

THE INVESTMENT OF SOFT POWER – Shaping Global Influence Through Culture and Diplomacy

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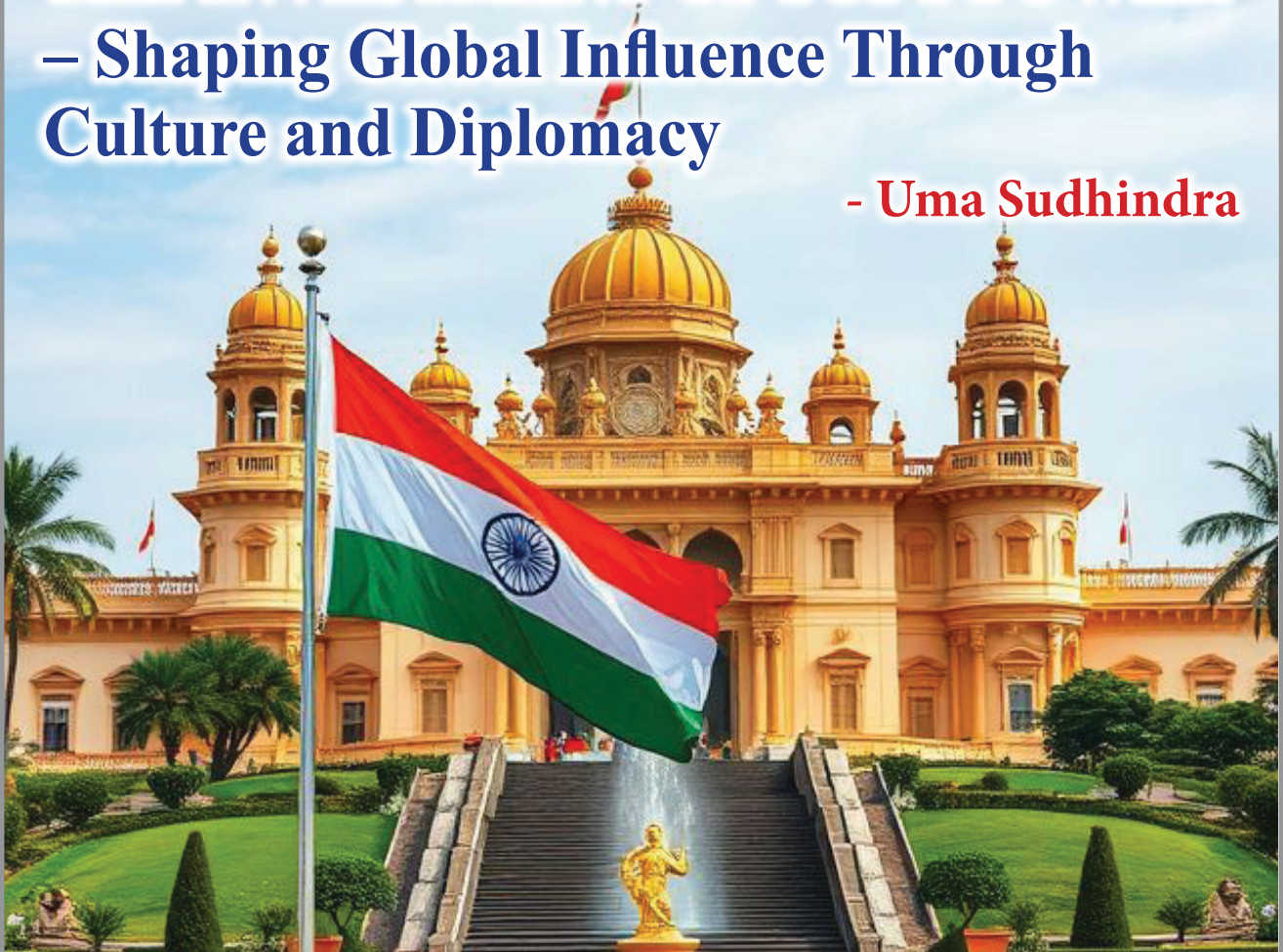


Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Understanding Soft Power	4
The Legacy of India's Soft Power	5
Assessing India's Use of Soft Power	7
Cultural & Religious Soft Power	8
The Soft Power of Indian Diaspora	14
India's Public Diplomacy – Components and Objectives	14
Conclusion	17

Key Takeaways

- ▶ **Soft Power:** Coined by Joseph Nye, soft power relies on attraction through culture, values, and policies, distinct from coercion or payments in diplomacy.
- ▶ **Role of Diaspora:** India's global diaspora significantly contributes to cultural dissemination and diplomatic efforts, as seen in the U.S.-India nuclear deal.
- ▶ **India's Civilizational Diplomacy:** India's rich cultural heritage, ancient knowledge systems, and spiritual traditions have historically contributed to its global influence.
- ▶ **Integration of Soft Power:** Soft power complements official foreign policy, aligning public diplomacy with national objectives.
- ▶ **Religious and Cultural Tourism:** Sites like Bodh Gaya and events like Kumbh Mela attract global attention, showcasing India's spiritual and cultural strengths.
- ▶ **Digital and Economic Transformation:** India's rapid tech growth, including mobile connectivity, exemplifies its modernization and global influence.
- ▶ **Health and Wellness Leadership:** India excels in wellness tourism with Ayurveda, yoga, and cost-effective medical treatments.
- ▶ **Strategic Focus:** Leveraging historical and cultural assets, India aims to position itself among the top soft power nations globally.

