

# Cultural Diplomacy of India

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## INTRODUCTION

*“The concept of “cultural diplomacy,” refers to the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding. But “cultural diplomacy” can also be more of a one-way street than a two-way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on promoting the national language, explaining its policies and point of view, or “telling its story” to the rest of the world.” [ Cummings 2009 ]*

The paper illustrates the essence of soft power in the realm of Indian diplomacy which is advanced through the forms of media, culture and practises, leading to a desirable influence in foreign policy. Given that its impacts are typically gradual and subtle, soft power is neither the only or even the most significant source of influence. But to overlook it or dismiss it is a critical strategic and analytical error. Power in the Roman Empire stemmed from more than just its troops; it also came from the allure of Roman culture and law. The Berlin Wall was taken down by people who had been persuaded by Western soft power, not by a military attack. Politically astute individuals have long realised the influence of values. I won't have to force you into doing something you don't want to do if I can make you want whatever I want. A nation can make minimal use of the policy of carrots and sticks if it upholds values that other nations find appealing. Three factors significantly contribute to a nation's soft power: its heritage, its political principles, such as democracy and human rights (when it respects them), and its strategies, which are deemed to be appropriate since they are designed with consideration for the interests of others.

Culture serves as both a resource and a tool for transforming society. A nation can sway people's opinions by setting a positive example at home (by defending the press freedom and the freedom to protest, for example), in international contexts (by considering others and encouraging multilateralism), and through its foreign affairs (such as by promoting human rights). China attempted to deploy "vaccine diplomacy" during the COVID-19 pandemic to rebuild its soft power, which had been weakened by its covert management of the coronavirus' first breakout in Wuhan. The government has been working to strengthen its soft power to reinforce the Belt and Road Initiative, which provides funding for infrastructure projects around the globe.

*“The concept of cultural diplomacy is the “sharing of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs and other aspects of culture, with the objective of improving mutual understanding, with the ability to forge and preserve enduring bonds of trust serving as the ultimate goal.” [ Cummings 2009 ]* Among the earliest forms of diplomacy is cultural diplomacy, in which nations work to harness cultural assets in order to advance or realise foreign policy objectives. It entails exhibiting the national culture through a range of events and activities, such as concerts and exhibitions. It's a crucial component of a nation's soft power, and India has consistently used this aspect of diplomacy during the past ten years. In fact, when India's culture, art, and spiritual treasure drew travellers from all over the world for millennia, the international reach and acknowledgment of the nation's soft power was already realised. Dr. Moxraj, India's first cultural ambassador to the US, returned to India in January 2021 after three years of teaching Sanskrit, Hindi, and promoting traditional Indian tradition in addition to yoga and meditation in various US states. One of the earliest steps toward what we can now refer to as a global citizenship was the ancient Indian Vedic idea "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,";Even while political borders were still being drawn to divide nations, India already was blazing the way and employing soft power.

India relies on its wide cultural practices, that include Bollywood cinema, yoga, Ayurvedic treatment, historical tourism, and unique, spice-rich cuisine, to deploy soft power diplomacy. The Indic civilization, which dates back more than 5,000 years and represents one of the world's major cultural patterns, encompasses everything from religion and philosophy to arts and architecture to language and literature, trade, and travel. It is crucial to recognise this when discussing India's soft power. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism have had their origin and growth majorly in India. As a country where all of the major religions have lived in harmony for generations, India offers a distinctive and syncretized religious rhetoric. [ Tharoor 2012 ]

