

FROM ABEYANCE TO A 'STRONG' SOFT POWER: THE PROGRESSION OF INDIA'S CULTURAL SUBTLETY

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ABSTRACT

The study of power has been one of the main features of global politics. It is said that sometimes in the current era, states win the wars by telling a better story instead of the state who has power and can prevail in a battleground. Though India has constantly had several soft power tactics, they had limited success as they were not combined with hard power such as a strong army and developed defense skills, particularly nuclear ability. Nevertheless, the previous decade was an important turning point that showed India's growing hard power, driven by strong economic growth and vigorous maritime policies, which reinforced its soft power projection. Soft power has come to be one of the foundation stones of the current Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi Doctrine and is an important theme in most of his state visits. This paper analyzes the different soft power components such as civilization and ancient heritage (Buddhism, yoga, Ayurveda, Sanskrit, democracy, and Bollywood used by the Indian governments. Soft power tools have raised importance, mainly as concerns culture and values, which mixed with peaceful policies made for a truly great opportunity of using soft power. The study evaluates India's soft power assets and liabilities, thus presenting how the state has been trying its best to make better use of its potential to realize the state's interests. Hence, the research has largely analyzed and described numerous ways in which all over the world states have resorted their selves to soft power in the face of interdependent world order to garner influence and for the attainment of foreign policy objectives which all depend upon state resources that what they have and side by side abilities to mobilize.

Keywords: India's soft power, Hindutva, Narendra Modi, Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

In simple terms, soft power is soft, it does not depend on hard tools of power like a military tank. Its impact is soft one feels it delicately as one feels attracted to some music or food. In scholarly writing in International Relations, the neorealist methods manage to emphasize hard power, but liberal institutionalist academics believe soft power is an important resource of diplomacy. The major distinction between soft and hard power is that the last intimidates the actor to do the same the coercer prefers as soft power convinces it to do the same thing without intimidation. According to Nye Jr, "soft power is the capability to achieve desired results beyond attraction rather than force or costs". (Nye Jr., 2009) It lies in the skill to set the political plan in a way that forms the first choice of others. (Jr, 2003) Soft power contains almost everything other than financial and military power. But, in cases of both hard power and soft power, there is a matter of power, ample power, to achieve a state's goal. Nye Jr contends, soft power, is a persuasive technique for international relations. Economic or cultural influence is used in this approach. Currently, this notion has been applied as a key tool for nation-states to ultimately prove the progress of their insubstantial position in global politics. India, China, and America are effectively employing soft power as a tool to get the required results.

India is experiencing tremendous economic growth while its political ambitions are aiming higher and higher. The country is trying to increase its global power using resources and instruments of soft power. India is learning this art in a new way, using its rich culture and returning to its traditions.

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References made to religious diversity and democracy are another powerful tool in the state arsenal. There has been a reorientation in foreign policy as well, which refocused on supporting the state's economic development by seeking and maintaining good relations with foreign countries. Soft power instruments have grown in importance, especially as concerns culture and values, which combined with peaceful policies made for a truly great opportunity of using soft power.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Constructivism

For this study, we have employed the theory of constructivism, which entails that reality is always under construction, which in other words opens the prospects for change. Similarly, it all depends upon actors that hold different beliefs and ideas, hence showing meanings are not fixed but can be changed with time. Likewise, anarchy can be interpreted in many ways, all relying on the meaning that actors assign to it. Furthermore, it describes the utmost important matter of concern for the constructivist school of thought i.e., interests and identities, States can hold multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with others in which the soft power dilemma of India can be best elaborated.

In international relations, constructivists assume the power of ideas and norms shows quite a similarity to soft power. Discussions mostly show that it contains the central elements of what Nye calls soft power. Soft power strategies can be contemplated, spreading certain standards on global and regional standards, disseminating information through notable people or known celebrities, as well as by making attractive slogans and creating a sense of urgency to make awareness or by spreading fear in its fewest examples. Therefore, for some scholars, soft power strategies ought to be goal specific.

Why Constructivism?

A considerable variety within constructivism explains what type of questions and the conventional constructivists cause an actor to act, in which they more keenly delved into explaining the possibilities to explain the world in casual terms and show interest in discovering relationships between actors. For instance, whether the identity is visible or not can make possible predictions about the process on which the process of identifying changes happened and that urged them to cause change. Scholars like Billy Mattern argued that the most common process through which attraction constructs in global politics is verbal fighting which includes coercing the target to accept one subjective interpretation of reality by using the representation force.

