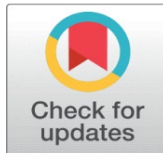
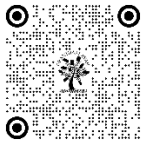


INDIA'S SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY: LEVERAGING CULTURE, DIASPORA, AND YOGA FOR GLOBAL INFLUENCE

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ABSTRACT

The cultural past, large diaspora, and global yoga popularity has made India's soft power diplomacy ever more crucial in its search of world influence. India's cultural diplomacy is playing a pivotal role in interconnected world where the expression of a nation's identity may eclipse traditional hard power dynamics. Particularly by focusing on initiatives such as the ICCR and international cultural events; this study explores how India effectively uses its artistic, musical, and cinematic resources to raise its global presence. One of the largest diasporas globally, which serves as an unofficial ambassador for India helps to enhance India's prominence both politically and economically. Initiatives undertaken by the government, like Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and various diaspora involvement, have strengthened these relations centralising the diaspora in India's soft power strategy. Yoga, rooted deeply in India's spiritual and intellectual traditions, has gone global and enhances India's reputation as a nation of peace, wellness, and spirituality. The International Day of Yoga, approved by the UN in 2015, has been rather successful underscoring India's leadership in health and wellness diplomacy. India's soft power diplomacy has to negotiate geopolitics, internal socio-political issues, and competition from other developing countries. Notwithstanding these obstacles, public diplomacy, online platforms, and higher education give India's soft power opportunity for rather significant development. India is becoming more and more relevant worldwide by making appropriate use of its diaspora and cultural treasures. This paper highlights the significant potential of India's soft power diplomacy to influence its overseas relations, thereby enhancing its leadership in the twenty-first century, through the use of culture, diaspora, and yoga.

Keywords: Soft Power, Cultural Diplomacy, Indian Diaspora, Yoga Diplomacy, Global Influence, Public Diplomacy, Bollywood, Cultural Heritage, Foreign Policy, Geopolitics, Health Diplomacy, ICCR, Global Perception, Digital Diplomacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

India's soft power diplomacy has developed into pillar of her foreign policy stressing cultural effect, multilateral cooperation, and non-coercive techniques of projection. The political scientist Joseph Nye (1990) came up with the term "soft power" to describe a country's ability to persuade and influence others without using force or coercion. He argues in *'Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power'* that the state's power extends beyond its economic and military capabilities, enhancing its ability to influence behavior through the attraction and persuasion of other state (Nye, 1990; 1990a). In his subsequent work, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics", he introduced the notion of smart power—the capacity to integrate hard and soft power into effective strategies that mutually reinforce one another (Nye, 2004). Nye also emphasised that soft power encompasses not only the state's prerogative but also the role of civil society, international bodies, domestic actors, and alliances both bilateral and multilateral (Nye, 2009).

India appeals, particularly, to her rich cultural past, diaspora presence all over, and global recognition of yoga as a symbol of wellness and harmony. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi have been representing India's cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and non-violence values—which historically have been its ways of enhancing its global reputation (Srinivas, 2019). Over time, this approach has changed to include among current tools media, movies, and digital diplomacy.

The Indian diaspora, one of the largest in the world, acts as unofficial representatives for India's political and economic interests, therefore enhancing the soft power of the country. Moreover, the global popularity of yoga, which started on

the International Day of Yoga, has positioned India as a leader in promoting holistic health and well-being, thereby enhancing its efforts in cultural diplomacy. By means of programs like the ICCR, India extends cultural ties and increases it globally (Thussu, 2020). Among the difficulties India's soft power diplomacy must address are domestic socio-political problems, poverty, poor HDI, regional strife and rivalry from other foreign powers (Patgiri et al, 2022; Khanna & Moorthy, 2017). Notwithstanding these challenges, India's deliberate exploitation of its cultural assets has produced a strong worldwide image with great possibilities for forthcoming diplomatic undertakings. Examining how India uses yoga, diaspora, and culture to increase its soft power and validate its position in world events helps this study to evaluate the successes and limits of its present policies.

