

India's Soft Power: Multiple Perspectives

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Abstract

Though slower to yield results, soft power is a less expensive means than military force or economic investments to get others to do what one wants. India boasts of an amazing variety and wealth of soft power resources. Its spiritualism, yoga, movies and television soaps, classical and popular dance and music, its principles of non-violence, democratic institutions, plural society and cuisine have all attracted people across the world. India indeed holds strong cards in the arena of soft power to further its foreign policy goals.

Key Words: Soft power, Yoga, Bollywood, Ayurveda

I. Introduction

India's potential, when it comes to its soft power, is phenomenal. Noted ancient Indian scholars like Kautilya and Kamandak have referred to 'Soft' diplomacy, including practice of *Sandhi* (Treaty) for achieving progress. In fact, the role of *Doot* (Ambassador) in conducting interstate relationship has been emphasized time and again by these scholars. Contemporary international community is much in awe of India's accommodation of the 'other', its plurality, multiculturalism and secularism.

II. The Importance of Research

The article is important because it spells out important components of India's soft power. It also enumerates various facets and dimensions of India's soft power components. Not only it emphasizes the variety and enormity of this rather unexplored resource in India's kitty, it also dwells upon the inability of state to project its soft power in an efficacious manner.

III. Goal and objectives of Research

It is only over the past decade or so that India has begun to play its soft power cards more systematically. The objectives of this article are understanding the concept of soft power, assessing India's soft power earnestly and analysing whether the nation is able to use its soft power resources effectively to project its image on world forum.

IV. Research Question

Can India overcome the challenges and employ its soft power capabilities on the world forum in an efficacious manner?

V. Method and Methodology

Composition method has been used in the article. In order to prove the issue, all the information has been interpreted and analysed well.

VI. Context

In the realm of International Relations, Soft Power is the ability to co-opt rather than to coerce. The word 'Soft Power' was coined by Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye. He defined it as the 'ability to attract people to our side without coercion'. According to Nye, the three key sources for a country's soft power are: its culture, its political values and its foreign policies. It has been stated that while hard power is 'push', soft power is 'pull'.

USA has been able to project its soft power in an effective manner. By putting the colours of American flag in the costumes of popular superheroes such as Superman, Wonder Woman and of course Captain America, and by selling to the world the idea of the 'American Dream', the country has managed to present an image that stands for justice, freedom and democracy. In India, this leads their best and brightest to take the first America-bound flight they can get on, in pursuance of the American dream, resulting in India losing its best and brightest.

India is the largest democracy in the world, and also a secular state. In fact, Indian secularism, unlike Western secularism, not only tolerates but supports minority religions. A safehouse for not only Tibetan refugees, but also the Dalai Lama, India perhaps has not been able to communicate its best qualities, while being known mostly for its food and Bollywood and more negative things like abject poverty, Indian scams and high crime rates.

In 1992, Severn Cullis-Suzuki - a Canadian teenager addressed the UN at United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, where she said amongst other things,

I could be one of those children living in the favelas of Rio. I could be a child starving in Somalia or a victim of war in the Middle East or a beggar in India

Little had changed as to how India is viewed in terms of financial prosperity and standards of living. Today, thirty years later, as tourists would still flock (pre-pandemic) around Dharavi capturing pictures of the destitute.

In the age of social media, YouTube and Netflix, it has become easier than ever before to project one's soft power. Succeeding paragraphs examine various facets of India's soft power and how they have been communicated to the world.

VII.Salience of Bollywood

According to an article in the New York Times in 2003, when the Taliban government fell in Afghanistan in 2001, the Indian foreign minister flew to Kabul to welcome the new interim government in a plane not crammed with arms or food, but full of tapes of Bollywood movies and music, which were in no time distributed across the city.

US government cables released by Wikileaks pointed to the potential positive role played by Bollywood in promoting anti-extremism across the world. Bollywood also has visible influence in Latin-America. For example, the successful Brazilian soap opera, "**CaminhoDas India's**" (India a love story) won the 2009 International Emmy Award for Best Telenovela. It attained an audience share of 81% for its last episode in Brazil and was distributed to countries across the world.

While '**Raj Koothrapali**' from Big Bang Theory and '**Apu**' from the Simpsons were offensive Indian stereotypes representing awkward and undesirable Indian men, Priyanka

Chopra's tryst with Hollywood projected a more exotic, confident and competent side of India. However, despite Bollywood's international influence and India's influence in international media, it is obvious that Indian diplomacy has largely overlooked the use of its entertainment industry as soft power. While a Hollywood movie would exhibit the Russians or the Nazis as deplorable negative characters, later defeated by an American hero, Indian films have often shown its aggressive neighbour as a cute, estranged brother in its movies.

The gesture is of course not reciprocated. To put things in perspective, the Pakistani short film, 'Hind Banega Pakistan', starred children asking for conquest of India and enslavement of the Indian Army. In 2015, Leslee Udwin made a documentary called 'India's daughter' about the heart shattering 'Nirbhaya' incident that took place in New Delhi in 2012. Although in 2015, in an interview Indian Journalist Barkha Dutt brought out that statistically speaking, the incidents of sexual violence and assault are more frequent in the United Kingdom and United States.

In 2018, Menaka Guruswamy and Advocate Arundhati Katju, succeeded in decriminalisation of homosexuality for what is the largest LGBT population in the world. The two lawyers later came out as a couple. No film has been made on them yet. During the pandemic too, India got plenty of coverage in international news channels for its funeral pyres but little coverage for development of Covid-19 Vaccines.

