



ANALYSING INDIA'S SOFT POWER CONCERNING SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract: South Asia is a unique region faced with cross-border challenges and several paradoxes. Regardless of civilizational, historic and ethnic linkages among the countries, it is one of the least integrated and most temperamental areas in the world.

After being unsuccessful in the test of using the hard power approach to get the desired outcome, India has looked towards soft power. It now aims to regrow its positive image in the region and attract more neighbours to a vision of shared peace and prosperity through soft power.

This paper analyses how soft power can be a better bet for India to integrate South Asia and its cumulative growth. This paper also examines soft power as an approach to a foreign policy of India, its evolution, effectiveness, features, untapped soft power resources and lessons it can learn from China which is much ahead in this field.

According to Wagner, using a soft power strategy would require India to transform its soft power capacity such as yoga, Bollywood, and sports into capability; harnessing them all into securing national objectives without much compromise.

Keywords - Soft power, India, foreign policy, South Asia, China, democracy, COVID-19, Taliban, health diplomacy, Vaccine Maitri, regional diplomacy, smart power.

1. INTRODUCTION

"India represents the wealth of mind which is for all. We acknowledge India's obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others their best." (Bhaswati Mukherjee, 2021, Distinguished lecture, MEA)

The above statement was made by **Dr Rabindranath Tagore**. Even at that time, Tagore had understood soft power as India's peculiar strength. We need to diffuse this soft power through the institutions of cultural diplomacy of our country so that we can build bridges for greater international understanding, peace and harmony. This is our responsibility for India and our future generations.

Power in International Relations (IR) is defined in relative terms, as the ability of Actor A to impact the behaviour of Actor B to get the result he wants (Nicolas Blarel, 2010).

David Malone in his book 'Does the Elephant Dance' cited three factors that can essentially decide the Foreign Policy of a country: its geography, history and capabilities. Geography is a given. As they say, a country can't choose its neighbours. Thus, neighbourhood strategy becomes fundamental for any country. Normally, commitment and clashes are more articulated with neighbours. History determines the vision psyche of countries and their linkages with others. Capabilities are acquired by a nation over a period of time. These could be in the military, monetary or innovative regions. With new capabilities, the Foreign Policy approaches of a country come into being. New interests outside of the neighbourhood develop. Terms like "extended neighbourhood" and "strategic interests" have become common usages in International Relations.

"Soft Power", capabilities become important. Strategic thinkers over the centuries posed asked these enquiries. Kautilya's Arthashastra talks of Shadgunyas and the four Upayas to be utilized. These are Saam, Daam, Dand, Bhed.

At the most basic level, Soft Power is tied to winning the hearts and psyches of people. Hence, there has to be a citizen-centric approach. States cannot do beyond facilitating the process. Soft Power is not "image polishing". It is much more than that. Mere polishing without improvement in actuality can backfire.

The idea of Soft Power isn't exact, Joseph Nye did well to signal this significant perspective in the Foreign Policies of countries. There is no country in the world today, which does not append significance to this factor. India is in a decent position in this regard because of its tremendous assets that prove to be useful in expanding the country's appeal to other people. Academics and intellectuals can play a crucial role in this regard.

The above analysis is important to study India's position in soft power concerning South Asia.

2. WHAT IS POWER?

Like air, power is omnipresent. Power and its diverse conduct are tangible or intangible, noticeable or unnoticeable, measurable or immeasurable, observable or non-observable, fungible or non-fungible; it never lost its significance in the domain of human life. Power is structureless. Power is about weightage in a relationship which implies the outcome of the event. until recently, there is no consensus about the concept of power in totality.

Researchers from various backgrounds never concurred when it comes to power and its different forms, especially on definition, conception and measurement. This paved the way for the discipline of international relations to regard power as the selective area of realism. Those opposing realism, always part away from power considerations. Researchers from different schools of thought in IR, never comprehend distinctive face and its behaviour of power, every theory in IR has its power behaviour but it is not analysed in terms of different features of power and even they are solely obsessed and likened with power for realism. (Steven Lukes, 2007, 86-90)

3. WHAT IS SOFT POWER?

3.1 Evolution of soft power

The nature of soft power is nothing new in the world. Soft power is a form of power, like any other power, it can be used for both good and bad intentions. Soft power is intangible, invisible, immeasurable, and non-fungible. It can be used to shape the behaviours of others in the form of attractive measures. These characteristics are not less strong than any other form of power. It has direct and indirect effects, intentional and unintentional effort, shorter and longer sustenance, less and more powerful tool, immediate and gradual aim, nearest to deepest engagement and static and dynamic behaviour, etc. (Joseph Nye, 1990, 130-134).

