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# Beyond Coyness: On Treating Soft Power as Strategy

 THE HINDU

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# Beyond Coyness: On Treating Soft Power as Strategy

 **The Hindu** 12 June 2026 **GS2**

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"India has vast cultural and civilisational appeal, but often treats it as incidental. Should soft power be a deliberate instrument of statecraft, and what would that require?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Hindu](#)

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources **HOW**

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

As India steps onto more global stages, from the **G7** to the Global South, a recurring question returns: does it use its vast **soft power** deliberately, or treat it as an afterthought? For an aspirant, this is a thoughtful **GS2 (international relations, diplomacy) lead**. The argument: India's culture, diaspora and democratic example are strategic assets, and the country should wield them as **instruments of statecraft**, not incidental charms.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

**Soft power**, the ability to attract rather than coerce, is something India has in abundance: civilisation, culture, yoga, cinema, a vast **diaspora** and a functioning **democracy**. But India treats it as incidental and **under-resources** the institutions that convert appeal into influence. Soft power complements hard power; it is cheap and effective. The task is to move from **coyness to strategy**.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Soft power</b>	Influence through attraction, not coercion	A low-cost source of global influence
<b>Cultural diplomacy</b>	Promoting culture, language, education abroad	The vehicle for soft power
<b>The diaspora</b>	~35 million people of Indian origin worldwide	A bridge and an asset
<b>Hard vs soft power</b>	Coercion vs attraction	Complements, not rivals

## THE ANALYSIS: WHY SOFT POWER IS STRATEGIC

- 1 India has it in abundance.** Civilisation, culture, yoga, cinema, diaspora and democracy are global assets.
- 2 It is under-resourced.** India has invested less than peers in the institutions that convert appeal into influence.
- 3 It complements hard power.** Attraction builds the goodwill that makes strength more effective and less resented.
- 4 It is cheap for its returns.** Few instruments of statecraft offer as much influence for as little cost.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

**soft power** (coined by Joseph Nye); the spectrum from soft to hard to “**smart power**” (the blend).

**Instruments:** the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)**; cultural centres; scholarships; **yoga and Ayurveda diplomacy** (International Day of Yoga); cinema and cuisine. **The diaspora:** around **35 million** people of Indian origin worldwide, the largest diaspora; the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas; eMigrate.

**The example:** the world’s largest democracy; vaccine diplomacy (Vaccine Maitri); disaster relief (HADR).

**Linkage:** Global South leadership, strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.

## THE DEBATE

**Argument for hard power:** Military and economic strength are what really matter; soft power is vague and hard to measure.

**Argument for soft power:** Attraction builds the goodwill and legitimacy that make hard power more effective, at low cost, and is essential for Global South leadership.

**The balanced verdict:** It is not soft *versus* hard but **smart power**, the strategic blend of both. Soft power cannot substitute for strength, but it multiplies it. India should resource and integrate it deliberately rather than leave it to chance.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*A weak answer praises India's culture and stops there. The strong answer asks how that appeal is converted into influence, through institutions, funding and strategy, and what is lost when it is not. The move is from possession to deployment. The same lens applies to demographic dividend, natural resources and any latent advantage.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

India's culture + diaspora + democracy + yoga/cinema -> vast soft power. The gap: under-resourced institutions -> appeal not converted into influence. The integration: fund cultural diplomacy + leverage diaspora + align with diplomatic/economic goals -> smart power (soft + hard) -> global influence at low cost.

## THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Resource cultural diplomacy and institutions** (such as the ICCR) adequately.
- ② **Integrate soft power into a coherent strategy**, not as an afterthought.
- ③ **Leverage the diaspora and the democratic example** deliberately.
- ④ **Align cultural outreach with concrete diplomatic and economic goals.**

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*“India should treat soft power as a deliberate strategic instrument rather than an incidental cultural asset.”*

*Examine, with reference to India’s foreign policy. (250 words)*

*“India’s attraction is among its greatest assets, but only if it is wielded, not merely possessed; soft power is strategy, not sentiment.”*

*soft power (Joseph Nye) · smart power · ICCR · International Day of Yoga · diaspora (~35 million) · Vaccine Maitri · Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.*

*Should a rising power invest in attraction as deliberately as in arms?*

*Connects to GS2 PYQs on India’s soft power, diaspora and foreign policy; a probable question is the strategy-versus-incidental framing above.*

*today’s India-France / G7 article (India’s global engagement); static GS2 on India’s foreign policy and diaspora.*

*Sources: The Hindu, Ministry of External Affairs, ICCR*

Source: Beyond Coyness: On Treating Soft Power as Strategy — Ujjyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

### ● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

**India possesses immense soft power in its culture, diaspora, democracy and civilisational heritage, but it tends to treat this as an incidental asset rather than a deliberate instrument of statecraft; harnessing it strategically, and resourcing it adequately, would strengthen India’s global influence at low cost.**

#### ✓ SUPPORTING

- Soft power, the ability to attract rather than coerce, is a genuine source of influence, and India has it in abundance through culture, yoga, cinema and its diaspora.
- India has under-invested in the institutions and funding that convert cultural appeal into diplomatic influence, compared with peers.

- Used strategically, soft power complements hard power, builds goodwill, and advances India's interests, including its leadership of the Global South.

### **COUNTER**

Some argue that hard power, military and economic strength, is what really matters, and that soft power is vague and hard to measure.

### **WAY FORWARD**

Resource cultural diplomacy and institutions adequately, integrate soft power into a coherent strategy, leverage the diaspora and the democratic example, and align cultural outreach with concrete diplomatic and economic goals.

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### **MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

#### **QUESTION**

*"India should treat soft power as a deliberate strategic instrument rather than an incidental cultural asset." Examine, with reference to India's foreign policy. (250 words)*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Joseph Nye called it the power to attract rather than coerce. India has more of it than almost any country, in its civilisation, culture, diaspora and democracy, yet it has long been curiously shy about using it as a tool of statecraft.

#### **BODY**

Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction and persuasion rather than payment or force. India's reserves of it are vast: a civilisational heritage; global cultural exports from cinema to cuisine; the worldwide appeal of yoga and Ayurveda; one of the world's largest and most successful diasporas; and the example of a functioning, diverse democracy.

Yet India has tended to treat these as happy accidents rather than strategic assets. Compared with countries that invest heavily in cultural diplomacy, through well-funded cultural centres, scholarships,

media and language promotion, India under-resources the institutions that convert appeal into influence.

The counter-view, that hard power is what really counts and soft power is vague, contains a half-truth: military and economic strength are indispensable, and soft power cannot substitute for them. But it is a complement, not a rival.

Soft power builds the goodwill and legitimacy that make hard power more effective and less resented; it is cheap relative to its returns; and for a country that aspires to lead the Global South and to be a bridge between worlds, attraction is a strategic necessity. The task is to move from coyness to strategy: resource cultural diplomacy and institutions properly, leverage the diaspora and the democratic example deliberately, and align cultural outreach with concrete diplomatic and economic objectives, rather than leaving soft power to look after itself.

### CONCLUSION

India's attraction is one of its greatest assets, but only if it is wielded, not merely possessed. Treating soft power as strategy, not sentiment, is how a civilisational state becomes a global one.

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