SOFT POWER AND INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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The concept of "Soft power" has aroused a lot of interest , debate and discussion, among both IR scholars and practitioners of foreign policy ever since 1990. Joseph Nye, the eminent former Harvard political science professor is credited with popularising the concept within the lexicon of International Relations (IR). As Prof Gallarotti has succinctly put it , " .... few scholarly concepts have transcended the ivory towers of academia as vigorously as the concept of soft power, and its corollary smart power."(Gallarotti :2011) .

 Since Nye introduced the concept of soft power in his "Soft Power" (1990b) and *Bound to Lead* (1990a) the literature on soft power has grown overwhelmingly over the past two decades. As is known generally , "power" is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one (power-holder) wants. Again ,Power, in international relations, has traditionally been understood as what has been termed as 'hard' power, i.e. those elements calculated and assessed in the context of military and economic might. Hard power is deployed in the form of coercion: using force, the threat of force, economic sanctions, or inducements of payment.

Thus there are several ways to affect the behaviour of others to get what one wants. One can coerce them with threats or /and induce them with payments. Or one can also attract or co-opt them. In contrast to hard power, soft power implies the use of positive attraction and persuasion to achieve foreign policy objectives. Sometimes called "the second face of power", it is the indirect way to get what one wants. A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries admire its values, emulate its example or/and aspire to its level of prosperity and openness. This soft power—getting others to want the outcomes that one wants—co-opts people rather than coerces them or antagonises them.

Soft power has been defined by Nye as the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without resorting to force or coercion. Soft power, he said, lies in a country's

attractiveness. If power means the ability to get the outcomes one wants from others, it is done generally by coercion (sticks) or inducements (carrots) and attraction (soft power) .The latter is 'the ability to shape the preferences of others'.

According to Nye the Soft power of a country comes from three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others}, its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). Though slower to yield results, soft power is a less expensive means than military force or economic inducements to get others to do what we want. The international and internal sources of Soft Power are presented in a tabular form below for easy comprehension.

It is no gainsaying the fact that traditionally, power or hard power in world politics has been seen in terms of military power: the side with the larger army is supposed to win. But even in the past, limitation of military power had also become evident. After all, the militarily mighty US lost the Vietnam War. So also the Soviet Union had its Vietnam in Afghanistan . A September 11 happened on America in spite of its being the lone super power of day in a world still described uni-polar and US- dominated .These and many other examples undermine the efficacy of hard power alone and underline the necessity and importance of soft power, i.e. both as an alternative to hard power, and as a complement to it.

For Nye, the US is the original model of soft power. It is the home of Boeing and Intel, Google and the iPod, Microsoft and MTV, Hollywood and Disneyland, McDonald's and Starbucks. Most of its major products dominate daily life around the globe. The attractiveness of these assets, and of the American lifestyle of which they are emblematic, is that they naturally make the US to be emulated and persuade others to adopt the agenda of the US, rather than it having to rely purely on the dissuasive or coercive 'hard power' of military force.

However it needs to be mentioned and to be fair to Nye Jr that in his book, *The Paradox of American Power*, he took the analysis of soft power beyond the US. Other nations too, he suggested, could acquire it. In today's information era, he wrote, three types of countries are likely to gain soft power and could succeed: "Those whose dominant cultures and ideals are closer to prevailing global norms (which now emphasize liberalism, pluralism, autonomy); those with the most access to multiple channels of communication and thus more influence over how issues are framed; and those whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international performance."

Theoretically speaking, International politics like any other politics revolves around power. "Power" (as already pointed out) as Dahl had said is having the ability to influence another to act in ways in which that entity would not have acted otherwise. Hard power is the capacity to coerce them to do so. Hard power strategies focus on military intervention, coercive diplomacy, and economic sanctions to enforce national interests. In academic writings, it is the realist and neorealist approaches that tend to emphasize hard power, especially the hard power of states, while liberal and neo-liberal institutionalist scholars emphasize soft power as an essential resource of statecraft.

