
EU-India Relations: Future Perspectives

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India is strategically utilizing its natural resources through its modernized focus on soft power and its consequential strategic deployment to stimulate further India's foreign policy objectives in this globalizing world. Under the present Government headed by Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi, India's foreign policy is becoming more ambitious and innovative in its scope. Also, India has moved from the periphery to the center of international relations. But despite the enormous potential of soft power in the context of EU-India relations and the Strategic Partnership and a Joint Action Plan, which was signed over a decade ago, it has not been able to live up to its potential. Various initiatives include the Indian Diaspora within the EU to lift Indian soft power in the Middle East and learn from others' experiences to manage diversity; the entente cordiale can move beyond the prevalent misconceptions and impasse. The world is afflicted with multiple challenges, so dialogue between the two must be based on core natural synergies and strengths, including a common vision of the international order. It should be the main idea for taking this relationship to a greater level.

The Overhauling of India's Foreign Policy

Over the years, there has been a dramatic shift in Indian foreign policy during the regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who incidentally came to power on a domestic development agenda. In recent years, there has been a shift in the position of India in the international system, which has accredited it to move from the periphery relations to the center. Still, foreign policy is questioned as being uncertain, delicate, and ad-hoc, while it lacks direction and goals. Now, India's approach toward the world has significantly changed. It has now become much bolder and more innovative. India is not only strengthening its hard power, but it is also venturing into a massive military modernization and defense procurement program. India is significantly mobilizing the domain of soft power, which is being methodically and strategically deployed like never before.

The Concept of Soft Power

The term 'Soft Power' for the time came into the picture in the 1980s. It describes soft power as the ability to get what you want through appeal rather than coercion which might result in a more beneficial public opinion and credibility abroad.¹ Public Affairs US It has been emphasized by author Shashi Tharoor, who states that 'the associations and attitudes conjured up in the global imagination by the mere mention of a country's name is often a more accurate gauge of its soft

power than a dispassionate analysis of its foreign policies.ⁱⁱ The intercessions of the previous decade have stood behind the limitations of using force. It led to a subsequent resurrection in the importance of soft power as a foreign policy tool that could incite other states to approve a country's agenda and endorse its interests worldwide.

India and the Concept of Soft Power

The concept of soft power is an ancient concept in India. India had a relatively very weak position in the international system during its post-independence years; due to that, India followed the use of ideals and vocabulary which were normative in order to attempt to secure its interests. The ideals were India's Non-alignment Movement (NAM), the aims of promoting international peace, Third World Solidarity, self-determination of all peoples, and multilateralism; all these developed in the unequivocal historical situation of India's independence struggle. It was the representation of the values and ideals, such as the Gandhian nonviolent legacy, that had an impact over it.ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, we see that independent India's aristocracy made an attempt to pursue a leadership role for India based on its ideological soft power and diplomacy. Indeed, India's first Prime Minister, Nehru, was a proponent of soft power and carved an international role for India based on its moral standing and support of the developing world, thus attempting to play a normative role in international relations. The soft power resources that India has in plenty due to its cultural and spiritual heritage include the movie industry, a cuisine that has worldwide popularity and a tremendously successful Diaspora, the IT industry; its democratic governance to a number of scientific achievements and finally its emergence as a global innovation hub. All this showcase that India has been a player in this phenomenon of globalization for quite some time with its soft power reaching everywhere all around the world. As Tharoor espouses, 'The attractiveness of these assets is that they permit countries to persuade others to adopt their agenda, rather than relying purely on the coercive 'hard power' of military force'.^{iv} A notable example of this is the international community's exceptional treatment of India in the realm of nuclear trade based on its relatively benign and responsible international image in addition to realist considerations.^v

Strategic Soft Power Engagement of India

India's military power was not up to the mark in the Nehruvian era. Despite this India's soft power clout is much stronger today and now it has also acquired the hard power to back it up with. Yet India has been reticent in this pursuit. Even the previous governments have not consciously capitalized on the country's soft power potential by following policies that build up the same to better achieve political ends. India's soft power outreach has been largely unplanned. An institution like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was started in the 1950s to publicize Indian culture worldwide but it lacked adequate investment and resources. The Indian

Government has been working on and emphasizing India's democratic potential. For example, India's democratic credentials and accomplishments during his visits to Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Fiji, Australia and Japan to the official UN recognition of International Yoga Day and a vigorous engagement of the Indian Diaspora in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia and beyond. In fact, PM Modi has re-ushered the concept of soft power into the Indian foreign policy discourse.

