






Leveraging India's Goodwill in Latin America as 'Soft Power'

INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER









About the Journal

Journal DOI	https://dx.doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha
Journal Home	www.rupkatha.com 
Indexed by	Scopus  Web of Science: Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)  DOAJ 
Journal Metrics	CiteScore 2020: 0.2 SJR 2020: 0.162 SNIP 2020: 0.193 JCI 2020: 0.50

About the Issue

Themed Issue	Volume 14, Number 3, 2022 Across Cultures: Ibero-America and India
Guest Editors	Ranjeeva Ranjan ¹ & Mala Shikha ²
Affiliation	¹ Universidad Católica del Maule, Talca, Chile, ² Doon University, Dehradun, India.
Issue DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n3
TOC	https://rupkatha.com/v14n3.php 

About the Article

Title	Leveraging India's Goodwill in Latin America as 'Soft Power'
Author/s	Hari Seshasayee 
Affiliation	Woodrow Wilson Center, and Trade Advisor, ProColombia
Author ID	0000-0002-4146-3429 
Funding	No funding received. Published free of any charge.
Article DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n3.01  Pages: 1-10
Abstract	https://rupkatha.com/v14n301 
Full-text PDF	https://rupkatha.com/V14/n3/v14n301.pdf 
Article History	First Published: 16 September 2022
Article Impact	Check Dynamic Impact 
Copyright	Aesthetics Media Services 
Licensing	Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 

Leveraging India's Goodwill in Latin America as 'Soft Power'

Hari Seshasayee

Global Fellow, Woodrow Wilson Center, and Trade Advisor, ProColombia

Abstract

Although India commands considerable goodwill in the Latin American region, it does little to leverage this to conduct economic diplomacy. It is imperative to study the nature of India's image and goodwill in Latin America, and subsequently, differentiate it from how the region views other countries, before examining if and how this can be leveraged as soft power. Based on interviews with select experts in Latin America, we can gather certain insights that separate India's image from other countries in the region. Perhaps the biggest point of consensus amongst all the experts interviewed is the sheer lack of knowledge about India amongst the general population in Latin America – with the caveat that many niche segments, including businesspersons, journalists and academics have a reasonable amount of knowledge of India, including the contemporary, 'New India.' The Indian government can work together with stakeholders in Latin America to help increase awareness of the country, including the elements of the old and the new, be it yoga, Ayurveda and literature or the New India's IT, pharmaceutical and manufacturing investments in the region, as well as the reach of Indian cinema and entertainment.

Keywords: goodwill, India, India-Latin America relations, Latin America, soft power

Introduction

India enjoys considerable goodwill amongst the comity of nations; as an ancient civilization, as the home of religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, as one of many victims of colonization, and more recently, as a growing global economic power. The image of India is often accompanied by benign elements like Bollywood films, yoga and spirituality.

As scholar-industrialist Naushad Forbes outlines in his book *The Struggle and The Promise: Restoring India's Potential*,

"People like us and want us to succeed. I have personally experienced this from a variety of sources around the world: the former Prime Minister of Singapore, the United States Trade Representative, the Iranian foreign minister, the Indonesian trade minister and the Myanmar Senior Counsellor. All conveyed a message that India was a welcome investor, that they wanted India to succeed, even as they wanted specific things—our trade policy, say—fixed. We have huge international goodwill we can and must build on." He adds that "India starts with the huge advantage of being liked; people around the world want us to succeed. We must not squander this advantage" (Forbes, 2022).

Although India may be 'likeable,' the goodwill it enjoys is not spread evenly across the world. Within its own neighbourhood, India is often viewed as an antagonistic force by Pakistan and China. Other South Asian countries may see India as a regional power but even friends like Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan sometimes perceive India as a 'big brother,' a neighbour they don't want

to upset or provoke. For most of the rest of the world, India's image remains friendly and non-threatening.

