

Critical Analysis of India's Soft Power Capability

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ABSTRACT

There is an evolving unanimity in the academic literature that because of its universal culture, democracy, political values and tradition of leadership among developing nations India has a significant amount of soft power assets. In the middle of the 21st century, India initiated efforts to materialize the above-mentioned resources into creating soft power at the global level that might yield desirable foreign policy outcomes. However, some scholars are sceptical about India's soft power. They argue that the resources of Indian soft power resources have not been up to the mark and have not yielded the fruitful results. Besides, they argue that India has failed to wield soft power and its soft power resources have been overestimated. Furthermore, India's military capabilities (hard power) have not advanced to a sufficient level to have an evident influence on India's foreign policy. Likewise, India is still battling with ethnic, religious and caste issues. The primary focus of this chapter is to critically evaluate the Indian soft power. The methodology used in this study is primarily analytical and explanatory. The study relied on the pool of articles, journals, and unclassified research papers that are available.

1. Introduction

Soft power chiefly means an ability possessed by a state or non-state actor to establish its influence through attraction and persuasion. In other words, it is the competence to establish preferences tends to be linked with immaterial power assets such as culture, ideology and institutions. However, in comparison, hard power is linked with material (tangible) power assets like military and economic strength. In International Relations theory, 'Soft power' is defined as the capacity to indirectly influence the behaviour or conduct of others by culture or ideological means. It can be argued that hard power is an important power source acquired or used by various states to seek domination, but it has its fault lines. For example, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine have proved the failure of hard power. 'Soft power' was the cornerstone of American foreign policy, however, now a day's its scope has expanded as other countries especially India is trying to enhance its influence through Soft power. Sometimes, we can get the outcomes we want without using force ('Carrots' and 'Sticks'). This indirect or "second face of power" is called Soft Power. A state or non-state actor may get the desired outcomes at international level when others admire its values, prosperity, and openness (Nye 2004: 5).

As per Nye, "Soft power is the ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate of having moral authority" (Nye, 2004: 6). He further adds that Soft power is the capability to attract, and attraction habitually ends with assent. In other words, 'soft power' is an attractive power and the resources of soft power are the assets that produce such attraction (Nye, 2004:6). Soft power is based on immaterial power resources like culture, ideology, and institutions. The currency of 'soft power' is the appeal of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. Simply put, 'soft

power' is the ability or capacity to make others do what you want based on how they see you and how you present yourself (Hymans, 2009: 235). 'Soft power' is the capability to get the desired outcomes through appeal rather than coercion or force or bullying or 'payments'. Soft power is enhanced when the policies are seen as legitimate by others. When we can get others to admire our values and ideals, then we do not have to rely on 'sticks and carrots' (force) to move them in our direction or favour. As Nye argues, "Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive" (Nye, 2004: x). He contends that the key to success is to make yourself attractive to others. Nye further argues that soft power is an attractive power and the path to attractiveness is to adopt openness, respect for rules and recognition of human rights both at domestic as well as at international level (Hymans, 2009: 235).

2. Indian Soft Power

There is a growing consensus in the academic literature that because of its universalistic culture, democracy and the tradition of leadership among developing countries, India enjoys noteworthy soft power resources. In the 21st century, India initiated efforts to carry these resources into cultivating soft power at the international level to get desirable foreign policy outcomes (Mukherjee, 2014: 47). Since the early 2000's India has been aggressively active around the globe. India's soft power resources are miscellaneous, which include democratic credentials, free media, an independent judiciary, secularism communal harmony, music, Bollywood, etc (Mukherjee, 2014: 48). As per Joseph Nye, the two important sources of 'soft power' are culture and political ideals. The above-mentioned attributes of Indian soft power fit the Nye's sources. The policies that are accordant, cooperative and

nonviolent are generally being regarded as attractive (Mukherjee, 2014: 48).

Indian soft power is highly appreciated and very high in South-East Asian countries because of shared heritage and civilizational links. Similarly, Indian culture is valued in South Asia as well. India has extraordinary prospects for soft power because of its culture, large Diaspora, Bollywood and historical and cultural relations with several countries (Purushothaman, 2010: 4). The sources of Indian Soft power are:

a) Culture: Culture is regarded as the most important source of state's soft power. As far as Indian culture is concerned, India has an advantageous position. India has cultural and civilizational links with several countries. It is being argued that because of the richness of Indian culture traders and travellers from around the world have been attracted to India for thousands of years (Purushothaman, 2010: 4). Besides, another asset of India's culture is India's Diaspora. There are millions of Indians spread across the globe. Similarly, Indian professional elites have found its way to the western countries. They have contributed to the influence and respect of Indian culture in these countries. Likewise, "Yoga" is practised all over the world and is now an international sensation. Yoga is swiftly becoming a symbol of Indian culture. Furthermore, Indian cuisine is also becoming popular in the West. There are many Indian restaurants in the U.K., the U.S, and Canada. Similarly, Indian music and movies have a wide range of followers in many states. The popularity of Indian music and movies has a large international market. The Indian movies are not popular only in South Asian countries but also in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Also, India's acceptance of different religions and cultures is remarkable and highly appreciated. India's belief in secularism is presently valuable and practicable when there is much conflict in the name of religion (Purushothaman, 2010: 5). One of the main attractions of India has been spiritual diversity. The spiritual diversity is India's strength and at the same time unites India. The existence of different religions and the capacity to exist harmoniously help to build mutual understanding and to minimize the fear and ignorance about the respective religion (Thussu, 2014: 86).

