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India's emergence as a global soft power leader in Modi's era: Embracing opportunities amidst challenges

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Abstract

The research paper examines the concept of soft power, including its definition and distinction from hard power. It emphasizes the importance of soft power in the development of international relations and discusses its particular relevancy in the Indian context. This article discusses the elements leading to India's rise on the global arena, with a focus on its trajectory as a developing soft power since 2014, particularly under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. It examines the prospects that have propelled India into a leadership position in global soft power equations. The study assesses the impact of India's culture, values, and policies on its worldwide image, as well as the difficulties and opportunities that come with its rise to global soft power status. However, in addition to these prospects, the report emphasizes the potential roadblocks to India's route to become a leading global soft power. It critically examines India's problems in this endeavour, with the goal of charting a course to overcome these obstacles. This paper aims to provide insights and recommendations for India to further strengthen its position as a global soft power leader by conducting an in-depth analysis of soft power concepts, India's journey, opportunities, challenges, and potential strategies. Global power politics is a significant competition that requires large-scale thinking and action from governments. Given its numerous characteristics, India belongs to this group that has been attempting to improve its capacity to get things done. The report covers several strategies implemented by the Government of India to boost its worldwide position, mostly through the use of soft power.

Keywords: Cultural diplomacy, global soft power challenges, Modi governance impact, peace and humanitarian assistance, soft power dynamics, strengthening India's global influence

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the power dynamics of nation-states have shifted dramatically in terms of foreign policy and other aspects of government. In the modern world, every nation is interconnected and depends on one another for progress and success. As a result, countries must devote significant resources on their soft power matrix. In this changing global context, India has the opportunity to establish a new framework for its own progress as well as the development of developing countries all over the globe. India's primary goal for the next few decades should be to play a big role on the global stage. India, a rapidly developing economic powerhouse, has been working hard to expand its global influence through the use of soft power. Soft power, according to Joseph Nye, is the ability of a country's culture, ideas, and policies to influence how people discuss things around across the globe. Because of its extensive cultural heritage, increasing economy, and diplomatic initiatives, India has emerged as a major global player. This article examines India's soft power strategies in Southeast Asia, including how they function and what bureaucratic issues can impede their success. India is still rising. It has had substantial economic growth, placing it among the world's fastest-growing largest economies. After the United States, China, Japan, and Germany, it is the world's fifth richest country by GDP. It is becoming increasingly relevant on the global stage. It actively engages in diplomacy, trade, and collaboration with other countries to advance its own interests and help address global challenges. In an increasingly interconnected globe, power encompasses more than just military or economic strength. India, a country with a vast history, diverse cultures, and a booming economy, has been gradually emerging as a global soft power.

In the 1980s, a Harvard professor named Joseph Nye coined the term soft power. In his seminal 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, he provided greater detail about it. Soft power is a country's ability to achieve its foreign policy goals by attracting and affecting other countries through cultural, educational, and diplomatic means, rather than using force. India has a strong cultural history and a wealth of soft power sources. It has been using soft power more and more to increase its global influence and protect its interests. India's soft power is derived from a variety of sources, including its old civilization, diverse culture, religious customs, cuisine, film industry, yoga, and a rapidly growing economy. India has also demonstrated its responsibility as a global actor by engaging in international diplomacy, providing humanitarian help, and trying to maintain regional peace and security. People all across the world are aware of India's soft power, which ranks among the world's best. Soft power is a method for a state or international player to have more influence over the global framework, either by attracting, persuading, or uniting principles. This can occur with other actors, institutions, or organizations. It frequently use cultural diplomacy, but it also employs values, customs, ideas, and even religious beliefs to garner support from both within and without the nation.

