



## Soft power of India in Central Asia

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### Abstract

This paper presented the Soft power of India in the Central Asian region. The soft power is as the milestone for integration the bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the globalization era. Therefore, India tries to use the track second diplomacy and cultural diplomacy, with the using traditional and new approaches to build and leverage its soft power. This leads the reasons for the investment, the various forms of public diplomacy the effectiveness of its efforts to shape public opinion with the Central Asian people. It finds that Indian investment in public diplomacy is partly a response to concerns about the perceived growth of Indian soft power in the Central Asia and partly a function of changed beliefs in the foreign policy-making about the uses of new engagements. Thus, this paper tries to attempt the comprehensive analysis and an overview of soft power of India in Central Asian region which explore the outline the bilateral as well as multilateral cooperation between India and Central Asian countries.

**Keywords:** central Asia, post-cold period, soft power, SCO, chahabar port

### 1. Introduction

India's soft power has been demonstrated since Ancient period and not only soft power player in Uzbekistan but also all Central Asian region. Additionally, there are most important features of soft power for example, Sufi music, Bollywood and yoga as well as shared heritage in art, cuisine, architecture and democratic values. It's too early to evaluate if India's effort are having any substantive impact of foreign policy. But for the first time a coherent policy is underway to increase India's interest. This is likely to have significant implications for the conduct of Indian diplomacy and the broader role of India is global politics in the coming years.

The Indian Cultural Centre in Uzbekistan established in 1995 and after seven year it was renamed as Lal Bahadur Shatri Centre for Indian Culture in 2005<sup>[1]</sup>, this centre organizes regular yoga classes. The yoga is more popular action among the local people in Uzbekistan who regard it not only as a physical exercise but also have accepted it as a way of life. It seems that India is providing for development of relations with Uzbekistan and free classes on kathak, yoga, Hindi and tabla is highly appreciated through local government and the people.

Indian history in Central Asia including Uzbekistan interactions through trade, goods, ideas and spiritual interface. In fact, this is positive image of India in the Central Asia region as popular perceptions comes from their past trade, commerce and cultural linkages. Babur as the founder of Mughal Dynasty in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He came from Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan in the region of Central Asia. The famous Sufi saint of the Chisht order, Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki came from Osh (Stobdan, 2016). Thus, soft power can still play a useful role in contemporary relations with Uzbekistan. It is high time that the best channels of

opportunities available for transforming of India's positive outlook.

Other most important feature of soft power that language is more significant tools for connect of the people to people contact. When Radio Tashkent of Hindi section established by government of India in 1962 at regular broadcast. Radio Tashkent program are not only listeners in Central Asia region but also North Europe side which continues to receive various letters from its dedicated listeners<sup>[2]</sup>. The friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between two countries.

On 7 July 2015, Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi at Tashkent said, "the language is key to the development of personality and interactions between people to people contacts. Language helped connect with strangers in a foreign place and hearing someone speak in one's native gave happiness. PM Modi in a tweet said that Indian movies, language and music are very popular in Uzbekistan<sup>[3]</sup>. In early, 2012 Uzbek radio completed 50 years of Hindi broadcasting. This is as the biggest tools of understanding each other.

The concept was first formulated by American scholar and frequent policy-maker, Joseph S Nye Jr, who defined it in 1990 as when one country gets other countries to do what it wants and as coercive power (Nye, 1990). He noted: *Today.....the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force... The factors of technology, education and economic growth are becoming significant in international power*<sup>[4]</sup>. He described the determinants of soft power as growing out of "a country's culture.....out of our values

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Uzbekistan\\_09\\_02\\_2106.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Uzbekistan_09_02_2106.pdf). Accessed on 27 November, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pravdareport.com/news/world/ussr/17-12-2002/19337-0/>. Accessed on 3 December, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/pm-narendra-modi-uzbekistan-tashkent-central-asia-ufa-russia/1/449679.html>. Accessed on 3 December, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Malone, David, M. (2011) Soft Power in Indian Foreign Policy' available at <https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents%20EN/EPW-Soft-Power-3-September-2011.pdf> Accessed on 23 April 2019

democracy and human rights, when we live up to them” (Nye, 2004). In 2006, he elaborated further that the power is the ability to alter the behaviour of others to get what you want and there are basically three ways to do that: coercion (sticks), payment (carrots) and attraction (soft power) (Nye 2006). He also mentioned the key role of civil society in generating USA soft power from Hollywood to Harvard<sup>[5]</sup>.