Entertainers of Indian origin, and Indian journalists and comedians have found lucrative employment opportunities to disproportionately show or misrepresent India's social evils while completely ignoring or minimising its achievements to allow the western audience to feel good about themselves. So far, the Indian government has done little to counter this trend but would benefit much from cancelling visas or overseas citizenship, particularly in cases of slander and libel against the state.

It can be stated that though India has been able to represent its culture and its tragedies through media, it has rather failed to use the media in communicating its achievements on the international stage.

VIII. Humanity through Medicines

When major pharmaceutical producers were demanding inordinately high prices for medicines during the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in 2001, Indian companies came to the rescue by supplying inexpensive antiretroviral medicines to African countries. India's pharmaceutical industry also emerged as one of the largest suppliers in the fight against Malaria and Tuberculosis. India's exports of medicines are presently over \$ 20 Billion and India has come to be known as the 'Pharmacy of the world'.

Living up to this sobriquet, India has also come to the rescue of many countries in countering the Covid-19 pandemic. As of 28 January, 2022, India has provided roughly 146 million Vaccines to 98 countries. Through its Vaccine Maitri Campaign, India has donated Vaccines to the United Nations 'Blue Helmets' peacekeepers. Under its 'Neighbourhood first' policy, in order to develop 'friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all its neighbours' India provided Covid-19 vaccines on a priority basis to its immediate neighbours.

The United States, India, Japan and Australia, came together for the 'Quad Vaccine Collaboration', in order to counter China's hold in the South East Asian region. However, while there is a trend of using resources to counter COVID 19 as leverage to gain access to

limited supplies, India has provided its supplies, as one may argue, way too freely to the world.

IX. Religious Tolerance and Diversity

India is the birthplace of four major religions namely, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism. It has interacted with Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam, and has accommodated and assimilated religions that have been very different than, and often much less tolerant of its home-grown religions. A majority Hindu Nation, it has had a Sikh Prime Minister, a Muslim President, and a Christian Defence Minister, further providing various political and leadership positions to people of all faiths.

India has also provided refuge to the religiously, and ethnically persecuted, Zoroastrians, Jews and Tibetans. India not only tolerates different religions, but supports them by way of reservations and other legal protections provided to minorities. According to recent Pew polls, 84% Indians believe that to be truly Indian it is important to respect to all religions. 80% Indian's believe that respecting other religions is a very important part of their own religious community.

India also happens to be the only nation of the world with zero cases of antisemitic violence. It is perhaps for this reason, that despite the fact that India has never vocally supported Israel, the Jewish nation continues to be an eager strategic partner and ardent supporter of India. India provides a model for world peace like no other nation does, and can lead the world towards religious tolerance and harmony.

X. Civilisational Sciences and Sustainable Living

In 2014, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, in his first address to the United Nations General Assembly, persuaded the international community to dedicate a day for the practice and celebration of yoga. The draft resolution establishing the International Day of Yoga was proposed by India and endorsed by a record 177 member states. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address during the opening of the 69th session of the General Assembly, said:

Yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action ... a holistic approach [that] is valuable to our health and our well-being. Yoga is not just about exercise; it is a way to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature.

Although Indians have been largely indifferent to India's ancient treasures, the world, particularly the west, has benefitted greatly from India's civilisational knowledge. In the early 1990's two US researchers claimed they 'discovered' the healing properties of turmeric, a spice that Indians have been using for medicinal purposes since time immemorial. Around the same time, a U.S. company also patented using 'Neem' as pesticide, something that Indian farmers had been using for a very long time.

While the world covets and stakes claims over knowledge, India gives it freely, generously and liberally. India's civilisational knowledge is the need of the hour particularly in this time of global warming and global pandemics, where environmental preservation and sustainable living have become more important than ever before. India's system of ancient medicine,

Ayurveda, is well researched, extremely effective and works on allopathic principles, but ironically still is often referred to, by some as a 'pseudoscience'.

Healthcare and fitness are becoming more and more unaffordable across the world, the sister sciences of Ayurveda and Yoga, allow for healing, immunity, and even beauty that can be attained easily in one's backyard, without the use of heavy gym appliances or expensive treatment. The Indian way of life also exemplifies sustainable living. India has been home to the Chipko movement, where tribal women hugged trees to stop them from being cut, and various traditions and rituals of India are centred around living in harmony with nature.

Indian traditional solutions include using vetiver roots for air conditioning and earthenware for refrigeration. Indian heritage offers plenty of sustainable solutions, or 'life hacks' that can be used for basis of more sustainable technological solutions. For instance, an Indian architect designed an air-cooling system by arranging earthenware like a beehive.

India also offers the largest variety of vegetarian cuisine, with many vegan options. In an increasingly empathetic world that understands the dangers of clearing forests for breeding livestock that is to be slaughtered later, India provides a palatable solution in the form of its mouth-watering cuisine.

Also, in a world with increasing depression rates, opioid deaths and suicides, India's spiritual knowledge has many tools to offer to deal with mental health problems. In fact, Indian meditation techniques are used internationally in colleges and corporate offices alike to boost morale and increase productivity. India's maxim of 'Vasudhev Kutumbakam', a phrase taken from its 'Maha Upanishads' allows it to see far off lands and people as one family, thus exemplifying a world without borders.

XI. Conclusion

While India has a lot to offer to the world, its soft power need not be spread by strategic methods from the top brass of National Administration. The image of a sustainable, tolerant, culturally rich, and medically independent and cost-effective India has to be proliferated by the common citizen. The common citizen needs to learn the value of India's rich heritage, as opposed to his obsession with the west. If the people of India keep viewing India from a Victorian Lens, there is little hope for polishing its image internationally.

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