AN ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONS AND TRADITIONS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN INDIA: CONTEMPORARY SHIFT AND ITS PROSPECTS

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Abstract: The paper examines the multidisciplinary concept of public diplomacy, its evolution in India, and its impact on the country's global image. The study examines the potential relationships between public diplomacy and nation branding, two related concepts that share common ground, and explores their application prospects in the Indian foreign policy debate. The study further examines the contemporary trends in public diplomacy and their impact on reshaping India's international relations. It analyses the government's and the people's adaptation and resistance to the shift in public diplomacy towards culture and tradition. It further explains how India uses public diplomacy to advance its economic interests and attract foreign investment. The paper examines various public diplomacy initiatives undertaken by the Indian government, as well as the social and rhetorical forces influencing India's efforts to rationalize and legitimize its foreign policy. The role of non-state actors in collaborating with the government has been discussed. The way they use social media platforms, taking various initiatives related to cultural exchange and advocacy for social issues on a global scale, has helped promote a nuanced understanding of India, creating a more favorable image of the country. The media narrative about India's evolving soft power could also shape the nation's reputation and influence how it is perceived internationally. The paper further argues for people's diplomacy, eliminating obstacles to people's access to diplomacy, enhancing people's skills, and exploring solutions for inclusive diplomacy.

Introduction

Public diplomacy has emerged as a vital instrument in states' foreign policy toolkits, enabling them to communicate with and engage foreign populations, thereby promoting mutual understanding and fostering positive relationships. Central to this practice is the concept of nation branding, which focuses on promoting a country's image and values to enhance its global standing. Indian foreign policy has a long history of utilizing public diplomacy and other soft power tools. After its independence, India established high-level diplomatic dialogues, intellectual exchanges, and cultural connections to influence public opinion at home and abroad. Indian Public diplomacy dates back to the days of Chanakya, who advocated listening as one of the most essential traits of an ideal king. Every day, listening to the people remains a significant part of Public Diplomacy in the 21st century. The paper explores the multidisciplinary conceptualization of public diplomacy and its intertwined roles with eight frames and positions: soft power, constructivist perspective, nation branding, media framing, relational and transformational diplomacy, two-way symmetrical model, and cultural and digital diplomacy.

I. Understanding Public Diplomacy

Since the First World War, the term 'public diplomacy' has been used to refer to publicly brokered peace covenants or to the propaganda of the Cold War (Melissen, 2005).

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Public diplomacy is defined as “direct communication with foreign peoples, to affect their thinking and ultimately, that of their governments” (Melissen, 2005). It involves political campaigns, advertising, and public relations (PR) that address the country's social and political incentives, creating a context for foreign policy decisions. Edmund Gullion coined the term "Public Diplomacy" in 1965, and it gradually became recognized as a notable diplomatic practice in most Western nations (Walter R. Roberts, 2006). Public diplomacy has its roots in international relations (IR), beginning with the realist emphasis of power and traditional diplomacy, and further developing into the neoliberal concepts of ‘complex interdependence’ and ‘new institutionalism’ as well as the constructivist focus on culture and identity (Melissen, 2005; Gilboa, 2008).

The evolution of the term underscores the recognition of factors beyond mere power dynamics that influence global interactions.

In India, the Public Diplomacy Division was established in 2006 by the Ministry of External Affairs to promote India's dialogue with the world (MEA, 2024). It strives to effectively project the diverse facets of India through print publications and audiovisual production. Concerning a framework of public diplomacy that represents a country’s projection abroad, Gilboa’s (2000, 2001) three models, i.e., the Domestic PR model, the Nonstate Transnational model, and the Basic Cold War model, have been followed which are borne with distinct variables including goals, major actors-initiators, types of media, means, and techniques. In the basic Cold War model, international broadcasting was used by the two opposing Cold War blocs—the United States and the Soviet Union—to shape favorable public attitudes toward their contending ideologies. Civil society and NGOs are emerging players in international affairs that dictate substantial interdependence among all actors while calling for a revision of the Cold War model (Car et al., 2016). The Nonstate Transnational Model considers group diplomatic activities, particularly the efforts of NGOs within and across national boundaries, their pursuit of reforms through external pressure, and their use of media events and global news networks to cultivate support for their causes.

Various nonstate actors, including NGOs, cultural organizations, and private sector entities, actively promote India’s cultural heritage, democratic values, and economic potential on the global stage. The activities of non-state actors at the grassroot levels, the way they pull social media platforms, undertake various initiatives related to cultural exchange, adopt advocacy for social issues on global scale (Palit, 2018) can effectively counter stereotypes and misinformation about the nation, simultaneously aids to promote a better understanding of India, helping to create a more favorable image of the country.

Organizations such as the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) and the Global Education and Training Institute have been implementing projects to promote Indian arts, traditions, educational programs, and showcase India’s rich heritage, thereby deepening intercultural connections. Organizations such as Mukul Madhav Foundation (MMF) that works to promote gender equality and has established MMF UK to find global support; National Federation of Indian Women(NFIW), affiliated with Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF) made up of women from socialist countries, CREA Feminist human rights, ActionAid India, the Prajnya Trust and many other organizations have been working for women’s rights and women empowerment to prevent gender and sex based violence against women. Similarly, All India Council of Human Rights, Liberties and Social Justice (AICHLS), with branches in India and abroad, Human Rights Watch, International Federation for Human Rights (IFHR), World Organization against Torture (WOAT) are among many that promote human rights literacy and awareness in society and intervene for the protection of it. These NGOs help highlight India’s progress and challenges in the relevant areas. By engaging with international forums and building networks and partnerships, NGOs have drawn international attention to local issues, brought global perspectives to Indian social

challenges, and influenced international discussions (The Role of Sub-state and Non-state Actors, 2018; Kaleidoscope, 2022). NGO advocacy raises awareness and encourages foreign partners and governments to collaborate on solutions, positioning India as a proactive player on the world stage.

Traditional diplomacy involves government-to-government interactions, focusing on political and economic affairs (McClellan, 2004). Arts, education, international broadcasting, and cultural exchange programs were the main tools for steering old public diplomacy. Different governments across the world spent vast sums of money, particularly on education and cultural exchange programs, through the end of the Cold War. The post-9/11 era witnessed a shift in public diplomacy that came to be known as 'new' public diplomacy with a strong foreign policy orientation reflected in terms such as "engagement," "relationship building," or "two-way communications" (Servaes, 2012). New public diplomacy aims to connect directly with the foreign public through cultural exchange, educational programs, knowledge sharing, policy engagement, and media outreach, to create a favorable image of a nation and foster a conducive environment for political and economic relationships (Melissen, 2005). Choi (2019) equates new public diplomacy with people's diplomacy, also known as people-to-people diplomacy. People's diplomacy enables informal communication and interactions between individuals and groups across different nations, promoting goodwill, understanding, and collaboration. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which government officials conduct, people's diplomacy emphasizes grassroots efforts, cultural exchange, and civil society initiatives. In people's diplomacy, people can propose ideas related to foreign policy and implement them, provided the government does not object. Introduced in South Korea in 2017, this approach represents a novel diplomatic trend aimed at advancing democratization and responsiveness to citizens' needs. The key goals of people's diplomacy include building infrastructure for improved communication, facilitating public participation, and strengthening the populace's diplomatic capabilities (Choi, 2019).