The EU-India Alliance: Harnessing the Potential Soft Power

EU and India are strategic partners since 2004 and they also signed a Joint Action Plan in 2005. It's been over a decade still both are far from a substantive partnership. Though the EU still remains India's largest trading partner the impulse in their relationship seems slumped with the FTA remaining held up for years. Both the EU and India face tensions and pressure in their foreign policies owing to their respective histories. The EU does not have a gleaming history concerning the war, so it has positioned itself as a normative actor in the international system. On the contrary, India's position has risen in the international system from a weak state to an emerging power India has shifted from its historical Gandhi-Nehruvian normativity to a more realist foreign policy.^{vi}

The significance of the EU has reduced to a great extent due to its complex relationship with Pakistan and China where the key players are US and Russia who play a very crucial role in the international system. India is now encompassing the "multi-alignment" and joining hands with all the major and middle powers, including Europe. But if we analyse on the scale of priorities, Europe seems to have been declassified to the backburner as India's focus has shifted to the Asia Pacific.^{vii} However, this partnership could be seen as a productive partnership that does not risk itself being hijacked by the ephemeral nature of international relations. So if we view this from a prism of optimism this partnership shows that soft power is central in the context of EU-India relations. Soft power is something that both have in plenty, especially at a time when the Government of India is emphasizing soft power in its foreign policy. As Neelam Deo of Gateway House emphasizes, 'There is no contradiction between an expansion of relations by India in Asia and with the European Union'.^{viii}

The Indian Diaspora and its Engagement

The Indian Diaspora refers to the symbiotic relationship between India and the overseas Indians, which could promote, nurture and sustain a mutually beneficial relationship. India falls among those countries that worked on this and created the Ministry in the year 2004 called 'Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs or MOIA'.^{ix} The modern diasporas include the ethnic minority groups of migrant origins who reside and act in the host countries but maintain strong sentimental and

material links with their countries of origin and their homeland.^x A report by the Rockefeller Foundation-Aspen Institute Diaspora Program (RAD) has revealed that due to the high levels of economic and educational achievements of the Indian Diaspora in the US, it has set them way above the American national averages.^{xi} Besides the huge success of the Indian Diaspora there, a lobby has developed. An enhanced prominence of well-organized Indian-American lobby groups in American politics including amongst others the US-India Political Action Committee, the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, that have helped facilitate and influence outcomes conducive to India's agenda.^{xii} Instances of this include the effective promotion of the 2005 civil-nuclear deal in US Congress, and American revamping of Pakistan's aid package after the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament.^{xiii} So, we see that the Indian soft power has not been as rampant within Europe. The perceptions of EU and the focus of media remains stuck in the Third Worldism, poverty and human rights issues. The media emphasises more on the shortcomings that have existed in India rather than an awareness and appreciation of how far India has come despite its interminable challenges^{xiv} while on the other hand, the Indians generally have the view of Europe as an antiquated power which is on the verge of diminishing in the global dominance and remaining irrelevant to Asia. If we talk about the Indian media precisely it focuses more on the financial crisis that EU is going through and the issues related to multiculturalism rather than its successes as an institution.^{xv}

The Indian Diaspora in the EU, despite being significant in terms of population have not been as concomitant as its American counterpart with reduced economic and social engagement with India.^{xvi} Hence, it's evident that there have been a lot of astigmatism on both sides and also the lack of strong social links that have impeded the interactions and proffered a deficiency of conviction of the importance of the relationship, resulting in the marginalization of both parties in each other's political consciousness. PM Modi has been emphasizing on the Indian Diaspora in his many foreign trips as a part of his wider soft power campaign which recognized its potential as a principal strategic advantage to advance India's international agenda and interests. One of the prominent moves in this direction was seen in the election of 2014 when for the first time the NRIs were allowed to vote and as a result they contributed very significantly to the Government's majority mandate.^{xvii} So, it's believed that the Indian Government's continuous engagement with the Diaspora in the EU has expansive potential to become a key driving force towards a more substantial EU-India relationship. As Raja Mohan asserts, 'The Indian Diaspora can be a viable strategic asset, an 'instrument of soft power' in that they can lobby in favour of the Indian state's interests and positions in their respective host countries'.^{xviii} The Diaspora has contributed sizeably to the economies of both countries, and this link's innate disposition can propel their foreign policy agendas by acting as an operative crossover in modifying pervasive misinterpretations. Hence, the prospect and experience of the Diaspora within the EU could be boosted by strengthening collectively valuable policies by influencing elections within India and shaping the thought processes and discourses through positions in host governments. This could enhance the overshoot of India's soft power in Europe and intensify India's many successes, from its vibrant democracy to its emergence as a global innovation hub.

EU Foreign Policy vis-a-vis Centrality of Democracy

Europe has a strong position in the soft power domain where democracy is at the heart of the EU's foreign policy. But it seems that despite the firm role that the EU has been portraying, for India, its way is different. It increasingly appears that the EU in its foreign policy, emphasizes normativity and does not in reality distinguish between democratic and non-democratic states and it basically favours engaging with authoritarian China. According to an Indian expert on Europe, 'Europe has taken too little interest in India, and the US has now clearly decided to favour us over China.'^{xix} The interest of US in India is motivated by its realist considerations. It's rather a strategy to camouflage the same in ontological terms which could focus on India's democratic credentials as a starting point that has certainly thrived and entrenched a fruitful partnership. Thus, for the Indians, conceding and valuing is great attainment of their incontrovertible system in a region where most countries struggle to synthesize and sustain undergoing ideals. Likewise, the EU must advance its association with countries that share its fundamental values. On the bright side, France and Britain have categorically supported India's endeavour for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.^{xx}

