International Relations · GS - II

To what extent can cultural diplomacy strengthen India's engagement with Central Asian countries and other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation? Examine its opportunities and limitations.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
DAILY PRACTICE 23/11/2026	GS - II	International Relations

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Cultural diplomacy, civilisational links, SCO, manuscript preservation, heritage networks, people-to-people contacts, soft power, regional cooperation, geopolitical differences

Model Answer

Introduction

Cultural diplomacy uses shared heritage, language, education and artistic exchanges to strengthen international relations. India's engagement through the SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum reflects an effort to complement strategic and economic cooperation with cultural connectivity.

Opportunities for India

1. **Civilisational linkages:** Historical trade routes, Buddhism, Sufism and shared architectural traditions provide a foundation for engagement with Central Asia.
2. **Heritage preservation:** Joint manuscript digitisation, conservation and research can strengthen academic and institutional cooperation.

3. **Soft power:** Cultural festivals, translation initiatives and youth exchanges can improve India's visibility and mutual understanding.
4. **Regional cooperation:** An SCO heritage network can create platforms for collaboration among museums, universities and cultural institutions.
5. **People-to-people relations:** Educational and cultural exchanges can build long-term societal connections beyond formal diplomacy.

Limitations

- Divergent political and strategic interests among SCO members.
- Limited institutional funding and implementation mechanisms.
- Language barriers and uneven cultural infrastructure.
- Risk of symbolic declarations without measurable outcomes.

Way Forward

India should establish clear project timelines, joint research grants, digital heritage repositories and regular youth and academic exchange programmes. Initiatives should remain inclusive and depoliticised.

Conclusion

Cultural diplomacy cannot replace strategic engagement, but it can create trust and durable societal connections. Converting shared heritage into sustained institutional cooperation can strengthen India's regional engagement.

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