

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 7 | Issue 6

2024

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The Ultra-soft Power of Bharat: Moving Towards Global Harmony

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ABSTRACT

The ultra-soft power of Bharat has emerged as a crucial instrument in its pursuit of global harmony within the current geopolitical context. Defined by the capacity to sway others through balanced tactics rather than through direct conflicts or deceptive interventions, the ultra-soft power is a fundamental aspect of Bharat's foreign policy. In recent years, Bharat has engaged in effective dialogues and enacted insightful policies aimed at strengthening its relationships with various nations worldwide. Significant efforts for fostering sustainable dialogues through military cooperation, economic association, cultural and value-based collaboration, bilateral relations, humanitarian assistance, etc. have become foundational stones to Bharat's diplomatic strategy. Bharat's active participation in various global forums highlights its commitment to collective action in addressing pressing global issues. Its focus on its democratic ideals and multicultural society resonates with numerous countries, enhancing its reputation as a responsible global leader. Subsequently, the ultra-soft power of Bharat transcends mere strategies for improving its international standing; it is fundamentally connected to its vision of promoting peace, security, stability, prosperity and happiness across borders. This research paper delves into the diverse aspects of Bharat's ultra-soft power, encompassing its military prowess, economic strength, cultural assets, humanitarian attitude, democratic principles, and dedication to sustainable development, all aimed at achieving global harmony.

Keywords: *Ultra-soft power of Bharat, global harmony, military prowess, economic strength, cultural interactions.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ancient Indian literature indicate that the northern hemisphere was once completely encircled by waters, encompassing a significant landmass identified as Jambou Dweep. This area corresponds to what is now known as Asia, Europe, Africa, and North America, and was referred to as Bharat Varsh. Bharat Varsh was subdivided into nine distinct parts, one of which was Bharat Khaṇḍ. The *Viṣṇu Puraṇ* describes it as the territory situated south of the Himalayas,

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surrounded by water from three side. It is also said that the word 'Bharat' is derived from the name of King Bharat, who is celebrated as the first Chakravarti. Bharat Varsh refers to greater India, while Bharat Khand denotes the Indian subcontinent, which stretches from the Himalayas in the north to Kanyakumari in the south. (Devi, 2023).

As Bharat (Bharat Khand) is developing in the field of ultra-soft power and endeavours to formulate a healthy overarching strategy for its external affairs, the notion of ultra-soft power may prove beneficial. A robust ultra-soft power strategy could facilitate Bharat's acceptance as a leader at international level, attract greater foreign investment and tourism, and secure increased backing to strengthen its standing in global forums in a stable and dynamic manner. Bharat can guide the world towards peace and establish a new world order. (Singh, 2017, p. 01). It possesses a significant potential, and it is imperative for the nation to leverage this capability in the current context.

(A) Ultra-soft Power: A Conceptual Framework

The discourse on global harmony invariably emphasizes the importance of 'ultra-soft power' in shaping external affairs. The concept of 'soft power' was initially introduced and brought to prominence by the Harvard professor Joseph Nye in his book, *Bound to Lead* (1990). In his article, "Soft power: the origins and political progress of a concept" (Nye, 2017), he asserts, Soft power refers to the capacity to achieve desired results by influence or attraction rather than through force or payment (Nye, 2017). The five essential components of soft power, when utilized with strategic intent, encompass Samman (dignity), Samvaad (dialogue), Samriddhi (shared prosperity), Suruksha (regional and global security), and Sanskriti evam Sabhyata (cultural and civilizational connections) (Mukherjee, 2024). In contemporary society, it is essential to formulate a new strategy that encompasses all these aspects in a comprehensive and effective way as the phrase 'Soft Power' has limited dimensions. The necessity for 'Ultra-soft Power' arises in order to effectively manage external affairs. The phrase 'Ultra-soft Power' means extra-ordinary soft power, which elegantly amalgamates all the dimensions of power for social welfare in the global context: military prowess, economic strength, and the influence derived from cultural and other value-based factors. The concept of 'ultra-soft power' pertains to the ability to balance actions collaboratively through useful tactics in order to attain comprehensive results on a global scale.

