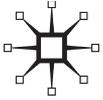


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## *Introduction*

The soft power of India, and especially Bollywood, is powerfully illustrated in an encounter experienced by journalist Bobby Ghosh, former Baghdad bureau chief of *Time* magazine. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Ghosh was reporting from a village west of Baghdad, a stronghold of Saddam loyalists. A “Colonel,” on finding out his occupation, picked up his AK-47 and pointed it to his forehead:

“You American?” he shouted.

“I’m from India,” I said.

“No, you’re American,” he said again. “You will die.”

My translator interjected, pleading with the Colonel not to shoot. I was indeed an Indian, he said. But the Colonel was having none of it. “He is American, and he must die,” he said.

More out of panic than forethought, I blurted out, “I’m Indian . . . like Shammi Kaboor.”<sup>1</sup>

“Shammi Kaboor?”

“You know Shammi Kaboor?” the Colonel asked. He still had the gun to my forehead.

“Of course I know Shammi Kaboor,” I said. “All Indians know him. He’s a big star.”

The Colonel lowered his AK-47. He stepped back. “You really know Shammi Kaboor?”

“Yes,” I said.

“I like Shammi Kaboor,” he said, with a small smile. “I saw all his movies when I was young.”

“Me too,” I lied.

“What was it he used to shout?” he asked. “Yahoo,” I said. The danger had passed. “You are lucky you’re Indian,” he said as I got into the car. “Otherwise you would be dead by now. You should

thank God.” In my mind, there was no doubt about who I needed to thank.” (Ghosh, 2011)

This encounter illustrates not only the widespread appeal of Bollywood and the different perception of India and Indians as a power outside the West, but also the role of India's professional diaspora working for the US. “India has soft power in abundance” exclaimed a recent *Economist* editorial entitled: “Can India become a great power?” (*Economist*, March 30, 2013). India is going global. The “Third World” label is rapidly being discarded, with the globalization of its English-fluent middle-class making their presence felt internationally through global corporate, publishing, and marketing networks. At the beginning of 2013, Ghosh was appointed the editor of *Time International*, the first non-American to achieve such an honor in the magazine's 90-year history. Ghosh's is not an isolated example: Nitin Nohria became the tenth dean of the Harvard Business School in 2010—the first Asian to be elevated to such a position. The Indian industrial group Tata owns the luxury brands British Jaguar and Land Rover, while the steel magnate, Lakshmi Mittal, an Indian, is the richest man in Britain. As one of the world's fastest growing economies and a vibrant, pluralist, and secular polity, India is increasingly viewed internationally as an economic and political power. On the basis of purchasing-power parity, in 2013 India was the world's third largest economy, behind China and the United States, although it still had 40 percent of the world's poorest people. Parallel to its rising economic power, is the growing global awareness and appreciation of India's soft power—its mass media, popular culture, cuisine, and communication outlets (Hymans, 2009; Lee, J. 2010; Wagner, 2010; BBC, 2010; Hall, 2012; Tharoor, 2007; Tharoor, 2012). India thus offers unprecedented opportunities to study soft power in a globalizing world with a media and communications infrastructure that enables the rapid global interchange of ideas and influences.

India's global influence has a long and complex history. The dissemination of Hindu and Buddhist ideas across Asia is well documented: it is no coincidence that the official airline of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, is named *Garuda*, a Sanskrit word, associated with a mythical bird, a *vahana* (mount) of the Hindu god Vishnu. The Indian contribution to Arab and Islamic thought on mathematics, astronomy, and other physical and metaphysical sciences is widely recognized. In more recent years, India has been a major exporter of human and intellectual capital to universities, transnational corporations, and multilateral organizations in the West. Despite its social inequalities and

poverty, the popular image of India outside the country has traditionally been positive as a nation of historical cultural continuities and distinctive and celebratory spirituality, from yoga to the *Kamasutra*, and Maharajas to Maharishis.

If the first two decades of globalization enabled the expansion of largely Western culture and consumerism around the world, the second decade of the twenty-first century is witnessing a steady growth in the visibility, volume, and value of cultural products from India—from Bollywood cinema to Bhangra music. From mobile telephony to online communication, India has witnessed a revolution in the production, distribution, and consumption of images and ideas. Unlike in the West, the media are booming in India: newspaper circulation is rising (India is the world's largest newspaper market with 110 million copies sold daily); the country has more dedicated television news channels—180 on the last count—than the whole of Europe put together and it is also home to the world's largest film industry. The digital revolution has ensured that Indian ideas are now reaching all corners of the globe, largely through the increasingly vocal and visible 25-million strong Indian diaspora and this has contributed to India's emerging soft power (Thussu, 2012).