Moreover, various non-state, non-governmental, not-for-profit organizations in India work to demystify the world of diplomacy and foreign affairs, engage young people in the challenges of a globalized world, and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships between India and other countries (EEA Technical Report, 2011). The Center for Public Diplomacy and Soft Power (CPDSP), instituted by the India Foundation, advances the study of soft power and public diplomacy through lectures, events, international conferences, workshops, and joint project collaborations. Non state, not for profit, nonpartisan youth driven think tank, Indian Youth Diplomacy Forum, Indian forum for public diplomacy aims to aid diplomacy through young academia; Centre for public Policy Research, Global Policy insights, Global Youth India, the Geostrata, Observer Research Foundation, provide people specially the youth, exposure to careers in international organizations, helping them to understand the realities of a global outlook, make them active participants in diplomacy and foreign affairs (Srivastava, 2022).

In recent years, Indian public diplomacy has shifted from a state-centric to a more humanity-centric approach, reflecting a growing emphasis on the welfare of individuals and communities. The transformation underscores the importance of inclusive development focusing on social justice, health, education and environmental sustainability through a targeted campaign by launching various schemes, e.g., schemes (PMVishwakarma) to support artisans and craftspeople, schemes (stand-up India, PMSVANidhi, national livelihood mission) to support economic activities, schemes (Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan) to bridge the gap in job skills in rural areas and for the poor, schemes (Jan Vikas Jojna) that address multi sectoral development and so on.

Concurrently, India's soft power assets play a crucial role in public diplomacy, enhancing its global standing and improving international collaborations. The paper assesses the soft power assets that nurture the growth of Public Diplomacy in India and investigates various initiatives the Government of India has taken to promote New Public Diplomacy. The study's questions are: 1) How does India's new public diplomacy depart from India's past practices? 2) How has Public Diplomacy in India evolved, and what are the major shifts in its traditions and institutions? 3) How does India's cultural diversity and history influence its public diplomacy strategies?

The objectives of the study pursues are: 1) To understand the evolution of Public Diplomacy in India and its impact on the country's global image, 2) To examine the contemporary trends in public diplomacy and how they have reshaped India's international relations, 3) To analyze the effects of Covid 19 pandemic on Indian Public Diplomacy and its response to global crisis. 4) To investigate how India utilizes public diplomacy to promote economic interests and attract foreign investment.

II. Nation Branding VS Public Diplomacy

Both Public diplomacy and nation branding are connected concepts (Hill, 2003; Anholt, 2008). The government is recognized as the initiator and coordinator of nation branding (Szondi, 2009). On the other hand, public diplomacy has gained greater credibility and visibility in dealing with non-state actors, such as NGOs, than the government has. It is in keeping with the contemporary global climax characterized by violence and extremism, environmental hazards, the outbreak of epidemic viruses, and financial unpredictability, which call for an alliance between state and non-state actors, more collaboration among various partners working within and outside the civil society, including individuals, NGOs, and governments.

Nation branding is conceptualized as the strategic self-presentation of a country's image to build reputational capital**.** Based on the literature (Frederick, 1993; Hill, 2003; Anholt, 2008; Szondi, 2009), six identified areas could serve as the role of Public Diplomacy.

Subsequently, India's public diplomacy functions through six identified areas or appeals that enhance India's global standing by leveraging its cultural richness, emotional narratives, political engagement, regional cooperation, and economic potential. **Cultural appeal** is about retaining the values of a discrete, distinct yet alluring culture with an enriching past. **Emotional appeal**, or how much the country is adored, admired, and appreciated. India's emotional narratives echo the country's historical struggle for independence, its diverse religious tapestry, and its commitment to democracy.

Political appeal encompasses the perception of a country's political environment, its stable democracy, bilateral and multilateral relationships with other countries, and its political leadership. Through International organizations and platforms like the United Nations, as well as through various bilateral engagements, India has advocated for climate change mitigation, counter-terrorism, and sustainable development, and has voiced support for developing nations, promoting a multipolar world. Additionally, India's Act East Policy and strategic partnerships (MEA, 2024) with countries such as the US, Japan, and Australia enhance its political influence in regional and global forums (Ogawa, 2009; Malone, 2011).

Economic appeal comprises general perceptions of India's growth and development, competitiveness, productivity, and investment risk. Initiatives aimed at skill development and technological cooperation (Pethiyagoda, 2013) enhance India's attractiveness as a partner for economic growth.

Regional appeal encompasses the country's perception as having high standards in its transactions with the global community, adherence to best practices, and effective

environmental procedures. Regionally, India plays a pivotal role in South Asia, acting as a stabilizing force. Initiatives such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) demonstrate India's commitment to regional cooperation and development (Raghavan, 2024). India strengthens its ties with neighboring countries by offering assistance in areas such as infrastructure, education, and disaster relief. For India, the neighborhood has remained a primary diplomatic pillar of its foreign and security policies since 2014. By adopting the Neighborhood First Policy (MEA, 2024), India focuses on the benefits its immediate neighbors could derive from India's economic growth and development. India has been investing in building a stable and secure neighborhood based on cooperation, improved infrastructure, connectivity, people-to-people contacts, and an outcome-oriented approach.

Ham (2008) associated nation branding with constructivism, arguing that customs, ideals, values, norms, and identities are social constructs upheld and recognized by relevant actors, with debates primarily conducted in the media. Constructivism offers a valuable lens for understanding the interplay among public diplomacy, nation branding, and media, focusing on how they shape nations' identities and relationships and resonate with foreign audiences' values and beliefs. According to constructivist thought, public diplomacy is a mechanism through which countries can construct and communicate their identities to the world. Nations and non-state actors constantly engage in dialogue and cultural exchange to build mutual understanding and trust (Gilboa, 2007). The narrative shaped through media is crucial in this process, as it helps establish a nation's reputation and influences how it is perceived internationally. As countries navigate an increasingly interconnected world, the importance of strategic communication and effective branding can't be overstated. The media is a crucial tool, facilitating communication and disseminating narratives that could influence public perception and policy (Palit, 2023). By framing issues and shaping discourse, the media not only amplifies public diplomacy messages but also serves as a platform for diverse voices, enabling more inclusive participation in global dialogues.