'Ultra-soft power' is a wide-ranging concept. While it can manifest through specific policies, initiatives, or activities, its scope extends beyond these elements. Similar to any valuable resource, ultra-soft power has the potential to be utilized for beneficial ends.

(B) The Ultra-soft Power of Bharat: Initiatives for Global Harmony

In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, the significance of ultra-soft power has emerged as crucial in determining a nation's global reputation and influence. The ultra-soft power of Bharat is, to some extent, supported by its military capabilities, economic strength and cultural interactions and value-based systems, reflecting a dedication to regional stability, national security and global welfare. Through its involvement in peacekeeping operations and the establishment of strategic alliances, Bharat illustrates its ability to exercise responsible leadership, improving its international standing and advocating for cooperation and communication rather than conflict in global affairs. India's economic initiatives, such as 'the Act East Policy' and participation in regional trade agreements, highlight its commitment to promoting regional integration, economic collaboration, and development. By capitalizing on its economic strength and strategic partnerships, India aims to enhance its role as a significant player in the global economy and influence the regional geopolitical landscape. Additionally, India's ultra-soft power is enriched by its diverse cultural heritage, which includes art, music, spirituality, yoga, meditation and Ayurveda that resonate worldwide. Together with its democratic values and ethical standards, India champions ideals of peace, tolerance, and inclusivity, fostering international relationships and cooperation. These initiatives, which exemplify the ultra-soft power of Bharat, attest its esteemed image and build capacity to promote global harmony. Although balancing cooperation and contribution play major role in shaping the world, the role of communication strategies is becoming increasingly vital, with outcomes being influenced not just by the success of the military forces but also by the dominance of the narrative that emerges (Nye, 2011).

This research paper delves into Bharat's multifaceted engagement with these dimensions of ultra-soft power in promoting global harmony, exploring how the country's rich cultural heritage, economic policies, strategic partnerships, military strength and effective communication contribute to its emergence as a significant player on the world stage.

(C) Research Inquiries

- What are the ways of the ultra-soft power of Bharat?
- In what ways is Bharat integrating an ultra-soft power strategy into its external affairs?
- What key instruments does Bharat employ to project its ultra-soft power internationally?
- What type of power is Bharat likely to evolve into?

(D) Objectives

- To understand the evolution of power dynamics and to elucidate the execution of ultra-soft power in the present scenario of the world.
- To critically assess the resources and potential of Bharat's ultra-soft power across its various dimensions.
- To evaluate how Bharat has implemented the ultra-soft power approach to measure the effectiveness of foreign policies.

(E) Methodology

This study will utilize descriptive method to make an in-depth examination of the ultra-soft power of Bharat. It would employ secondary method for collecting data from various sources of knowledge. Each dimension of the framework will be scrutinized to ascertain how Bharat can harness its ultra-soft power to foster global harmony.

II. DIMENSIONS OF ULTRA-SOFT POWER

The dimensions of ultra-soft power are identified thus: military prowess, economic strength, and the influence derived from cultural and other value-based factors.

a) Military Prowess

Bharat is recognized as a big military power. Its position as the fourth most powerful military globally, as indicated by the 2024 Global Firepower Index, underscores its crucial contribution to regional security (Sagar, 2024). However, it does not attain the status of a 'military superpower' comparable to the United States, Russia, and China. Therefore, India's desire to achieve such a status necessitates a comprehensive strategy. This could potentially be one of the factors contributing to the change in its defence structure. In 2020, India implemented structural changes by appointing a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) to lead the newly established Department of Military Affairs (DMA). This initiative aims to improve integration and balance within the Indian defence system, ensuring that the three services (Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Air Force) effectively utilize their resources in a cohesive manner.