To be conceptually clear about Soft Power , it needs to be emphasised again that Nye defined it as the ability to get what one wants through persuasion or attraction rather than coercion (Nye 1990). It builds attraction and encompasses nearly everything other than economic and military power (Cooper 2004). Nye (2004) stated, "In terms of resources, soft-power resources are the assets that produce such attraction." (Ernest J. Wilson, III   Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power).

It may further be elaborated that Nye argues that soft power is more than influence, since influence can also rest on the hard power of threats or payments. And soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it. It is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence. ......Thus the key element of Soft Power is "attraction". If I am persuaded to go along with your purposes without any explicit threat or exchange taking place—in short, if my behaviour is determined by an observable but intangible attraction—soft power is at work. Soft power uses a different type of currency — not force, not money—to engender cooperation. It uses an attraction to shared values, and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values. (http://publicdiplomacy.wikia.com/wiki/Soft_Power)

Growing importance and greater attention to soft power itself reflects the changing landscape of international relations. It is no coincidence that such sources of power have been embraced by Neo-liberalism and Constructivism, paradigms that have underscored the changing nature of world politics. While history has shown soft power always to have been an important source of national influence, changes in modern world politics have raised its utility all the more (Gallarotti 2010a and 2010b). Indeed the world has become and is continuing to evolve into a "softer world."

Much of the present emphasis on soft power is a reaction to a long tradition of over -reliance on hard power that neglected the benefits of this benign aspect of power (soft power). In his

well argued essay, "Soft Power: What it is, Why it's Important, and the Conditions Under Which it Can Be Effectively Used", Giulio M. Gallarotti has advanced following six factors as rationales to explain the importance of soft power in a changing global environment.

(i)First, Interdependence is more pronounced in the era of Globalisation whose pervasive process compounds its effects on power. There is an obvious decline in the utility of hard power which is partly the result of a specific political, social and economic context created by modernization whose hallmark is interdependence. Sticks, or whatever kinds of coercive methods, generate considerable costs in an interdependent world where punishing or threatening other nations is tantamount to self-punishment. In such an interdependent environment strategies for optimizing national wealth and influence have shifted from force and coercion to cooperation.

(ii) Civil societies in the global age have acquired the capacity to receive and transmit information, as well as move across nations with ever greater speed and magnitude. Enhanced access to foreign governments and citizens created by globalization also enhances the effects of democratization in creating political impediments to the use of hard power (Haskel 1980). These forces have shifted the epicentre of competition away from force, threat, and bribery (Rosecrance 1999 and Nye 2004b. p. 31).

(iii)Third, the costs of using or even threatening force among nuclear powers is unimaginably high. Current leading scholarship in the field of security has proclaimed that the nuclear revolution has been instrumental in creating a new age of a "security community," in which war between major powers is almost unthinkable because the costs of war have become too great.

(iv) Fourth, the expansion and growth of democracy in the world system has served to compound the disutility of coercion and force as the actors bearing the greatest burden of such coercion and force, i.e. the people have political power over decision-makers. In this respect, the process of democratic peace has altered power relations among nations. As individuals become politically empowered, they can generate strong impediments to the use of force and coercion. But even beyond the enfranchisement effect, democratic cultural naturally drives national leaders towards the liberal principles manifest in the cannons of soft power. Hence, national leaders are much more constrained to work within softer foreign policy boundaries, boundaries that limit the use of force, threat and bribery. Rather, outcomes are engineered through policies more consistent with liberal democratic legitimacy.

(v) Fifth, social and political changes have made modern populations more sensitive to their economic fates , and consequently far less enamoured of a "warrior ethic" (Jervis 2002 and Nye 2004b, p. 19). This "prosperous society" has compounded the influence of economics and made economic interdependence that much more compelling as a constraint to the utility of hard power. With the rise of this welfare/economic orientation and the spread of democracy, national leaders have been driven more by the economic imperative and less by foreign adventurism as a source of political survival (Gallarotti 2000 and Ruggie 1983). This prosperous society, through the political vehicle of democracy, has shifted not only domestic but also foreign policy orientations. The economic welfare concern has put a premium on cooperation that can deliver economic growth and employment, and worked against hard power policies that might undercut such goals.