The concept of soft power is substantial component of a state’s power regarding influence with the welfare countries each other. It is difficult to measure its actual impact of those activities has done through bilateral relations. On the other hand, the advantages of hard power such as military as well as economic resources that they can be measured and compared, and their direct effects are more or less profound. It is impossible however to quantify the appeal of a country’s values, culture, institutions or achievements, an appeal which is inherently subjective and therefore contested and fluctuating. Furthermore, the indirect nature of India’s soft power is more difficult to ascertain. It is for example difficult to assess whether a foreign government acceded to India’s foreign policy objectives because of its partiality towards Indian culture. Nevertheless, in spite of these caveats, some observers of India’s foreign policy have noticed how certain characteristics of India’s history, culture and political development have progressively gained foreign attention. India has a long history of civilisational and cultural links with countries in Central Asia, South-East Asia and the Middle East (Zafar, Athar, 2015). Its riches have attracted traders and travellers for thousands of years. Buddhism spread from India to China and beyond, leading to a sustained exchange of ideas since ancient times. Even today, the proposal by India to rebuild the once internationally famous Nalanda Buddhist University in partnership with China, Japan, South Korea and Singapore serves as testament to those historic cultural ties.

India’s connection in Central Asia has since Ancient period that had provided the direct physical connectivity till before 1950s decade. The people of Central Asian Republics (CARs) had come for the purpose of trade and commercial activities through Silk Road who provide the direct connectivity in term of trade and commercial and cultural activities. At the present, India has lack of direct connectivity from CARs which is the main barrier for the improving the trade as well as people to people contact. On the other hand, India appears to be reorienting its military strategy in Central Asia toward a more modest, soft power approach. Therefore, India set up a small field hospital in Farkhor, Tajikistan, just two kilometers from the border with Afghanistan in 2001. On the other hand, the most important regarding military cooperation between Tajikistan and India, India began renovating an airfield at Ayni, just outside Tajikistan’s capital of Dushanbe in the year 2004 which uses other military bases in the country at no charge, start to pay rent on them (Dave, Bhavna, 2016). It seems that India has shown signs of changing approach in its military and soft power’s outreach strategy in Central Asia. All the Central Asian republics will help India strengthen its bilateral and multilateral engagement with countries of heartland region and has been increasing up New Delhi’s re-engagement with Central Asian countries. This paper try to attempt an efforts regarding diaspora as well as soft power of India in Central Asia which has attain a great

opportunities for investment and people to people contact.

### **India’s Soft Power strategy in Central Asia**

United States of America, China and Russia are the three major strategic players in Central Asian region in the Post-Cold war period. India is a strategic as well as interested power in the region. America entered into region after disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991 and keeping in mind various issues of geostrategic and geopolitics, security, democracy values, natural resources. Therefore, India presence was further strengthened only around 1994s with the largely focus concerned in the area of oil and natural resources in the region. China also made direct pipeline originating from the region and to maintain a balance of power through countering the terrorism and separatism, has been focusing continue own interest. The main objective is to access the uranium mines and energy. The objectives USA is to obtain the natural resources and energy from the region and threat like Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and so on. At the same time, China and Central Asia have been closely interwoven in the history, which relationship has begun to reemerge at the present time (Pradhan, R. 2015). Further, this has led to a flourishing relationship between the two natural allies in the early years of the 21st Century. China shares a 3500 km of border with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. In the early years of the Central Asian Region, China is more interested player the political stability of the region and in avoiding Islamic fundamentalism captivating roots. Finally, America has been trying to continue the boosted democracy and its diplomacy with all Central Asian countries. Nevertheless, China’s major interests in the region also includes: to get access to energy resources of the CARs, and to address its problem of East Turkestan movement in Xinjiang. China is actively taking part in exploring the Aktyubinks and Mangyshlak oil deposits and building an oil pipeline in the Kazakhstan Xinjiang region. It is the major energy partner of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on the eastern side of the Caspian. Compare to India, China worked to create the world’s fastest built natural gas pipeline, connecting the Turkmenistan’s vast southeastern Gas fields with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan’s forbidding assets to support extinguish the second largest economy’s seemingly voracious thirst for resources.