The military prowess of Bharat serves as a vital component of its ultra-soft power, promoting global harmony through peacekeeping missions, humanitarian assistance, non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and defence diplomacy. By participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations, India showcases its commitment to stability and conflict resolution, building trust with other nations. Additionally, India engages in defence cooperation and joint exercises with various countries, fostering partnerships and enhancing regional security. This approach not only strengthens India's strategic position but also emphasizes its role as a

responsible global player dedicated to maintaining peace and fostering collaboration, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious international society. The influence of Indian values, which promote peace, is evident in Europe and various Western nations (Sharma, 2023)

The initiatives of Bharat in security and defence cooperation are also vital for protecting its national interests, fostering regional stability, and addressing emerging security challenges. The United States, as Bharat's strategic ally, has become a significant defence supplier and security collaborator, with bilateral cooperation encompassing defence technology transfers, joint military exercises, and intelligence sharing. The renewal of the 'U.S.-India Defence Framework Agreement, 2015' highlights the dedication of both nations to enhancing defence relations and advancing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, Bharat's defence partnerships with nations such as Israel and Russia have bolstered its defence capabilities and addressed a variety of security issues. Bharat's engagement with Southeast Asian nations, guided by the Act East Policy, aims to enhance maritime security, combat piracy, and improve collaboration in areas like counter-terrorism and disaster response. Joint naval exercises, including the Malabar Exercise, which involves the navies of Bharat, the United States, Japan, and Australia, exemplify the increasing cooperation among Indo-Pacific nations to uphold a free, open, and inclusive region. Additionally, Bharat's involvement in regional security organizations such as the 'Indian Ocean Rim Association' (IORA) and the 'ASEAN Regional Forum' (ARF) demonstrates its commitment to fostering peace, stability, and security in the area.

b) Economic Strength

The economic strength of Bharat constitutes an essential element of its ultra-soft power, fostering international unity. In April 2024, the International Monetary Fund projected Bharat's GDP growth at 6.8 percent. However, in July 2024, this forecast was adjusted upward by 20 basis points to 7 percent. This positive assessment is largely due to a rise in household expenditure, especially in rural regions, which has been bolstered by increased agricultural earnings and various government assistance initiatives. Bharat's economy is characterized by its diversity and rapid expansion, driven by vital sectors including information technology, services, agriculture, and manufacturing. The nation effectively leverages its extensive domestic market, a young and technologically skilled workforce, and a growing middle class. Subsequently, Bharat is positioned fifth in the global GDP rankings for the year 2024 (*Forbes India*, 2024).

The economic strength of Bharat is pivotal in advancing regional integration, stimulating

economic growth and reinforcing relationships with the other countries of the world. ‘The Act East Policy’, introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, aims to bolster economic interactions with countries in East and Southeast Asia, capitalizing on Bharat's geographical advantages and historical connections to the area. Through platforms such as the ASEAN-India Summit and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, Bharat seeks to enhance trade, investment, and connectivity, unlocking new avenues for economic collaboration and development. A Win/Win solution ensures that all involved parties are satisfied with the decision and are dedicated to the implementation of the action plan. This approach views life as a collaborative endeavour rather than a competitive one (Covey, 1999, p. 207).

Bharat’s involvement in regional trade agreements like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) underscores its dedication to regional economic integration and cooperation. India's economic diplomacy also extends to Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, regions that hold considerable economic potential and strategic significance. Engagement with Central Asian nations, supported by initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Chabahar Port Project, aims to improve connectivity and foster trade and investment in these areas. Likewise, India's relationships with the Middle East, marked by energy collaboration, remittances, and cultural exchanges, play a crucial role in promoting regional stability and economic prosperity. Prime Minister Modi transformed the ‘Look West’ policy into the ‘Link and Act West’ initiative during his initial visit to the United Arab Emirates, which was subsequently followed by trips to Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Iran between August 2015 and June 2016.

c) Cultural and other Value-based Factors

1. Cultural Interactions

Culture encompasses all the patterns of thought and behaviour exhibited by individuals within a society. It embodies the methods by which the individuals think and behave as members of a society. It comprises values, beliefs, codes of conduct, and other frameworks for social, political, economic and spiritual organizations. These elements are transmitted from one generation to another through formal and informal interactions.

