

# DEFINING THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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*Abstract:* Public relations and its practices are perceived to have a direct role in working towards managing and improving foreign relations, and is instrumental in the implementation of larger and more inclusive foreign policies. To justify the connection between public relations and foreign affairs of India, the following research paper defines the conceptual role of public relations in India's foreign policy-making and implementation. The paper explains how public relations functions helped India to open the lines of communication between India and its foreign allies and create a space for itself in the global environment. The study examines the key incidents in the foreign policy actions and developments in India and analysed them on the basis of the strategic application of the tools of public relations. The findings reveal the strategic role of public relations in the development of foreign relations of India and how the government has successfully worked in a two-way symmetrical format for developing and implementing its foreign policy initiative.

*Keywords:* public relations, foreign policy, public opinion, public diplomacy, Covid-19.

## INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy formulation is a complex process mediated by the participation of various stakeholders. Indian foreign policy has been a work of considerable thought as it has the task "to protect and secure India's integrity, citizens, values and assets, and to enable the development" (Menon 2020). Key players like the Prime Minister, Ministry of External Affairs, Parliament, non-governmental players like political parties, the media, various industry representatives and pressure groups, all impact the designing and implementation of the foreign policy in India. The political parties opine on foreign relations through manifestoes that help in shaping the country's foreign

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relations. However, the matter of foreign policy is not just a political concern. With the growing role of social media and online awareness, easy information is becoming accessible to everyone. Right from a common man to a bureaucrat, everyone seeks information on government endeavours and initiatives. The nature and scope of government actions and decisions can either garner public support or disapproval. The foreign policy thus runs in coordination with the “state, public opinion (domestic and foreign) and the media” (Flint 2015: 1). This eventually requires strategic handling and deliberate planning for managing public opinion on both sides of the border.

Public relations is as a way of “earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour” (Institute of Public Relations 2004). Many studies have been found where similarities are seen between public relations and the “management of foreign affairs by government” (Petersone 2013: 308). Public relations has also been addressed as “a vital communication function for organizations, nations and even the world, helping to develop an understanding among groups and eventually reduce conflict” (Grunig 1993: 138). To justify the connection between public relations and foreign affairs of India, the following research paper defines the conceptual role of public relations in India’s foreign policy-making and implementation. The paper explains how public relations functions strategically helped India to open the lines of communication between India and its foreign allies and create a space for itself in the global environment. The study examines the key incidents in the foreign policy actions and developments in India and analysed them on the basis of the strategic application of the tools of public relations.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS AND INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

In 1947, when India got independence, the country was in a state of rebuilding its economy. The foreign policymaking had the reflection of India’s desires and the burden of its staggering economy. The hard-earned freedom achieved through the principles of morality and strong belief system formed the basis of



the policy. Aparna Pande (2017: 10) in her book *From Chanakya To Modi: Evolution of India's Foreign Policy*, defines the policy document as a “desire for international respect without having the resources to exercise global power”. Though with a history of invasions and conquest, as pointed out by Nobel laureate V.S. Naipul (Naipul 1976: 8) India is more affected due to “its inadequacies” on working “without the intellectual means to move ahead”. But India always has the advantage of being a “security provider as well as the key economic power for the region because of its geographical position, size, resources, manpower and industrial potential’ (Panikkar 1943: 6-7). India’s foreign policy thus could be seen from the “Kautilyan” framework as to how it managed to “gain power in South Asia – a sort of Indian Monroe doctrine” (Pande 2017: 47). Every decision and action for India’s foreign relations and its policies have shown India’s stand and dominance with a strategic bend of mind. Every action has considered the “civilization heritage” along with the ideas catering to the national interests (Pande 2017: 8). However, India’s foreign policy seemed to have lacked the seriousness in various “sensitive and technical issues” (Jain 1999: 58). In comparison with other Asian countries, it can be said that China has a well-articulated foreign policy which defines its “equality and sovereignty at global level”, “cooperative partnership at the regional level” and also maintaining “special relationships” (Jain 1999: 60) with the small nations like Bhutan and Nepal. An absence of collectiveness can also be seen in the handling of such issues. When India accomplished its mission of testing the Prithvi Missile in the year 1996, then American president Bill Clinton pressurised the Indian government to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The “bilateral dialogue” between India and America was questioned and was defended by the single-man representation from India, Jaswant Singh, in contrast to the team of top defence personnel of America to argue the case. Though things never went out of control the criticism did persist.

