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From a latent to a 'strong' soft power? The evolution of India's cultural diplomacy

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ABSTRACT India celebrated when in 2014 the United Nations adopted the 21st of June as International Yoga Day. In recent years India's leaders have increasingly focused on its diaspora, multicultural ethos, and its ancient practices like yoga, through official campaigns and foreign visits. Particularly since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, there has been an increased activism to draw attention to and employ India's soft power. The article traces the evolution of India as a soft power since its emergence as an independent country. It explores how this soft power has shaped India's foreign policy and behavior. India's soft power assets are not of recent origin, but there is an increasing activism to use those assets effectively. Has India evolved as a soft power? What are the characteristics of India's soft power? How is India's current political dispensation different from the earlier ones in applying soft power in foreign policy? The article addresses these questions by applying Nye Jr's concept of soft power and aims to contribute to the debate on soft power by focusing on cultural diplomacy of a rising power. It demonstrates that though soft power resources, including culture, are not new, the increasing awareness and activism of India's political class to use those resources to realize foreign policy goals is recent. The focus on soft power, particularly cultural diplomacy, and its use in foreign policy, has become increasingly visible in recent years. This article also argues that the increasing acceptability of its culture and values opens up possibilities for India to realize foreign policy goals. It will, however, be a daunting task for members of the Indian political class to use soft power effectively unless they address internal and external constraints. This article is published as part of a collection on soft power.

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During his electoral campaign in New Delhi in 2013, Narendra Damodardas Modi, who became Prime Minister of India a year later, stated “India’s journey has gone from snake charmers to mouse charmers!”, adding, “the youth of the nation has its finger on the mouse of computers and is changing the world” (*The Economic Times*, 2013). “Snake charmers” was an allusion to India’s mysticism, superstitions, poverty and backwardness. “(Computer) mouse charmers” was an allusion to rising profile of India as an information technology power, its economic growth, rising middle class, human resource and rising aspirations. During his address to the joint session of the US Congress in June 2016, Modi revealed approximately 30 million people in the United States practice yoga, a system of body and mind practices that evolved in ancient India.

Soft power, in its current usage, became popular after the end of the cold war, when the United States emerged as the lone superpower. The “unipolar moment” that the United States enjoyed following the Soviet collapse, witnessed developments and challenges not necessarily amenable to resolution by hard power tools (Krauthammer, 1990/1991 and 2002/2003). Borders became flexible, globalization became an international norm, information and communication technology changed modes of interaction, and non-state actors increasingly challenged state sovereignty. To confront these challenges and make use of newly available opportunities, hard power seemed insufficient and, at times, unfeasible. Recent—and even ancient—global history is replete with instances where coercive state apparatus failed to bring desired results or proved costly. Against this background, scholars like Joseph Nye Jr were interested in remodelling statecraft whereby the states could pursue their interests without the use of military force and economic sanctions. Even before the modern state system came into place, empires and kingdoms used soft, non-military, assets in pursuit of their goals. An old Indian saying in Hindi captures this aptly: “jahan kaam aaye sui kaha kare talwari” (if you can get your work done through a needle, you do not need a sword.)

India’s ancient image as a “golden bird”, a land of spiritual knowledge, a land of spices, gold, diamond, ivories, enchanted merchants, explorers and navigators, is well established. Mark Twain’s words vividly capture this bewildering phenomenon called India:

“This is indeed India! The land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendor and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the country of hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods, cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grand mother of tradition” (Twain, 1899: 26).

Twain further notes,

“(India is) the one sole country under the sun that is endowed with an imperishable interest for alien prince and alien peasant, for lettered and ignorant, wise and fool, rich and poor, bond and free, 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” (Ibid.)

India’s traditions of non-violence and pluralism, diversity and tolerance, its yoga and Ayurveda, its Bollywood and classical dances, are well known—but how far they help India realize its goals remains a subject for investigation. The Indian government

under Modi is apparently crafting a policy to capitalize on these assets to realize policy goals. The earlier governments, particularly after the 1990s, pursued the soft power policy, but the kind of vigour displayed by the Modi government was apparently lacking. India’s soft power assets are not of recent origin, but the increasing activism to use those assets is a recent one. How do Indian leaders factor India’s soft power in policymaking? How is India’s current political dispensation different from earlier ones in cultivating India’s soft power? The article addresses these questions while following a historical and chronological pattern in examining the elements of India’s soft power and their use since its independence to the advent of the era of globalization and beyond.

What is soft power?

Put simply, soft power is *soft*—it does not rely on hard instruments of power like a military tank. Its influence is soft—one feels it subtly or surreptitiously as one feels attracted to certain music or food. In academic writing in IR, the neorealist approaches tend to emphasize hard power, while liberal institutionalist scholars consider soft power as an essential resource of statecraft (Wilson, III, 2008: 114). The major difference between soft and hard power is that the latter coerces the actor to do something desired by the coercer, while soft power persuades it to do the same thing without coercion. According to Nye Jr, “soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye Jr, 2009a: 29). It rests on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others (Nye Jr, 2002-2003: 552). Soft power encompasses nearly everything other than economic and military power. But, in cases of both hard power and soft power, there is a concern for power, tangible power, to fulfil a state’s goal. Nye Jr argues,

If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow. If it can establish international norms consistent with its society, it is less likely to have to change. If it can support institutions that make other states wish to channel or limit their activities in ways the dominant state prefers, it may be spared the costly exercise of coercive or hard power (Nye Jr, 1990: 167).

The major characteristics of soft power include, “culture (when it is pleasing to others), values (when they are attractive and consistently practiced), and policies (when they are seen as inclusive and legitimate)” (Nye Jr, 2009b: 161). The concept of soft power draws upon the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, who conceptualizes how a state uses its cultural and ideological power to maintain hegemony. According to Nye Jr, “... political leaders and thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci have long understood the power that comes from setting the agenda and determining the framework of a debate. The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as an attractive culture, ideology, and institutions” (Nye Jr, 2002-2003: 552). Nye Jr was concerned with the problem of maintaining the US supremacy in international politics, to realize the US’s goal in the increasingly complex global system. The Smart Power Commission co-chaired by him, in its report of 2007 argued, “America’s image and influence had declined in recent years, and that the United States had to move from exporting fear to inspiring optimism and hope ... Smart power is the ability to combine the hard power of coercion or payment with the soft power of attraction into a successful strategy” (Nye Jr, 2009a: 30).

