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Indian Culture & Diplomacy in the Narendra Modi Era

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Abstract –

The additional space that cultural diplomacy affords softens the interest-driven foreign policy's hard edges, promoting a positive public opinion scrutinizing foreign policy. Because culture is a vital tool for examining the shared history of civilization, cultural diplomacy can be used to safeguard a state's foreign policy. Samuel Huntington, who originated the phrase "Clash of civilizations," argued that the rising tension could be reduced by utilizing socioeconomic leverage, which makes up the elements of Joseph Nye's now-famous term "soft power." Cultural diplomacy not only benefits a country's economy, politics, and society but also its defense and security. In the case of India, which is one of the oldest, most profound, and most diversified civilizations in the world with a long-lasting global impact, such cultural diplomacy is particularly crucial. India's ancient civilizational ties to the other Southeast Asian nations create a shared cultural legacy that can foster good relationships and support a shared regional identity. Such cultural alliances are advantageous for both India and its neighbors, who can use India as a cultural ally to protect their national ethos against hostile external forces. Cultural diplomacy can help with communication, unifying ideals, and resolving conflicting national interests for a broader regional consensus, extending to East Asia, which has long embraced India's dharmic traditions. Globally, India's historic tradition of peace, tolerance, and diversity can serve as a model for reconciling rival states and the various clashing ancient and modern civilizations of the entire world. The enormous and distinctive heritage of India, which already has an impact on the world due to its intrinsic value, is a reflection of the country's potential soft power and cultural diplomacy. This is demonstrated by the popularity of Indian yogic teachings and dharmic traditions, which historically had their roots in India and are now practiced all over the world. In light of cultural diplomacy, this practice should be encouraged. In addition to advancing Indian cultural diplomacy, the Modi administration has revitalized its institutional frameworks for preserving and fostering India's cultural heritage. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) efforts to advance cultural diplomacy since the Modi administration took office in 2014 are noteworthy. Through its cultural centers, which are dispersed across 37 nations, it has organized cultural festivals in India and abroad, appointed Chairs of Indian Studies abroad, offered scholarships and fellowships to foreign students and scholars to study in India, and engaged in other similar activities, thereby fostering not only cultural but also more extensive ties with nations around the world. This is evidenced by the rising demand for yoga sessions at ICCR's international centers.

Keywords –

Cultural diplomacy, Foreign policy, Narendra Modi, Indian Culture, India

Introduction –

It will be interesting to watch how the Modi Government makes the most of the potential use of culture as a diplomatic tool to persuade other nations and uses Indian cultural diplomacy as a negotiating chip to further advance India's reputation around the world in the years to come. The idea of "unity in variety," 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. Since gaining its independence, India has recognized the value of cultural diplomacy as a tool for connecting with the rest of the world and the relevance of using culture to create a dialogue between civilizations. Indian arts, culture, and religion have captivated people all around the world for millennia. People's curiosity has been piqued, drawing them to Indian culture and traditions. The five pillars of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy, Samman (dignity), Samvaad (dialogue), Samriddhi (shared prosperity), Suraksha (regional and global security), and Sanskriti evam Sabhyata, have gone a long way towards advancing India's cultural diplomacy and improving India's global image (Cultural and civilizational links). By enhancing, in the words of Joseph Nye, "the power to achieve what you want by attraction rather than through force or payments," he has expanded India's influence over the world.

Cultural Diplomacy

“The concept of “cultural diplomacy,” refers to the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples 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]