(vi) Finally, the growth of international organization and regimes in the post-war period has embedded nations more firmly in networks of cooperation: these being fundamental components of soft power. As these networks have evolved, so too has the soft power of norms and laws they represent increased (Krasner 1983 and Keohane and Nye 1989). In such a world, unilateral actions that disregard these institutions become far more costly. Such institutions have effectively raised the minimum level of civil behaviour in international politics, and consequently raised the importance of soft power significantly.

India's Soft Power

The popularisation of the concept of soft power and the rise of India happened almost simultaneously i.e. in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. Both grew in prominence during the same period leading observers to draw a link between the two. Writing in 2003, Indian foreign policy analyst C. Raja Mohan argued, "The spiritualism of India has attracted people from all over theworld, and its Gurus have travelled around the world selling yoga and mysticism. Bollywood has done more for Indian influenceabroad than the bureaucratic efforts of the Government. From classical and popular music to its cuisine, from the growing impact of its writers and intellectuals, India now has begun to acquire many levers of soft power."

Shashi Tharoor (2008, p. 40) is perhaps the most enthusiastic scholar and writer to draw attention to India's soft power. Analysts often cite his famous passage below:

"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". (Tharoor : 2008, p. 40)

A recipient of Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and later a Minister of State, Government of India, Tharoor writes, " When Americans in Silicon Valley speak of the IITs with the same reverence they used to accord to MIT, and the Indianness of engineers and software developers is taken as synonymous with mathematical and scientific excellence, it is India that gains in respect". He further writes " India's democracy, our thriving free media, our contentious civil society forums, our energetic human rights groups and the repeated spectacle of our remarkable general elections, all have made India a rare example of successful management of diversity in the developing world" .

The success of soft power heavily depends on the actor's reputation within the international community, as well as the flow of information between actors. Thus, soft power is often associated with the rise of globalization and neoliberal international relations theory. Popular culture and media is regularly identified as a source of soft power, as is the spread of a national language, or a particular set of normative structures; a nation with a large amount of soft power and the good will that it engenders may inspire others to acculturate, avoiding the need for expensive hard power expenditures."

It goes without saying that, India has considerable soft power resources which are multi-faceted. They include sports, music, art, film, literature, and even beauty pageantry. To this list, others have added India's anti-colonial history, democratic institutions, free press, independent judiciary, vibrant civil society, multi-ethnic polity, secularism, pluralism, skilled English-speaking workers, food, handicrafts, yoga, India's status as a responsible nuclear power, the rapid growth of the information technology sector in places such as Bangalore, and the existence of a large Indian diaspora in certain western countries (Blarel 2012, Malone 2011, Purushothaman 2010, Hymans 2009, Mohan 2003).

 Since the early 2000s it has also been actively promoting its soft power credentials around the globe and to its own people (Suri 2011). As the growing consensus in the literature was that India possesses considerable soft power resources arising from its universalist culture, democratic political institutions and tradition of leadership among developing nations, in the new millennium, Delhi began a concerted effort to channel these resources – including those of Indians living abroad – into generating soft power that might produce beneficial foreign policy outcomes (Hall 2012).

In May 2006, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) established its Public Diplomacy Division to educate domestic and global opinion on key policy issues and project a better image of India. It is modelled on the Public Diplomacy Office of the US State Department. Public diplomacy which refers to the art of serving national interests by informing, influencing and understanding foreign audiences, is fast emerging as an essential tool for serving national interests in international politics. Educational, cultural, social and diverse media activities constitute the core of public diplomacy. (http://www.ipcs.org/article/india-the-world/public-diplomacy-lessons-for-the-conduct-of-indian-foreign-policy-2522.html)

In other words, public diplomacy is a key ingredient of soft power's potency. The target audience of Public Diplomacy include domestic and international think-tanks, faculties in institutes of higher learning, press clubs and editors of local and foreign newspapers. Public diplomacy is "the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented" (Sharp, cited in Melissen 2005, p. 8). It does not focus on specific policy issues (a task better suited to lobbying); neither is it ideological in its content (like propaganda). Rather, it focuses on "building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies" (Nye 2004, p. 107).