Public relations is a persuasive way to build two-way communication and relationships with the public through “good character and responsible behaviour” (Cutlip, Broom, Center 2006: 3). It is a way to develop mutually beneficial relationships



between the government and its public that can help frame and maintain a foreign policy known as International Public Relations (IPR). IPR is the art and science of forming positive reputation and image of the particular country abroad or establishing a receptive environment for achieving foreign or economic policy” (Tench, Yeomans 2006: 115). Every activity is a thoughtful process of defining the goals first and then further strategically involving all the stakeholders (Jain 1999: 1). This can be a deliberate implementation of the public relations tactics for developing and maintaining domestic peace with its citizens or say internal publics as well as for controlling or maintaining a relationship with the external relations or foreign nations. This defines the conceptual role of public relations in handling relations discussed in the four models as well as in the theories of the public relations.

#### *Four Models of Public Relations*

James Grunig discussed the four models of public relations highlighting the growing role of building relationships by the government from a mere publicity model to a two-way symmetrical model through “dialogue, collaboration and compromise” (Grunig 1993: 160) to develop and create a public opinion for its foreign policy within and outside the country. The models are the ways of handling mass media to develop a public opinion towards government policy including foreign policy. The “publicity model” and the “public information model” are the one-way form of communication where information is disseminated through mass media channels to achieve maximum public attention. Both these models give immense scope to the sender in highlighting its achievements and initiatives to shape people’s opinions as per its policy needs. Since independence, Indian foreign policy has been “under the command of the prime minister’s office (PMO)”. With the outgrowth in the “private media houses, big businesses, the NGO sector, and private think-tanks since the 1990s”, the policy decision making has reached more to the public platform. With this, even the state governments became active participants which helped in



structuring “the central government policy approach on various occasions” (Blarel, Paliwa 2020).

The “two-way asymmetrical model” is where persuasion is the key and the arguments are framed “scientifically” and are presented creatively. The information is collected from the publics concerning their interest and attitudes and targeted information is formulated to disseminate in order to shape the people’s opinion in favour of the policy. Here the marketing and advertising techniques are used to form a positive public opinion. Earlier, it was “felt that foreign policy is a low salience issue for the Indian public” (Iyer 2020) but the rise in “social media has encouraged Indian political leaders to create personal brands with an amazing mix of personal feelings, nationalist pride and smart positioning” (Ramalingegowda 2014). The fourth model is a “two-way symmetrical model” where the public relations activities aim at building cordial relationships with its publics by understanding their concern and then communicating back accordingly. There is a scope of feedback and negotiation to resolve conflicts and issues. Public relations thus work as a bridge to build positive opinions between both parties to build mutually beneficial relationships. The role is to “disseminate information to minimize conflict” and is meant to exhibit “collaboration, communication, and participatory decision making” (Murphy 1991: 65-70). To develop such efficiency and effect in the making of the foreign policy, India’s ‘Make in India’ initiative and its “engagement with the multilateral and regional trade negotiations” have tried to lead the country to focus on the demand of being economically self-sufficient and at the same time indicated the government move towards “export-led growth”. This then opens the path for conversations between nations.

