

## Review Article

### Projecting Soft Power: The Case of India

#### Abstract

India, the seventh largest country of the world guards a position of extraordinary diplomacy which grades its international relations. The paper speculates into Joseph Nye's concept of Soft Power, which is a break-through strategy in the world gripped by hard power. The world witnessed two great Wars, which was and is in no way covetable. Thus, to sustain more of individual resources and beget a platform through which it becomes easier to mutually benefit both the sides engaged into the international relations, India develops its strategic soft power. Rich cultural heritage, inspiring spirituality, pioneering educational institutes, international trade makes India a country to pave its way into the global world of importance. The research work utilizes the available data and scrutinizes into the probable areas where India strategically develops its soft power to impress and attract the world utilizing its own resources.

**Keywords:** India's Soft Power, International Relations, Education and Soft Power, Trade and Soft Power, UNITWIN Programme.

The Republic of India is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world and imbibes a culture of its own. The diversity of the country never failed to mesmerize thinkers, philosophers, poets, scientists and every individual who has known it. Mark Twain said, *"This is indeed India! The land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendour and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence... the country of hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods... the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the world combined"* (Following the Equator, 1897). There seems to be multitudinous comments on India and its illustrious diversity. The genius and majesty it showers in terms of culture, multiplicity of languages, values, customs, asceticism etc. are mind boggling and fascinating. India's total population as per Census 2011 is 1.21 billion, with 966 million Hindus, 172 million Muslims, 20.8 million Sikhs, 27.8 million Christians,

8.5 million Buddhist, 4.5 million Jains and 8 million others. Such a diverse country is quite arduous to trace in terms of the oneness in presentation or language, but in '*identity*', which lies underneath every Indian aligning their common rituals, culture, social behaviour and patriotism.

India has been a gamut of unprecedented qualities and apportions its resonance with the concept of '*Soft Power*' to manifest its sovereignty, alliance system, power symmetry, political values and domestic and international policies. Soft Power as a concept was proffered by Joseph Nye in his 1990 book, '*Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*'. For Nye, soft power is the competence to co-opt, refraining coercing. It comprehends accumulation of positive opinion through attraction. He further fosters this concept in his 2004 book, '*Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*', where he propounds an emphasis on thriving the soft power skills as an indispensable in world politics. "*The term 'soft power', coined by Harvard's Joseph Nye, is a relatively new notion in international discourse. It was used to describe the extraordinary strengths of the United States that went well beyond American dominance. Power is the ability to alter the behaviour of others to get what one want*" (Tharoor, 2008). Today, politics asserts to competitiveness to achieve domination, which is a purposive urge to control. Every social institution is judged on their ability and competence to manage individual domains (Tellis, 2016). Power is a relationship. Hence, it should be budgeted with patience and tolerance wherever possible, most remarkably in the post- Second World War period. This policy of diplomacy is drifted out through state officials who seek to procure the objectives of the foreign policies rather than compelling and distorting relations through force (Diez et al. 2011). Negotiation stands out as a peak feature in this case, while other features draw out to '*attract*' the other in terms of trade, culture, tourism, education, spirituality, technology, art, media etc.

Historically speaking, what India represented in her pre-Independence period is a convoluted answer. Both North and South India stood out with individual kingdoms, which wrestled for individual recognition, identity and space. Even then, "*Indianness*" has been an unremitting identity, "*...a mostly pluralistic identity influenced by simultaneously contending and co-existing religions and belief systems, as well as shared cultural heritage...*" (Dalmia & Malone, 2012). As a matter of fact, there are two broad phenomenon which have remained constant in Indian history are, first, the repeated influx of foreign invasions (Afghanistan, Persia, Mongolia etc.) and induced migration, trade and pastoral circuits, and secondly, foreign influences producing a prolonged cultural fusion.

