

YOGA DIPLOMACY AND THE INDIAN DIASPORA: DIFFUSION OF SPIRITUAL NORMS IN THE GLOBAL SOCIETY

Dr. Sultan Singh Yadav,

Assistant Professor,

Department of Political Science, Govt. Degree College Tanakpur, Champawat, Uttarakhand.

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary international system, soft power has emerged as a crucial instrument through which states influence global perception and norms. Among India's various cultural resources, Yoga has evolved into a powerful diplomatic tool that transcends national boundaries and promotes values of harmony, holistic well-being, and spiritual consciousness. This paper examines the concept of Yoga diplomacy and analyzes the role of the Indian diaspora in communities function as vital cultural intermediaries who transmit and reinterpret yoga traditions within diverse socio-cultural contexts, thereby amplifying India's soft power. The study particularly highlights the global momentum created by the adoption of the International Day of Yoga by the United Nations, which institutionalized yoga as a global cultural practice and reinforced India's normative influence in international discourse on health, mindfulness, and sustainable living. By situating yoga within the broader frameworks of the soft power and norm diffusion in international relations, this paper argues that yoga diplomacy extends beyond cultural promotion to become a subtle yet effective means of shaping global values and identities. In conclusion, the study shows that the Indian diaspora plays an important role in spreading yoga across the world and turning it from a traditional spiritual into a widely accepted way of life that influences health, well-being, and values in global society.

Keywords: Yoga Diplomacy, Soft Power, Spirituality, Indian diaspora, Public diplomacy.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world of war and conflicts, the concept of soft power has emerged as a significant tool in international relations. Unlike the traditional form of power that rely on economic and military coercion, soft power now shaping global outcomes through persuasion, cooperation, people-to-people connections and cultural diplomacy. With long civilizational history and rich spiritual culture, India, can act as a catalyst in promoting soft power in Global politics.

Among these cultural resources, Yoga is one of the most prominent global symbols of India's cultural identity. And the declaration of the International Day of Yoga in 2014 at UN showcase India's soft power as a promoter of physical, mental and spiritual well-being. With increasing followers of Yoga across the globe, India is becoming the flag bearer of soft power and holistic well being. Hence, Yoga is becoming a crucial element of India's diplomacy (Thussu,2020).

Simultaneously, the Indian Diaspora is also helping in the spread of Yoga globally through Yoga events, cultural organizations, digital platforms.

This paper explores how Indian diaspora helps in building networks for Yoga Diplomacy and how this process rolls out spiritual norms in Global society. It also argues that the Indian diaspora acts as connecting link, that allows yoga to go beyond its traditional context and ally with global politics on holistic living.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOFT POWER AND NORM DIFFUSION

To Understand how cultural practices influence international relations first we need to understand the concept of Soft Power and Norm diffusion. These theories help us to examine how Yoga has become a part of global politics and how it increases India's International influence.

The concept of soft power was presented by Joseph S. Nye Jr. According to Nye Soft power is the ability of a country to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than military or economic coercion. Hard Power is in the control of the government and easy to apply, but its effects are devastating in nature. Whereas soft power is outside of the control of the government and more difficult to apply but its effects are beneficial in the long run. Cultural practices, Media, Lifestyle habits, educational exchanges are the important tools of soft power. Hence, soft power resources are scattered, slower and more unwieldy in comparing to hard power resources. (Nye, Soft Power).

India holds a reservoir of cultural traditions that promote soft power. Yoga, spirituality, philosophy, Ayurveda and classical music are India's ancient traditions that drew Global attention. And among these, Yoga has emerged as a globally recognized practice because of its emphasis on physical and mental well-being. Indian Diaspora, international yoga events, educational programs etc. are displaying India's Image as peace, harmony and holistic living country in the global platform.

Another important concept in international relations is norm diffusion. Norms can be understood as shared expectations of appropriate

behavior within a particular social context. (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In their work of international norm dynamics, scholars have explained how socialization and institutionalization help in the flow of ideas and practices from local to global.

Therefore, soft power and norm diffusion together help us to understand how yoga and Indian diaspora function as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. Yoga has gradually moved from a traditional practice of physical and mental well-being to a globally recognized symbol of wellness and spiritual balance, through diaspora communities, global networks and institutional support.