### *Theories of Public Relations*

Public relations can be seen as the “boundary spanner” for the government in terms of establishing symmetrical relationships with the public and different stakeholders in the making and acceptance of the foreign policy. Boundary spanning is a



public relations way of linking internal communication to the external sources of communication to develop a healthy relationship for a country to achieve its aims. The function of public relations can help the government in knowing their international boundaries and so in recognizing the ways to reach out to the foreign nations to build relations (Signitzer, Wamser 2006: 437). The National Democratic Alliance government in 2014 at the centre expanded the role of state government in foreign policy-making with “the potential to transform the country” and bring attitudinal change (Natarajan 2019: 798) among the public on global matters. In 2015, the Ministry of External Affairs told “Chandrababu Naidu Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh to lead a high-profile delegation to China in April” (Jain, Maini 2017: 287). Similarly, Mamta Banerjee, the West Bengal Chief Minister, intervened during the “Teesta water sharing agreement between India and Bangladesh is a great example that captures the role of Indian states in influencing India’s foreign relations” (Natarajan 2019: 809).

Grunig (1993) proposed that governments should symmetrically practise public relations. The “excellence theory of public relations” states the aspect of mutual communication between both the communicator and receiver. It is based on exclusive “research and uses communication to enhance public participation” in favour of the government decisions. The focus is on dialogue and active listening for involvement and participation. This in turn also provides control over the decisions without any conflict. The counter Balakot “airstrikes on Pakistan after the Pulwama terrorist attack assuaged the Public’s concerns of national security” in the year 2019 boosted the image of the government as an “indispensable defender of the country” (Iyer 2020). This thus helped in shaping the foreign policy from the security point of view and secured confidence from the domestic as well as external publics (Iyer 2020).

The “situational theory of the publics” helps in identifying the groups that can affect large sections of people. The theory works as a tool to segment stakeholders into publics, to isolate the strategic publics with whom organizations need to develop relationships to be effective, and to plan communication strategies with publics whose communication behaviours range



from active to passive. Thus, the situational theory of the publics states that individuals, organizations, and the publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behaviour to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave. This brings to the fact that if applied strategically and analytically, PR can bring the problems of stakeholder publics into decision-making- publics, which may benefit both foreign as well as domestic relationships for a government.

The “relationship management theory of public relations” as proposed by Ledingham in 2003 states the fact that forming relations between nations can help in “achieving a nation’s foreign affairs objectives” (Fitzpatrick 2007: 187). This may require working closely with media and public relations experts in external as well as in political relationships. Through this relational paradigm, the government can “support the strategic dimensions of public diplomacy” (Fitzpatrick, Fullerton, Kendrick 2012: 3) to associate with various lobbies to get support and build positive public opinion towards its decision making.

## STRATEGIC APPLICATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS

### *Public Opinion*

The foreign policies decision making was affected by the “understanding of the public’s foreign policy views” (Aldrich, Gelpi, Feaver, Reifler, Sharp 2006: 496). Foreign policy definition remains no more a private affair, its setting and its implementation require the government to seek public opinion. Earlier, considering public opinion as the factor for developing a sound foreign policy was a matter of “emotionalism and subjectivity which make it a poor and inadequate guide for national action” (Kennan 1951: 93). But today, “the public’s views on foreign policy seemed to be shaped significantly by the behaviour of policy-making elites, the news media, and other opinion leaders” (Kapur 2009: 288). The media gives considerable attention to international matters and their opinions. Mass media





can “play a critical role” in “shaping public attitudes about, and influence upon, foreign policy” (Baum, Potter 2008). The positivity expressed by the dedicated columns and programs helped in bringing the common people’s interest to international matters. Public opinion played an important role in foreign policy decision-making as the government tried to create the “hyper-nationalist rhetoric” about the conflicts at the India-Pakistan border about airstrikes after the Pulwama terrorist attack as a matter of concern towards national security among its domestic public. Similarly, another incident of Galvan Valley where on June 15, 2020, India and China had a violent clash that killed 20 Indian soldiers. This later led to a “military stand-off with China and at least 11 rounds of military talks for the disengagement process” (Express Web Desk 2021). While addressing the nation, the Prime Minister stated the agenda very clearly that “India wants peace. But on provocation, India will give a befitting reply” (Express Web Desk 2021). This crisis management theory had a great impact on the domestic audience of the country which further shaped the country’s foreign policy (Iyer 2020). Similarly, in the year 1995, during the “indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty (NPT)” in a poll conducted with a desire to know whether India would go nuclear, 85 per cent responded in favour, which could be seen in action when Atal Bihari Vajpayee finally conducted the nuclear tests displayed a “decisive leadership during a vulnerable time” (Bajpai 2009: 36)