Traces before Nye

Before Nye, "thinkers no less significant than Foucault, Bourdieu, Gramsci, Lukes and others articulated the version of soft power and recognise that power can be expressed without making threats, or promising payments, or inducements." However, for Nye, the soft power theory has been built on the realist tradition. Works of some scholars like Carr, and Morgenthau works shed some light on intangible aspects of power, such as the power of ideational resources or nonmaterial resources, power over opinion (mass popularity) etc.

The roots of soft power stem from the realist tradition when Nye coined the term soft power in 1990 in his book "Bound to lead: the changing nature of American power". He builds his base on soft power from EH Carr's idea of 'power over opinion'. He opines that *There is no contradiction between realism and soft power. Soft power is not a form of idealism or liberalism. It is simply a form of power, one way of getting desired outcomes.*" (EH Carr, 1931, page 35)

Nye's soft power is a continuity of realist tradition. He thoroughly captured the missing link from the realist view of power. He also followed the realist tradition of national elements of approach in his power analysis which depicts power as a material and non-material resource and calculates a country's relative power position among the nations.

Nye differentiates power behaviour into two broader categories namely hard power and soft power based on resources. According to Nye, hard power mainly derives from military and economic strength and soft power is sourced mostly from the country's culture, values, ideals, institutions and foreign policy efforts.

Nye is the sole proponent of soft power theory. During the 1990s, he coined the term, conceptualised, wrote numerous articles and many books, to support and build his theory. Since then, slowly and steadily, the evolution of soft power theory is taking place very deeply and getting more and more strength.

Analysis of soft power can be incorporated in all the events of international politics, ranging from small to complex issues. Issues may be related to both non-military and non-economic and also military and economic domains.

Nowadays, soft power is the main source of power to project a country's image and also an important tool of diplomacy to reduce the negative image. It is not necessarily seen as a zero-sum game and a negative-sum game but is generally seen as a positive-sum game and **win-win situation** because of the interplay of soft use of power. Here there is no scope for coercive power. However, in some situations, it encourages a zero-sum game and the resultant favours some and disfavours others.

4. **PROMINENCE OF SOFT POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

This is the age of information, this era marked the commencement of the global information revolution. The locus of power is on information, it is less coercive and less tangible. In this circumstance, the use of the military is not an easy task to get a desirable outcome, it requires an elaborate moral justification and getting popular support becomes a difficult task. It enhances the role of soft power in foreign policymaking (it involves deeper digital diplomacy and more communicative public diplomacy) and the cyber domain always gives equal opportunity for all, full freedom with anonymity.

Information Communication Technology (ICT), plays an important role in reducing military power into ceremonial power. The socially awakened population cannot be controlled easily and in this situation use of the military is irrelevant and more difficult. Soft power is more useful when information is more diffused and horizontal. These technological advancements give a boost to socially awakening the population and reducing the warlike situation in modern democracies. This is also evident in the statement of Nye, "*power today is less tangible and less coercive among the advanced democracies than it was in the past.*" (Joseph Nye, 1990, page: 150-154).

5. **INDIA'S ENCOUNTER WITH SOFT POWER**

5.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN SOFT POWER

To analyze the change in Indian foreign policy, the following section aims to show how soft power has been transformed into a concrete state policy. Joseph Nye divides soft power into three groups -culture, political values and foreign policies which characterize the Indian case as well.

