
Tools of India's Cultural Diplomacy: An Overview

Sreshtha Chakraborty

PhD Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, School of International Studies

ABSTRACT:

This paper seeks to understand India's approach to cultural diplomacy, tracing its origin and evolution since India's Independence. This paper will study the role of ICCR and its instrumentalities in the promotion of cultural diplomacy. This paper points out five different tools of India's cultural diplomacy and will analyse the effectiveness of these tools in the promotion of India's cultural diplomacy. This study will be qualitative and descriptive in nature and mostly based on secondary sources. Primary sources will include government reports and documents. The secondary sources including books, magazines, various national and international Think Tanks, NGO reports, journals, newspaper articles both print and e-paper and internet sources.

KEYWORDS: *India's Cultural Diplomacy, Indian Foreign Policy, Cultural Relations.*

INTRODUCTION

Since its independence in 1947, India's cultural diplomacy has tried to enhance mutual understanding amongst countries and its peoples. India's cultural diplomacy was promoted soon after its independence because India was genuinely committed to rebuilding a post-colonial world on foundations opposed to that of colonialism. This trend has been visibly reinforced through various elements of mutual exchange in India's cultural diplomacy, especially in the exchange of people and ideas, creative performances and performing arts groups, and the promotion of India's civilizational heritage in its cultural diplomacy activities. Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and his ideas itself were promoted to enhance cultural relations

India's cultural diplomacy can be well understood by placing it in the broader context of changes to India's foreign policy since its independence in 1947. In the four decades following its Independence, India's non-aligned foreign policy stance was, as C. Raja Mohan points out, 'the singular feature' of its foreign policy. The foundation of that stance was fundamentally challenged by the end of the Cold War. As a result of this, several core aspects of its foreign policy, and its economic policy, were reconsidered, and in the 1990s underwent significant change. The first steps towards economic liberalisation were taken. Greater emphasis was placed on the pursuit of India's national interests rather than on Third World solidarity.

The soft power assets of India were not factored aptly in foreign policy formulation till 1990s. Not that the policymakers were not aware. The founding fathers of modern India were themselves ambassadors of soft power. But there was a lack of display to use tools of cultural diplomacy. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) were established to play a significant role in cultural diplomacy.

Over the years the government has realised the systematic use of various tools of cultural diplomacy like Indian diaspora, educational and academic exchanges, tourism, sports, yoga, cultural associations, Bollywood, cuisine and in promoting cultural diplomacy between the two countries.

Indian Council for Cultural Affairs and its instrumentalities

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was established in the year 1950 and has been bestowed upon with the primary responsibilities for India's Cultural Diplomacy. Whilst Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership and vision set the framework for the establishment of the ICCR, it was Maulana Abul Kalam who can be described the person who gave structure to the institution. Cultural exchange was at the core of the Nehruvian idea of 'peaceful co-existence' and was in line with the 'non-alignment' policy that he championed. (Sahai,2019)When the ICCR was established in 1950, it was located administratively within the Department of Culture, a location which well suited Azad's ideas on the role that culture had played in the making of India, and on the importance of cultural cooperation for world peace. However, in 1960, the administrative location of the ICCR was transferred to India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).ⁱThe organisation's new link to the MEA ensured the strong backing of Indian embassies for its work, the focus of the ICCR became much more closely aligned to the pursuit of diplomacy. Since 1960, the ICCR has essentially been a division of the foreign ministry – and indeed the ICCR's director-general, always an Indian diplomat, has been designated as ex officio head of MEA's cultural division. The ICCR's two deputy directors-general have also always been drawn from the foreign ministry; the ICCR's funding has been provided through the MEA.

These purposes of establishing ICCR were embodied in the four objectives set out 'Memorandum of Association' dating back to the 1950 founding:

- To participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations;
- To foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries;
- To promote cultural exchange with other countries and peoples;
- To establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture.

ICCR was given the performing twin tasks of promoting and interpreting Indian culture abroad and also the task of reviving and strengthening the cultural ties between India and other countries.ⁱⁱBut as Paramjit Sahai argues ICCR is expected to play a role both for the formulation and the implementation of cultural diplomacy but the formulation has not been accomplished as there is no embracing policy on cultural diplomacy.