### *Thought Leadership*

L’Etang defines public relations as “the practice of presenting the public face of an organization, institution or government” (L’Etang 2006: 2). Diplomats like public relations practitioners represent their governments, negotiate for peacemaking on behalf of their government, counsel the government officials, the intelligence gathering and environmental scanning. Leaders with the “power of their words (in speeches, letters, media releases and other written and verbal communications to internal and external stakeholders)” (Benn, Todd, Pendleton





2010: 404), can influence the policymaking. Walter Russel Mead (2002: 593) in his book discussed four approaches based on the principles of four leaders applied by America after independence for shaping its foreign policy: the first approach is based on the principles of Alexander Hamilton, the first secretary, meant to promote “the health of American enterprise at home and abroad”. The second approach is based on the ideals of President Woodrow Wilson to spread the country’s “values through the world”. Similarly, the third approach is taken from President Thomas Jefferson’s, which highlighted the need for “preservation of American democracy”. The final one is taken from President Andrew Jackson focused on the need to spread a culture of “honour, independence, courage and military pride among the American people”. These four leaders’ thoughts “reflect deep-seated regional, economic, social, and class interests; they embody visions for domestic as well as foreign policy; they express moral and political values as well as socio-economic and political interests” (Mead 2002: 593).

“Thought leadership has become an important means of building trust [...] used to describe the intellectual firepower [...], is frequently linked with public relations (PR) activity” (Bourne 2015: 322). On defining the major source of India’s foreign policy, “the ideas and power of Jawaharlal Nehru have no real competitor” known for “his pre-eminent leadership in domestic politics; [...] his dual role as both prime minister and foreign minister” (Power 1964: 259). He was the forerunner of India’s foreign policy (Heierstad 2016: 139). In 1925, the Indian National Congress under his leadership formed a foreign department to develop contact with the foreign public and to publicize the freedom struggle of the country (Jain 2014). “Nehru dreamed of a multipolar, cooperative world order”, consequently he formed a Non-Alignment Movement in 1962 which would enable India to retain good relations with both blocs the United States and the USSR “without itself becoming embroiled in the Cold War” (Rauch 2008), which paved way for the camaraderie of the Third World countries. Nehru always wanted the country to play “a leadership role in Asia and on the global stage” (Pande 2017: 61). The year 1974 marked the phase where India’s focus was again more on rebuilding its



security systems when it conducted its first nuclear explosion (Mohan, Agarwal 2019). However, India again had to deal with the US sanctions on the nuclear explosion tests. In 1991, with a looming economic crisis due to the Gulf war and the fall of the USSR, India faced economic sluggishness and domestic unrest. This drove the focus on working aggressively on domestic and foreign policy. The architects of this phase were three people: P.V. Narasimha Rao, Manmohan Singh and Atal Bihari Vajpayee who “brought abundant intellectual capital to the task of remaking India’s policies to fit the changed situation” (Menon 2016: 3). Rao even during the crisis restructured the economy and built peace with China through the Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement. Vajpayee experimented with the nuclear weapon and made India a safer place by declaring it as a “nuclear-weapon state”. Singh under his prime minister-ship took the “civil nuclear initiative with the United States through India’s Parliament” (Menon 2016: 3-4). This led to the shift of safeguarding India’s strategic autonomy through nuclear weapon development.

