



## INDIA'S SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY: INDIA'S USE OF SOFT POWER TO ENHANCE GLOBAL INFLUENCE

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### ABSTRACT

*India's Soft Power which is part of Smart Diplomacy or cultural diplomacy in India can be traced back to the time when Swami Vivekananda visited the Chicago Parliament of Religion and spoke about Hinduism and India, which attracted many Indians and Foreigners who visited India and learned about the Indian culture and the Sanskrit, his book on Raja Yoga influenced Western countries to practice Yoga who came to India and visited ashrams, India's main soft powers include spiritualism, yoga, Ayurveda, the world is shifting towards organic method of treatment which has its trace in India. There is a cultural exchange of arts, music, and dance. Indian Diaspora and Young youth are the weapons for the spread of Indian culture across the globe. People are interested in Indian culture and epics of Ramayana and Mahabharat, and studying Kautilya. Indian literature and craft have received international recognition, and countries abroad have included Sanskrit in their educational curriculum. India has also emerged as an exporter of herbal medicine to many foreign countries like the Middle East, Europe, Africa, etc., and this soft power of India will help in creating a massive influence across the world, but before that, Indians should have ample knowledge about their history, culture, and languages.*

*The term soft power was introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990, which means magnetism toward a country's culture, political ideas, and foreign policy. Soft power requires no military power, no political pressure, and no hard diplomacy. Soft diplomacy can also be referred to as Smart Diplomacy. Soft power comes from three components, which are culture: places that are attractive to others, Political values: when they live up to them at home and abroad, and most importantly, foreign policy when they are seen as permitted and upright. Soft power is less expensive compared to hard power. It has become a weapon for public diplomacy. It is the key*

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*pillar of foreign policy in this age of globalization, mass communication, global trade, and tourism, which includes the sharing of cultural values among countries, like intellectual and artistic. It also helps countries to expand their association and interest with other countries. Cultural diplomacy aims at educating the people on other countries' values and heritage and can help to correct negative ideas in foreign media and academic, and Political presentations. For centuries, India's soft power has been recognized across the globe, where people learn about the Indian culture, arts, and heritage of one of the oldest civilizations. India is using Yoga, Buddhism, and its rich culture to increase its soft power.*

**Keywords:** Soft Power, Cultural Diplomacy, Foreign Policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye. He defined soft power as the 'ability to shape the preferences of others,' mainly through attraction. In an interdependent world where traditional power resources have become costlier, technology, education, and economic growth have risen as important factors determining a country's power. The power to influence others wants— to make them align their interests with your own – enables an actor to achieve its desired outcome without having to use coercion ("sticks") or inducement ("carrots"). It can do so by capitalizing on various assets, such as a country's culture, political values, and foreign policy, as well as by legitimizing itself to the world and standing beside popular channels of communication. This leads to others admiring the nation and aiming to follow in its footsteps, which increases its power.<sup>1</sup> For the universalization of American culture, of brands like McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Apple and the vast economic resources possessed by transnational corporations based in the USA, is extremely beneficial in Graph ref.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW HAS THIS SOFT POWER SHAPED INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND BEHAVIOUR?

The concept of soft power is not new to India India's Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), the aims of which were the promotion of international peace, Third World Solidarity, self-determination of all peoples, and multilateralism, developed in the explicit historical situation