2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Deeply ingrained in ancient rituals, spirituality, art, and philosophy, India's long-standing cultural heritage has always earned her respect as a nation of diversity and expertise all around. From the entrance of Buddhism in ancient times to the present worldwide popularity of yoga, India's cultural exports have often helped to establish her reputation overseas. As globalisation and connectivity have expanded, India has come to prioritise cultural diplomacy as a means of raising its global reputation. Joseph Nye argues that this strategy aligns with the broader definition of soft power, where a country's influence stems from seduction rather than force (Nye, 1990; 2004). The importance of non-military and non-financial instruments of influence is driving India's strategic emphasis on soft power. Along with its popular cultural assets such as Bollywood, yoga, and cuisine, India leverages its diaspora as a powerful link between India and nations worldwide. The Indian government, with the help of the ICCR, has especially institutionalised many initiatives including cultural diplomacy efforts like the International Day of Yoga. However, India's soft power strategy must also address issues like regional conflict, local socio-political concerns, and global competitiveness. Still, India has great potential to increase its worldwide influence through non-coercive policies, so its soft power strategy is quite important for its foreign policy. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which Yoga, diaspora, and culture have developed into a vehicle for projecting India's influence on the global stage. By doing this, they have fostered goodwill, forged alliances, and fostered mutual respect, all of which have contributed to the understanding of India's soft power diplomacy.

The Global significance of soft power

In today's global systems, soft power has become an essential component of international relations, therefore strengthening traditional hard power tactics like economic influence and military prowess. More countries understand in this globalised era that military or economic dominance cannot by itself generate world leadership and influence. Instead, the power to influence tastes, increase cultural appeal, and promote global harmony has taken the stage. Underlining common values, enhancing diplomacy by peaceful means, and major global audience engagement, soft power helps nations to flourish. At a time when knowledge is not limited and public opinion has the potential to affect foreign policy, the use of soft power is absolutely necessary for the establishment of a society that is worthy of respect (Paul, 2014). This is particularly crucial considering countries like China, the United States, and India fighting for influence in several fields and raising world competitiveness. Because rising powers are so important, the global order has also become more multipolar. Soft power provides a differentiator for nations - especially those with historical, cultural, or diplomatic strength - without resorting to forceful policies. Its less coercive nature also inspires national confidence, coalitions, and teamwork. Soft power gives underdeveloped countries like India a chance to show leadership in multilateral forums, build strategic alliances by means of which India and other countries may use their cultural assets to forward national goals, ensure long-term worldwide impact by means of cultural diplomacy, media, and public participation. Thus, soft power diplomacy has evolved into a required tool for negotiating the intricate web of world events in a way that advances mutual understanding, wealth, and peace (Wagner, 2010).

India's Historical Roots in Soft Power

Deep historical foundations of India's soft power vary mainly in form from its great philosophical and cultural legacy. Since ancient times, the spread of Indian religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism throughout Asia has influenced global thought and behavior through non-coercive methods (Thussu, 2016; Hall, 2012). Driven by Mahatma Gandhi, who supported peaceful fight against colonial control, India's strategic soft power underwent radical transformation following independence. Gandhi's principles of ahimsa, or nonviolence, and satyagraha, or truth force, inspired people all around, developing into strong markers of moral authority and non-violent opposition (Mahapatra, 2016). It was

India's non-alignment during the Cold War, in which it rejected both the USA and the USSR, that contributed to the establishment of its soft power reputation as a nation that seeks peace and neutrality (Thussu, 2016). This posture, which advocated for disarmament, anti-colonialism, and world collaboration, stemmed from India's goal to portray itself as a moral leader in international politics. India's emphasis on non-alignment played a significant role in the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a movement that brought together countries seeking a substitute for military power blocs (Chacko, 2013). Over time, India's growing emphasis on peaceful collaboration, diplomacy, and cultural engagement shaped its foreign policy, highlighting the nation's reliance on soft power over military capability. India's soft power is growing in relevance on the international arena now as, by means of its historical ideas of non-alignment and Gandhian values, which sustains it, it consistently supports worldwide collaboration and peace (Mahapatra, 2016). Because of this development, India has been able to forge enduring alliances, demonstrate its leadership through cultural diplomacy despite contemporary geopolitics, and have an impact on global governance.

Cultural Diplomacy in the Global South

Global South nations, particularly those under the control of global heavyweights like the United States and China, have increasingly resorted to cultural diplomacy as a counterbalance to their traditional reliance on physical might. Emphasising the interchange of ideas, values, and civilisations, cultural diplomacy helps these nations to exert influence without military or financial capability thereby improving their identities and supporting goodwill (Mahapatra, 2016). Many Global South countries have mostly used cultural diplomacy as a key means to fight for independence; colonial past have made it necessary for them to assert their sovereignty and identity on the international platform. Latin American nations, for instance Brazil's samba and bossa nova and Mexico's rich artistic past, have created global impressions with cultural exports ranging in music, art, and literature. African nations have also sought acceptability in international settings and improved world cooperation using their cultural riches - traditional art, music, and dance. India and other Asian nations including Vietnam and Indonesia use cultural diplomacy to communicate their historical legacies, spiritual ideas, and artistic traditions—all of which help to raise their global importance. Focusing on cultural diplomacy enables Global South countries to participate in global exchanges, participate in peacebuilding projects, and establish themselves as cultural leaders, transcending their status as mere recipients of foreign aid or zones of influence for stronger states (Chacko, 2013). Preserving their unique cultural identities enables these nations not just to improve diplomatic connections but also create travel, business, and global goodwill. Thus, cultural diplomacy acts as a strategic counterbalance to the global dominance of hard power by leveraging soft power influence, promoting mutual respect, and creating cooperative platforms for global engagement (Mahapatra, 2016).