The "Soft Power 30" study for 2023 said that India was ranked 28th in terms of soft power. India requires an independent agency for development partnerships that makes plans for the long and short term, sets priorities, and gathers expertise to improve its soft power strategy. To reach its goals, it needs to get rid of internal obstacles like policy and bureaucratic delays. There are several reasons why the South Eastern region, which is commonly used to include Southeast Asia, is important for India and the world as a whole. Southeast Asia is a complex and changing area that is important for many reasons, including its economy, politics, culture, and strategy. The South China Sea is a strategically important area in Southeast Asia because of its power for battle and its role in global marine trade and exchange. The safety and stability of the area have effects on world politics. India is a member of multiple South East Asian regional organizations and forums, such as ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and Mekong Ganga Cooperation. Although, India is not the member of ASEAN, but it has a strategic partnership with ASEAN countries and takes part in the ASEAN-India dialogue and summits. ASEM is a forum for dialogue and cooperation between Asian and European countries and other organizations. To add, India is also a member of the G20 summit, which gives the country a chance to exhibit its might and importance on the global stage. The emergence of soft power has become a defining force in the complicated web of global power, going beyond traditional measurements of domination. India, a cultural mosaic made up of many different cultures, histories, and ways of life, has become a strong global soft power. India has become a major player on the world arena thanks to its mix of old traditions, new cultural exports, and a growing economy. Its culture, values, and diplomatic savvy have made it a powerful force. Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, and Gautam Buddha all preached a peaceful message that gave India's soft power a historical depth based on its civilization.

In addition to economic and military power, the idea of "Soft Power" has been more prevalent in the last few

decades. People from all over the world have been drawn to Indian arts, culture, yoga, spirituality, food, festivals, music, and dance styles, among other things, for a long time. The sixteenth report from the Committee on External Affairs, which just came out, talked about the pros and downsides of India's global soft power and cultural diplomacy. The Committee on External Affairs' sixteenth report, which was just released, talked on the pros and downsides of India's soft power and cultural diplomacy. The report by the parliamentary committee, along with other suggestions, stressed the need for better cooperation between the Ministry of External Affairs and other ministries, departments, and organizations that work on cultural diplomacy of India and soft power. This paper talks about how India is trying to improve its image abroad and how its soft power is becoming more important. India's path to become a soft power has been shaped by its old traditions, its modern cultural exports, and its expanding economic might. Mahatma Gandhi's ideology of ahimsa (non-violence) and India's strong democracy have won praise around the world, which has increased its soft power (Panda, 2020). The image of India has also improved around the world because to the growth of the Indian diaspora, their contributions to welcome countries, and their love of Indian culture.

2. Objectives of the study

- 1) To explore the theory of soft power and its relevance in international relations, particularly in the Indian context.
- 2) To analyse the strategies adopted by India post-2014 to project soft power globally.
- 3) To identify key opportunities available to India in expanding its influence through soft power.
- 4) To critically evaluate the domestic and international challenges that hinder potential of India's soft power.
- 5) To recommend approaches to strengthen position of India as a global soft power leader.

3. Research methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive approach rooted in political science and international relations theory, with particular emphasis on the evolving concept of soft power as articulated by Joseph Nye. The methodology involves a systematic review and thematic analysis of secondary data sources, including academic literature, government reports, policy papers, think tank publications, and global indices such as the Soft Power 30 Report and the Global Soft Power Index. By tracing India's diplomatic and cultural initiatives post-2014 under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the study critically examines the role of soft power tools, ranging from cultural diplomacy to digital outreach and economic engagement in shaping India's global identity. The research also incorporates content analysis of speeches, international campaigns (e.g., International Day of Yoga), and foreign policy documents to uncover strategic patterns. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of both the opportunities India has embraced and the structural challenges it faces in solidifying its status as a global soft power leader.

4. Research questions

- 1) What defines soft power in the contemporary

international system, and how has India historically engaged with it compared to hard power?

- 2) What key policy and cultural shifts since 2014 under Prime Minister Narendra Modi have reoriented India's soft power strategy?
- 3) How effective has India been in leveraging cultural diplomacy, such as yoga, Bollywood, and cuisine, as tools of soft power on the world stage?
- 4) What role do India's educational institutions, technological innovation, and diaspora play in enhancing its soft power projection?

What are the structural and bureaucratic challenges that impede India's ability to fully realize its soft power potential?

5. Understanding soft power: a conceptual framework

Soft power is the ability of a country to change the choices and behaviours of other countries, businesses, communities, and the public without using force. The theory of soft power was first put out by Professor Joseph Nye in the 1980s. In his important book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, which came out in 2004, he went into more detail. One thing that makes soft power different is that it doesn't use force. Culture, political beliefs, and relationships with other countries are its currency. It is said to be a strong way to deal with international politics that uses a country's diplomatic, historical, and cultural might. Soft power is the ability of a country or organization to change the stories that people talk about the world by appealing to them, persuading them, and attracting them, rather than by using force or money. Joseph Nye came up with the term "soft power." It means that a country's impact on the world stage isn't just based on its military or economic strength, but also on its cultural heritage, values, policies, and capacity to attract and cooperate rather than force.

