



India's soft powerProjection: Emerging dynamics

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The concept of soft power was developed by a Harvard academician Joseph Nye. Soft power refers to the ability of a nation to woo other nations via its foreign policy, culture etc. without resorting to force(Nye, 2004)ⁱ Soft power is less expansive option in comparison to hard power in international politics. It also has more legitimacy because the nations get attracted towards you voluntarily. Unlike hard power wherein you are coercing other nations to do what you want. Soft power essentially is about attracting other nations towards you via your culture, values and foreign policy. USA happens to be the most powerful country not just because it is having the most powerful military but because of its soft power which includes Hollywood, democratic culture, art, music, world class educational institutions etc. Some examples of American soft power may be the huge number of foreign students studying in U.S.Soft power is not something which are yielded by state but also by Civil Society organizations like NGO's, International Organisations etc.

India's soft power potential

India is having lot of soft power potential. India can proudly claim to be one of the only few developing countries which have been successful democracy. India is the world's largest democracy. Indian democracy has only got deep rooted in the last 70 years. The political values that we stand for i.e. non-violence. Our national leader Mahatma Gandhi is a living symbol of Non-Violence who is respected across the world.

The way we have managed our diversity is also something which is respected across the world. India happens to be one of the only few countries who has given refuge to Jews, Parsis, Buddhists. India happens to be the only country where Jews were never prosecuted. OnInternational Holocaust Remembrance Day many "Poignant tales of compassion of Jews finding refuge in India in the midst of the horror of the Holocaust were recounted as the UN commemorated the International Holocaust Remembrance Day"(Press Trust of India, 2019).ⁱⁱ

Bollywood happens to be another important source of soft power. Bollywood movies had left deep imprint of rich Indian culture across the globe.The impact of Bollywood industry can be



estimated from the words of Shashi Tharoor. Tharoor has described “the popularity of Bollywood films around the world as a concrete indication of India's capacity to project a ‘good story’ that the world wants to hear” (Athique, 2019).ⁱⁱⁱ Yoga happens to be another important dimension of India's soft power. The year 2015 witnessed world observing International Yoga Day for the first time. From now on “United Nations resolution to this effect have been passed and it has been endorsed by an unprecedented 170 countries” (Ramachandran, 2015).^{iv} India can proudly claim that Yoga emanated on Indian soil and from here it spread to China, Southeast Asia etc. Yoga is about essential unity of body and soul. In the last two years when the world was grappling with Covid. Lockdown were imposed, deaths happening around the world, major economies taking a downward spiral its importance was felt even more. Mental health which happens to be a very ignored concept was taken very seriously by the world. This in turn brought ‘Yoga’ to the center stage. India as a country must feel elated it happens to be the birthplace for ‘Yoga’.

A much-ignored theme in making India a successful democracy is India's Election Commission. India Election commission happens enjoys a considerable reputation. When India got independent it was believed that India will not survive long as a democracy (Jayal, 2010).^v It is worth noting that integrating a vast majority of illiterate population into the mainstream and making them participate into the democratic process was a gigantic task. Election commission did this job commendably well. It can easily be concluded that “as an institution primarily responsible for administering and regulating the electoral space between and each electoral trial, the ECI has enhanced its faith over the years” (Roy and Singh, 2019).^{vi}

India's display of Soft Power

Despite having huge Soft power potential India has not been very proactive in harnessing its soft power potential. It has only been a decade or so that India has started engaging in soft power diplomacy for attaining its national interest. It took fifty nine years for India to establish its public policy division. Beside increasing the scope for Indian council for Cultural relations. Ministry of tourism also launched ‘Incredible India tourism’ ” (Roy and Sudha, 2019). Bulk of the tourism that India receives is in the form of religious tourism. India also possesses a unique potential to emerge as a global hotspot for education and healthcare. India's doctors, healthcare professionals, engineers enjoy considerable respect across the



globe. It has been said “ The Indian healthcare industry also seems to be growing at a rapid pace and is expected to become a \$280 billion industry by 2020. India is quickly becoming a hub for medical tourists seeking quality healthcare at an affordable cost (Financial Express 2022). Reduced costs, access to the latest medical technology, growing compliance with international quality standards and the ease of communication—all these work to India’s advantage”It is worth mentioning here that a vast majority of people visiting India not just for rich diversity and for spectacular nature but also for Medical tourism. Medical tourism includes curative medicines (cardiac care, kidney, organ transplant etc.), Alternative medicines (Ayurveda,Unani,Siddha, Homeopathy, Yoga) and for wellness and rejuvenation (spa, stress relief etc.) (Kamala Vardhana Rao 2021).^{vii}One must take note of the fact that India was the only select few countries who indigenously developed its own vaccine against Covid. India vaccine diplomacy was hailed across the world. It has been said “Since the coronavirus pandemic began, the country has been at the forefront of supplying medicines and generic drugs to others. India received requests from more than 100 countries for hydroxychloroquine (once thought to help treat COVID-19) and paracetamol (a painkiller), and sent supplies to Brazil, the United States, and Israel. By May 2020, India was spending \$16 million on pharmaceuticals, test kits, and other medical equipment for about 90 countries” (Pant,2021).^{viii}India was the one of the few countries which vaccinated the highest number of people in India and abroad. At a time when the world was witnessing vaccine nationalism India was one country who generously helped the world against Covid by supplying essential vaccines to the needy countries.

What is harming India soft power potential

Prime Minister Modi had a distinct focus on harnessing India’s soft power. This was signaled when he invited all the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) for his swearing in ceremony. When he visited Nepal his purposefully paid visit to Pashupati Nath Temple. This was a successful invocation of India’s soft power i.e. Hinduism as a long existing bond with India and Nepal. “The Modi government appears to believe that although India’s soft power may not be able to directly effective in persuading foreign nations to support India’s national interests, however in longer run it will make it easier for New Delhi to promote its traditional foreign-policy objectives, related to security and economic interests.” (Mazumdar,2018).^{ix} The reasons why India invoked its soft power was to allay any



fears owing to its rapid rise, also to improve its international image and respecting the living legacy of its founding fathers(Mazumdar,2018,470).Despite having loads of soft power India is yet to realise its full soft power potential. India hasn't been able to channelize its soft power potential to fulfil its short term and long term national interests. This can be estimated from the fact that "in the recently released Portland USC report on global soft power rankings of countries, India doesn't feature in the top 20" (Khanna,2017). One needs to ponder why are the Indian rankings so poor. What explains India's failure to harness its soft power potential. One of the foremost factors is lack of proper institutional infrastructure or ecosystem to tap India soft power. For example Even the much famed international destinations like Taj Mahal lack international facilities. Buddhism was born in India. But the much talked about Buddhist circuit is still in its nascent stage despite the fact the money have been pumped by Japan.

India for long have been touted as a nation which have preached values like non- violence, tolerance to the entire world. India has always touted itself as a country which not just tolerates but rather celebrates diversity but the recent incidents mob lynching have dented India image as a tolerant nation. The way government handled students protests in India's premier institution was immature so say the least. India brutal response to protests against Citizenship amendment Act Increasing incidents violence against minorities and women have undermined India image globally.Biased Media coverage of events during. India needs to work towards rebuilding its image which would help India to better harness its soft power potential.

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