### Soft Power

The notion of “soft power,” associated with the work of Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye, is defined, simply, as “the ability to attract people to our side without coercion.” The phrase was first used by Nye in an article published in 1990 in the journal *Foreign Policy*, where he contrasted this “co-optive power,” which “occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants,” to “the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants” (Nye, 1990a: 166). “Soft co-optive power is just as important as hard command power,” Nye argued, “If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow” (Nye, 1990a: 167). This much-cited article was based on Nye's book, published in the same year, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990b). The idea was subsequently developed in his four related books: *The Paradox of American Power* (2002), *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004a), *Power in Global Information Age* (2004b), and, most recently, in *The Future of Power* (2011). In the most widely

cited book *Soft Power*, Nye argued that soft power “rests at the ability to shape the preferences of the others” (Nye, 2004a: 5). He suggests three key sources for a country’s soft power: “its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (Nye, 2004a: 11).

The argument was elaborated by Nye in his 2011 book *The Future of Power*, in which he explores the nature and shift in global power structures—from state to non-state actors. In an age when, as he suggests, “public diplomacy is done more *by* publics,” governments have to use “smart power” (“neither hard nor soft. It is both”), making dexterous use of formal and informal networks and increasingly drawing on “cyber power,” which Nye describes as “a new and volatile human-made environment,” an arena where the United States has huge advantage, being the country which not only invented the Internet but is also at the forefront of governing it technologically, and dominating it both politically as well as economically. Nye defines soft power as the “ability to get preferred outcomes through the co-optive means of agenda-setting, persuasion and attraction” (Nye, 2011: 16).

In this process of persuading foreign publics to conform to a country’s foreign policy interests, a large number of non-state actors—transnational corporations, universities, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations, celebrities associated with creative and cultural industries—increasingly participate. Yet, for Nye, the state remains the primary object of analysis. According to Nye, soft power can be inherent in the history, culture, and political organization of a state and he calls such attraction the “passive approach” to soft power. On the other hand, in an active consolidation of soft power, states consciously try to make themselves attractive and persuasive by availing themselves of a number of policy tools, such as public diplomacy, economic assistance, cultural exchanges, and media broadcasting.

Though vaguely defined and rather amorphous, the concept of soft power has been adopted or adapted by countries around the world as a component of foreign policy strategy, despite Nye’s focus being primarily on the United States. It has generated much debate in academic and policy circles about the capacity of nations to make themselves attractive in a globalizing marketplace. The term has acquired global currency and is widely and routinely used in policy and academic literature, as well as in elite journalism. The soft power discourse provides an increasingly important perspective on international relations, as does the primacy of communicating a favorable image of a country

in an era of digital global flows and contra-flows, involving both state and non-state actors and networks. For idealists, in an age when communities “cooperate and co-create” communication networks, there exists the potential for “a genuinely collaborative public diplomacy” (Fisher and Lucas, 2011). However, increasingly soft power has been also used as a tool for hard military campaigns, for example by NATO to improve its public image. The use of international broadcasting and personalized social media—Facebook and Twitter—is adding another dimension to communicative power of governments and corporations, in a “global networked society” (Castells, 2009).

### **Soft Power and Public Diplomacy**

The term “public diplomacy” was first used in 1965 by Edmund Gullion of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in the United States with the establishment at Fletcher of the Edward Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy. According to a US government definition, “Public Diplomacy refers to government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television” (US Government, 1987: 85). Nicholas Cull refers to public diplomacy as “an international actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public” (Cull, 2009a: 6), while Melissen describes it as “the relationship between diplomats and the foreign publics with whom they work” (Melissen, 2005: xvii). Soft power plays an integral role in a country’s public diplomacy, where states interact with other states and exercise cultural and media power in particular contexts to achieve foreign policy aims, often in collaboration with private corporations and civil society groups.