Soft power includes cultural exports (such as music, movies, and food), academic and political ideals, foreign policies, and global projects that improve a country's image and attract people. Instead of utilizing coercion, it fosters kindness, encourages admiration, and connects people based on shared interests and ideas. Countries often employ soft power to boost their global standing, create allies, and persuade others. It is a form of power that operates in the background, relying on persuasion, influencing, and the appeal of a country's culture, ideas, and policies rather than using force or money. Soft power is a means for a state or other foreign entity to gain more control over other individuals or groups in the international system. It operates by recruiting, influencing, or pulling together people who have similar ideals. (Nye, 2008) ^[31]. It frequently employs diplomatic techniques related to culture, but it also employs values, conventions, ideologies, and even faith-based beliefs to gain support from within and outside the country (Gupta, 2008) ^[11]. What tools are appropriate in the context of "Soft Power"? In his *Arthashastra*, Kautilya describes four *Upayas* (tools) that must be used. These are: *Bhed* (breaking apart the enemy's gang), *Dand* (using force), *Saam* (providing friendship), and *Daan* (giving material incentives). The first two choices are incentives and peaceful techniques (Vishwanathan, 2019) ^[49]. Soft power does not function alone; it requires both an economic foundation and hard power assets at the national level (Lee, 2010) ^[21]. Because of globalization and the exchange of information throughout the world, the nation that tells the best story (Tharoor, 2007)

is frequently able to keep its full national strength, foreign policy, and a more favourable international atmosphere. A superpower is a nation that is extremely dominant on an international level. It combines elements of politics, diplomacy, culture, technology, and the military (Thomas, 2020) ^[48]. Anything other than security and the military, such as public diplomacy and common culture, as well as more powerful economic and political tools such as aid, investment, and membership in international bodies (Kurlantzick, 2007) ^[19].

6. Hard power vs soft power

Nye came up with the idea of hard and soft power in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead: Changing Nature of American Power*. His earlier series of novels from 1990, 2002, 2004, 2007, and 2008 built on the premise. He usually defines command or hard power as using force and threats together, and power as being able to change other people's behavior to get what you want. Hard power is based on military intervention, intimidating diplomacy, and economic sanctions (Gallarotti, 2011) ^[7]. It concentrates on real power resources like the military or money (Wilson, 2008) ^[50]. The UN's 1991 economic sanctions on Iraq after the first Gulf War are an example of hard power. In short, pull is soft power and push is harsh power. (Nye, 2012). "Hard Power" is a way of dealing with international politics that uses military and economic might to affect or control the activities or interests of other states or political groups. As a result, countries with better military and economic resources often have power over those with weaker ones. In the past, military and economic might were often thought of as the main sources of influence in international affairs. It is called "hard power," and it can be measured. Hard power is when you use force, threaten to use force, or use other means to get what you want.

On the other hand, inducements, coercion, and commands are all examples of hard power (Nye, 2004) ^[33]. Threats or rewards, which are sometimes called "carrots" or "sticks," are what hard power is predicated on. This definition says that a country is powerful in international politics if it has a large population, a large area of land, a lot of natural resources, a strong economy, a strong military, and social stability. An actor can get what they want without having to use "carrots" or "sticks" to get people to do what they want. This is because they can change what other people want and make it match their own. It might do this by using a country's culture, political beliefs, and foreign policy to their fullest potential, as well as by building trust with the outside world and working with famous media outlets. Nye says that strong governments need both- hard and soft power, which means they need to be able to force people to do things and change their minds and preferences over time. To present differently, soft power is about getting people to "want what you want" (Hocking 2005) instead of forcing or pressuring them to perform whatever you want.