As per ICCR Report (2016-2017) the activities promoted and implemented by the ICCR are broadly divided into

- Academic and Intellectual: It includes Academic and intellectual activities, administration of scholarships to foreign students, holding chairs of Indian studies, organization of seminars and conferences and award of fellowship.

- Art and culture: It include the activities of cultural centres abroad, the incoming and outcoming troupes of cultural activities like singing and dancing.
- The Other Activities includes all other various activities like the promotion and propagation of Hindi, publication of books and journals and presentation of artefacts, holding annual memorial lectures and others.

ICCR also holds and grants various International scholarships for undergraduate, post graduate and doctoral programmes for diverse streams like art, culture, humanities, engineering, pharmacy, accountancy, business administration and management, and also Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy under AYUSH scholarship except medical courses. ICCR handles 23 scholarship schemes out of which 17 are as Agency Work on behalf of Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of AYUSH for which funds are provided by concerned Ministries and 7 are ICCR schemes which ICCR runs from its own funds. Annually ICCR offers around 3400 scholarship slots for Under Graduate, Post Graduate, M. Phil and Ph.D. courses at any point of time around 6000 foreign students are on the role of ICCR from around 140 countries.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tools of India's Cultural Relations

The following section makes a study of five important vehicles of India's cultural diplomacy and how these tools have been used by India both by the government and different cultural organization working at the private level.

Yoga: One of the major recognitions of India's soft power has been in recent times has the United Nations' approval of 21 June as International Yoga Day. Yoga has emerged as an important tool of India cultural diplomacy. The international acceptance and the practitioners' enthusiasm over various platform across the world legitimize the importance of yoga as an important soft power tool. Popularity of yoga is not only limited to the activity organised in the Indian Cultural centres and by various government organisation. The emergence of various local yoga centre across the world marks the importance of it. The outreach of yoga is not a new phenomenon, as it had made it appearance long before the official declaration of International Yoga Day on 21 June. C Raja Mohan argues that the initial spread and popularity of yoga had very little to do with government initiative and promotion. Yoga generated universal interest over the years also with the globalisation process, spread of Indian diaspora and recognition of it physical and mental benefit.^{iv}

However, one of the significant accomplishments in promoting yoga as a tool of soft power has been the proclamation by the United Nations on 11 December 2014 to designate 21 June as the International Yoga Day. The overwhelming support from 170 member states of United Nations has not only recognised Yoga as an important soft power asset but has widen the practice and scope of Yoga in general.

Yoga also has blended well in the time when there is a global concern for healthy body and mind in the international arena. The popularity of yoga throughout the world is not something which was directed by the government. The present government under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi has been able to successfully use it to serve the interest of India's effort to promote its soft power. According to Swapan Dasgupta, the recognition for yoga in United Nation General Assembly by such a huge number of members, Indian government aimed two things. First, it helped in institutionalising yoga as tool of Indian soft power and second, it highlighted the

importance and relevance of India's heritage not only to the world but also to its own citizen. International Yoga Day is a diplomatic initiative that involved not only projecting India's heritage to the world but also to its own people.^v

Bollywood

Indian cinema has huge audiences across the world and appeals to audiences beyond the Indian diaspora. Films has always been one of the most influential political tools for promotion of culture, heritage and tradition. Indian film industry to start with its outreach, Bollywood has gone far beyond the popular narrative of calling it the poorer cousin of Hollywood. It has become important because of cultural globalisation, communication technologies, innovation, consumerism and the presence of huge Indian migrants. However, Shashi Tharoor describes the popularity of Bollywood films around the globe as a capacity of projecting the "good story" that the world wants to see and hear from India.^{vi} Roopa Swaminathan (2018) in her book "Bollywood Booms" has described the growing political outreach of Bollywood which also comes along with the popularity of the Indian celebrities abroad. Bollywood which is the popular Hindi cinema industry in India is often been confused with the other regional and Indian film industry which also has its reach among its regional diaspora and film enthusiasts.