It is a testimony to the power of the United States in the global arena, that its political vocabulary has been globalized to the extent that public diplomacy has now become a crucial component in the conduct of international relations (Melissen, 2005; Snow and Taylor, 2008; Li, 2009; Lee and Melissen, 2011; Cornish, et al., 2011; Hall, 2012; Lai and Lu, 2012; Sherr, 2012; Otmazgin, 2012). In the past decade, many countries have set up public diplomacy departments within their ministries of foreign affairs, while a number of governments have sought services of public relations and lobbying firms to coordinate their “nation branding initiatives,” aimed at attracting

foreign investment and boosting tourism, making public diplomacy a big business. Unlike propaganda, which retains a negative connotation in democratic societies, public diplomacy has elicited little controversy as it is perceived to be a more persuasive instrument of foreign policy, that is not coercive but soft, and one which is conducted by states in conjunction with private actors as well as civil society groups. This shift has stemmed from a growing appreciation of the importance of soft power in a digitally connected and globalized media and communication environment. Castells has argued for a broader understanding of public diplomacy in such a connected space. He suggests that it “seeks to build a public sphere in which diverse voices can be heard in spite of their various origins, distinct values, and often contradictory interests,” and recommends using it for developing “a global public sphere around the global networks of communication, from which the public debate could inform the emergence of a new form of consensual global governance” (Castells, 2008: 91).

The essence of soft power is that it is not forceful or aggressive, it is “getting others to want the outcome that you want” (Nye, 2004a: 5). Such a rendering of power is located within a hegemonic discourse and thus draws on cultural attributes. In his study of the impact of cultural forces in international relations, Ugandan scholar Ali Mazrui has argued that “culture is at the heart of the nature of *power* in international relations” (Mazrui, 1990: 8, emphasis in original). Mazrui suggested that among the functions of culture, one important aspect was what he called “culture as a mode of communication,” which apart from language, “can take other forms, including music, the performing arts, and the wider world of ideas” (Mazrui, 1990: 7). The importance of culture and communication in international relations cannot be overemphasized and the interplay between them has a long and complex history (Lebow, 2009; Norris and Inglehart, 2009).

With the advantages of its formidable cultural and media power and the unrivalled capacity to communicate it to a global audience, the United States has been the key actor in this arena. US soft power, underpinned by its extensive political and economic power, was crucial in its ideological war against communism during the Cold War, as well as in creating pro-market regimes in the Third World, leading to claims of cultural and media imperialism (Schiller, 1976; Boyd-Barrett, 1998). With the end of the ideological certainties of the Cold War years, a “cultural turn” to international relations emerged in the 1990s. Following 9/11, the dominant discourses emanating from the United States proclaimed a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 1996) and gave

rise to a large body of literature about culture and communication in the global age. As editors of a special issue on the theme of “International Relations and the Challenges of Global Communication” of the British journal *Review of International Studies* noted: “The conventional approach within IR has been, until recently, an attitude that ‘we’ know all that there is—or is needed—to know about global communication, and therefore that there is no need to situate IR within the emerging dynamics of communication elsewhere” (Constantinou, et al., 2008: 7). More recent work, notably the contribution of postcolonial theory to international relations has highlighted the need for broadening the discipline (Seth, 2012).

The US model of soft power, centering on engagement and influence and drawing on communication networks, though understandably dominant, takes a rather narrow view of what culture is and how cultural power can be exercised in a rapidly changing multicultural and multilingual world. India’s assets in terms of civilizational and cultural capital have existed for centuries: bringing it into the discourse of a “soft power” that can be globally communicated and deployed reflects the rise of India’s “hard” economic and political power and status.

### The Rise of India

In the last two decades, India has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world: its economic growth, averaging at 7 percent between 1992 and 2011, has led to the quadrupling of India’s GDP and, despite a population growth of more than 40 percent (from 850 million in 1991 to 1.2 billion in 2011), a rise in per capita income from \$915 in 1991 to \$3,700 in 2011. In this period, the country’s literacy rate has grown steadily from 52 to 74 percent, while the number of institutions of higher education has increased from 194 to 504. Average life expectancy has risen from 58 to 68 years and infant mortality rate has dropped from 80 to 47 deaths per every thousand births (Bhagwati and Panagariya, 2012; UNDP, 2013). Though still home to the largest number of world’s poor, these are significant developmental achievements. Stocks of foreign direct investment (FDI) to India have soared from \$1.6 billion in 1990 to nearly \$202 billion in 2011. Perhaps more instructively, FDI outward stock rose from just \$124 million in 1990 to more than \$111 billion by 2011. While much of this investment has been in Western countries, a significant proportion has gone to other developing countries (Price, 2011; UNCTAD, 2012a).