The cultural initiatives of Bharat have significantly contributed to the enhancement of its ultra-soft power and the promotion of cultural exchange and understanding with other countries. Indian cinema, renowned for its rich narrative tradition and widespread appeal, has emerged as a formidable medium for cultural interaction, reaching audiences globally and encouraging

cross-cultural dialogue. Indian films have gained traction in various nations, overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers to resonate with a wide array of viewers. By presenting its culture, traditions, and values through film, Bharat has successfully forged connections of friendship and collaboration with individuals from diverse regions. The *Sanatan* principle of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' (the world is one family) embodies this philosophy, highlighting the interconnectedness of all individuals and the necessity of nurturing mutual understanding and cooperation among nations.

The ultra-soft power of Bharat is characterized by a wide array of cultural elements that reflect the nation's rich heritage, varied traditions, and significant contributions to global civilization. By engaging in numerous cultural, educational, and diplomatic initiatives, India effectively utilizes these ultra-soft power resources to promote cross-cultural understanding, foster goodwill, and strengthen its international presence. The global proliferation of Indian culture and civilization stands as one of the most remarkable outcomes of this interaction (Mir, 2023).

Culture is pivotal to Bharat's ultra-soft power strategy, with institutions such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) leading the charge in presenting nation's cultural diversity and heritage to a global audience. Events like the International Yoga Day illustrate India's capacity to advocate for wellness, unity, and peace through ancient practices that have universal appeal. Beyond Yoga, India's extensive literary heritage, classical music and dance, culinary arts, traditional textiles and handicrafts, spiritual destinations, and lively festivals further enhance its ultra-soft power portfolio. Works such as *the Bhagavad Gita*, various classical Indian music and dance forms, Indian culinary traditions, and festivals like Diwali, Holi, Eid, Christmas, Baisakhi, Pongal, etc. exemplify Bharat's cultural richness and spiritual significance, resonating with audiences around the world. These elements of ultra-soft power, that bolster India's global influence include:

a) **Indian Cuisine:** Celebrated globally for its rich flavors, diverse spices, and culinary traditions, Indian cuisine is widely available in major cities worldwide, highlighting its popularity and appeal. Through its culinary offerings, India showcases its cultural diversity, culinary skills, and hospitality, thereby influencing global food trends and practices. The appreciation for Indian recipes is growing among individuals worldwide, indicating that Indian cuisine is poised to achieve increased popularity in the future (Mangalassary, 2016).

b) **Classical Music and Dance:** The classical music and dance traditions of Bharat, including *Bharatanatyam*, *Kathak*, Carnatic music, and Hindustani classical music, have enchanted audiences globally with their sweet rhythms, emotive expressions and spiritual

significance. Indian artists, including musicians and dancers, present the elegance and richness of Indian culture through their performances. They additionally safeguard, advance, and disseminate Indian art forms, which embody the essence of Indian culture and heritage (Devi, 2023).

c) **Literature and Philosophy:** Bharat's extensive literary tradition, which encompasses ancient texts, epics, poetry, and contemporary works, provides deep insights into the human nature, spirituality, and philosophical thought. Notable texts such as *the Bhagavad Gita*, *the Ramayana*, *the Mahabharata*, along with the literary contributions of Vishnu Sharma, Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir, Rabindranath Tagore, R.K. Narayan, Munshi Premchand, etc. resonate with a global audience, fostering reflection, dialogue, and cultural interchange. Veda, Upanishads, Samhitas, Indian literature has served as a source of inspiration for individuals worldwide (Sharma, 2023).