Modern Geopolitics and the Impact of Soft Power

From the conventional predominance of military and economic power to the growing relevance of soft power, present geopolitics clearly shows a change. As the world gets more interconnected and sophisticated, the capacity to influence and involve others by cultural attraction, diplomacy, and shared values becomes even more vital. Though military and economic power still be important in international relations, they are insufficient on their own to ensure long-term influence and leadership. Nations are realising how much diplomacy, cultural exports, and a strong global image influence international outcome. From this vantage point, soft power has evolved into a strategic weapon used for alliance building, enhancing cooperation, and obtaining influence without resorting to hostile policies (Mazumdar, 2020). Mostly dependent on military and economic supremacy, countries like the United States have gradually increased their soft power by means of their cultural assets including Hollywood, music, and universities. China has also embraced soft power under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Confucius Institutes, and support of Chinese culture abroad, thereby increasing political and economic ties and presenting a peaceful, cooperative picture. Soft power - which allows nations to communicate with people all over world utilising internet platforms, social media, and foreign news sources - becomes progressively more significant as digital technology and media have grown. In rapidly changing scenarios both rising and existing powers have shifted their priority from costly military conflicts and complex economic competitiveness to public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and worldwide engagement (Mullen, 2015).

The Cultural Practices of India and the Public Diplomacy

India's Rich Cultural Heritage

India's cultural legacy shows millennia of civilisation on a living fabric of art, music, literature, spirituality, and philosophy. Her old temple sculptures, elegant paintings like the Mughal miniatures, and traditional crafts - known for

their symbolic meaning and visual appeal - showcase India's creative wealth. From the traditional forms of Hindustani and Carnatic music to folk traditions all throughout India, and now to the contemporary mixing of Indian and Western styles, music has always been a fundamental part of India's cultural identity (Khara, 2018). From the epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana to contemporary masterpieces by writers like Rabindranath Tagore and R.K. Narayan, Indian literature has lavishly given to world literary traditions. India's spiritual and philosophical teachings, rooted in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, have had a significant global impact, thereby advancing ideals of peace, compassion, and self-realization (Thussu, 2016). Indian philosophy shapes not just India's identity with ideas like ahimsa (non-violence) and dharma (duty) but also world vision. Moreover, as disciplines like meditation, yoga, and Ayurveda establish India as a spiritual centre, India's spirituality draws pilgrims from all around the world. These components together render Indian culture vivid and varied, therefore highlighting its special attractiveness anywhere. Presenting its rich cultural legacy on the international scene has strengthened New Delhi's soft power by extending international goodwill, tourism, and cultural interaction, thereby improving its diplomatic activities in the modern global scene (Paul, 2014; Mazumdar, 2018).

Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy

The cultural diplomacy of New Delhi is defined by institutions and projects aiming at worldwide promotion of its cultural legacy; the ICCR is quite important in this respect. Originally established in 1950, ICCR is a major government agency encouraging artistic, linguistic, and intellectual projects between India and other nations, hence increasing cultural interaction. Apart from establishing Indian cultural institutions all around to promote local interactions with Indian arts and ideas, the ICCR plans international cultural events, art exhibits, and performances celebrating Indian traditions. Offering workshops in Indian music, dance, yoga, languages, these groups act as focal points of cultural interaction strengthening ties between immigrants and Indian community (Khara, 2018). To further intellectual ties between India and other nations, the council also plans academic cooperation with foreign universities, scholarships for international students, and educational exchanges programs. Programs like Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and Know India Program (KIP) also aim to include the Indian diaspora to underline India's cultural impact via its nationals living elsewhere. By planning global film festivals, cultural tours, and historical displays, various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and cultural institutions support outside of government projects using these tools of cultural diplomacy (Mahapatra, 2016). These initiatives, taken together, build an integrated framework that supports India's cultural diplomacy, therefore strengthening its global identity and sustaining diplomatic and cultural ties. By presenting itself as a country rich in legacy, India enhances its soft power and gains influence and goodwill on the international scene, all without relying on its military or financial capabilities.

