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## India's Public Diplomacy-The Institutional Framework

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**Abstract:** *This research paper examines the institutional framework of India's public diplomacy. The paper begins with a brief background on the concept of public diplomacy as well as the role that public diplomacy plays in India's foreign policy. The paper then reviews existing literature on India's public diplomacy. The paper then examines the various institutions that carry out India's public diplomacy activities. It also examines in detail the various public diplomacy activities carried out by these institutions and the interrelationships among these institutions. The paper concludes with suggestions to improve the institutional framework of India's public diplomacy to better serve the national interest.*

**Keywords:** *public diplomacy, soft power, India's public diplomacy, India's foreign policy, MEA, XPD Division, ICCR*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Various scholars have defined the term "Public Diplomacy" differently. For example, Kishan S Rana defines public diplomacy as, "Activities through which governments, working with non-state agencies, reach out to publics and nonofficial actors abroad, covering inter alia information, culture, education, and the country image." [1]

Navdeep Suri defines public diplomacy as, "the framework of activities by which a government seeks to influence public attitudes in a manner that they become supportive of foreign policy and national interests." [2]

According to Joseph S. Nye Nye, public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize the resources "that produce soft power" to communicate with and attract the people of other countries. [3] These resources according to Nye are: values that a nation's culture gives expression to, the examples that its policies and practices sets, etc. [4]

Although there is no unanimity on the definition of public diplomacy, most scholars working in the field agree that it is aimed at influencing the peoples of foreign countries with a view to secure the foreign policy objectives of the state practicing public diplomacy. [5]

The essential difference between public diplomacy and the traditional form of diplomacy is that while the latter is limited to interactions between government officials, the former goes beyond this narrow domain and focuses on communicating with non-governmental entities in foreign countries-namely, individual citizens and Non Governmental Organisations. [6]

Public Diplomacy is one of the most multidisciplinary areas of modern scholarship. Several disciplines of the social sciences, including International Relations, Communication Studies, Public Relations, and Marketing, have contributed to theoretical and empirical knowledge of Public Diplomacy. [7]

The post-Cold War world has seen three broad trends which have increased the importance of public diplomacy [8]:

1. The trend of democratization. As a result of this, influence of public opinion on the formulation and implementation of foreign policy of states have increased significantly.
2. The emergence of a normative world order. This has made soft power a more influential tool than use or threat of force.
3. The revolution in communication technology. This has made it possible for the government to communicate with foreign audiences directly rather than be dependent on the government or the media of the target country.

Explaining the importance of using soft power to secure India's foreign policy objectives, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs argues, "it is not always the country with the bigger army that always wins, but that which tells the better story. Seen from this perspective, soft power is something of an instrument of persuasion, to bring the world around to our perspective, not by force but by 'selling' them a compelling story". [9] Describing the "enormous soft power resources" at India's disposal, the Committee adds, "India is endowed with enormous soft power resources in the form of a vibrant culture, our art, artifacts, tangible and intangible heritage, practices like Yoga, meditation, Indian TV and cinema, information and technology exports, our democracy, our pluralism and a thriving Diaspora." [10]

The goal of India's public diplomacy was succinctly put by the then foreign secretary of India Nirupama Rao thus: "(India's) public diplomacy... (seeks to) project India...advocating and explaining the Indian 'brand' as it were." [11] She clarified that "the projection of India's soft power is very much a part of the processes of public diplomacy..." [12] She also clarified that "public diplomacy...overlaps with our cultural diplomacy..." [13]

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, India has been giving increased emphasis on public diplomacy. It has invested a huge amount of resources in public diplomacy. The primary objective of this is to leverage India's soft power as well as increase it. Both traditional approaches and new approaches of public diplomacy are being used to secure this objective. [14]

Kalathmika Natarajan finds that the emphasis of the Public Diplomacy Division of India's Ministry of External Affairs is on engaging with domestic audiences to inform them about government's foreign policy decisions rather than on influencing foreign public. [15]

## 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks the answer of the following research questions:

Q1: Which are the major institutions that undertake India's public diplomacy activities?

Q2: What are the activities these institutions undertake?

Q3: What is the interrelationship between these institutions?

