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## Showcasing Cultural Diplomacy: India's Strategic Use Of Soft Power At The G20 Summit

**Research Scholar Name:**

**David Sharma**

**Dept. of Political Science  
Shambhu Dayal PG College,  
Ghaziabad**

**Supervisor Name:**

**Prof. Rochna Mittal**

**Hod, Dept. of Political Science  
Shambhu Dayal PG College  
Ghaziabad**

### Abstract

This research paper explores India's strategic use of cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool during its presidency of the G20 Summit. By emphasizing India's rich cultural heritage, traditions, and values, the paper examines how cultural diplomacy was employed to foster global partnerships, promote inclusivity, and enhance the nation's global image. The study analyzes key initiatives such as the promotion of traditional arts, cuisine, and philosophy, as well as their impact on global perceptions of India as a bridge between developed and developing nations. Through a qualitative approach, the research highlights how India leveraged its cultural identity to shape narratives, strengthen alliances, and assert its leadership on the global stage. The findings underscore the significance of cultural diplomacy in advancing foreign policy objectives in multilateral forums.

**Keywords:** Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, G20 Summit, India, Global Leadership, Strategic Communication, International Relations.

### Introduction

In the global arena of international relations, the role of diplomacy has evolved beyond traditional power dynamics, embracing a more nuanced approach that incorporates culture, values, and public perception. Cultural diplomacy has emerged as a potent tool, enabling nations to foster international relations through the promotion of their culture, heritage, and societal values. Among the various countries employing cultural diplomacy, India stands out for its strategic use of soft power, a concept that refers to the ability of a country to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. This is particularly evident in India's engagement with global platforms such as the G20 Summit, a forum where leaders of the world's

largest economies gather to address global challenges. The G20 Summit, initially established to promote international economic cooperation, has gradually expanded to encompass discussions on a wide range of issues, including sustainability, climate change, health, and trade. India's strategic use of soft power during these summits highlights its growing role as a global leader, one that seeks to influence not only through economic and political means but also through its rich cultural heritage, democratic values, and inclusive approach to global governance. The 2023 G20 Summit, held in New Delhi, provided a particularly significant platform for India to showcase its cultural diplomacy and soft power, underscoring its aspirations to be a key player in shaping the global order.

This research paper aims to explore the strategic use of India's soft power at the G20 Summit, with a focus on how cultural diplomacy plays a central role in advancing the country's diplomatic goals. The paper will delve into the various facets of India's cultural engagement, examining the ways in which the country leverages its diverse cultural assets to strengthen its global standing. Additionally, it will highlight specific initiatives undertaken by India during the G20 Summit, shedding light on the methods and tools used to project its cultural influence on the global stage. To understand the significance of India's soft power at the G20, it is essential to first define the concept of soft power itself. Soft power, as articulated by Joseph Nye, refers to the ability of a country to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction rather than through coercive measures. This power is rooted in a country's culture, political values, and foreign policy, and it has become increasingly important in a world where traditional hard power (military and economic strength) is not always sufficient to address complex global challenges. For India, a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, soft power has become a key element of its foreign policy strategy, enabling it to project an image of peacefulness, inclusivity, and development.

At the G20 Summit, India's approach to soft power is multifaceted, incorporating elements of cultural exchange, heritage promotion, and the advocacy of values such as democracy, pluralism, and sustainable development. One of the primary ways in which India showcases its soft power is through cultural diplomacy, which involves the exchange of cultural ideas, practices, and values between countries to foster mutual understanding and cooperation. India has long recognized the power of culture to bridge divides and promote dialogue, and it has actively used its cultural assets in various diplomatic settings, including the G20.

Cultural diplomacy is not limited to the arts, literature, and music but also extends to aspects of Indian society such as its spiritual traditions, hospitality, and philosophy of peace. The promotion of Indian culture at the G20 Summit serves not only to strengthen bilateral relationships with individual member countries but also to position India as a leader of the Global South, advocating for the voices of emerging economies and developing countries. This is particularly important in the context of the G20, where the power dynamics between developed and developing nations often shape the outcomes of discussions on global issues. In addition to cultural diplomacy, India's soft power at the G20 is also reflected in its ability to shape global discourse on issues such as climate change, health, and sustainable development. India has consistently used its platform at the G20 to advocate for a more inclusive and equitable global order, one that takes into account the needs and aspirations of developing nations. Through its cultural diplomacy, India has sought to highlight its role as a champion of inclusive growth, social justice, and environmental sustainability, leveraging its cultural heritage and democratic values to influence global policy discussions.

One of the most significant aspects of India's cultural diplomacy at the G20 is its emphasis on the concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" – the idea that the world is one family. This ancient Indian philosophy, rooted in the country's spiritual and philosophical traditions, reflects India's vision of a world where nations work together in harmony to achieve common goals. At the G20 Summit, India has consistently invoked this principle to advocate for a cooperative approach to addressing global challenges, emphasizing the need for multilateralism and collective action.