Global Reach of Indian Festivals and Art

As a strong instruments for cultural diplomacy, festivals such as Diwali, Holi, and innovative festivals, have considerably increased India's global cultural presence. Not just in India but also abroad, the Indian diaspora celebrates Diwali, the festival of lights, increasingly by non-Indians who value its message of victory of light over dark and good over evil. Celebrated in Sydney, New York, and London, Diwali celebrations have evolved into major public events with Indian cultural acts, music, and cuisine helping to promote a good image of India and hence foster intercultural understanding. Comparatively, Holi - the celebration of colors - has become rather famous globally with events in the UK, Canada, and the USA. Many times, non-Indian attendees of these events contribute to explain the cross-cultural appeal of Indian traditions (Ghosh, 2019). Apart from celebrations, modern and traditional Indian works of art have visited major cities, stressing the abundance of India's creative legacy. Exhibits including classic Indian art forms like Pattachitra or Mughal miniatures together with contemporary artists like M.F. Husain provide insight into India's creative expression and cultural growth. Usually kept in famous museums or cultural centres, these pieces of art attract visitors from all over and promote cultural relations, therefore enhancing India's status on a global stage (Thussu, 2020). By underlining the universality of its cultural values, India has changed the scene of world affairs and raised its soft power by means of many activities and presentations. Indian festivities and the worldwide presence of Indian art improve India's cultural diplomacy and hence strengthen its cosmopolitan, inclusive image.

Bollywood and Popular Culture

Bollywood, India's vibrant film industry, serves as a potent instrument of cultural diplomacy, significantly influencing global perceptions of India. As Tharoor states, perhaps Bollywood plays a pivotal role in the context of New Delhi's soft

power in global south states (Tharoor, 2013). Particularly in the SAARC region, the West Asia, Africa, and more recently Western nations, Bollywood films draw a huge worldwide following in major part due its unique mix of song, dance, drama, and emotional narrative (Srinivas, 2019). Bollywood appeals to a worldwide audience due to its ability to present India's cultural variety, customs, and social ideals, while simultaneously addressing universal human emotions and experiences, thereby making it relevant (Blarel, 2012). Movies like *Lagaan*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, and *Dangal* have not only had financial success abroad but also offered stories examining India's historical challenges, social difficulties, and aspirations. Case studies demonstrate the impact of Bollywood, particularly in Russia and former Soviet nations, where Indian film has consistently gained popularity since the 1950s (Lahiri, 2017). Bollywood continues to gain popularity in new countries in the twenty-first century, such as China, where films like *Dangal* have deeply resonated with viewers, thereby fostering cultural relations between the two countries despite geopolitical concerns. Furthermore, producing worldwide icons from Indian origin, Bollywood's stars—Amitabh Bachchan, Rajnikanth, Shah Rukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai, and Priyanka Chopra—represent Indian culture on foreign arenas including Hollywood, international award events, and cultural festivals. Beyond films, Bollywood shapes perceptions of Indian fashion, music, and language around the world so strengthening India's soft power and cultural diplomacy (Thussu, 2019; Kishwar, 2018). Exporting its cinematic culture, Bollywood presents India as a significant actor on the global entertainment platform, therefore promoting a positive image of India and intercultural understanding.

Leveraging the Indian Diaspora for Diplomatic Influence

Historical Overview of the Indian Diaspora

Originating in centuries of migration with significant waves during British colonial control, the Indian diaspora is among the largest and most varied diaspora in the world. Indentured labor dominated early migration, as British colonial projects in Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia moved Indians to work on plantations, railroads, and other projects (Mazumdar, 2018). Despite the large number of Indian origins, nations such as Trinidad & Tobago, Fiji, and South Africa still bear the legacy of this era (Blarel, 2012). Later, waves of migration following independence brought seasoned professionals seeking better opportunities in the states namely the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia (Khara, 2018). This more recent migration produced a diaspora with tremendous economic success and educational background. Over time, the Indian diaspora began to greatly shape perceptions of India worldwide. As awareness of Indian culture and values grew, groups of professionals, academics, and business leaders with Indian heritage expanded globally, thereby contributing to the growth of the global economy. The diaspora helped to create, in part, strong diplomatic and commercial ties between India and its hosts (Mohan, 2003). This migration in great part explains India's prominent position in the global IT sector - especially in Silicon Valley - which defines India as a technological powerhouse (Khara, 2018). The Indian diaspora currently acts as a link between India and the world since its migration past is tightly linked with the transformation of world impressions of India as a culturally rich, varied, and quickly growing nation. Their efforts in many fields are enhancing India's soft power, hence the Indian diaspora is becoming even more significant for India's diplomatic influence.