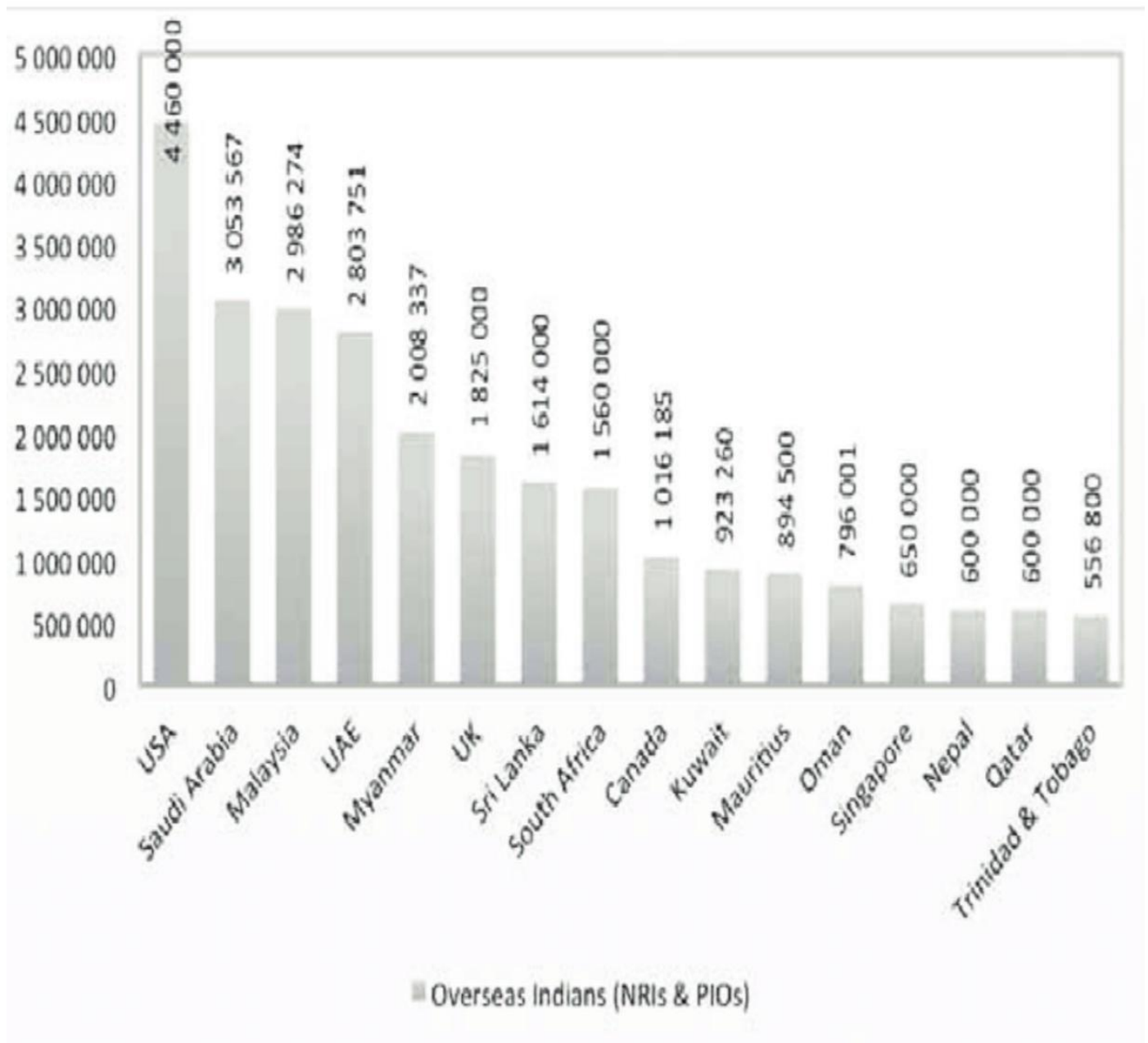
Mahatma Gandhi's famous sequence of affirmations from 1921 (1921, 171) sheds light on the unique way that the majority of Indians who use the phrase truly perceive worldwide cultural exchange,

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people’s houses as an interloper, a beggar, or a slave”.

Cultural diplomacy, which involves countries working to use cultural assets to promote or realize foreign policy goals, is one of the earliest types of diplomacy. It comprises showcasing the national culture through a variety of occasions and pursuits, including concerts and displays. India has continuously employed this facet of diplomacy over the past 10 years. It is an essential part of a country's soft power. In truth, the international reach and recognition of India's soft power were already realized when its culture, art, and spiritual wealth lured tourists from all over the world for millennia. After spending three years teaching Sanskrit, and Hindi, and promoting traditional Indian customs in addition to yoga and meditation in various US states, Dr. Moxraj, India's first cultural ambassador to the US, returned to India in January 2021. One of the first actions towards what we might now call a "global citizenship" "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," an old Indian Vedic concept, was used to unite nations even when political borders were still being constructed to separate them. India was already leading the way and using soft power.

India relies on its wide cultural practices, which 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 recognize 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]