From that perspective, soft power goals are same as those of hard power—only the means differ.

Soft power takes a long time to produce intended results, but it is an effective instrument for accomplishing goals. One of the major elements of soft power, which is applicable perhaps to all cases, is non-violence. The actor wielding the soft power appeals to proponents and also opponents through the method of non-violence. It can be argued Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, used this soft power during the freedom struggle to realize the goal of Indian independence. Whether it is Hollywood, or pop music, or Dunkin Donuts—none of them use the method of physical violence, but an appeal to the human “mind and heart”. Such an attraction, however, may lack the moral content, hence force—as morality varies from culture to culture, from people to people, and from place to place. Ferguson argues, “all over the Islamic world kids enjoy (or would like to enjoy) bottles of Coke, Big Macs, CDs by Britney Spears and DVDs starring Tom Cruise. Do any of these things make them love the United States more? Strangely not” (Ferguson, 2003: 21).

Jeffery Haynes, influenced by Peter Katzenstein, examines use of soft power in the context of how religious and cultural groups influence foreign policy. Katzenstein rejected the assumptions of neo-realism and neoliberalism as they focused on physical capabilities of states and institutions, but neglected influential norms, collective identities and cultures of societies. Haynes (2008: 143) makes the case that “soft power should include cultural (including religious) actors who seek to influence foreign policy by encouraging policy makers to incorporate religious beliefs, norms and values into foreign policy”. This argument is particularly relevant in the context of debates on India as a soft power, as India’s culture, religion, ancient systems and practices such as yoga have contributed to its soft power. Sikkink (2002: 305–306) draws upon the idea of soft power as developed by Nye Jr and “communicative power” of Dryzek and Habermas, to explore how transnational advocacy groups play an active role in shaping international norms. These groups change discourses and practices through their communicative power, which may take the shape of information politics, symbolic politics, accountability politics, or leverage politics.

Some of the critics argue that the idea of soft power, as developed by Nye Jr, might not be applicable to other countries and it might entail grafting an American concept to other situations (Smith-Windsor, 2000: 51–56). Despite popularity of the term in the last two decades, the importance of soft power in realizing foreign policy goals appear to be secondary to hard power. According to Wilson, III, “... there is simply no counterpart to the huge political base of the hard power community. Instead, the firm advocates of soft power and its wider introduction into foreign policy making exist as scattered public intellectuals in various think tanks and universities, or the occasional consulting group” (Wilson III, 2008: 119).

It is hard to ignore soft power and its utilities. It would appear naïve not to accord it due significance, and particularly its contextual significance in the changing world. At a basic level, the concept indicates a nation-state does not necessarily need to use military or economic might to promote its national interests. Its soft power tools can be useful. Second, it highlights the expensive nature of hard power tools. In the contemporary world ridden with conflicts and of the availability of a plethora of highly destructive armaments, advocacy for the use of soft power over hard power is appealing. It is also crucial that while soft power appeals, keeping in view its cost-effectiveness, the output depends on what kind of soft power asset a nation-state possesses. Soft power is a broader concept and implies all elements of persuasion including culture that a nation-state uses to realize its foreign policy goals. The core significance of the concept, useful for this

paper, is national culture, particular those aspects which are attractive or pleasing to others, is an element of soft power. The nation-state promotes those pleasing aspects of culture with the goal to increase its persuasive power to realize goals. Against this background this article examines India’s cultural diplomacy and its elements, and their prospects in shaping India’s foreign policy.

India’s soft power assets

The word India evokes for many the image of a soft power. Quotes from Mark Twain above present a captivating image of India. Whether it is soft-mannered Mahatma Gandhi, a saint among politicians and a politician among saints, or India’s spiritual and cultural depth, its vast landscape, its diversity, its shibboleths, all these sometimes benumb a rational mind. The epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are compared with Illiad and Odyssey, and Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit playwright and poet, is compared with Shakespeare and Kautilya with Machiavelli. Kautilya’s disciple, Ashoka, once known for his aggressive foreign policy and rule of the sword, later abandoned his aggressive policy and cultivated soft power. He converted to Buddhism, and promoted it in different regions. India’s multiple names also reveal its soft power imagery. The name India is derived from the name Indus (the river, in the valley of which evolved Indus valley civilization). The other names such as Bharatavarsha or Aryavarta or Hindustan have religious and spiritual connotations. Whereas the term Hindu is of the Persian vintage (as Persian traders pronounced Sindhu—the local name for Indus—as Hindu), Bharat is derived from the Vedic interpretation of Bha—implying knowledge, and Rat—implying engaged, the word implying the people or race engaged in knowledge.

India has been a melting pot of religions, languages and cultures. Sanskrit played an important role in building the identity of India and its soft power. According to Hart (1984: viii), Indian scholars had accumulated some 160,000 texts in Sanskrit since long time. While Sanskrit dominated the landscape for significant part of its history, other languages and religions gradually became an inseparable part of Indian culture and tradition. Notably, three of the world’s major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism—originated in India. Christianity arrived much earlier (in first century AD) in India than in many other parts of the world. The Indian culture and spiritualism as enshrined in scriptures such as Vedas and Vedanta aptly encapsulated this diversity. In Chhandogya Upanishad, it is written, “Ekam Sat, Vipra Bahudha Vadanti”—the Truth is one, but the wise speak it in different ways. Similarly, “Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina, Sarve Santu Niramaya. Sarve Bhadrani Pashyantu, Ma Kashchit Dukhbhag Bhavet”—Let everybody be happy, healthy and wise, and let me share their sorrow. Mundaka Upanishad says, Satyameva Jayate (also used in Indian national emblem)—“Let truth emerge victorious”. Indian tradition identifies individual values with universal values, and does not differentiate individuals on the basis of religion, language, race or color. This trait is encapsulated in Sanskrit words “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”—the whole world is one family. During his speech at the United Nations in September 2014, Prime Minister Modi referred to this message from Vedanta and argued that it encapsulates India’s culture (Lakshman, 2014).