5.1.1 Culture

Being one of the world's oldest civilizations, India's rich culture constitutes the single most important source of its soft power. It has fascinated outsiders since at least the times of Alexander the Great. Buddhism was born in India, which left a considerable impact on the culture of Southeast Asian countries. These old civilizational links and shared religious heritage were already used by Nehru in the promotion of common Asian identity (C. Raja Mohan, 2007, page 99-115), and it remains a valuable asset today. India's art, classical music and dance, yoga, Ayurveda, principles of non-violence, philosophy, spirituality and even cuisine and fashion are followed around the globe. As summarized by **Dr Shashi Tharoor**,

So when India's cricket team triumphs or its tennis players claim Grand Slams when a Bhangra beat is infused into a western pop record or an Indian choreographer invents a fusion of Kathak and ballet, when Indian women sweep the Miss World and Miss Universe contests or when Monsoon Wedding wows the critics and Lagaan claims an Oscar nomination when Indian writers win the Booker or Pulitzer prizes, India's soft power is enhanced. (Shashi Tharoor, 2008, page 32-35)

India is also making inroads into areas like sports like the formation of a professional cricket league, the Indian Premier League, in 2008, holding the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010 and conducting the Formula 1 racing in Noida in 2019 are a few cases in point. India's strength in cricket is important for '**cricket diplomacy**' has played a special role in South Asia.

5.1.2 Political Values

With its open, multi-ethnic and cultural society and a secular, federal state, India has sufficient resources for soft power. As a tolerant country built on the idea of 'unity in diversity, India can serve as a model for many other internally divided countries. The endurance of a democratic system in a relatively poor, illiterate and immensely diverse society provides a strong argument for the promotion of democracy as the best political system

India's position on democracy is very pragmatic: it can occasionally promote democracy when it serves its interests; at the same time, it tries to distinguish itself from the more offensive policy of Western states, seen sometimes as meddling in other countries internal affairs. In that sense, Indian policy on democracy promotion is coherent with the soft power approach, but it is designed to address expectations different from that of Western powers. Although India may be losing a chance to distinguish itself positively in Western eyes from major authoritarian powers like China, it earns some goodwill in many developing countries, which find Western policies to be intrusive and imperialistic.

5.1.3 Foreign Policy

India's non-violent struggle for independence and its support for decolonization, disarmament and peaceful co-existence of nations helped the country garner much support world. Its active role in the NAM contributed to its positive image and helped position itself as a spokesperson for the developing world. Although much of this attractiveness had decreased towards the end of the Cold War, as India pursued a more pragmatic foreign policy, new strengths arose. Look east policy embarked a step further in this direction attracting south Asian neighbours.

As India's international image has improved over the last decade, it has instituted new tools to explain its policy such as a new Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004 and a dedicated Public Diplomacy Division in 2006.

This evaluation suggests that India has a toolbox of soft power instruments and policies to address major issues in its immediate neighbourhood.

5.2 SOFT POWER AND INDIA

This part investigates how soft power has been a significant instrument in India's relations with its neighbours: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The instruments incorporate truly expanding social discretion and individual to individual contact, extending grants and preparing programs, further developing exchange and travel game plans, compelling monetary formative help, valuable commitment, compassionate help and conciliatory support.

5.2.1 Expanding Cultural Diplomacy and People-to-People Contact

Afghanistan

To augment and strengthen cultural ties with Afghanistan India inaugurated an Indian cultural centre, and established four consulates in Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Mazar e sharif. Also, a Sanskrit scholar was appointed to the Kabul University to teach and establish Sanskrit faculty.

In 2001, after the end of the war, the then external affairs minister Yashwant Singh toured Afghanistan with a bag full of CDs containing Bollywood movies showing India's sensitivity in cultural engagement with Afghanistan. Some of the TV serials are very popular and dubbed in the Dari language which includes *Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Saare-ga-ma-pa*, *Kum Kum* and *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki*, *Kasauti Jindagi Ki*.

India is the most favoured destination for Afghan tourists especially medical tourism. Many Afghans believed that India's cheap medicine and healthcare system are very useful and at the same time highly trustworthy.

Bangladesh

India-Bangladesh cultural relationships are very deep and close for many years. Both countries share many commonalities and affinities such as geography, history, culture and language.

The cultural cooperation between the two countries increased its momentum after the inauguration of IGCC (Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre) at Dhaka in March 2010.