China has also courted Public Diplomacy as a tool of Soft Power strategy of late. In fact, the very concept of 'public diplomacy' was a distinctly foreign one for the Chinese who tend to use the term wai xuan, meaning 'external propaganda'. But over the last few years, China has embraced a softer approach to foreign policy. This transition was ushered in by the creation of the Division for Public Diplomacy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004. Combined with the rapid expansion of Confucius Institutes around the world, a growing number of foreign-language Xinhua news outlets, and a swelling public diplomacy budget, China's soft power capability appears to be on a steep upward curve. (http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/The%20new%20persuaders_0.pdf)

This is a critical phase in the debate on soft power's role in global politics. For much of the last decade, China has invested in trying to project an image of a peaceful rising power. Many western observers were in thrall of so-called Chinese success in enhancing its brand value across the globe, but especially in Asia — with its Confucius Institutes, extravagant

Olympics displays and rhetoric of a peaceful rise. There are more than 480 Confucius Institutes around the world with plans to expand that number to 1,000 by 2020.

(http://www.outlookindia.com/article/indias-softpower-strategy/295206)

India's soft power: Some critical reflections

However, for a country almost destined to provide significant moral leadership in the post-Cold War world, India's soft power resources have frequently proved not up to the task (Blarel 2012). India is a neither a 'hard power' like the US, Russia and China nor the 'soft power' like the UK, Germany and United States among others. It is neither here nor there because its power is nowhere in the world. Recently , the London-based consultancy Portland Communications has compiled a list of 30 countries in the world believed to have wielding 'soft power' in which India does not find a place.

The Soft Power 30 is a new, authoritative index that aims to help governments and countries understand better the resources they have at their disposal. It ranks leading countries using a combination of objective metrics and new international polling data to measure soft power, covering categories such as Government, Culture, Education, Global Engagement and Enterprise. It asked respondents to rate countries based on seven different categories, including culture, cuisine, foreign policy and friendliness, among others.

(http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-and-the-soft-power-30)

'The Soft Power 30' is topped by United Kingdom and followed by Germany, United States, France, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, Japan, Sweden, Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Austria, Spain, Finland, New Zealand, Belgium, Norway, Ireland; Korea, Republic (South Korea), Singapore, Portugal, Brazil, Poland, Greece, Israel, Czech Republic, Turkey, Mexico and finally, China. The UK scored highly in every category but with a particularly strong performance on Culture, Digital and Global Engagement.

Britain scored highly in its "engagement" with the world, its citizens enjoying visa-free travel to 174 countries—the joint-highest of any nation—and its diplomats staffing the largest number of permanent missions to multilateral organisations, tied with France. Britain's cultural power was also highly rated: though its tally of 29 UNESCO World Heritage sites is fairly ordinary, Britain produces more internationally chart-topping music albums than any other country, and the foreign following of its football is in a league of its own (even if its national teams are not). It did well in education, too—not because of its schools, which are fairly mediocre, but because its universities are second only to America's, attracting vast numbers of foreign students.

(http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21657655-oxbridge-one-direction-and-premier-league-bolster-britains-power-persuade-softly-does-it)

Interestingly ,Singapore, which ,in fact, has the smallest population of any nation in the top 30 , yet ranks above the giants of Brazil, Turkey, Mexico and China. It is also one of only four Asian countries, along with Japan, South Korea and China - which comes in 30th place - to make the list. (http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-and-the-soft-power-30)

The United States comes only third despite its leading position in the Education, Culture and Digital categories. It is pulled down by widespread distrust of its foreign policy. China's bottom placed ranking, despite investing hugely in soft power assets such as the Confucius Institutes and its global broadcasting platform CNC World, also shows it is struggling to overcome concerns about foreign policy as well as its human rights record. (http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-and-the-soft-power-30).

