

Indo-Russian Bilateral relations a case study of soft power and the role of Movie Industry of India.

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ABSTRACT:

India and Russia have shared a warm and cordial diplomatic relation over many years. Both the nations have stood by one another when there have been testing times and proved that they are both dependable on one another. Apart from the trade, defense and diplomatic bonhomie that the two nations share the role of the Movie Industry of India in helping to cement the ties between the two nations can be considered second to none. This paper dwells in the myriad dimensions of Indo Russian relationship based on soft power and the role that Indian Movie Industry has played over the year to strengthen this relationship.

Keywords: *Bilateral Relation, Soft Power, Movie Industry, Cultural Globalization.*

INTRODUCTION

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: Indo Russian relationship dates back to a long time and has been a key pillar of India's foreign policy. Post Indian independence Russia has been a key partner in the development of Industry and Defense prowess of the country. The relationship began with a visit of First Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to the Soviet Union in June 1955, which was returned by the visit of First Secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev in the fall of 1955. Over the years' successive leaders of both the countries kept the relationship warm and growing with their visits business deals and support in various international forum. The signing of the "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership" in the October of the new millennium heralded another milestone in the Indo - Russian Relationship. During the visit of President Dmitry Medvedev to India in December 2010, it was decided to further elevate the strategic partnership to the level of a "special and privileged

strategic partnership" giving a new qualitative dimension to the already happy relationship between the two nations. The 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Russia was celebrated on 13 April 2012. The two Governments have also established two Inter-Governmental Commissions - one on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation, co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister and the Russian Deputy Prime Minister and another on Military Technical Cooperation co-chaired by the two Defence Ministers, both of which meet annually. Apart from these relations that are going on between the political leaders and the diplomats there is a very strong cultural relation shared by the two nations between the people of the country. It is a relation that started slowly but evolved and became stronger steadily. The catalyst to this cultural relation is the Movie industry of India. In the following paragraphs there is a details discussion on the contribution of Movie Industry in building this relationship.

Literature Review:

The cultural prowess of any nation is called its soft power. The term soft power was coined by Nye in the late 1980s. It refers to the ability of a nation to establish a cordial relation with other nation of a different culture not by coercive means but by mutual acceptance of one another based on cultural dimensions. The promoter of the concept Nye is of the opinion that a country, in order to be successful strong and accepted by other nations need both hard and soft power (Ikenberry, 2004). The cultural ideals that are accepted by the people of the other country at large is the more sustaining and less stressful means of creating a cohesive bilateral relation between two nations. Indian leaders recognized the role of soft power early and used it to make India a nation of eminence. Movie industry of India is at the center- point of Indian soft power. Indian soft power is largely driven by Bollywood, the Hindi Film Industry. The term Bollywood is a neologism (Combination of Bombay Hollywood). Bombay is the erstwhile name for Mumbai and Hollywood is the site where American Movie Industry is

largely based. Indian culture that forms the premise of India's soft power is vividly depicted by the movies that are made in Bollywood. As the data suggests India has been able to make its soft power into monetary numbers earning US \$ 2.5 billion in this service sector. The service sector consists of more than 50% of Indian economy (Dastidar and Elliot, 2020).

The origin of India Movie Industry dates back to 1913 when the first silent film titled Raja Harishchandra was made. The Movie Industry grew steadily in the 1920s and the 1930s. major studios were like the Bombay Talkies came up with many movies. Gradually, in the post - colonial era the Movie Industry looked Westward and started sending Indian

Movies to Western Markets. The prominent film makers who made international mark were Chetan Anand, Raj Kapoor and Yash Chopra (Majumdar, 2012).

Gradually, regional Cinema also emerged in India. Thus, films in languages like Tamil

, Telugu and Malayalam also made a mark in the international market. The international access of Indian movies gave a niche market to Indian movies around the world. The ascent of Indian movies to global popularity could be attributed to the overall process of cultural globalization. Experts also are found to compare culture globalization with the concept of cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1997). A study by Curtin (2007) suggests that 'Bollywood has increasingly emerged as a significant competitor of Hollywood in the size and enthusiasm of its audiences' (p. 3). Although Indian films earned only 5% of revenue as compared to Hollywood in terms of revenue, it has had a dramatic

global approach since liberalization of the country in 1991 (Loria, 2020).