d) **Textiles and Handicrafts:** The long-standing tradition of textile production, embroidery, and handicrafts in Bharat highlights the nation's artistic talent, craftsmanship, and cultural variety. Indian textiles, including silk, cotton, and wool, along with detailed embroideries such as *zari* and *kantha*, are esteemed worldwide for their quality and artistry, reinforcing India's position as a global center for fashion and design. The realm of textiles and handicrafts not only embodies the cultural identity of the nation but has also served as a vital source of income for millions of artisans (Kshirsagar, 2024).

e) **Traditional Festivals and Celebrations:** Celebrations such as Rakshabandhan, Krishna Janmashtmi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Durga Puja, Dusshera, Diwali, Pongal, Holi, Hanuman Jayanti, Shivratri, Buddha Purnima, Eid, Christmas, Lohari, Baisakhi, Mahavir Jayanti, etc. are observed with immense enthusiasm throughout India, reflecting the nation's cultural richness and religious diversity. These festivals unite people, promote social harmony, and create avenues for cultural exchange and tourism at international level. India is a nation rich in festivals, characterized by the harmonious coexistence of individuals from diverse religious backgrounds (Fenn and Joshi, 2021).

f) **Spiritual Tourism:** The surge in spiritual tourism in the world has highlighted numerous tangible and intangible factors that carry significant social, cultural, economic and ecological implications. Bharat is uniquely positioned as a cradle for all the major world religions. This rich tapestry of faiths serves as a significant draw for spiritually inclined visitors from around the globe. The extensive international media coverage of events such as the *Kumbh Mela* also underscores the global admiration for Bharat's enduring commitment to its spiritual beliefs and

traditions over the centuries. India stands out as a highly favored destination for what is commonly referred to as spiritual tourism, a conclusion that is supported by the significant number of visitors it attracts (Banerjee, 2015).

g) Yoga and Meditation: Bharat's ultra-soft power initiatives have significantly contributed to its global standing and the way the country is perceived internationally through the communicative events of yoga and meditation. Throughout the past few decades, the terms meditation and yoga have become widely known and embraced around the world (Pandey and Singh, 2021). The International Yoga Day, initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 and observed annually on June 21st, has become one of Bharat's most effective ultra-soft power endeavors. This event promotes yoga and meditation as a comprehensive approach to health and wellness, attracting widespread participation worldwide, with millions from various backgrounds uniting to practice yoga and meditation, and adopt its principles of unity, harmony, and inner peace.

h) Ayurveda: Ayurveda represents the organized body of medical knowledge and healing methodologies that originated in the Vedic period. The term Ayurveda is derived from two Sanskrit words: 'veda', which means 'knowledge' or 'science', and 'ayu', which signifies 'life' or 'lifespan.' Consequently, Ayurveda can be understood as the science or knowledge pertaining to life. The *Caraka Samhita* and the *Susruta Samhita*, the two most renowned classical Ayurvedic texts, were composed in Sanskrit and are integral to the Ayurvedic tradition of Bharat. Indian Ayurveda, with its holistic approach to health, has significantly contributed to global wellness by emphasizing balance between mind, body, and spirit. Its teachings on natural healing, herbal medicine, and preventive care have gained worldwide recognition. As a form of soft power, Ayurveda fosters cross-cultural exchange, promotes sustainable living, and strengthens global harmony by offering accessible, eco-friendly health solutions that resonate with diverse cultures and traditions across the world. A variety of studies have examined the effectiveness of Ayurvedic treatments for different health conditions, and the incorporation of Ayurvedic principles into modern healthcare could enhance the overall approach to patient care (Verma et al, 2024).

