



INDIA'S SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY

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Introduction – India's Soft Power

*Soft power, a term coined by **Joseph Nye**, refers to the ability of a nation to shape global perceptions and influence others through attraction rather than coercion. Unlike hard power, which relies on military or economic strength, soft power derives from cultural heritage, political values, and diplomatic initiatives. India, with its vast civilisational history, rich traditions, and growing technological advancements, has positioned itself as a key player in global affairs using soft power strategies.*

*From **yogadiplomacy** to the rise of **Bollywood**, from space exploration to **digital** advancements, India's outreach has expanded significantly. However, despite notable successes, challenges such as resource constraints, geopolitical rivalries, and internal socio-political issues continue to affect its soft power strategy. This essay explores India's soft power approach over the last decade, highlighting its strengths, challenges, and the path forward.*

Global Soft Power Index

- India has jumped a spot from rank 29 in 2022 to 28 in 2023.
- Index is released by Brand Finance, the world's top independent brand valuation and strategy consultancy.
- It is the world's most extensive research study on impressions of nation brands, polling over 100,000 respondents from 121 countries.

*Cultural **Diplomacy**: Projecting India's Heritage to the World*

One of the most powerful tools in India's soft power strategy has been cultural diplomacy. The government has strategically promoted Indian traditions, arts, and heritage to foster international goodwill. This has included efforts such as:

1Yoga and SpiritualDiplomacy: India's spiritual traditions, particularly yoga, have been central to its global cultural outreach. In 2015, India successfully persuaded the United Nations to declare June 21 as International Yoga Day, supported by 177 nations. Since then, the global celebration of yoga has reinforced India's image

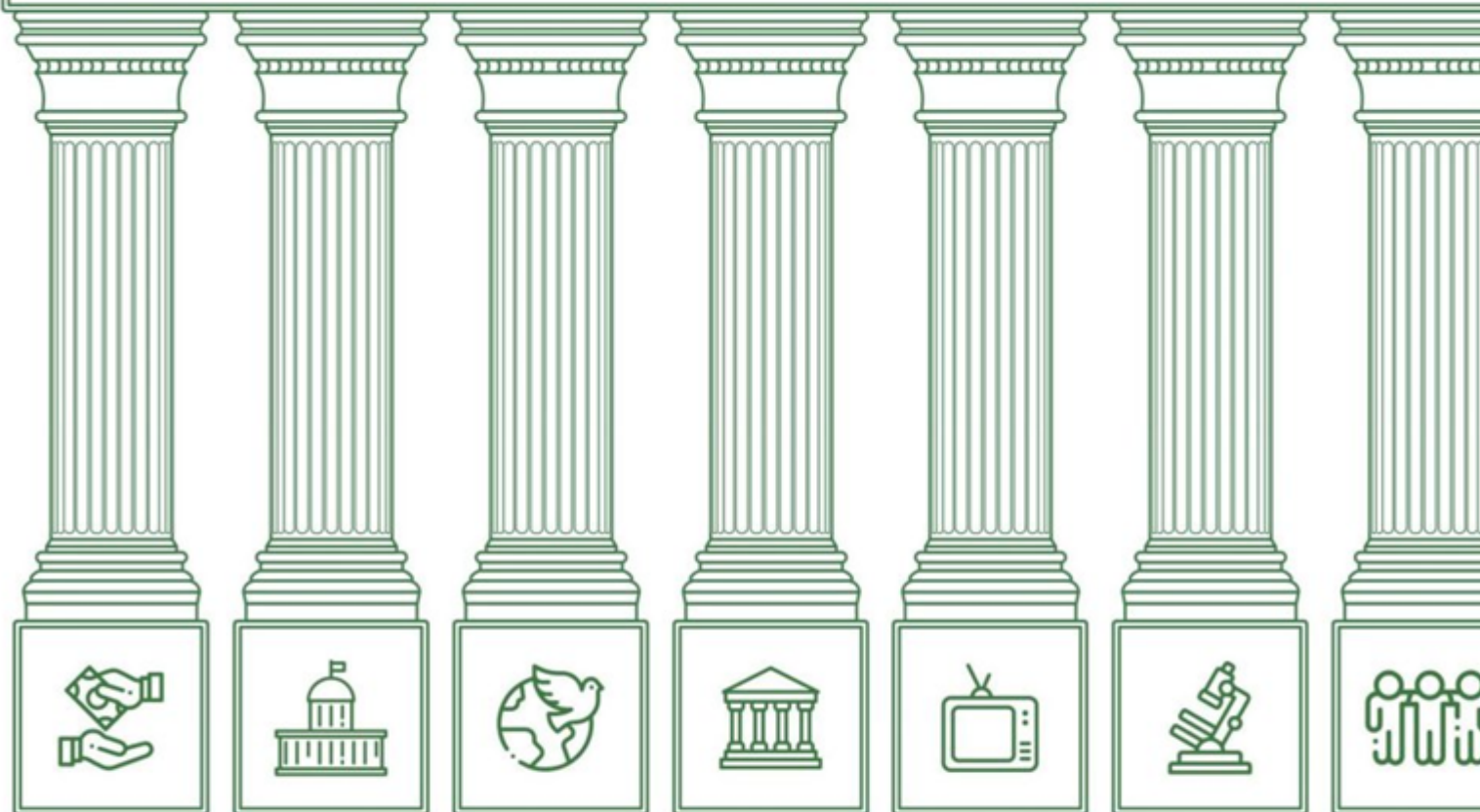
2Bollywood and the Entertainment Industry: The Indian film industry, particularly Bollywood, has gained immense popularity worldwide, especially in regions like the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Indian films, rich with emotional storytelling and vibrant music, have created cultural bridges between India and the world.