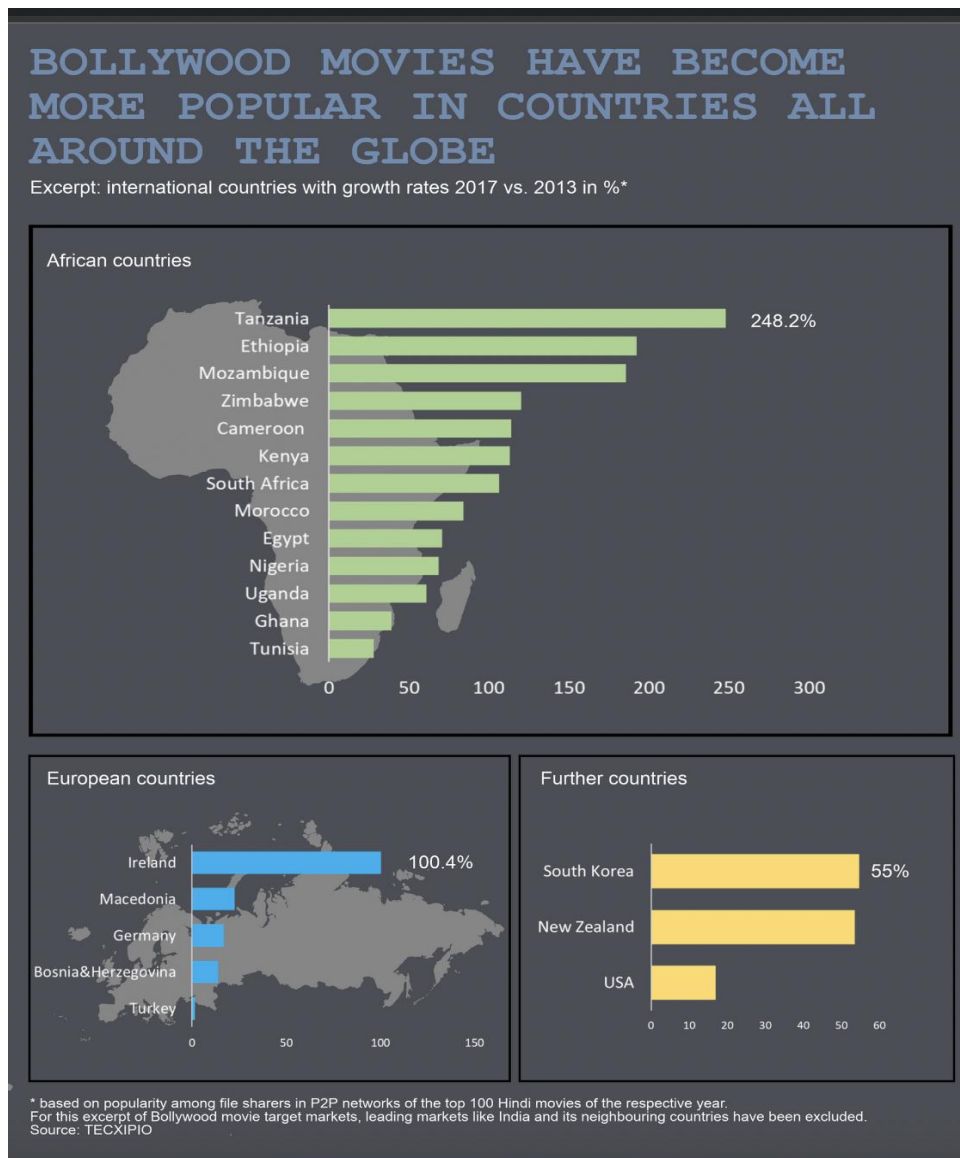
Cultural diplomacy has recently grown in importance as a cornerstone of Indian foreign policy. Syed Akbaruddin, a former Indian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, remarked in 2015 that "India's soft power diplomacy now transcends literature, culture, and film." Prime Minister Narendra Modi has altered Indian strategy to include new soft aspects. The five aspects of soft power are Samman (dignity), Samvaad (dialogue), Samriddhi (shared prosperity), Suraksha (regional and global security), and Sanskriti evam Sabhyata [ Srivastava, 2019 ]. The overall political and economic

objectives of India are aligned with each of the five components. "Modi's India is undoubtedly a soft power player to watch in the upcoming years." [ PTI, 2018 ]. While India somehow doesn't rank among the world's top 30 soft power countries, the new initiative highlights Modi's utilisation of social media to educate, enlighten, and inspire involvement on both global and domestic policy fronts.

This paper will discern Indian cultural diplomacy through the components of Bollywood, Yoga, and Diaspora. India envisions a generally diverse, ethical, and liberal democratic global leadership. Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore as legacies in themselves, combined with philosophy, music, theatre, the tech sector, and Ayurveda, provide an unparalleled array of soft power elements that reflect India's popularity to the global society.

The essences that Indians are known for include respect, peace, and brotherhood, with Ashoka, Buddha, and Gandhi serving as primary exponents. The Modi administration has reinvigorated its institutional frameworks for preserving and fostering India's cultural heritage as part of its efforts to advance Indian cultural diplomacy. Since 2014, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has made a substantial contribution to the growth of cultural exchanges. It has organised cultural festivals in India and abroad, appointed Chairs of Indian Studies abroad, given scholarships and research grants to foreign students and academics to study in India, and committed to other similar activities through its Cultural Institutes, which are dispersed across 37 countries. By doing so, it has helped to promote not only cultural but also more general links with nations around the world. The ICCR also employs yoga instructors to send them abroad to teach yoga in order to maintain quality and meet the growing demand.