7. Importance of soft power

American political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr. was the first to separate these "hard" dimensions of power from what he called a "soft power" approach in his 1990 book *Soft Power*. He came up with the term "soft power" to emphasize how important ideologies, values, and ethos were in a new era when military force was no longer the only way to understand power. More recently, in his article 'Public

Diplomacy and Soft Power' (Nye, 2008) ^[31], When Nye described a nation's soft power as relying on "their culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its governing values and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority. Nye also made reference to "soft power" itself as the "power of seduction," expanding on the concept. Joseph Nye's writings (1990, 2004, 2008, 2017) ^[31-34] stimulated the subsequent discussions on soft power and the profits that the use of this attractive power can grow for public diplomacy and foreign policies. Shashi Tharoor has emphasised the significant essential worth of soft power in his "guns versus ghee" debate, which pits defence expenses against the growth of ability of India to attract foreign investors as a country rich in cultural legacy. Soft power plays a pivotal role in today's complex global landscape, offering nations a means to wield influence, build relationships, and shape international narratives beyond traditional hard power tactics. Its significance lies in its ability to foster cooperation, attract allies, and advance national interests through persuasion and attraction rather than coercion or force.

Some of the most essential reasons why soft power is vital include:

- 1) **Improving diplomacy and relations:** Soft power is a key part of international diplomacy because it helps countries build good relationships with each other, both bilaterally and multilaterally. As Joseph Nye says, soft power helps countries "get others to want the outcomes that you want," which makes alliances and partnerships stronger based on shared values and interests (Nye, 2004) ^[33]. It creates an environment that is good for cooperation and dialogue, which is important for dealing with global issues like climatic change, security risks, and economic inequality.
- 2) **Cultural influence and attraction:** The cultural aspect of soft power makes a country more appealing to people around the world. A country's cultural exports, such as art, music, literature, movies, and food, play a big role in shaping people's opinions and making them admire the country. For example, Hollywood's worldwide supremacy has not only entertained people but also spread American social values around the world, which has strengthened the soft power of United States (Said, 2001) ^[43]. Similarly, India's Bollywood and South Korea's K-pop have helped these countries become more influential around the world, which has also increased its soft power (Kim, 2018) ^[18].
- 3) **Promotion of ideals and values:** Soft power enables governments to propagate their social and political principles, supporting concepts that people all over the globe can relate to. Democracies frequently use their support for human rights, the rule of law, and individual freedoms to positively impact how others perceive them around the world. For example, the European Union's emphasis on democratic norms and human rights has enhanced its attractiveness as a soft power (Leonard, 2005) ^[22]. Promoting universal principles allows governments to gain legitimacy and backing on the global stage, increasing their influence.
- 4) **Economic influence and trade:** Soft power influences investment and trade flows. A country's soft power is derived from its economic power, transparency in government, and appealing markets. China's development in economic power, including rapid

growth and global trade projects like the Belt and Road Initiative, has enhanced its soft power by providing partner countries with economic prospects (Kurlantzick, 2007) ^[19].

8. Understanding soft power in Indian context

This essay looks at the term "soft power" in relation to India. It says that India's huge "soft power" potential in Asia isn't because Bollywood movies and Indian food are getting more popular, but because India is becoming stronger and more complementary to the existing regional order, rather than challenging it like China does. To understand India's soft power potential in Asia, we need to look at how it uses its social, monetary, and strategic resources to shape regional dynamics and promote its interests. India's soft power strategy is different from China's because it focuses on building goodwill and strengthening cultural and normative ties within the region.

Soft power, in India's perspective, is employed as a tool to influence the behaviour, positions, or perceptions of other nations in alignment with Indian interests. The country understands the need of developing relationships based on common values, cultural exchanges, and financial collaboration in order to exercise influence without coercion. The recognition that the behaviour and goodwill of other countries are extremely important in furthering India's own objectives is central to the country's foreign policy. Economic interests play an important role in Indian foreign policy formulation, reflecting the belief that greater involvement in international trade, particularly through increased exports, not only boosts national income but also strengthens a state's power by encouraging interdependence with other countries (Perkovich, 2003) ^[39]. This viewpoint underscores India's strategy for soft power, in which economic involvement plays an important role in increasing its influence and position in the international arena. India's emphasis on using soft power in the area is not just focused on projecting cultural exports or economic supremacy, but also on reinforcing a regional order that is consistent with its strategic goals. By fostering shared standards, cultural values, and economic cooperation, India seeks to create a regional climate favourable to its interests, separating itself from China's more assertive strategies. Behind the scenes, India is becoming the world's most powerful IT factory, giving it high ranks in science and technology. Indian IT corporations are leading the way in bringing digitalization to the world during the pandemic. India uses its limited resources to assist other nations in healthcare, both through physical power (vaccines) and soft power (Francis, 2022) ^[6]. With its reliance on global resources, India discovered a method to maintain balance in a polarized world of geopolitics, earning a respectable 4.2 rating for 'excellent ties with other countries'. This is a country that values innovation while simultaneously developing cutting-edge blockchain technology. India is yet to present itself on a global scale. Perhaps it doesn't have to. (Global Soft Power Index, 2022) ^[9].