b) Political values: As India is regarded as the 'world's largest democracy'; its successful functioning democracy has been its biggest asset of 'soft power'. India has been successful in establishing democratic institutions. India has been successful in establishing the fact that democracy can work even in a developing and illiterate country. Contrary to its neighbouring state Pakistan, India has been successful in holding free and fair elections since independence (Purushothaman, 2010: 10). Besides, India's democracy has provided an opportunity for weaker sections like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women to partake in governance. It can be argued that India's commitment to democracy has

helped enhance 'India's soft power'. Similarly, the existence of a free press also contributes to India's soft power credentials (Purushothaman, 2010: 10).

c) Bollywood: Bollywood is perhaps the notable example of global entertainment. Presently, Bollywood is a \$ 3.5 billion industry and its movies have the viewership in more than 70 countries. It is regarded as the world's largest showbiz industry both in terms of production of movies and viewership. The advancement of family and community-oriented values has made audiences more receptive to Indian films (Thussu, 2014: 9). Also, some universities are offering courses and research this form of Indian popular culture. It can be argued that Bollywood is becoming a different genre of persuading the world about the rising prominence of India (Thussu, 2014:11).

d) The Bomb and Bangalore: Stephen Cohen argues that the public opinion in the U.S is positive about India. It is because that they now consider Indian foreign policy as muscular, realistic, and cooperative. Cohen argues that this image makeover has been due to India's nuclear tests in 1998 and has contributed to dispersing India's image of the weak and poverty-ridden country. On the other hand, Bangalore is now the symbol of offshore outsourcing of information technology and other services. The American universities and companies are fond of Indian minds and they fiercely compete with each other for Indian students (Hymans, 2009: 253-255)

3. Critical Evaluation of Indian Soft Power

The impact and successfulness of soft-power is very challenging to measure because the soft power resources are intangible. So, the impacts and influences which the soft power resources bring are also intangible and long term in nature. Therefore, scholars and analysts rely on public opinion surveys to measure the impact and working of soft-power (Mukherjee, 2014: 49). The consensus in the literature suggests that Indian soft power resources have not been up to the mark and have often failed to get the desired outcomes. India's soft power resources have often proved not up to the task. For instance, various surveys have indicated that world opinion is still less favourable as it should have been. India has failed to wield soft power. This is more evident in India's neighbourhood, where India's image is negative to some extent and also viewed as a regional hegemon. Studies show that since the late 1990's American have expressed negative feeling towards India. Similarly, a 2006 survey expressed the same results. In the same survey, 42% of respondents were against India's bid for U.N Security Councils membership. Likewise, a 2012 study although concluded that Afghanistan and Bhutan's perceptions of India were positive. However, the perception of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka about India highlighted a "Trust deficit". While as Palestine and Nepal criticized India's "Big Brother" attitude towards their nations (Mukherjee, 2014: 47-51).

Another way of calculating a country's soft power is by quantifying the number of persons who have visited the country either for education, immigration or tourism. In India's case, the

number of foreign students has increased over time. Similarly, the numbers of international migrants in India have fluctuated (Mukherjee, 2014: 52). No doubt these surveys show prospects of Indian soft power, but the Indian Soft power has not proved up to the mark as it should have been. For instance, Baru argues "There is little proof as yet if Indian Soft power is shaping the foreign policy of other countries towards India or India's policy towards others" (Mukherjee, 2014: 49). Likewise, Shashi Tharoor states that "India could pour for more resources and energies into its cultural diplomacy to promote the richness of its composite culture into the hands which already had a predisposition for it" (Mukherjee, 2014: 49). Similarly, Rohan Mukherjee points out that India's shortcomings vis-a-vis Soft power are because of the three factors. First, he contends that Indian soft assets have been overestimated. Second, he argues that India's military capabilities (hard power) have not advanced to an adequate

level to complement the Indian soft power capabilities and have an evident impact on Indian foreign policy. Lastly, he asserts that because of lack of social progress India is still battling with ethnic, religious and caste issues. He argues that these issues are hampering India's soft power capabilities (Mukherjee, 2014: 47).

4. Conclusion

There is no doubt that India has the incredible potential of 'soft power' but the fact remains that it has not been effective in generating enough of it. India is still battling with problems like caste, communalism, poverty, and corruption. Also, its hard power capabilities have not reached a level where it can complement its soft power resources. Unless and until these problems will not be tackled properly, India will not be able to project its soft power properly.

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