**Bollywood in advancing Cultural Diplomacy**



**Fig 1: Overseas influence of Bollywood over a decade**  
 Source: Tecxpicio - Market Research tool

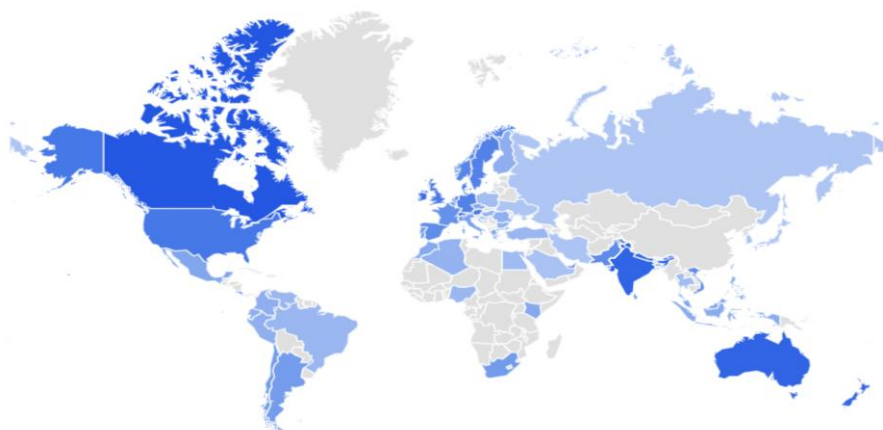
The idea of "unity in diversity," which reflects the vast tapestry of cultures and civilizations that has, and continues to fascinate, many people throughout the world, can be considered to be ingrained in India's international reputation. As a result, it is acknowledged that "Culture" as an extension of "Soft Power" diplomacy is a key tool in India's foreign policy for fostering connections between people in other nations. Bollywood has been perceived as being more powerful when it comes to soft power than other entertainment industries in the global South.

The Bollywood label has come to define a creative and confident India, co-opted by India's business and administrative elite and embraced by members of its diaspora. Today, Hindi cinema is distributed simultaneously all over the world, and its actors are well-known in worldwide advertising and entertainment. There are several Bollywood-themed festivals and celebrations, and top colleges provide courses and study into this style of popular culture.

In 2008, Prime Minister Singh addressed Indian Foreign Service probationers that *"In many ways, India's soft power might be a highly successful foreign policy weapon. Cultural ties, India's film business - Bollywood - I find people talking about Indian films wherever I travel in the Middle East and Africa. So this is a fresh approach to persuade the world of India's rising importance. In the modern world of diplomacy, soft power is equally vital."* [ Thussu, 2013 ]

Indian cinema has immensely been proven as an eminent tool to advance foreign relations. From the standpoint of soft power, it isn't so much about theatre statistics as it is about the impression of India that popular film produces among different global audiences and the characteristics that resonate across cultures. Bollywood's spread into unexplored countries such as Latin America demonstrates the rising acknowledgment of Indian popular culture's soft power. *Caminho das Indias (India - A Love Story)*, a prominent Brazilian tv drama that aired in prime time on TV Globo and won the 2009 International Emmy Award for Best Telenovela, is one noteworthy example. According to a US cable dated March 2007, high-profile Bollywood celebrities might play an important role in Afghanistan. *"We believe that Bollywood movies are extremely popular in Afghanistan, therefore willing Indian celebrities should be requested to come there to raise awareness of social concerns."* [ Burke 2007 ]