India's use of soft power is closely linked to its goal of building relationships, strengthening economic ties, and promoting cultural ties in the region. This approach, which is based on mutual cooperation and improving regional stability, is what makes India's soft power strategy different from its other foreign policy goals.

9. Rise of India as a global soft power: under Modi's India since 2014

Since 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led India to become a global soft power. His government has used India's cultural, economic, and diplomatic strengths to increase the country's soft power and make it a major player in international relations. Modi's government has worked hard to raise India's soft power on the global stage. Cultural diplomacy, economic partnerships, and strategic alliances have all played a role in India's rise as a global soft power. While there are still challenges, Modi's comprehensive approach has greatly increased India's global influence and set the stage for continued prominence in the international arena. Some important highlights are:

- 1) **Cultural diplomacy and heritage promotion:** The Modi government has brought India's rich cultural heritage to the world's attention. The International Day of Yoga, which Modi started and the United Nations later adopted, is an example of how India has successfully shared its cultural legacy with the world (Acharya, 2019) ^[1]. Ayurveda, spirituality, and traditional practices have also helped India's soft power by drawing global audiences in with their ancient wisdom and holistic wellness approaches (Panda, 2017) ^[37].
- 2) **Economic diplomacy and "Make in India":** Economic diplomacy has been a key part of India's soft power strategy. Modi's "Make in India" campaign, which aimed to make India a global manufacturing hub, attracted foreign investment and made India look like a good place to invest (Rajagopalan, 2018) ^[41]. India's economic outreach, especially at events like the World Economic Forum, has helped it look like an emerging economic powerhouse.
- 3) **Diplomatic engagements and regional alliances:** Under Modi's leadership, India has actively worked to strengthen regional alliances and partnerships. The "Act East Policy," which aimed to improve economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asia, has had a big impact on India's influence in the region (Ghoshal, 2020) ^[8]. Strengthening ties with major global powers like the US and Middle Eastern countries has also improved India's diplomatic standing (Mohanty, 2019) ^[27].
- 4) **Impact and significance:** Under Modi's leadership, India's soft power assets have been used strategically to great effect and gained worldwide recognition. India's cultural initiatives have not only helped people understand each other's cultures better, but they have also helped people connect with each other around the world (Ladwig III 2017) ^[20]. Economic engagements have led to more foreign investments, which has helped India's reputation as a promising economic market (Gupta, 2020) ^[12]. India's diplomatic outreach has also helped it gain support for its global goals and has been a key factor in shaping regional and global discourse (Pant, 2018) ^[38].
- 5) **Foreign policy:** India implemented many programs, including the Look East Policy, Act East Policy, the Look West Policy, the Connect Central Asia Policy, and the deepening of connections with Africa. All of these initiatives contribute to India's dual goal of achieving its foreign policy objectives while also improving its image in the region it is targeting. This demonstrates that in this new international order, India launched a determined attempt to channel these

resources, especially those of Indians residing abroad, into developing soft power that may prove useful for foreign policy objectives (Hall, 2012) ^[14].