Historical Background

If we investigate the background of this concept in the Indian history, we may witness that King Ashoka and Mahatma Gandhi used soft power techniques in their times as well. People like Hitler, Mussolini, and Osama bin Ladin who were popular for their viciousness also applied soft power effectively. Robin Bates referenced Benjamin Martin's book "The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture" which highlighted, how Hitler and Mussolini had tried to weaponize the arts. They used cinema, literature, music, art, and sculpture to turn the rest of Europe to their will. Cultural apprehensions were most important to the grand projects of Hitler and Mussolini. Harvard Professor Joseph Nye said in the Spiegel Online talk show that "Osama bin Ladin had a lot of soft power qualities. He showed his soft power skills when he planned to destroy Twin Towers. Bin Ladin did not threaten the people who flew the airplanes. He did not pay either." They followed Osama's instructions because they agreed with Ladin's beliefs.

India is rich in exotic cultural heritage. The unique assets that India found its timbre with the notion of 'soft power. India stands in the twenty-seventh position in soft power in the world, which chairs it at the back of Portugal. Every country has used its culture as an effective soft power tool. Historical account of India shows that cultural negotiations were done by gifting gems and jewelery, art and crafts, and the exchange of crown court poets, dancers, musicians, artists even chefs. These are examples of how political matters had been fixed, or at least controlled, with the help of cultural objects. According to Indian author Sunita Kumar, "distinctive culture is progressed through everlasting values." Similarly, B.P. Singh stated, "India is a 5000 years-old civilization and an exclusive example of unity in diversity."

Spirituality is the topmost element of Indian soft power, and its specialty is that people of all age groups across the country give special respect to their consecrated men. From the beginning, kings and nobles and the common man honored them and seek their advice to resolve their problems. Through their own life's example, these sanctified men passed the message that egotism and power, prosperity,

and grandeur, are nothing in evaluation with the supremacy of the soul. The Tibetan Buddhist leader Dalai Lama expressed that “India’s religious broad-mindedness can be an example for the whole world.” The foreigners are deeply impressed by Indian family values and the strong family bonding that they have missed in their western culture. Indian lifestyle is described as its appreciated soft power. India is one of the major manufacturers of generic drugs and vaccines in the world. Indian companies such as Ranbaxy and Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories are well-recognized across the world. Ayurveda, Naturopathy, Unani, and Siddha are ancient forms of healing remedies that India’s specialties. The Curative system has increased its spiritual position in the world and use as a soft power tool.

Yoga is an Indian discovery and now millions around the world exercise yoga. India may use yoga as a soft power instrument to show its impact on global society at a nominal monetary cost. Indian Diaspora demonstrated the values of love, peace, and brotherhood in other countries These are the qualities that Indians are known for. Early Indian heroes like Gautam Buddha, Mahavir, Ashoka, and Gandhi are key examples. The diaspora mainly contributes to the country’s economy through remittances. This proves that the native Indians can adjust and flourish in the strange and often hostile environment. Most Americans, Canadians, or Dutchmen have never seen Indian migrants as national security or economic threats. They acknowledged their modest, supple, and appealing qualities.

India is the greatest democracy in the world. Despite a long list of problems faced by India at home, India has a vigorous democracy. Indian people are used to the democratic process and are always ready to capsize the ruling party if it does not deliver. In this way, they have shown the individuality and greatness of India and its democracy to the world. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), Ministry of information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Tourism, and Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is initiated by the government. These efforts are strongly projecting Indian civilization and highlighting India’s positive image in the global world.

Tourism is considered one of the most sectors that attract and impact human minds. India’s rich culture and inheritance make this sector the most exciting termini in the world to visit. Local people and foreigners are interested in discovering a country that embraces an extraordinary variety of food, culture, customs, and geography. Adventure tourism is one of the most dominant parts of the tourism industry. India is likely to change up five spots and will be ranked among the top five business travel markets internationally by 2030, and business travel expenses in the country are predicted to triple by 2030 from US\$ 30 billion in 2015. After the 9/11 attacks, America’s efforts to combat terrorism are nowhere close to subsequent. If a superpower like America could not crush this menace, is there any force in the world that can do it? Of course, Bollywood (India’s magnificent Film industry) can do this. For example, the Beatles and rock ‘n’ roll helped to bring down the Kremlin similarly Bollywood is trying to fight against the concept of Islamic Fundamentalism. Bollywood’s magic is rooted in shared heritage, values, and issues. India blockbuster films are engaged in a cultural war on extremism. India’s current economic success makes its pop culture even more convincing.

