



Assessing the Role of Soft Power in India-Russia Relations

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Abstract: The article examines the cultural relationships between Russia and India, which have existed for several centuries, and their impact on the development of political relations between the two countries, particularly in the twentieth century. Culture has played an important role in the multi-layered bilateral relations between India and the Soviet Union. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and geopolitical reorientations, Russia had to focus on rebuilding its economy before engaging with soft power. Similarly, India liberalized its economy in the 1990s and adapted to changing political equations in the international order.

Soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, includes cultural resources, political values, and foreign policies that can be used to influence others. This article examines all three aspects of soft power and notes that Russia and India have channelized their cultural resources into public diplomacy since the 2000s, setting up institutions and bodies to deal with it. Despite their rich cultural resources and institutionalization of the dissemination of soft power, both countries do not fare well in soft power rankings.

The article argues that changes in the international order since the 1990s, shifts in political ideologies, and the reorientation of the foreign policies of both countries have led them to seek new allies. While cultural relations between the two nations continue, soft power and public diplomacy have yet to realize their full potential in this fluid scenario.

Keywords: soft power, cultural ties, public diplomacy, foreign policy, soft power rankings, international order, culture industries, education, cinema, festivals

This article provides an overview of the cultural relations between India and Russia for several centuries before delving into an analysis of when and how Russia and India began to engage with public diplomacy and soft power as foreign policy instruments. Specifically, it examines the measures taken by both countries to exercise soft power and how changing foreign policy orientations have affected the exercise of soft power between them. The article draws on Joseph Nye Jr's concept of soft

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power, which gained global popularity in the 1990s as a response to declining American power to attract and affect others in a post-War on Terror era. Nye notes that the US "new unilateralism," which became a full-fledged strategy rather than a sparingly used tactic, was undermining its soft power in Europe-America relations (Nye 2006: 25).

Traditional diplomacy was state-oriented and realized through official representatives of states interacting with each other. These accredited representatives implemented the foreign policies of their respective countries through negotiations. Public diplomacy, on the other hand, is oriented towards the public of another country, towards groups and organizations that may not have official status. According to Paul Sharp (2005: 106), public diplomacy is "... made necessary by economic interdependence, possible by the communications revolution, and desirable by the rise in democratic and popular expectations". This is a multilevel, open dialogue aimed at creating goodwill for the initiator country among the citizens of another country. Daya Thussu (2013: 4) points out that non-state actors, transnational corporations, universities, think tanks, non-government organizations, and celebrities associated with creative and cultural industries, among others, participate in public diplomacy.

Tested ties

Russia has had a longstanding friendship with India, and the relationship between the two countries has been a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. Since India gained independence, the Soviet Union has been a reliable political ally, and in 1971, the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation was signed. The Soviet Union provided assistance to India in establishing heavy industries and even facilitated Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma's journey into space as part of the Soviet Interkosmos Programme. The Soviet Union and Russia have also collaborated on the production of arms and have supplied weapons to India. Russia has supported India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

In addition to state-level cooperation between a socialist superpower and a developing country with socialist leanings, there have been political links between the communist parties of the two countries and people-to-people connections among those with a leftist ideology. For example, M.N. Roy (1887–1954), an international revolutionary who founded the Mexican Communist Party and the Communist Party of India in Tashkent, served as a delegate to the congresses of the Communist International during the times of Lenin and Stalin.

In 2000, President Putin signed the Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership during his visit to India. This declaration was further upgraded to a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership during President Medvedev's visit to India in 2010. The highest dialogue mechanism between the two countries comprises the annual summit meetings between the Indian Prime Minister and the Russian President. Two intergovernmental committees have been formed to oversee the military technical cooperation, and trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural cooperation.

The committee on military technical cooperation is chaired by the Defense Ministers of both countries, while the committee on trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural cooperation is co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister from India and the Russian Deputy Prime Minister. The latter committee is the official and primary forum for economic cooperation, with various working groups focusing on areas such as trade, mining, energy, tourism, culture, science, technology, and IT.

India-Russia cultural relations

The strong government-to-government relations between India and Russia have been complemented by longstanding cultural connections. Buddhism, which originated in India, spread northwards into Siberia and beyond, with Buddhist lamas from Buryatia becoming influential in the Tsarist courts from the mid-18th century onwards. Indian merchants also settled in Astrakhan in the 17th century and became integral to the trade in the region.

Russian interest in Indian culture was further piqued by the travels of Afanasy Nikitin, one of the first European travelers to India, who recorded his impressions in his book *The Journey Beyond Three Seas*. In addition, translations of Sanskrit texts began in Russia in the late 18th century after Gerasim Lebedev, a writer, musician, and linguist, visited India and set up a printing press in St. Petersburg. The establishment of the Asiatic Academy in St. Petersburg in 1818 further facilitated Sanskrit studies in Russia. Scholars such as Pavel Petrov and Ivan Minyaev made significant contributions to the translation and study of Indian texts, including the Ramayana.