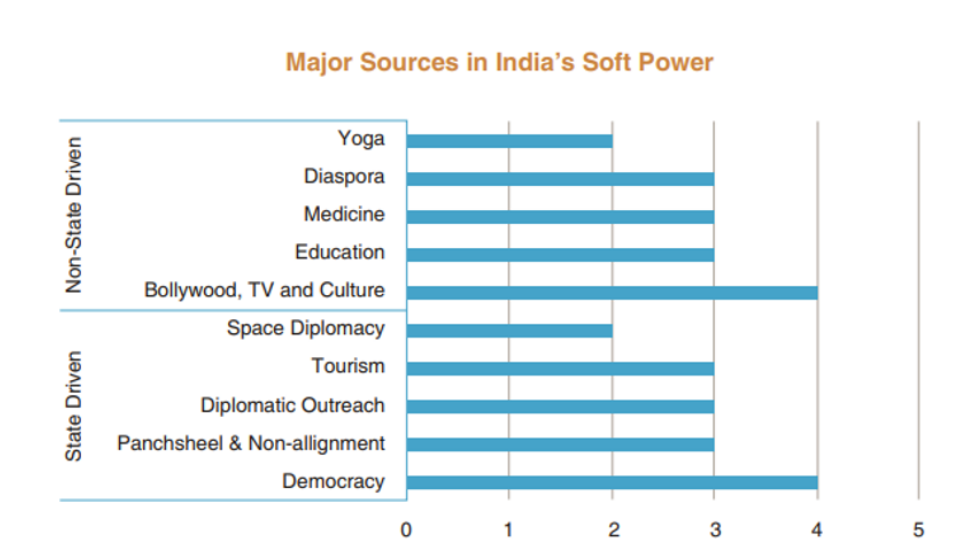
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<sup>1</sup> Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra, 'From a latent to a "strong" soft power? The evolution of India's cultural diplomacy' (2016) 2 *Palgrave Communications* 16091.

<sup>2</sup> Rahmat Ullah (et al), *Contemporary World: Policy, Politics and International Relations* (Institution of Economic Development and Social Researches Publications 2018).

of India's independence struggle and was an embodiment of the values and ideals, such as the Gandhian nonviolent legacy, that influenced it. Thus, independent India's elites attempted to pursue a leadership role for India based on its ideological soft power and diplomacy. Indeed, India's first Prime Minister, Nehru, was a proponent of soft power and carved an international role for India based on its moral standing and its support of the developing world, thus attempting to play a normative role in international relations. Soft power is a resource that India has plenty of – from its cultural and spiritual heritage, its movie industry, its cuisine that enjoys worldwide popularity, and its hugely successful diaspora, to its IT industry, its democratic governance, its many scientific achievements, and its emergence as a global innovation hub.

India has long been a player in the phenomenon of globalisation, with its soft power reaching far and wide. As Tharoor espouses, “The attractiveness of these assets is that they permit countries to persuade others to adopt their agenda, rather than relying purely on the coercive ‘hard power’ of military force”.<sup>3</sup> A notable example of this is the international community's exceptional treatment of India in the realm of nuclear trade based on its relatively benign and responsible international image.



(in addition to realist considerations).

Soft power – the ability to shape the preferences of others – is regarded as the power of attraction. As Nye put it, there are three ways to do that: coercion (sticks), inducement (carrots), and attraction (soft power). Indian foreign policy under the Modi administration is becoming

<sup>3</sup> Christian Wagner, 'India's Soft Power' (2010) 66(4) *India Quarterly* 333.

more ambitious and innovative in its scope, as India moves from the periphery to the center of international relations. India is tactically exploiting its natural advantages through its renewed focus on soft power and its subsequent strategic deployment to further India's foreign policy objectives in an increasingly globalizing world.<sup>4</sup>

Indian foreign policy has undergone a dramatic shift under the government of Prime Minister Modi, who ironically came to power on a domestic development agenda. In recent years, India's rise in the international system has enabled it to move from the periphery of international relations to the center. Yet, its foreign policy has been accused of being ambiguous, reactive, and ad-hoc, whilst principally lacking direction and goals.

