

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

1.1.1 The importance of image for a nation

The Cambridge dictionary defines ‘image’ as a picture in your mind or an idea of how someone or something is or the way that something or someone is thought of by other people. Image might mean a variety of things such as pictures, statues, maps, diagrams, dreams, spectacles, projections, poems, patterns, memories and even ideas (Manghani et al, 2006). A nation’s image is the sum of peoples’ beliefs, opinions, ideas and impressions about it. Image of a nation is formed due to various factors like society, culture, values, economy and politics (Lodhi, 2021). A nation’s geography, history, food, fashion, art and music, famous citizens, global brands etc. also play an important role in creating its image (Kotler & Gertner, 2004). Images once formed can be long lasting and difficult to change.

A positive and favourable image helps a nation in many ways hence every nation aspires for it. It plays a crucial role in earning respect and influence in international affairs (Lodhi, 2021). It is easy for nations with a positive image to build a consensus around any issue. For example, in 2014, the draft resolution passed by India to declare 21st June as the International Day of Yoga received a massive support by 177 nations in the United Nations. A positive national image helps to attract foreign investors, tourists, international students, donors etc. Every country has a unique name and image in the minds of people. The decisions related to purchasing, investing, residence and traveling are often dependent on the kind of image, perception and opinion people have about a particular country. If beliefs about a country are positive, evaluation of the country’s products and brands will also be positive (White, 2012).

Customers worldwide place their trust in products belonging to certain countries based on the image and perception of that country in their minds. Products manufactured in developed countries such as USA, Germany, Switzerland, UK, Japan etc. are considered to be of higher quality than those produced in developing countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam, Surinam, Afghanistan or Syria due to the low country brand equity (Kotler &

Gertner, 2004). Thus, each nation strives to create a positive national branding for itself which makes it look distinct from others.

Nations with a negative image face perception issues, low credibility and great difficulty in pursuing their interests on the world stage. A survey conducted by Pew Research Centre in 2022 showed that 68% of citizens in the developed countries of the western world had a negative image of China mainly due to its involvement in human rights abuses and expansionist military policies (Guibert, 2022). They saw China as a serious threat. Similarly, Pakistan's inclusion in Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list for its involvement in money laundering and terror financing gave it a negative image and made difficult for her to ask for loans, financial aids or bailout packages from global financial bodies. It discouraged the investors from investing their money and thus decreased Foreign Direct Investments (FDI).

1.1.2 Role of media in constructing image of nation

Media has long been used as a tool for diplomacy, propaganda, fulfilment of national interests and for the promotion of soft power. Narratives create perceptions that often become permanently etched or embedded in the subconscious (Sood,2020). People's perceptions, opinions and images about any nation are built from the news and information presented in the global media. Edmund (2016) found that the national image was directly proportional to favourable or unfavourable media coverage given to it. It is very likely that war-torn nations like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon etc. will have a negative impression in the minds of people due to continuous negative media representation. Tourists and investors would avoid visiting these countries because of a negative and unfavourable image.

Here is another example. In August 2021, the United States withdrew its troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban regained control of the country (Schaeffer, 2022). Once in power, they prohibited girls from attending secondary school, banned women from attending and teaching at universities, and prevented women from working (Maizland, 2023). These steps attracted negative media coverage and a negative image for the Taliban government and made it difficult for it to ask for financial aids from monetary institutions. The Taliban facing the heat of economic sanctions tried their best to convince

the world that they stood for good governance and equal rights for women but nobody seemed to believe them.

Since media is used as a key instrument of foreign policy hence nations make huge investments in media resources to promote their perspective on issues of global importance. For example, Cable News Network (CNN) had a major impact on the conduct of the United States' foreign policy in the late Cold War period as well as in the post-Cold War era (CNN effect). Likewise, the Voice of America (radio service) was started by the US in 1942 to combat Nazi propaganda during world war II. Radio Free Europe (RFE) was started by the US in 1949 to spread anti-communist propaganda in the countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Caucasus and the Middle East. These services continue with a clear objective to serve the US diplomacy by building a favourable American narrative in the countries where the radio waves could reach. For a similar purpose, the broadcasters such as BBC (in Britain) and Al-Jazeera (Qatar) are funded by their respective national governments.