## 4. RESEARCH METHODS

This study is descriptive, analytical and exploratory. It is a qualitative study. The study uses primary resources such as the Annual Reports of the Ministry of External Affairs, Annual Reports of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Annual Reports of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, other Government documents, websites of the Ministry of External Affairs, YouTube channel and Facebook Page of India's Ministry of External Affairs, Websites of Indian Embassies and Indian High Commissions, speeches of important government officials, etc. It also uses secondary resources such as Books, journal articles, etc.

## 5. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF INDIA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

This section examines the institutional framework of India's public diplomacy. In other words, this section examines the institutions that take part in design and implementation of India's public diplomacy activities and the interrelationship between these institutions.

The main institutions tasked with designing and implementing India's public diplomacy activities are: *External Publicity & Public Diplomacy (XPD) Division* (before this division was created in 2014, its works were divided between the *Public Diplomacy Division* and the *External Publicity Division* until both were merged to form a single *External Publicity & Public Diplomacy Division*) of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the *Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR)*. Both of these are organizationally under the Ministry of External Affairs. However, other ministries, especially *Ministry of Tourism* and *Ministry of Commerce*, too conduct some programmes which may broadly come under the classification of public diplomacy. The state governments also undertake some tourism and investments promotion activities in foreign countries which may be considered as public diplomacy activities. The role of Non Governmental Actors in India's public diplomacy is not significant although sometimes they are roped in by the above mentioned institutions to help them to help implement their public diplomacy initiative.

### **5.1 Public Diplomacy Division**

*Public Diplomacy Division* of the Ministry of External Affairs was created in 2006. Later in 2014, it was merged with External Publicity Division to form the *External Publicity and Public Diplomacy (XPD) Division*.

The *Public Diplomacy Division* was (until its merger with *External Publicity Division* to form the *External Publicity and Public Diplomacy Division* in 2014) entrusted with designing and implementing, in cooperation with other relevant government agencies and non-governmental organizations, public diplomacy programmes. The activities of the Division included (but not limited to) [16]:

1. Producing print and audio-visual materials which showcase the rich and diverse natural and cultural kaleidoscope of India. These materials were mostly sent to Indian missions abroad. The latter, distributed these in their respective host countries.
2. The Division organised a wide range of outreach activities that were aimed at creating a greater understanding and a more sympathetic view of India and its foreign policy. Such outreach activities were organized both within India and abroad.
3. The Division collaborated with Indian and foreign universities, think tanks and research organisations, chambers of commerce and private organisations to organise seminars and conferences on important issues of concern for India. The Division also undertook special projects.
4. The Division also hosted delegations from various foreign countries and organisations to India. The objective behind such programmes was to provide influential foreign citizens a first hand experience of the natural beauty, cultural diversity and liberal democratic values of India.

### **5.2 External Publicity & Public Diplomacy Division**

In January 2014, two divisions of the Ministry of External Affairs, namely the *Public Diplomacy Division* and the *External Publicity Division* were merged to form a single division namely *External Publicity & Public Diplomacy Division*. [17]

The mandate of the *External Publicity & Public Diplomacy (XPD) Division* includes “effectively articulating the position of the Government of India on various foreign policy issues to the national and international media, as well as engaging with domestic and global audiences to explain India, its foreign policy and various aspects of India’s engagement with the world.”[18]

One of the important works of the Division is commissioning documentaries which endeavour to ensure positive projection of India’s image abroad. DVDs of such documentaries are then sent to Indian missions abroad for presentation, screening and telecast on TV channels in their respective host countries.[19]

The Division also ensures wide-spread press coverage of government’s diplomatic initiatives in Indian as well as foreign media.[20] The Division also ensures that catch-phrases like “Neighbourhood First” and “Act East” policy are widely disseminated in print, electronic as well as various social media platforms.[21]

The Division also ensures wide publicity of government’s economic initiatives in foreign countries. For example, the Division worked closely with Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion to ensure that the ‘Make in India’ campaign gets wide attention around the world.[22]

The Division also ensures wide coverage in the media of visits of important foreign dignitaries to India as well as of visits of Indian leaders to foreign countries.[23]

The External Publicity & Public Diplomacy Division is also the nodal division in charge of the Ministry of External Affairs’ social media and digital media outreach efforts.[24]