It initiated in 1996 the formation of the Shanghai Five with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia to stabilise its borders, to promote peace and cooperation in the region and to develop greater trade relations with the CARs. Uzbekistan joined the Organization in 2001, when it was renamed as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Stobdan, P. 2016). Two strings, Chinese pipeline are already completed, connecting with Turkmenistan to China through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Russia, on its part, has three major reasons for being involved with the region. First, that is to protect ethnic Russians in the region. Second is that to maintain access to important resources such as precious metals. Third, to restrict the influence of the external powers and the United States of America retain its influence for the national interest. In this regard, USA, China and Russia are the major geostrategic player in the region (Mukerji, Ashoke. 2012). The competitive rivalry between Turkey and Iran in Central Asia is new type of game for natural resource. They have taken steps to induce and to recognise their respective roles in the region. Turkey has been concerned that Iran may

<sup>5</sup> ibid

attempt to turn the Muslim nationalities towards theocracy, while Iran is worried that Turkey's active role in the region is aimed at pan Turkism. This rivalry has emphasized with USA open support to Turkey and Russo Chinese backing to Iran from the region. Pakistan has offered political support and economic integration to the region, to surface the way for a broader strategic unity. The role of Iran, Turkey and Pakistan has been transformed over the year with regard to Central Asia. Particularly, after the 2001 World Trade Centre attack incident, the regional politics in the CARs got intertwined with larger national security perspectives of the nation surrounding of Central Asia and Afghanistan. For Iran, greater US involvement brought the engagement. India needs to seize the opportunity through engaging the contradictory powers with each other while keeping an eagle eye on her interests in mind. Iran and Turkey are friendly countries of India. New Delhi can promote own interest in the region (Pradhan, R. 2015).

### India as a Soft Power

From independence of India which is rare amongst great powers of India's size as well as strength in term of demographic dividend. India as a unique soft power at the world stage to emphasis as an advantage in the favour of multipolar world. New Delhi has an positive image of comparatively non-violent, and pluralistic democracy, tolerant with a non-threatening international influence. Its foreign policy also has the same qualities as soft power such as non-violence, a democratic set up, peaceful resolution of disputes, cooperation, friendly relations with other states, no first use of the w-eapons or weapons used only to retaliate, not to attack another country, nor try to interfere in others sovereignty and so on. The ID is also peace loving, democratic, do not fight with others, and easily integrate with the host society, etc. These values of the Indian diaspora community further enhance the soft power of our country. (Kumari, Kamni, 2017) Although, India has been trying to attract maximum foreign students for the medical, tourism and so on (Singh, Maini, Tridivesh, 2016).

### India's Connect Central Asia Policy

The first India-Central Asia Dialogue, organized on 12-13 June 2012 at Bishkek, a capital of Kyrgyzstan. Minister of State for External Affairs of India, E. Ahmad, announced India's 'Connect Central Asia Policy'. He remarks that India is now looking closely at the region through the framework of its 'Connect Central Asia' policy <sup>[6]</sup>, which is based on pro-active political, strategic and economic, cultural engagement with Central Asian states, both individually and collectively". The policy is a broad-based approach, which improve the relation in the field of economic, political, people to people contact, cultural engagement with Central Asian states, both bilateral and multilateral level. This is positive and important step about a long term partnership with the Central Asian Republics. The main objectives of this dialogue, to begin a regular annual dialogue forum among scholars, government officials, academics and business representatives from India and the region of Central Asia, with the aims of providing outcomes from both sides Roy, (Meena Singh. 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Ansari, Shri M. Hamid. "Inaugural Address." *CRRID National Seminar on India and Central Asia: Perspectives on Bilateral and Regional Cooperation* 2012. <http://vicepresidentofindia.nic.in/content.asp?id=394>. Accessed on 25 November, 2016.

In Indian strategic and geopolitical situation, Central Asia region is considered to be a part of its extended neighborhood. India's security concerns in Central Asia are Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The part of the Central Asia's geopolitical paradigm is as dynamic because there are various issues like proliferation of small, Afghan refugees, drug trafficking, the arms culture, instability Afghanistan which have a direct manner on India.