India's Values and Tolerance

In the global scenario India's image is perceived to be non-violent, tolerant and pluralistic democracy whose values are seen as largely positive in nature. It is an image that has been crafted carefully by the architects of Indian foreign policy gives India a unique soft power advantage in the multipolar international scenario.^{vii} The dominant cultural values that includes non-violence, pluralism, tolerance have been integral to India's foreign policy formulation also helped India to create an image for itself. India after independence constantly pursued the goal of the promotion of world peace. This policy was formulated by the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. The struggle for world peace on the part of India would influence the newly independent countries which were caught in the political instability, shattered economies due to the war, colonialism and ever-increasing entanglement in the cold war. In this way, the pursuit of the goal of the international peace became inevitably linked with the national interest of India. India's anti-imperialist and anticolonial stand had a profound impact on her overall foreign policy. The movement for independent India led by Mahatma Gandhi also defined India's identity through non-violence. Indian society is plural and heterogenous and it is admired by the international community for its tolerance of diversity.

Indian Cuisine

India with its cultural diversity is home to a fascinating array of Cuisine. In the present international scenario where cuisine diplomacy has made its appearance in the form of "gastro-diplomacy" Indian food is one of the most widely accepted and liked because of its distinct taste and uniqueness. Cuisine differs across India's diverse regions as a result of variations in local culture, geographical locations and economics. It also varies seasonally. Indian cuisine also reflects an intermingling of various communities and culture leading to variety in flavour and regional cuisines. The arrival of Mughals, British Portuguese and have added variety to what we called the Indian cuisine. The wide variety of cooking style, Indian spices have wide popularity in the international arena.

Tourism

Tourism is an important tool of cultural Diplomacy in enhancing country's image and soft power. It not only connects people and its culture but also helps in boasting country's economy and generates employment. India is long known for its diverse culture, geography and diverse landscapes, rich heritage, history and historical monuments. Indian government took an initiative to leverage on Tourism as soft power and roped in the Ministry of Tourism by promoting "Incredible India" campaign. The efforts were also undertaken "to showcase its social, political and cultural assets abroad" by Ministry of Overseas Indian. The growing healthcare industry in India also stands a potential hub for medical tourism. India attracts people all over the world seeking good quality facilities at affordable cost. Bollywood also generates tourists by showcasing beautiful landscapes of India to its audiences. Buddhism connects people and attracts huge tourists especially from the South-East Asian countries. Indian airports are well-connected to almost all parts of the world ensuring good connectivity for the visitors and tourists.

The global presence of Indian Diaspora is a strategic asset and one of the major soft power of India. However, Indian Diaspora who are globally present and stands as a connecting bridge between India and host countries are not globally organised under one policy. Effort from the government is made to leverage on Indian Diaspora as a tool of Indian Cultural Diplomacy by organising "Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas". Institution framework has been set up to facilitate Indian Diaspora by establishing the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in 2004, which is now a Department in the Ministry of External Affairs since 2014.

Limitations

Cultural Diplomacy is not new to Indian Foreign Policy. Even before terms of "cultural diplomacy" "soft power" "Public Diplomacy" were coined, India has been using its traditional cultural practices and exchange to promote and attract people around the world. After Independence successive India governments have in different ways deployed cultural diplomacy and leveraged by establishing ICCR and other cultural organisations. India recently has systematically mixed its traditional and mixed approaches with the establishment of the Public Division under the Ministry of External Affairs in 2006. The use of huge India's soft power potential to promote foreign policy is a very recent phenomena and started with mainly with the initiative of the present government. According to the Portland Soft Power Report, India has not been listed in the top 30 countries despite of its huge and wide variety of Soft Power potential. It also points out the underutilisation and promotion of India's cultural resources. India's image is also dependent on its domestic situation and needs to tackle its perineal challenges of poverty, gender-based violence, illiteracy, ethnic clashes to enhance its effective soft power.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the importance of various tools of cultural diplomacy. The present Bhartiya Janta Party government has certainly been more consistent in institutionalizing and development Cultural Diplomacy through various efforts. Despite of having endowed with huge soft power resources, there lacks an appropriate mechanism to harness its cultural diplomacy to further its interest in the international arena and reach its full utilisation of potential.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱMuch of the information concerning the ICCR has drawn on reports of the Parliament of India’s external affairs committee, which serve to make up for a dearth of writing about the ICCR, other than ICCR publications annual reports have been consulted.

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