### Role of Yoga



**Fig 2: Worldwide popularity of yoga over the last decade**  
**Source: Google Trends**

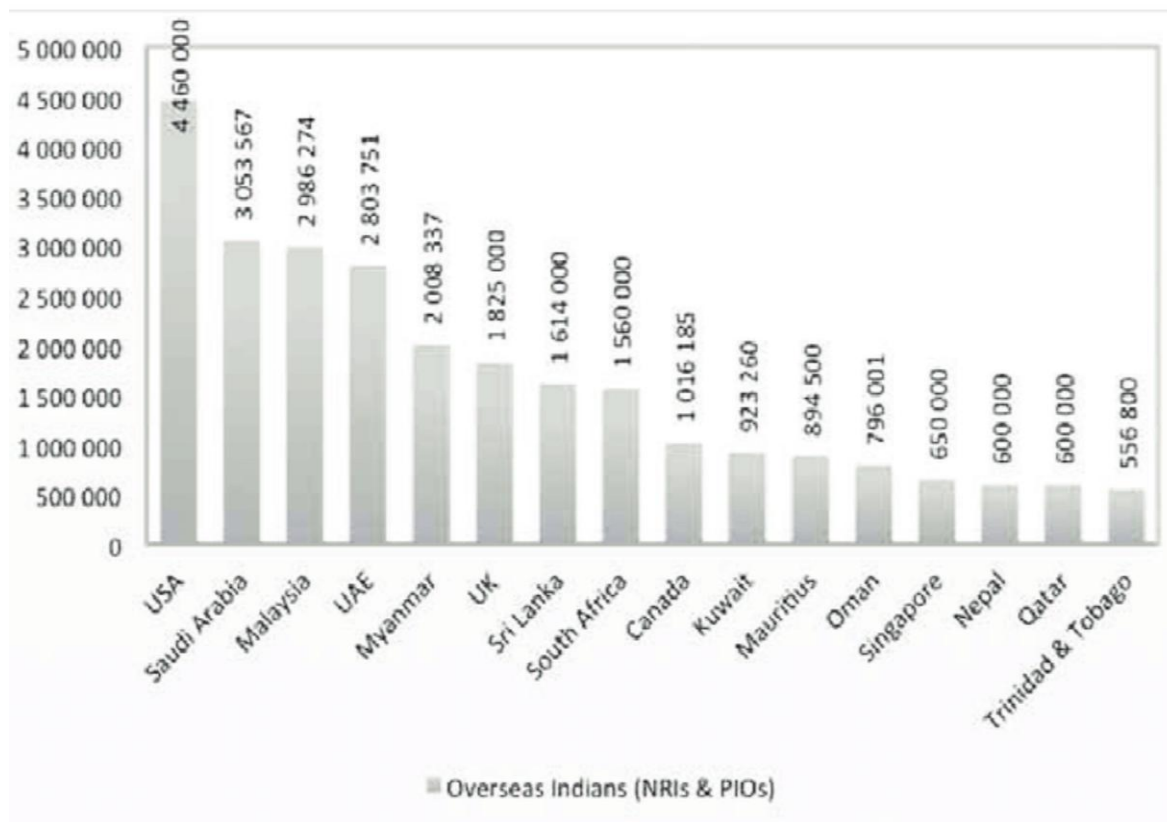
Swami Vivekananda's voyages to the West, beginning in 1893, sparked a massive renaissance of India's social traditions over the world, driven by a wide acceptance of Yoga-based teachings and practices. Vivekananda's emphasis on global awareness and Self-realisation matched Einstein's efforts in dismantling time and space barriers and ushering in a new unified picture of the cosmos. His efforts to disseminate Yoga to the West were supplemented by his efforts to restore respect within the nation for its own Dharmic traditions, which had been rejected as retrograde under foreign control. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposed recognition of Yoga day on a global stage, in effect of which the United Nations General Assembly declared June 21 to be the yearly 'International Day of Yoga.' When addressing the UN General Assembly, Modi requested the UN to help the globalisation of yoga. *"Yoga means oneness of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and accomplishment,"* Modi remarked, adding that *"yoga is a treasured gift of our ancient civilization."* [ Modi 2021 ]. On a Central Asian tour in 2015, Modi was asked to open a traditional medicine and yoga centre in the city of Ashgabat, where a statue of Mahatma Gandhi was also installed. Modi spoke about the event, emphasising that it was simply a *"modest step towards his aim of a world-class Yoga Centre, which would illustrate the effects of Yoga to everyone."* [ Modi, 2015 ].

The International Day of Yoga enables India to interact with the approximate 125 million individuals who practise yoga throughout the world. An interpretation of this relationship may be utilised to further local and foreign policy objectives, such as increasing interest in old Indian scriptures and emphasising the spiritual component of yoga. Since the yoga sector is still monopolised by Indian opinions, and genuine yoga guidance is still thought to be found just in India, the state can use its engagement in yoga to spread "India's history and cultural ideas," as well as "motivate travel to India by foreign academics and practitioners of Yoga." (Mazumdar, 2018).