Introduction

“**W**hat is soft power? It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises out of the attractiveness of the country's culture, political ideas, economics & policies.”

– **Joseph S Nye Jr.**

The term soft power was coined by Joseph Nye in 1990 and is a relatively new phrase in international relations. This is not to say that soft power did not exist earlier. It did but was largely known as Cultural Diplomacy or Civilizational

Diplomacy. Friendships between countries developed as they projected their cultural and non-commercial sides to each other, thereby indirectly helping them to pursue their national interests.

Soft power as defined by Nye was used to describe the extraordinary strengths of the United States that went beyond American dominance. Power is the ability to alter the behaviour of others to get what you want. According to Nye in his book, **Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power**, there are three ways to demonstrate power: coercion (sticks), inducement (carrots) and attraction (soft power).



If countries can attract others, they economize on carrots & sticks. To quote Nye again,

The soft power of a country primarily rests on three resources: its culture in places where it is attractive to others; its political values when it lives up to them at home and abroad; and its foreign policies when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.

In his first book, Joseph Nye wrote about the US as the archetypal exponent of soft power as the world used products made in the US in their everyday lives – Microsoft, Intel, IBM, Apple, MTV, Coca Cola, Kellogg's, McDonalds, Pizza King, Starbucks to name a few. These products were the emblems of the

American lifestyle, attracted generations to the US and helped promote the American agenda. Washington had long ago realised that deployment of soft and hard power was equally important to maintain America's position as the superpower. In his second book, **The Paradox of American Power**, Nye takes the analysis of soft power beyond the United States to other countries. In today's information era, he writes three types of countries are like to gain soft power and thereby succeed,

Those whose dominant cultures and ideals are closer to prevailing global norms which today emphasize liberalism, pluralism and autonomy; those with the most accessed multiple channels of communication and thus

more influence over how issues are framed and those whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international performance.

When viewed from this lens, we realise that several countries have pursued soft power with success for decades. In 1870 France lost the war to Prussia and to rebuild the country's shattered morale and enhance its prestige, France started the Alliance Francaise to promote French language, culture and literature throughout the world. Similarly, the UK has the British Council, Germany has Goethe Institutes/Max Mueller Bhavan, Spain has Cervantes Institute and China followed suit with the Confucius Institutes. However, soft power does not rely on government initiatives alone. Hollywood, James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, MTV, burgers, fries, fish n chips, croissants, noodles & fried rice have done more in terms of contributing to the attractiveness of those countries than just the institutes. As Nye himself puts it, **“soft power is created partly by governments and partly in spite of governments.”**

Understanding Soft Power

Recently, besides Joseph Nye, others have tried to give various names to the same concept. Hillary Clinton called it “Smart Power” meaning a clever mixture of traditional military, political and economic powers combined with the softer aspects of culture and humanitarian approaches. “Sharp Power” is another term that was used for some time. Both terms could not last long enough to make an impact.

An important point to consider before

delving deeper into India's soft power capabilities and projection is to understand whether soft power is a product or a process or both. Typecasting culture, art, music and food as only soft power and military as only hard power may lead to contradictions and misunderstanding. Let us examine certain circumstances.

- Generally military power is considered hard power and is not included in the realm of soft power. However, the same military power, when used for peacekeeping and disaster relief, takes on a completely different colour as it comes under humanitarian aid and welfare activities.
- Projecting a country's culture in other countries through various channels is laudable. The same projection can be interpreted as cultural imperialism or hegemony when the approach is aggressive, and the intentions are not so honourable. We are familiar with this kind of imperialism when colonies were being developed across the world with the famous quote, “It is the white man's burden to civilise the natives.”

Hence, it is important to see how one uses the instruments of soft power. It is equally important to see how the other side or the world views it. Soft power ultimately becomes an ongoing process with the national interest remaining the same, yet the instruments can change based on the circumstances.

Soft power has become the main instrument in public diplomacy. Soft power initiatives complement official diplomatic efforts, ultimately aimed at increasing and enhancing knowledge and appreciation of the country in foreign shores. The promotion of a country's soft power is a means to meet its foreign policy objectives. It will be good to always remember that public diplomacy cannot achieve its aim if it is inconsistent with the nation's foreign policy.

The three main factors determining any country's foreign policy are:

- **Geography** – largely a fixed component as one cannot choose one's neighbours. Neighbourhood policy becomes a vital part of international relations for any nation. Engagements or conflicts are pronounced in any neighbourly bi-lateral relationships, leading to strong bonds or rivalries.
- **History** – this factor determines mindsets, values, ideologies, policies and vision for countries. Many of the issues a country faces are a product of its history and so are the linkages to other countries.
- **Capabilities** – are what a nation acquires over a period. These could be military, technological, or economic capabilities. Foreign policy, therefore, evolves with new capabilities and new interests. Countries think beyond the neighbourhood giving rise to “extended neighbourhood”, “regional blocs”, “strategic alignments” and the likes.

Capabilities become relevant in the context of soft power. Some questions that constantly need answers are:

- How do we protect our national interests?
- What instruments do we use?
- What role does the country play in a multipolar world?
- What strategic alignments work in the nation's favour?