When Inder Kumar Gujral was the Minister of External Affairs during H.D. Deva Gowda Government in the year 1996, Gujral came up with the Gujral doctrine, stated that “being India as a bigger country of South Asia should give a one-sided concession to her small neighbours and have cordial relations with them” (Singh 2018). This then paved the way for the subsequent governments to involve their neighbouring countries. As in the year 2001, the government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee call for the Agra summit to resolve the long-standing issues between India and Pakistan. Similarly, in 2014, the Indian foreign policy initiative took centre stage when Narendra Modi invited Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for the swearing-in ceremony which highlighted the Indian foreign policy approach towards external security and looked for potential investors for economic engagements along with strategic collaboration with foreign nations (Kumar 2014). With the growing endeavours, the Indian leadership thus could gain public support and, therefore the foreign policy actions became a matter for the public platform. Also, the rise of social media use and the growing access to information have led the governments



and the leaders to “exercise “public diplomacy successfully on their own” (Pigman, Deos 2008: 87) and to build congenial relations with the publics.

### *Public Diplomacy*

Public diplomacy can be defined as the “efforts by the government of a nation to influence the public or elite opinion of a second nation to turn the foreign policy of the target nation to its advantage” (Manheim 1994: 4). This requires the government and the national leaders to project their image to “develop an understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture [...] its goals and policies” (Nakamura, Weed 2009). The concept of public diplomacy was coined during World War I when President Wilson created the Public Information Committee known as Creel Committee with a purpose to inform the world about “US war aims”. Later in 1953, the United States Information Agency was formed to influence the opinion of the foreign public which later played a major role in supporting the US during the Cold War. Similarly, countries like China and Russia have used the tool of diplomacy to engage the international audience. In 2006 in India, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) initiated the Public Diplomacy Division with the purpose to arrange for outreach programs within and outside the country for projecting India’s foreign policy to all the nations. This required working in close collaboration with researchers, think tanks, civil society, media, and industry to attain its objectives (Ritambhara 2013). It also pioneered in addressing the issues “like terrorism, climate change or even multilateral trade negotiations” on being “closely intertwined with the domestic political agenda” (Suri 2011: 297). This gave rise to the “network model of diplomacy” as against the “club model of diplomacy, whereby diplomats primarily interacted with peers alone” (Heine 2008).

The function of Public diplomacy “overlaps” in public relations in rhetoric, dialogue and counselling where there is an open exchange of information a pre-requisite for any policy-making (L’Etang 1996: 15). Public diplomacy supports the



government in formulating opinion among other nations; “the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of intercultural communication” (Morrow Center 2001). Public diplomacy is an “inclusive” function which handles “multilevel relations conducted by MNC’s, NGO, private groups and social movements” engage in “new technologies of communication to interact with and petition foreign publics” (Ritambhara 2013).

### *Public diplomacy and social media*

Social media has grown as an effective public relations tool for “connecting to people and creating images” that are “critical when the public evaluate politicians” (Lalancette, Raynaud 2017). India uses personal diplomacy for “nation-building” and affecting the “global information environment” for leveraging their brand in the context of developing the country as the “destinations for tourism, trade and investment” (Noya 2006). Since Western media has always tried to portray “recalcitrant” India (Dasgupta 2011: 75), to counter this damaging representation, India deployed social media “in communicating its stories with public diplomacy acquiring a conspicuous digital character” (Palit 2018: 139-140). The PM of India, Narendra Modi has been an active social media user for connecting with foreign publics. He has been “prompt in making birthday wishes, sending congratulatory messages and even expressing condolences following calamities and other setbacks in foreign countries.” However, “whatever message any government puts out is also instantly available to its domestic audience on the internet”. The Indian government too has been active in understanding the national interest and therefore by using social media it has been “engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences” (Brown 2011).