Indian companies such as Tata, Infosys, and Reliance are increasingly recognized as global corporate brands, while its information technology sector dominates global outsourcing, the basis of globalized electronic commerce. According to an UNCTAD report, during the past 20 years, production of software and BPO (business-process outsourcing) services in India surged from \$200 million to \$75 billion in 2011, while export sales rose from \$110 million in 1991 to nearly \$58 billion in the same period (UNCTAD, 2012b).

Militarily too, India has hugely expanded in the last two decades, modernizing its armed forces, forming the world's third largest army after China and the United States. India's defense budget has increased by 64 percent since 2001 and it will spend \$80 billion on military modernization efforts by 2015. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, India was the world's largest importer of conventional weapons during 2008–2012, accounting for 12 percent of global imports (SIPRI, 2013). It is a nuclear power, and, with the launch in 2012 of *Agni V*, a missile capable of carrying an inter-continental nuclear warhead, it has joined the elite club of nuclear nations. This has been possible to a large extent due to the changing geopolitical relationship between the world's most developed and its largest democracies. Washington's acceptance of India as a nuclear power and the 2005 civil nuclear agreement, while weakening the Non-Proliferation Treaty, demonstrated the strategic shift that the United States had made toward what it considers a major ally, especially in Asia.

This change in India's global status has coincided with the relative economic decline of the West, creating the opportunity for an emerging power such as India to participate in global governance structures hitherto dominated by the US-led Western alliance. Given its history as the only major democracy which did not become a camp follower of the West during the Cold War years, pursuing a nonaligned and pro-Third World foreign policy, India is well positioned to take up a greater leadership role. Despite its growing economic and strategic relations with Washington, it maintains close ties with other major powers. Its presence at the Group of 77 developing nations and at the G-20 leading economies of the world has been effective in articulating a Southern perspective on global affairs. India was a founding member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in 1985, and of IBSA, created in 2003 which groups India, Brazil, and South Africa, the three major multicultural democracies, "to contribute to the construction of a new international architecture." More importantly, it is a key member of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India,

China, and South Africa), whose annual summits since 2009 are being increasingly noticed outside the five countries, which together account for 20 percent of the world's GDP. The BRIC acronym, coined in 2001 by Jim O'Neill, a Goldman Sachs executive, to refer to four fast-growing emerging markets, has in its fifth summit in South Africa in 2013 (which joined the group in 2011), announced the setting up of a BRICS Bank to fund developmental projects, to potentially rival the Western-dominated Bretton Woods institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The emergence of such groupings reflects, in the words of one commentator, the fact that the “the centre of economic gravity could be shifting from some point in the Pacific Ocean to a dot near Mount Everest” (Bahl, 2010: 25), perhaps influencing the Obama Administration's view that the “pivot” of US foreign policy is moving to Asia, in its efforts at “rebalancing” international relations. Indeed, the major countries of the South have shown remarkable economic growth in recent decades, prompting the United Nations Development Programme to proclaim *The Rise of the South* (the title of its 2013 *Human Development Report*) which predicts that by 2020 the combined economic output of China, India, and Brazil will surpass the aggregate production of the US, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, and Italy. As the report notes: “economic exchanges are expanding faster ‘horizontally’—on a South-South basis—than on the traditional North-South axis. People are sharing ideas and experiences through new communications channels and seeking greater accountability from governments and international institutions alike. The South as a whole is driving global economic growth and societal change for the first time in centuries” (UNDP, 2013: 123).

In parallel with the development of its hard power resources, India's soft power is increasingly becoming an element in its diplomacy. India's soft power has a civilizational dimension to it: the Indic civilization, dating back more than 5,000 years, being one of the major cultural formations in the world. Its manifestation takes diverse forms—religion and philosophy, arts and architecture, language and literature, trade and travel. A civilization which gave birth to four of the world's great religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism—and where every major faith, with the exception of Shintoism and Confucianism, has coexisted for millennia, India offers a unique and syncretized religious discourse (Tharoor, 2012). India's cultural influence across Southeast Asia during the early centuries of the Christian era, was through the spread of Hinduism, expressed in its architecture and other

art forms. In Indonesia, even today, the famous Theatre of Shadows puppet shows—*Wayang*—are based on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, where Bheem, a key character in the latter epic, becomes the shadow puppet Bima.