III . India's New Public Diplomacy: A Departure from Past Practices

Public diplomacy involves engaging with a foreign audience to promote national interests, strengthen cultural ties, and build mutual understanding. Traditional Indian public diplomacy has focused heavily on bilateral relations, cultural exchanges, and soft power initiatives, such as yoga (Mazumdar, 2018), Bollywood, and other cultural endeavors. While these methods remain essential, India is now expanding its repertoire to address contemporary global challenges and opportunities.

In recent years, India has significantly evolved its approach to public diplomacy, reflecting broader changes in global dynamics in congruence with national aspirations. This transformation marks a departure from traditional practices, emphasizing a more proactive, multifaceted, and technology-driven strategy.

India's current approach is characterized by proactive engagement, unlike the reactive stance of the past, which was initiated through a campaign targeting specific global issues. India's strategic partnerships and collaborations with countries such as Australia, Japan, African countries, and Afghanistan in defense, energy, trade, and technologies signify a shift towards a more relational and transformational form of diplomacy (Naidu, 2008; Ogawa, 2009; Malone, 2011).

India's new diplomacy actively engages with its overseas citizens (Parameswaran, 2017), encouraging them to act as cultural ambassadors. Programs aim to foster connections with the

Indian community abroad and to help promote India's narrative worldwide. India has harnessed social media and digital platforms to reach a younger audience globally. Initiatives such as the Digital India campaign (DEITY report, 2024) showcase technological advancement, fostering a modern image of the country.

India's new public diplomacy reflects a strategic recalibration that resonates with contemporary global realities. India is redefining its role on the world stage by embracing technologies that engage its diaspora and focusing on collaborative global governance. This evolution enhances India's soft power and positions it as a key player in addressing the global challenges, marking a significant departure from past diplomatic practices.

The **New Indian Public Diplomacy** has been familiarized since 2000 and departs from India's past practice in three key ways (Hall, 2012). The Ministry of External Affairs has employed and coordinated several new initiatives under the banner of New Indian Public Diplomacy. India's new public diplomacy seeks to forge a bond with the politically enthusiastic youth at home. New public diplomacy's quest for new audiences encompasses Indian diaspora communities overseas, neighboring countries, and key opinion formers in resource-rich states of the Global South, including those in the developing world (Parameswaran, 2017). Secondly, the Indian Government is endeavoring to make India's foreign policy-making process more active and accessible to the public, with an emphasis on incessant engagement in dialogue and interaction with groups outside the diplomatic class and political elite of New Delhi. Thirdly, the new public diplomacy has used social media rather than traditional media to reach new audiences.

IV. Contemporary Trends in Public Diplomacy in India

In India, Narendra Modi's premiership has brought in the "de-elitification" of elite practices in diplomatic traditions. Present implications in diplomacy reflect the civilizational greatness, as a politically focused approach to Hindu revivalism at the helm of rich and glorious India, rather than Western ideologies that accompany hyper-masculine conceptions of international security.

India's diplomatic identity received a shift with revisioning some oblivious practices and an outwardly innocent celebration of Indian culture like the sponsored Hindi events at Indian embassies; the Indian Council of World Affairs publishing the very first Hindi-language book; and organizing the first Hindi-language foreign policy conference, the prime minister's conference for heads of the mission held in Hindi, amid the struggle of ambassadors to speak Hindi (Huju, 2022); the celebration of a significant religious festival Kumbh Mela, one of the world's largest religious gatherings attracts millions of pilgrims from across India and abroad, held every 12 years at four rotating locations in India. The Government of India has leveraged the Kumbh Mela to promote India's soft power, showcasing the country's spiritual traditions, hospitality, and organizational capabilities through diplomatic channels. The Indian government has invited international delegates and scholars to attend the mela, facilitating cultural exchanges and discussions around spirituality, wellness, and sustainable tourism (Ministry of Tourism, GOI, 2024). This outreach aims to enhance India's image as a spiritual hub, foster a deeper understanding of Hindu practices worldwide, and thereby educate global audiences about the significance of Hindu symbolism.

India's rich art and crafts heritage is another avenue for public diplomacy. The Indian government has been actively promoting Hindu artifacts, including sculptures, paintings, and textiles, through exhibitions and cultural festivals worldwide. Cultural exhibitions abroad often feature renowned artisans and craftsmen who demonstrate their skills. Furthermore, such artistic initiatives contribute to economic diplomacy by attracting international markets for Indian crafts.

Premier Modi insists on visits to Hindu and Buddhist temples as part of his foreign trip itinerary and chooses Hindu artifacts, such as the religious tract and the Bhagavad Gita, as gifts to his political counterparts (Srinivas, 2019), demonstrating a concern for Hindu leanings and an effort to leverage India's existing soft power assets. The Bhagavad Gita, the foundation of Hindu philosophy, addresses universal themes of duty, righteousness, and reality, resonating with diverse audiences worldwide across religions and cultures. It has become an essential object of public diplomacy initiatives in India.

V. A Shift in Public Diplomacy towards Culture and Tradition: Adaptation and Resistance

The new trends made a cultural–linguistic preference for Hindi as the "authentically" Indian expression over English (Huju, 2022). This shift in diplomacy, which involves disapproving of the use of expressive English in most official diplomatic outcomes, is considered a belated attempt to decolonize the minds of foreign audiences by speaking English —the language of former colonizers. Simultaneously, it serves the nationally contentious posture of strengthening Hindi. This language is predominant in northern India's "Hindi belt." This move aligns with several changes to diplomatic training, as diplomats are expected to follow the mandate of the "Ayush" ministry, established in 2014 (MoA, 2014), alongside other indigenous modalities. Newly recruited diplomats are trained to promote Ayurveda and homeopathy, whereas yoga is accorded particular centrality, with academic and physical classes to prepare future diplomats to promote it abroad. Ayurveda's emphasis on holistic well-being and sustainability resonates with global audiences' concerns about the side effects of modern medical practices.

Diplomats are trained to advocate for more Indian culture, consciously or unconsciously approving of an instruction of 'aggressive superiority' that promotes a provincial-minded Indianness while rejecting 'foreign' as culturally corrupt.

In February 2020, the Foreign Service Institute, a training center for diplomats established in 1986, was renamed as the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, in honor of the late BJP minister of external affairs (Huju, 2022).

Historically, the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) represents the social hierarchies of an urbane, anglicized, English-speaking elite, which has been dominated by men from select upper-caste, upper-class families, with elite degrees from Oxford or St Stephen's College in Delhi.