2. Bilateral Relations

The bilateral relations of Bharat with significant nations are instrumental in defining its foreign policy goals and strategic priorities. The United States, recognized as India's strategic ally and its largest trading partner, maintains robust economic, defence, and strategic connections with India. The Joint Statement issued during the State Visit of the U.S. President to India in January

2015 underscores the strengthening partnership between the two nations, highlighting collaborative efforts in defence, counter-terrorism, and economic development. In a similar vein, Bharat's relationship with China, marked by both collaboration and rivalry, has profound implications for regional stability and security. The ongoing border dispute between India and China, along with China's expanding influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, continues to be a significant concern for Indian policymakers. Therefore, a robust centralization of foreign policy is anticipated to facilitate a cohesive and efficient reaction to global issues, especially in the areas of international security (Subramanian and Shairgojri, 2024)

The *Sanatan* principle of 'Ahimsa Paramo Dharma' (Meaning: Non-violence is the highest moral virtue) emphasizes the importance of non-violence as the highest moral duty. It advocates for resolving conflicts through peaceful dialogue and diplomacy, promoting understanding and cooperation rather than aggression. This approach encourages individuals and societies to seek harmonious solutions, fostering a culture of respect and compassion in interpersonal and international relations.

3. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

The bilateral engagements of Bharat extend beyond economic and strategic interests to include humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. Bharat believes that the evolution of human beings represents a journey back to an inherent state of perfection. This state can only be achieved through the cultivation of holiness and love (Vivekananda, 1999). As a responsible global leader, Bharat has provided assistance to countries affected by natural disasters, conflicts, and humanitarian crises. For example, in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, Bharat played a significant role in providing relief aid and rehabilitation support to affected countries in the region. In 2024, India has sent 30 tons of vital humanitarian assistance to Palestine, comprising medicines, medical supplies, and food items, in response to the escalating conflict in Gaza. It is affirmed by the statement of Randhir Jaiswal that Bharat remains committed to supporting the people of Palestine (*Business Standard*, 2024). Similarly, Bharat has been actively involved in peacekeeping operations under the United Nations umbrella, deploying troops and humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected areas such as South Sudan, Haiti and other regions of the world.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, India showcased its dedication to global solidarity by providing humanitarian aid, notably through the *Maitri* Vaccine Initiative. This initiative enabled the distribution of millions of vaccine doses to more than 95 countries, encompassing regions such as South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Bharat's contributions not only aided in

the fight against the pandemic but also strengthened its position as a responsible global leader, promoting international collaboration and goodwill during challenging times. The *Sanatan* concept of “Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayah/ Sarve Bhadrani Pashyant, Maa Kashcid-Duhkhah-Bhag-Bhavet”, which means “May all sentient beings be at peace, may no one suffer from illness, may all see what is auspicious, may no one suffer” (Gaikwad, 2021), reflects this spirit of humanitarian assistance and reliefs, conveying the wish for the well-being and happiness of all beings. That is why, Bharat stands as the most exceptional of all nations globally, serving as a beacon for the propagation of humanism throughout the world (Singh, 2008, p. 180).

III. CONCLUSION

The ultra-soft power of Bharat is in its nascent stage in modern perspectives, highlighting the necessity for its in-depth analysis for understanding global harmony. Consequently, the present study intends to address dimensions related to the ultra-soft power of Bharat and to illuminate these dimensions in a different way. The study not only focuses on the potential of Bharat’s ultra-soft power; but also explores how this potential is being developed into actionable capabilities and assesses its practical application in external affairs. It is situated within the broader context of Indian strategic thought and is framed within the parameters of Indian policy-making.

The ultra-soft power of Bharat signifies its shifting paradigms of foreign policy and positive desire for global leadership. Through various ultra-soft power initiatives, Bharat showcases its military capabilities, economic influence, and cultural and other value-based initiatives, promoting global harmony. The nation’s strategic partnerships and bilateral relations, bolstered by its military strength, highlight its dedication to tackling security challenges, advancing mutual interests, and influencing regional and global governance structures. Bharat's economic initiatives are designed to foster regional integration, stimulate economic development, and strengthen relationships with various countries of the world. By capitalizing on its military prowess, strategic alliances, economic advantages, cultural heritage and other value-based systems, Bharat adeptly navigates the intricacies of international relations, contributing to global peace, stability, and prosperity.

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