This essay will analyze Bollywood, yoga, and the Indian diaspora to analyze Indian cultural diplomacy. India hopes for a broadly varied, moral, liberal, and democratic world leadership. The legacies of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, along with those of philosophy, music, theatre, the computer industry, and Ayurveda, give an unrivaled variety of soft power components that demonstrate India's appeal to the international community. Respect, peace, and brotherhood are the three tenets of Indian culture, with Ashoka, Buddha, and Gandhi serving as leading examples. As part of its initiatives to develop Indian cultural diplomacy, the Modi administration has revitalized the institutional frameworks for safeguarding and promoting India's cultural heritage. India's international reputation can be said to be deeply rooted in the notion of "unity in variety," which represents the enormous tapestry of cultures and civilizations that has fascinated many people throughout history and continues to do so now. It follows that "Culture" is recognized as a crucial element in "Soft Power" diplomacy as an extension of India's foreign policy encourages interactions between citizens of other countries. When it comes to soft power, Bollywood is thought to be more potent than other South Asian entertainment sectors. The term "Bollywood" has come to represent an innovative and self-assured India that has been embraced by its diaspora as well as the country's business and political elite. Hindi movies are now simultaneously released in all countries, and the actors are well-known in global entertainment and advertising. There are several. Festivals and festivities with a Bollywood theme are common, and prestigious schools provide courses and research into this popular culture



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

The government of Modi has frequently pushed the idea of a "3-D strategy" (Democracy, Demography and Demand). However, he is also particularly worried about the fourth "D," which stands for Diaspora. According to the United Nations, there are 25 million abroad Indians in the world, making them the largest community. India is significant. NET gainer of various international interests. That includes an effective immigrant workforce that benefits the motherland through a process called "brain acquisition" in reverse. He views them as the perfect immigrants for host nations because Indians overseas work hard to build them. To forward his diplomatic agenda, Modi has made interactions between non-resident Indians (NRIs) and Indian citizens abroad (OCIs) a priority.

Civilizational Roots of India

The oldest and most developed civilization in the world, the Indus Valley civilization (2600–1900 BCE), is where India's civilizational roots lie. This civilization thrived in what is now Pakistan and northwest India, near the Indus River. Its citizens established planned cities, a well-developed hygienic system, and a sophisticated urban culture. Despite its gradual fall around 1900 BCE, the Indus Valley civilization left a lasting legacy that impacted other Indian civilizations. After the Indus Valley civilization, the Aryans, who spoke Indo-European and were nomadic tribes from Central Asia, arrived in India during the Vedic era (about 1500–500 BCE). Therefore Hinduism today has its roots in the Aryan culture and language that they brought with them. The Vedas, the holy books of Hinduism, were written during this time. In addition, Chandragupta Maurya's Mauryan empire (322–185 BCE) united a large portion of the Indian subcontinent under its dominion. The third Mauryan monarch Ashoka allowed Buddhism to flourish and expand throughout India and beyond. Nonetheless, the Gupta Empire (320–550 CE) was a time of great cultural and economic success, and the Mauryan Empire left a long-lasting legacy of centralized government and territorial expansion. Indian science, particularly mathematics and astronomy, flourished throughout this time. The Ajanta and Ellora Caves are just two examples of the many temples and monuments built during the Gupta era.

India's foreign policy has been profoundly influenced by its historical civilization in several ways. For example, India's ancient ideology of Ahimsa (non-violence) and its desire to remain independent from both the Western and Eastern blocs can be linked to its non-aligned attitude during the Cold War. India, therefore, places a high value on sovereignty because of its long history of fending off colonialism and foreign invasions. It rebuffs outside meddling and upholds an independent foreign policy. Additionally, India strengthens its cultural diplomacy, which is vital for promoting relations between nations. Thus, to showcase India's rich cultural legacy, which is recognized throughout the world, the government supports a variety of Indian arts, music, and dance overseas. India actively engages in international groups like the United Nations and the G20, which promote fair representation, sustainable development, and an international order based on norms, since it believes in Vasudev Kutumbakam.