The perception of India in Latin America has received little to no attention in the world of academia. Although India commands goodwill in the region, it does little to leverage this to conduct economic diplomacy. How do Latin American countries view India, and how is it different from their view of traditional partners such as the United States, China, Japan and Europe? What is India's cultural appeal in Latin America? Does India wield any soft power in the region, and if so, how can this be used to advance its interests?

To answer these questions, we must first study the nature of India's image and goodwill in Latin America, and subsequently, differentiate it from how the region views other countries, before examining if and how this can be leveraged as soft power.

Numerous images of India

The perception of India in Latin America can be examined through the lens of time, looking at the historical and contemporary view, and subsequently, at how these can be leveraged in the future.

The historical view

Given that India and Latin America have been separated by a vast distance of up to 15,000 kilometers, with few historical linkages, the knowledge of India in the region remains limited to some basic tenets – such as the British colonization of India, the independence struggle where Mahatma Gandhi played a key role, all under the base view of India as a land of spirituality, meditation and yoga. This is often juxtaposed with the Western depiction of India – as a country still struggling with poverty, lack of quality infrastructure, and developmental issues. Yet, Latin Americans have some unique memories of India – which the rest of the world is less aware of:

Literature and poet-diplomats:

Certain prominent literary figures have left their mark in India and Latin America, particularly Rabindranath Tagore (who spent two months in Argentina in 1924), Mexican poet-diplomat Octavio Paz (who served as ambassador to India from 1962 to 1968) and Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (who met with Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru during multiple visits to India). Other literary connections too left quite an imprint on both sides. As a result, most Latin Americans have heard of Tagore, and many have read works like *Vislumbres de la India* (Glimpses of India) by Octavio Paz. The parallels drawn by Octavio Paz of the similarities between Mexico and India have left a lasting impression on numerous Latin Americans; "Everything that I saw (in India) was the re-emergence of forgotten pictures of Mexico," notes Paz in *Vislumbres de la India* (Kapoor, 2019). Tagore's literary works were translated by Mexican philosopher and author José Vasconcelos and distributed free in the 1920s. As the Mexican academic Xicoténcatl Martínez Ruiz notes, "Tagore offered inspiration and literary guidance to Mexican writers, poets and philosophers." (Martínez Ruiz, 2017). Tagore's kinship with Argentine intellectual Victoria Ocampo – who was referred to as *La mujer más Argentina* (the quintessential Argentine woman) – also became a subject of such interest and curiosity that it is part of pop culture in both India and Argentina, displayed through books and even films such as Argentine director Pablo Cesar's *'Thinking of Him,'* with a stellar team of award-winning actors and producers. These literary

connections are unique to India and Latin America and have left an indelible mark not only on the intelligentsia on both sides but also on a vast number of interested readers, travelers and common people. The works of the famous Indian poet Kabir were translated to Spanish by Argentinians Joaquin V. Gonzalez and Carlos Muzzio Sáenz Peña immediately after the English translation, in 1915-16, and later by scholars at the Colegio de Mexico in 1991 (Gupta, 2019). As academic and translator Prof. Sonya Gupta notes, "Spanish translations of modern Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Girish Karnad and Saadat Hasan Manto have been mainly done in Latin America."

Mahatma Gandhi and non-violence

Mahatma Gandhi may be well known globally, particularly as a leader of India's fight for independence, but in Latin America, he is first and foremost a symbol of non-violence in a region that has often been described as one of the most violent in the world. Mahatma Gandhi's impact in Latin America is palpable – a number of schools are named after Gandhi, statutes and busts of Gandhi are visible across the region from Mexico to Argentina, and numerous non-governmental organizations in the region teach and train people on the philosophy of non-violence espoused by Gandhi called Ahimsa. From Brazil and Argentina to Colombia and Mexico, Gandhi's birthday (known as Gandhi Jayanthi) is celebrated in innovative ways, through seminars and essay competitions on non-violence, as well as training sessions for the Sao Paulo police conducted by Brazilian organizations like Palas Athenas, which conducted training sessions on peace and non-violence, meditation and restorative justice for 9,541 participants in 2021 alone.