India made a revolutionary change in its foreign policy from hard power to soft power. As we see in the very recent Kashmir Issue, the condition was very sensitive for India because 18 soldiers were killed in the Uri Army Camp by an army strike of the Pakistan Army. Most probably, Indian people were waiting for a step by hard power, but the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi, didn't go forward in that way. In his first public speech after the Uri attack, Mr. Modi challenged Pakistan to go to war against poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and infant mortality.<sup>5</sup>

### **IS THE SOFT POWER BEING USED EFFECTIVELY UNDER THE BJP GOVERNMENT?**

Over the last few decades, regardless of the party in power, India has done very little to grow its state-driven soft power. India has historically stood firmly with the G77, non-alignment, and the voices from the global south on the international stage. Unfortunately, over time, Indian delegates earned a reputation as procedurally competent and clever but frequently defensive and self-serving in their approach. They often came across as self-obsessed and sometimes downright arrogant. The diaspora almost always experienced Indian embassies as inefficient, bureaucratic, and even unfriendly. None of this helped build up India's soft power.

The networks of the most powerful bureaucrats and politicians and their families in Delhi and regional capitals in India reproduced themselves in key global capitals and the non-state soft

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<sup>4</sup> Salil Shetty and Tara Sahgal, *India's Soft Power: Challenges and Opportunities* (Occasional Paper, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies 2019)

<sup>5</sup> Rahmat Ullah (et al), *Contemporary World: Policy, Politics and International Relations* (Institution of Economic Development and Social Researches Publications 2018).

power, whether industry, culture, or arts, as institutions or diaspora members, as individuals rarely got thoughtful and consistent support from the state. Most of their successes were despite and not because of, the state. This is partially why leveraging did not take place, and India's soft power potential remained untapped.

The biggest challenges to India's soft power, the most common answer was religious intolerance and the increased number of hate crimes, both of which erode India's traditional democratic and secular values. India, under the current regime, has become increasingly aggressive towards any form of dissent and the foundational checks and balances of any healthy democracy, i.e., independent media, judiciary, civil society, etc. The country's handling of domestic disputes – including but not limited to caste-based violence, lynching over beef allegations, rights of adivasis, and taking away Kashmir's special status has all taken its toll on India's soft power.

It is hard to take any 'soft' Indian initiatives seriously when India behaves with a sort of cognitive dissonance. Moreover, human rights violations and violence within the country could effectively lessen its standing on the world stage and could even result in the imposition of sanctions. If looked at domestically, the Indian state, irrespective of the party in power, has never been soft on its detractors 20 India's Soft Power: Challenges and Opportunities but the current regime has taken it to another level entirely. It is often described as the imposition of an undeclared emergency, and all indications are that it will only get worse.

Even as the domestic democracy deficit is growing, the current regime has alienated pretty much all its neighbors, some by choice, others by bungling. The collapse of constitutional morality has reduced India's standing in the eyes of its neighbors. The country's 'Neighbourhood First' policy was meant to prioritize improved relations with its immediate neighbors, but its relationships are at an all-time low. No government in India has dared to find a way of ending its conflict with Pakistan, and Pakistan hasn't helped either. The elite on both sides of the border find many benefits for themselves in keeping this conflict simmering. For India's current Hindu nationalist regime, attacking Pakistan as a Muslim state and a historical enemy is a core part of its identity. With the unprovoked stripping of Kashmir's special status and rights of the people of Kashmir, India has consciously chosen to further alienate Pakistan and China.

The blockade, which Nepal claims was imposed by India after it adopted a new constitution, led to shortages of essential supplies and isolated the nation. This alienation now spans all generations, even the older people who have strong religious links to Hindu holy shrines in India. The prices of fuel and medicine skyrocketed, and scarcity affected not just the poor but also the rich. So, while Indian soaps and Bollywood films continue to be part of the normal Nepali diet, there is palpable hostility against India, which will be hard to reverse for some time to come. Moreover, all is not well even with the country's relationships with nations like Bhutan and the Maldives, which are often touted as success stories by the Indian government. In short, there are big question marks on the soft power front for India in South Asia and its super assertive and powerful eastern neighbor.

The rise of hate crimes and weakening democracy in India also brings to the forefront a very intriguing question: does the 'new' India even want to be a soft power? Many people think that India wants to break free from its historical 'softness,' characterized by Panchsheel and non-alignment, and portray itself as a rising hard power in the world.

