

Exploring the Gandhism in India's Soft Power Strategy

Dr. Vijay Chauhan

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science

Maharana Pratap National College

Mullana (Ambala) Haryana

Email: drvijaympnc@gmail.com

Abstract

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, served as Prime Minister from the year of the country's independence until his passing in 1964. Gandhi's principles were reflected in the distinctive foreign policy that Nehru crafted. "The policies and philosophy which we aspire to adopt are the policies and philosophy provided to us by Gandhi," he said in his final words. Nehru aimed to implement his guru's methods both within India and in the context of global politics. A significant component of India's soft power diplomacy may be Gandhism. Gandhism lends itself well to soft-power diplomacy because of its emphasis on peaceful cooperation, nonviolence, the truth, and its widespread international presence. This research exercise helps to make sense of the Indian government's efforts to incorporate Gandhism into its foreign policy as a foundation for future diplomatic, economic, cultural, and strategic ties and efforts to take advantage of Gandhism in Soft Power strategy.

Keywords

Foreign Policy, Cultural Diplomacy, Gandhism, Soft Power.

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Dr. Vijay Chauhan

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Introduction

Since Joseph Nye first coined the concept of “soft power” in the 1990s, the concept has gained more weight in discussions about foreign policy around the globe. Nye proposed that traditional hard-power strategies based on military might would no longer be the only factor in determining the degree to which a nation commanded power in the international system due to the changing nature of international relations and a turn (at least in rhetoric) towards peaceful global interaction.¹ Importance of the soft power has increased in the context of globalization and the growing disquiet over the use of military power for achieving foreign policy objectives. Winston Churchill, the then-prime minister of the United Kingdom, characterized India as “a geographical expression” that was “no more a nation” single country than the Equator” at the time of its independence in 1947. At the time of its independence, there were low expectations of India around the world. Over the following four decades, India did little to change that, as New Delhi pursued policies that hindered its economic growth and caused it to be excluded from and ridiculed by much of Asia and the West. Because of the significant impact of LPG, India launched new economic policies in 1991. These efforts were effective in helping India reemerge as one of Asia’s true superpowers. Developing its “soft power” credentials by leveraging the appeal of Indian culture, values, and policies to further its foreign policy goals in the area has taken precedence over building its “hard power” capabilities, which are economic and military in nature.²

What is Soft Power?

Power has been a key factor in international relations from the time of Thucydides and Machiavelli’s early political works, and it continues to be one of the most significant and least understood political theory notions. Robert A. Dahl defined power as the capacity of one actor to affect another actor’s actions in ways that would not have happened otherwise³. In other words, power is the capacity to influence desired results and, if necessary, to alter other people’s behavior to achieve them. The range of resources at one’s disposal, such as territory, population, natural resources, military might, economic strength, and political stability, are typically related to one’s capacity to achieve the results at hand. Many forms of power have been investigated in recent years, but the realist perspective on this idea has persisted. A “display of might through the war” could be the true test of “great power,” according to the school of realism, which views power in terms of military and economic force (or “hard power”)⁴. Because of this, realists have historically focused on a country’s capacity for influence as well as the role of tangible and coercive sources of power (threat and force). Joseph S. Nye Jr. has developed the idea of influence derived

from intangible sources, such as culture, fundamental principles, and values, and public diplomacy, which he defines as “soft power.”

Since Nye originally used the term “soft power” in 1990 in ‘Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power’, the concept’s significance has grown significantly and many students of international politics have developed a serious interest in it⁵. According to Nye, a nation may achieve the results it seeks in international politics because other nations aspire to emulate its degree of prosperity and openness, admires its principles, and emulate its leadership. In this view, it is crucial to set the agenda in international politics and entice people rather than trying to alter them by using threats of military action or economic sanctions. This soft power co-opts people rather than compels them, getting them to want the outcomes that you want. The foundation of soft power is the capacity to influence others’ preferences. While “hard power” relies on intimidation (sticks) and persuasion (carrots), “soft power” depends on the capacity to influence international politics according to one’s values and ideologies. It is feasible to find solutions to issues where “hard power” resources are ineffective by using “soft” tools. Moreover, the effects of the aggressive intervention are never long-lasting. Because it depends heavily on their continued success or retention.⁶ Hence, “soft power,” according to Nye, is a significant fact in today’s world, but using its tools does not ensure total success or enormous dominance or authority because other governments may exhibit cultural resistance and refuse to accept enforced norms, values, and institutions. In other words, there are restrictions on its use, making it not a full, all-encompassing solution.⁷ The ability of a nation to set up a situation such that other nations form preferences or define their interests in ways compatible with one’s nation is known as co-option power, according to Nye. In addition, Nye asserted that non-material forms of influence, such as “cultural and ideological attractiveness as well as the laws and institutions of international regimes,” are where co-option power originates. As a result, since soft power is mostly built on intangibles like the power of example, the distinction between hard and soft power depends on how materialistic each is. Hence, the ability to influence a state’s preferences as a result of their perception of you is known as soft power. The allure of a nation’s culture, political ideas, and policies gives rise to “soft power.” The “soft power” is increased when the adopted policies are seen as legitimate by outsiders. Therefore, the major sources of “soft power” are culture, political institutions and ideals manifested in the policies that a state adopts within its boundaries and in the manner, in which it manages itself abroad.⁸

Why Gandhism?