The ancient, and traditional, portrayal of the Hindu religion as a tolerant and pluralistic religion has helped India portray itself as a peaceful and tolerant nation. The US Congresswoman, Tulsi Gabbard, argued, “The essence of the Hinduism that I practice is karma yoga and bhakti yoga, which means to love God and all [emphasis hers] of His children, regardless of their race, religion, etc., and to use my life working for the well-being of everyone” (Balachandran, 2016). As Niall Ferguson argued, the role of

religion in shaping politics cannot be undermined, and the power of religion and morality may prove more enduring than hard power. He argues, "Faith, then, is perhaps as important a component of power as material resources ... Faith cannot move mountains. But it can move people" (Ferguson, 2003: 22–24). Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetans, argued, "India's long tradition of religions tolerance can be a role model for rest of the world". He further argued, "major religions of the world like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism originated in India and it provided shelter to followers of religions like Zoroastrianism. These can be a model for rest of the world" (DNA, 2008). Tharoor (2012: 40) gave an apt example of Indian diversity and peaceful coexistence: "the sight in May 2004, after the world's then-largest democratic exercise, of a victorious leader of Roman Catholic background and Italian heritage (Sonia Gandhi) making way for a Sikh (Manmohan Singh) to be sworn in as Prime Minister by a Muslim (President Abdul Kalam), in a country 81 per cent Hindu, caught the world's imagination and won its admiration. This had nothing to do with external messaging: it was simply India being itself".

It would be exaggerated to argue that India's soft power is based on or driven by the Hindu religion. The Hindu religion and culture, as briefly presented above, have played a role in shaping it, but other religions and cultures have contributed to its evolution. The Indian thinkers and freedom fighters—whether Mahatma Gandhi, B. G. Tilak, or Swami Vivekananda, or Sri Aurobindo, or Jawaharlal Nehru—often emphasized on synthesis of diverse values and cultures for the rise of the Indian nation. Nehru's concept "unity in diversity" conceptualizes this synthetic character of India's soft power. Swami Vivekananda argued, "For our motherland, a conjunction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta Brain and Islam Body—is the only hope" (Mehta, 2012). There are ample cases in history of how Islam shaped Indian culture. Mughal Emperor Akbar, of 16th Century, conceived a new religion—Din-i-Elahi (Religion of God)—synthesizing the best elements of various religions (Roychoudhury 1941). There were Saints who bore Hindu and Muslim names. For example, in Kashmir the names Nund Rishi (Hindu name) and Noor-ud-Din (Muslim name) belonged to the same saint. Similarly, there were Saints like Kabir who had both Hindu and Muslim disciples. Not only in spiritual, religious or cultural field, India's soft power assets also encapsulated the fields of science. Aryabhata, Bhāskara I, Brahmagupta, Varāhamihira contributed to mathematics and astronomy in the ancient period. It has often baffled the Western mind how great Indian mathematicians and scientists were also devoutly religious. In the Indian conception of science and spiritualism, the line of demarcation is thin. The 2015 Hollywood movie "The Man Who Knew Infinity", based on the life of the famous Indian mathematician, Srinivasa Ramanujan, displays the connection between science and religion, a characteristic trait of Indian culture and identity.

One of the major soft power icons of India was Swami Vivekananda. The young Swami of 30, almost obscure, suddenly rose to fame after his address at Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893. He was not invited to the Congress, but he secured a place as a representative of Hinduism. While other speakers addressed the audience with customary words "ladies and gentlemen", Swami Vivekananda's opening words "brothers and sisters of America" struck chord with the audience. The Swami inspired thousands of Indians and non-Indians across the globe. He was followed by Sri Aurobindo, educated in Britain, but decided to join freedom struggle after brief service in the Baroda state. When India got independence on 15 August 1947, Sri Aurobindo in his radio message envisioned five dreams for India. The fourth one, "the spiritual gift of India to the world", read,

"India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice" (Mohanty 2008, 197). It may not be mere coincidence that Prime Minister Modi, during his first Independence Day speech from ramparts of Red Fort in Delhi, on 15 August 2014, reminded this dream of Sri Aurobindo. He said, "... today, on 15th August, we also have the birth anniversary of Maharishi Aurobindo ... With regard to the destiny of India, he remarked, 'I have a faith that the divine power and spiritual heritage of India will play an important role towards the welfare of the world' ... I strongly believe in the words of legends" (*Indian Express*, 2014a).

Undoubtedly, one of the most famous ambassadors of India's soft power was Mahatma Gandhi. A non-resident Indian in South Africa for 21 years (1893–1914), the Britain educated lawyer, Gandhi shot to fame while fighting against injustice in South Africa. Gandhi made famous the principles of truth and non-violence during his struggle in South Africa, and practiced those in India against the British rule. He inspired thousands of freedom fighters around the world, and gave the call for an "Asian Way" during the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in April 1947, when he said, "... the message of the East, the message of Asia, is not to be learnt through European spectacles, through the Western spectacles ... If you want to give a message again to the West, it must be a message of 'Love', it must be a message of 'Truth'" (Singh 224). King Jr (2005: 136) referred Mahatma Gandhi as "the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change", and, during his India visit in 1959, said in a radio address, "In a real sense, Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation".

Among various soft power assets of India, yoga is a prominent one. The term yoga has broad and narrow connotations. It literally means to yoke or to add. According to Indian spiritual tradition, it implies union of the individual soul with the divine soul. For Indian philosopher, Sri Aurobindo (1999: 6), "All life is Yoga." According to him, "In the right view both of life and of Yoga all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga". Hindu scripture, Gita, defines yoga as "Karmasu Kauslam" (the art of work is yoga, implying yoga provides the practitioner skilful mastery of activities). According to Patanjali, the founder of the school of yoga, "Yoga Chitta Vritti Nirodha" (to have mastery over mind is yoga). Yoga, as conventionally understood, is practice of certain exercises that help the practitioner to control the movements of body and mind towards leading a healthy life. While introducing a proposal to celebrate yoga as an international event at the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Modi stated, "yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition. yoga embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action ... a holistic approach [that] is valuable to our health and our well-being" (UN, 2016a). According to the United Nations website, "yoga is an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India. The word 'yoga' derives from Sanskrit and means to join or to unite, symbolizing the union of body and consciousness ... International yoga Day aims to raise awareness worldwide of the many benefits of practicing yoga" (UN, 2016b).