Diaspora as Cultural Ambassadors

Acting as unofficial cultural ambassadors, the Indian diaspora is crucial in improving India's profile overseas by means of everyday connections, professional achievements, and participation in cross-cultural events. By sharing Indian cultures, festivities, cuisine, and values with their host nations, individuals and groups contribute to portraying India in a positive light. Celebrated by Indian diaspora people living in countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, celebrations like Diwali and Holi have become worldwide-known events, drawing in non-Indians as well. Often involving Indian music, dance, and cuisine, the vibrant events foster Indian culture on a global arena by means of intercultural communication (Thussu, 2020). The success of Indian-born persons in fields including technology, academics, healthcare, and politics helps India to establish itself as a nation of creativity, intelligence, and leadership. Prominent individuals such as Google's CEO, Sundar Pichai, or Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, contribute to represent the success of the Indian diaspora and hence enhance India's global profile (Mahapatra, 2016). Through their contributions, the Indian diaspora links India to their host nations, so fostering deeper understanding, respect, and collaboration. Furthermore, many diaspora groups actively support humanitarian initiatives aiming at Indian development, hence strengthening India's profile as a nation with global conscience and social sensitivity (Thussu, 2020). Their role as cultural representatives beyond the preservation of rituals to include Indian values into the

worldwide cultural mosaic, so strengthening India's soft power and fostering stronger diplomatic connections with the countries where they live.

Political and Economic Clout of the Diaspora

In countries such as the USA, the UK, and the Gulf nations, the Indian diaspora has emerged as a robust community, wielding significant political and economic influence. Growing importance in world affairs, Indian-originating leaders contribute to clarifying India's diplomatic strength. For the Indian diaspora, Kamala Harris's election as the Vice President of the United States, for example, signifies a historic event since it reflects the growing political influence of people with Indian heritage in one of the most powerful nations on earth. Likewise, well-known Indian-origin politicians in the United Kingdom, notably Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak, underscore the increasing political participation and influence of the diaspora. The Gulf countries, where numerous Indian workers support the local economy, show very clear signs of the diaspora. In fields such as technology, healthcare, and construction, the Indian workforce is indispensable; their remittances make up a significant portion of India's foreign financial flows. Especially in sectors like technology and finance, Indian-born business leaders have also contributed to define India's global economic posture (Thussu, 2020). Prominent figures like Sundar Pichai (CEO of Google) and Satya Nadella (CEO of Microsoft) have become symbols of professional excellence, enhancing India's global image as a hub for technological innovation. Since many of the diaspora members support greater links between India and their new nation, their political and financial support might not only benefit their host nations but also enhance India's soft power (Mahapatra, 2016). Their contributions to trade, diplomacy, and international relations establish India's worldwide presence and hence assist the diaspora's important role in India's foreign policy approach.

Engagement Strategies: Government Policies

Understanding their importance as tools of soft power and as supporters of national progress, the Indian government has launched many initiatives to boost its engagement with the diaspora through various policies and programs (Lahiri, 2017). One of the key strategies is celebrating Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), an annual celebration of the efforts of overseas Indians for India's development. Originally scheduled for 2003, PBD gathers individuals of the Indian diaspora to celebrate their achievements, pursue common interests, and strengthen ties to their homeland. The Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) program permits non-resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) live, work, and invest in India without a visa (Thussu, 2020).

Diaspora and Development Diplomacy

Particularly via remittances, skill transfers, and funding of developmental projects, the Indian diaspora is growing in relevance for development diplomacy. Comprising around \$80 billion annually, remittances from the Indian diaspora rank among the largest worldwide. These funds support India's infrastructure development, poverty reduction, and economic stability in addition to helping people back home (Srinivas, 2019). Many diaspora members make real estate, education, healthcare, and entrepreneurial investments in India; therefore, they support local development. In addition to providing financial support, the Indian diaspora has significantly benefited from talent transfers, particularly in high-tech fields like biotechnology, healthcare, and information technology. Working with Indian companies and educational institutions, Indian-origin professionals in the United States, Europe, and other nations often help to bridge the gap between India and the established technological capacity of the West therefore enabling knowledge transfer and skill development. This is especially evident in India's emergence as an IT hub since many of its top companies benefit from diaspora knowledge and networks. Development diplomacy also involves charitable initiatives whereby diaspora members support Indian social issues. Companies such as the American India Foundation and the UK India Business Council work on a variety of development projects in fields such as education, healthcare, and rural development. Making use of their skills, resources, and influence, the diaspora significantly aids in the socioeconomic development of India (Pradhan & Mohapatra, 2020). To maximize these groups' capacity for national development, the Indian government actively communicates with them, therefore turning the diaspora into a major driver of India's development diplomacy and enhancing its worldwide profile. India's soft power strategy benefits much from the diaspora since they act both as economic participants and cultural emissaries (Khara, 2018).