The Legacy of India's Soft Power

As an ancient civilization India has influenced cultures in the east and west for centuries and simultaneously has assimilated ideas from foreign cultures, most notably Arabic, Persian and European. Home to one of the oldest surviving civilizations and religion, India was always the hub of knowledge and education. Its ancient roots continue to provide wisdom and learning. The interplay between the continuity of Indus Valley Civilization of 3000 BC to the Vedic Period of 1500 BC to the disruptions of Middle Eastern invasions and the British colonial era means that Indian intellectual traditions have been reinvigorated and revitalized by the constant exposure to other cultures. Jawaharlal Nehru in 1947 at the Asian Relations Conference said, “streams of cultures have come to India from the West and East and been absorbed in India, producing the rich and variegated culture of the country today.”

Speaking of India's sacred geography, Diana Eck the Harvard scholar has stated India is a land linked not by the

power of the kings and governments but by the footprints of pilgrims and scholars. Indian ideas have travelled across the globe - from the peaceful spread of Buddhism during 5th & 6th century BC in Asia to Gandhian message of non-violence in the 20th century to Vasudaiva Kutumbakam philosophy of the Maha Upanishads being espoused by Narendra Modi - enriching & engaging and absorbing & assimilating.

At the heart of all these exchanges between Indian kings, scholars, court poets & writers and even the common man was the quintessential quest for knowledge, information and the idea of co-existence as shown in the hallowed halls of the Nalanda University from 427 AD to 1200 AD.

Foreign policy outcomes are never unilateral decisions as their success depends on other countries. While soft power is a necessary condition for achieving foreign policy goals, it is not the only sufficient condition. Soft power is known to “lubricate” the various instruments of diplomacy. It is important to remember that activities coming under soft power contribute to foreign policy but by themselves do not amount to policy. One of the best ways to make sense of the present and prepare for the future is by understanding the past. In this context, Indian history and its texts like Mahabharat the epic and later Artha Shastra, an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy, elaborate several concepts crucial and critical in governance and diplomacy. Chanakya states that the **Shadgunyas or the Six Measures of**

Foreign Policy are fundamental for any nation state to understand and adopt. The Shadgunyas are listed as:

- Sandhi - peace treaty or alliance.
- Vighraha - hostility or war.
- Asana - neutrality or passive approach.
- Yana - prepare for war.
- Samashraya - seeking alliance with a stronger power.
- Dvaidhibhava - dual policy.

The role of diplomacy as a tool of negotiation comes up repeatedly in our ancient texts. One of the most important and illustrative examples emerges from Krishna's negotiation ability in the court of Dhritarashtra where he uses the following and successfully places the onus of responsibility of past misdemeanours on the Kauravas:

- Sama – conciliation.
- Dana – gifts or incentives.
- Bheda – sowing differences or creating a divide.
- Danda – punishment or force.

The Indian way of conceptualising war, soldiering, diplomacy, foreign policy and using soft power comes from a rich and ancient tradition based on such texts. Yesterday we considered long range



artillery superior, today it is the age of drones and tomorrow something else will become the game changer. It will be wise to remember that the principles of diplomacy will remain the same while the context may change.

Assessing India's Use of Soft Power

The British historian EP Thomas wrote "The heritage of diversity is what perhaps makes India the most important country for the future of the world. All the convergent influences run through this society. There is not a thought that runs in the East or West that is not active in some Indian mind." The Indian mind has been shaped by myriad diverse forces: ancient Hindu tradition, myth and scriptures, aggressive Islamic forces, educational approach of Christianity, commercial conquest by colonisers, and the result today is unique. Observers from across the globe were surprised by our survival as a pluralistic state from the 50's through 70's without understanding that it is the same pluralism that emerges as an everyday reality for Indians. Simply put, it is an inevitable choice due to India's geography, reiterated by its history and it is most definitely who Indians are.

Earlier, India's regional concerns and geo strategic views had always been underplayed in the larger context not only by India herself, but also by the west. The last 15 years have seen a significant shift in this, more so, in the last few years. India's newly recognised global economic significance and potential greatly lends weight to the country's international profile. In seeking to improve the frayed ties with her neighbours, recently India has been experimenting

with asymmetric diplomacy. From Nehru onwards, civilizational and other historic links were much emphasised in India's declaratory neighbourhood diplomacy. It is only recently that India's "pull" has become a strong one, (eliciting mixed emotions) with its economic progress, unmatched to date in most of the immediate neighbouring countries. The stereotypical image of underdeveloped, impoverished India has now been removed by the impression of a modern and dynamic economy attracting now foreign investments and workers from different parts of the world and the return of NRIs.

India has consistently attracted intellectuals and common folk from across the globe. At the most basic level soft power is all about winning the hearts and minds of people. The Indic elements of geography, history and its capabilities have always ignited the curious minds and we find more and more Indologists or India observers/analysts. Two events come to mind with India becoming popular in the minds of the global population.

The first was when Mahatma Gandhi called for nonviolent non cooperation which was seen as the new paradigm to fight injustice and oppression. So much so that the same approach was adopted by Martin Luther King and James Bevel in their campaigns to win civil rights for African Americans, Nelson Mandela initially to fight apartheid, Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia or Czechia as it is called today and in recent times, the nonviolent campaign of Leymah Gwobee and the women of Liberia to end their 14-year-old civil war.



The second happened during the 1960's and the Hippie Movement when the Western interest in yoga, meditation, classical music and the spirituality of India increased so much that celebrities made regular trips to India to find their gurus and follow the path of spirituality. In both the above cases, governments of the day had very little to do with promoting these softer aspects and putting Brand India on the global map.