Gandhian idealism in global contexts tends to be seen primarily as an alternative to dominant Western assumptions about power, violence, and identity. Gandhi's nonviolent campaign for India's independence is frequently cited as the ideal application of soft power. Modern thinkers are starting to refer to Gandhi's style of dominance as "soft power." Gandhi's famous quote "In a *gentle way, you can shake the world*" is the best suitable example of Soft power. Gandhi has an amazing global reputation. Even after more than 7 decades after his death, Gandhi's life and his legacy are still the center of discussion all over the world. Gandhi worked in three different countries in his life England, South Africa and India. He was an anti-imperialist agitator, social reformer, religious thinker, and a messiah. He lived in one of the most violent centuries in the history of the world.⁹ He invented a weapon of protest that was based on non-violence. A study of about 5 dozen power transitions by democratic movements found that in more than 70 percent of cases, dictatorships did not collapse because there was an armed rebellion against them. Rather, the boycott strike was defeated by fasting and other means of protest, inspired by Gandhi. Recently, during the so-called "Arab Spring" Movement, agitators in Egypt, Yemen and other countries displayed Gandhi's photographs and led protests.

Gandhism and India's Soft Power

Gandhism has the capacity to influence Indian foreign policy due to the established transnational network and the significant impact it has on the lives of millions of people worldwide. India's freedom movement, which was greatly influenced by Gandhi's beliefs, is where India's foreign policy has its origins. Gandhi undoubtedly served as an inspiration for the distinguishing features of India's foreign policy in the first few decades following its independence. India's stance on global issues was motivated by a remarkable moral clarity and fearlessness that earned it many friends, elevated it to the top spot among developing nations, and gave it influence in international affairs that was out of all proportion to its actual economic and political might. Gandhi's message had a huge impact on how others saw India. Gandhi gave the Indian people a sense of dignity and self-respect, which enabled them the resolve to resist pressure to join one of the Cold War blocs and instead stand up and pursue an independent foreign policy. For more than 60 years, it has continually been a defining aspect of Indian foreign policy. The most remarkable historical illustration of the potential efficacy of political techniques based on "soft power" is perhaps the non-violent freedom struggle led by Gandhi's Indian National Congress against the British. But why exactly did the Gandhian approach to soft power work? When Nye writes, "Contrast the repercussions of Gandhi's choice of soft power with Yasser

Arafat's choice of the rifle, Gandhi was successful in persuading moderate majorities in Britain to support India's independence, and the outcomes were both effective and morally commendable. He left India's soft power with a significant legacy. Contrarily, Arafat's hard power tactics led Israeli moderates to the far right. Characteristics that had formerly looked to be an aspect of Indian fragility in his hands abruptly changed into an element of Indian might. Gandhi achieved this by taking use of the non-linear dynamics of interactions between national identities.

The purpose of the International Day, as stated in General Assembly resolution A/RES/61/271 on June 15, 2007, which established the observance, is to "disseminate the message of non-violence, especially via education and public awareness." The resolution reaffirms "the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence" and the desire "to secure a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and non-violence". Anand Sharma, the minister of state for external affairs of India, introduced the resolution to the General Assembly on behalf of 140 co-sponsors. Mr. Sharma noted that the resolution's broad and diverse support demonstrated the continued importance of Mahatma Gandhi's worldview. He stated, quoting the late leader directly: "The most powerful tool at our disposal is nonviolence. It is more powerful than the most destructive weapon ever created by human intellect." The International Day of Non-Violence is observed on 2 October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Indian independence movement and pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non-violence. Moreover, The beautiful music video for Mahatma Gandhi's favorite bhajan, Vaishnav Jana, created by the Ministry of External Affairs and published on October 2, 2018, to kick off the Gandhi sesquicentennial celebrations, gave a clear indication of the importance of Gandhism in India's soft power strategy. The video gave a message to discuss on culture, representation, and the various ways in which Gandhi is understood in the modern world.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy is built on the notion of nonviolence. It is not due to any deception on the part of Indian politicians or diplomats that this has not always been obvious. The largest challenge is the frequency with which India's activities are misconstrued. India's identity was never hidden, despite the fact that observers couldn't make sense of what they saw. It is vital, therefore, to reach a fresh knowledge of India. Yet if fresh data continues to be perceived incorrectly, this cannot be achieved solely through diligently gathering new facts and figures. For analysis, the West has to develop a brand-new theoretical framework that can account for Gandhi's mission and his enduring influence. The genuine nature of India's foreign policy may only be disclosed only after that.

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