One of the major recognitions of India's soft power was the United Nations' approval of 21 June as International Yoga Day. Internationally about 125 million people practice yoga. In 2016, on the yoga day at Dubai, led by Indian yoga guru, Baba Ramdev, 100,000 people participated, creating Guinness Book record. In recent days, there have also been attempts to explore the utility of

yoga in bringing peace in conflict situations. Yoga can play a positive role in bringing peace to conflict situations (Mahapatra, 2013). The famous yoga guru and founder of Art of Living Foundation, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is a strong advocate for applying yoga to realize peace and reconciliation among warring parties in conflict situations around the world. His foundation travelled to conflict situations within India and other countries such as Iraq, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Sri Lanka to promote peace and harmony. According to Sri Sri Ravishankar (2016), "Achieving lasting peace begins with the individual", and his methods include, "self-development programs, dialogue and rehabilitation", and they have "a positive effect in numerous conflict and post-conflict countries all over the world".

Besides yoga, Ayurveda (which can be translated as "science of life"), an ancient practice, is another Indian soft power tool. According to Sharma (1981: v), "Ayurveda is one of the branches of the Vedas". Charaka, whose *Charaka Samhita* is considered one of the major texts on Ayurveda, was, according to some accounts, belonged to second century AD, though some accounts place him to an earlier date (Sharma, 1981: viii–x). Ayurveda has become increasingly popular in the developed world, and it is seen in conjunction with yoga. At present, there are about 2000 Ayurvedic Retreat centers around the world, and out of which about 100 centers are based in the United States. Association of Ayurvedic Professionals of North America (AAPNA) (2016) aims to bring "the healing science of Ayurveda and its modalities to the forefront of integrative medicine in the West". In November 2014, Indian government upgraded the Department of Ayurveda, yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy, founded in November 2003, into a full-fledged ministry.

India's film industry, Bollywood, is the producer of highest number of films in the world and is popular in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, the Middle East, South East Asia and in many other parts of the world. Tharoor accounts how during the peak of violence in Afghanistan in 1990s, people never failed to watch Indian soap opera, *Kyun Ki Sass Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*. He cites another example, in Syria during the regime of Hafez al-Assad, the life size portrait of then Bollywood superstar, Amitabh Bachchan, was as big as of al-Assad (Tharoor, 2008b). While walking in the Batavia area of Jakarta in October 2008, Indonesia, a local started conversation with the author and knowing that the author is from India, he mentioned the names of Indian film stars Mithun Chakraborty and Amitabh Bachchan, of whom he was a fan. During the cold war era, film stars like Raj Kapoor worked as bridge between India and other countries. Kapoor and his films like *Awara* and *Mera Naam Joker* were immensely popular in Soviet Union. In the Middle East, Indian films run for days, and the diaspora plays an active role in popularizing the films. In countries such as the United States, Hindi films are increasing playing in multiplexes to satisfy demands of increasing Indian diaspora. Along with Bollywood, Indian music and cultural elements such as dance and drama too have played a role in boosting India's image as a soft power. For instance, the USA-based Bollywood America, annually organizes dance and other cultural events. The aim of the organization is "to celebrate and spread interest in the diversity and tradition of South Asian culture" in the world (Bollywood America, 2016). The popular memory treasure the friendship of the Beatles with the Indian sitar maestro Ravi Shankar and Yogi Bhanu. And, to add, many Indian actors are becoming part of Hollywood movies as well as television shows. For instance, Bollywood actor Priyanka Chopra played a leading role in TV serial *Quantico*, and is confirmed to play a role in *Baywatch*. Similarly, Deepika Padukone, another Bollywood actor, is playing a major role in *The Return of Xander Cage*.

Indian food, another element of the soft power, has become increasing popular in various parts of the world. One can easily find an Indian restaurant in most places. It is noteworthy that many restaurant owners of other South Asian countries name their eateries Indian. Indian spices too have crept in several non-Indian households all over the globe. Samosa, chaat, chicken tikka masala, masala dosa, curries and many such Indian dishes have made inroads across the globe. A leading Indian national daily, *Times of India*, elaborates,

Indian spices have captured the popular imagination by featuring in films like *Mistress of Spices* and *Today's Special* and a whole host of television shows like *Outsourced* and *The Big Bang Theory* for example ... Indian food including kebabs, chicken tikka masala, biryani, curries, masala dosa and even the humble naan are immensely popular and available in places like UK, Canada, the Middle East, US and even China ... This reflects the soft-power that India has abroad through its food ... When singer Katy Perry was in the country two years ago to perform at the T20 opening ceremony in Chennai, she insisted that she wanted to try out all the staple kebabs and curries ... From street stalls to subway cafeterias to Michelin-starred restaurants, Indian food and ingredients have made inroads at every level on the larger gastronomic map (Suresh and Nooran, 2014).

According to a report of 2003, there are about 9000 Indian curry houses in the United Kingdom, employing about 70,000 staff. The Indian food industry in the United Kingdom is worth £3.2 billion and accounts for two-thirds of all eating out. In London, there are more Indian restaurants than in Mumbai and Delhi, and Indian restaurants in Britain serve about 2.5 million customers every week (The National Archives, 2003). Then British Secretary of State, Cook (2001), had said, "Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences. Chicken Tikka is an Indian dish". According to a report of 2007, more than 1,200 Indian food products were introduced in the United States since 2000, out of which 300 were introduced in 2006 (Bhide, 2007). According to an Indian-American, "After first moving to Washington in 1992, I would travel to India to bring suitcases full of spices, spice mixes, pickles, lentil wafers and even curry leaves, because local availability was limited. Today, ingredients are easily available at Indian markets, at Korean stores and at chains such as Giant, Whole Foods, Costco and Wegmans. Moreover, food manufacturers and even local grocers are now tempting people to cook easy Indian—a concept that once was oxymoronic—through the use of time-saving products" (Ibid.). Though the entrance of Indian food to the West is relatively of recent origin, its spread to countries of developing world including South East Asia, Middle East, Central Asia, Caribbean Islands could be traced to at least few centuries. In the ancient and medieval periods, India had a strong naval trade with eastern coast of Africa through the Arabian Sea, and with the countries of South East Asia through the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean, and land route trade with China, Central Asia and Persia through the Silk Road, through which not only spices but a whole lot of goods, ideas, knowledge and skills were transported.