In assessing India's strengths and use of soft power we must not forget that soft power is both a process and a product. The judicious mix of both is what is going to help position India based on national interests and the larger geopolitical landscape.

Cultural & Religious Soft Power

India is fortunate to be home to all the major religions of the world. Four are indigenous to the country – Hinduism,

Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Four others came from other parts of the world – Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. This is an incentive for the religious minded and spiritually inclined foreigners to visit India and seek what they want. The coverage by the international media of the Kumbh Mela is testimony to the interest and admiration expressed by other countries as to how it is managed and how India has kept the tradition alive for centuries.

Religious tourism is a major factor in our external relations. India is the most favoured and sacred place for Buddhists from across the world. There is a steady stream of visitors from all countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia where Buddhism is practised by a reasonably large populace. Although the Buddhist population in India is less when compared to other religions, India has a few factors in favour to claim its legitimacy for Buddhist diplomacy.



First, the roots of Buddhism are in India giving it a unique historical legitimacy. Second, many important Buddhist sites exist in India – Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, Sarnath. Third, India’s reputation as the protector of the oppressed by allowing the Dalai Lama and Tibetans to settle in Dharamshala and other places across the country.

India also hosted the “Shared Buddhist History” international conference in March 2023, which includes the SCO members. There is an increased momentum to associated educational, cultural and economic activities by highlighting the shared Buddhist history between India and other Asian countries. A government approved \$15 million grant towards refurbishing and building Buddhist temples, archaeological collaborations and cultural exchanges in Sri Lanka, the increasing ties between India and Japan again signifying the shared civilizational bond are some of the recent examples of the present

Modi led government is cementing its soft power approach.

Christianity and Judaism also have a very long history in India which became the home to many Jews who were persecuted in other countries. Southern India is replete with several ancient churches and synagogues that hold not just religious significance but also architectural worth. Similarly, with respect to Islam, there are places of worship like dargahs of Moinuddin Chishti and Nizamuddin Aulia which are frequented by not only Muslims but by people of other faiths too. Islamic & Persian architecture has been the hallmark of so many heritage monuments in India which are part of the tourism circuit.

The spiritual connection between India and a large population across the world through yoga and meditation is constantly growing. The health and wellness benefits of both are being

researched by practitioners, doctors and scientists in many countries and being shared everywhere. The Government of India pushed for June 21st to be declared by the UN as International Yoga Day and today one sees the celebration of this important day globally.

The celebrated British historian AL Basham narrates an interesting episode in his book *The Wonder that was India*, “According to the 11th century Persian poet Firdusi, the 5th century Sasanian king Baharam Gur, invited 10,000 Indian musicians, gave them cattle, corn and land to settle down in his kingdom so that they could entertain his subjects who had complained that music and dance remained the pleasures of the rich.” The importance of music and dance in India has a long-recorded history forming a significant part of its cultural fabric, one for which it was fabled in the world. Indian Council for Cultural Relations or ICCR under the Ministry of External Affairs does some pioneering work in promoting Indian culture through various programs, events and festivals. However, more resources must be allocated, and energies need to be channelled to promote our composite culture. The government must provide the infrastructure and let the private sector curate projects and showcase them. In 1992 the government started The Nehru Centre which acts as the cultural wing of the High Commission of India. We should have Nehru Centres across the world and get into a PPP model of promoting cultural diplomacy.

Such Centres can serve as catalysts for the locals and visiting Indians to perform or screen their work, thus enabling foreigners to see the products of our rich

heritage and culture. This must proudly reflect the multi religious identities of our people, the diversity in our languages, and myriad manifestations of our creative energies. Only then will it be truly Indic in its representation. Soft power is not only what we display or exhibit, but also rather what others see and perceive. This constant interplay is what makes cultural diplomacy an interesting process.

Bollywood has brought its glitzy and ritzy brand of entertainment to many countries. Not only are Indian movies and television shows popular with the NRIs but have also become entertainment staples in countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bulgaria, Senegal, Kenya, Malaysia, Syria, Egypt and many island nations. There was a time when one could trade postcards and posters of Bollywood celebrities for shoes, fabric and bags in the old souks of Cairo, in Damascus the only life-sized posters publicly displayed besides President Hafez al Assad was Amitabh Bachchan. The number of Bollywood dance videos



made by youngsters from Nigeria, Kenya, Korea are a testimony to how popular mainstream Indian film music is in these countries. Some of these young social media celebrities have even met the Prime Minister of India. For over two decades Raj Kapoor was the Indian icon every Russian was in love with. Even today Russian ballet troupes perform to some of his old songs in Indo-Russian cultural events.