*“The Arabs, Turks, Afgans and Persians were familiar to Northern and Western India, since they had not only been contiguous peoples but had been linked by trade, settlement and conquest, links which went back, virtually unbroken, to many centuries”* (Thapar, 2000) Modern India is quite different in its approach towards creating policies of peace, tolerance, migration and trade. India’s independence movement dates back to a history concluding to a striking formation of a large democracy, reinforcing its moderation. There was a quest for high office in the domestic realm which was regulated in a fine orderly process. It never required any obsessive mobilization of resources. Further any possibility of external expansion limited itself owing to its heritage of non-violence. Thereafter the result was, *“India was not compelled by either external or internal exigencies to build a strong state or nurture the productive economy that would have generated robust national power urgently”* (Tellis, 2016).

India has been imposing both hard and soft policies in dealing with the migrants. Migrants are defined as *“a permanent change in place of residence by the crossing of specified administrative or political boundaries. The person who fulfils these two criteria are regarded as migrants”* (Ghosh, 2016). Migration in India is difficult to put into category. During the last six decades, India has witnessed a massive migration which is a result of India’s soft power strategy. The migration not only resulted because of the labour market, push and pull factors, social ties as marriage, refugees, social and political tension in the other country, education, religious movements, spiritual followers etc. According to Census 2011, total migration from the neighbouring countries is 47,66,231, which consists of 6,476 from Afghanistan, 27,47,062 from Bangladesh, 7,964 from Bhutan, 18,114 from China, 59,282 from Myanmar, 8,10,158 from Nepal, 9,18,982 from Pakistan, 1,98,193 from Sri Lanka. The total migration in India is 53,63,099. Factors like history, geography and capability contributed significantly to create foreign policy of India. India’s newly recognised global economic potentials lend a place of utter importance in the international profile. *“...India as a none-too-straightforward international performer frequently disrupting cosy multilateral gatherings with its high-minded and literate (if sometimes disingenuous) interventions. But today, its international actions and positions matter more and are perceived differently”* (Malone, 2011).

International trade is another aspect of soft power. These are based on the premises which share mutual benefits between nations- between producer, customers and governments. The current convention of the World Trade Organization promotes ‘Free Trade’, which

would remove trade barriers and eliminate non-tariff barriers. India's total value of exports is US\$ 323,251 million. India's export of goods and service as percentage of GDP is 20.96% (World Integrated Trade Solution, WITS). What is surprising here is that India and Pakistan have been engaged into trade since 1947. Despite the hostilities, Pakistan has been importing a bulk from India (Sridharan, 2014). India- Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement of 1998 (effective 2000) reaching the stage of zero-duty imports subject to the rules of origin ranging 35% or 25% value-added if it consists of 10% Indian content. This also bars a list of items from both sides- 429 from India and 1180 for Sri Lanka (Sridharan, 2014).

India's 'Act East Policy' covers, "*economic, political, strategic, and cultural initiatives to engage with the Asia-Pacific region*" to brace the ascendancy of the People's Republic of China. India has maintained cultural ties with Vietnam, Singapore, Cambodia and Philippines along with Free Trade Agreements with Thailand and Sri Lanka. Ties with Japan, Taiwan and South Korea have been strengthened. India's top export destinations are USA, China, UAE, Hongkong, Bangladesh, Singapore, UK, Germany, Nepal, Netherlands, Malaysia, Saudi Arab, Belgium, Indonesia, Vietnam, France, Italy, South Korea, Japan, Brazil, Thailand, Australia, Turkey, South Africa and Sri Lanka (Indian Trade Portal, Ministry of Commerce and Industry). These however contribute to international development, which are the "*process and policies through which various actors seek to improve the living standards of societies that are not their own*" (Diez, et al. 2011). Soft power for India is thus economic and political instruments used in developing and strengthening international relations which characterize India's integrity and attractiveness. The image developed by India promotes exchange of international cooperation, business, brotherhood and tourism through other people's perception. This is exactly what soft power does- influence positive outcomes by creating impressions among other foreign countries.

