

SYMPOSIUM

India's Soft Power in Asia

15th March 2013

Along with the proposed International Seminar on *Beyond Strategies: Cultural Dynamics in Asian Connections* during February/ March 2012, the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies proposes to organise a Symposium on *India's Soft Power in Asia*.

The recent tendency of scholars and analysts to assess India's emergence as a major actor in the international arena through the prism of material indicators as economic growth, military expansion or demographic evolution needs to be supplemented by an analysis of her 'soft power' credentials. The concept of soft power develops from the notion of co-optive power which is the ability of a nation to structure a situation so that other nations develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with that nation. Joseph Nye has indicated that co-optive power emerges from soft power and immaterial sources such as "cultural and ideological attraction as well as the rules and institutions of international regimes". Soft power is therefore the ability to modify other states' preferences because of their perception of "you".

Soft power is an intangible component of a state's power and it is difficult to measure its actual impact. India uses her soft power capacities mainly for image building rather than as an instrument to exert influence. India can therefore be qualified as a defensive soft power that puts a stronger emphasis on its capacities rather than the capabilities. References to Indian culture, to its diaspora, to its political values and to its economic development have mostly been rhetoric for image-polishing. It poses the question of whether India has really tried to exploit its huge soft power potential.

The Symposium proposes to analyse the conceptual relationship between soft power and hard power which often remains blurred. It would try and evaluate whether India has been able to use the attractiveness of its culture, values and policies in order to

increase her attractiveness and modify perceptions of other actors in the international arena. Has India's soft power instruments like Indian music, films, yoga, Ayurveda or perhaps its political pluralism, religious diversity and openness to global influences helped raise awareness of India or enthused societies abroad. Perhaps the other questions that could also be addressed through this symposium is whether a rising power needs to develop both hard power and soft power resources to attain major power status? Or do both dimensions of power substitute each other or do they overlap in a complementary way? Does India today fulfill these two prerequisites?