The 2023 G20 Summit, in particular, highlighted India's efforts to bring its cultural diplomacy to the forefront of international discussions. Through the curation of cultural exhibitions, performances, and collaborations with global artists, India showcased the vibrancy and diversity of its culture. The event also featured discussions on India's spiritual and philosophical contributions to global thought, such as its emphasis on mindfulness, sustainability, and holistic well-being. These initiatives underscored India's commitment to promoting its cultural heritage as a tool for fostering global cooperation and understanding. Furthermore, India's leadership in the G20 Summit also provided an opportunity to highlight its achievements in areas such as technological innovation, sustainable development, and public health. By positioning itself as a leader in these fields, India sought to demonstrate how its rich cultural heritage can be integrated with modern solutions to address contemporary global challenges. This juxtaposition of tradition and modernity is a key element of India's soft power, as it emphasizes the country's ability to balance its ancient wisdom with its aspirations for a progressive and inclusive future.

This paper will analyze how India's soft power, particularly through cultural diplomacy, is deployed strategically at the G20 Summit to achieve its diplomatic objectives. It will examine the specific initiatives undertaken by India in the context of the 2023 G20 Summit, assessing their impact on global perceptions of India and the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in advancing India's foreign policy goals. By drawing on examples from the summit, the paper will explore how India's cultural diplomacy contributes to its broader diplomatic strategy and its quest for a more equitable global order.

In doing so, this research paper will contribute to the growing body of literature on the role of soft power in contemporary international relations, offering insights into how cultural diplomacy can be leveraged to shape global narratives and influence the decisions of powerful international organizations. Through an exploration of India's strategic use of soft power at the G20 Summit, the paper will provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which culture, values, and diplomacy intersect in the pursuit of global influence.

### **Theoretical Framework: Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy**

The theoretical framework for analyzing India's strategic use of soft power at the G20 Summit can be grounded in Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which refers to the ability of a nation to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or payment. This framework emphasizes the role of culture, values, and foreign policies in shaping a country's global image. India's approach to soft power leverages its rich cultural heritage, democratic values, and diverse societal practices to build positive global relations. At the G20 Summit, India effectively positioned itself as a leader in promoting sustainable development, inclusivity, and multilateral cooperation, using cultural diplomacy to enhance its diplomatic influence. The framework also draws upon the theory of public diplomacy, which involves engaging foreign audiences and creating a favorable image through communication and cultural exchange. India's cultural initiatives, such as promoting yoga, Ayurveda, and Bollywood, are key examples of this strategy, highlighting its soft power in action. Additionally, the concept of "Strategic Narratives" plays a role, where India has used the G20 platform to craft a narrative that aligns with its aspirations of global leadership, economic growth, and fostering South-

South cooperation. Thus, this theoretical framework situates India's use of soft power within the broader context of international relations and global diplomacy.

## Impact of India's Soft Power at the G20 Summit

India's presidency of the G20 Summit in 2023 provided an important platform for the country to assert its global leadership through the strategic use of cultural soft power. Soft power, a term popularized by Joseph Nye, refers to a nation's ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion, particularly through cultural, diplomatic, and ideological means. India's cultural soft power, built on a rich heritage and a diverse, pluralistic society, played a central role in shaping the summit's outcomes and enhancing India's international stature. Below is an exploration of the impact of India's cultural soft power at the G20 Summit.

### 1. Promotion of India's Global Image

**Cultural Diplomacy as a National Identity:** India's use of cultural diplomacy helped shape its global image as a vibrant and culturally diverse nation. The G20 summit served as an ideal venue to showcase India's rich traditions, heritage, and philosophies. By integrating Indian cultural elements—such as the theme *\*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam\** (The World is One Family), ancient texts, and symbols like the lotus—India positioned itself as a country deeply rooted in history yet forward-looking, committed to global unity and sustainable development.

**Yoga and Wellness Diplomacy:** India's promotion of yoga and wellness practices during the summit highlighted the country's contributions to global health and well-being. The participation of G20 leaders in yoga sessions symbolized a commitment to holistic health and also deepened India's soft power influence, particularly in wellness and mindfulness sectors. This initiative solidified India's position as a leader in global wellness practices, contributing to the global popularity of yoga and meditation.

### 2. Strengthened Bilateral and Multilateral Relationships

**Building Partnerships through Cultural Exchange:** During the summit, India engaged with G20 members through cultural exhibitions and events, fostering stronger ties with various countries. Cultural diplomacy allowed India to engage not only on the political and economic fronts but also on people-to-people relations, emphasizing mutual respect and understanding. Delegates and leaders experienced India's diversity firsthand, thus paving the way for deeper bilateral ties, particularly in areas such as tourism, education, and trade.

