

Soft Power as a Tool in Indian Foreign Policy

KMS Kodithuwakku

Department of International Relations, University of Colombo, Colombo 3,

Sri Lanka

shashi.uoc@gmail.com

Abstract— *India, the largest and most powerful country in the South Asian region, has a major role in keeping diplomatic relation within region than with other western or Middle East regions. Hence, Indian foreign policy is more towards South Asian countries because its culture appreciates in its immediate neighbourhood. Moreover India continues to have tremendous potential in soft power because of its culture, large diaspora, popular films, music, arts and many cultural links with several countries in the world. Soft power is mainly known as “The ability to obtain what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment. In fact soft power can arise due to the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies which are ‘real but intangible’”. World politics in modern age has been undergoing changes elevating the importance of soft power relative to hard power. In this transformed international system, soft power is crucial in enhancing influence over international outcomes because it has become more difficult to compel nations and non-state actors through principle levels of hard power. India has used its own potentials and capabilities in terms of culture, religion, economy and politics since Indus-Valley civilization as means of its soft power. Even though India has successfully applied its soft power within region; she has not successfully extended its power beyond it to encompass other world states. Research problem investigates whether India is using soft power as national capability and studies how much of it is utilized in her foreign policies within the region. Using mixed methods, the study investigated whether India actually relies on soft power resources in foreign policies. Main objective is to understand utilization of Indian soft power in South Asian region. Additionally, the research finding is India has utilized soft power tools within her foreign policy to spread power and control in South Asian Region.*

Keywords— *Soft Power, Foreign Policy, Utilization*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Since India’s rise at the global arena, the scholarly communities in India and Western Countries have increased their writing on India’s Soft power. Many of these scholars & researchers could have gained discourse on soft power potential which India is

implementing through their foreign policy. Especially India has used its own potential and capabilities in terms of their culture, religion, economy and politics. In this research the author has mainly discussed about India as a regional heavyweight and to what extent she is implementing soft power tools through her foreign policy.

B. Problem Statement and Research Problem

“Soft power as national capability and study how much of their soft power capabilities does India actually utilize in her foreign policies within the region. Using mixed methods, I will investigate whether India with high soft power capabilities, actually relies on her soft power resources in the foreign policies”.

According to the research statement has stated above, the main research concern of this paper is as to why, India is unable to extend soft power beyond the South Asia even though she has stronger tools than the United States of America.

C. Significance of the Research

The significance of this research paper is to bring discourse on the Indian utilization of soft power as a powerful emerging Asian country, in pursuing her International Relations.

D. Hypothesis

This paper is driven by the hypothesis of “India has utilized the Soft Power tools within her foreign policy to spread power and to be the policeman in the South Asian Region”.

E. Research Objectives

The initial research objective here is to find whether India has the potential to establish hegemony with their soft power elements.

The secondary research objectives are to understand utilization of Indian Soft Power in the South Asian region and understand about cultural perspectives of Soft Power.

Moreover to get an idea about challenges and obstacles that India is confronting when extending its soft power elements within the South Asian region.

F. Methodology

Mainly this attempt would be an archival research. Therefore I will be using secondary data such as Books, E-Articles, News Paper Articles and also Magazines. Apart from that, I will use the “quotation” to ensure the validity of research study. I have especially used definitions, concepts and electronic media sources in this research.

II THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Concept of power in International Relations defines power as the ability to achieve one’s motives or goals and at the most general level, it is the capacity to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcome that one wants. (Purushothaman Uma,2010) As this definition elaborates, power may influence the behaviour of others in several ways such as to coerce with threats, induce with gratifications or allure & co-opt to obtain outcomes that require to be attained.

Moreover, the schools of Realists, Structural Realists and Neo- Realists have explicated the nature of anarchical International System with relation to the concept of Power.

As above table denotes, many states in the world exercise the concept of power in different ways. According to the present phenomena, states not only intend to utilize and gain hard power but also states utilize and gain soft power from various ways. Since this paper specifically focuses on the Indian utilization of soft power, it attempts to identify soft power tools and role of soft power by means of Indian context.