Indian democracy has remained an attraction throughout the post-cold war world, in which more nation-states are turning democratic. Despite being a developing economy, with significant level of poverty and other nation building travails, India is known as the largest democracy in the world, while its neighbours have witnessed coups. Except a brief period, from 1975 to 1977, India has regular elections. During the 2014 nation-wide elections,

there were about 814 million eligible voters, 100 million more than the last elections in 2009, and there were 930,000 polling stations to exercise their basic political right (BBC, 2014a). *The Washington Post* called the 2014 elections “the biggest year in the history of democracy”. It reported,

Even for those who know nothing about India, this really looks to be one of the most fascinating political events this year, and not just because of its scale. The election is taking place in an increasingly important tech-savvy country, with vital issues of economic problems and nationalism at stake ... It's a fascinating moment in democracy, and one that shouldn't be ignored (Taylor and Kaphle, 2014).

Cultural diplomacy in action

The soft power assets of India were factored inaptly in foreign policymaking till 1990s. Not that the policymakers were not aware, rather the founding fathers of modern India were themselves ambassadors of soft power, but they displayed recalcitrance to use soft power tools to realize foreign policy goals. As early as 1948, Indian Foreign Secretary, K. P. S. Menon had written to “Heads of Indian Missions and Posts Abroad”, seeking reports on a regular basis on “persons of Indian descent ... their number, employment, economic and political position, treatment, all relevant matters as well” (Kapur, 2010: 190). Those attempts were more aimed at tracking Indian origin population outside. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) played a role in cultural diplomacy. The objective of ICCR, founded in 1950, was “to establish, revive and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries” (ICCR, 2016). At present, the ICCR has 35 cultural centers around the world, working under respective Indian Missions. It is planning to establish new centers in Dar-es-Salaam, Yangon, Paris, Washington, Hanoi, Lagos, Singapore, Rome and Kuwait. ICWA, established in 1943, aimed to “promote India's relations with other countries through study, research, discussions, lectures, exchange of ideas and information with other organisations within and outside India engaged in similar activities” (ICWA, 2016). The historic Asian Relations Conference in April 1947 was organized by ICWA, in which Mahatma Gandhi had emphasized on Asian way. ICWA was incorporated as a member of the United Nations Academic Impact in 2015. At present, it has partnerships with organizations in 38 countries.

Nehru amply capitalized on Gandhian principles of non-violence, and translated it into foreign policy agendas such as Non-alignment or Principles of Peaceful Co-existence (or Panchsheel). According to Tharoor, the great flaw in Nehru's approach was that his soft power was unrelated to any acquisition of hard power, as was amply demonstrated during India's defeat in 1962 war against China. Tharoor (2008a: 43) further argues, “... soft power becomes credible when there is hard power behind it; that is why the U.S. has been able to make so much of its soft power. Soft power by itself is no guarantee of security”. A balance of soft and hard power is the key but the Indian leadership of post-Independent India failed to evolve this balance. Besides its failure to emerge as a hard power, India also failed to adequately cultivate its soft power assets, in which it could claim advantage over many countries. The result was India emerged neither a soft nor a hard power for a long time. Even at the later stages, the balance continued to remain missing with India continuing to struggle to claim its due position at the global forums. India's soft power remained highly under utilized till the end of the cold war. India's soft power assets remained under cultivated.

India remained a latent soft power or a sleeping giant, till forces of globalization and information technology revolution awoke the sleeping giant from slumber. The moment arrived only in 1990s, and was given a concrete shape in the 21st century.

There was a significant shift in 1990s in the policy emphasis to factor soft power towards realizing foreign policy goals. There were various factors responsible for this shift, the major ones being: India's economic crisis in 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of biopolarism and the advent of liberalized and globalized world, India's giving up of old foreign policy calculations guided by the cold war world order, the unpopularity of India among its neighbours, and rise of consciousness among the policymakers about the utility of soft power tools. In 1991, India faced a severe balance of payment of crisis. The crisis propelled the Indian leaders to shun old policy of licence permit raj, and open India to the forces of liberalization, privatization and globalization. Indian policymakers apparently realized that in order to harness its potential economically it will be useful to cultivate relations near and far. In early 1990s, the Indian government initiated the “Look East” policy to revive relations with South East Asian countries, with which it had enjoyed long historical, cultural and economic relations, but which had received set back during colonial and cold war years (Haokip, 2015). Though the Indian subcontinent and the surrounding regions including the members of the regional cooperation bloc South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), share many cultural traits and legacies, India could not establish enduring relations with these countries. Indian leaders realized the significance of soft power to earn trust of these countries. Towards this end, one of the policies adopted by the Indian government in 1990s was establishing friendly relations, under the name of Gujaral doctrine, with the SAARC countries. According to Murthy (1999: 639), “the Gujaral Doctrine is considered to have made a substantial change in the manner in which India's bilateral relations were conducted with its immediate neighbours, especially the smaller ones”.

The use of social media buttressed India's soft power outreach. Unlike the cold war times, when the wars and rivalries were mainly based on ideological differences, the relations in the post cold war period have significantly been shaped by the revolution in information technology. Nye Jr (2008: 99) rightly argued, “Information is power, and today a much larger part of the world's population has access to that power ... Technological advances have led to a dramatic reduction in the cost of processing and transmitting information”. India, an information technology power, could realize the importance of information power in promoting cultural diplomacy. The Indian foreign ministry established a new web portal for public diplomacy in 2006, in which later it uploaded YouTube videos and pictures and a Facebook page. It launched its Twitter account and sent first tweet in July 2010. At present Prime Minister Modi has 21.6 million followers on Twitter, and since January 2009, till the time of writing of this article he made 12000 tweets (Twitter, 2016a). His Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj has 5.47 million followers and 4184 tweets till June 25, 2016 from November 2010 (Twitter, 2016b). Indian government uses Facebook boosters to send regular posts on its policies. Indian policy establishment has become well adept in using information technology to promote policies. The Tweet on International Day of yoga, from the prime minister's office was followed by 20 million people worldwide.