Historical exchanges

Although the historical exchanges between India and Latin America are rare, some are worth mentioning. Perhaps no other linkage between India and Latin America is as enduring as the Portuguese colonization of Brazil in the Americas and Goa in India. In the early 19th century, more than three-fourths of Goa's exports were bound for Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's then-capital (Bauss, 2019). The trade of agricultural commodities between India and Brazil shaped cuisines and agriculture on both sides – including shipments of mango, cinnamon, pepper and coconut from India to Brazil, and tapioca, rubber and cashew from Brazil to India. Another major influence was the export of Indian cows to Brazil – although Latin American countries are world-renowned for their cattle meat, it is quite a startling fact that cattle are not endemic to the Americas, and were only brought to those shores by European colonizers. The vast majority of cattle in Latin America today is made up of Indian breeds that could acclimatize to the tropical weather conditions of Latin America, in contrast to the large European cows that were accustomed to colder climates. There are also some notable historical connections between India and Mexico, particularly those of Pandurang Khankhoje and MN Roy. Khankhoje played such a pivotal role in Mexico's agricultural revolution – such as the development of high-yielding varieties of maize and wheat – that a mural of him can be found even today in Mexico's Ministry of Education. The mural shows Khankhoje sitting at the head of the table breaking bread, described by one historian as an "allegory of the biblical Last Supper, or the multiplication of loaves" (Sawhney, 2014). It was painted by none other than Diego Rivera, Mexico's most famous muralist, who also holds the record for the highest price of any Latin American artwork sold at auction. The other famous Indian in Mexico was MN Roy, whose few years in Mexico left a lasting impact. Roy was close to numerous leaders of the Mexican Revolution, and became active in politics and even wrote columns in local

newspapers. Eventually, he founded the Mexican Communist Party (MCP) – the first at the time outside of the Soviet Union – along with Mexican socialist Adolfo Santibanez (Iyer, 2021). Given its proximity to the United States as well as the sheer dominance of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI) in the national political scene, the MCP was eventually banned and later dissolved.

In modern history, perhaps one more element of India-Latin America relations is worth mentioning: India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made a visit to eight Latin American countries in 1968. Her visit left a lasting impression – it was not a common sight in 1968 for a woman to be head of government, and that too of the world's largest democracy; it's not uncommon today to find a number of girls and women in Latin America named 'Indira,' including the daughter of Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez, named Indira Cato, as well as members of Parliament Indira Vizcaíno Silva in Mexico and Indira Huilca in Peru. These historical images of India in Latin America have also helped shape the more recent, contemporary view of the country. Post-independence India established diplomatic relations with Latin American countries in the 1950s-60s, but both India and Latin America remained preoccupied with their own domestic issues until the late 1990s.

The contemporary view

India's image in Latin America has gradually but surely changed in the 21st century. The perception of ancient India has been replaced by the 'New India.' This is also apparent in the Latin American literature on India, through books like '*La nueva India*' (the New India) by scholar-diplomat Jorge Heine, which draws lessons from India's experience with economic development for the Latin American region; others like journalist Patricia Campos Mello's '*Índia - Da Miséria A Potência*' (India – from misery to potency) and author Florência Costa's '*Os Indianos*' (the Indians) also look at modern India and its place in the world. Even in academia, a number of centers of study in Brazil, Mexico and Colombia began researching contemporary India, its economic growth story and its relevance in geopolitics; these include the India program at the State University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, the India-Brazil Immersion Program at FGV's Sao Paulo School of Business Administration, and the Center for Studies on Contemporary India and South Asia (CESICAM) at Externado University in Colombia, amongst others. Although this renewed image of India may include a contemporary understanding of India, the historical view of India as the home of Gandhi and Tagore, the land of yoga and spirituality, still remains. The 'New India' includes India's economic growth story, at the center of which lies the country's information technology (IT) revolution that propelled it to global fame. This contemporary image continues to evolve. Yet, challenges remain, specifically the lack of knowledge of India in the general populace.