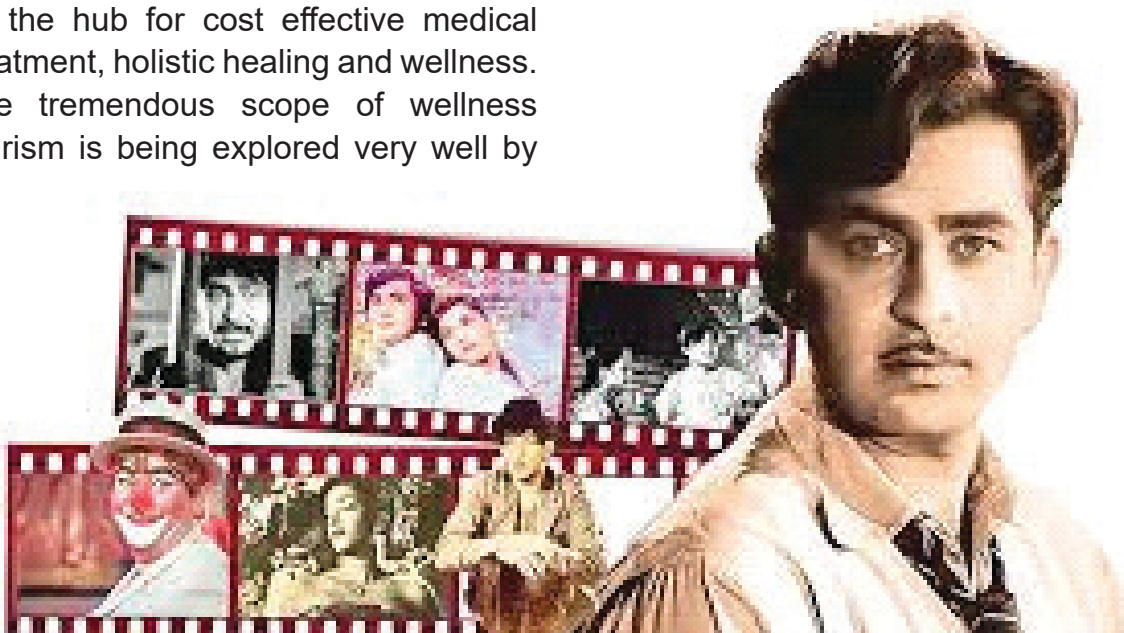
Indian cuisine has hit the high note with celebrities from India investing in the food business in other countries. In the UK, Indian restaurants provide more employment than any other in the service sector. Indian chefs are winning the prestigious Michelin star for their creativity and authenticity. Chefs Vikas Khanna, Atul Kochar, Garima Arora, Vineet Bhatia, Sriram Aylur, Sriji Gopinath, Chetan Shetty, Vijay Kumar and Alfred Prasad are some very prominent names from the world of cuisine.

● Health and Wellness

India has done well to position itself as the hub for cost effective medical treatment, holistic healing and wellness. The tremendous scope of wellness tourism is being explored very well by

the Indian healthcare segment and the facilities are increasing day by day. India is perceived as the true home of the modern wellness movement given the legacy of Ayurveda, yoga, plant-based Satvik diets, zero waste and sustainable farming and meditation. India attracts people from all over the world for medical treatment, holistic healing and general wellbeing. The following factors work in India's favour:

- Expertise in alternate therapies and holistic healing along with allopathic treatments.
- Cost effective treatments in comparison to the Western world.
- Low-cost luxury and semi luxury accommodation.
- Well networked transportation system in the cities and towns.
- Good communication infrastructure.
- Availability of English-speaking staff.



Experts have predicted a 110% growth in the medical tourism market for India. In 2024 alone the Indian wellness tourism market is expected to reach US\$19.43 billion. COVID 19 saw India step up and take charge of healthcare logistics, vaccine production, availability of medicines, PPE equipment, masks, and hospital supplies. It was a wake-up call and India set an example for the rest of the world as it embraced the crucial role of wellness and healing. This triggered a 180-degree transformation in people's attitude to wellbeing. More and more working professionals are turning to wellness for rejuvenation, revitalizing and unwinding and



millennials are simply craving wellness travel. Wellness today extends way beyond the realms of hospitality and recreation, gaining traction among various stakeholders such as corporates, schools, residential communities, senior citizens and others. This signals a broader movement amplifying the paradigm shift towards holistic wellness and the quest for collective wellbeing.

● Educational & Academic Soft Power

India has always been the hub of learning and knowledge. This needs to be strengthened by both public and private initiatives. The last few years have seen private Indian educational institutions start campuses abroad to encourage locals and the Indian diaspora to pursue higher education.

ICCR has been giving scholarships to students from Africa, South America and some Asian countries to study in India. In contemporary times the efforts of IITs, NITs and IIMs have been lauded for their contribution in the fields of STEM and management. Indian higher education institutes play a vital role in propagating India's culture and are augmented as one of the primary tools of soft power. The Ivy League universities did exactly the same in the 20th century. A degree from these universities was much coveted and laid the foundation for the big American dream.

To promote cultural knowledge, institutes often organise programs, workshops, seminars and festivals to showcase India's diversity. These initiatives not only enrich the experience of international students but also become engaging platforms for intercultural dialogues. Despite some of these efforts, Indian education diplomacy is woefully lagging behind some of the other countries where Indian students prefer to go. This is one of the least explored tools of soft power.

Approximately 75,000 foreign students are catered to by India in comparison to the 7-8 lakh Indian students going to the USA & Canada for higher studies. The global education market is expanding rapidly, and education diplomacy contributes to the domestic economy and in the long run creates tremendous good will among foreign students. The same foreign students emerge as carriers of India's soft power.

India's collaboration with South Korea, Australia, Taiwan, Singapore and Japan is commendable in the education sector. The expanding horizon for the private sector can help in this outreach program but requires strict regulations regarding course fees, fee structure, and quality of education. The biggest roadblock is financial limitation, and the Central government is way behind of the target of 6% of the total budget. Education diplomacy has the potential to grow like Health & Wellness Tourism but has a long way to go with conducive efforts and cooperation.