Yoga as a Key Element of Soft Power

Yoga's Global Popularity: A Historical Overview

Originally practiced in ancient India, yoga has evolved from a spiritual and physical discipline into a global phenomenon. Developed over 5,000 years as technique to achieve balance between the mind, body, and spirit, it originated in the ancient texts of the Vedas and Upanishads. About 400 CE, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali systematised yoga philosophy and technique; generations of yogis and spiritual leaders further refined this body of knowledge. Indian temples and ashrams performed yoga, primarily as a path to spiritual enlightenment and inner calm. Highlighting its contemplative and philosophical aspects, ascetics such as Swami Vivekananda and Paramahansa Yogananda began promoting yoga to the West in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By the middle of the 20th century, yoga began to attract Westerners seeking physical health and well-being as influential gurus such as B.K.S. Iyengar and T. Krishnamacharya popularised the physical postures (asanas). Now performed millions of times worldwide, yoga has developed into a global activity across boundaries and cultures. India has welcomed yoga, one of its most important cultural exports, for its health advantages, stress-relieving qualities, and spiritual depth (Davis, 2021). Although yoga originated in Indian mysticism, its adaptability to fit modern life defines its global appeal. From wellness resorts in Bali to New York's offices, yoga is growing in popularity as a strong statement of India's soft power projection via cultural traditions supporting physical and mental well-being (Lahiri, 2017).

International Day of Yoga

The proposal for the International Day of Yoga (IDY) at the UN was one of India's most significant diplomatic initiatives meant to strengthen its soft power and showcase its cultural heritage. In 2014, Indian Prime Minister Modi proposed June 21 as the IDY during his address to the UN General Assembly. In December 2014, the United Nations officially recognized June 21 as International Yoga Day, a record in UN history, with 177 member nations co-sponsoring the resolution (Khanna and Moorthy, 2017). We chose the date because it coincides with the Northern Hemisphere's longest day of the year, the summer solstice, which holds great significance in the spiritual traditions of yoga. Celebrated in more than 190 countries, International Yoga Day has developed into a global event since its first celebration in 2015. Millions of people who are symbolising the universal appeal of yoga participate in mass yoga activities in well-known locations as Times Square in New York, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and Red Square Moscow. One cannot underline how polite this event is (Davis, 2021). The International Day of Yoga disseminates a message of harmony, love, and peace, positioning India as a global leader in holistic health and wellness practices. Furthermore, the International Day of Yoga has emerged as a crucial component of India's cultural diplomacy, showcasing the country's profound spiritual roots and global appeal (Blarel, 2012). The success of this initiative has substantially improved India's soft power; hence yoga is a perfect tool for fostering diplomatic ties and world goodwill (Thussu, 2020).

Health Diplomacy through Yoga

Particularly in light of the global COVID-19 epidemic, health diplomacy through yoga has become a significant component, as countries worldwide recognize the importance of mental and physical well-being. India's strategic use of soft power and its encouragement of yoga as a wellness tool complement each other, providing an easily accessible, non-invasive approach to improve public health globally (Patgiri et al., 2022). Rising stress, mental health issues, and a focus on preventative healthcare in the post-pandemic world have created ideal conditions for yoga's full advantages to proliferate. Science has shown that yoga, with its emphasis on breathing exercises (pranayama), physical postures (asanas), and meditation, can lower stress, improve cardiovascular health, and promote mental clarity. By pushing yoga as a coping mechanism for the emotional and physical tension the pandemic generates, India has positioned itself at the front of health diplomacy (Mole et al, 2012). This approach is especially relevant as nations look for economically priced, eco-friendly solutions to raise public health standards. Governments and international organizations have included yoga in health initiatives; Indian embassies and cultural centers all across the globe offer virtual yoga lessons and wellness activities during the epidemic. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and other worldwide health agencies have acknowledged the advantages of yoga, thereby endorsing its inclusion in public health policies. India's health diplomacy through yoga not only addresses acute health issues but also cultivates long-term goodwill. India keeps increasing its influence in international health policy by matching yoga with global health concerns; therefore, it presents itself as a pioneer in encouraging physical and mental well-being (Blarel, 2012).