A mix of the old and the new

Some elements of India's contemporary image in Latin America include a mix of the old and the new, particularly yoga, Ayurveda and literature. Yoga originated in ancient India and is described in sacred texts like the Vedas and Upanishads, practiced by sages and common folk alike. Today, yoga is practiced globally, be it in Argentina, the United States, Australia, Uganda or Russia – or indeed, in India. Latin America has taken to yoga just as much as any other part of the world. There are numerous centers to study yoga in Latin America, as an academic discipline with a master's degree or a graduate certificate, as well as through training centers. The Indian diplomatic

missions in Latin America and its cultural centers promote the practice of yoga and have organized yoga sessions in public spaces, including the city centers in the capitals of Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Chile, and even in Peru's Machu Picchu. In addition to yoga, India's traditional medicine, namely Ayurveda, has also piqued the interest of Latin Americans. The region regularly imports ayurvedic products from India and multiple universities in countries like Argentina have a Department of Ayurveda medicine and offered courses in Ayurveda, including the University of Buenos Aires, the University of Maimonides, the Catholic University and Cordoba University. Besides the literary exchanges between India and Latin America have moved from Tagore and Paz to a plethora of Indian and Latin American authors whose works are regularly translated. The Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Cien años de Soledad* (One hundred years of solitude) was translated from its original Spanish to Hindi back in 2003, and released as *Ekant Ke Sau Baras*. Additionally, India's diplomatic missions and some institutes such as the Indo-Hispanic Language Academy in Kolkata actively organize literary events and encourage exchanges between India and Latin America. Most recently, India was the 'Guest of Honour' at the International Book Fair at Guadalajara, Mexico, arguably the region's most important literary fair.

Entertainment and sports

A more contemporary element of India's image in Latin America is that of entertainment, particularly but not limited to Bollywood cinema. Numerous Indian films are dubbed or subtitled and released in theatres in Latin America; they are also available with street vendors that still sell DVDs of Bollywood films old and new. Numerous Indian films have also been shot at famous Latin American tourist destinations, including *Dhoom 2* in Rio de Janeiro, the Rajnikanth-starrer 'Robot' filmed in Machu Picchu, Peru, and the Telugu film *Sarrainodu* in Bolivia's surreal Salar de Uyuni (salt flats). In Latin America too, the famous India-themed series 'Caminho das Índias' took Brazil by storm; the series was shot partially in India, used numerous Indian soundtracks, and even won International Emmy Awards. Moreover, it brought India into the homes of millions of Brazilians who grew more curious about the country. A handful of Latin Americans also form part of India's movie industry, primarily as actors and actresses, including some notable leads like the Brazil-born Bruna Abdullah, Giselli Monteiro and Nathalia Pinheiro. Yet another element worth mentioning here is a sport, namely football. Latin American countries like Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay are well-known in India for their success in the world of football. Brazil and Argentina enjoy a massive fan following in some of India's left-leaning states, particularly Kerala and West Bengal. Whenever these countries play football on the international stage, fans in Kerala and West Bengal flock together wearing the blue-and-white of the Argentine flag and the vibrant green of the Brazilian flag; they go the extra mile, with murals depicting their favourite players, larger-than-life cutouts of Lionel Messi and Neymar carried through the streets like a parade, and even with kites of the Brazilian and Argentine flags and football logos flown across the city. When India began its own domestic football tournament, the Indian Super League (ISL), many teams naturally sought to collaborate with Latin American countries, bringing numerous players and coaches from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay and Venezuela. To date, more than 70 Latin American footballers have played in India's ISL.

The Latin America perspective

India's historical image in Latin America has surely shaped the modern, contemporary view of India in the region, which continues to evolve as more people from both sides begin to discover new facets of India and Latin America. Having examined India's past and present images in Latin America, it would be worthwhile to also look at how this compares with the region's traditional partners. How do Latin Americans view India in comparison to other Asian countries like China, Korea and Japan? How different is the Latin American view of India compared with Western nations like the US, Canada and Europe? Based on interviewsⁱ with select experts in Latin America, many of whom have been directly involved in their country's relationship with India, we can gather certain insights that separate India from other countries in the region.