● Sports as Soft Power

Sports transcends borders and languages serving as a bridge between nations. The power of sports diplomacy lies in its ability to foster strong relationships between people and societies. The people to people connect is a strong tool in cultural diplomacy and nothing brings it out like sports.

The idea of utilising sports as a relationship building tool dates back to the Greeks who through the Truce established in 9th century BC between Greek monarchs of Elis, Pisa, Sparta and Delphi to allow safe travels for athletes, artists and families to participate in the Olympics. Sport was rediscovered by politics in the early 20th century after the Olympic Games was revived in 1896. Although sports is not the last stop in diplomacy, it is leveraged effectively between two nations. Ping pong diplomacy of China with the US, pin-down policy between Iran and US, North and South Korea's unified team at PyeongChang Winter Olympics are a few examples.



Since independence India has used sports to promote itself despite the little experience it had in the initial years. Hosting the 1st and 9th Asian Games in 1951 and 1982 respectively, the 20th Commonwealth Games in 2010, Indian Grand Prix F1 in 2011, forming the Indian Premier League in cricket in 2008 and successfully conducting it every year are all testimony to India's commitment to sport and people relationships.

Cricket for long has been the religion of Indians world over. It is one game that unifies the country and brings about a fervour unmatched anywhere. Any kind of cricket diplomacy cannot be discussed without bringing India-Pakistan into it. Tournaments between the two countries have helped keep the gates open for its citizens to connect. Even today, diehard cricket fans state that if not for the partition, the sub-continent would have had the strongest team in the world. Under Track II diplomacy, Indian policy makers and diplomats have used cricket as a leverage with Pakistan. Any violent attack on Indian soil with a connection to Pakistan, India has cancelled matches to condemn the events.

Hosting sporting events is understood as a way for cities and nations to present themselves on the world stage and strategically brand themselves to show economic achievements and diplomatic stature. These mega events attract investments and new audiences for consumption. India hosting international sports events will allow it to put forward its socioeconomic and political capability besides the nation building image in the international arena.

The Soft Power of Indian Diaspora

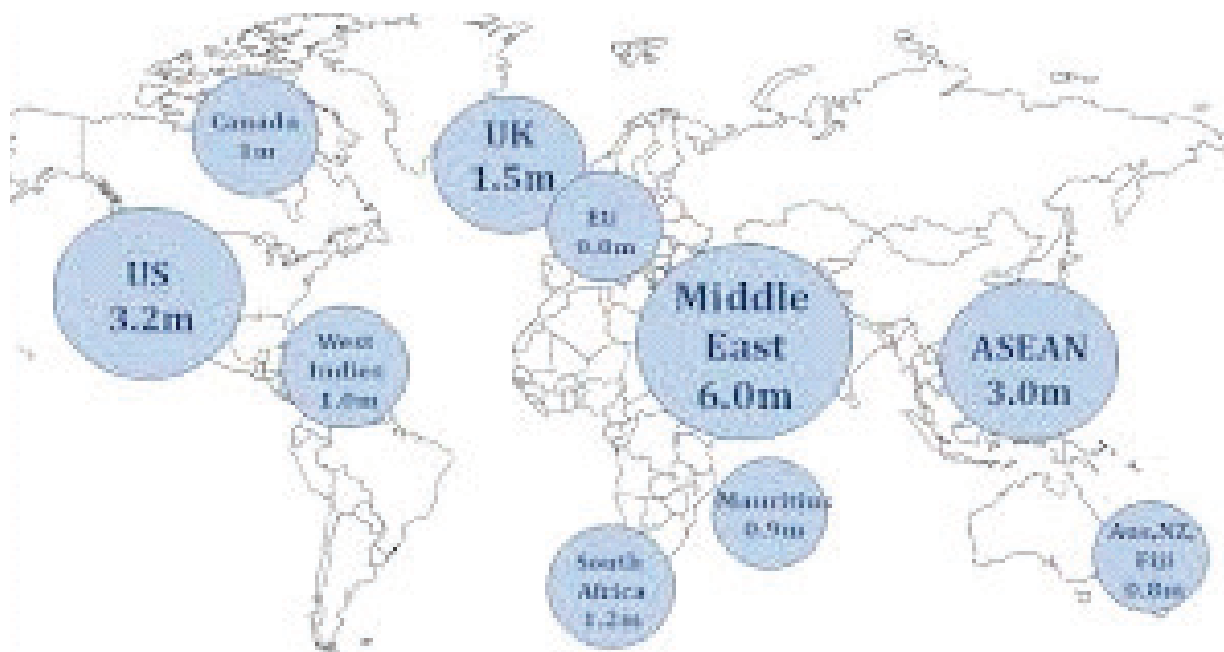
"Today the world is keen to engage with India and our diaspora can play an important role in furthering the country's bond with the world. At the same time, it is necessary for us also to strengthen our bond with the Indian diaspora. We should not view them in terms of 'Sankhya' but in terms of 'Shakti'. In doing so, we can convert the problem of 'Brain Drain' into 'Brain Gain'." This statement was made by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Indian diaspora includes Non-Resident Indian (NRI) and Person of Indian Origin (PIO) and together they are about 21 million strong. That is a huge number by any standard and are spread across all continents, countries, has grown in stature, fame, and become influential and prosperous over the decades. They not only help in disseminating Indian culture but also in promoting foreign policy goals. The best example of this was during US-India Nuclear Deal negotiations in the first decade of this century. Many influential; Indians lobbied with American Senators and Congressmen to get them to see out point of view.

