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India Blog Series: Back to Basics: Public Diplomacy and Indian Heritage ^[1]

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As a part of the mandate for public diplomacy in the Ministry of External Affairs, the Division is required to conduct activities engaging and educating Indians about government policies and Indian culture – a form of internal public diplomacy. By investing in the education of citizens, especially about national and foreign cultures, the government helps create effective citizen diplomats. For example, in the U.S., track II diplomacy has worked to stave off conflicts and encourage peace talks with other countries. However, these citizens would not have been useful without the knowledge of American interests and history, as well as knowledge of the world around them.

Video From Public Diplomacy Division on Indian History

Globally-aware citizens make for better ambassadors and for a more active democracy. Internal public diplomacy is a tool for producing more informed citizens prepared for the challenges of globalization such as multicultural workplaces and the homogenization of cultures. Additionally, citizens that understand their own history are better able to participate in policy decisions, and by becoming more civically engaged, ensure that the external image of their nation reflects their beliefs. Creating opportunities for the Indian populace to become actively interested in their country is a critical prerequisite for them to function as citizen diplomats for India.

One of the first forms of Indian public diplomacy was through Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). The ICCR invited guests in the arts to demonstrate Indian heritage to teach foreigners about India. Live dance and music programs were vehicles for engaging foreign audiences, as opposed to simply seeing pictures in a book



With similar logic, Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a Hindu organization that advocates for practical spirituality through social service, built Akshardham. Akshardham is a temple complex complete with exhibits, gardens, boats, and a cinema theater with information on thousands of years of Indian heritage. Visitors are encouraged to explore the grounds on boat rides and by walking through gardens filled with statues of Indian luminaries such as Mahatma Gandhi and Ashoka the Great. The cinema theater plays educational movies on Indian culture and Hindu heritage. Akshardham is an all-in-one type destination dedicated to teaching visitors about the origins of India and its culture. Visitors get to experience India's culture and learn more about Hinduism, which allows them to create a personal, lasting connection to history.

Citizens are authentic communicators for the realities of India, and if they are knowledgeable about cultural heritage, they can accurately communicate the story of India. By supporting such activities and leveraging the many historical sites that speak to the country's rich heritage, the PD Division can more easily fulfill its mandate to engage Indians in communicating who and what India is all about. The burden of shaping the image of India and expressing it to foreign publics is taken off of the shoulders of one government department if every citizen can function as a cultural ambassador.

The India: Inside Out team looks forward to visiting Akshardham and other incredible landmarks of India!

Aparajitha Vadlamannati is a Master's of Public Diplomacy student at USC, graduating in May 2012. She is also the President of the Association of Public Diplomacy Scholars and a senior editor on the Public Diplomacy Magazine board. Aparajitha is interested in studying U.S.-India relations and Indian government public diplomacy. She hopes that participating in the India: Inside Out Project will contribute to her knowledge through primary research on both topics.