A. Soft Power in International System

The concept of soft power first coined by Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye who expressed the term from his book called “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power”. As Nye defined Soft Power is “the ability to obtain what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. In fact soft power can arise due to the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals and policies which are ‘real but intangible’”. (Nye Joseph, 1990)

Table 1

| | Realist | Structural Realist | Neo Realists |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| Elements | Power and Statecraft | Power | Power and threats |
| Objective | States requires ensuring their survival and security. | Maximization the power of states through self-help. | States act according to the logic of self-help--states seek their own interest and will not subordinate their interest to another's. |
| Perspective | In order to attain above mentioned objective as independent entities, states increase power. The realist tradition explicates international politics as a ‘state of nature’, an importantly anarchic system in which each State is forced to help itself and give priority to its own national interests. | States are basic units of anarchical international system and they pursue power as a central concern for dominating other countries in order to thrive and ensure power. War and conflicts are obvious consequences of this process. | States develop offensive military capabilities, for foreign interventionism and as a means to increase their relative power. Security dilemma is obvious since lack of trust is enhancing on each states. The desire and relative abilities of each state to maximize relative power constrain each other, resulting in a 'balance of power', which shapes international relations. |

In the context of states, Nye finds three important sources of soft power- Culture, political values and foreign policies. In India its rising status might promote certain attractive values like sovereignty and economic growth. In the same way a country’s foreign policy may also attract other countries when it promotes trade, mutual relations, human rights and good governance. (Nye Joseph, 2011)

Moreover, soft power is frequently related to the rise of globalization and neoliberal theory. Popular culture and media is identified as sources of soft power since those can extend national language, or a particular set of

normative structures. Therefore the nation with a massive amount of soft power and the determination of winning other state's inspiration will avoid the requirement for expensive hard power expenditure. In other words, even though soft power cannot produce results as soon as hard power it is less expensive than hard power. The difference between hard power and soft power is clearly indicated in the table.



As described in the above chart, main hard power elements utilized are sanctions, through force or payments & bribes. But soft power is mainly utilizing to co-opt on culture, political ideals & economic relations. (Nye Joseph, 2011) However the intensity of using force is minimal in soft power, it is very much effective and a highly productive way of displaying power and encompassing others in to its attraction.

When comparing to Hard power to Soft power, “hard power” is a very simple and intuitive form of power. It is more easily experienced and older than soft power. Hard power is easier to see and its effects are easier to measure. Especially soft power advocates to think about hard power. They consider hard power a form of power. Soft power is the ability to attract people to our side without coercion. Therefore legitimacy is central to soft power. (Pallaver, Matteo, 2011)

III TOOLS AND ELEMENTS OF INDIAN SOFT POWER

Above theoretical background mainly reserved to understand utilization of Indian soft power through their foreign policy. For convenience of the study the author will be dividing to sub headings as following.

A. Economy

Indian economic sector has widely expanded since independence in 1947. India's diverse economy encompasses traditional village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide range of modern industries and a multitude of services. With the liberalised economy India was able to maintain its economic growth around 7% since 1997 and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rates are composited with 17.4%, 25.8% and 56.9% in agricultural, industrial and service sectors respectively. (The world fact book, 2014)

Among them Indian work force is ranked second after China and India has capitalized on its large educated English-speaking population to become a major exporter of information technology services, business outsourcing services and software workers.

Even though the big picture of economic statistics of India is relatively healthy, when observing the depth of the Indian economy it indicates a grey picture. For instance the inflation rate is 9.6% in 2013 and population below poverty line is 29% in 2013. (The world fact book, 2014)

B. Culture

Culture is an important source of soft power. India has had a long history of Civil and cultural links with regional countries. Indian culture is the one of the oldest, most diverse as well as a popular soft power element which assists to build the image of India positively. Indian culture is described as “first and the supreme culture in the world.” Thus, all the behaviours and learning of India have been formatted, based on its culture. (Purushothaman Uma,2010) Specifically the classical music, Indian dancing, language diversity, yoga, spiritual practices, Bollywood film industry, diaspora, arts and food of India are effective elements that are able to make a difference in this world.