Jorge Heine, former Ambassador of Chile to India (presently Research Professor at Boston University): India is [perceived] as a fascinating but complex and difficult country. In terms of political and economic relations, compared to China, Korea and Japan, India is seen as somewhat similar to what has always been said about Brazil: "India is the country of the future, and it always will be." In reality, none of the Asian countries are seen as a threat [in the region], so the issue is not how 'benign' India is but rather how much it offers Latin America in terms of development opportunities. The answer is not obvious. In theory, many would like to bet on India, in terms of trade, investment and project financing. In practice, there have been many disappointments in this regard, and the conclusion is that it is best to lower expectations. India is seen as part of the Global South, and as a country that could play a key role in the "post-Western world" emerging in the new century. At the same time, India is perceived as a "reluctant power" with very little interest in Latin America (which is reflected by the lack of high-level official visits).

Patricia Campos Mello, an award-winning Brazilian journalist and associate research scholar at Columbia University: I think there is a vast ignorance in Latin America regarding India. Nevertheless, in general, it is seen as more benign than China. China is the largest importer to many countries, and there is uneasiness due to its power, its undemocratic government and ideological reasons. Even though India is seen as part of the Global South and on an equal footing with Brazil, most people excluding the foreign policy community and some businessmen don't really know much about India.

Lia de la Vega, Deputy Director of the Asian Affairs Committee at the Argentine Council for International Relations: The perception, for those who know something about India, is positive (although the lower economic classes know less about India, the middle and upper class usually knows more). India is closely associated with images projected by Europeans, for example: "spiritual India" (this image may be enhanced by the activities of the International Yoga Day). On the other hand, another image that persists is that of poverty, which is sometimes a widespread image that prevents us from seeing India with its technology, its pharmaceutical industry, space program etc. In some places, like Peru, the image of India is tinged with the presence of Indian cinema (especially but not limited to Bollywood). There is a lack of a better-targeted Indian strategy, in terms of public and cultural diplomacy. It is not wrong to emphasize tradition, but India is also about modernity and it is necessary to project that image as well. And a clearer academic strategy is also lacking. A more real balance is lacking around all the elements that India can project more effectively on the international stage.

Jorge Castañeda, former Ambassador of Peru to India: The perception of India is that of a developing country, with a vast population, and cultural wealth but with large contrasts of prosperity and misery amongst its population. In comparison to Japan, Korea and China, the knowledge of India [in Peru] is far less. While Japan, Korea and China are considered developed countries, India is viewed as still in the process of development, and as part of the Global South.

Hector Cueva, former Ambassador of Ecuador to India, and current professor at the University of San Francisco, Quito, Ecuador: The image of India for Latin Americans is often one of poverty and backwardness – India is what National Geographic or Discovery Channel teaches us. India barely exists in the Latin American worldview, and it is a shame because India is the vector for the development of solutions for many of the problems that Latin America has – particularly in healthcare. China is here with its loans, Korea with its companies and Japan with its technology, but India is hardly present [in Ecuador], mostly with yoga. Unfortunately, India sells its image poorly [in Ecuador].

Ariel Andrade, Director General of Grupo 108, El Salvador, and former Ambassador of El Salvador in India: Most people see India as a very distant country, little known and with many social problems – including poverty, violence against women etc. They recognize Gandhi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Sai Baba, Yoga and Hinduism. Few people understand the entire cultural and historical legacy of India, as well as its economic and scientific advances. In some industries like pharmaceuticals, automotive and information technology, the role of India is recognized. Japan has been a traditional ally of El Salvador since the 1950s (the first Latin American country where Toyota cars were sold was El Salvador), while Korea has been widely recognized since the 1990s. Culturally, both are highly revered by old and young (especially for anime and K-pop) and recognized as countries with a great quality of life. China is recognized both as a global economic actor and as a very important trading partner. There are certain negative views about the quality of Chinese products and their long-term interest, but without falling into the Sinophobia that prevails in other countries. In terms of soft power diplomacy, Japan, Korea and China have strong activity in El Salvador: the Confucius Institute of China, the King Sejong Institute of Korea and the Japanese embassy (they have a mascot called Chamba-Chan, Chamba is short for Salvador). Compared to these three countries, India has much less influence. In this rather myopic view, India does not have much visibility. Unlike China, which is seen as the main challenger in the battle for new world order, few people appreciate India's global weight today. Many people I know have been surprised to learn that India has the same population as China and is the fifth largest economy in the world. In addition, there is no Indian embassy in El Salvador, which places it at a serious disadvantage in comparison to other countries.