India is working its strategy towards Uzbekistan with the aim of peace and stability. Therefore, India declared strategic partnership with Uzbekistan in the year 2011, when President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov visited at New Delhi. India has built an expanding security relation with Uzbekistan based on a common aversion to Islamic terrorism activities in the region. Indian scholars believe these two states are natural allies, who observe each other this way as they both threaten the same threats like drugs, insurgency, terrorism, separatism etc. (Blank, Stephen. 2013) Uzbekistan has increasingly widened its security discussion with India to include intelligence sharing, military and paramilitary training program and mutual cooperation in the joint working groups against terrorism as India has done with Washington and Moscow.

### Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation is a program in the area of economic as well as technology cooperation with the countries. It was started by Prime Minister of India late Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1964, and it was required to strengthen relations of mutual interest and interdependence based on the common interest and aspirations in the bilateral as well as multilateral cooperation with the members of ITEC Program. There are 161 countries in the program of ITEC and the continent of Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Europe, Caribbean and Pacific and small Island countries. And there are various areas are covered under this program like information technology, journalism and mass communications, non-conventional energy, telecommunications, banking and finance, audit and accounts, small scale industries and so on.

### The main features of the ITEC program are following

- Projects related to activities such as feasibility studies as well as consultancy service
- Donations of the equipment of the ITEC program's member
- Training in India of nominees from ITEC Program's members<sup>1</sup>
- Aid for disaster relief
- Study tour <sup>[7]</sup>

### Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program and Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan joined India's Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation program since 1993. Uzbekistan is the first country in the Central Asian region which took the membership after independence in the ITEC program. This program is working in the several areas like management, journalism, small business and medium business, English language, information technology, mass communication, study aboard, etc. For example, Indian think tank Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) offered ten

<sup>7</sup> <http://itec.mea.gov.in/?1320?000>. Accessed on 24 November, 2018.

scholarships annually for students of Uzbekistan. And other institute named, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) offered 30 scholarships annually for the student of Uzbekistan (Attri, Ashok Kumar, 2010). In the year of 2002-03, 104 candidates participated, in 2003-04, 109 candidates participated, in 2004-05, 100 candidates participated in the ITEC program's training through External Ministry of Affairs of India.

Thus, it has become the most important regarding export and import of technology as well as commercial point of view. Because of India's technology, it is beneficial for the progress of economy as well as social development, particularly in Uzbekistan. In the period of Post-Cold War era, during this time India's technology development is building high with the United States of America and western countries. And another aspect is more significant regarding human development in the area of technology as well as scientific development. Uzbekistan has also signed several agreements with India for technology, scientific and economic collaboration under the ITEC program (Sachdeva, 2010). Consequently, India is better and most developed country than Central Asian countries especially, Uzbekistan. Therefore, India and Uzbekistan can work with the systemic for the development of the technology as well as economic relationships through this program. In recently, when Prime Minister of India visited at Tashkent on 6 July 2015 then several candidates participate in ITEC program during Valediction function at National Institute of Labour Economics Research and Development (NILERD). On the other hand, a program organised as a Golden Jubilee celebration by trainers of ITEC at Tashkent. Several students of Uzbekistan are studying in different Indian Institutes or University. Furthermore, India and Uzbekistan can increase the relation in the area of technology and economic sphere. India has expanded it's already computerization in the Uzbekistan since 1993. It means Indian technology has been successful in the progress of society of the Uzbekistan.

### Conclusion

The soft power can certainly play an essential role in generating goodwill. Though, India's use of soft power has been hindered through key limitations like scarcity of resources, especially in comparison to countries including China as the major power, and the lack of a clear strategy due to internal contradictions of India. Moreover, the soft power through itself will not be enough in the absence of tangible economic and hard power. For example, South East Asia and Africa may have strong strategic convergences with India, and yet it is China's financial ability that gives it the decisive advantage. India has reformed its public diplomacy, reinvesting in traditional modes of building soft power, including the cultural exchanges organized by the ICCR with the Central Asian countries, and utilizing new methods, including the use of new social media. In part, these efforts are a response to a wider struggle for soft power in Asia. They are extensions of India's long-standing concern with public diplomacy, which gives back into the Nehru era. Lastly, these initiatives have been stimulated by a growing interest among India's foreign policy with Central Asian countries. The soft power concept was coined by Joseph Nye. He proposes that soft power is a country's ability to achieve its goal through attraction and persuasion. It forces other countries to shape their preferences and

interest for the country. It appeared that the soft power depends on attraction and persuasion instead of force and inducement, which is different from hard power based on economic and military power. This kind of attraction is derived from a nation's culture, values and soft diplomacy.

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