To further, greater cooperation in the cultural field, India agreed to construct Kala Bhavan in the department of theatre and music at Dhaka University. Encouraging prominent Bangladeshi in the field of art and literature, the Indian government conferred Padma Bhushan to eminent scholar and writer **Anisuzzaman** was the first recipient of this kind of award from India. Above all, for 43 years, India has been publishing the Bengali monthly magazine **Baharat Bichitra**. This magazine has wider viewership and is considered one of the best of its kind among Bangladeshis.

Apart from the above, India encourages Bangladeshi youth to visit India, with its funding a 100-member Youth Delegation has been visiting India annually since 2012 to further cement the strong people to people link between India and Bangladesh.

Bhutan

Since India's independence, the movement of people and goods has moved freely across an unhindered open border of 700 km between India and Bhutan. India has maintained a tradition of no visa required for Bhutanese citizens to visit India.

Maldives

In July 2011, the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) was established in Male, increasing its cultural activities by conducting regular courses in yoga, classical music and dance. Soon after, the ICC programmes have become largely popular and won the hearts of Maldivians of all ages and also the centre has emerged as a special institution that enjoys a prestigious position as a place of cultural learning within the span of a short period. The Indian community is the second-largest expatriate in the Maldives with approximately 22,000 people. Indian expatriates consist of workers, doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, managers, accountants, and technicians etc. In the Maldives, closer to one-third of doctors are Indians. Similarly, around 25% of teachers in the Maldives are Indians, mostly at middle and senior levels.

Nepal

Since independence, India has maintained a protracted open and porous border over 1850 km with Nepal. India's cultural relations are very deep and close, there are many common cultural features between India and Nepal which include ethnicity, religion, language, customs, geography and so on (**roti-beti ka Rishta**).

Sri Lanka

India has launched a new Buddhist pilgrimage circuit train "**Damba Diva Vandana**" which starts from Chennai and touches key Buddhist sites in Northern India namely Bodhgaya, Saranath, Rajgir and Khushinagar.

If looked at closely, Sri Lankan visits to India has been increasing. In 2019, the embassy issued 70,000 visas to Sri Lankans to visit India. In 2014, around 2,00,000 visas were issued by the high commission of India.

5.2.2 Capacity Building through Scholarship and Training Programmes**Afghanistan**

Since 2001, India's engagement with Afghanistan became wider and deeper, especially in the areas of capacity building through numerous scholarships and training programmes for Afghans. Immediately, both the scholarships and training slots were increased from 200 to 500 by PM Singh's visit in August 2005. Since 2020, India is offering annually 1000+ ITEC slots and 200+ slots under TCS Colombo plan to improve the capacity and various skill development of the Afghan officials/nationals. In addition, India also conveyed its continuing support for building indigenous Afghan capacities and institutions, through the Afghan National Institution Building Project.

Bangladesh

Very active cooperation in the field of education and technical training is continued since 1990. Several thousand students and officials from Bangladesh pursued their studies and training courses in India, under ICCR and ITC scholarships. The ITEC scholarships have been raised from 215 in 2014 to 400 in 2019.

Bhutan

For Bhutanese, India is contributing many scholarships to meet its growing demands and aspiration of the Bhutanese higher education sector which includes Under Graduate and Post Graduate Scholarships, Nehru – Wangchuck Scheme, Ambassador Scholarship, Sainik School Scholarship and multilateral schemes like ICCR, SAARC, ITEC and Colombo Plan Scholarship.

Nepal

Since the 1990s, a large number of students and officials from Nepal have availed of academic and training facilities in India. Until 2003, India's scholarship programme was minimum, it offered 200 scholarships annually to Nepalese citizens which comprised of ICCR, Distance Education Scholarship (at Indira Gandhi National Open University), ITEC and TCS Colombo Plan.

Sri Lanka

India has been assisting in scholarship and training programmes to Sri Lankans in the areas of human resource and capacity building, especially in the education field. India is supporting several different scholarship schemes to Sri Lankans under ICCR schemes, Commonwealth, IOR-A & SAARC fellowship programmes, TCS Colombo Plan and ITEC.