3The Influence of Indian Cuisine: Food has long been a symbol of India's diversity and cultural richness. Indian restaurants in cities like London, New York, and Sydney have played a crucial role in introducing global audiences to India's culinary traditions.

4Mythology and Literature as a Diplomatic Tool: India has also leveraged its ancient texts and epics, such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, to establish cultural ties with Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Indonesia,

and Cambodia, where elements of Hindu traditions remain embedded in local cultures

Soft Power



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SECURITY
CONSTITUTION
POLITICAL ELITE

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INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS
CONFLICT RESOLUTION
INTERNATIONAL AID
CLIMATE ACTION

Culture & Heritage

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MARKETING

Education & Science

HIGHER EDUCATION
SCIENCE
TECHNOLOGIES

People & Value

VALUES
CHARACTER
TRUST

Scientific and Technological *Diplomacy*: India's Innovation as a Soft Power Asset

Space Exploration: India's Rise as a Technological Powerhouse: India's space programme, led by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), has been a key contributor to its soft power success. **Digital Diplomacy:** The

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Rise of India's IT Sector: The Digital India initiative, launched in 2015, has transformed the country into a technology-driven society. India's Aadhaar biometric system, the world's largest digital identification programme

Vaccine Diplomacy: India's Role as the Pharmacy of the World: India's pharmaceutical industry has played a crucial role in its soft power expansion, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Significance of Soft Power for India:

- **Economic Opportunities:** A strong soft power presence can attract foreign investments, tourists, and business collaborations

India's cultural exports, such as **Bollywood films, traditional arts, and handicrafts**, contribute to its economic growth by generating revenue and employment opportunities.

- **Strengthening Diaspora Connections:** India's soft power connects with its vast diaspora population, creating a sense of pride and affinity towards their homeland

This bond often translates into **active support for India's interests in their adopted countries**.

- **Building Strategic Partnerships:** Soft power can help India build strategic partnerships with other countries based on shared values and interests

These partnerships can lead to collaborations in **various sectors like education, technology, healthcare, and defense**. Ex: India's outreach to Pacific Island countries, which have substantial Indian Diaspora.

- **Soft Power Diplomacy:** India's government often employs soft power diplomacy to complement its traditional diplomatic efforts

For example, initiatives like the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** and the **Ministry of External Affairs' cultural outreach programs** promote India's soft power globally.

- **Advancing Foreign Policy Goals and Interest:** Soft power can help in promoting regional stability, combating terrorism, expanding trade and investment, and strengthening multilateral cooperation

By using its soft power resources, such as diplomacy, cultural exchanges etc, **India can build trust and goodwill with other countries** and persuade them to support its positions and initiatives

This can also help **India to balance the hard power of other countries** that may pose challenges or threats to its security and sovereignty.

- **Shape the global agenda and norms** on issues that matter to it, such as climate change, human rights, democracy, peace, and development

Soft power can help India to assert its role as a responsible and constructive global actor that upholds the values of pluralism, tolerance, and cooperation.

Challenges to India's Soft Power Expansion

Despite its successes, India faces several obstacles in fully realising its soft power potential:

1 Resource Constraints in Cultural Diplomacy: Compared to China's well-funded **Confucius Institutes**, India's cultural promotion efforts through ICCR remain underfunded. Greater investment is needed in international

cultural centres, exchange programmes, and language learning initiatives to maximise India's outreach.

2Geopolitical Rivalries and Regional Tensions: India's strained relations with Pakistan and border disputes with China have sometimes overshadowed its soft power efforts. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), backed by significant infrastructure investments, challenges India's cultural and economic influence in South Asia.

3Internal Challenges: Social and Political Issues: While India promotes itself as a pluralistic democracy, issues such as religious tensions, gender inequality, and press freedom concerns have occasionally weakened its global image. Reports of rising intolerance or restrictions on civil liberties have provided critics with grounds to question India's democratic values.

Recommendation by Standing Committee on Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:

- **Policy Clarity:** The MEA should create a policy document on India's soft power projections, outlining its tools and how it is projected abroad, along with a vision statement for the future.
- **Restructuring ICCR:** ICCR should be reformed to make it more autonomous, accountable, and efficient, with a clear mandate and vision statement that reflects its goals and strategies.

Central government should increase ICCR's budgetary allocation by Rs 500 crores so that it can conduct India's soft power and cultural diplomacy in a robust manner.

- **Body for Coordination:** The article advocates that there should be a central body that can coordinate and monitor the soft power initiatives of various ministries and agencies, such as tourism, education, sports, science and technology, etc

It should have representatives from MEA, ICCR, Ministry of Culture and other stakeholders who can ensure synergy and alignment of policies and programs.

- **Yoga certification board:** India should establish a yoga certification board that can standardize and regulate the quality and authenticity of yoga teachers and institutions across the world

India should organize more yoga festivals and events to showcase its diversity and expertise in this field.

- **Interact with Indian diaspora:** India should create a mechanism to engage with the diaspora more effectively and regularly, such as through online platforms, cultural exchanges, scholarships, awards, etc

Ex: Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) has been celebrated on 9th January every year since 2003 to mark the contribution of the Overseas Indian community in the development of India.

- **Promoting tourism:** India should invest more in developing its tourism infrastructure, facilities, and services

India should launch more campaigns and initiatives to attract more tourists from different regions and segments.

MEA should open more AYUSH centres overseas strategically and in a planned manner.

Conclusion

India's soft power and cultural diplomacy have contributed to enhancing its global image and attracting international cooperation, investment, and partnerships.

As the world becomes more interconnected, India's soft power assets continue to play a vital role in shaping its relations with other nations and contributing to the global cultural landscape.