In a country where only 10 percent of Indians speak English (Rukmini, 2019), this figure staunchly echoes class, caste, and educational inequalities. The English of diplomats from less privileged backgrounds, whose accents are deemed 'too Indian', does not match the exacting standards of diplomatic poeticism. The current shift in the promotion of less privileged diplomats thus contests the idea that the choice of professional language is merely instrumental in a diplomatic circle; instead, what matters most is the sense of comfort, which is realized with new cohorts, often with rural roots and provincial education. This practice leads to the 'democratization' of India's civil services through the diversification of cadre intake (Huju, 2022). The new IFS cadre is gradually becoming more reflective of India as a whole and, thus, more likely to represent rural India and small towns in exerting their values, showing a greater consciousness of who they are, both religiously and culturally, and a shift in class and caste (Huju, 2022). Including diplomats from small towns and rural backgrounds enriches diplomatic discourse while ensuring adequate representation of India's rural narratives and challenges in international forums. This representation aligns with the concept of people's diplomacy, the Indian Government's vision of making diplomacy accessible and reliable to every Indian, regardless of their geographic and demographic background.

VI. Soft Power: Sub-sets of Public Diplomacy

Soft power is considered a geopolitical tool, the value of which has been recognized by the Indian government since independence, but the effort and determination to use it to further India's foreign policy goals have been largely ad hoc (Pant, 2015).

The term “soft power” is defined by Joseph Nye, who coined it in the late 1980s, as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion, resulting in a more favorable public opinion and credibility abroad” (Nye, 2004; Malhotra, 2015). The interventions of the previous decade have highlighted the limitations of the use of force, leading to a subsequent resurgence in the importance of soft power as a foreign policy tool that can induce other states to endorse a country’s agenda and interests worldwide (Malhotra, 2015). Contemporary India’s key values and institutions, such as democracy, secularism, federalism, and the official recognition of multiple languages, hold promise for managing multiethnic, multireligious, multicultural societies, especially in the developing world (Paul, 2014).

VII. Soft Power Assets and Cultural Diplomacy

The idea of India exhibiting a secular character is culturally branded with assets like Bollywood, Ayurveda, and Yoga, which lie at the heart of cultural diplomacy. The renowned ancient civilization of India not only nurtures pulsating democratic values but also serves as a source of inspiration to the young workforce and a rapidly growing economy, laying the foundation for promoting Indian foreign policy. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations has promoted Ayurveda and yoga since its establishment in 1950. The UN has observed International Yoga Day since 2015, portraying India as a caring, gentle, and positive cultural force in international affairs (Martin, 2015; Mazumdar, 2018). Yoga practices stimulate the ancient Indian image connected with the past school of learning, meditation, health, and well-being. Social media is full of stories and photos of people from all creeds, colors, and nationalities sharing their yoga practices.

India’s diaspora community is another key focus area for the UN.

India’s multidimensional civilizational assets possess significant soft power (Rao, 2016; Chaulia, 2016; The Hindu, 2018). The peaceful coexistence of atheists and religionists represents a rich intellectual discourse and a cynical tradition. With a peace-generating ethos, Bhakti (Devotion) and the Sufi movement of medieval India have been spreading secular, eclectic ideas and practices across the nation. The major religious practices in India, such as Hinduism, and existing minority religions like Sikhism, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, and Christianity, which are known for their peace-generating ideas, are among India's key religious soft power assets.

India has been a strong advocate of world peace; this idea has been reflected in the doctrines and practices of India’s ancient and modern heroes, including Lord Buddha, Emperor Ashoka the Great, Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great, and Mahatma Gandhi (Paul, 14). Currently, India’s sportspersons have been attempting to harmonize India’s relationship with neighboring countries through sports diplomacy. Cricket diplomacy, in the form of test matches between India and Pakistan, has sought to lower tensions between the two neighboring countries while also promoting India’s bilateral relationships with other countries (Mullen, 2015).

Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of ahimsa and nonviolence, as well as Jawaharlal Nehru's nonalignment philosophy (Paul, 2014), remain pertinent in contemporary international relations and remain key soft power assets of Indian foreign policy.

The blend of diverse values and cultures of Indian freedom fighters and philosopher-thinkers, such as Swami Vivekananda, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru (Jagannathan, 2019), as well as Indian values like Unity in diversity, has contributed to shaping a positive perception of India across the world.

The success of the Incredible India tourism campaign (Ministry of Tourism, GOI, 2021), which promotes the nation as a lucrative investment destination through words and slogans, has advanced both cultural and economic diplomacy by creating an impression that attracts global business to India. Similarly, the Make in India campaign introduced a range of economic reforms, including automatic approvals and single-window clearances. It reduced tariffs intended to entice large industries to invest in India by harnessing the vast pool of cheap labor, both skilled and unskilled, in line to improve infrastructure and establish a robust intellectual property regime (Make in India report, 2023; Pethiyagoda, 2013).

Vegetarian Indian cuisine is now globally popular and one of the most preferred international foods in the UK. More people worldwide now prefer vegetarian diets to help prevent ailments like heart disease and cancer. Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of India, can compete globally as a valuable alternative to conventional healing for specific ailments.

The books of many foremost writers, as well as the literature of Indian expatriates such as V.S. Naipaul, Aravind Adiga, Salman Rushdie, Abraham Verghese, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, and Kiran Desai, are now globally recognized texts.

India's fashion and apparel designs also have corresponding soft power potentials (Pant, 2015). The idea of fusion holds great promise in the globalizing landscape, which has further helped promote prominent classical and modern dance forms of India, such as Kathak, Sattriya, Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, and Mohiniyattam. Notably, Western artists such as Shakira, Michael Jackson, the Beatles, and Madonna have incorporated elements of Indian music and dance into their performances. Bhangra, an upbeat dance and music form, is now popular at many bridal celebrations, other parties, and festivals in the West, especially in North America. A considerable number of Indian musical traditions, such as ghazal, Karnatik, Hindustani, and instrumental music that utilizes the sarod, tabla, and flute, have been globally appreciated (Tharoor, 2011).

VIII. Populist Strategies and Strategic Diplomacy

The role of the Prime Minister of India in branding the nation through soft power interventions is always vital in redefining India's foreign policy (Mohan, 2015; Lakshmi, 2015). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's spectacular rise as a populist leader has placed foreign policy debates at the center stage of the electoral campaign. Modi has given primacy to domestic political considerations while engaging with the public, informing them of the Indian context and foreign policy, and attempting to shape public perception of India among International audiences. The popularity of programs like Mann ki Baat and the selfie trend has become part of the right-wing ruling Party in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and has shaped its domestic policy, outlining the party's profile while simultaneously fostering direct contact with citizens within and outside India. Modi's selfie trend is widely featured on Twitter, which contributes to his popularity among the youth across the nation and the border.

IX. Media Resources: Indian and Foreign Presence

The media serve as the primary channel through which messages are communicated and perceptions are shaped. Traditional media such as television and newspapers, alongside digital platforms, facilitate the dissemination of information, enabling nations to effectively project

their narratives. The speed of social media, user-generated content, and grassroots movements has influenced the shaping of public opinion, making media a dynamic player in public diplomacy.