### **5.3 Indian Council for Cultural Relations**

The *Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)* was established in 1950. The main objective behind the creation of ICCR was “establishing, reviving and strengthening cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries.” [25]

The Memorandum of Association of ICCR lays down the following aims of the organization:

1. To participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations;
2. To promote cultural exchange with other countries and peoples;
3. To promote and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; and
4. To establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture.[26]

The major activities of the ICCR are[27]:

1. Administration of scholarship schemes for overseas students on behalf of the Government of India and other agencies;
2. Grant of scholarships to foreign students to learn Indian dance and music;
3. Exchange of exhibitions;
4. Organization of and participation in international seminars and symposia;
5. Participation in major cultural festival in foreign countries;
6. Organizing "festival of India" in foreign countries;
7. Exchange of delegations of performing artistes with foreign countries;
8. Organization of lecture-demonstration by Indian performing artistes abroad;
9. Organizing Distinguished visitors programme under which eminent personalities from abroad are invited to visit India and Indian experts are sent to foreign countries for delivering lectures;
10. Presentation of books, audio-visual material, art objects and musical instruments to institutions abroad;
11. Providing the secretariat for the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding;
12. Organizing the annual Maulana Azad memorial lecture, conducting Maulana Azad essay competition;
13. Publishing books and journals for distribution in India and abroad;
14. Maintaining Indian Cultural Centers abroad;
15. Maintaining a library and the manuscripts of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad;
16. Digitization of rare manuscripts.

The Council also maintains Chairs of Indian Studies abroad under the Bilateral Cultural Exchange Programmes, Scheme of Propagation of Hindi abroad and Council's own programme.[28]

#### **5.4 Other Ministries**

Apart from the above mentioned agencies of the Ministry of External Affairs, some other ministries, such as the *Commerce Ministry* and the *Tourism Ministry*, of Government of India also sometimes carry out activities which may be considered to come under the rubric of public diplomacy, though they usually do not give the tag of *public diplomacy* to their activities. For example, the *Commerce Ministry* established the India Brand Equity Fund (IBEF) in 1996, to build "positive economic perceptions of India globally." [29] Similarly the *Ministry of Tourism* of Government of India launched the high profile advertising campaign 'Incredible India' in 2004 to promote tourism.[30]

#### **5.5 State Governments**

Apart from the agencies of the Central Government, the state governments also often conduct outreach activities among the citizens of foreign countries with a view to promote tourism and investment in their respective states. Although they do not normally use the tag 'public diplomacy' for these activities, in view of the fact that these

outreach activities are often aimed at the citizens of the foreign countries rather than foreign governments, these may be considered as public diplomacy activities.

## 6. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, it is clear that though ministries like Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Tourism and even state governments of India occasionally undertake activities which falls in the domain of public diplomacy, the two institutions that undertake major portion of India's public diplomacy activities are: the *External Publicity & Public Diplomacy (XPD) Division* of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the *Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)*.

Although both the XPD Division and the ICCR are organizationally under the MEA, unlike the XPD Division which is a Division of the MEA, the ICCR is an autonomous institution. Moreover, a study of the relevant reports of the MEA does not give any hint that there is a systematic coordination of activities of these two organs. There is also no coordination mechanism to coordinate the routine public diplomacy activities of these two institutions with occasional public diplomacy activities of other ministries and that of the state governments. Although there is a 'States Division' in the MEA to coordinate with states, there is no overall coordination between the public diplomacy activities of state governments, Ministries other than MEA, the XPD Division of the MEA and the ICCR. Such coordination is desirable for better results from public diplomacy activities. Moreover, the merger of *Public Diplomacy Division* with the *External Publicity Division* betrays a lack of appreciation of the difference between *public diplomacy* which aims at long term relationship building with foreign public and mere publicity work which.

The result of this lack of proper coordination between different organs of the government undertaking public diplomacy activities is that instead of projecting a consistent and coherent image of itself to the outside world, India is currently projecting multiple images.[31]

Therefore, in place of the current chaotic situation where different organs of the government are undertaking public diplomacy activities without proper coordination among them, what we need is a proper institutionalization of public diplomacy activities which streamlines these activities by properly distributing the task between these organs and putting in place an institutional system of coordination between them.

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