Notably, Lev Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindu*, written in 1908 to Tarak Nath Das, the editor of *Free Hindustan*, espoused the concept of non-violence and had a profound influence on Mahatma Gandhi and his concept of *ahimsa*.

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), the renowned Russian theatre director, was a proponent of the practice of yoga, which he used as a part of his exercises in training actors for the theatre. The Chamber Theatre in Russia staged Kalidasa's *Shakuntalum* in 1914, marking the first production of an Indian classic in the country. This was followed by other productions based on Indian literary works. In 1960, the Children's Theatre in Moscow produced the *Ramayana*, which featured Gennady Pechnikov in the lead role. He played the role for forty years and remained the only professional artist to do so in Europe. In recognition of his outstanding contribution, Pechnikov was conferred with the Padma Shri, the fourth-highest civilian award in India, in 2008¹.

¹ The 2022 list of Padma Shri awardees for 2021 included Prof Tatyana Shaumyan (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences). The Padma Bhushan (third highest award) was given to Svyatoslav Roerich in 1961 and to Russia's Ambassador to India, Alexander Kadakin, in 2018. Likewise, The Order of Friendship has been awarded in the past to the well-known filmmaker Mrinal Sen; to Professor Devendra Kaushik, a specialist on Russia, Eurasia, and Central Asia, in 2003; to Ramayah Shanmuga Sundar, Director of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in 2016, to name just a few. The Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, was awarded the Order of St Andrew the Apostle, the highest Russian civilian award, in 2019. Pushkin Awards are also given annually to those who teach Russian language and literature.

Nikolai Roerich (1874-1947), a prominent Russian painter and set designer, established India as his permanent residence and conducted two expeditions to Central Asia and other regions beyond India. He passed away in India in 1947. Roerich believed in the spiritual connection between Mount Belukha in Altai and Mount Kailash, viewing them as spiritual twins. He also believed that Shambhala, the Buddhist utopia, was situated in the region between the two mountains.

In addition, the Soviet Union had a significant publishing and translation industry that translated an extensive range of books from various disciplines into many Indian languages and sold them at affordable prices. The generations of Indians who grew up with these economical and elegantly illustrated children's books are still overwhelmed by nostalgia at the mention of these publications today.

According to Nye, *"the USSR also placed great emphasis on demonstrating the superiority of its cultural and educational system, spending large sums on the arts. The Bolshoi and Kirov Ballet companies and Soviet symphony orchestras attracted wide acclaim (though socialist realist art did not). The Soviets also invested heavily in sports, and over the decades, Soviet Olympic teams won more gold medals than the US in the Winter Games and were second in the Summer Games. Popular culture, however, was an entirely different story. The closed nature of the Soviet system and its constant efforts to exclude bourgeois cultural influences meant that the Soviet Union ceded the battle for mass culture, never competing with American global influence in film, television or pop music"* (Nye 2004: 74). For Nye, the export of popular culture serves as the main criterion for evaluating the success of soft power, with science, technology, the arts, and sports being of secondary importance.

Lai and Lu (2012: 11) argue that Nye's concept of soft power fails to recognize the significance of technological and scientific prowess, economic resources, and foreign aid as indicators of a nation's place and importance in the world system. They also point out that Nye's discussion of the Soviet Union's closed nature overlooks other cultural markers, such as universal literacy and high cultural literacy rates. The concept of the "popular" is distinct from its definition under market and socialist economies. For instance, within the USSR, popular films sold over 60 million tickets in the year of their release, not to mention their long-term runs in theaters. The same was true for popular music.

Cinema

Nikolai Cherkasov (who played Alexander Nevsky and Ivan the Terrible in Eisenstein's eponymously named films) and Vsevolod Pudovkin (director of *Mother*, based on Gorky's classic literary work) visited India in 1951 and visited studios, film societies and met with leading Indian filmmakers of the time. Raj Kapoor's *Awaara* (1951) was the third-largest grosser among foreign films in the USSR, and it sold over 62 million tickets in the Soviet Union². Dev Anand's *Rahi* (1953), Kapoor's *Shri 420*

² The record for the highest number of tickets sold in the Soviet Union for a foreign film is held by the Mexican film *Yesenia* (91 million tickets) and Hollywood's *The Magnificent Seven* (67 million tickets).