The state-run media outlets of India have a substantial foreign presence. The External Services of All India Radio (AIR) commenced in 1939 to counter Axis propaganda in the immediate region, and currently broadcasts in 27 languages to more than 100 countries. After Independence, AIR has expanded its broadcasting reach to include English, French, Burmese, Chinese, Dari, Baluchi, Indonesian, Nepali, Arabic, Persian, Pashto, Russian, Swahili, Thai, Sinhala, Tibetan, and 11 Indian languages. The External Services Broadcasts in English are more extensive, with eight hours of broadcasts to 79 countries on shortwave radio daily, compared to one or two hours of broadcasts in other languages (AIR External Services Division, 2024).

The role of Indian Media in public diplomacy can't be overstated. Through media resources in India, including public service broadcasting and other private channels and networks, the government effectively communicates India's cultural heritage, values, and policies to the world. Indian news channels, digital platforms, and social media serve as vital tools for disseminating information about India's cultural achievements and diplomatic initiatives. The global outreach of English-language news outlets, such as The Times of India and Hindustan Times, along with Digital platforms like The Wire and Scroll, provides international audiences with insights into India's sociopolitical landscape. Doordarshan diplomacy, best known for leveraging India's national public broadcaster to expand the country's cultural and diplomatic reach, emphasizes the preservation of its rich cultural heritage through programming that highlights traditional art, history, and cultural narratives. By showcasing documentaries, travelogues, and cultural programming, these channels, including Doordarshan, private networks, and the YouTube Channel of India Public Diplomacy division, serve not only as platforms for historical preservation but also facilitate cultural exchange and create understanding between people of India and of foreign countries (Live TV; Prasar Bharati, 2024; Indian Diplomacy, 2024).

Doordarshan attempted to bring the tales of bravery of more than 550 freedom fighters to life by broadcasting the Historical TV show "Swaraj- Bharat Ke Swatantrata Sangram ki Samagra Gatha," a mega show comprising 75 episodes that celebrated 75 years of independence (Doordarshan, 2024). A two-part documentary series Dharohar Bharat Ki - Punruthaan Ki Kahani (Haritage of India, A Tale of Revival) focusing on the cultural and civilizational roots and ancestors, is narrated by Kamiya Jani, founder of Curly tales and social media influencer exploring India's rich history and culture focuses on the efforts being taken by the government to preserve, propagate and rejuvenate them (DD India, 2024).

The YouTube channel Indian Diplomacy features a range of documentaries, including Palasi ki Jung, Kashmir Votes Hindu Nectar: Spiritual Wanderings in India, Chandrayaan, India-Afghanistan: An Enduring Friendship, India Votes, Forum for India-Pacific Cooperation, and A Short History of Indian Spices. Cityscapes: Calcutta, India & Africa - A time-tested partnership, the International Day of Yoga effectively presents India's socio-cultural diversity and heritage, its political and democratic ethos, and its achievements and accomplishments in bilateral ties to a global audience. These documentary films, commissioned by the Ministry of External Affairs over the last three decades, showcase different facets of India (Indian Diplomacy, 2024).

Some of the documentary films uploaded on YouTube by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, such as Beyond tradition, (2009), Pride of India, Mallika Sarabhai, Kuchipuri revisited (1998) Rhythmic echoes and reflections, (2003), Kalarippyat (2002) Bamboo flute (2000) Sanchari (1991) to name a few explore the universality of various dance forms, a holistic view of classical dance forms as well as contemporary dances in India, martial art of

Kerela and so on. Video streaming platforms Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Public Broadcaster Doordarshan streamed "Bharat Hain Hun," an animated series on Indian freedom fighters, on October 15, 2023, as part of the celebrations of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (DD India YouTube Channel; Public Diplomacy Division, MEA, GoI).

Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram enable direct engagement with foreign audiences, facilitating real-time communication and outreach.

India's soft power extends beyond culture and encompasses intellectual engagement. Through collaborations with foreign institutions, India enhances its global intellectual footprint. Partnerships between Indian Universities and foreign institutions facilitate research exchanges, collaborative projects, and programs focused on Indian philosophy, history, and contemporary issues, thereby encouraging scholarly dialogue. Organizations like the Overseas Friends of BJP, Indian American Forum (IAF), and Indo American Community of USA (IACU) engage in advocacy, tourism promotion, economic cooperation, and promote secular heritage, cultural values of India, aid to foster understanding with the community through cultural events and public programs, support health initiatives, various educational and vocational programs.

X. ICCR and ICWA: Cultural and Intellectual Linkages

The Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR), founded in 1950, is one of the premier institutions for public diplomacy, facilitating academic and cultural exchanges through its 14 regional headquarters in India and 24 centers abroad. Another 14 centers have been established in Europe, as well as in Paris, Washington, East Asia, Southeast Asia (including Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur), Tokyo, and Africa. The ICCR, through its activities such as displaying and exhibiting art, hosting book fairs, and organizing film festivals, intends to present an image of a plural Indian society (ICCR's Global Presence: Foreign Cultural Centres, 2024). These centers continue their associations with local NGOs of India, which are engaged in the promotion of Indian art and culture, music, literature, yoga, and dance, and joined hands with these local and transnational organizations to impart Hindi teaching to both the Indian and foreign public (Rana, 2010; Martin, 2015).

For academics, the ICCR offers 30 fellowships each year at Indian universities and provides travel expenditures for 20 eminent guests to India (The Many Scholarship Schemes of ICCR, 2024). It also supports short-term (3 to 6 months) and long-term (2 years) chairs for 30 Indian scholars at foreign universities. Half of the chairs are dedicated to teaching Hindi and other Indian languages, while scholars of Indian history, international relations, and peace studies occupy the other chairs. The Chairs have been expanded to include 49 additional members, covering the regions of Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. (ICCR Chairs in Foreign Countries, 2024)

On the other hand, the ICWA (Indian Council of World Affairs), an "institution of national importance" as recognized by an Act of Parliament in 2001, is an independent think tank established in 1943. ICWA has been engaged in various research activities, including publishing research papers on foreign affairs, organizing seminars, and conducting outreach. Since 2001, the Council has signed a memorandum of understanding with 19 other institutions, including three Indian institutions and 16 institutions from the United Arab Emirates, China, Russia, and Malaysia (MEA Annual Reports, 2015-16).

XI. Establishment of (MOIA): Institution of Public Diplomacy

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), initially known as the Ministry of Non-Resident Indians' Affairs, was established in 2004 (MOIA, 2023) to attend to the interests of diaspora communities or overseas Indians and showcase the new India to them and foreign publics as well (Mani and Varadarajan, 2005).

In 2006, the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) scheme was introduced to allow individuals of Indian origin abroad to enter India visa-free. In 2008, the Tracing Your Roots service was established to assist diaspora members in identifying their genealogies and tracing their families and relatives in India (Jain, 2015; Varadarajan, 2010).