10. Opportunities for India to grow as global soft power leader

India has the potential to become a global leader in soft power because of its rich cultural legacy, diversified population, and technological progress. Here are some ways India can flourish as a soft power leader:

- 1) **Cultural diplomacy:** India's dynamic and distinct culture can be a valuable diplomatic tool. The recognition of Indian cuisine, music, dancing, and yoga has already expanded worldwide. The government of India has created various cultural centres in different countries to encourage Indian culture and arts (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India). Another opportunity for India to grow as a global soft power leader is through its traditional art forms like classical dance, music, and painting. India has a rich cultural heritage, and its traditional art forms are renowned across the world. Indian classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and Odissi, and classical music forms like Hindustani and Carnatic music have a significant following across the world. By promoting these traditional art forms, India can showcase its rich cultural heritage and build cultural ties with several countries.
- 2) **Indian cuisine:** Even the growing popularity of Indian cuisine over the world elevates our culture in the eyes of others. In England, Indian restaurants employ more people than the shipbuilding, coal, and iron and steel industries combined. In distant countries, the number of these firms has skyrocketed. Indian cuisine is becoming increasingly popular in the West as part of a balanced diet that aligns with the concept of the art of life. India's food is also a valuable soft power asset that may be used to enhance its image as a worldwide soft power leader. Indian cuisine has grown in popularity around the world due to its diversity, flavour, and health benefits. In reality, Indian cuisine is one of the most popular in the globe, with numerous Indian restaurants opening in various nations. By promoting Indian cuisine, India can highlight its diversity and richness while also strengthening cultural relations with other countries. Our popular culture is strong enough to be on par with Television and McDonald's.
- 3) **Education:** India's education system is one of the largest in the world, and the country has a rich tradition of scholarship and learning. Many Indian universities are ranked among the top in the world. By promoting higher education and research, India can attract international students and scholars, which can enhance its soft power. India's new image as a nation with English-educated, young businessmen has been influenced by the accomplishments of Indian companies such as Infosys Technologies and Wipro Technologies in the Information Technology (IT) sector, the success of other international corporations like the Tata Group and Reliance Group, and global recognition of the academic standing of the Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) and Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), the centre of excellence (The Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2017).

- 4) **Social:** India's soft power assets are not limited to its culture and heritage, but also extend to its people. India has a large pool of skilled professionals and innovators, who have made important contribution to the world. Indian entrepreneurs like Satya Nadella, Sundar Pichai, and Indra Nooyi have made a mark in the global business world, while Indian innovators like C.K. Prahalad, and Dr. Abdul Kalam have contributed significantly to the world of science and technology. By showcasing its people as soft power assets, India can build its image as a country of talented and skilled professionals. Amit Gupta's 'Commentary on India's Soft Power and Diaspora' (2008) ^[11] points to spiritualism and ancient civilizational culture captivating Western imaginations as being "exotic" and forming a point of connection for the India.
- 5) **Bollywood:** Bollywood, India's mainstream cinema industry, has also inspired literary works (Roy, 2021) ^[42]. Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has a sizable global viewership, particularly in nations with big Indian diaspora populations. Bollywood films frequently depict Indian culture and values, which can assist to project a positive picture of India. (Source: Indian Film Industry, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.) Indian music and movies have a significant international market and are gaining popular, particularly in Asia, Europe, Africa, and West Asia. Indian films, particularly Hindi, are widely distributed in Russia, Syria, and Senegal.
- 6) **Digital India:** The technology sector in India has grown a lot in the last few years. Programs like Digital India, Make in India, and Startup India have encouraged new ideas and businesses to start up in the country. India can show that it is a modern and forward-looking country by using its technological skills.
- 7) **International relations:** India's growing diplomatic power and its membership in international groups like the G-20, BRICS, and SCO give it chances to show off its soft power. India's foreign policy is based on the principles of non-alignment, respect for sovereignty, and peaceful coexistence. (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India)
- 8) **Ayurveda:** Currently, Yoga is one of India's most successful and long-lasting imports. Millions of people around the world do it as a form of exercise and to relieve stress. Because of this, yoga is already a global phenomenon and is quickly becoming part of mainstream culture, especially in the West. Prime Minister Modi talks about "Yoga diplomacy" in detail (Mohan, 2014) ^[28], where he talks about how India successfully lobbied the UN General Assembly to declare June 21 as the "International Day of Yoga."
- 9) **Tourism:** India's soft power might also aid its economic growth. India's soft power may attract tourists, students, and investors. Tourism is a significant element of India's economy, and India's soft power can attract more tourists. India's soft power has the potential to attract more students, allowing the country to become a knowledge hub. India's soft power can also attract more investors, allowing the country to increase investment and improve its economy.
- 10) **India's democratic system:** Another thing that has helped India's soft power is its democratic system. It

has been an inspiration for many developing countries. The world is paying attention to how well India has kept its diversity and democracy. Instead, these countries are drawn to India's democratic ideals, which they also value in their own societies (Malone, 2011; Blarel, 2012; Choedon, 2015) ^[24, 3]. Since Prime Minister Vajpayee took office in 1998 and continuing under Prime Ministers Singh and Modi, India has been selectively inoculating democracy into its global activities (Mohan, 2014) ^[28].