(1955) and *Bobby* (1973), *Mamta* (1966), *Hamraaz* (1967), *Seeta aur Geeta* (1972), and later Mithun Chakravarty's *Disco Dancer* (1982), were widely seen in the Soviet Union. Post-Soviet times have seen fewer releases, such as *Barood* (1998), *My Name is Khan* (2010), and *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* (2013). None of the stars of these films, however, were as popular as Raj Kapoor and Nargis were across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union.

There have been instances of coproductions between Indian and Soviet filmmakers. One such example is the film *Pardesi* (1957), a collaboration between Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and Vasily Pronin, which was based on Afanasy Nikitin's travels to India. Another instance is Raj Kapoor's *Mera Naam Joker* (1970), which featured Ksenia Ryabinkina in a lead role. *Ali Baba aur Chaalis Chor* (1980) directed by Umesh Mehra and Latif Faiziev, drew inspiration from a popular legend from *The Arabian Nights*. *Sohni Mahiwal* (1984), also by the same duo, was based on a well-known love story from the South and Central Asian region. In more recent times, films like *Lucky: No Time for Love* (2005) by Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru, and Abbas-Mastan's *Players* (2012) were set in Russia, although the plot of the films did not revolve around the country or its people.

Public diplomacy is closely connected to state and nation branding, which in turn is linked to the global culture industries market. In the realm of cinema, famous directors can help promote a nation's image through the accolades they receive at prestigious film festivals. For example, Andrei Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan* won the Best Film Award at the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in 2014, and Roman Vasyanov's *Dorm* received a Special Jury Mention at the 52nd IFFI in November 2021.

While India produces over 1500 films annually, Russia only produces around 150. Additionally, Russia and Brazil are the two largest markets for Hollywood films, whereas Indian audiences predominantly watch their own films. While Indian films have had success in the Soviet Union/Russia, Russian films have mostly been exhibited in India through film festivals, film society screenings, and more recently, through the "Days of Russian Cinema". The Russian Film Festival, organized by Rosskino in 2022, was screened in several Indian cities and showcased the latest comedies, melodramas, documentaries, and animated films, including Klima Shipenko's *Serf* and Alexander Fomin's *Young Man*. Over a period of three weeks, the festival drew nearly seven hundred thousand people, according to the organizers, and is scheduled to travel to two dozen countries, according to Russkiy Mir³.

Cultural Festivals

In 1987 and 1988, the Festival of USSR in India and the Festival of India in USSR respectively were grand occasions that brought the best high and popular art forms to almost one hundred cities in both countries. According to senior journalist Madhu

³ Russian Film Festival Prokhorit v Indii. Editorial Team of the Portal of Russkiy Mir. Available at: <https://www.russkiymir.ru/news/307451/> (accessed 12.04.2023).

Jain, "the two countries intend to show off their classical best as well as their kitsch modern. Thus it is the Bolshoi ballet and symphony (with an orchestra if a pit can be made in Siri Fort in time), the pick of European art from the incomparable Hermitage of Leningrad, as well as their gymnasts and circuses. India will send the best from its classical arts, as well as the wandering performers from *apna Utsav*. And over 200 works of some 80 painters from the National Gallery of Art collection – in addition to the exhibitions of Jamini Roy, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Rabindranath Tagore"⁴.

These cultural festivals, organized on a reciprocal basis by the governments of India and Russia, have persisted beyond 1991 albeit on a smaller scale such as the Festivals of Russian Culture in India and Days of Moscow in Delhi in 2012. Moreover, milestone anniversaries of the diplomatic relations between the two countries, such as the 150th birth anniversary of Tagore in 2011, have been celebrated with mini-festivals of Indian culture and conferences in Russia. These events serve as tools of soft power, attracting audiences from various strata of society. While academic events are primarily attended by specialists, cultural events cater to a broader demographic.

Education

The Embassy of India's Jawaharlal Nehru Centre in Moscow hosts regular cultural events and offers courses in Hindi, yoga, dance, and music for a large number of students. The Mahatma Gandhi Chair is located at the Institute of Philosophy in Moscow, and several universities have departments devoted to various aspects of Indian Studies, such as the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, Kazan State University, Far Eastern National University in Vladivostok, and the School of International Studies at St Petersburg University.

In 1946, the University of Delhi established the Department of Russian Language, the first of its kind in India. Following this, several centers to teach Russian language and Russian/Soviet literature were established in universities across the country. Additionally, Russian/Soviet history was included as part of the syllabus in History Departments in many universities. Although the language and literature programs have experienced a resurgence after a period of decline in the 1990s, there has been a decrease in the study of Russia through other academic disciplines.

The number of people who speak Russian and have expertise on Russia has decreased globally⁵. The Soviet Union had many universities that welcomed thousands of students from developing countries, but the number of international students dropped

⁴ Jain M. 1987. Festivals of India-USSR Promise to be a Spectacular Extravaganza. *India Today*, 31. March. Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/society-and-the-arts/story/19870331-festivals-of-india-ussr-promise-to-be-a-spectacular-extravaganza-798683-1987-03-30> (accessed 12.04.2023).