### **INDIA'S SOFT POWER: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: ANALYSIS**

Challenges for Soft Power: Religious Intolerance, Barriers to Free Speech, Caste Conflicts, Visa Problems, and Aggressive Foreign Policy. The two directly affect each other. This can also be seen in India's worsening relationship with some of its neighbors due to its handling of domestic issues. As mentioned earlier, Indo-Pak relations have been at an all-time low since the Government of India decided to neuter Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Pakistan observed this 15th August – India's Independence Day – as a Black Day, with a massive protest organized outside the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. Similar protests were seen in London.<sup>6</sup>

India's fraught relations with Bangladesh have been precariously poised on a razor-thin edge, largely due to the NRC implementation deeming millions stateless. India's domestic machinations have precipitated friction squarely within South Asia. Issues like cozying up with Israel compound this and risk alienating friendly Muslim states in various parts of the world rapidly. These factors altogether possess considerable potential for sparking significant friction across a region rather quickly obviously. India has a unique reality with its diaspora scattered

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<sup>6</sup> Rahmat Ullah (et al), *Contemporary World: Policy, Politics and International Relations* (Institution of Economic Development and Social Researches Publications 2018).

across much of Southeast Asia, thereby helping progress soft power and sometimes sparking tensions. India's foreign policy, one pillar of soft power, can heighten the risk of tension extremely aggressively with very bold overtures abroad.

Experts from the ASEAN region divulged how India endeavours to extend its role as the regional hegemon of South Asia into South East Asia and ends up getting isolated from other countries therein. The Indian Government notoriously stalls multilateral agreements and blocks labour movement across borders quite frequently under various pretexts. India's push for the free movement of its labour abroad starkly contrasts with resistance to foreign labour entering its borders, sparking regional irritation. Other countries will take India's soft initiatives seriously only after it starts remediating issues and fully utilises soft power resources effectively now.<sup>7</sup>

### **WHAT IS THE GLOBAL IMPACT OF THE USE OF INDIA'S SOFT POWER UNDER THE BJP GOVERNMENT?**

The BJP government led by Narendra Modi has increased soft power reliance drastically as a key aspect of its foreign policy. This tactic belongs to the category of cultural, spiritual, and diaspora diplomacy with an emphasis on Buddhism, Yoga, and the Indian diaspora. These have been crucial in boosting India's profile globally and are in line with strategic objectives; however, there are several crucial challenges that limit their potential fully realized. Below is a detailed study of these factors and their effectiveness under Modi's administration. For India, it means creating attention, promotion, and active support for those aspects and products.<sup>8</sup>

### **MAJOR ASPECTS OF INDIA'S SOFT POWER**

**Buddhism: Reclaiming Historical Heritage:** Buddhism originated in India and has therefore become a major aspect of Modi's soft power diplomacy. The government has thrown forward India's Buddhist heritage as a linking bridge with countries in South, Southeast, and East Asia. India manifests as a spiritual bastion of Buddhism through shared cultural and mystic tenets utterly antithetical to China's growing clout. Buddhist Circuit encompasses various sacred sites such as Bodh Gaya or Sarnath, deliberately crafted to lure foreign devotees and strengthen ties

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<sup>7</sup> Shairee Malhotra, 'EU-India Relations: A Soft Power Approach' (European Institute for Asian Studies 2015) <https://www.eias.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/EU-Asia-at-a-glance-Malhotra-EU-India-Relations-A-Soft-Power-Approach-2015.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Swaroopa Lahiri, 'Soft Power – A Major Tool in Modi's Foreign Policy Kit' (2017) 5(1) *Journal of South Asian Studies* 39.



with predominantly Buddhist nations like Vietnam and Mongolia. India's stewardship role in authentic Buddhist teachings was emphatically reiterated at the internationally hosted Buddha Poornima Diwas celebration this time around.