### Role of Indian Diaspora

From António Costa (Portugal) to Kamala Harris (USA), Priti Patel to Suella Braverman (Britain), Anita Anand (Canada) to Priyanka Radhakrishnan (New Zealand), headlines of Indians obtaining high-level positions throughout the world have kept people making comments. This not only gives people of Indian descent more political representation on a worldwide scale, but it also increases our exposure and influence in global forums like the UN. The Indian diaspora is the world's second in terms of number after the Chinese. The 27 million Indian diaspora is scattered over 136 countries and is quite varied, with individuals migrating for an assortment of reasons. The Indian diaspora has led to a lively and multicultural, multilingual culture in host nations, whether in the United Kingdom, the United States, or Mauritius and Caribbean countries where Bhojpuri and Hindi are spoken.

*“Overseas Indians are a smaller force but they are a resource, which can be harnessed. NRIs were at one time spurned as non-required Indians. PIOs were referred to as FIOs, or Forgotten Indian Overseas. I invented a new term for NRIs: they are the National Resource of India. Positive Indians Overseas are also known as PIOs. Indeed, the diaspora is and should be a component of our resistance to globalisation and its West-centred politics.” [ Singhvi 2012 ]*



**Fig 3: Annual Growth of Indian Diaspora from 1990 to 2017 in several countries.**  
**Source: MEA, India 2017**

With the top talent, the Indian diaspora is recognised as a "model minority." [ Singhvi 2012 ] This is especially true for Indians living in more advanced nations such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. As the Indian overseas groups acquire significance, both in terms of total size and economic contributions, the host country understands that it must pay greater attention to them. The achievement of Indians in varied industries such as academia, entertainment, cinema, and information technology, as well as successful entrepreneurs, CEOs, scientists, and other professionals, has fostered trust in India's academic abilities in other countries.

Furthermore, the Indian diaspora has played a significant role in protecting India's interests in their host nations. To illustrate, during the Kargil conflict, India's nuclear testing, the Burton proposal, and the agreement between India and the US on civil nuclear cooperation, the Indian diaspora in the United States pushed vigorously as a pressure organisation to support Indian interests. Because of their impact and recognition in the countries where they live, people of Indian descent are immensely essential sources of support for the Indian government in the implementation of its policies. [ Mohan 2003 ]

With Rishi Sunak becoming the prime minister of the UK, there are possibilities for a revised relationship between India and the UK, with India vouching for an enhanced cooperation.

*“We are all quite conscious of the possibilities for the UK to sell products and do things in India, but actually we need to look at that connection differently because there is an immense lot that we here in the UK can learn from India. I want to make it easier for our academics to travel to India and study, and I want to make it easier for our firms and Indian companies to collaborate, because it's a two-way street, and that's the sort of change I want to bring to that relationship.”* [ Sunak 2022 ]

India's diplomatic ties with the United Kingdom may be prepared to grow after Rishi Sunak was sworn in as Britain's first Indian-origin Prime Minister on Tuesday, capping an astonishing political revival in British politics. Mr. Sunak's historic achievement as the country's first non-white Prime Minister is widely seen as a symbol of modern-day Britain's multiculturalism.

*“His election as Prime Minister marks the Indian diaspora's maturation process. Unlike in the United States, where young professionals make up the majority of the diaspora, in the United Kingdom, they have been a part of the country's shadow for decades. He is a part of the success story that is currently capturing the public's attention.”* [ Mattoo 2022 ]

## CONCLUSION

The Incredible India tourist project played an important part in the advancement of 'Brand India,' a term used to characterise the promotion launched by India to attract attention and promote India as a beneficial place for investment. According to the United Nations (UN), India will be the most populous country by 2024, and the Indian diaspora will keep increasing, which is a significant strength for generating a positive perception of the country. India has been a firm supporter of inter-civilizational and inter-cultural interaction and one of UNESCO's most illustrious members. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has chosen to develop a "soft power prism" to analyse the effectiveness of the country's soft power strategy. The country's soft power potential, if realised, will undoubtedly elevate India's status in the globe, making it well-positioned and prosperous. In the escalating globalised world society, India has the capacity and vast chances to further uplift its status as a "growing global soft power," paving the path for the country to become a "soft power-superpower" of the twenty-first century.

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