- 11) **Economy:** India's economy has also had a significant impact on its soft power. India's economic growth during the past few decades has been spectacular. It has emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing economies, and its growth rate is likely to exceed that of China in the future years. India's economic prosperity has made it a desirable location for investment and commerce. India's economic growth has given it the financial resources to invest in soft power. India's economic progress has resulted in the formation of a new middle class with greater disposable income, creating chances for the expansion of soft power industries such as tourism, fashion, and design. India has also evolved as an IT sector hub, with technical breakthroughs boosting the country's soft power.
- 12) **Spirituality:** India's soft power is entrenched in its spirituality. Swami Vivekananda warned that if India dies, religion and its Truth will be wiped out. India is fortunate to have all of the world's major religions represented. The four indigenous religions are Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. We have also embraced alien religions like as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This serves as an incentive for religiously motivated tourists to visit India. Aside from the Kumbh Mela, other sacred places such as Varanasi, Badrinath, Puri, Kedarnath, Vaishnav Devi, Amarnath, Tirupati, Sabarimala, Tanjavor, Madurai, and others get a great number of visitors. India is also the most popular destination for Buddhist pilgrims. Throughout the year, a continuous stream of travellers from ASEAN countries, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar visit Bodh Gaya and Nalanda. We also have historical churches and synagogues in India. Thousands of devotees visit Sufi saints' darghas, including Moinuddin Chishti and Nizzamuddin Aulia (Vishwanathan, 2019) ^[49]. In short, India can enhance its global image and power by leveraging its assets in culture, education, entertainment, technology, and diplomacy.

11. Possible hurdles in the way

A variety of impediments impede India's ability to fully utilize its cultural, economic, and diplomatic resources, preventing it from realizing its soft power potential. India is making headway in increasing its soft power, but it still faces a number of complicated issues that must be tackled strategically in order to achieve long-term growth and influence. India has made progress in enhancing its soft power, but there is still much work to be done to maintain and strengthen its soft power position.

- 1) **Historical disregard for soft power:** In the past, India's soft power has not been used as a strategic tool in diplomacy, which is one of the primary reasons for its failure to rise to the top. Despite its history of giving priority to hard power, India has just recently

recognized the value of cultural diplomacy (Kumar, 2015) ^[16]. Because of this delayed acknowledgment, India is unable to fully capitalize on its rich culture and traditions.

- 2) **Reliance on hard power and image awareness:** India's soft power potential is constrained by the necessity for robust hard power capabilities. According to Nye (2004) ^[33], successful soft power requires substantial hard power resources. People are more concerned with India's military and economic ability than its soft power, therefore they believe it has less global impact.
- 3) **Picture projection issues:** The country struggles to present a complete and positive picture to the rest of the world. India has made progress in many areas, but its reputation remains tarnished by issues such as poverty, high corruption, and human rights violations (Malik, 2019) ^[23]. These factors make it more difficult for it to gain global respect and trust, which are soft power attributes.
- 4) **Lack of coherent strategy and education reform:** A comprehensive strategy that incorporates strong cultural diplomacy, efficient tourism development, and the promotion of creative enterprises is critical (Sengupta, 2018) ^[45]. Furthermore, the education system must be thoroughly revamped to promote creativity, fresh ideas, and critical thinking, allowing the country's soft power to grow from within (Narayanan, 2020) ^[30].
- 5) **Maintaining soft power while balancing it with hard power:** Because India's developing soft power is threatened by domestic difficulties, the country must address issues such as poverty, corruption, and inequality concurrently. Furthermore, India must strike a careful balance between demonstrating soft power and utilizing strong force so that no one perceives India as aggressive or out of balance in its global attitude (Pandey, 2017) ^[36].