For two decades, India’s soft power is exhibited around the world. The Indian way of life is fascinating Western society since the 1960s. Bollywood’s extraordinary celluloid cost is mesmerized enormous viewers in important parts of Asia, Africa, and beyond. India’s English-language novelists have often encircled native British writers for the admired Man Booker Prize. Umar Hayat shared memories of his stay in France. He got a chance to attend a music festival over there, he says that “in an annual music festival, the first float is presented by France, and the second float is presented by India. Street people from different countries like America, France, and Japan know about India and its culture. Indian overseas have penetrated their culture in those countries, where they are living.”

Joseph Nye argues that “the commonly applied concepts like ‘military might’ or ‘pecuniary power’ is a fusion of ‘both possessions and conducts,’ for example assets, raw materials, the building of behavior to create desired results. The mixture of ‘hard and soft power techniques’ guides states to achieve desired outcomes in the modern world.” Leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, and Manmohan Singh worked hard and made its institutions strong. Since the institutions were strong, India constantly and gradually progressed year by year. IT and the medical sector brought an economic boom to the country. India is lucky enough to get the special support of America to achieve its desired goals. India is fully utilizing its foreign policy and soft power skills to attract the whole world.

Furthermore, in comparison to Korean soft power, which is nowadays the talk of the town, a cue for India to take it from them. Same thing circulating in India as audiences are learning Korean as Korean pop bands are attention-getters all over the world. In many ways, South Korea’s soft power

enables carve-outs to promote state interest in several all-inclusive state affairs, with a growing premium being placed on their state status as a robust democracy. A receptor mentioned that it provides a new model of what a 21st - century Asian state can look like, an amalgamation of the progressive economy with an ancient civilization that is at once irreversibly beneficial in few perspectives likewise irrevocably democratic, innovative using technological advancement and culturally vibrant. Relating it with India's soft power shows more work needs to be done for ensuring more effectiveness of their soft power tactics.

For instance, India has the largest democracy in the world, and no worldwide television channel that portrays the state image in the world, to support the argument, BBC of Britain global advocate in Cosmo polis, defines a borderless space, and everyone dwells in it. In addition, Aljazeera a sophisticated voice of Qatar multiplies force all across universally. Also, according to their scholarly point of view, on the national channel, Doordarshan's desperate makeover is needed as it holds the capacity and power to become. Likewise, Korea (K-Pop, China through TikTok, and Japan with Anime emphasizing to introduce of more brands like Uniqlo and airline of Emirates, so for the purpose to bring innovations in the old ideas rather than being like prisoners of ideas and outlive in their life shelves, without getting afraid of risks, in sum preferring their giant resonance.(Rao, 2022)

Coming to theme light under Modi's regime before his rise to power, the soft power of India was on rising to prominent factors like economic boost, democratic credentials, cultural growth, yoga promotion, and accreditations regarding secularism. While none can deny mindset, approaches, actions, and policy decisions have shaken the very foundations of the state image of soft power, especially from the removal of the mascot of secular democratic to fascist Hindu nationalism, their real face. Considering, the fear of eruption on unprovoked ferocity, the rise of radical violent pressure groups, and violence in decision-making had made the state a risky investment. A case study of India's economy concerning its soft power image shows that negatively impacted the consumer ship and middle class, façade of their claims has already been exposed completely under Modi which vindicates the efficacy of the two-nation theory. The economic meltdown was triggered by ill-conceived policies of demonetization of the Modi government which took India's currency abruptly out of circulation by a large percentage, that downward spiral under him damaged the greater asset of past decades' soft power. A huge impact on the economic situation in this context can be seen which shows the lack of effectiveness in policies shows high chances of devastating effects of the pandemic on all realms i.e., eco-social and political.(Khurshid & Khawaja, 2021)

Modi government consistently underscores the democratic credentials when it comes to India's diplomatic engagement across the globe. India continues to signal the virtues of democratic political order, at a time when economic turmoil in the West is generating apprehensions about democratic values. Differ the difference-set traits and leadership, unlike his predecessors Modi regime, is more ambivalent about its concentration on the economy instead of emphasizing sharing political values for strengthening closer bonds with West and Asian democracies. Praising the nation as the new bright light of democracy in the world; during his visit to Mongolia, thereby demarcating the distinction between the democratic values of Mongolia, India, and those of authoritarian China. In short, striving not only to revive the national pride of India's ancient values but similarly enhancing hard power by availing the advantages of soft power.(Pant, 2022)