### *Soft Power and Public Relations*

Soft power as coined by Joseph S. Nye (1990), is the art to achieve something “through attraction rather than coercion or payments”. This requires a nation to work on its foreign policy along with its culture and “political value” (Ritambhara 2013). By highlighting its rich culture, historical origin and strong leadership, a country can present its perspectives as the reflections of its foreign policy and can be articulated well only through public relations ways. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was established in 1950 to re-build and strengthen India’s cultural relations with the foreign world. The use of media in the forms of “mass media, films and broadcasting” (Ritambhara 2013) can help the government in interacting and reaching out to the foreign public. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting carries out government programs and “promote the Indian image abroad” (Ritambhara 2013). For effective engagement, the Indian government celebrates “Pravasi Bhartiya Divas” and “Know India” programs for targeting “influential Indian diaspora”. The other related tools are magazines, films and organizing cultural events. The production of the magazine called “India perspective” is the “flagship publication of the Ministry of External Affairs” published in 17 languages. Bharat EkParichay in 2018 was launched to “establish corners in educational institutions globally” as “single point reference for information and knowledge about Indian art, culture, religion, philosophy, economy, etc. through select books sent from India” (Bharat EkParichay 2018). The Ministry also organizes the distinguished lecture series with the experts to “share their views/opinions on contemporary foreign policy themes in collaboration with top universities and academic institutions in India” (MEA 2019).

Besides, soft power is also “a Government’s process of communicating with foreign publics” to develop an “understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals” along with its “national goals and current policies” (Nakamura, Weed, 2009). In 2015, India succeeded in persuading “the United Nations to declare 21<sup>st</sup> June as International Yoga Day” (Ganguly 2021). Then in 2016, U.N. Secretary Ban Ki-moon reinforced the



benefits of doing yoga. This action gave an immense push to India's image in the international world and emphasized its soft power. However, the attitude of defensiveness towards "foreign criticism on India's domestic matters" (Ganguly 2021) sways the country away from this soft power. For instance, India "cut back on palm oil imports" (Ganguly 2021) from Malaysia when it tried to articulate India's Citizenship Amendment Act. With the rise of India in "global forums" as well as in the "global politics" there is a possibility that the government can rebuild only if it strengthens its "ideological vision" and puts it across strongly among the public (Ganguly 2021).

### *Lobbying and Associations*

The growing role of lobbies in media and academia have also been impacting the domestic public in foreign policymaking in India. The formulation of the advocacy group Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) and other such groups act as government delegates to foreign countries and may impact the policy decision making. Recently, FICCI announced that "Indian industry should begin exporting 5 per cent of its production and exporters should double their volumes, while exploring new markets to take the country's share to 10 per cent of global exports" (Times 2020). Besides this five-point plan, president Sangita Reddy stated the full support of the association and its members to the government concerning "all the steps taken by the government in handling the standoff at Galwan Valley" (Times 2020). Similarly, looking back at the time when India had "coldness towards the US, Indian favorability for the USSR" accredited the Soviet Union for "supporting India's war effort against a Pakistan aided by the American dispensation" (Milliff, Staniland, Narang 2019: 8). Even on Joe Biden's, the United States President's restriction on the export of vaccines and raw materials during Covid-19, the country "oversaw a 'whole of society' mobilization of aid from United States Agency for International Development (USAID), corporate America, India-centric trade advocacy groups, and even the Indian diaspora" (Kapur 2021).



### *Crisis Communication*

A crisis is the biggest test of any country and the way it manages its populace is an assessment of public relations strategies and tactics. India and Kuwait shared a “traditionally friendly relations” (MEA 2016) based on commercial and trade links, cultural relations, engagement in youth affairs and sports, and a memorandum of understanding for medical cooperation of 2013 can be another example which “withstood the test of time” (D’Souza 2021). During the pandemic when India needed medical assistance, Kuwait Minister for Commerce and Industry Abdullah Isa Al Salman, inaugurated the ocean-bridge of medical supplies to help India’s navy ship INS Kolkata to sail with “oxygen tanks, cylinders and concentrators” (Nayar 2021) from the port. The country received offers of help from nearly 40 other nations. “We have assisted; we are getting assistance”, what shows the true nature of India’s active indulgence and concern for the foreign nations which “shows an interdependent world. It shows a world that is working with each other” as quoted by Indian Foreign Service Officer Harsh Vardhan Shringla (Sushant Singh 2021).

