



A different outreach

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The Modi government's over-reliance on religion for diplomatic engagements is problematic

- Chief of the Army Staff General Bipin Rawat's argument that Pakistan must "develop as a secular state" to have any dialogue with India can be interpreted to convey two contradictory messages.
- The first is that India has no intention of engaging with Pakistan since there is no possibility of Pakistan being converted into a secular country in the foreseeable future.
- The second is that the Modi government's 'faith diplomacy' has obvious limitations, and may prove costly for India's national interests in the longer run.
- That diplomacy rooted in religion can be a double-edged sword became evident when the narrative of Pakistan's "googly" forcing the Modi government's presence at the groundbreaking ceremony of the Kartarpur corridor gained widespread currency.

Marketing brand India

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has enthusiastically used the religious dimension of India's soft power in order to market brand India.
- Yoga and Ayurveda cannot be strongly associated with religion; however, Hinduism and Buddhism are being used to promote India's interests in the neighbourhood as well as to reconstitute the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region.
- Mr. Modi has often made visits to Hindu and Buddhist shrines in the neighbourhood, apparently to counter China's promotion of Buddhism.
- India hosted Sri Lankan military personnel and their families in Bodhi Gaya last year which was projected as an innovative way of wooing Sri Lanka back into India's geopolitical orbit.
- Serious attempts are also being made to encourage Nepal to reciprocate India's attempts to forge Hindu-based civilisational bonds with the country.

- Pakistan has been a master manipulator of religion to achieve its goals.
- If the Modi government believed that the success of the Kartarpur corridor project would allow it the elbow room to expand Sikh diplomacy to other holy sites, it was mistaken.
- The proponents of Hindutva ideology believe that India's identity is made up of Hinduism and other religious faiths which originated from Indian soil, such as Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism.
- Since the Modi government has given primacy to Hinduism and Buddhism for diplomatic outreach, quietly ignoring the rich Indian legacy of Sufi Islam, it could not afford to be seen denying India's Sikh community an opportunity to visit the Kartarpur shrine when Pakistan seemed willing to roll out a red carpet for them.

The impression Pakistan created

- India made it clear that the opening of the corridor can't be the basis of a thaw between the two countries.
- However, Pakistan seems to have created an impression of generosity towards all Sikhs living in India, as well as projected itself as a champion of reconciliation.
- The Modi government seems to have become a victim of its own over-reliance on religion for diplomatic engagements.
- There have been concerns that the government has been undermining India's secular foundations.
- It is time to ask whether the government's eagerness in tapping India's 'original' religions as diplomatic resource has promoted India's interests or restrained its actions.

The Hindu