Finally, India's soft power path faces a number of challenges, including being overlooked in the past, having issues with how people perceive it, lacking a clear plan, and failing to implement changes within the country.

12. Way forward and conclusion

Power is more than just "the ability or right to control people or things." It also includes the ability to influence others, as well as "the ability to act or produce an effect." Finally, soft power refers to the ability to influence governments without using force. In other terms, it is "getting others to want what you want," which you can do by displaying your common values and goals. Foreign policy, culture, economics, political beliefs, standard of living, excellent educational system, and rule of law all have a significant impact on a country's capacity to win over its citizens. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, there was discussion of a growing Indian powerhouse. India must do a few things to sustain and enhance its soft power. To develop its soft power, India must strengthen its institutions, culture, and values. To keep its soft power, India must solve domestic concerns including inequality, poverty, and corruption. India must ensure that everyone benefits from its thriving economy. India has evolved as a major soft power in recent years, thanks to its diverse people, rich cultural history, and expanding economy. India's soft power is derived from its rich history,

Bollywood cinema, yoga, food, and the influence of its diaspora worldwide. This article addresses India's emergence as a global soft power, the opportunities it provides, and the obstacles it confronts in preserving and improving its soft power status. People projected that the twenty-first century would be India's century because of its vast religious and linguistic diversity, the world's largest functioning democracy, a diaspora of over a million people, Bollywood's impact at home and abroad, and massive economic growth following liberalization in 1991.

However, India's current focus on developing its "soft power" talents is the best thing for the country. If India can persuade its critics, it will be in a great position to influence the Asian Century and be one of its most important players. India's ascension to global soft power opens up numerous opportunities for the country, including promoting its culture, creative industries, and economic potential. To maintain and improve its soft power position, India must address a number of issues, including lack of a national policy, and the need to fully reform and update its educational system. If these issues are addressed, India has the potential to play a significant role in the realm of soft power. Since 2014, when Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, there has been a concerted effort to boost India's soft power on the international scene. India has become a global soft power because it can demonstrate its cultural heritage, values, and strengths. To improve its reputation, India must promote its rich culture, which includes history, food, music, films, and novels. It should also emphasize its commitment to global peace, respect for human rights, and democratic principles. To maintain its soft power, it must address issues like as poverty, corruption, and inequality within its boundaries. In order to be perceived as a responsible global player, India must ensure that economic growth benefits all citizens. India's recent growth as a soft power can be attributed to its lengthy history, the global fame of Bollywood, the popularity of yoga, its cuisine, and the significant impact of its diaspora. These aspects contribute to India's soft power around the world and present several opportunities. India, on the other hand, struggles to shape its global image. It needs a comprehensive plan to showcase its diverse culture, creative industries, and economic potential. Changing the educational system to stimulate creativity and critical thinking is also vital for increasing its soft power. India has a lot of soft power that comes down from the Himalayas like a river. It is typically mild, but may be modest and robust when necessary. It handles the ups and downs of time with grace.

Finally, India's soft power path will be defined by its capacity to preserve its cultural identity, address its own difficulties, and use its global talent. These methods have the ability to propel India to the forefront of soft power. To maintain India's soft power, it is necessary to solve challenges such as poverty, corruption, and inequality. Making economic success beneficial to all members of society not only makes India more inclusive, but it also strengthens India's global reputation as a fair and responsible actor (Gupta, 2020) ^[13]. Focusing on these internal challenges is crucial to maintaining India's reputation and strengthening its soft power. India has recently emerged as a global soft power due to its rich past, Bollywood's international reach, the growing popularity of yoga, its distinct cuisine, and the enormous influence of its

diaspora worldwide (Biswas, 2018) [2]. Combining these variables increases India's soft power, providing it with a wide range of chances and benefits on a global scale. However, if India is to deal with the changing global scene, it must work hard to strengthen its soft power capabilities. By exploiting its soft power strengths, India is positioned to influence the developing Asian Century and become a major participant in the global arena. India's soft power has grown as a result of its economic development, liberalization, and rapid military buildup. India's hard economic and military resources have increased, giving it greater confidence in using soft power. So, based on the reasons stated above, it is reasonable to conclude that India's total growth is expected to propel it to global leadership in the twenty-first century.

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