There has been a dramatic display of strategies of innovations which would dominate other spaces. India has taken a remarkable stratagem far in the Middle East. India has been in terms both with Iran and the United Arab Emirates, and simultaneously outlined to reach out to Saudi Arabia. India's foreign trade, "the lifeblood of connectivity in its larger sphere of interest," is a matter of deep speculation (Tellis, 2016).

Indian Universities and Think-Tanks play a very vital role in India's foreign policy promoting soft power- while one provides formal education, the other plays a keen role in informing and influencing policy making. Human resource power finds its interchangeability with Education. Power of knowledge is speedily taking over the battlefield and is engrossing itself as a global power. Hence the power of a nation is built up and determined by the ability of its human resources. Culture, social values and spiritualism has posed themselves as explicit element of magnetism for the world. Its prior planning, strategic and chalked out presentation of various perspectives can mold and create an ecosystem of cooperation and friendship, at the same time promoting India's soft power influence. The first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, had a vital role to play here in terms of his understanding of international relation scholarship in India, *"such was the effect of Nehru's aura, expertise and knowledge about international affairs, that domestic academia remained trapped in a virtual intellectual vacuum sustained by the belief that they could not engage as equals given his understanding of foreign policy, nor offer critiques"* (Malone, et al. 2015). Thereafter, it becomes essential for us to acknowledge Nehru's expertise not only as a policy maker but as an institution builder paving way to India's soft power strategy in international platform. Under the patronage of Nehru, Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) was founded under Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru in 1943. ICWA has played a critical role in setting up the International School of International Studies (ISIS) in 1955 as a part of the University of Delhi (presently under Jawaharlal Nehru University as School of International Studies). The Center for Policy Research (CPR) has also reinforced its presence among the think-tanks which constitute a healthy mix of academics and experienced policy makers.

The university twinning and networking scheme is also known as UNITWIN. India has been in terms with UNESCO's UNITWIN Networks to promote higher education institutions. The UNITWIN has a very flexible nature of programmes, because of which the institutions can presently be more prepared to the higher learning demands and on-going research in the world. The recent data speaks that India has recently opened 16 programmes accounting for 80.3% of international students, with more than 20% of students enrolling in B. Tech courses. The highest number of foreign students in India comes from the neighbouring countries. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) mentions in its 10<sup>th</sup> edition that 49,348 international students got themselves enrolled in the higher education during the academic session 2019-2020, which was just a slight rise from 47,427 during the previous year. It is very recent that Kerala University announced that it received applications of 1,042 students

for the new academic year. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, the state-wise distribution concludes that Karnataka welcomes the highest number of foreign students in India (The Pie News, 2021). Tagore's Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan has a long history of welcoming international students to enrol into various courses. Visva-Bharati's website says, *"There is also a Research Fellowship programme for foreign students. Research students recommended by any Government or University and with specific programmes for investigation approved by proper authorities and accepted by Visva-Bharati are provided with research facilities and guidance."*

The National Education Policy 2020 can be assessed as an appropriate pursuit towards engaging into soft powers, which would inspire and encourage a larger framework of educational system. It incorporates a holistic system which would be based on Indian identity keeping at par with the global outlook. Addressing a webinar on the theme, *"India: The Global Destination for Higher Education- The Post NEP, 2020 Scenario"* organised by IIT Kharagpur, the Union Education Minister, Dr. Ramesh Pokhriyal said that *"there is no need for some of our students to enroll in foreign universities, spending dollars in admission. We have all the infrastructure and facilities. The National Education Policy, 2020 has further taken care of the issue. Our students will stay and study in the country now."*

India has been a cradle of spirituality and has been attracting both followers and tourists from all over the world. It is believed that it is the sages who had been embodying the spirituality in its finest form. The diversity of religion, yet peace and tolerance in appeal makes India a wonderful place to be attracted to. Christianity reached India much before it reached Europe. At the same time Islam too, displays its most vibrant form, while Sikhism originated in India itself. To cultivate this richness of spirituality, India attempted to promote its soft power by projecting and launching *'Incredible India'* internationally in 2002. The Government of India next took interest in the formation of a Public Diplomacy Division within the Ministry of External Affairs in 2006. Religious tourism in India has turned itself into a booming market. Delhi based National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) shows that the largest proportion is made up of religious pilgrimages consisting of various religions. Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) provides with a much needed boost to promote spiritual tourism in India through various travel plans. These merits of India compelled Dalai Lama to say, *"India's religious tolerance can be a role model for the rest of the world."*