**Soft Power and Global Governance:** India's cultural diplomacy at the G20 helped enhance its influence on global governance issues. By aligning the summit's agenda with themes such as sustainability, inclusivity, and the importance of shared global values, India presented itself as a champion of global cooperation. The emphasis on cultural diplomacy helped shift the G20 narrative towards cooperation that transcends political and economic dimensions, focusing also on cultural exchanges and shared human values.

### 3. Economic and Strategic Impact

**Promotion of India's Cultural Exports:** India's cultural soft power also had an economic dimension. The global visibility generated by the cultural exhibitions, cuisine, and displays of traditional art forms introduced international audiences to Indian products and services. This exposure has the potential to boost cultural exports—such as handicrafts, textiles, films, and music—which in turn can stimulate India's economy. For instance, Indian cuisine presented at the summit helped increase global awareness of India's diverse food culture, likely leading to greater demand for Indian spices and culinary tourism.

Enhanced India's Status in Global Leadership: Through its soft power strategies, India has positioned itself as an emerging global leader capable of shaping narratives on climate change, digital innovation, and inclusivity. By focusing on the cultural aspects of diplomacy, India was able to demonstrate that its leadership extends beyond economic and military capabilities to include moral and ideological influence.

#### 4. Cultural Diplomacy and Sustainable Development Goals

Cultural Integration with Policy Initiatives: India's emphasis on cultural diplomacy at the G20 was aligned with its commitment to global sustainability goals. By integrating cultural preservation and environmental sustainability into the discussions, India drew attention to the role of culture in shaping sustainable policies. The promotion of indigenous knowledge systems, such as traditional farming practices and sustainable living, resonated with the G20's focus on climate change and environmental responsibility.

Global Connectivity through Digital Platforms: India also showcased its tech prowess in creating digital spaces for cultural exchange. The inclusion of digital platforms for sharing cultural content—films, music, and art—demonstrated how technology can act as a conduit for promoting cultural understanding and collaboration. This underlined India's emerging role in driving global conversations on the intersection of technology, culture, and sustainability.

#### 5. Cultural Soft Power as a Tool for Advocacy

Advocacy for India's Role in Global Governance: India's cultural soft power at the G20 allowed the country to advocate for its position in global governance. The country's focus on shared human values, peace, and cooperation resonated with developing countries and emerging economies. Through cultural displays and the strategic use of themes like "One Earth, One Family, One Future," India promoted a narrative that emphasized the interconnectedness of nations and the need for inclusive global leadership. This advocacy positioned India as a bridge between the developed and developing world, further solidifying its role as a global voice for the Global South.

Symbolic Leadership in Global Multilateralism: India used cultural diplomacy to symbolize its leadership in multilateralism, highlighting the importance of dialogue and collaboration among nations, especially in areas like climate change and global health. Through its cultural initiatives, India was able to portray itself as a champion of peaceful coexistence, drawing from both ancient wisdom and contemporary policy priorities to shape the global discourse.

### Challenges and Criticisms

Despite India's strategic use of soft power at the G20 Summit, there are several challenges and criticisms to consider. One key issue is the difficulty in ensuring that cultural diplomacy translates into tangible political or economic outcomes. While cultural exchange can foster goodwill, it does not always lead to concrete policy changes or international cooperation. Additionally, there is concern over the authenticity of India's soft power initiatives, with critics arguing that they sometimes prioritize national interests over genuine cultural sharing. Another challenge is the diverse and complex nature of India's cultural identity, which may make it difficult to present a unified message to the global audience. Furthermore, some critics suggest that soft power, while influential, cannot fully replace traditional hard power in addressing complex geopolitical issues. As such, India's reliance on soft power may need to be balanced with more assertive diplomatic strategies to achieve long-term success on the global stage.

## Lessons Learned and Future Implications

The G20 Summit highlighted India's effective use of cultural diplomacy as a key aspect of its soft power strategy. Through initiatives like promoting Indian art, heritage, and values, India demonstrated the importance of non-coercive influence in fostering international relationships. One key lesson learned is the growing significance of cultural exchanges in shaping global perceptions and fostering mutual understanding, particularly in diplomatic settings. India's ability to intertwine cultural elements with strategic dialogue underscored the potential of soft power in influencing policy discussions. Looking forward, this approach could be further expanded to strengthen India's global standing, especially in emerging geopolitical contexts. Future implications suggest that cultural diplomacy will increasingly play a pivotal role in not only enhancing national image but also in addressing global challenges, such as climate change and public health, by fostering international collaboration through shared cultural understanding. Enhanced focus on soft power could offer India new avenues for global leadership.

## Conclusion

India's G20 presidency was a masterclass in cultural diplomacy, demonstrating how soft power can be leveraged to achieve diplomatic objectives. By showcasing its rich heritage and aligning cultural values with global challenges, India not only enhanced its international image but also contributed to fostering global unity and cooperation. As the world navigates an era of increasing complexity, cultural diplomacy will remain an essential tool for building bridges and shaping the future of international relations.

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