Rodrigo Blanco, Chair of the Advisory Board, India-Mexico Business Chamber, Mexico City: From the outset, the perception [of India] is of a distant, complex country without too many opportunities. Not much information is available about the country [in Mexico]. Other Asian countries like Japan and South Korea have often been perceived as more advanced or sophisticated markets. There is a division in the perception of Japan and Korea as desired markets, and China as potential market, but one to be cautious about. In some parts of Latin America, they perceive India as similar to China, but there is a lot of ignorance. The United States and Europe are traditional markets for Latin American countries. This is both in business and foreign

investment. In comparison, India is a completely unknown market. I would place India as a mirror of Latin America in Asia.

As is apparent from these comments by numerous Latin American diplomats, businesspeople, scholars and journalists, India's reach in Latin America remains limited when compared with other Asian and Western countries. Moreover, the image of India in the region is by no means uniform. In larger countries like Brazil and Mexico, where India has diplomatic missions and cultural centers, people seem more well-informed about India. These countries are also home to a number of Indian companies and brands, some of which are market leaders. In smaller countries like El Salvador and Ecuador, where India does not even maintain an embassy, there is considerably less knowledge and interest in India.

Yet, in almost all cases, there are two points of consensus: most of the region believes India is a country with immense potential, but little has been done to cement linkages with Latin America, which leaves people unaware of India's place on the global stage. In many ways, as the experts above have acknowledged, India's presence in Latin America cannot be compared with other Asian or European countries, let alone the United States. There remains far more to be done before India can grab the attention of the general populace in Latin America.

Converting goodwill to soft power

The advantage of India's goodwill and general 'likeability' can be leveraged in some ways as 'soft power.' Coined by political scientist Joseph Nye, soft power is "the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion" (Nye Jr., 2004). So, how can India convert its goodwill in Latin America to soft power, and perhaps use it to conduct economic diplomacy? What practical contributions or solutions can India offer Latin America that complements its goodwill and could potentially be used as 'soft power'?

It may be possible for India to convert its goodwill into soft power, or even more so, to economic diplomacy; such diplomacy is often conducted through a system of reciprocity and the 'cards' one can put on the table. Based on recent research published by this author for the Woodrow Wilson Center (Seshasayee, 2022), we can surmise India's possible 'soft power' cards in Latin America as the following:

- The supply of affordable generic medicines and vaccines to Latin America helps reduce the cost of public healthcare in the region.
- Investments and employment of about 100,000 people in Latin America, specifically in the IT, services and manufacturing sectors.
- Leadership in space diplomacy, which includes satellite launches for Latin American countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Mexico, and collaboration with numerous space agencies in the region
- Lines of credit extended by EXIM Bank of India totaling roughly US\$500 million to Latin America, specifically to Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and some Caribbean nations.
- Hundreds of annual scholarships through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation program for Latin American students and professionals

This brings us to another question: What can India's soft power in Latin America be targeted towards?

If India can implement even some of the recommendations noted above, it could use its soft power in Latin America to numerous ends. First and foremost, India can leverage its soft power to get better deals in the region's energy sector. There is no national priority in India more urgent than energy security, given India's lack of domestic energy resources. Latin America, on the other hand, has a landmass that is more than five times India's, with abundant energy resources and only half of India's population. India can benefit greatly from Latin America's energy resources, including petroleum and lithium, and also from collaboration in renewable energies. Second, India can look to Latin America to fulfill its food security needs. Latin America is a major global agricultural exporter and can provide India with useful pulses, vegetable oils, fruits and other processed foods. Finally, India can also use its soft power to court Latin American investments. After all, the region's companies have already invested \$1.6 billion in India, and are expected to invest far more given India's growing middle class.