⁵ This fall was a worldwide phenomenon. Richard Sakwa states that "the end of the Cold War has been accompanied by a dramatic falling off in students taking courses in Russian and allied studies. Commensurately, funding has been curtailed. The whole academic discipline of post-communist and Eastern European area studies is in a period of retrenchment" (Sakwa 1999: 712).

sharply after the dissolution of the USSR. Despite the Russian government's increase in scholarship opportunities for foreign students, the number of international students attending Russian universities is still much lower than during Soviet times. Currently, the United States receives 18% of the global intake of international students, followed by the United Kingdom with 10%, while Russia receives only 4%. In 2022, out of 1,324,954 Indian students who studied abroad, 465,791 went to the USA, 183,310 to Canada, 100,009 to Australia, 164,000 to the UAE, and only 18,039 to the Russian Federation⁶.

New Bottles for Old Wine

The presented inventory of cultural connections between India and Russia is not exhaustive, as it is impossible to encompass the multifaceted, intricate, and diverse threads of cultural relations that exist between the two countries at various levels, including state institutions, agencies, and people-to-people interactions spanning many centuries. The political bond, which has persisted through various challenges, along with the extensive range of cultural ties, has been reimagined in recent times. Despite the reduction in the scale of interactions since the 1990s, the cordiality between the two nations has endured.

Russia's Soft Power

In the mid-2000s, Russia had regained its position as a major player in international politics, but its image was still largely negative. The country struggled to attract foreign investments and faced challenges in gaining trust for its political objectives. The Color Revolutions in neighboring countries, such as Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003, Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution in 2005, were sources of serious concern for Russia, as were its fears of NATO expansionism. Additionally, the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 further complicated Russia's relationships with neighboring countries. As a result, Russia began to pivot towards Asia, becoming closer to China and prioritizing its relationships with nearby countries through participation in regional organizations. The country also actively promoted BRICS, indicating its desire to establish stronger ties with emerging economies.

Three Phases

Vera Ageeva (2021: 120) has observed that Russia's pursuit of Soft Power has undergone three distinctive phases: 1) the unofficial stage spanning from 2000 to 2007; 2) institutionalization from 2008 to 2013; and 3) the tightening of the approach or the

⁶ Estimated Data of Indian Students Studying Abroad. *Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/lu3820-1-mar-25-22.pdf> (accessed 12.04.2023).

fall since 2014. Following President Putin's directives in the early 2000s, Russian government agencies and diplomats embarked on efforts to enhance Russia's international image. Ageeva states that the first period was marked by *"an informal approach, with no strict control by the state, but with pluralism in formats and personalities, private initiatives, and the involvement of foreign specialists (especially in the field of PR). Until 2007, the term 'soft power' was not pronounced inside the Kremlin, but the country's leadership was concerned about the international image of Russia, primarily because of its significance for foreign economic activity"* (Ageeva 2021: 124).

In 2004, the Valdai Club was established to facilitate discussions on significant global issues, featuring the participation of the President and leading experts from Russia and other countries. During the early 2000s, there was a shift in the perception of the diaspora, which had been previously viewed as "traitors" during Soviet times. Instead, they were now considered part of the "Russian World" and integral to Russia's soft power efforts.

Russia Today, an international television channel launched in 2005, marked Russia's entry as an active participant in the international media landscape. Its primary objective was to provide Russia's perspective on global events, broadcasting in English and other foreign languages while employing foreign reporters. Apart from news, the channel airs a variety of programs and has a broad viewership in over a hundred countries worldwide. The international supplement to the *Rossiskaya Gazeta – RTBH* – began publication in 2007 in several languages and countries and claimed a readership of about 32 million by 2016.

In an effort to improve Russia's image abroad, public relations firms Ketchum from the US and GPlus Europe from Belgium were hired for the 2006 G8 Summit. Their efforts proved successful, leading to further campaigns such as the 2007 push for President Putin to be named Time Magazine's Person of the Year, a four-part documentary on Putin by BBC Two in 2012, and a 2013 article by the President titled "A Plea for Caution from Russia." According to Ageeva, the services of prominent lobbyists such as James Baker and Henry Kissinger were also enlisted in the effort to improve Russia's image abroad (Ageeva 2021: 123).

Investing in Soft Power

The second phase of Russia's engagement with soft power began with President Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, and it was characterized by an increased level of government activity on the soft power front. During this phase, Russia emphasized the values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law that are espoused in the West. In 2008, the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation was established in Paris and New York as a think tank to promote these values. Additionally, Russia started publishing reports on human rights in Europe, Canada, and the US.