Moreover Indian diaspora can be stated as the richest asset of Indian soft power since the diaspora has expanded across countries like Fiji, Guyana, Malaysia, Mauritius, Surinam, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Trinidad. Importantly, countries like Fiji and Mauritius have large Indian communities with people of Indian Origin holding important political positions. In addition Indian population who have settled in the USA is another important factor of Indian soft power since those Indo American community attempts to upturn their identity with lobbying and influencing.

Yoga is another spiritual and physical practice which is a by-product of Indian soft power and it is widely followed all over the world, especially in the West. People engage in Yoga to release the tension and stress. Apart from that, Indian food that use endemic and delicious spices & herbs also play an important role in utilizing Indian soft power and particularly, these cuisines are very popular in the United Kingdom. Interestingly, most of the Indian restaurants have mushroomed in Asian and Western countries.

Elements of popular Indian culture like music and movies have a wide following in many countries. It is the largest film industry next to Hollywood. Indian movies along with Indian music are popular and are watched in South Asian region as well as in the Middle Eastern, African and European countries. Many Bollywood artistes like Amitabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai and Shah Rukh Khan have become the icons of Indian soft power that are capable of alluring others to Indian culture. Remarkably, India has won three Oscar awards after 1982 as a milestone of Indian film industry.

In addition as Uma Purushothaman mentioned when Indian writers win international awards like the Man-Booker prize, when India becomes the guest of honour at international book fairs like the Frankfurt Book Fair, when Indian movies are screened at International Film Festivals like Cannes and when Indians win awards like the Nobel and Magsaysay, India's soft power is being consolidated on a rock steady base.

In that sense it is undoubtedly to say that Indian cultural aspects play a significant role in order to attract others to Indian soft power elements. However, when concerning about the utilization, it is noticeable that India has encompassed all South Asian countries through its cultural invasion and South Asian countries are eagerly aping those continuously as well as these exotic cultural elements have become a part & parcel of their lifestyles, since most of South Asian cultures have been fed with heavy quotas of Indian culture. Nevertheless the extension of Indian culture beyond the South Asian region has been somewhat unsuccessful.

C Politics and Governance

The sub section is divided into two segmentations such as internal political policy and foreign policy.

Indian foreign policy has been based on moral values from the time of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who stands out as figure of tremendous influence, even today. (Purushoththaman Uma, 2010)

Despite confronting many challenges India is successfully operating its democracy and it is the greatest asset of India, in terms of soft power. On the other hand Indian democracy is the world's largest. Specifically India has proved that functioning democracy is a realistic feature even in a poor and illiterate country as well. Since the independence India has held free and fair elections to

select public representatives to the Congress though India has marginalised society in terms of multi caste, multi religion, and multi languages. Female participation in politics is also an outstanding feature of Indian soft power. In fact, in the nearest countries like Nepal and Bhutan, the recent transfer to democracy clearly denotes the influence of Indian democracy. Indian representation and assistance on behalf of democracy further enhances Indian soft power.

Most interestingly, freedom of the press and freedom to express opinions are spectacular features that enable the thriving Indian soft power. Indian population does not ever hesitate to take their grievances to the court and to challenge the arbitrary decisions of the government. The independent judiciary plays an active role in India by taking up many sensitive and current issues which directly affect the public on the open forum. These implications clearly indicate that India is practicing not only democracy but also balance of power (the concept of checks and balances) and good governance to some extent. In fact it is noteworthy mention Indian commitment to build and retain its democracy causes to enhance the moral power as well as soft power of India.