MOIA runs the "Know India Program" (MOIA, 2023), a three-week orientation for diaspora youth aged 18–26 and a studentship program that includes grants and scholarships for 100 diaspora students to attend Indian universities. The Program is designed to promote awareness among diaspora youth of the diverse aspects of life in India and the country's progress across various fields. The Persons of Indian Origin University was established in Bangalore by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in 2009.

XII. Diaspora Diplomacy

The diaspora strategically advances foreign policy goals and claims a stake in India's growth story. Well-structured diaspora bonds would directly finance key development priorities of the country they hail from, demonstrate their long-distance patriotism, and bring entrepreneurs and concrete economic benefits (Rana, 2009). The Indian diaspora population currently comprises a total of 27 million individuals, concentrated in approximately 130 countries worldwide, and has occupied key positions in public and private institutions across the globe. Many Indian migrants are well placed in South Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, and the Caribbean Basin. According to the World Bank's projection, India became the top recipient of diaspora remittances, receiving $89.4 billion in 2021. In 2022, remittance flows from the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) community to India surged to $ 100 billion, up 12 percent from 2021, when they increased by 7.5 percent (World Bank Report, 2021; 2022). Indian Government, with the pursuit to boost the diaspora community, espoused several policies from time to time, such as Made in India, VAJRA (Visiting Advanced Joint Research)[1], a dedicated program exclusively for overseas academicians and scientists, NRI (Person of Indian Origin), PIO (Overseas Citizen of India), and OCI, to work as adjunct/visiting faculty for a specific period in India (Jain, 2015). The Government of India has also implored NRIs to invest in leading programs, including Digital India, Swachh Bharat, Clean Ganga Campaign, and Skill Development Initiatives.

XIII. Bollywood and Diplomacy

Bollywood movies are already being leveraged as "soft power" to boost India's economy and shape the world's perception of Indian values. Bollywood movies are popular in the UK, Canada, Germany, France, South Africa, the Middle East, and other countries worldwide where large numbers of the Indian diaspora reside and settle. Targeting the diaspora market for Indian films is more profitable than pursuing domestic Indian market ventures. Bollywood movies such as Veer-Zaara, PK, Chalte Chalte, Mohabbatein, Koi Mil Gaya, Kal Ho Na Ho, and others have gained immense popularity in Indonesia, China, and Saudi Arabia (Zaman, 2009; Gustanto, 2017; Yau, 2018; Gupta, 2022; Proctor, 2022). India and Indonesia have been

[1] Home Run: NRIs' share in realty market doubles post-pandemic. The Economic Times, June 7, 2023

exploring promising opportunities for co-production and shooting in both countries, with a focus on developing scripts and common screenplays in recent years.

In Saudi Arabia and many Western Asian countries, Bollywood tickets are sold for up to 1 billion (Proctor, 2022).

Nowadays, globalization and the advent of digital technology platforms such as OTT (over-the-top) platforms have spread India's culture through Bollywood movies. Bollywood films in the 1990s marked total domination of the urban milieu. Bollywood films from the 1990s onward churned out high-tech, glossy fantasies that invariably featured exotic foreign locales and heroines in Western clothing, including shorts, skirts, and the like.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the slogan "Be Indian, buy Indian" could not be fully realized, as the nation-building projects of the time often prioritized "be Indian but buy and flaunt foreign" products. Films like Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge (1995), Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1997), Dil To Pagal Hai (1998), and Mohabbatein (2003) are a few names that were appropriated by Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) (Therwath, 2010). Incipient hybrid aesthetics combined the glamour and glitz of an urbanized lifestyle with family values featured in many Bollywood films of that era. The NRI happens to be a new aspiring model who has thrived in the finest of both worlds —material affluence —while still retaining Indian values and standards. Raised in Hollywood but firmly grounded in Bollywood, the chunk of directors, writers, musicians, choreographers, and all who are in the film crew, including the art directors, editors, stylish, distributors, and publicists served an ingenious concoction of Indian values draped in northern Yankee influence and persuasiveness (Chopra, 2011). They are opinionated and aware, and often borrow their jargon from the West.

Bollywood in the 1990s became a signifier of India's national worth or pride on behalf of NRIs (Therwath, 2010). Bollywood unlocked the market for Western "cultural' commodities in India by commercializing capital-driven spectacles, including basketball, Valentine's Day, and unabashedly exhibited brand names like Reebok, Adidas, Pepsi, Levi's, etc. At the same time, Bollywood movies perpetuated provincial and parochial Indian customs, such as Karva Chauth and Daandiya, turning them into cultural capital and making them a festival of consumption and a pan-Indian asset.

Beyond entertainment, nowadays the audience looks for social values, optimism, and hope. Contemporary Bollywood movies with a profound storyline have highlighted cases that resonate with the spectator's real-life context, increased awareness of similar social issues, and conveyed social messages. In a good film, a good story has no borders, no language, and no ethnic boundaries. Audiences, regardless of age, from young to old, are drawn to well-crafted, content-driven films. Spectators would like to be drawn to themes and storylines that can engage and entertain them.

XIV. Digital Diplomacy

First described in 2001, Digital Diplomacy is revolutionizing public diplomacy institutions by shifting from a "Need to Know" tradition to a "Need to Share" practice, providing Governments and Diplomats with the scope to reevaluate their roles in diplomacy (Natarajan, 2014).

In conjunction with the Center for Media, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) inaugurated a new web portal in 2001 to improve Indian Public Diplomacy by increasing its engagement with the web 5. MEA released the first 'tweet' on July 8, 2010, along with a string of YouTube videos, a portfolio of photographs on Flickr, and a dedicated Facebook page. Besides these, the Ministry has also registered its presence on Flickr, SoundCloud, and Google+. On Instagram, MEA has crossed 896000 followers in 2023.

The Ministry's Facebook page and the Indian Diplomacy page collectively have over 4 million followers. The Ministry's official spokesperson's Twitter handle (@MEAIndia) has organically reached 2.3 million followers, while the @IndianDiplomacy handle reached 1.5 million in 2023, organically rather than through paid promotions.

The MEA Missions' social media outreach has grown from passport services to crises and consular queries. The mission's social media handles share innovative videos and graphics. Prime Minister Modi's Twitter accounts @NarendraModi (personal account) and @PMOIndia (official account) are among the top ten most followed individuals on Twitter in the world, according to the list released by the World of Statistics on its official Twitter handle. PM Modi secured the eighth position in the list, with more than 90 million followers [2] on Twitter, making him the most-followed active politician worldwide on the platform.