The onset of globalization, increasing commerce and exchange among nations, flexibility of borders and rising international migration created a much-needed cushion for the use of soft power. The Indian leaders realized the potentials of India's soft power, and capitalized it through various methods. There is also an argument that the Chinese “charm offensive” in terms of

vigorously pursuing its soft power, for example opening Confucius Institutes in academic institutions world wide, played a role in spurring Indian policymakers to galvanize India's soft power elements to realize policy goals (Hall, 2012: 1095). According to Ian Hall, five new developments can be identified in what he terms "new Indian public diplomacy" since 2000. Those are: efforts to reach out to overseas Indians; building connections with foreign business interests; foreign aid and development programme; promoting events to showcase and "nation-brand" India; and, using new social media to reach out younger generations (Hall, 2012: 1103). The Indian diaspora, mostly neglected in foreign policy discourse of early years of post-independent India, have been increasingly incorporated in the post-cold war world. Ministry of Non-Resident Indians' Affairs was established in May 2004, which was transformed as Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in September that year. MOIA merged with the Ministry of External Affairs in January 2016. On 9 January 2003, India for the first time organized Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Non-Resident Indians' Day) in New Delhi. Since then every year, 9 January is marked for this celebration. So far 14 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas have been celebrated in different cities of India. During the 8th celebration in New Delhi in 2010, an investment facilitation platform, the Overseas Indians Facilitation Centre, was launched by then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, to attract investment from the diaspora. In May 2008, India's Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Vayalar Ravi, announced that India would make its first university for Persons of Indian Origin in the city of Bangalore (India Edunews, 2008). India instituted Pravasi Bharatiya Samman (Overseas Indian Honor/Award) to award successful Indian origin people or non-resident Indians. Among the awardees were the Prime Ministers of Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius, and the CEO of Microsoft.

The Indian diaspora reached top echelons in American technology industry and other professions. At present, Indian-Americans lead some of the major US companies. For example, Satya Nadella is CEO of Microsoft, Sundar Pichai is CEO of Google, Indra Nooyi is the head of Pepsi Co and the White House chief of surgeon is Indian-American. Soft power is not only limited to the power and potentials of the diaspora or cultivating the relations with them. It can help a state to reach globally by cultivating diaspora as cultural ambassadors even while making economic gains from diaspora investments and remittances. To become a "strong" soft power the outreach needs to span across multiple areas including economic aid and assistance, establishing cultural and academic programs, participating in international peacekeeping or other missions, promotion of democracy. And, India is active in some of these areas including peace keeping and humanitarian missions. In 2006, at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum at the Swiss city of Davos, India launched brand-India campaign. The New York Times wrote, under the caption "India Everywhere in the Alps", "Delhi swept into Davos on Wednesday (January 25), with an extravagant public relations campaign by India intended to promote the country as the world's next economic superstar, and as a democratic alternative to China for the affections of foreign investors. There were few places one could go, on this first day of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting here, without seeing, hearing, drinking, or tasting something Indian" (Landler, 2006). The participants found in their hotel rooms iPods with Indian music and Pashmina stoles as a "gift from the Himalayas to keep you warm in the Alps". To further buttress this nation-branding, India launched Incredible India campaign in 2007 (IncredibleIndia, 2016). The website created in this name showcases tourist attractions, festivals and cuisines, and many other attractions in India.

Cultural diplomacy under Modi

Modi came to power in New Delhi in May 2014. His policy to use soft power was different from his predecessors in various ways. Some of the major innovations distinguishing Modi from his predecessors include: addressing Indian diaspora during foreign visits, hosting foreign leaders in different locations of India, crafting policies such as "Make in India", and frequently alluding to Indian culture and tradition in speeches. Unlike his predecessors, Modi makes it a regular practice to address the diaspora during his official visits abroad. During his first official visit to the United States in September 2014, Modi addressed 18,000 people, mostly Indian-Americans, at the Madison Square in New York. The venue was packed and those unable to find a place through lottery preferred to watch Modi and listen to his speech outside on the big screens. Accompanied by few US lawmakers, Modi addressed the crowd with the words "Hail to Mother India", and the crowd joined him. The BBC reported that Modi received a "superstar welcome", and argued that Modi's speech was a "rebranding exercise" as he "predicted this would be India's century because of his country's youthful population and spirit of innovation" (BBC 2014b). Similarly, during his visit to Shanghai in China in May 2015, Fiji in August 2015, Seychelles in March 2015, Brussels in March 2016, and Johannesburg in July 2016, Modi, unlike his predecessors, almost made it a custom to address Indian diaspora, meet Indian origin people and even pose with them for selfies. On 2 October 2016, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Modi inaugurated Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra (Indian Diaspora Center) in New Delhi, and argued, "Let us view our Diaspora not only in terms of Sankhya (number) but let us see it as Shakti (power) (DNA 2016). The author's interactions with the Indian diaspora bring home the point that the Diaspora feel "connected and relevant" since Modi's outreach initiatives. The initiatives prompted many to visit India frequently than earlier, invest and "do their part to promote India's interests even while residing outside India".

Besides connecting to the diaspora during foreign visits, Modi adopted a novel approach to showcase India's soft power assets to foreign leaders during their India visits. He preferred to hold official talks at different cities of India, keeping aside the usual practice of conducting talks in the capital, New Delhi. Modi invited Chinese President, Xi Jinping, during his visit to India in September 2014, to Ahmadabad for bilateral talks and together they visited the Gandhi Ashram, founded by Mahatma Gandhi. In the Ashram, Jinping paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and sat bare feet to spin charkha (spinning wheel). As the world is interconnected and technology ensures fast relay, these events appear to catch the imagination of not only Indians but also of people outside India. Similarly, in December 2015, Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, was invited to Indian religious city of Banaras, famous for hosting religious sites of Hinduism as well as Buddhism (Buddha had given his first sermon some 2500 years ago at the outskirts of the city at a place called Sarnath). Modi and Abe watched the famous Hindu religious rite of Aarati (evening prayer by priests) while sitting on a boat on the river Ganges. During Modi's earlier visit to Japan in August 2014, India and Japan had signed a pact under which Banaras and Kyoto, a heritage city of Buddhist culture, would be engaged in heritage conservation, city modernization and cooperation in the fields of art, culture and academics.