The Indian diaspora is a real asset as more and more become successful in their fields in other countries.

India's Public Diplomacy – Components and Objectives

Navdeep Suri, who retired as Indian Ambassador to UAE outlined the key elements adopted by India to develop a public diplomacy agenda. These include:



- Developing a positive narrative
- Projecting soft power
- Digital diplomacy
- Hosting visitors
- Image and branding
- Broadcasting
- Coordination and strategic communication

An institutional framework to engage with foreigners has been developed over a period to support the above key elements. The primary agencies under the MEA involved in maintain Indian public diplomacy abroad are:

- Overseas Indian Affairs Division (OIA)
- External Publicity & Public Diplomacy Division (XPD)
- Development Partnership Administration Division (DPA)

Two autonomous organizations, the ICCR and ICWA, both of which are more than 50 years old are also engaged in public diplomacy activities.

In a multipolar world, the competition between countries for investments, resources and markets is intense. If a country can market itself as an attractive destination for investments by differentiating itself from others it stands a good chance of succeeding in this competition. To market themselves countries would need to improve their standing, develop a positive image and reputation for themselves. In other words, a country should develop a “brand” for itself.

Most countries are unhappy with the perceptions foreigners have about their image or reputation. Either the country suffers from a bad image or reputation or has an outdated projection of image. The latter happens when there are rapid socioeconomic changes in recent times. India is one such country. From the image of a land of snake charmers

and elephants, it has taken India a lot of efforts through public diplomacy to present an image of a country capable of producing high quality products and services for exports, technological innovation and skilled workforce. A dialogue must be established involving external actors in the development of the positive new image of the country so public diplomacy does not turn into propaganda.



Citizens must be made aware of the achievements of the ordinary people living amongst them as opposed to only government initiatives and programs. They must feel proud of these accomplishments and buy into the narrative of a changing country destined for greatness before the international audiences start accepting this image. The most effective way to shape perceptions of the external audiences is to communicate recent achievements to bring the image of the country in line with the current realities. This branding exercise should be ongoing and in context with the cultural heritage of the country. Culture is the most authentic

representation of a country. People may tend to gloss over achievements as momentary, but it is difficult to ignore the uniqueness and richness of any culture.

India has undertaken a combination of 'destination branding' and 'nation branding' campaign. One of the earlier efforts involved the creation of India Brand Equity Creation or IBEF, a trust established by the Ministry of Commerce in 1996. IBEF works with domestic and global actors to promote "Brand India". In 2006 IBEF launched the successful "India Everywhere" campaign at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The goal was to portray India as a country that had transformed from a relatively closed economy to a state that welcomed investments, trade and commerce from all corners of the world.

Prior to this in 2002 the Ministry of Tourism launched the "Incredible India" campaign which by far has been the most successful branding exercise. The initiative was designed to create a very distinctive identity for the country. For 22 years the campaign has worked on promoting tourism in India as an enriching experience for tourists from all over the world.

In 2014, the Modi government started "Make in India" designed to encourage international companies to manufacture their products in India and portray India as an attractive destination for investments. Besides being a Government of India initiative, there has been tremendous encouragement to the states internally to attract their own investments and grow the state economies. Both Make in India and



Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EETPC) have made their presence felt in the Hannover Messe in Germany, the world's largest trade fairs where India is the official partner country. The government has made substantial investments in resources and projects to enhance India's capabilities in the realm of soft power. The programs and incentives under the "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" campaign, an umbrella concept for India to become self-reliant, efficient, competitive and resilient in a dynamic world economy, encourage the startups and MSMEs to contribute to the GDP. India has also increased the number of embassies abroad, reviving ties with regional alliances like ASEAN, BIMSTEC and SAARC and becoming a valued partner in QUAD. The impact of these efforts may take time to materialise but the strategic and commercial benefits for India are plenty.

Conclusion

Soft power is one arrow in a country's quiver of national security. It is not an all-purpose solution. While India

leverages its soft power globally, it must simultaneously ensure that Indians are well fed, healthy, educated and secure not just from acts of terrorism but also the terror of poverty, ill health and hunger. Along with this India must also preserve its precious pluralism which is its civilizational asset. Pluralist India must balance its plural expressions of its many identities. This is the Indian culture that gives India its soft power and that culture must be defended & protected against all forces of intolerance and bigotry inside and outside the country.