5.2.3 Trade and Investment**Afghanistan**

Since the end of the war, trade has become one of the major areas of cooperation between India and Afghanistan. During 2003, India and Afghanistan entered into a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) under which India endorsed substantial duty-free concessions for Afghan goods (38 items) ranging from 50% to 100%, especially Afghan dry fruits and also another major export basket of Afghanistan.

Bangladesh

In 2003, India finalised a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Bangladesh, which substantially boosted (trade) the bilateral ties between both countries. India has given more liberal trade-related concessions considering the LDC status of Bangladesh. Since then, Bangladesh became a major and largest trading partner for India among the SAARC countries.

Bhutan

In 1972, both India and Bhutan had signed Trade and Transit Agreement. Since then India is Bhutan's major trading partner. This agreement provides various duty-free concessions to Bhutan's goods to export and import from India and also extends the transit facility. India also agreed to a time-bound exemption for essential commodities to Bhutan and fully exempted from any ban on the

export of wheat, milk powder, pulses, edible oil and non- basmati rice. The government of India refunds the LPG/ Kerosene subsidy and excises duty to Bhutan on an annual basis and also allows Bhutanese citizens to purchase duty-free goods at Indian airports.

Maldives

On the trade front, India-Maldives bilateral trade has witnessed a steady increase since the trade agreement signed in 1981. It has steadily increased from INR 307.95 crores in 2005-06 to 395.57 crores in 2009-10.

Nepal

India maintains an open border stretching over 1860 km across which tradable commodities move freely and this makes India become Nepal's largest trading partner. Moreover, 60% of Nepal's world trade is India-centric, India is alone provides a transit facility to Nepal's global trade and 48% of the FDI in the country comes from India.

Sri Lanka

As a follow-up to the operationalization of the India-Sri Lanka FTA in March 2000, bilateral trade and investment continued to grow rapidly in Sri Lanka's trade and investment. The two-way trade between India and Sri Lanka has raised from US \$ 561 million in 1999 to US \$ 7.45 billion in 2014-15. India has become Sri Lanka's largest trading partner globally, however, Sri Lanka is India's second-largest trading partner in the SAARC region.

5.2.4 Developmental diplomacy and Constructive Engagement

Afghanistan

After the end of the Taliban war (2001), India has taken proactive measures and a concrete stance in meeting not only the humanitarian needs but also continued various developmental assistance and useful engagements in the form of reconstruction and rehabilitation measures in post-conflict Afghanistan. India is the biggest regional donor by far the largest from other regional players and the fifth-largest donor and also a major player in reconstruction and rehabilitation in Afghanistan

5.2.5 Humanitarian Assistance and Diplomatic Support

Afghanistan

Immediately after the end of the war (2001), there was a severe humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. India quickly acted on the crisis to alleviate the suffering of the innocent civilian people in the war-ravaged country. India announced humanitarian assistance of one million tons of wheat for the displaced Afghan people. Many different teams of doctors and paramedical staff were sent to Kabul to treat and cure the citizens who were affected in the war between USA led forces and the Taliban. They had set up various camps for fixing artificial limbs) for Afghans.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a country highly prone to natural disasters like frequent floods and cyclones. India always helps and supports Bangladesh whenever natural calamity struck the country

Bhutan

India extends diplomatic support whenever and wherever Bhutan wants and needs. During the year 2007, many losses of lives and property were caused by the flash floods in Bhutan.

Maldives

Whenever the country faces a humanitarian crisis preceded by calamities, India always provides timely help to the Maldives. In 2004, a massive tsunami struck the Indian Ocean littoral states, followed by huge destruction which caused heavy destruction of men and material.

Nepal

Nepal is prone to frequent floods which cause severe humanitarian crises especially on the banks of the river and many times the rivers change their direction and severely affect people livelihood. For instance, India extended its support at an International Donors' Conference organized by Nepal in Kathmandu in June 2015 towards post-earthquake reconstruction in which Sushma Swaraj announced US\$ 1 billion credit to Nepal in which 1/4 would be as a grant

Sri Lanka

At the beginning of the 21st century, a series of natural and man-made calamities continuously struck Sri Lanka. During the drought, India donated US\$ 25,000 for drought relief assistance and supplied food materials to tide over the food crisis.