Yoga's Cultural and Political Impact

Through political and cultural channels, yoga has greatly improved India's reputation as a global leader in spiritual health and wellness, therefore enhancing its soft power. Yoga, which transcends religion, nationality, and class, has become a

universal emblem of peace, well-being, and holistic health aligning with India's ancient identity as a place of spirituality and knowledge (Mazumdar, 2018). Along with raising India's cultural profile, the general acceptance of yoga in the West and beyond has made yoga a major component of India's diplomatic ties. India presents itself as a country that provides spiritual and wellness remedies in a world confronting rising stress, mental health concerns, and lifestyle-related ailments by supporting yoga, thereby offering not only technological and economic benefits. Politically, yoga enhances India's profile in multilateral institutions as the United Nations, where its projects like the International Day of Yoga have been generally embraced (Ibid). Yoga is also included into India's public diplomacy as Indian embassies and cultural organisations push yoga programs in host countries to encourage cultural engagement and build bilateral ties. Moreover, yoga's impact reaches India's reputation as a leader in ecologically friendly and preventative medicine, which speaks to people all around as healthcare systems cope with rising costs and inadequate treatments. In the worldwide discussion on health, wellness, and sustainability, yoga is a non-invasive, readily available, cheaply priced option that makes India a fantastic friend for foreign wellness initiatives. Yoga thus not only raises India's cultural influence but also serves to establish it as a prominent participant in worldwide discussions on sustainable development, health, and well-being (Khara & Satpathy, 2022).

Yoga in International Relations

Many diplomatic projects have included yoga as a symbol of peace, unity, and kindness, making it an effective tool for international relations. Established in 2015 under ideas of a cultural exchange between India and China, one well-known example is the China-based India-China Yoga College. The yoga college provides a forum for soft diplomacy and cultural understanding even if political issues between the two nations exist. In spite of continuous geopolitical difficulties, the college provides research, yoga therapy, and courses for yoga teachers, thereby promoting harmonic cultural relations. "Yoga for Peace" is another project started by India's Ministry of External Affairs in association with the United Nations and other international agencies (MoEA, 2020). Underlining yoga's capacity to foster world harmony and mental peace, this project plans worldwide yoga activities. The project has been especially successful in areas with past strife, such as the Middle East, where it has planned big yoga events in nations like Israel and the UAE, thereby promoting interfaith and intercultural communication. Celebrating International Yoga Day in well-known sites like Times Square in the United States has evolved into a diplomatic event, where Indian officials interact with American counterparts and the general public, thereby highlighting the cultural relations between the two countries. Built on the universal appeal of yoga, these diplomatic projects have helped India establish peaceful relations, improve mutual understanding, and strengthen its global image as a nation dedicated to wellness and peace. India has basically built a platform for cultural diplomacy spanning political boundaries by using yoga in international interactions, hence centralising yoga in its soft power diplomacy (Davis, 2021; Mazumdar, 2018).

India's Global Soft Power Institutions

Role of the Ministry of External Affairs in Cultural Diplomacy

Leveraging its large network of embassies, consulates, and cultural centres around the globe to support India's soft power, the MEA centralized India's cultural diplomacy. Aimed at underlining India's cultural variety and furthering international peace, the MEA's institutional structure for handling soft power consists of alliances with various intellectual, cultural, and educational institutions. By means of cultural events, movie screenings, art exhibits, and yoga sessions planned through its embassies and posts overseas, the MEA encourages Indian traditions, arts, and values. Indian embassies also assist local enterprises in cultural encounters and multilingual communication, therefore fostering understanding and strengthening bilateral relations. Establishing cultural facilities under the embassies, such as the Indian Cultural Centres, significantly contributes to the dissemination of Indian art, language, dance, and philosophy, thereby facilitating global access to Indian culture (MoEA, 2020). These hubs of cultural diplomacy teach among other languages Hindi, yoga, classical music, and dance. The MEA also aggressively supports its cultural exports, such as Bollywood films and traditional Indian crafts, so boosting India's global cultural presence. By means of cultural diplomacy compliant with foreign policy goals, the MEA not only enhances India's soft power but also its international reputation as a nation supporting peace, cultural diversity, and mutual cooperation. Celebrating the International Day of Yoga, organising outstanding yoga events in major cities all around the world, and so underlining yoga's significance in India's cultural diplomacy the Ministry also plays an important role (Kugiel, 2017). By means of deliberate cultural events the MEA guarantees that India's soft power remains the main instrument for its foreign policy, so augmenting its global impact. (Mole et al, 2022)