Yet, in order to use its soft power in the region, India should heed the advice of the Latin Americans interviewed for this article. Perhaps the biggest point of consensus amongst all the experts interviewed is the sheer lack of knowledge about India amongst the general population in Latin America – with the caveat that many niche segments, including businesspersons, journalists and academics have a reasonable amount of knowledge of India, including the contemporary, 'New India.' The Indian government can work together with stakeholders in Latin America to help increase awareness of the country, including the elements of the old and the new, be it yoga, Ayurveda and literature or the New India's IT, pharmaceutical and manufacturing investments in the region, as well as the reach of Indian cinema and entertainment. Another recommendation is to open more diplomatic missions and cultural centers, be it a new Embassy in Ecuador, a new Consulate General in Guadalajara, Mexico, or cultural centers in Chile and Argentina; perhaps even more so, India should increase the number of personnel at its diplomatic missions in Latin America, given that many embassies are managed by just one ambassador and one additional diplomat. Such an increase in diplomatic presence is unlikely to happen unless there is more political will in India to pay more attention to Latin America. Until India organizes more high-level official visits to the region, perhaps it may be worthwhile for India's Ministry of External Affairs to formulate a policy targeted toward the Latin American region – much like its 'Look East' or 'Neighbourhood First' policies. Until then, it is unlikely that India can compete with other Asian countries like Japan, China, and Korea (let alone with Europe) for 'soft power' in the Latin American region.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The author is currently a trade advisor to ProColombia, a Colombian government entity.

Funding

No funding has been received for the publication of this article. It is published free of any charge.

Note

ⁱ All personal interviews were conducted by the author electronically.

References

- Bauss, R. (1997). Textiles, bullion and other trades of Goa: Commerce with Surat, other areas of India, Luso-Brazilian ports, Macau and Mozambique, 1816-1819. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 34(3), 275–287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946469703400301>
- Forbes, N. (2022). *The Struggle and The Promise: Restoring India's Potential*. Harper Business
- Gupta, S. (2014, April 24). Solitude, in other words. *Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/solitude-in-other-words/>
- Gupta, S. (2019). Inter-Subaltern Dialogue or Reworked Essentialisms? Kabir's Translations into Spanish in Latin America. *International Journal of European Languages*, 1(1). <https://www.efluniversity.ac.in/Journals/INTER-SUBALTERN%20DIALOGUE%20OR%20REWORKED%20ESSENTIALISMS.pdf>
- Iyer, A. (2021, July 28). How an Indian Radical Founded the Mexican Communist Party. *Tribune India Magazine*. <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2021/07/how-an-indian-radical-founded-the-mexican-communist-party>
- Kapoor, M., S. (2019, March 31). 'An assemblage of images': How Delhi and its architecture influenced the poetry of Octavio Paz. <https://scroll.in/article/918372/an-assemblage-of-images-how-delhi-and-its-architecture-influenced-the-poetry-of-octavio-paz>
- Muñoz García, Adrián. (2017). Poética educativa. Artes, educación para la paz y atención consciente. *Innovación educativa (México, DF)*, 17 (75), 197-201. Available at http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-26732017000300197&lng=es&tlng=es
- Nye Jr, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Sawhney, S. (2014, November 30). *Rare photos of Pandurang Khankhoje, an Indian revolutionary in 1920s Mexico*. <https://scroll.in/roving/675432/rare-photos-of-pandurang-khankhoje-an-indian-revolutionary-in-1920s-mexico>
- Seshasayee, H. (2022). *Latin America's Tryst with the Other Asian Giant, India*. Woodrow Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/latin-americas-tryst-other-asian-giant-india>

Hari Seshasayee is a trade adviser at ProColombia, a Colombian government agency, and a Global Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center. He can be reached at harishesh@alumni.stanford.edu. The views expressed do not reflect those of the Colombian government.
