

Heart Power, not Hard Power

Bharat's Soft Power: Cultural Diplomacy and Global Influence for Viksit Bharat

When I went to college in the US, there was only 1 Indian flag near me.

Not outside an embassy or a military base: it was outside a movie theatre in New Jersey. A theatre that showed Indian cinema, and shared a wall with *Mithaas*, a little Indian chaat restaurant that had Americans lining up around the block.

That's the power of Bharat: melodically, colourfully, flavourfully *soft*.

It's visible when New York City mayor Mamdani ends his victory speech playing *Dhoom Machale*. It's visible when the Indian Premier League is watched around the world. It's visible when the Louvre hosts Indian art retrospectives. And it's visible when India's G20 presidency closes with Bharatnatyam on a global stage.

Now, even as Bharat rises as the world's 4th-largest economy and military (in terms of GDP and Global Firepower Index), its soft power shines just as bright: India's arts, dances, literature, cuisine, yoga, Ayurveda and sports are everywhere, and have been since 1946.

The rise and rule of the ICCR

In 1946, Bharat's freedom fighters were struggling with a question: who were we? How did we want the world to see us? And how could we share our personality and heritage with the world?

Education Minister Azad and Prime Minister Nehru's solution was to establish the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in 1950, to revive and strengthen India's international cultural relations. Today, the ICCR runs over 37 Cultural Centres globally and engages 17,000+ artists across 60 locations.

As ICCR and other cultural ambassadors expand Bharat's presence from Bollywood to boardrooms, Bharat's voice — or **WANI** (**W**ellness, **A**rts, and **N**ew innovation) as I call it — is shaping global narratives, starting with wellness.

Wellness & Wisdom: Global Calm & Nourishment, Powered by Bharat

Walk down a street, and you'll eventually face all kinds of people chanting *Om* and greeting you with *Namaste*. This is the power of yoga, which is perhaps India's best-known cultural export: since the UN General Assembly recognized June 21st as International Yoga Day, millions of people have practiced yoga together, [including](#) people of 144 nationalities in Dubai (2024) and 147,952 participants in a single Surat yoga class (2023).

However, yoga is not Bharat's only wellness export: Ayurveda, our 5000-year-old system of healing, has also grown to [a global market of \\$14.4 billion](#), and is projected to reach \$76.91 billion by 2030.

Ayurveda's reliance on foods such as Ashwagandha in reducing stress and Triphala's benefits for improving digestion have also emphasized the importance of Indian food and nourishment.

From turmeric lattes to sattvic diets, the [\\$85.19 billion](#) Indian food market shows the world what Bharat never forgot: that food *is* wellness. And for the dozen Indian chefs who [have won Michelin](#) stars around the world, it's also art.

Art: Bharat's Creative Storytelling as Diplomacy

From cinema to classical dance, art has always transcended India's language and geography.

In 2023 alone, Netflix dubbed or subtitled its content in [more than 30 languages](#), allowing audiences from Argentina to Japan to dance to *Naatu Naatu* and cry with *The Lunchbox*. *RRR*'s Oscar win wasn't just a cinematic triumph; it was a cultural handshake.

On YouTube and Instagram, Indian creators form one of the largest creative communities in the world, [worth over \\$1 billion](#) and growing at 439% every 3 years. Our folk musicians blend with EDM artists, Bharatanatyam dancers trend beside K-pop idols, and Indian storytellers redefine digital diplomacy: not in embassies, but in comment sections.

Indian artists are also making their mark beyond the screen: Deepika Padukone unveiled the FIFA World Cup, Gucci made Alia Bhatt their global brand ambassador, and Priyanka Chopra headlined Hollywood.

But India's artistic diplomacy isn't just organic - it's innovative. Last year, the ICCR's 77 outgoing cultural delegations brought Bharatanatyam to Edinburgh, Qawwali to Vietnam, and Kathak to Romania; and new-age tech platforms like my own Awaaze Books brought Indian voices to the global stage.

New Innovation: Digital Bharat's bytes as our brushstroke

Innovation is India's new frontier.

The India Stack, a public digital infrastructure of UPI, Aadhaar, and DigiLocker, has inspired dozens of nations around the world: [over 55 pieces of digital public infrastructure \(DPI\) from 16 countries](#) are now managed by Bharat. The International Monetary Fund also [praised Bharat](#) for its DPI, especially for our CoWIN vaccine management system, which has been used by countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Jamaica.

Innovation also transforms how culture travels. When Duolingo adds Hindi, when meditation apps integrate Vedic practices, when global tech companies adopt Indian festival holidays, or when gaming platforms feature Ramayana storylines - technology doesn't replace culture, it accelerates it. Digital platforms have made Bharat's soft power democratic: a Bharatanatyam dancer in Chennai can teach a student in Stockholm, a Sanskrit scholar in Varanasi can reach classrooms in Vancouver, and a startup in Bangalore can make Indian payment systems the backbone of African economies.

Through these innovative channels, Bharat's WANI travels at the speed of light, bringing us one step closer to Viksit Bharat.

Towards 2047: Choosing Connection over Conquest

As Bharat moves toward its centenary of independence, the world is watching how we lead: not by conquest, but by connection.

By 2047, success will be measured not just in GDP, but in the ideas, values, and emotions we share. It will be measured by how seriously we treat our yogis, storytellers, and artists as cultural ambassadors, how we invest in digital platforms that scale our stories globally, and how we create bilateral exchange programs that make India the destination, not just the origin, of cultural dialogue. It will be measured in the smiles when a British teen cooks dal on TikTok or a Kenyan DJ remixes a Punjabi beat, and Bharat's borders expand: not through maps, but minds.

In the past 78 years, Bharat's strength has come from song, not sword.

By 2047, Bharat's WANI won't just whisper — it will echo in every breath, beat, and byte.

-Shriya Sekhsaria