Leveraging Indian Soft Power in the Middle East

The EU can take an upperhand of India's soft power in the distraught region of the Middle East where the West is many times perceived with antagonism against the contrasting and generally conducive discernment that Middle Easterners hold of India attributing to the many cultural fondness and the popularity of Indian films and culture there. India is inimitably located owing to its relationships with all major players in the region which includes its documented and contemporary links with the Arabs and Iranians coupled with its internal geography of the world's second largest Sunni Muslim population and the second largest Shia population and many other racial leaning, and its gradationally proliferating relationship with Israel. A noteworthy example of Indian soft power at work here happens to be the immense goodwill and positive image that Afghans have towards India due to which they are accepting of Indian forces training their security personnel. As the Diplomat states, 'India regularly polls among the countries most popular with Afghans'.^{xxi} The EU can benefit from India and attempt to place itself as a key player in Afghanistan and the wider Middle East can gain adherence if it acknowledges India's distinctive soft power in the region and exploit the same as prospective balancer there. On the other side, even India must augment the scope of its foreign policy outlook from a largely sensitive to a more enterprising role by exercising its stance and exhibiting a tangible role for itself in the Middle East which might be more relevant than ever given the recently unmasked limitations of using force to achieve stability. For this, India must

drop its postcolonial circumscription make itself more pertinent at the international level and make a deliberate option to pursue such a role by capitalizing its unique soft power than ever given the recently exposed limitations of using force to achieve stability.

The Diversity and the Common Interests

India and the EU have common interests because both are composite, diverse entities of lingual, primordial and culturally variegated states. Lately, there has been a crisis in both the nations with respect to the decline in the ethos of secularism.^{xxii} Broadly though, if we try and understand secularism in India it refers to the equal treatment of all religions by the state whereas in Europe it means the separation of church and state.^{xxiii} The Europe is gradually leaning towards the right after being frequently intimidated by a fanatical minority that is influenced by religious build up, on the other hand, in India the commination, in terms of interludes of conscientiously stimulated violence against minorities is flowing from a majority right-wing Hindu nationalist government. The inter-ethnic relations between the two have largely been peaceful despite the occasions of contained communal violence. Also, despite the politicization of identity within the sheer scale and magnitude of India the relationship has remained cordial.^{xxiv} In fact, an acclaimed author Michael Mann explicitly diagnoses the case of India to be the exception in his assertion that 'Ethnic conflict is the dark side of democracy'.^{xxv} and India's federal system of governance has served in a great way in the peaceful coexistence of distinct indigenous groups, granting them self-determination and autonomy. Meanwhile, it is more essential than ever for Europe to accentuate India's democratic and secular credentials and extend support to these. Both are traditionally secular and tolerant entities so they can learn from the other's experience and cooperate on annihilate these mounting puritanical inclinations and comminations to their fairly complaisant pathways.

India's Soft Power and the Truths

As Joseph Nye has stated, 'In the information age, it is often the side which has the better story that wins'.^{xxvi} To continue its generally positive story, India must tackle its domestic challenges. While the Modi government mobilizes India's natural strengths in the international arena, India's soft power and international stature will gain its biggest boost if it is accompanied by important socio-economic changes that improve the security of women by countering its endemic rape problem and the deliverance of inclusive domestic development that improves the quality of life of its millions that still live under dire poverty. The Modi government must be careful and preserve its soft power by ensuring that India conserves its traditions of tolerance and secularism that have led to burgeoning conformity of its diversity, and is not confiscated by the forces of polarization. Soft power is equivalent to product branding i.e. a brand will instantaneously treat images and associations but all these will only remain valid so far as the brand performs.

The Way Forward

Now, it is the time when Indian statesmen calculatively undertake its innate soft power supremacy by draining into its many such assets and diplomatically engaging these as priceless instruments to further its foreign policy goals in the growingly transnational world. From this, it seems like a soft power strategy is in the making under the able governance of our Prime Minister Mr. Modi but equally important in sustaining this strategy. The EU and India may have contrasting perspectives but both eventually stand for the same global philosophies and adherence towards a multipolar, standard-based democratic international order. In a world afflicted with numerous challenges including Islamic fundamentalism and a fundamentally changing international perspective, the dialogue between both India and EU must acknowledge these elemental natural toughness and coactions and this should be the intermedial proposition taking the relationship forward. Thus, it's clear that the EU and India have much to clinch through the acknowledgement of the other's soft power attributes and transcribing the same into tangible foreign policy action to further their interests and create a more well construed world order. Hence, the constructive cooperation can set the ground for deeper commitment on strategic issues and can possibly modify the methodical impasse the relationship finds itself in, thereby developing into a wholesome all inclusive confederation that could unfold into a true and comprehensible partnership in the future.

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