as highlighted in the context of Malaysia.

Moreover, the Indian diaspora play pivotal roles in their religions, on committees and as believers. Many Indian diaspora integrate and participate in the Buddhist ceremonies in some Thai Buddhist events and functions, or even in their daily life. Kind hearted members of the Indian diaspora provide financial support to Thai monks for their higher education in some Thai universities.

Apart from individuals serving as agents of cultural diplomacy, the Government of India has consistently aligned itself with the policies of the Thai Government, nurturing a robust and interconnected cultural relationship between India and Thailand. This enduring commitment is exemplified through the establishment of the Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge (TBCL), an institution that has been pivotal in cultural exchange and dissemination for over 80 years. The Government of India has continuously supported the policies of the Thai Government, nurturing a robust and



deeply interconnected cultural relationship between India and Thailand. This enduring dedication is epitomized by the establishment and legacy of the Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge (TBCL), an institution that has played a pivotal role in cultural exchange and propagation for over 80 years.

Serving as a cornerstone for nurturing Indian-Thai connections, this lodge is upheld by committed committees comprising Indian-Thais and Thais working collaboratively on a voluntary basis, thereby enriching and perpetuating this vibrant cultural bond. The composition within the TBCL stands as a testament to its uniqueness, being one of the few such associations in the world.

Moreover, post-independence, the Government of India has prioritized cultural diplomacy by offering scholarships to international students to study in India. Numerous Thai monks and laymen have seized this opportunity through the ICCR scheme and others to pursue higher education in India. This initiative has enabled them to delve into subjects encompassing history, Buddhism, philosophy, languages and others empowering them to become proficient scholars. These well-equipped scholars have made significant contributions to various Thai offices and institutions across Thailand. India's use of educational exchange as a means for cultural influence stands as a remarkable demonstration of its soft power on the global stage.

Furthermore, several international days, including Non-Violence Day and Yoga Day, as well as Hindi Day and celebrations honoring esteemed Indian heroes, are actively acknowledged, promoted, and coordinated in Thailand. These events are supported and facilitated by the United Nations, Thailand's governmental bodies, the Embassy of India, host institutions, relevant associations, as well as the enthusiastic participation of Indian-Thais, Thais, and individuals from diverse nationalities.

The Swami Vivekananda Cultural Center, Embassy of India in Thailand functions as an official branch of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), serving as a representative body of the Government of India. Its core mission is to promote awareness of Indian heritage and culture while engaging the Thai public in various activities and training programs that address cross-cultural issues. This center serves as a significant conduit showcasing India's soft power on a global stage. It offers a vibrant social platform welcoming individuals interested in Indian culture to learn, actively participate, contribute, and regularly share their experiences.

Furthermore, with the rise in digital platforms, social media, and streaming services, the Indian diaspora and Thai enthusiasts of Indian cinema now have a plethora of options to swiftly



access and follow popular Indian movies. This quick accessibility has taken some Thai audiences by surprise. The influence of these movies can be profound, inspiring individuals to emulate the main characters, as evidenced by the "Gangubai fever" that led to a surge in demand for white sarees, resulting in them being sold out. This surge had a positive impact on the image of Indian movies and significantly boosted the economy of sari shops in Pahurat. Furthermore, its content was disseminated at the opportune moment in Thailand, coinciding with the legalization of sex work. Indian movies stand as a remarkable expression of India's soft power.

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