India's soft power in historical terms was directed not toward the West but to the rest of the world. The millennia-old relationship between India and the rest of Asia has a strong cultural and communication dimension and Buddhism was at the heart of this interaction: Buddhism was the biggest project of dissemination of Indian ideas. The translation into Chinese of the Sanskrit text *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Diamond Sutra*), the world's first printed book on paper, published in the ninth century (Sen, 2005) was a Buddhist text. As the distinguished India-based Chinese scholar, Tan Chung has suggested: "Buddhism performed the function of *Mahayana*, that is, the 'great carrier' (carrying quintessential Indian civilization to China)," that resulted in the "historical Chindian paradigm." He notes that "the advent of Indian civilization into China was by invitation," while "the *business* was an unprecedented inter-cultural joint venture, that is, the Sanskrit-Chinese translation enterprise" (Chung, 2009: 188, emphasis in the original). As the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has reminded us, "even the word *Mandarin*, standing as it does for a central concept in Chinese culture," is derived from *Mantri* (a Sanskrit word meaning Minister), which "went from India to China via Malaya" (Sen, 2005: 85). Interest in Buddhist philosophy encouraged Chinese scholars, most notably Hiuen Tsang, to visit Nalanda (an international Buddhist university based in eastern India between the 5th and 12th centuries) to exchange ideas on law, philosophy, and politics. Described as "truly the centre of Indian intellectual life," the university radiated Indian culture "all over the Buddhist Asia" (Panikkar, 1964: 93). Indian monks also visited China on a regular basis and these intellectual exchanges continued for centuries, and even today Buddhism remains a powerful link between the two civilizations.

India's fabled intellectual and material wealth attracted foreign interest and waves of invasion and occupation from central Asia and the Arab-Islamic world, bringing with them knowledge and institutions of Iran and Arabia to a Hindu-Buddhist culture, which, under the mighty Mughal empire (1526–1858), synthesized into a composite Indo-Islamic culture. At the same time, India's achievements in science and medicine travelled to Europe via Islamic centers of learning. The pomp and splendor of the Mughal Court and its incorporation of sophisticated Persian poetry—of Nizami, Saadi, and Hafiz, cuisine and miniature paintings, contributed to a rich and diversified Indo-Islamic

culture, symbolized by such marvels as the Taj Mahal. The 178 million Muslims in India—the second largest Islamic population in the world, after Indonesia—provides India with valuable cultural capital to promote its soft power among Islamic populations. Adding to this rich legacy is India’s long and continuing encounter with European enlightenment and imperialism, for two centuries under colonial subjugation and for the last six decades under conditions of intellectual autonomy. This rare combination of a civilization which has strong Hindu-Buddhist foundations, centuries of Islamic influence, and integration with European institutions and ideas, gives India unparalleled cultural resources to deal with the diverse, globalized, and complex realities of the twenty-first century.

An illustrative example of this composite culture is that the Hindu epic *Mahabharat* was adapted for Indian television in a Sanskritized Hindi by the Urdu novelist (a language associated with Muslims) Rahi Masoom Reza (1925–1992), a Muslim, while India’s finest Urdu poet of the twentieth century, Firaq Gorakhpuri (1896–1992) (real name Raghupati Sahay) was born into a Hindu family. A couplet in one of Firaq’s poems sums up the assimilative aspects of India’s civilization:

*Sar zamin-e-hind par, aquwaam-e-alam ke firaq,  
kafile guzarte gae, Hindustan banta gaya.*

Translated loosely, it means “In the land of Hind, the caravans of the peoples of the world continued to arrive and India continued to be formed.”