In the initial years after independence, Indian foreign policy was couched in the language of transcendent moral principle. Nehruvian New Delhi seemed to take greater satisfaction in being right than in being diplomatic, according to Dr Shashi Tharoor. Over time the glow of the independence struggle began to dull, and the harsh realities of national interest became the yardstick to express and conduct our foreign policy, the government had to abandon the moral high ground and formulations. India's adversaries gained advantages in the

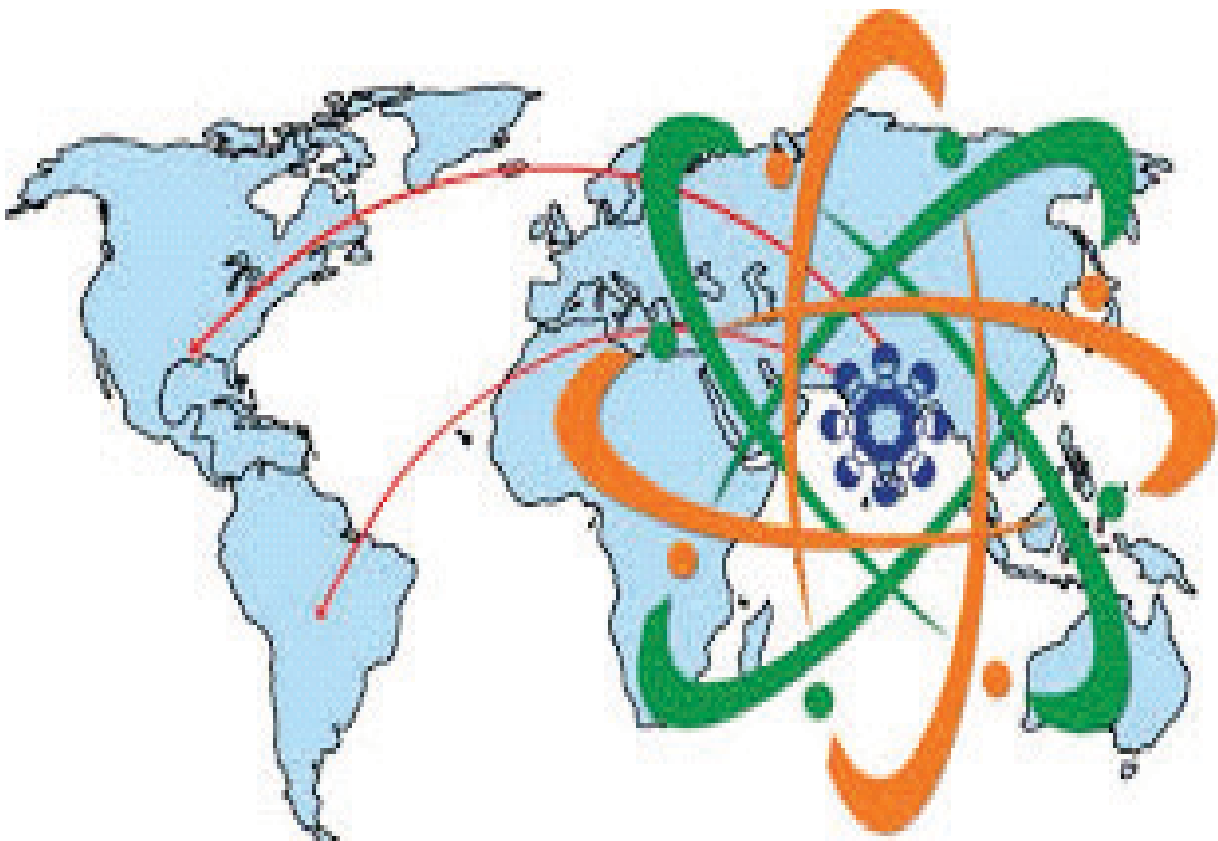
neighbourhood and in India's backyard, making it realise that the price of only ethical pronouncements in foreign policy was very heavy.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs submitted its report on 'India's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Prospects and Limitations' during the winter session of 2022. Amidst the rising challenges of increasing Chinese influence in neighbourhood and beyond, the Committee noted four limitations that inhibit India's soft power and cultural diplomacy, namely:

- Inadequate financing
- Lack of coordination among various institutions
- Shortage of skilled manpower
- Lack of clarity on the mandate of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

The Committee further made a host of recommendations on how India can better project soft power such as restructuring the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), establishing a coordinating mechanism between MEA and other line ministries, constituting a yoga certification board, establishing a mechanism to interact with the Indian diaspora and promoting tourism.

Good Country Index or GCI ranks countries based on their contribution to the global common good across various sectors like science and technology, culture, peace and security, world order, climate and sustainability, prosperity and equality, health and wellbeing. Today, India ranks 40th out of 169 countries. Simon Anholt, the creator of GCI explains that the goodness of a country is determined by its multilateral engagements and cooperation in addressing the global common challenges.



For Indian soft power to achieve its potential and to reach in the top 5 countries of the GCI, it is imperative to have an integrated approach that combines public diplomacy at the global level and creative and consistent socioeconomic initiatives at the local level. The government and other agencies must realise that in the information age, it is the country that has a “better story” to tell that will influence others. Both the above factors necessitate the involvement of all the stakeholders at all levels. India must determine where its strengths lie as it moves forward to make the 21st century its own. In his book *The Elephant, The Tiger and the Cell phone*, Dr Shashi Tharoor says, “...this lumbering, slumbering ponderous beast appears to be acquiring the stripes of a lithe, agile and sprightly tiger...In April 2007 India established a world record of selling the more cell phones in one month

than any other country. This was not just a transformation in terms of numbers but also in attitude...we have moved from a country where phones were regarded as a luxury to establishing the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) which is considered a model of its kind in the world.”

The cell phone, internet and digital economy has empowered the various strata of Indian society in ways that 50 years of socialist rhetoric never did. Yes, India has a long way to go, and paradoxes still exist. However, there is one attribute of 21st century India to which increasing attention should now be paid around the globe, it is not economics, military or nuclear strength, but the quality that India is displaying in ample measure today. And that is India’s soft power.

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