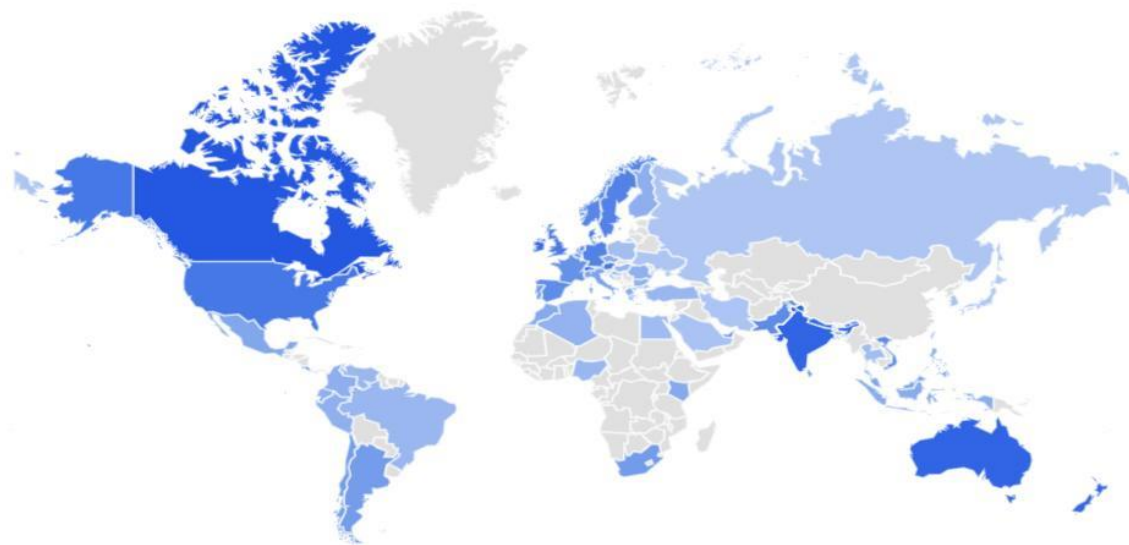
Yoga as an Indian diplomacy

Yoga is not new to India this has ancient roots in India looking behind the history we look at the Vedic period sages used to follow in their daily routine, as well as in the post-Vedic era either Ramayana and Mahabharata eras varying times seen. But in the 18th century beginning in 1893, Swami Vivekananda's travels to the West led to a huge revival of Indian social traditions all over the world, which was fueled by a widespread embrace of Yoga-based teachings and practices. Einstein's efforts to break down time and space barriers were paralleled by Vivekananda's emphasis on self-realization and world awareness. and bringing forth a new, unified view of the universe. In addition to his endeavors to spread yoga throughout the West, he worked to win back national esteem for the Dharmic traditions that had fallen out of favor while under foreign rule. The United Nations General Assembly officially proclaimed June 21 to be the yearly "International Day of Yoga" as a result of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal for international recognition of Yoga Day. In his address to the UN General Assembly, Modi asked the organization to support the spread of yoga around the world. "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]. At an event for diplomats in New Delhi featuring India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Israel's ambassador Ron Malka said Modi's use of yoga as a tool of diplomacy is "working quite well" to strengthen ties between the two countries. Yoga has also helped Modi improve his reputation at home. At a celebration for International Yoga Day in Ranchi, the seat of Jharkhand, Prime Minister Modi declared his intention to "make yoga an intrinsic part of the lives of the impoverished."

"We need to develop the yoga movement further... Diseases increase a person's level of poverty. According to Modi, we must bring yoga from the city to the rural, the jungles, the underprivileged, and the Adivasis (tribal people).

Yoga first appeared in India many years ago and spread gradually all over the world. According to its etymology, the word "yoga" derives from the Sanskrit word "union," which refers to the union of the body and the mind as well as the mind and the soul. Yoga can be interpreted in many different ways. For some, it is a means of maintaining physical health and fitness; for others, it is a treatment or cure for illness; for still others, it is a means of spiritual awakening to reach greater awareness. All of these beliefs are ultimately focused on achieving tranquility and calm. Yoga has spread over the world as a lucrative industry. Yoga videos like "Yoga Inferno" by fitness expert Jillian Michaels and books like "Slim Calm Sexy Yoga" by former American model turned yoga teacher Tara Stiles, for instance, are very popular worldwide. These materials depart from the original yoga doctrine and lose the spiritual elements that are enshrined in revered Indian literature like the Vedas. Several Indian-American organizations have made oppositional attempts to restore yoga's spiritual components.



The worldwide popularity of Yoga over the last decade

Source Google trends

Foreign policy of the Modi government

Even as he resisted China's obstructionism on the Doklam issue, the Modi government pursued solid alliances with regional allies of the United States, such as Vietnam, Japan, and Australia. India committed to join the revived quadrilateral with the United States, Japan, and Australia under Modi's leadership. Modi has grounded Indian foreign policy in the country's civilizational ethos and values, shedding the ideological baggage of the past. India's "Act East" initiative combines a distinct soft power effort with a sober assessment of the necessity to increase India's presence in East and Southeast Asia. India has exhibited unprecedented assertiveness in the Middle East, earning an invitation to deliver the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC (first)) inaugural address. Moreover, the Modi government uses soft power diplomacy based on its cultural soft power to carry