India's Minister of Commerce and Industry maintains an active Twitter presence and promptly responds to business queries. This allows businesspeople to avoid excessive red tape and corruption, which still plague many Indian systems. The website (http://www.makeinindia.com/home) reaches thousands of influencers worldwide. It initiates seeded conversations with them, providing the campaign with incredible reach: 4.6 billion Global digital impressions, 804,690 overall mentions, and 3.4 million Facebook fans.

Consular diplomacy has undoubtedly reaped significant benefits from digital diplomacy. India's Minister of External Affairs maintains an active online presence and is followed on Twitter by millions of people. [3]

Social media has made the government more responsive to the public and engaged the public in foreign policy decisions. It enables swift responses to common inquiries regarding visas and passports, as well as more serious crises overseas, streamlining communication and enhancing public service efficiency.

Social media serve as a powerful platform for showcasing, amplifying, and promoting Indian soft power globally. In South Africa, Zulu performers celebrate and showcase Kathak, a classical Indian dance form. Meanwhile, a Senegalese group entertains audiences at local clubs with Bollywood hits, underscoring the widespread appeal of Indian music. Indian-themed soap operas have also gained popularity on Brazilian TV, exemplifying the cultural exchange.

In the academic realm, a Syrian scholar has translated the epic Mahabharata into Arabic, bridging cultural gaps and enriching its tradition in the Arab world.

XV. Other Significant Initiatives at the Diplomatic Front

Public diplomacy plays a crucial role in how nations engage with the digital community, shaping perceptions and promoting mutual understanding. In India, several key initiatives, including Atmanirbhar Bharat, the Mudra scheme, and the National Health Mission (Report of Ministry of Finance, 2020; NDHM, 2020; Kaleidoscope, 2022) exemplify how public diplomacy can be harnessed to promote national identity, economic self-sufficiency, and social welfare.

Launched in 2021, Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav commemorates India's 75th anniversary of independence. India has been celebrating the accomplishment of foreign policy objectives (Pant, 2015), i.e., anti-colonialism, anti-racism, NAM (Non-Aligned Movement), Panchsheel

[2] PM Modi now has over 90 million followers on Twitter. (July 20, 2023). The Times of India, Retrieved from https://m.timesofindia.com/india/pm-modi-now-has-over-90-million-followers-on-twitter/articles how/101969966.cms

[3] XP Division, Ministry of External Affairs, I. (2015). Indian Diplomacy at Work # digital diplomacy MEA @ Social Media.

(Bhasin, 2008; Theis et al., 2017), Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, and Sabka Vishwas (Kohli, 2018). The Amrit Mahotsav initiative celebrates India's rich history, cultural diversity, and achievements, glorifies national and local accomplishments, and promotes national pride. The Mahotsav serves as a platform to showcase India's heritage, inviting global citizens to experience the country's rich traditions, diverse arts, and profound philosophies.

Another initiative, Atmanirbhar Bharat or Self-Reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat Package-3, 2020), aims to bolster the country's economy by reducing import dependence and enhancing domestic production. This initiative aligns with India's broader public diplomacy strategy by showcasing its economic resilience and sustainability commitments. Through the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, Public Diplomacy aims to position India as a global manufacturing hub. The initiative encompasses policies that encourage foreign investment, promote local industries, and create job opportunities. By engaging with global partners, India showcases its economic potential and strengthens bilateral relations, which are crucial for promoting trade and investment.

The MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency Ltd.) scheme, launched in 2015, is pivotal to public diplomacy and aligns with the Atmanirbhar Bharat objectives. It illustrates the country's commitment to inclusive growth and empowerment by promoting entrepreneurship among marginalized communities and providing financial support to micro and small entrepreneurs. Internally, India can highlight its efforts to empower citizens and drive economic growth through grassroots innovation. The scheme is a model for developing nations, promoting knowledge sharing and collaboration in entrepreneurial development. The Government of India (GOI) has launched several economic packages to provide policy and financial support to India's micro, small, and medium enterprises, as well as cottage industries. The MUDRA scheme is designed to provide MUDRA loans of up to Rs 10 lakh to non-corporate, non-farming small micro-enterprises.

The GOI has undertaken Numerous reforms under the aegis of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, reinforcing the Make in India initiative to attract foreign investment and improve the ease of doing business in India. The pharmaceutical industry in India is the third-largest by volume and the 14th-largest by value. Indian low-cost, high-quality medicines are in high demand worldwide. The Indian pharma industry manufactures and supplies medicines for the Indian and global markets. Indian pharmaceutical exports have reached more than 200 countries worldwide. Moreover, India is among the top 5 military spenders and is one of the world's emerging defense manufacturing hubs. Two defense industrial corridors have been established in India to enhance the domestic production of defense and aerospace-related items.

The food processing industry in India is recognized globally as the largest producer of milk, the largest consumer, producer, and exporter of spices, and the second-largest producer of food grains, fruits, and vegetables. With the Make in India initiative and the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan,[4] The government has intended to reinvigorate the micro food processing units in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has initiated the Vocal for Local campaign, inspiring the launch of the PM FME scheme on 29th June 2020, with an outlay of INR10,000 crore to support the country's unorganized micro food processing units. [5]

The national digital health mission represents a transformative approach to healthcare in India, focusing on digital integration to achieve better health outcomes. It envisions a national digital health ecosystem in India that supports universal health coverage, inclusive, accessible,

[4] See more about Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan in Atmanirbhar Bharat Package https://www.indiabudget.gov.in

[5] Make in India, about Us. Make in India, Government of India, New Delhi, India. (2023). Retrieved from http://www.makeinindia.com/home

affordable, timely, efficient, and safe. By enhancing accessibility and efficiency in healthcare delivery, the NDHM is a significant aspect of India's public diplomacy in the health sector (NDHM, 2020). In September 2018, the Ayushman Bharat scheme was launched, making one lakh fifty thousand (1,50,000) health and wellness centers accessible across India to provide free essential drugs and diagnostic services. Globally, India can position itself as a leader in health innovation, showcasing its advancements in digital health technologies. India strengthens its position in global health governance by collaborating with other nations on health initiatives and sharing best practices.

India's maritime segment has been the backbone of the country's trade. However, in response to international attention on ocean-ward issues concerning freedom of navigation, maritime domain awareness, naval modernization, and so on, India has shifted its focus.

A roadmap has been prepared to increase India's overall port capacity to more than 3300 million metric tonnes per annum under the Sagarmala program, which aims to integrate South Asian infrastructure. India has adopted global benchmarks to improve the efficiency and productivity of 12 major ports under the Unnati project.[6] Although India's maritime power is growing, the challenges are looming large. Hence, the aspirational and pragmatic Sagar approach, a vision on security and growth for the Indian ocean region (IoR), recognizes the interest of good order at sea for countries and small island nations, which will provide them maritime safety and help to deal with challenges such as terrorism, illegal fishing, drugs and contraband trafficking, piracy, illegal migration etc. India is committed to deepening economic cooperation and strengthening maritime security capacities, as well as collective action for peace and security, with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and other littoral countries (MEA, GOI, 2020; Mishra, 2020). India is also committed to respecting international maritime rules and the peaceful resolution of maritime issues. It contributes to creating a climate of trust and transparency in the Indian Ocean region.