Globalization has infused westernization in India. At the same time, the Indian culture has also been spreading its roots globally. Culture and traditions hold a significant place to soft sell its uniqueness. *“Indian culture is quite rich concerning its heritage and resources, and more importantly due to the welcoming approach of its citizens. India is a bouquet varying religion, dialect, edibles, tradition, custom, music, art and architecture, etc., bundled into a single unit of patriotism and unity”* (Chawla, 2017). Mohapatra adds, that the common factor which lies within this diverse Indian mindset is that of welcoming and celebrating in a united way which tracks heartfelt affection. This very essence attracts tourists all over the world who feel to stay back in India to relish its rich ambiance. *‘Atithi Devo Bhava’* imbibes the Hindu and Buddhist philosophy of having a dynamic relation of the host and the guest. To further enhance tourism the Government of India has started the *‘Atithi Devo Bhava’* campaign merging it with the theme of *Incredible India*, which promotes welcoming tourists with a greater sense of *‘welcoming’*.

India’s representation and address in the 69<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, called for a loud yet soft display of its pride in its rich heritage, culture and ancient civilization. Prime Minister addressed the house calling upon India’s philosophy of *‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’* or *‘the world family’*, which Indian culture represents and asked for a greater role for G-4 coalition helping every country to move ahead and think beyond the policies of *‘Zero-Sum Game’*, which normally benefits any one advantageous side. He devoted a very significant part of his speech engaging into the benefits of Yoga, urging for an International Yoga Day, *“It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature.”* Hence, soft-power diplomacy succeeded with the United Nations’ proclamation of 21<sup>st</sup> June as *International Yoga Day*. This proclamation was unanimously supported from 175 countries.

Total arrival of tourists in 2016 is 15026543, 16805842 in 2017 and 17423420 in 2018, which calls for a growth rate of 11.8% in 2016-17 and 3.7% in 2017-18. As per the monthly estimates prepared by Ministry of Tourism, Foreign Exchange Earnings from tourism in India in 2018 in terms were INR. 1,94,881 crore as compared to INR. 1,77,874 crore in 2017 registering a growth of 9.6 % in 2018 over 2017, with India ranking 13<sup>th</sup> in the World Tourism Receipt during 2016-18 (India Tourism Statistics, Government of India, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

There is an urgent need for a strategic transformation, if India feels one day it has to become a genuine power. There has been systematic implementation of projects which intended to stimulate the development on utilizing soft power. What Sashi Tharoor speaks holds a place of utter importance that India must determine where its real strength lies. Thus, for India, it is not only promoting cooperation and non-violence, but to support, give attention, respect culture and promote a healthy society, which would persuade others to look up to and respect India. This also means to deal with the complex and diverse nature of the country and turn it into an ultimate resource. Every great civilization incorporates a culture of its own and feels proud when appreciated by others. Soft power is nothing but displaying, integrating and promoting these unique traits and resources which can turn into mutual benefit for not only the giver but the receiver too. There have been remarkable forces shaping the diverse Indian minds. The ancient Hindu tradition, its myth and scriptures, at the same time, the impact of Islam and Christianity; asserted a grave impact on us. The centuries rule of the British also produced a unique result on the Indian minds. Presently India has been following steady measures in terms of education, religion, tourism, trade etc. which asserts it to be called a true genius manifesting soft power keeping in view the nature of the pluralistic state. In this age of information, the side which has developed the better story wins. To be a true genius India must retain a position which tells the better story, with creative energies to encourage and express themselves in a gamut of appealing ways. India's celebrated resources give it an extraordinary ability to narrate stories which are more persuasive than its competitors in the global world.

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