Added to this legacy is contemporary India’s secular federal democracy, its pluralist values and institutions, and its civil society, as well as its media, Information Technology (IT) and communications industries that can disseminate its soft power resources. Nye has stated that, “A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries—admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness—want to follow it” (Nye, 2004a: 4). The global presence and popularity of Indian cuisine and Bollywood cinema, the visibility of Indian art and literature as well as Indian spirituality—from yoga to alternative lifestyles—make populations in other countries highly receptive to its culture. As Tharoor notes, “India benefits from its traditional practices (from Ayurveda to Yoga, both accelerating in popularity across the globe) and the transformed image of the country created by its thriving diaspora. Information technology has made its own contribution to India’s soft power” (Tharoor, 2012: 284).

However, mere possession of such resources does not make a country attractive on the world stage; these assets need to be translated into influencing the behavior of other states and stakeholders, requiring a concerted effort by policy makers. Unlike China, India's soft power initiatives are not centrally managed by the government: indeed the government takes a backseat while its creative and cultural industry, its religions and spirituality, as well as its voluble diaspora and businesses help promote India abroad. An increasingly globalized and networked world offers excellent opportunities for India to communicate its soft power more effectively. The time is ripe to revisit the value of soft power resources as tools for the policy of an emerging power. One critical vehicle for soft power dissemination is its extensive and successful diaspora, especially in the United States and Britain, where many Indians hold influential positions in boardrooms of transnational corporations, Ivy League universities and premium media organizations. These are, in the words of Nye, "soft power resources" (Nye, 2004a: 6). Its official public diplomacy infrastructure, though still in its early stages, has begun to engage foreign publics, and in collaboration with increasingly globalizing Indian industries, have been working to project India as an investment-friendly, pro-market democracy. Communicating such an image has involved a public-private partnership to brand India using the power of Bollywood: to mark the 60 years of India's independence, the Public Diplomacy Division of India's External Affairs Ministry issued three videos on Bollywood, namely *Made in Bollywood*; *Bollywood: 60 Years of Romance*, and *Hindi in Bollywood*, although the phrase "soft power" does not even appear in the 2012 annual report of the Ministry of External Affairs.

India can draw on earlier precedents for views of its global role in the modern world. In an article, "India as a World Power," published in 1949 in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, less than two years after India's independence from Britain, and attributed to an Indian official, one can detect a distinctive approach to global politics: "It is time for a wider recognition in the West that we have come to the end of an historical epoch . . . India's re-emergence . . . is not a racial movement: it is not animated by any hostile intent. It does not further the aggrandizement of any nation. Its purpose is wholly pacific and constructive—to broaden freedom and raise the standard of living. It is in consonance with all that is liberal, humane and disinterested in the Western tradition. Its ultimate result must necessarily be to transform the politico-economic

map of the world, and establish a new relationship between east and west (*Foreign Affairs*, July 1949),” Such sentiments of bridging the East-West cultural divide remain valid in the twenty-first century when the “clash of civilizations” rhetoric continues to define popular discourse in Europe and the United States.

However, to make India a more attractive country, especially among other developing nations, would require it to address the serious deprivation that millions of its citizens suffer. Despite its admirable economic performance in the past two decades, India is still home to more poor people than the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. It is a country where multiple and multilayered forms of inequalities persist: India has the largest pool of employable youth in the world but it also has the planet’s highest incidence of child labor, despite it being banned in law. While 55 Indians figure in the *Forbes* list of the world’s billionaires, with their total net worth \$193.6 billion, India’s rank in the 2013 United Nations Human Development Index was at 136 out of 186 nations (UNDP, 2013). At a time when neoliberalism has created new modernity in shopping malls, Bollywood films, and fashion shows, nearly 300 million Indians live in abject poverty and deprivation. These social realities coexist in an upwardly mobile India, whose corporatized pro-American government, businesses, and dominant sections of media and academia tend to ignore such stark inequalities. As a new study attests: “India today is a scene of great change. But it is hard not be struck as well by how much has *not* changed—perhaps above all by the enduring inequalities of Indian society, and by the continuing prevalence of great poverty” (Corbridge, Harriss, and Jeffrey, 2013: 304, italics in original).

Despite a plethora of recent academic and journalistic literature on India’s rise—within India and in the West—the phenomenon has not yet been adequately analyzed from a communication perspective: indeed there is no single authored academic publication which examines India’s soft power discourse in its historical, cultural, and political context. Transgressing the International Relations/Media and Communication disciplinary and intellectual divide, and adopting a multiperspectival approach, this book aims to fill the existing gap in the field of media and communication studies as well as International Relations literature. Supported by a range of empirical data, the book offers a historical context of India’s global role; its cultural and communication power in the globalized world; its IT and intellectual prowess and its democratic, diasporic, and demographic dividends.