6. EFFECTIVENESS OF SOFT POWER APPROACH IN SOUTH ASIA

One can analyze the following facts to grasp a better understanding of the effectiveness of the soft approach of India in South Asia:

First, India has experienced a period of relatively good and cooperative relations with most of its neighbours during the last decade. Even if it has not realized its major objectives yet, its relations with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal have witnessed an upward trend and more mutual trust has been built involved in internal conflicts in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan and also in the political transition in Nepal have helped to get rid of its previous image of being a regional hegemon. Even though India today is a more powerful country and has acquired new strength, thanks to its economic growth and ascendance in the global arena during the last two decades, regional elites have less to worry about it than in the past. By its low-aimed responses and less one-sided approach to regional crises, 'twenty-first century India' is a relatively placable regional force. (Basrur, 2010, p. 280)

Second, an overview of the available public opinion surveys in South Asian countries reveals that India already has considerable soft power in the region. In Nepal, more than eight out of ten (84 per cent) respondents said that they had a rather positive opinion about their big neighbours. (Gallup/SADF, 2019)

India is the most preferred destination in the region for tourism and work among the citizens of neighbouring countries. In 2012, over 18 per cent of all foreign arrivals in India were from the seven SAARC countries. Most visitors are from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. More people come to India from war-ridden Afghanistan or Nepal. People from South Asia visit India not only for tourism but also to work and settle down. Available data shows that at least for Bangladesh and Nepal, India is an important destination for work and migration. For instance, 33 per cent of Nepalese and 13 per cent of Bangladeshis have acquainted living in another South Asian country, which is almost always India. (Pew Research Centre, 2012)

The evaluation of India's soft power approach in South Asia is, selective and incomplete. Nevertheless, recent trends in inter-state relations and the image of India in neighbouring countries offer a positive lesson for India.

7. INDIA'S UNTAPPED SOFT POWER RESOURCES

One of the key enquiries of this paper is the question of why a state such as India has not been able to harness them effectively. Soft power and public diplomacy (by extension) are not aimed at particular outcomes or occasions. Rather, it is aimed at creating an enabling political environment for a country's foreign policy. This characteristic of soft power makes its impacts extremely difficult to measure as the resources are also intangible. This is why many analysts depend upon public polls or indicators that suggest the workings of soft power. Unfortunately for India, public opinion in other countries has not been as per the expectations of New Delhi. Hyman's search yells that since the late 1970s, Americans have evinced moderately negative feelings toward India. Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey 2021 expressed slightly negative feelings—a score of 46 out of 100 (down from 49 in 1978), where 50 was a normal score.

Moreover, India ranked 27 in a 2011 study of the world's top 30 countries in terms of soft power slightly ahead of Russia and just behind Israel. It seems that although India's soft power has had gainful effects in absolute terms over time—as measured by the inflow of foreign students and migrants—its comparative standing among nations as well as the impression of India among the citizens of other countries come up short. (Rohan Mukherjee, 2010, page 6-9)

7.1 Why Untapped?

India's soft power resources are due to three factors:

First, India's cultural influence abroad pales in comparison to the cultures of the West already in circulation around the globe, and increasingly in comparison to China. Although ICCR has been since 1950, as of January 2019, it did not have more than 50 centres in foreign countries (ICCR 2019).

- a) India remains to be poorer and its population consistently low in Hunger Index
- b) India has not executed the cooperative and conciliatory policies required to garner soft power resources at the diplomatic front.
- c) India was accused of blocking the efforts of the big players to rescue the Doha Round trade negotiations in 2009.
- d) India continues to be a non-signatory to NPT and CTBT, despite being officially recognised as a nuclear power by the 2008 agreement with the US on civilian nuclear cooperation.
- e) West criticised India for its weak approach towards the crisis in Libya and Syria during its in a chair in UNSC (Kelemen 2011, page:23-34).

This creates hurdles in India's soft power ambitions.