In 2008, Russian government established Rossotrudnichestvo, which maintains the Russian Centres of Science and Culture and oversees exchanges and educational visits. This organization also organizes year-long performances of a country's culture

on a bilateral basis. Furthermore, the number of foreign students with fully funded scholarships in higher educational institutions increased to over 10,000, with over a hundred scholarships being availed of by Indian students.

In 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established several foundations to support the promotion of Russian language and culture, as well as to aid Russian schools and teachers of the language. Among these foundations was Russky Mir, which aimed to connect Russians living abroad and foreigners who identify with Russian culture. The word "mir" in Russian can mean both "world" and "peace", and the foundation sought to promote peace and understanding in the world through the Russian language and culture. The Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy was established in 2010, followed by the Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad in 2012.

Russia also hosted several major international events in recent years, including the Winter Olympics in 2014, the International Ice Hockey World Championships in 2016, and the FIFA World Cup in 2018. The Victory Day Parades on May 9th are also significant for Russia's branding as a Western ally that played a crucial role in the defeat of fascism. Additionally, the Sputnik news agency was established in 2014 to provide newsfeeds in English, Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish.

New Directions

In the third phase that began in 2014, there has been a shift in Russia's ideological orientations. The emphasis on soft power attractiveness based on political and economic achievements seems to have taken a back seat. The Ukraine conflict and the Crimean Peninsula becoming part of Russia in 2014 marked Russia's shift to smart power, the use of hard power and soft according to requirement and convenience. Russia's image in the international arena has considerably declined since the peak it had achieved during the first few years of the 2010s. According to Ageeva, *"the idea of the Russian world, which since the 2000s has been actively promoted by both the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church, has also transformed significantly from a purely cultural into a geopolitical phenomenon, forfeiting the potential of a neutral concept that could unite all those who, regardless of nationality, are interested in Russian culture..."* (Ageeva 2021: 134).

In the third phase, Putin's strategic narrative is centered around conservatism. This narrative appeals to the elites who are disappointed with the West and the general population that desires a slower pace to the post-Soviet transformations. Conservatism is the antithesis of the liberalism practiced in the 1990s.

The translation of "soft power" in Russian as "myagkaya sila" has been noted by some writers, who have suggested that this could be retranslated as "soft coercion" in English. Vasif Huseinov argues that *"the national narratives that constitute important components of Russia's soft power policies are built on the combination of a set of diverse policies, primarily a state-promoted ideology of conservatism and the Russian World concept, manipulation of symbols and nostalgia for the glorious days of the Soviet*

past, the leveraging of socio-political, economic, and cultural links with the post-Soviet states. These policies achieve greater success in Russia's 'near abroad' compared to the 'far abroad' (2019:141).

India's Soft Power

The 1990s marked a significant period of change for both Russia and India. India began implementing economic liberalization policies in the late 1980s, while the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left Russia in a state of transition. Both countries faced the challenge of stabilizing their economies and attracting foreign investment. Against this backdrop, the concept of soft power emerged as a critical instrument of foreign policy for both nations. Addressing the issue of soft power became a priority for both countries as they sought to project a positive image and enhance their global influence.

History

India has a rich history of exporting and assimilating diverse cultural influences over time. The Ministry of External Affairs Report on Soft Power states that *"India's global influence has had a long and complex history, from the dissemination of Hindu and Buddhist ideas across Asia to the welcoming of Arab and Islamic thought on mathematics, astronomy, and other physical and metaphysical sciences, to the more recent export of human and intellectual capital to Western universities, transnational corporations and multilateral organizations. However, it has only been in the last two decades that India has begun to promote and enhance its soft power effectively actively."*

The concept of "soft power" as it is understood today was already being practiced by India immediately after achieving independence in 1947. India was seen as attractive in the post-independence period in terms of soft power due to the uniqueness of its non-violent means of achieving independence. However, it was in the 1990s that India's attractiveness in terms of soft power grew due to its economic liberalization policies. According to Patryk Kugiel, *"it was one of the first countries to pursue a soft power strategy, under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, long before the term was coined. However, after the defeat in the 1962 war with China, India gradually shifted towards a hard power approach, and its foreign policy became more pragmatic and driven by realpolitik. Until recently, soft power played a negligible role in strategic and security discourse in India, and there was no single declaration or strategy to announce its greater infusion into the country's foreign policy. Only after 1998 did India rediscover the utility of its soft power in external relations"* (Kugiel 2017: ix).

⁷ Report, Standing Committee Chaired by Tharoor Shashi (2016-2017) Introduction. *India's Soft Power Diplomacy Including Role of ICCR and Indian Diaspora*. New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs. Available at: http://164.100.47.193/Isscommittee/External%20Affairs/16_External_Affairs_13.pdf (accessed 12.04.2023).