### **The Organization of the Book**

The book is divided into six chapters: the first discusses the nature and origins of soft power in its American context and provides a comparative overview of how it has developed in Europe and Asia, particularly in China. The chapter argues that the concept needs to be de-Americanized and expanded to be made more inclusive, and historicized to take account of the role of countries and civilizations such as India and China in the global communication sphere. Chapter two examines the evolution of India's soft power in a historical context, from the time of the expansion of Indian religions and cultural ideas to South East Asia, evident today in the magnificent Hindu and Buddhist temple complexes of Borobudur in Indonesia and Angkor Wat in Cambodia (the world's largest religious complex), to the spread of Buddhism to central and east Asia. In more recent times, the chapter explores the influence of such Indian thinkers as Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nehru, in particular on postcolonial and antiracist discourses.

The contribution of the 25-million strong Indian diaspora, scattered around the globe, to India's soft power is the focus of chapter three. This extensive and successful Indian presence, especially in the United States and Britain, where many Indians hold influential positions in boardrooms of transnational corporations, elite universities and premium media organizations, is a critical resource of soft power dissemination. The Indian diaspora has excelled in many spheres of life and enriched the cultural, economic, and intellectual experience of many countries. They have also made a significant contribution to India's emergence as an economic and cultural power: the net worth of the Indian diaspora is estimated to be \$300 billion and their annual contribution to the Indian economy valued at up to \$10 billion. Chapter four evaluates India's intellectual infrastructure as part of its soft power, from IT and media industries to universities, making it an important player in global communication. Supporting this is the growing convergence between cultural industries and information technology services. Despite being underresourced, the Indian higher education sector is growing both in size and ambition, drawing on a well-entrenched "argumentative" intellectual tradition. The recent initiative, led by Amartya Sen, to revive Nalanda University as a center of global learning in the twenty-first century is potentially a striking example of India's soft power (Sen, 2011).

Chapter five examines how India's culture is promoting its soft power. According to the UN's *Creative Economy Report 2010*, India showed the largest growth in exports of creative goods during 2002–2008. Indian cultural products have a transnational reach, attracting consumers

beyond their traditional South Asian diasporic constituency. The most widely circulated content is from India's burgeoning film industry—the world's largest—producing on average 1,000 films annually and exporting to 70 countries. The chapter explores the cultural, aesthetic, and academic importance of Indian cinema, as well as the influence of India's traditional culture in expanding its soft power. Chapter six assesses the contribution of India Inc. in promoting India globally and explores what efforts have been made by the Indian government to deploy its soft power through the Public Diplomacy Division within India's Ministry of External Affairs. A common thread running through this chapter is the role of digital communications technologies, especially the Internet, in facilitating India's soft power. Although in 2012 Internet penetration in India was still low, with 3G mobile telephony, this will fundamentally change, making the Indian presence on the cyberspace extremely significant. This, combined with the demographic divided and growing economic prosperity of a young India (70 percent of Indians are below the age of 35), and given their competence in English—the language of global communication and commerce—will create potentially new global constituencies in a post-American multipolar world.

The final chapter considers what India's growing global presence might mean for international and intercultural communication. One area in which India can offer a different perspective on world events is that of Islam and terrorism with a broader view of humanity based on a pluralist and integrated cultural tradition. India represents a civilization whose roots are not in the Abrahamic religions and whose perception of Islam is not influenced by the “clash of civilizations” rhetoric. In this way India's soft power could make a unique contribution as a global player to international relations in the media age.

“In behavioural terms,” Nye has suggested, “soft power is attractive power” (Nye, 2004a: 6). It is about the ability to tell a tale which is attractive to global publics. The “land of the better story” that is India, is well-placed to narrate it, given its long tradition of folklore, morality verses from Hindu epics, the Buddhist Jataka tales and its incorporation of Arabic and Persian *afsanay*. Tharoor notes: “To be a source of attraction to others, it must preserve the democratic pluralism that is such a civilizational asset in our globalizing world” (Tharoor, 2012: 312).

### Note

1. Bollywood star Shammi Kapoor (1931–2011), wrongly pronounced as “Kaboor” in this conversation.

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