Secondly, India is not sufficiently far along in terms of hard power resources for its soft power to make a difference in its foreign policy. India's soft power gained prominence only after it grew as an economic power. Therefore one can concur that soft power

requires the backing of hard power for smooth flow. Soft power is therefore not only generated by hard power, it also facilitates the smoother exercise of hard power by influencing the preferences of those who are the targets of a state's foreign policy. Instead, India remains in a transformative phase

Finally, India's contested nature of its own identity is another cause of the problem. India's ruling elites have not yet determined what kind of power their nation will be as it continues to rise, and this indecisiveness leads to incoherence in the reflection of India's image abroad.

As a result, poorer countries in international organizations are often frustrated by what they perceive to be India's pursuit of self-interest over the interests of developing nations (e.g. in trade negotiations).

Fundamentally, India's multiple social and political identities continue to conflict with each other both within policymaking, messages and images that India reflects the world. This creates confusion, unpredictable policy shifts, and general distrust among Indian mediators. Cumulatively these factors explain the limited success that India has had in exercising its soft power.

Though India's cultural resources are abundant, its internal dynamics and foreign policy are not attractive enough for states to want what India wants. Moreover, India is not yet powerful enough conventionally to lead in international affairs. And finally, India's confusion over its own identity as it negotiates its rise contributes to a fundamental incoherence in India's external image. (Rohan Mukherjee, 2013, page 9-10)

7.2 Lessons from China: Courage to accept and dedication to improve

The unintended consequence of China is that it compels India to think strategically and to do something. China provides momentum to India to come out of slumber. India needs to be imaginative, open-minded, neither complacent nor rhetorical in dealing with China (C. Raja Mohan, 2007, page- 99)

This section examines the lessons India can learn from China in so far as the deployment of the latter's soft power initiatives in South Asia is concerned.

7.2.1 Timely completion of projects

India's record in this respect as compared to China has been somewhat disappointing even when looked at from the point of view of privately-funded projects (Sumit Ganguly, 2007, page: 30-40).

The failure to take off on part of the US\$2 billion projects by the Tata Group in Bangladesh underline difficulties faced by Indian projects in South Asia. While there are political difficulties that often affect prospects of upcoming projects in the fragile South Asian region, India needs to counter them effectively by on-time project implementation.

The **South Asian University (SAU)** is a project, which can establish India's reputation as a mover of big ideas and their concrete implementation.

7.2.2 Worthy communication

China's efforts to build an effective cultural diplomacy policy coupled with large-scale development assistance have targeted nullifying the image of China as an aggressive power, particularly in its neighbourhood.

7.2.3 Achievements and Contributions

India seems to be a poor performer in reflecting its positive role in South Asia. As a responsible regional entity, India has responded to natural disasters and other crises in the region. It is also active in war-prone Afghanistan playing a significant role in the country's reconstruction. However, strategic literature and popular discourse have hardly attempted to positively articulate this aspect of India's involvement.

7.2.4 Politics-economics dichotomy

Despite swinging bilateral issues with Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, China has balanced economic engagement with them through development assistance and other commercial activities. In India's case, however, political challenges have sometimes resulted in disruption in economic ties with neighbours. This does not come fruitful in the long term.

7.2.5 Promoting contemporary culture in an institutional manner

Confucius Institutes have assumed larger cultural ambassadorial roles from the Chinese perspective. They signify China's cultural diplomacy. India can conceive of a similar institutional role through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

7.2.6 Diaspora as a bridge

Southeast Asia has a considerable presence of the Chinese diaspora. China's cultural diplomacy has tried to proceed by constructively engaging the ethnic Chinese. It has been a fairly successful strategy. India can benefit by enhancing engagement with its large and diverse diaspora in South Asia through initiatives such as the **Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas (PBD)** and so on.

7.2.7 Resources and Focus

Chinese and Indian initiatives on soft power are marked by the pure magnitude by which the former outpowers the latter. What is evident is the large resource allocation as well as focus that the Chinese have brought to its soft power strategy. India's efforts to engage South Asian neighbours lack comparable efforts. **Hanban** model is worth studying by ICCR. (Param Palit, 2011, page: 20-24)

8. INDIA'S SOFT POWER APPROACH DURING COVID-19

8.1 Namaste

COVID-19 has been carried out considering throughout the globe to numerous Indian customs that advance and support good practices for mental, physical and spiritual health. Premier among them is the Namaste, a greeting that has been all around upheld by pioneers around the world.