Assets

In the recent decades, India has increasingly focused on public diplomacy and soft power, with particular emphasis on areas such as tourism (including the "Incredible India" campaign), yoga, ayurvedic medicine, culture, spirituality, and Bollywood cinema. According to Nye, *"the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). But combining these resources is not always easy"* (Nye 2008: 96). India has had the advantage of possessing all three resources – culture, political values, and foreign policies – that are crucial for building and projecting soft power. Additionally, India's rise as a global power since the 1990s has been recognized worldwide. The country's soft power has been based on its ability to embrace diverse cultures, establish strong democratic institutions, and lead other postcolonial countries towards development. Furthermore, India's soft power has been significantly influenced by its political legitimacy, which has been built up since the independence struggle against British colonialism. The adoption of Gandhian non-violence has been a key factor contributing to India's soft power.

The Indian diaspora, which comprises around twenty million individuals worldwide, plays a significant role in projecting India's soft power. This diaspora serves as evidence of the diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural fabric that constitutes India.

India's cultural landscape is characterized by a diverse range of elements, such as classical, pop, and film music, including fusion music by acclaimed artists such as Ravi Shankar, L Subramaniam, and Zakir Hussain. The country is also known for its art, tourism, films, sports, mysticism, literature, food, crafts, IT industry, yoga, and large diasporas, among other factors. Despite this vast potential for soft power projection, India has not been able to maximize its effectiveness. For instance, while India produces over 1500 films annually, compared to less than 500 by Hollywood, the turnover of Hollywood in ticket sales per year is significantly higher than that of Indian cinema.

In 2013, the Indian entertainment and media industry had an estimated value of 29 billion USD, while the Bollywood industry alone was worth 3.5 billion USD. Prior to 1991, India had only one television channel, but by 2013, it had expanded to include 800 TV channels that were available in approximately 70 countries. However, India's soft power influence in areas beyond Bollywood, such as education, is largely limited to neighboring countries in Asia and Africa. The distribution network for promoting other aspects of soft power is not as widespread, extensive, or well-coordinated.

Government Initiatives

India has made significant efforts to promote its soft power through various governmental initiatives. The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs was established in 2004, while the Public Diplomacy division of the Ministry of External Affairs was set up in 2006. A Standing Committee, chaired by Shashi Tharoor, was formed to examine India's Soft Power Diplomacy, including the role of the Indian Council for Cultural

Relations (ICCR) and the Indian Diaspora. The ICCR has been organizing art and cultural events, exhibitions, and academic activities, including scholarships for foreign students, India Studies Chairs abroad, visiting programs for scholars, and Indian festivals. However, successful implementation of soft power strategies requires coordination between various government bodies such as the ICCR, MEA, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Ministry of AYUSH, Ministry of Tourism, and state governments.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was established in 1950 and has Nehru Centres affiliated with Indian embassies in foreign countries. Currently, there are approximately 35 ICCR centers located around the world. However, India needs to expand its institutional network to better promote its soft power resources.

India has been described as a defensive soft power and a soft power by default, with the focus of discussions primarily on cultural assets rather than foreign policy. The way in which India exercises its soft power is more significant than the resources it possesses.

Soft Power Indices

The Soft Power Index, which was developed by the Institute for Government (IFG) in the UK in collaboration with Johnathan McClory, was introduced in 2010. A high ranking on this index can enhance a country's reputation as a brand and attract foreign investment. *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power* Report (2019), jointly published by McClory, Portland consultancy, Facebook, and the USC Centre on Public Diplomacy, reveals that Russia has slipped to the thirtieth position on the list, having been ranked twenty-seventh in 2016, twenty-sixth in 2017, and twenty-eighth in 2018. India is not listed among the top thirty countries on the soft power index, but it holds the eighth position on the 2019 list of Asian Soft Power 10 (following Japan, South Korea, Singapore, China, Taiwan, Thailand, and Malaysia). According to the report, only the first four countries among the Asian top ten feature on the global soft power index list, with Japan ranked eighth, South Korea at nineteenth, Singapore at twenty-first, and China at twenty-seventh.

The top five countries, according to this report in the world are France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, and the United States. The data is collected according to two categories: objective data, which accounts for 65%, and polling data, which accounts for the remaining 35%. The objective data is collected based on six categories, namely Government, Culture, Digital, Education, Engagement, and Enterprise. On the other hand, the polling data is collected based on seven categories, namely Cuisine, Tech Products, Friendliness, Culture, Luxury Goods, Foreign Policy, and Liveability.