India's paradoxical climax perhaps lies in the poor utilization of state-rich resources, and its exceptional soft power potential including religion also culture to their democratic traditions along with economic affiliations that all top the list of her unharnessed resources. Spread of religion Buddhism contributed beyond borders that had tied its ties outside the region for more than three thousand years ago. Not only has this but the tourism department also endeavored for the Buddhist Circuit promotion to fulfill the desire to attract foreign tourists. Undoubtedly discrimination against North-Eastern states distressingly persists, such kind of complaint hinders the way of promotion of Buddhist destinations that are skewed toward central Indian states. Although such attempts to promote religious links with the Eastern neighbors but such policies overt military motives due to such potential India qualified itself as one of the future soft powers in the current century. In comparison to America, the EU, and the Republic of China, India doesn't perceive her political model as an instrument to exert much influence or attraction for others which indicates problematic as well as essential for India in terms of soft power use.(conflicts et al., 2021)

Cultural diversity not only in terms of language or religion but also in the presence of progressive civilizations in history gave and still supports India for holding an almost inexhaustible reserve of soft power to dig into it. Every aspect like folk music dances historical sites along with myths ranging from cinemas to diverse Indian cuisine all contribute immensely to their soft power resources. Further elaborating through yoga, celebrating Yoga Day, religious purpose tourist sites like temples which appeals to worldwide attention such kind of drives associates with state branding and promotes image at world level. They are also connecting it with fresh drives like Swacch Bharat Abhiyan, make in India and incredible India are no less than other supportive and promoting tactics. Enhancement of military capabilities such as the Indian Space Research Organization in explorations of outer space ranges side by side launching satellites for other countries catapulted India's image. Nation-building stressing on the importance that how and in which perspective it comes under when one talks about influence. Soft power is the power that culture and image hold on people's minds not only within a state but at the end of the day matters mainly for inhabitants all around the globe showing paramount significance for development and upgrading. (Prakash, 2021)

The neighborhood of the Modi government focused on maintaining peace and this approach towards regional states for benefitting relationships was their top priority, which required dollars in billions into states varying from Bhutan state through its diplomatic affairs ministries budget and further department. The main purpose behind the goal was towards Afghanistan, just to ensure that the state doesn't fall into the hands of extremists or other kinds of forces. Not only has this but India has much more familiar with what's at stake apart from goodwill and other alliances. All such concerns show mostly soft power, in regard to India's policy in Afghanistan. Several community projects, along with a parliament and dam, and educational institutions were also set up as well as social media Bollywood industry also succeeded in attracting Afghan people which has turned the middling path chosen by India into a diplomatic dead end. (Trivedi, 2021)

The question raises that indicates the contradictory views about soft power and that can it self-achieve foreign policy goals. Hence, it is obvious that from the worth of soft power might be a necessary condition for the attainment of aims & objectives, but not a sufficient condition, and the reason is foreign policy outcomes are not only confined to one-sided pronouncements along with it the credit of success rest on other countries nations. The interest of other plays a crucial role in the level of success that how much state is at it, in the case if policies opposed to their national interests, they would not bother it definitely despite of likeness for culture and civilization. All such facts show where some aspects of Hard Power would come to play their role which doesn't automatically suggest using force but truly highlights other persuasive tools. However, without denying the fact of soft power lubricates additional diplomatic instruments.

During decision-making situations, it could likely lean towards favorable ones if not adversarial to state interests. Soft power may help in conducting policy even if it may not directly be furthering foreign policy goals that are why urges for stating the difference between two things so that avoid perceiving wrong meanings of any term. Kautilya captured the actual essence of soft power due for this reason he conceptualized six stratagems (Shadgunyas) as foreign policy and four (Upayas) as an instrument of diplomacy. It entails a policy of peace as Samadhi, Viagra policy of hostility, Asana as to keep silent, Yana a policy of expedition and Sansraya meaning seeking accommodation with another king, lastly Dvaidhibhava in which double policy of sandhi with one kind and Viagra with else at the same time. (Viswanathan, 2019)

CONCLUSION

Due to the changing dynamics of world politics, national and foreign policies of the states which were once dictated by hard power elements have now shifted to the use of soft power elements. The emergence of soft power has given weaker countries to the enhance their power through image building by utilizing soft power tactics. Whereas some have adopted a smart power approach, a combination of hard and soft power to achieve their goals such as India. However, the exploitation of the soft & hard power tactics by India for its goal to establish Hegemony in the region of South Asia makes us question the credibility of the soft power strategies used by a state, if at the same time extremely hard power strategies are being implemented which oppose the original idea presented through soft power.

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