out its diplomatic strategy. The soft power of the Modi administration is linked to traditional Indian concepts like "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," which means "the family of the entire world." The ties between ancient legacy and soft power are some examples of wide sorts of soft power expression. Connections between civilizations (Buddhism, Yoga, Sanskrit, Ayurveda & Zero) Panchamrit's culture and regional security aspects are mostly drawn to ancient legacy and connections across civilizations. Therefore the current period, which Modi described as the "age of information," has seen a change in our positions and an increase in our responsibilities, he claimed. India must safeguard its cultural history in addition to offering the world a new orientation if it is to rise to the status of a superpower. Because of its young population and one of the oldest civilizations in the world, he calls India the best country in the world. Buddhism and yoga are the two main organizations operating under the ancient flag. Buddhism and yoga have a significant impact on India, establishing it as the global spiritual capital. Before Modi took office, the previous administration valued Buddhism highly as an instrument of culture. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has hosted Buddhist conferences in several Asian nations over the past ten years, including Thailand (April 2010), South Korea (May 2010), Nepal (May 2016), and Nalanda, India (March 2017). An independent foreign service, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, has created a cultural diplomacy program that hosts seminars in Buddhist nations for academics, monks, and leaders from many nations. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations hosted a festival in Ladakh with academics and ambassadors from South Korea, China, and Mongolia. The first conference on Buddhist relations between India and China was conducted in September 2015 at Fudan University in Shanghai. More than 240 participants from 39 nations attended the "Fifth International Buddhist Conference" that was held in Varanasi in October 2016 and was coordinated by the Ministry of Tourism and the Council on Cultural Relations. 2017's Rajgir "Buddhism in the 21st Century" conference. [10] [11] The Japan Foundation and the Vivekananda International Foundation organized the India-Buddhism Conflict Avoidance Initiative in Bodhi Gaya in 2015, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The historical connections between Theravada Buddhism and other Buddhist nations are also a good opportunity to further solidify ties with other Buddhist nations and to start a dialogue between various nations. During their trip to India for a conference on Zen Buddhism, monks and academics from the Shaolin temple in Henan province, China, also visited Kanchipuram, the birthplace of Theravada Buddhism. Additionally joining Indian scientific research institutes is the Council on Cultural Relations. A conference on the philosophical parallels between Buddhist philosophy and quantum mechanics was held at the Indian Institute of Science. Members of the East Asia Summit helped establish Nalanda University to promote cultural ties. According to Modi's visits to East Asian countries and his Eastern policy, as well as his predecessor's policy discourse, Buddhism is relevant to most people. Modi explicitly stated that "this century cannot be the century of Asia without the Buddha". [12] When visiting Buddhist nations, Modi spends a day at the temples. Buddhism's core message was successfully spread. Modi's visit to Kathmandu was a focus of his 4-CS agenda, which includes cooperation, engagement, culture, and constitution. He also gave Nepal a gift of a bodhi tree, reinforcing cultural views. Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan are neighbors of India. Modi advocated for the old India-Sri Lanka Buddhist link, which was completed under King Ashoka of the Mauryan kingdom. He strategically decided to travel to Anuradhapura, one of Sri Lanka's former capitals, and Jaya Shri Mahabodhi, which stands for the location where ties between India and Sri Lanka are being observed. He also visited the Mahabodhi shrine in Colombo and founded the Indian-funded Jafana Cultural Center. [13] Similar to this, Modi's trip to Japan, during which he toured the Toji and Kinkakuji famous historic Buddhist temples, strengthened bilateral ties with Japan. Till now Modi government has initially working on spreading India's culture to the whole world.

Conclusion

The Modi administration has announced a program to use cultural influence in foreign policy in this article. Although the Modi administration has not used cultural power in foreign policy, it is undoubtedly more potent when it comes to launches and deployments. Previous administrations have attempted to support foreign policy through the use of soft power, but their efforts have been relatively lackluster in their focus, consistency, and design. The Modi administration, on the other hand, is making efforts to create a unified, strategic, and

institutional approach to the use of soft power, which will improve the efficacy of its foreign policy. The historic legacy and civilization, culture, diaspora, economic assistance, and Bollywood are the primary components of the Modi government's soft power. The Modi administration is very committed to its push for soft power. The concept of creating soft power has been successful thanks to heads of state and government, luring overseas Indians, highlighting India's cultural ties through sizable events on foreign soil, as well as diplomacy. The standing committee's report also ICCR, the nodal government organization in charge of projecting India's soft power, was advised. Also, it's crucial to keep in mind that the Modi administration relies heavily on his personality as a source of soft power to influence many other nations. Although India is still in the early stages of becoming a soft power projection state, Modi's government has succeeded more than previous ones in institutionalizing and creating a more strategic and cogent approach to soft power. India's ties have improved under the Modi administration. with practically all significant nations in the world. It has demonstrated a willingness to stand up for India's interests. According to Prime Minister Modi, he won't let selfish desires or internal divisions prevent him from advancing India's objectives. Mr. Modi has boosted India's confidence and given it more power in terms of contacts and communication with other nations.....

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