The Soft Power 30 Index relies heavily on data sources from Western countries, with a particular emphasis on Anglophone nations. According to Chang Zhang and Ruiqin Wu, *"the selection of indicators of the Portland 30 Index is constrained by hegemonic western culture, and in turn, consolidates western cultural hegemony by legitimizing*

Anglo-American political values, economic models and even cultural tastes" (Zhang, Wu 2019: 187). The authors point out that *"the 'attractive model of governance' in the 'Government' sub-index reflects Nye's liberal conceptualization as well as the US-led liberal order, just as the sub-index of 'Enterprise' favors neo-liberalism, reflecting not economic power, but 'ease of doing business' and 'attractiveness of a country's economic model"* (Zhang, Wu 2019: 188).

According to the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index (2021), Russia is ranked 27th and India is ranked 40th in the global rankings. The top spot is occupied by Germany⁸.

It is important to critically analyze the variables used in soft power and nation branding rankings, as these rankings may be influenced by Western-centric perspectives. While countries like Russia and India may not be at the top of the soft power rankings, this may also be due to weaknesses in their strategies for disseminating their soft power assets. Despite having rich cultural traditions and attractive resources, soft power messages may conflict with hard power or national identity projections. Thus, policies may fail to deliver gains for the country. Soft power is linked to public diplomacy, and it is essential to be civil society-oriented instead of state-centric.

Both Russia and India have established institutions and organizations to deal with the dissemination of soft power since the 1990s. However, their cultural relations have remained on traditional paths laid out in the 20th century.

Conclusion

The international order is in transition, and the outcome is unclear. The conflict in Ukraine is challenging the system as it had evolved after the end of the Cold War. This is a new period of transition following the post-Cold War period of change in the international order. Shashi Tharoor and Samir Saran (Tharoor, Saran 2020: 278) have pointed out that the twenty-first century differs from the twentieth in that American unilateralism is over, and multipolarity is the new norm; there is a non-hierarchical diffusion of political and economic power across corporations, networks of non-state actors and cities and a great degree of economic interconnectedness along with a high degree of political divergence.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia experienced a decline in its geopolitical status as it embarked on a process of economic and political transformation. This involved a decade-long period of restructuring across various sectors including the economy, politics, and society. The most significant transformation during this period was in the realm of ideology.

⁸ Press Release. 2021. *Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index*. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-10/NBI-2021-ipsos.pdf> (accessed 12.04.2023).

India liberalized its economy in the 90s, and though the friendship with Russia continued on track, both countries were busy stabilizing their economies and exploring diverse multi-vector options in the changing international system and relations outside. As Nivedita Kapoor has pointed out, "this was a particular post-Cold War moment which offered an opportunity to various states to build a more diversified foreign policy based on non-bloc engagement."⁹ Russia looked West and to the US but was not welcomed there. The warming of relations with China started under Gorbachev, and the subsequent settlement of border issues got further cemented with Russia's pivot to the East. India, on the other hand, maintained a flexible engagement with the US while its relations with China became embroiled in border disputes, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and China-Pakistan relations. In the 1990s, China sought deeper economic engagement with the US and the West, but by the 2000s, the US saw China as a threat to its own economic status in the world. The formation of multilateral organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001, of which India became a full member in 2017, the Russia-India-China Trilateral (RIC) in 2002, and the emergence of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group in 2010 brought the three Eurasian countries together on the multilateral front. In 2007, the QUAD (USA, India, Australia, Japan) also emerged as a multilateral organization. The shifts in relations between the four players - Russia, the USA, China, and India - did not significantly strain their engagements beyond a reasonable point. However, the Special Military Operation in Ukraine in 2022 has changed the post-Cold War security arrangements, making the integration or rapprochement of Russia with the West unlikely in the immediate future. As Russia increasingly aligns with the East, it is possible that China may become a more important partner than India. According to Menon and Rumer, India's trade with Russia lags behind that of the US and China¹⁰. The Special Military Operation in Ukraine has brought hard power to the forefront, and Russia's efforts are geared towards presenting its position on the conflict, even as the conflict has lasted for a duration that had not been anticipated by many.

The Soviet Union was, and Russia remains, a trusted friend and ally and India's major arms and energy supplier through all these transitions and shifts.

Both Russia and India are territorially large countries with great diversities of languages, religions, ethnicities, and cultures contained within themselves. These are multinational states, and as such, their rich cultures remain a very important part of their identities.

⁹ Kapoor N. 2022. Russian Foreign Policy Under Putin: What Does it Mean for India? *Issue Brief, Institute for Security and Development Policy*. 15 July. Available at: <https://www.isdp.eu/content/uploads/2022/07/Brief-July-15-2022-Nivedita-Kapoor.pdf> (accessed 13.11.2022).