State heads are asking citizens to utilize the Indian greeting Namaste, to prevent contact and remain jovial.

8.2 Focus on Breath

Coronavirus has taken the concentrate directly back to the breath, where present-day science accepts everything to start and end. Clinical specialists all around the world are finding ways of handling the infection, which enters, stays and increases first in the upper respiratory framework, and when invigorated, assaults the lower respiratory framework.

He is what they are talking about:

prachardana-vidhāraṇa-ābhyāsaḥ vā prāṇasya

(Yoga Sutra, Samadhi Pada, Sutra 1.34)

Ayurveda experts are talking about the use of Indian herbs and spices in raising immunity.

8.3 Health Diplomacy

Health diplomacy is a significant part of India's outreach programme. India is known as the pharmacy of the globe. Therefore India bears the onus of any health crisis such as during covid 19. India ensured proper drug supply such as. Hydroxychloroquine. India initiated the SAARC COVID-19 Information Exchange Platform (**COINEX**) for the exchange of information regarding the pandemic. **Vaccine Maitri** plan shipped millions of Indian made vaccines to around 65+ countries amid chaos upon vaccine nationalism, vaccine race and vaccine apartheid. **Bolsonaro** termed it as Sanjeevni Booti (Smruti S. Pattanaik, Sage Journal, 2021)

9. WAY AHEAD: SOFT APPROACH AMID COVID CRISIS, SHATTERED SRI LANKAN AND PAK ECONOMY, TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN AND OTHER CHALLENGES.

The soft power measures like increasing cultural diplomacy, widening developmental assistance, people to people contact, better trade and transit arrangements, scholarship and training programmes, diplomatic and humanitarian assistance and confidence-building measures helped India to enhance bilateral cooperation and reduce misunderstanding and misapprehension with its neighbours (except Pakistan) in South Asia. The measures largely reduced tension and opened various avenues for better bilateral cooperation. The gulf between India and its neighbours has been reducing gradually. However, to reduce the deficit in the bilateral relationship, India has to adopt an active strategy (soft power tools) with its neighbours.

It is worth noting that soft power and hard power are not exclusive reigns but two extremes on a continuum of power. As rightly said by Nye (2006),

'It is a mistake to rely on hard power or soft power alone'; the best situation is when the two are effectively combined, which can be termed 'smart power.'

Programmes like '**Chennai Connect**', the UK defining its national food as '**Chicken Tikka Masala**', '**Namaste Trump**', Indian army getting training in **Tibetology** does reflect India's Soft power.

The formation of the EU is an example of the win of soft power to settle the ages of conflict in Europe. After World War II, students from France and Germany were sent on exchange programmes to learn about each other's customs and traditions. It resulted in the most powerful partnership is of France and Germany.

We also have an obligation to understand, nurture, strengthen and conserve this legacy for our people in the future.

Our soft power which is multidimensional and based on our social legacy is India's gift to the world. This message of affection and resilience is more pertinent than ever before in a world where the forces of fundamentalism and radicalism are raising their revolting heads.

Using a soft power strategy would require India to transform its soft power capacity such as yoga, Bollywood, and sports into capability. (Christian Wagner, 2010, 333-342).

Thus, following Wagner's advice India can strengthen the 6 pillars of soft power reoriented by PM Modi: **Samman**(dignity), **Samvaad** (dialogue), **Samridhi** (shared prosperity), **Suraksha** (regional and global security), **Sanskriti** and **Sabhayata** (cultural and civilizational links).

In the words of **Vinay Sahasrabuddhe** (chief of ICCR), "We believe that centrality of cultural ties will eventually promote our diplomatic, strategic as well as economic relationships". This reflects India's strategic culture. (The Hindu, 2020)

It is a composite culture spread worldwide. It reflects the evolution of our past, how India smoothly soaked other traditions but never lost its own. **William Dalrymple** had famously noted about India's soft strategic culture:

"India has always had a strange way with her conquerors. In defeat, she beckons them in, then slowly seduces, assimilates and transforms them". (Bhaswati Mukherjee, 2019, distinguished lecture)

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