Its collaboration with nations like Japan and Thailand in the revival of historic institutions such as Nalanda University further strengthens the common Buddhist heritage. Buddhism has eased India's Act East Policy towards reinforcing ties within the Asia-Pacific region. The cultural diplomacy based on Buddhism negates China's narrative at a time when Beijing is under fire for its treatment of the Buddhist culture in Tibet. India's Buddhist population is tiny, and it raises doubts among Buddhist-majority countries about its claims to be a leader in the Buddhist world.

Neglected infrastructure at important Buddhist sites and inadequate tourism facilities make it difficult to attract international audiences. However, despite these challenges, the Buddhist narrative continues to play an important role in presenting India as a peaceful rising power, distinct from the coercive diplomacy of other fundamental powers like China.

**Diaspora Diplomacy:** The Indian diaspora is an important foreign policy asset for Modi: there are 27 million Indians living outside the country. His administration has treated the diaspora as unofficial ambassadors and used their economic and political influence to build India's reputation abroad.

Modi's speeches at high-profile gatherings at Madison Square Garden in the U.S. and Wembley Stadium in the U.K. celebrated the diaspora's successes and urged it to help in India's economic development. Steps such as the merging of PIO and OCI cards reduced bureaucracy, and crises such as Operation Raahat in Yemen reinforced the message of proactive action to protect Indians abroad. The diaspora has played a significant role in India's economic development by means of its remittances, estimated at \$69 billion in 2015, and investments in critical areas such as IT and technology.

Several diaspora members hold important political, business, and academic positions overseas, and can help to forge stronger bilateral relations. – Bureaucratic delays and the lack of comprehensive information about Indians overseas make engaging with the diaspora difficult. Ideological differences within the diaspora may diminish the diaspora's potential to project a unified voice abroad, as exemplified by the protests by Modi in many of the countries he visited. While the diaspora continues to be a significant influence behind India's soft power,



these issues should ideally be dealt with for India to fully benefit from its potential to shape foreign perceptions and strengthen ties with host nations.<sup>9</sup>

**Yoga:** Yoga sits squarely at the heart of Modi's soft power play, embodying India's venerable mystique with surprising relevance amidst modern wellness fads. Yoga's global appeal garnered considerable recognition on June 21 when the United Nations declared it International Yoga Day, with 177 member states backing it fervently. The Ministry of AYUSH was set up rather quietly to vigorously promote various traditional Indian medicine systems, including somewhat obscure Yoga practices. Global events on International Yoga Day, including a record-breaking Yoga demonstration in New Delhi attended by international dignitaries, have highlighted India's leadership in this cultural space.

- Yoga strengthens India's cultural diplomacy by creating people-to-people bonds and fostering goodwill worldwide.
- It serves as a gateway to exploring other facets of Indian culture, from Ayurveda to philosophy, enhancing India's attractiveness as a tourist and cultural destination.
- Critics accuse the BJP government of using Yoga to promote Hindutva, alienating sections of India's population and its international audience.
- The increasing commercialisation of Yoga, especially in the West, raises concerns about its dilution and deviation from traditional practices.

India's leadership in cultural space was highlighted on International Yoga Day by global events and a record-breaking demonstration in New Delhi. Yoga strengthens India's cultural diplomacy by fostering goodwill globally and creating unusually strong bonds between people from diverse backgrounds worldwide. India's allure as a tourist destination and cultural hub intensifies by exploring facets like Ayurveda and philosophy through it. Critics accuse the BJP government of leveraging Yoga rather surreptitiously for furthering Hindutva ideology, alienating swaths of India's diverse population. Commercialization of Yoga escalates worryingly in Western cultures, sparking concerns over dilution and deviation from age-old sacred traditional practices.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dr Sumanta Bhattacharya, Vinay Sahasrabuddhe, Arindam Mukherjee, and Bhavneet Kaur Sachdev, 'An Analytic Interpretation on the Importance of India's Soft Power in International Cultural Diplomacy Over the Centuries' (2021) 12(3) *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* 131.

<sup>10</sup> Aparna Mazumdar, 'India's Soft Power Diplomacy under the Modi Administration: Buddhism, Diaspora, and Yoga' (2018) 49(3) *Asian Affairs* 468.