The second wave of COVID-19 in India has left a painful impact on the country’s foreign policy and relations. After a gap of 17 years, India has had to accept foreign aid which seems may impact the country in the long run. With the growing importance and influence of China at the international level and the expected inclination of the United States towards Beijing, India still has a chance to care for the possibility of change and develop new thinking. To come out of this grim situation and to make a mark even after losing hold on world politics, India still has an opportunity to open up the regional front for cooperation under the ambit of SAARC. It can focus on developing “regional health multilateralism” to “promote mutual assistance and joint action on health emergencies like this”. With the COVID-19 crisis, India can still bring “Classical geopolitics on a par with health diplomacy, environmental concerns and regional connectivity in South Asia” (Jacob 2021). With the approach, the country can handle its relationship strategies to emerge *Vishwaguru* (or master to the world).





## CONCLUSION

Foreign policy is a multi-faceted framework where planning and execution require all-embracing skills, art and political articulation. India being a developing nation has worked extensively in defining its foreign policy. In this process, the India's foreign policy is viewed through critical lenses and has been questioned for not being collective and considerate. Still, against difficult odds, the country has been able to present its stand clearly between contemporary world powers. Besides, in history and even during recent times, India has played its cards meticulously and thoughtfully to elucidate its position to the world and thus always been able to improve its support. This all did not happen serendipitously but through the rightful exercise of using the tools of public relations via diplomacy, soft power and building positive public opinion both among the foreign publics as well as their domestic citizens.

So, every act of public relations is a thoughtful process of building long-term relationships, the first-ever stakeholder is one's internal publics or say the people of the country. With the diminishing boundaries in the flow of information, foreign policy has become a matter of public discourse. The foreign policy in India is "more of a decider or a shape giver than an abstainer" (Chand 2020). The intention to fulfil the "national interests" with a practical approach to align with different nations and "proactive diplomatic outreach" define the Indian foreign policy (Chand 2020). The agenda was set, the motive was clear, public are defined but what processed it is a work of careful thought and strategic planning. Public relations thus "help governments reach their foreign policy goals" (Peterson 2013: 308). Through public relations strategies and tools, a government can maintain its international relations and can manage its foreign affairs symmetrically. The findings revealed the strategic role of public relations in the development of foreign relations for a country. The public relations thus can be "preparative", for establishing a conducive environment and can be "situational" meant to promote a single issue or create situations in one's favour. To do so, the public relations practitioners direct the "media agenda" through news values which in turn help in



shaping the “public agenda” whereas the “policy agenda is articulated by pressure groups and political actors” known as lobbying (Tench, Yeomans 2006: 118). Public relations practices use “symbols, slogans, events, agenda-setting” as the progressive media practices to “unite the public and stabilise opinions” (Tench, Yeomans 2006: 8) in the form of thought leadership. A positive bent of mind can be created among the foreign publics by highlighting the country’s desires through the media, cultural and student exchange programs known as public diplomacy. With the surge of information networks, the sources of information have also risen drastically. This led to the development of savvy public which had been fed with first-hand knowledge from the source itself to achieve a positive response to the action taken by the government. So, if a government works in a two-way symmetrical format it can successfully encourage a feedback both from the domestic and foreign publics and can build a positive public opinion towards its foreign policy.

The public relations from Indian foreign policy initiatives and actions can thus be defined as *a*) a process of strategic planning; *b*) for building a healthy and mutually beneficial relationship with its neighbouring countries, *c*) along with understanding the pulse of the world economies (scanning of the environment); *d*) paving the way for external publics; *e*) creating its own space by formulating a group of third world countries (creating your own story, actions and reactions); *f*) defining its standpoint by understanding its domestic needs and its security (strengthening internal communication by initiating nuclear tests for national security); *g*) for developing positive public opinion (to counter-terrorist attacks); *h*) reaching out for support and coordination during the crisis (Covid-19 aid).

Thus, Public Relations in the context of a foreign policy can be defined as a process of strategic planning for building healthy and cordial relationships with the external publics especially with the neighbouring countries and associated third world countries by developing a group of advocates or lobby to deal with the powerful nations. In the context of internal publics, public relations can be seen as the art of defining the country’s stand point to develop a positive public opinion, and to



ensure trust and security in order to gain the public support to tackle crisis.

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