¹⁰ Menon R., Rumer E. 2022. Russia and India: A New Chapter. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Washington DC: Publications Department, September. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/20/russia-and-india-new-chapter-pub-87958> (accessed 12.04.2023).

Alexey Kupriyanov points out that the post-Soviet Russia-India partnership differs from that of the Soviet period in that it lacks economic and cultural components, although both countries share the political vision of a multipolar world order: "*Russia either cannot carry out soft power programs in India like it once did in Soviet times or does not understand the value of doing so. ... At the same time, it is widely believed in Russian society that soft power programs in relation to third world countries, conducted by the USSR during the Cold War years, led to a considerable waste of its scarce resources.*"¹¹ Following the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, the sanctions and the Asian "turn" in Russian politics, Russia is pulling up its soft power socks to seek deeper cultural ties with India. There is a concerted effort on the part of both countries to increase cultural diplomacy at the state and non-state levels. For example, the Moscow-based Institut Perevoda (Institute for Translation), established in 2011, provides grants for translating contemporary Russian literature and classics into foreign languages, including numerous Indian languages. Russia also had a significant presence at the International Film Festival in Goa, with a focus on expanding its presence in the Indian film industry through co-productions and location shooting. Similarly, India is encouraged to screen not only Bollywood films but also films in other Indian languages that address social and political issues in Russia. Furthermore, there has been an increased synergy between the two countries in the field of education. However, these cultural diplomacy efforts are not driven solely by political or economic gains in bilateral relations but are also built on time-tested foundations of cultural relations and diplomacy.

In the 1990s, Russia's public diplomacy and soft power efforts were mainly directed towards the West. However, recent changes in the image orientation of both Russia and India are causing concern as these changes may impair their soft power capabilities in the long term. Russia has historically been recognized for its alternative and non-Western approach to modernity since the 18th century. As an empire, Russia was a great power on par with Britain and France during Tsarist times. In the 20th century, it was considered a leader in the world as the embodiment of socialist ideas. Therefore, Russia's adoption of conservatism as its brand of image for soft power purposes erodes its claims to be the "alternative universal," (Palat 1994: 4) a quality that many countries, especially those from the Global South, have admired. Similarly, India is abandoning its "unity in diversity" philosophy for a conservative majoritarian cultural nationalism, which is affecting its soft power capabilities. In the long run, this would also affect the two countries' attempts at nation-branding, as well as their capacity to extract the maximum benefit from their investments in institutions to promote soft power and public diplomacy that they have set up in recent years.

¹¹ Kupriyanov A. 2019. Russia and India: Correcting Damaged Relations. *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, 6 May. Available at: <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/russia-and-india-correcting-damaged-relations> (accessed 12.04.2023).

India and Russia should direct their soft power projections not only towards each other, but also towards wider Asia and the Global South. To further strengthen bilateral relations, they should increase their involvement in areas such as education, scholarships/fellowships, exchanges of scholars, publications and translations, and collaborative cultural activity. Despite their enduring historical relations, both countries need to be cautious of the shift towards a conservative majoritarian cultural nationalism that could potentially hinder their soft power capabilities.

In times when hard power is in action, soft power will play an even more important role as an instrument of foreign policy or public diplomacy. Therefore, it is imperative for India and Russia to ensure that their cultural ties are preserved, regardless of the shifts in their foreign policies.

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«Мягкая сила» в российско-индийских отношениях

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В статье рассматриваются культурные связи между Россией и Индией и их влияние на развитие политических отношений между двумя странами, особенно в XX веке. Культура играла важную роль во взаимоотношениях между Индией и Советским Союзом. Однако после распада СССР Россия была вынуждена сосредоточиться на экономическом развитии, а Индия либерализовала свою экономику, адаптировавшись к изменению политических условий в мире.

«Мягкая сила», включающая ресурсы культуры, политические ценности и внешнюю политику, может быть использована для влияния на другие страны. Россия и Индия начали использовать свои культурные ресурсы в целях публичной дипломатии с 2000-х гг., создавая специальные институты и организации. Однако, несмотря на наличие богатых

культурных ресурсов и институциональной поддержки «мягкой силы», обе страны не показывают высоких результатов в соответствующих рейтингах.

Автор статьи утверждает, что изменения в мировом порядке, идеологические сдвиги и переориентация внешней политики привели Россию и Индию к поиску новых союзников. Хотя культурные связи продолжают играть в отношениях между Россией и Индией важную роль, потенциал ресурсов «мягкой силы» и публичной дипломатии в этих отношениях пока не реализован в полном объеме.

Ключевые слова: «мягкая сила», культурные связи, публичная дипломатия, внешняя политика, рейтинги мягкой силы, международный порядок, индустрии культуры, образование, кино, фестивали

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