One of the major policy planks of Modi to project rising India, its indigenous technology and innovation, was the much publicized "Make in India" initiative. The Indian government launched the initiative in September 2014 "as part of a wider set of nation-building initiatives" to "transform India into a global design and manufacturing hub" (Make in India, 2016). The programme aims at steering Indian economic growth despite

uncertainties in global economy, for which it is interested to develop a “strategy that inspires, empowers and enables in equal measure.” The programme encompasses three main elements: first, inspire confidence in India’s capabilities amongst potential partners abroad, the Indian business community and citizens at large; second, provide a framework for a vast amount of technical information on 25 industry sectors; and, reach out to a vast local and global audience via social media and constantly keep them updated about opportunities, reforms and so on. (Ibid.). During his visit to Hanover Trade Expo in Germany in April 2015, Make in India initiative was significantly publicized. While inaugurating the Hannover Trade Fair in Germany in April 2015, Modi referred to “Make in India” initiative not as “a slogan or a brand but a new national movement” (Sonwalker, 2015). A major Indian daily under the caption “PM Narendra Modi uses soft power to hardsell ‘Make in India’ in Germany” reported, “From billboards to trams and buses, the lion (the logo of Make in India initiative) was everywhere as 400 Indian companies are among 6,500 exhibitors at the fair ...” (Ibid.).

Modi’s government has aggressively promoted India’s tradition and modernity worldwide. This is one of the government’s major contributions to India’s cultural diplomacy. India under Modi has not shied away from promoting India’s ancient civilization characteristics even while showcasing India’s newly gained advantages including human resource and fast growing economy. Ted Piccone at the Brookings Institute has offered this review of Modi’s first year as the political leader of India:

A review of Modi’s external affairs agenda during his first year in office tells us many things: his vision for making India work again, seizing the initiative in South Asia and the broader Asian theater, and proclaiming India as an inevitable success story worth betting on ... But one also takes away from Modi’s first year in office a deeply felt spiritual and philosophical worldview that promotes India’s civilizational and cultural characteristics as unique contributions to the world. Modi speaks of India’s vibrant democracy, its “unity in diversity” ethos, not only as the indispensable ingredient for governing its remarkably complex society but as the necessary path toward greater peace and coexistence in the world, a world that would allow his country to reach sustainable levels of development and prosperity (Piccone, 2016: 93).

In contrast to his predecessors who were not open to the idea of displaying religious identity and culture, Modi displays his cultural roots to promote India’s interests. Piccone argues, “what sets Modi apart from his predecessors is his mission to help spread the experience of a more inclusive and democratic India not only to his fellow Indians but to the wider world. As a devout Hindu, Modi is not shy about preaching the virtues of what he considers not a religion but a way of life that encompasses all societies ...” (Ibid.: 95). He used the occasions such as International Day of Yoga to promote inclusive and pluralistic identity of India. For example, he celebrated the day in 2015 on the Raj Path, with 35,985 people, belonging to 84 nationalities, doing 21 yoga postures. The exercise earned two Guinness World Record titles for “largest yoga session” and “most nationalities in a yoga lesson” (Ghosh, 2015). In 2016, he celebrated the Day in Chandigarh in Punjab, and while emphasizing on the idea to make yoga popular throughout the world, he announced two awards for the yoga day celebrations next year: one for those doing good work in the field of yoga at international level and the other at national level (*Indian Express*, 2016a).

Modi appeared to be aware of the constraints against realizing India’s soft power potentials. He realized that unless India develops good relations with its neighbours, it will be difficult to

emerge as a great power. The regional organization SAARC, formed three decades ago to promote regional cooperation, is almost in a tattered shape as it remains hostage to the conflicts between the members, particularly between India and Pakistan. Modi sought to correct this problem, and in this direction he invited all the SAARC leaders to his swearing-in ceremony as Prime Minister. All the SAARC members were present at the ceremony. Modi’s meetings with SAARC leaders, and particularly with the leader of Pakistan, were highlighted by national and international media. The US Secretary of State, John Kerry observed, “Prime Minister Modi took the important first step of inviting Nawaz Sharif (Prime Minister of Pakistan) to his inauguration ... I talked to Nawaz Sharif after his visit there. He was very encouraged, thought it was positive ...” (*Deccan Chronicle*, 2014). After being elected as Prime Minister, Modi’s first official visit was to neighbouring Nepal. During the visit he observed, “India and Nepal share many similarities, they have similar culture, and they share same religion, and it is time to further boost the relations”. Speaking at Nepalese Parliament, he said, “I hope my visit will open a new chapter in India-Nepal relations, characterized by more frequent political engagement and closer cooperation across the full spectrum of our extraordinarily broad-based relations, which will serve as a model and catalyst for South Asian partnership for prosperity” (*Indian Express*, 2014b). He visited all the neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, within the first two years of his office.

In March 2016, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs organized along with Observer Research Foundation, a think-tank based in New Delhi, “Raisina Dialogue”, named after the Raisina Hill (the hill in New Delhi that houses many important buildings including the residence of President of India, the head of Indian Republic, and the office of the Prime Minister of India). In the dialogue, academicians, top policymakers, business leaders and strategic analysts from different parts of the world participated. The dialogue was mainly designed “to explore prospects and opportunities for Asian integration as well as Asia’s integration with the larger world”. It emphasized that for such an integration India needs to play a big role as the integration is “predicated on India’s vital role in the Indian Ocean Region and how India along with its partners can build a stable regional and world order” (Raisina Dialogue, 2016). The panel themes such as “connecting a continent: an Asian Union”, “securing digital Asia: threats and opportunities for a smart realm”, “light of Asia: the future of energy,” “can SAARC get serious?,” “challenges and opportunities for regional cooperation on border management” reflected the interest of the Modi government to increase India’s role in immediate neighbourhood and in Asia. The conference was attended by top ministers from Modi’s government. Besides playing a role in organizing such conferences, Modi’s government also used India’s cultural legacy to promote its policies. The government developed projects such as Operation Mausam and Spice Route—the former aims at opening of traditional Indian route in Indian Ocean to revive India’s traditional connections with the Eastern Africa and to the South East Asia and the later aims at opening the Silk Road, the ancient trade route that spanned across Asian continent and parts of Europe.