Indian Movie Industry in Russia

One global market that Indian Movies have developed, sustained and prospered in these years is the Russian Market. The popularity of India movies among the Russian audience is legendary. It was seen that between 1954 to 1991, more than 200 Indian films were brought into the Soviet Union as against only 41 films from USA (Wright, 2019). In 1982 a movie by the name of Disco Dancer starring Mithun Chakravarty with the story about a street dancer caught the imagination of Russians and became the highest grossing film of the Soviet Era earning 60 million Roubles. The second place in terms of box office earning was by the Raj Kapoor starrer Awaara of 1954 a story influenced by Romeo and Juliet. The American Movie the Magnificent Seven of 1961 was in the fifth place and the first Movie from USA to be in the chart of Box Office earnings (Write, 2019). This shows the hegemony of Indian movies in the Soviet Era.

The appeal of India Cinema among the Russians was surreal. One of the reasons for the same was the opulence of Indian movies, the glamour in them and also the somewhat similar social fabric that India and Russia had that was shown in the Indian Cinemas was well accepted by the Russians. Also the Russians could connect to the Good Vs Evil aspect of Indian movies along with some movies depicting socialistic ethos that was vibrant in Russia of those times.

There was also a distinct political link to emerging bonhomie of soft power in the Indo- Russian relationship right after Independence. The leaders of the country kept on meeting one another

over the years forging a strategic partnership between the two nations bringing about economic and defence relations as well. India is still Russia's largest buyer of defense equipment, India's space endeavours have been created with a lot of Russian guidance and observation. India employs 1.38 million people in its armed forces and is one of the world's largest arms importers, spending \$12.4 billion between 2018 and 2021, with Russia accounting for \$5.51 billion, the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database shows. The Indian Army is equipped with Russian-made tanks and Kalashnikov rifles. In 1984, Rakesh Sharma became the first Indian citizen to enter space when he flew aboard the Soviet rocket Soyuz T-11 launched from Baikonur Commadore in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic on 3 April.

The impact of Ongoing Russia and Ukraine conflict has turned the interest on Indian Movies once again among the Russians. The Indian National Cultural Center (SITA) organized the second SITA Bollywood Film festival on April 30, 2022. The festival took place in the biggest cinema in Moscow and was attended by over 600 guests.

Conclusion

India's soft power the Movies have indeed been a backbone for cementing Indo-Russian Bilateral relations over the years. In the 1950s when the popular slogan Hindi Rusi Bhai- Bhai era Raj Kapoor the showman from India rose to be a legend in the hearts of the Russians. Once he landed in Russia without a visa and this is what his son Rishi Kapoor had to say about the whole incident: Rishi Kapoor said that after passing through immigration with ease, "He got

outside and waited for a taxi... By then people started recognizing that Raj Kapoor is in Moscow. His taxi came and he sat in. Suddenly what he saw was that the taxi is not moving forward and instead is going up. The people took the car on their shoulders."

The title song, *Awara Hoon*, from Kapoor's picture *Awara* played at official Russian banquets and it is rumoured that the song was even hummed by figures like ex-President Boris Yeltsin and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. As *The Calvert Journal* puts it, "The peak was in the 1950s and 60s when Raj Kapoor especially elicited fan frenzy that can only be compared to the madness that followed the Liverpool boys, The Beatles, on the other side of the world." Many interpreted the famous song in *Shree 420* sung by Mukesh

Mera joota hai jhapni

Yeh patloon englistani sar pe laal topi rusi

phir bhi dil hai Hindustani

Translation

My shoes are Japanese This trouser is English

The hat on my head is Russian

But my heart is Indian

As one that placed the Red Russian Cap on the protagonist cementing the respect for the nation once and for all.

Russia also honored Raj Kapoor with

Audience Heart Award, this making Raj Kapoor the first Indian to win it, which was won the second time by India in 2020 by Prabhas . Prabhas is another actor from India to win much adulation of the Russian audience for his portrayal of Amarendra and Mahendra Baahubali in the Movies *Bahubali* . Thus we can conclude that the role of soft power in Indo-Russian relationship is second to none.

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