## **ANALYSIS OF INDIA'S SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY TO HENRY KISSINGER: DIPLOMACY**

India's foreign policy employs soft power quite effectively, aligning with themes in Henry Kissinger's Diplomacy, like pragmatism versus ideology and nuanced global leadership. India reflects a modern twist on Kissinger's principles with cultural diplomacy, historical ties, and economic clout underpinning its unique geopolitical stance. India prioritizes cultural diplomacy heavily as a key element in its soft power strategy abroad, very effectively. India leverages contributions from ancient civilizations heavily in philosophy, spirituality, and the arts to build a rather significant global influence nowadays. Initiatives like the International Day of Yoga, introduced in 2014, have become symbolic of India's cultural outreach, while the global popularity of Bollywood enhances its image abroad very effectively nowadays. India's spiritual traditions, particularly Buddhism, foster strong connections with East Asian nations and various Southeast Asian countries simultaneously overseas. These efforts resonate deeply with Kissinger's ideas; he heavily emphasizes cultural and ideological tools in bolstering hard power very effectively.

India's approach ostensibly projects an image of a peaceful global leader with considerable inclusive credentials in its foreign policy endeavors worldwide. India has adopted economically pragmatic strategies, balancing ideological aspirations with principles somewhat like Kissinger's notably influential foreign policy tenets. India fosters strategic partnerships and trade agreements quite vigorously in regions like Africa and parts of Southeast Asia, strengthening ties. Development aid serves as another cornerstone of its considerable economic influence abroad, very quietly. India lends a helping hand to Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, fostering goodwill whilst subtly stymying China's Belt and Road Initiative expansion very quietly. India's commitment to sustainable development is demonstrated through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, which fosters various global alliances effectively.

Kissinger's pragmatic diplomacy emphasis manifests in this approach through economic tools, forging alliances and stability is maintained effectively. India's non-alignment policy during the Cold War era remarkably underscores a diplomatic tack somewhat rooted deeply in pragmatism espoused by Kissinger. India under leaders like Nehru stuck with the Non-Aligned Movement, rejecting alignment with either the U.S. or the Soviet blocs, maintaining autonomy in foreign affairs, and remaining steadfast. India bolsters its global stature vigorously through participation in forums like the United Nations and the G20 alongside BRICS and the Shanghai

Cooperation Organisation. India's aspiration for global leadership manifests rather vividly by hosting the G20 Presidency in 2023, sans antagonising major world powers greatly. India exhibits a uniquely prominent global role, and its soft power strategy overlaps eerily with Kissinger's pragmatic diplomatic vision remarkably enough. India champions the interests of developing nations vigorously in climate negotiations and international trade agreements as the leader of the Global South. Initiatives like the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation program offer rapid education for officials from various developing countries abroad nowadays.

India's global leadership aspirations are highlighted starkly by such endeavours and also by the Digital Public Goods Alliance, showcasing technological innovation domestically. Kissinger's stress on adaptable leadership and strategic acumen manifests in India's knack for redefining global norms with pragmatic yet ambitious actions.

## CONCLUSION

India's soft power diplomacy exemplifies Kissinger's principles of strategic pragmatism infused deeply with considerable cultural resonance and ideological undertones. India carves out a significant role in global affairs, rather than leveraging its historical legacy and multilateral engagement quite effectively nowadays. Kissinger's assertion that successful diplomacy relies heavily on inspiring others through shared values and occasionally on sheer brute force gets reinforced. The BJP government wielded soft power tools like cultural diplomacy and engagement with the diaspora, yet faced significant hurdles domestically and regionally. The current approach yields some successes but falls short of coherence and credibility, largely due to glaring contradictions between stated policy and actual murky practice. A balanced strategy addressing these challenges is essential for India to emerge as a true leader in soft power arenas lately. Thus, the answer to whether Buddhism in the Bollywood administration uses soft power effectively is nuanced. While there are positive initiatives, their impact is limited by systemic and policy-related flaws that need urgent attention.