Summation: Power has become much more diffuse - moving from west to east, from north to south, from state to non-state actors and, through social media, increasingly from the elite to the universal. Challenges are now rarely constrained by national borders. (http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-and-the-soft-power-30).In this more complex world, countries have realised that Professor Joseph Nye, who first coined the phrase soft power 25 years ago, was right when he said "power with others can be more effective than power over others". Soft Power is an exceptionally powerful platform on which to build and to help the country achieve its foreign policy goals and extend its influence.

But, question is often raised as to how is it that a nation such as India with a history of moral high ground and leadership among developing nations, a tradition of statesmen highly regarded by interlocutors in the international sphere, and considerable cultural and domestic political capital to attract other nations to its cause could have failed to successfully translate it into soft power in order to achieve a favourable political environment for its foreign policy goals.

India's soft power struggles under the following shortcomings :

First, soft power-deficit in case of India is linked to resources which are not as abundant as proponents of the idea would like people to believe. India's cultural influence abroad, while significant, pales in comparison to the cultural circulations of the West around the globe, and that of China in Asia and beyond. Official and semi-official Indian modes of cultural dissemination are also relatively few. For many decades, organizations such as the Peace Corps, Alliance Francaise, the British Council, the Goethe Institute and the Japan

Foundation have been promulgating the respective cultures of the greatpowers around the world. They have most recently been joined by China's Confucius Institutes, which numbered 322 in 2011 (Na 2012). Although the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has been around since 1950 with the aim of conducting activities similar to the organizations already mentioned, as of January 2013 it did not have more than 35 centres in foreign countries (ICCR 2013). Moreover, it was only in 2004 that India established its Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs to better leverage the presence of millions of Indians abroad, and only in 2006 that India's Ministry of External Affairs established a division dedicated to public diplomacy (Suri 2011). Tharoor (2009, p. 41) – an ardent believer in India's soft power –concedes that "we (India) could pour far more resources and energies into our cultural diplomacy to promote the richness of our composite culture into lands which already had a predisposition for it." Compared to the British Council, Alliance Française and even the Confucius Institutes, the performance of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, with centers in about 35 countries and aimed at promoting Indian culture, has been lackadaisical. India has failed to build its brand value abroad. The record, therefore, deserves more systematic scrutiny.

(2) Although Indian culture, which is based largely on universalist and assimilationist

Hindu principles, is a potent source of attraction, India's domestic institutions and foreign policy have mitigated this effect on the perceptions of outsiders. In the domestic realm, India has done a much poorer job of lifting its population out of poverty when compared to China. Casteism (Rohit case, Hyderabad University) and Dadri do not present a good image of the country outside India .

(3) Although the government has made major strides in liberalizing the economy, many sectors remain highly regulated. India's public institutions are rife with corruption, inefficiency, patronage and nepotism. In Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index, India ranked 94 out of 174 countries, tied with, Colombia, Greece, Moldova, Mongolia, and Senegal (China ranked 80). In the words of one analyst (Malone 2011, p. 38), "no amount of cultural promotion can undo the damage internationally caused by spectacular corruption scandals" of the sort that India has recently been witness to, and that have given rise to an anti-state social movement that made international front page news in 2011.