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

One of India's most important organizations in charge of advancing cultural diplomacy through cultural interactions, scholarships, and worldwide cooperation is ICCR. Established under Ministry of External Affairs in 1950, the ICCR stresses cultural linkages between India and the rest of the world (Kugiel, 2017). By means of worldwide cultural events, exhibits, and performances stressing India's rich artistic, musical, dance, and literary past, it promotes cultural diplomacy. The ICCR also fosters the spread of Indian cultural institutions all over numerous nations thereby advancing Indian philosophy, language, and culture. The ICCR also encourages academic and intellectual interactions by providing scholarships to foreign students from underdeveloped nations to study in India, and strengthens stable educational and cultural linkages. The ICCR also supports Indian academics, musicians, and artists visiting foreign countries, conferences, and cultural events thereby raising India's worldwide cultural profile. (Mahapatra, 2016). Through its diverse range of cultural initiatives, the ICCR has significantly bolstered India's international soft power, thereby promoting and strengthening cultural ties and diplomatic relations with nations worldwide. By emphasizing cultural diplomacy as a tool for promoting global understanding, the ICCR has positioned itself as a major actor in Indian foreign policy and cultural outreach.

Media and Digital Diplomacy

As social media, streaming services, and digital news platforms gain importance, Indian media and digital channels play a crucial role in enhancing India's soft power globally and fortifying its cultural narrative, particularly through its films, music, and TV shows. India's cultural offerings are becoming better known all over the world. For example, digital services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and YouTube make it simple for people all over the world to watch Bollywood films. This spreads Indian culture and values to everyone. Indian TV stations like Doordarshan International, Zed TV, and NDTV 24X7 help show India's political and cultural issues to people outside of India. They do this by reaching both Indian experts and foreign fans. These channels show Indian films, TV shows, and news, introducing people who are not from India to the country's rich cultural landscape and helping to keep the diaspora linked to their cultural background. Indian ambassadors, embassies, and government agencies talk to people all over the world on social media sites like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. This has made these platforms even more important in India's efforts at digital diplomacy. Along with the personal accounts of Indian embassies and diplomats, the official MEA Twitter account often posts about India's cultural events, foreign policy successes, and interactions between the two countries. This makes diplomacy more open and clearer (Thussu, 2020). India's digital diplomacy is working, as shown by events like the classes to mark International Day of Yoga. These online projects not only enhance India's cultural recognition, but also assist other technologically advanced nations in making a positive impact on the global community. India has been able to boost its soft power by using digital means to spread its diplomatic and cultural messages to people all over the world.

Public Diplomacy and Soft Power

Public diplomacy has become even more crucial for the soft power objective of the government as India implements several initiatives to raise the country's profile and support world goodwill.

Public diplomacy is a set of activities by a State to influence foreign public opinion, in order to pursue foreign policy objectives, usually through 'nation branding', media outreach, cultural events, educational exchanges, seminars, daily communications and strategic communication campaigns (Khanna and Moorthy, 2017). In 2006, India formed a public diplomacy division inside its Ministry of External Affairs to effectively utilize soft power resources with the objective of enhancing the exchange of foreign policy issues across all segments of society, both domestically and internationally. India's public diplomacy initiatives aim to showcase its cultural richness, economic potential, technical innovation, and commitment to global peace and development. They also promote the International Day of Yoga, which has garnered significant global attention and positions India as a global leader in wellness and holistic health. The Incredible India campaign has played a significant role in promoting travel by highlighting India's rich cultural legacy, natural beauty, and spiritual traditions. This effort has significantly shaped international impressions of India as a dynamic, varied, and friendly place for visitors (Davis, 2021). Through its Indian cultural centers and embassies, which routinely organize cultural events, language classes, and exhibitions supporting Indian arts, crafts, and traditions for overseas audiences, the Ministry of External Affairs actively engages public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is strengthened by long-term cultural and intellectual linkages between nations as well as by educational interactions including scholarships for

abroad students enrolled in India. Using social media and online tools to directly involve people all around, give updates on its foreign policy, and promote its cultural values, India has also embraced digital diplomacy. India has been able to raise its soft power on the international stage by means of these public diplomacy projects, thus strengthening its position as a major actor in world events, advancing its foreign policy objectives, and building a positive worldwide image. (Mazumdar, 2020)

3. CONCLUSION

Driven by its rich cultural history, global appeal of its diaspora, and universal acceptance of yoga, India's soft power diplomacy keeps growing its impact on the international scene. India's concentration on cultural exports, digital platforms, and cooperative enterprises reveals its resilience in spite of local sociopolitical concerns, geopolitical challenges, and worldwide rivalry. By embracing new industries such as sports, climate diplomacy, and women's leadership, India can keep its worldwide impact and position itself as a leader in the twenty-first century in fostering peace, wellness, and cooperation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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