When considering the foreign policy of India, we note that it has been based on moral values since the time of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. As Joseph Nye expresses that a country's foreign policy can increase its soft power if its foreign policy is perceived by other countries and people to be legitimate and having moral authority. Gandhi begun Non Violence Movement to achieve independence peacefully and it is named as a soft power element since nonviolent methods have influenced to develop the area of peace studies. Afterwards Nehru consolidated this soft power strategy as a foreign policy agenda.

Moreover India attempts to maintain her 'big brother' role within the South Asian region by resolving disputes and obtrusively interfering in regional matters which have a spill over effect. As Uma Purushothaman has quoted Wagner, he argues that India's regional policy after the 1990s has been characterized by greater emphasis on soft power strategies. For an instance Gujral doctrine introduced the principle of non-reciprocity which is emphasising that India not only had a bigger responsibility, but should give more to the smaller neighbours than she would receive. This doctrine echoed domestic changes in India, especially the economic liberalisation- post 1991.

Apart from that, at the institutional level India remains and is recognized as a sizeable institutional power due to its leadership at the G-77, G-22 and Non Aligned Movement. However, the Indian wish to acquire a permanent seat in the UN Security Council displays its soft power goals significantly.

Precisely, this would denote that Indian public diplomacy along with cultural invasion and neighbourhood influences are very much effective soft power elements that India is utilizing.

D. Social aspects

Not only cultural, economic, political and governance but other aspects of India also can be identified as soft power elements. Specifically, education, demography, infrastructure and sports are elaborated.

According to the CIA fact book data, by July 2014 Indian population stood at 1,236,344,631 and India is only second to China. Therefore India has a reliable & massive workforce in order to obtain economic development, since literacy rate is 62% in 2013, these would become a plus points for India. As the population graph illustrates below, the young work force of India is above 50% and this proves the capability of utilization of Indian soft power in various fields.

Moreover, cricket -specifically Indian Premier League - continues to build strong relations between India and some other Asian nations beyond her immediate neighbourhood. Since players from Western countries also participate in this League, cricket fans all around the world are attracted on to this series. The October 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi in spite of gross organizational shortcomings, proved to be a meaningful selling point with the many Asian and Pacific Commonwealth countries.

India's youth is a crucial asset in Asia. Amazingly, in Singapore, Finance and Information technology (IT) sectors welcome young Indians and many companies, Banks and Financial institutions have started visiting top Indian campuses for recruitment purposes. Electricity generation of India is another crucial factor in terms of soft power since India is ranked in sixth place in electricity production.

IV. ANALYSIS

According to above soft power elements, we can clearly identify the nature of Indian soft power implementation which she has been following during the past few decades.

The Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru first laid the foundation to ensure soft power method in India. He built up the Indian Foreign policy as a moral and an independent force in global affairs and as the voice of developing countries. He did not apply hard power among the countries to continue their foreign policy. Apart from that, India's soft power's enormous potential arises from Indian Television Dramas, Bollywood Movies, Miss World contests as well from other Indian cultural attractions.

After economic reforms in 1990, India emerged as a long standing democratic country and great power within the region. Furthermore India could become an important member of the evolving 'Democratic Community' in Asia.

To ensure the political stability and economic prosperity India plays a pivotal role in the region. Therefore India is building bridges among the countries to consolidate their powerful image through economic ties. During the past decades India tried to protect their territorial integrity and national sovereignty through the military power. But after the 9/11 attack they realized that they can't win the hearts and minds of people through hard power. Hence India utilized the soft power to enhance their power relations within the region and beyond the region.

India, as the powerful emerging country and vibrant democratic country in the region, has introduced "Big Brother Policy" among neighbouring countries. However within the framework of this policy, India self conferred upon herself, the responsibility to preserve peace and to ensure the stability in the region. Therefore India shares her economic, cultural, political and religious aspects among the regional countries. These policies lead to establishing bilateral relationships with neighbouring countries.