The Berlin-based corruption watchdog Transparency International (TI) has put India at rank 76 out of 168 countries in its latest Corruption Perception Index. The country's 2015

corruption perception score remains the same as last year's – 38/100 – showing lack of improvement. India shares its rank along with six other countries: Brazil, Burkina Faso, Thailand, Tunisia and Zambia. China fared worse than India and Brazil at rank 83 with a score of 37. TI has also noted that Pakistan is the only country among the SAARC countries, to have improved its score this year, though its rank remains poor at 117. (The Hindu, 18 January 2016)

(4) Critics point out that India is not sufficiently far along in terms of hard power resources for its soft power to make a difference in its foreign policy. Although in earlier periods India had relied on soft power as a substitute for hard power, India's attractiveness following the end of the Cold War grew precisely because of its hard power resources, specifically economic growth, which made India a desirable international partner. It is no coincidence that references to India's soft power grew in frequency only after its economic gains were consolidated and the world could be optimistic about India's fortunes. In this sense, India's trajectory corroborates the argument of various analysts that soft power is most effective when backed by hard power (Tharoor 2008, Lee 2010, Blarel 2012). Soft power is therefore not only generated by hard power (all else being equal, other countries are drawn to success), 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.

(5) Nowhere is this shortcoming more glaring than in India's own neighborhood, where perceptions in almost every state range from ambiguous to openly hostile toward India's regional hegemony (*Gateway House 2012).*As a commentator wrote , *"*Through all this, relations with the two most populous neighbours — Pakistan and Bangladesh — remain contentious. Half-hearted overtures are made, but soon withdrawn. Political constituencies have been created on maintaining a tough posture and there is too much riding on that stance. Aside from the stop-and-go career of the dialogue with Pakistan, the compulsions of nurturing this constituency were evident in Home Minister Rajnath Singh's bizarre exhortation recently to the Border Security Force to redouble the vigil against cross-border cattle movements, so that rising prices would compel Bangladeshis to give up their dietary beef habit."(http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blink/know/weve-got-the-soft%20power/article7085583.ece)

In the Indian context, it is important to clarify that soft power is not to be found in India's trade, investment, or foreign aid policies, as some have claimed (Lum et al 2008, Mullen and Ganguly 2012). While it is true that economic prosperity breeds attraction (Huang and Ding

2006),economic diplomacy is more appropriately categorized as an instrument of hard power, particularly the use of negative and positive inducements to coerce and buy the support of others respectively. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been the political star of social media, whose Facebook page generates twice as many comments, shares and thumbs-ups as that of Barack Obama. (http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21657655-oxbridge-one-direction-and-premier-league-bolster-britains-power-persuade-softly-does-it. However, it must bother the policy makers ,the scholars and practitioners of diplomacy as to why India fails to figure in the list of "Soft Power 30" in spite of being a democratic country [world's largest democracy in action however functional and dysfunctional (Monsoon Session 2015)], contributing to culture (at the global level - International Yoga Day, Gandhi as the symbol of non-violence, and growing digitally (India is the third largest country in the world after China and the USA in terms of the number of Internet users and India being described as IT Super Power). India fails appallingly in education, global engagement, enterprise and in governance (what is there for the world to learn from India in those fields?)

Whether his reasoning is accepted or not, Hymans (2009, p. 234) perhaps sounds correct when he argued that "India remains a minor soft power in the contemporary world" because it has abandoned the soft power ambitions of its founding generation of leaders, especially Gandhi and Nehru. It will not perhaps be wrong to say that India remains in a transitory phase where its hard power is yet to become preponderant even regionally to the point where it can meaningfully project its soft power in order to create a political environment conducive to

its international goals. Again India has to take lessons from those who have excelled with Soft Power .The concept of being an 'information warrior' and 'perception manager' which is gaining prominence in the US needs to inspire the conduct of public diplomacy in India. In an era where the most successful advertising agencies are running the public diplomacy efforts of countries like the US, the UK and China, efforts by India are rudimentary at best. Innovativeness, foresight, marketing blitz, strategic planning and psychological management are imperative for any successful public diplomacy effort. India needs to realize that public diplomacy is not simply an office space in the South Block, but a connecting link and strategic leverage in its foreign policy.(http://www.ipcs.org/article/india-the-world/public-diplomacy-lessons-for-the-conduct-of-indian-foreign-policy-2522.html)

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