XVI. Public Diplomacy and National Image During Crisis

India has enhanced its international legitimacy by developing vaccines (Surie, 2021). Yet, the ploy of restricting access to social media during political unrest poses a significant threat to the image of the world's largest democracy, especially among the diaspora who remain plugged into India's public sphere. In this context, emerging social media play a key role in communication and spreading the messages of the nation across the world (Hocking and Melissen, 2015; Manor, 2016).

The crucial role that social media has played in contemporary public diplomacy efforts and practices can't be denied. However, certain practices of the Government of India, which they legitimized on the grounds of maintaining social order, e.g., the internet shutdown and threatening local employees of Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp with arrest, have contributed equally to abridging the nation's international legitimacy.

The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the rift between the nation and the state (Manor and Pamment, 2022). People all over the world took to the streets to protest against authorities and voice their dissatisfaction and discontent via social media. The polished narratives and harmonious promotional materials manufactured and presented by the state for national branding clash with the realities faced by ordinary citizens. This disconnect has led to a multiplicity of competing national identities, often contradictory accounts of what a nation supposedly is, each vying for recognition and legitimacy against the official state version (Manor and Pamment, 2022). A new era of transnational non-state protest has predominantly

[6] Make in India, about Us. Make in India, Government of India, New Delhi, India. (2023). Retrieved from http://www.makeinindia.com/home

disputed the content rather than the form of the nation. Moreover, issues such as farmers' protests over the agriculture bill, the government's crackdown on protestors, attacks on minorities, and violence in North-East India and Jammu & Kashmir during 2019-2024, (The Hindu report, 2022; Morton 2022; Pradhan 2024; AlJazzeera, 2024; BBC News, 2024). have been able to garner international support and have evolved into a multilateral issue.

Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the idea of nationhood as a crucial component of both personal and collective identity. The dynamics of public diplomacy have shifted, underlining the need for authentic engagement with diverse national narratives.

The hard domestic realities of India, social discrimination, crippling economic disparities, caste issues, and communal conflicts, contradict the efforts to project a positive image of India. The dichotomy in the effort to promote the nation branding of India in terms of public diplomacy involves exposing the dark realities like weaknesses and social maladies, or constraining it because of the apprehension that it may cause negative public opinion about India across the world, which pays to reinforce the stereotypes and clichés about India across the globe.

XVII. Forward

Despite assertions of public engagement and claims of listening to the public, politicians, diplomats, and communication strategists have historically viewed the people either as an obstacle or a problem, mainly during the conduct of negotiations or in situations of conflict, or as a tool or resource to be leveraged for the benefit of those in power. In times of conflict or social upheaval, these figures frequently argue that presenting a genuine national identity can threaten democracy and hinder meaningful change. The beliefs of diplomats, communication consultants, and politicians are arguable, as they involve notions of moral and national superiority.

Indian public diplomacy efforts have undergone a new shift following the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing decentralization, localization, and awareness, in addition to belief, conviction, and transparency (ICWA report, 2023).

India is striving to be more open about its diplomatic practices, policies, and outcomes. By engaging in transparent dialogue and sharing information with stakeholders both domestically and internationally, India can foster greater understanding and collaboration. This transparency could enhance India's image and invite constructive criticism and feedback.

Decentralization in public diplomacy allows for a more grassroots approach to international relations. Localization complements decentralization by tailoring diplomatic efforts to resonate with specific audiences. India recognizes that a one-size-fits-all strategy is ineffective in today's complex geopolitical environment. For instance, cultural exchange, trade missions, and educational collaborations can be tailored to align with the interests and values of specific regions, making India's diplomatic outreach more effective.

The Indian government is actively working to enhance global awareness of its achievements, values, and culture. India aims to project its narrative more effectively through initiatives like international cultural festivals, academic exchanges, and digital campaigns. By clearly and consistently articulating its convictions on global issues such as climate change, sustainable development, and human rights, Indian public diplomacy has enhanced India's credibility on the world stage, promoting trust and respect among international partners.

Public diplomacy necessitates a temporary suspension of the perpetuation of nation-branding narratives. It ought to consider that chaos, conflict, and transformation are at the core of nationhood rather than chimeras of homogeneity, stability, and authenticity. It should

recognize that the very basis of these practices will benefit the members of a given human community.

The pandemic, however, intensified existing social challenges, deepening the structural inequities, gender, class, and racial inequalities. Issues like dwindling income sources and reduced access to healthcare became exposed. People around the world have undergone similar trauma, such as the loss of loved ones, a heightened need to protect vulnerable populations, the decline of industries, job losses, and so on. The fear of losing essential services, social distancing, and isolation highlighted the importance of maintaining connections with countries, institutions, colleagues, friends, and loved ones, even from a distance. This situation prompts a reevaluation of public diplomacy's actual and potential as a positive force in international relations. Hence, it is essential to transcend the raw projection of national interests and make public diplomacy more culturally and humanistically oriented.

In the Indian context, 'dialogue-based PD' is the need of the hour, which is partially realized in the practice of digital diplomacy. However, the Indian state has yet to fully embrace cooperation with non-state civil society actors in international relations and bilateral issues. Collaborating with them will be a way forward toward realizing India's foreign policy goals.

In recent years, India has witnessed a significant shift towards people's diplomacy, driven by various initiatives that reflect the nation's adaptability and resistance to traditional norms. Initiatives such as local cultural exchanges and collaborative environmental projects strengthen international ties and empower marginalized voices within India. This blend of tradition and innovation enables a more inclusive approach to diplomacy, allowing citizens to play a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy and addressing global challenges, ultimately redefining India's place on the world stage.

India's Right-wing populism, with recurring themes of neo-nationalism and social conservatism, aims to defend national culture and Hindu Hindi identity, seeking citizens and people of India to legitimize its agenda, encouraging revaluation of societal norms and values, and they have carried this out by increasingly adopting historical narratives and cultural symbols that resonate with the masses. The right-wing populism in India promotes a vision of governance that prioritizes the people's interests over established political elites. The author would like to argue that it's not the time to dwell on the potential side effects of populism; instead, the focus should be on bridging the divide between government and citizens, ensuring that people's needs and citizens' concerns are genuinely addressed to create a more inclusive and responsive political order. It is crucial to embrace people's diplomacy, eliminate obstacles to their access to diplomacy, enhance their skills, and explore solutions for inclusive diplomacy. By creating open channels for engagement, it is necessary to empower individuals and communities to participate in decision-making, ensuring their voices are heard and valued.

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