India's neighbours draw much of its attention in its overall foreign policy dilemmas. Except from Bhutan and Maldives, India is facing security challenges from all her neighbours. Therefore Indian Foreign policy strategies primarily focus on protecting her core national interests. Therefore India mainly uses soft power as a tool in their

foreign policy to enhance regional integrity and stability. In this phenomenon, India began to embrace and extend soft power skills based on Gujaral doctrine. This is the first official neighbourhood policy which set out five principles.

The main reason for this power shifting is to check Chinese influence among the neighbouring countries.

Especially Bollywood movies have been regionalized in the modern century. Not only movies but also Indian music has become more modernised. Bollywood music currently contains more modern themes and also uses the English and Tamil. Box office hits such as Devdas, Kalho Naho and Three Idiots draw lasting attraction in regional countries as well as from western audiences. India never had it so good. These movies and soap operas promote Indian popular culture and potentially play a role in enhancing the attractiveness of India. These sights and sounds reflect regional cultural patterns and hold people's interest. Therefore these Bollywood themes are very much popular in the south Asian region - Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. Hence we can clearly assess, to what extent India's soft power skills are winning the hearts & minds of masses around the region.

Apart from that, Indian dishes & spices also took a firm hold throughout the region. Especially Indian Masala shops and traditional cuisine -some of them vegetarian- are widely spread through the region and therefore Indian influence has informally caught-up with the regional populace.

India's soft power potential viewing among political and strategic elites within the region is significant sense that regional capitals view a rising India as a cooperative, attractive and non-threatening country. Therefore India continues to rise and to pave way for her deepening integration in to the existing global order. Politics and governance of both countries are attractive. Especially, charismatic Indian leaders enjoy the potential to display their soft power across the globe. But as the author feels, the "politics and governance" of India has failed to expand its soft power due to internal issues that they confront in economic, political and social spheres.

In social aspects, India is infirm to expand its soft power due to challenges like brain drain, growing population, poor facilities in health care and etc. All these are internal

issues that India should address carefully, in order to strengthen its soft power.

V. CONCLUSION

In the current International system Indian elite could become more powerful and confident, re-emerging their nation as a great power in Asia. Present day Indian soft power policies are not like the principles of Premier Nehru. These extend beyond the traditional policy within the country.

However, in the present scenario, soft power is an emerging notion in the Indian Foreign Policy. India has exercised the hard power potential and now they are evoking the soft power capability through her foreign policy. However, due to the lack of social progress, lack of control over India's media, belated entry in to the global economy, poor cultural diplomacy has led to falling short of soft power potential within her foreign policy.

Therefore India should broadbase their soft power ability through tools of its culture, economy, social aspects and also political relations. Apart from that, it is high time for India to realize her soft power resources and leadership potentials to influence Indian skills throughout the South Asian region.

REFERENCES

- Blarel Nicolas, Indias Soft Power: from potential to Reality?, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/SR010/blarel.pdf>
- Lee John (2010) Unrealised Potential: India's 'Soft Power' Ambition in Asia, the Canter for Independent Studies, <http://www.cis.org.au/publications/foreign-policy-analysis/article/1728-unrealised-potential-indias-soft-power-ambition-in-asi>
- Melissen Jan (2005) The New public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael
- Melon M. David(2001) Soft Power in Indian Foreign Policy, *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol.36,
- Mukherjee Rohan (2014) The False Promise Of India's Soft power, Volume 6(1), ISSN 1948-9145

Nye Joseph (1990) Soft Power, Foreign Policy, No. 80.,<http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/rdenever/PPA-730-27/Nye%201990.pdf>

Purushothaman Uma (2010) Shifting Perceptions of Power: Soft Power and India's Foreign Policy, Journal of Peace Studies, Vol. 17, Issue 2&3.

Shashi Tharoor (2007) *Making the Most of India's Soft Power*". The Times of India.

Wagner Chrstian (2015) From Hard Power to Soft Power? : Ideas, Interactions, Institutions, and Images in India's South Asia Policy, South Asian Institute, Department of Political Science, University of Heidelberg.