YOGA AS AN INSTRUMENT OF INDIA'S SOFT POWER

Among the many cultural resources that contributes to India's soft power, yoga stands out as the most influential one. In recent times, yoga has moved from being a spiritual practice exercised in the Indian society to the global platform as a means for health, mindfulness, and well-being. Earlier, thought of as just a practice involving pranayama (breathing techniques) and dhyana (meditation), Yoga has evolved and spread beyond India, attracting people around the world with benefits of a healthier lifestyle and mental peace.

The modern world faces numerous challenges, from war torn nations, social unrest and conflicts to stressful lifestyles and growing health challenges. Through Yoga, India projects its association with values such as peace, harmony, positivity, and balance with the environment. This association further transforms to a bridge that connects cultures and promotes mutual respect and understanding. Sharing Yoga with the World has reinforced India's cultural identity, philosophical influence, and global goodwill around the world.

Such meaningful impact of Yoga and the positive image it generates has empowered Indian tourism which has further helped it in shaping a positive global perception as well as spread its

cultural influence internationally. Due to these cities like Rishikesh and Haridwar attract numerous visitors from international domains, travelling to India to study yoga in traditional settings. In this manner India has strengthened its presence on the world stage while by promoting wellness, mindfulness and cultural exchanges.

ROLE OF INDIAN DIASPORA IN PROMOTING YOGA

A spiritual practice that is an amalgamation of body postures, breathing techniques and a quiet mind-Yoga, originating in India over thousands of years ago and has since transcended borders to become a universal way of life. Millions of people around the world got introduced to this practice by the Indian Diaspora, who promote yoga internationally through their teachings and people-to-people cultural exchange.

The Indian diaspora has further strengthened the spread of yoga through Indian communities around the world by actively organizing workshops, camps, training institutes and cultural festivals. All these helps to spread knowledge about practicing Yoga and its benefits meanwhile preserving traditional knowledge alongwith adapting yoga as per modern lifestyle and to a wider international audience. With the rapid growth of the Indian diaspora across continents, yoga continues to serve as a cultural bridge connecting communities and promoting mutual understanding.

Public celebrations of the International Day of Yoga have become a major means for promoting the practice at a global scale. For example, the Consulate General of India hosted "Solstice at times square", New York which was attended by around 10,000 participants from different nationalities. Similarly in 2024 over 700 participants from different communities gathered despite heavy rain for an event organized by the Indian High Commission at Trafalgar Square, London. This depicts how Indian diaspora's promotional efforts are in the line with India's cultural diplomacy.

Beyond such large-scale events, the diaspora's influence is sustained through permanent institutions as well. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has established cultural centers worldwide. It actively promotes Yoga through workshops and training sessions.

DIFFUSION OF SPIRITUAL NORMS IN GLOBAL SOCIETY

The diffusion of spiritual norms is the process by which spiritual beliefs, values and practices spread among cultural and societies. In this digital age, these spiritual beliefs, values and practices are increasingly moving across cultural and national boundaries. Other factors like globalization, migration, cultural exchange and tourism have acted as a catalyst for this diffusion, transforming spirituality form a mostly localized cultural phenomenon into a dynamic gold exchange. Similarly, diaspora communities carry religious and spiritual practices into new societies and cultures where they interact and adapt with local traditions. It is due to these factors that the spiritual norms do not remain confined to specific geographic or cultural regions.

When these spiritual ideas get in contact with new cultural contexts, they go through reinterpretation, adaptation, and hybridization. Their meaning may also shift depending on the contemporary incidents and requirements of the time and region. For example, Yoga which is historically linked to attaining a disciplined path toward spiritual liberation is often presented in contemporary western societies as a technique for stress reduction.

The journey of yoga throughout history is a very good example that illustrates how spiritual traditions are reshaped through cultural interactions. Yet, despite these transformations, yoga has carried forward all the underlying values and philosophical ideas from Indian spiritual traditions. Concepts such as mindfulness, inner

balance and the interconnectedness of mind and body still form the core of Yoga.

CONCLUSION

India's influence in global politics is increasingly shaped by its soft power, supported by its rich cultural traditions, universal acceptance of Yoga and the widespread presence of its diaspora. These elements together project a positive image of India and spread its cultural presence across different societies. The diplomatic initiatives, active involvement of diaspora and the institutional support has helped Yoga to gain pervasive acceptance across diverse societies. With the promotion of its cultural heritage, using digital platforms and fostering international collaboration, India is strengthening its diplomatic presence while navigating domestic challenges, complex geopolitical structure and increasing international competition.

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