Modi also used the policy of foreign aid and soft loans to promote India’s policies in developing countries. During his visit to Fiji in November 2014, first by an Indian prime minister in 33 years, Modi offered two lines of credit totalling US\$75 million for the sugar industry and a grant of \$5 million for village, small and medium industries. During the visit to Fiji and other Pacific nations, his government announced Special Adaptation Fund to provide technical assistance and training for capacity building to the Cook Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Nauru, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Niue, Palau, Micronesia, Marshall

Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea (Chaudhury, 2014). During his visit to Mongolia in May 2015, Modi announced a \$1 billion credit line for infrastructure development (*The Hindu*, 2015). While participating in the third India-Africa Forum Summit, attended by 41 Heads of State and Government and officials from 54 African countries, in December 2015, Modi offered Africa a concessional credit of \$10 billion over 5 years and a grant assistance of \$600 million. Besides other development activities, the assistance also included 50,000 scholarships in India to Africans (Roy, 2015). During his four-nation—Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya—tour to Africa in July 2016, he quoted from Mahatma Gandhi's farewell speech in South Africa in 1914, "The sub-continent had become to me a scared and dear land, next only to my motherland". While addressing the large gathering of Indian origin people in Johannesburg, Modi said, "South Africa transformed Mohandas into Mahatma. It is here that Mahatma Gandhi conceptualized his politics, this is the birth place of Satyagraha (love for truth, the Gandhian weapon to fight injustice)" (*Indian Express*, 2016b). In December 2015, while inaugurating Afghanistan parliament, constructed by India at \$90 million, Modi said, "This Parliament Complex is a small tribute to your progress as a nation and a democracy. And, it will stand as an enduring symbol of the ties of emotions and values, of affection and aspirations that bind us in a special relationship" (*Times of India*, 2015). In June 2016, he along with Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated \$290 million Salma Dam, also known as Afghan-India Friendship, in Herat province of Afghanistan.

Conclusion

This article presented a broad picture of India as an evolving soft power and argued that though many of its soft power resources including culture are not new, the increasing awareness of its political class to use those resources to realize foreign policy goals is recent. Though there were attempts to use the soft power tools in the post-independence period and more increasingly after the advent of globalization in 1990s, the focus on soft power and its use in foreign policy has become increasingly visible in recent years. There is an increasing awareness and momentum in India's foreign policy establishment to use various cultural tools. Recognition of yoga internationally, efforts to reach diaspora and cultivate them to promote India's interests or using information technology to popularize Indian culture, all these demonstrate that India's evolution from a latent soft power to a strong soft power is perceptible.

India's soft power assets are phenomenal and the current government's activism is perceptible, yet how far India would be able to use those resources to realize its foreign policy goals remains contested. India's capability to tell a "better story" has so far not been very effective in producing desired results. While there are several good stories about India's soft power, the constraints too are phenomenal. Despite the soft power resources, India struggles to emerge as a big power on international stage. A significant percentage of the Indian population still lives below the poverty line. The clashes between communities and religions, high levels of corruption, and many other related issues continue to haunt India's international image. According to a survey in 2013, India is one of the least tolerant countries (Fisher, 2013). This report, however, has been contested (Chaudhry and Roy, 2013). The Transparency International put India at the rank of 76 out of 168 countries in its 2015 Corruption Perception Index (*The Hindu*, 2016). Besides conflict with its neighbours particularly China and Pakistan, insurgencies within have impacted India's growth. Modi's image in some sections as a Hindu nationalist leader also affects India's soft power image. According to Dasgupta (2015), to the modern Centre-Right ideologists Modi

appeared as a "Margaret Thatcher who would bring out the true economic potential of India," and for his detractors, he was "too 'polarizing' a politician to be acceptable to a large and culturally diverse country like India". This contested image may undermine some of Modi's strategies to use soft power. Modi's emphasis on Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas (together with all, development for all) is an attempt to address this image problem. The US Secretary of State, John Kerry, stated, "The new Indian government's plan "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," together with all, development for all—that's a concept, a vision we want to support" (*The Economic Times*, 2014). The application of this vision in India's policies would help address the image problem and enhance its acceptability as an effective soft power.

There is another issue that India needs to deal with - namely, that soft power assets *per se* do not translate into policy gains. India might be actively wooing the diaspora, but how far this soft power asset would help realize policy goals needs examination. Devesh Kapur raises this issue in the context of the Indian diaspora in the United States and their role as strategic tools of Indian foreign policy in influencing the US policy. He points out that in order to be influenced the US foreign policy requires a combination of: "an electoral threat, a lobbying apparatus, and a successful appeal to the country's national interests and American symbols and values, such as democracy and freedom" (Kapur, 2010: 191–192). It appears, however, that while the Indian diaspora in the United States has been largely successful, it has not yet been conclusively established whether they have effectively influenced the US foreign policy. The influential sections of the Indian diaspora have played a role in expediting the US policy decisions in the context of India, rather than playing a role in setting the agenda. Kapur quotes Nye Jr who argues "when a country gets very popular with the American public it gets somewhat harder for Washington to follow a hard line against them". It is difficult to establish whether India is popular with American public and the diaspora has been successful as an agenda-setter. Though the Indian soft power assets such as yoga and Ayurveda have become popular, it needs examination whether they actually have attracted the practitioners towards India. Kapur (2010: 188) rightly cautions of the "danger of narcissistic delusion" that one becomes more enamored of one's own attractive qualities than others really are.

In international politics, where a realist notion of state-to-state relation remains dominant, India's soft power without the backing of hard power may not provide it enough leverage to realize its goals by means of cultural diplomacy alone. Soft and hard power both aim at realizing national interests and how far India is able to capitalize on its soft power assets demands scrutiny. It may also appear premature to give a verdict on Modi, given that his government completed two years in office. A complete term of his government in 2019 may provide a better picture as to where Modi stands in this context. It can, however, be safely argued that the 21st century Indian leaders appear to be well aware of the significance of soft power in foreign policymaking. This realization and attempts towards its active utilization are a new development, which this paper has amply demonstrated. The increasing acceptability of its culture enables India to present foreign policy goals in a persuasive way, which may consequently produce intended results depending on how the Indian leaders address internal and external challenges.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this paper as no datasets were generated or analysed.

Additional information

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