Media plays a crucial role in constructing the image of nations and it is for this very reason why China, which aims to become the next superpower, has been making huge investments in its media resources. With an objective to combat negative discourses in the mainstream international media and to provide their own version and narrative of the global events, the Chinese media has been expanding internationally. Its primary news agency, Xinhua, has around 170 foreign bureaus and it publishes its content in ten languages. The English language editions of China Daily and the Global Times are available worldwide today. CCTV, the state television broadcasting news service, has rebranded itself as China Global Television Network in December 2016 and it now broadcasts six channels, two in English and others in Arabic, French, Russian, and Spanish (Albert, 2018).

Even in India, the external broadcasts were started with an aim to promote the Indian narrative. The first external broadcast by All India Radio(AIR) was made in Pushto language in 1939 by the then British rulers to counter the Nazi Germany propaganda during World War II. In the present times, the external services division of AIR broadcasts in 27 languages i.e., 15 foreign and 12 Indian languages and are projected to over 100 countries. These foreign language services include Arabic, Baluchi, Burmese, Chinese, Dari, French, Indonesian, Persian, and Baloch. Similarly, Doordarshan launched DD India

on 14th March 1995 and its services were available in the 146 countries of the world. It was revamped and repositioned as an English news channel for the global audience in 2019 with an objective to counter anti-India narratives in the foreign media. Many private Indian channels are also being broadcasted across the world today.

1.1.3 Role of soft power in creation of favourable national image

The term “soft power” was coined by Joseph Nye in his 1990 book ‘Bound to Lead’. He defined it as the ability of a country to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2017). The major difference between soft and hard power is that the latter coerces the actor to do something desired by the coercer, while soft power persuades it to do the same thing without coercion (Mahapatra, 2016). Nations engage in various activities to boost their soft power and global image. For example, the 2022 FIFA World Cup (2022) event was an opportunity for Qatar to expose the world to their culture, displaying everything from their architecture to their hospitality (Ronald, 2022). In the next paragraphs we will see how different nations have been investing in their soft power.

French food is recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, and France has the most Michelin-starred restaurants worldwide. It has the highest number of tourist arrivals in the world (Handley, 2022). It is home to cultural icons such as the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre, as well as a multitude of museums, galleries, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Louvre is the most visited museum in the world. The events such as the Cannes Film Festival, the Tour de France, and Bastille Day have an international appeal. These events are followed by audiences around the world.

British art, film, music, sport and education are the greatest soft power strengths of the UK and have global appeal. British television and films such as Harry Potter, Sherlock Holmes, The Crown, Downton Abbey and James Bond are renowned worldwide. The Game of Thrones series helped to increase tourism in Northern Ireland (Mannheimer et al, 2022). Also, the presence of museums, galleries and theatres in large numbers has helped to increase tourism in the UK. It is also home to some of the best universities in the world such as Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College, Edinburgh, King’s College etc. These universities attract international students from different parts of the world.

Germany is well known for its advanced manufacturing goods, engineering prowess, high end automotive and machinery industries and some of its best automobile brands include Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, BMW etc. Other popular brands like DHL, Schwarz, Allianz, Uniper, Bosch, BASF, Siemens etc. have a global presence. Berlin is a major European tech and digital hub. Germany has diverse tourist attractions such as historical museums, castles, Alps mountain ranges, waterfalls, medieval cathedrals and vibrant exhibitions to attract tourists. The country has some of the finest world-class universities like Technical University of Munich, Heidelberg University, Humboldt University and University of Bonn which offer large number of scholarships to international students.

Sweden, is known for its unique model of governance, high-performing public sector, strong political values and individual freedoms. It is one of the most peaceful countries and consistently ranks very high on the human development index. It gives high emphasis on women's rights, climate change and environmental issues, green energy etc. It plans to cut its carbon emissions to net zero by 2045. H&M, IKEA, Volvo, Spotify and Skype are some of the well-known brands which belong to Sweden. The country is famous for its scenic beauty which includes the colourful wooden buildings, traditional huts, stone fortresses, cathedrals, stunning scenery and the picturesque fishing villages.

The soft power of the US has been immense and its deep imprints can be found in any corner of the world. The popular American images such as Walt Disney, Mickey Mouse, Broadway, Hollywood, Times Square, Central Park, the Empire State Building, McDonald's, Superman, Microsoft, Henry Ford, Benjamin Franklin, Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable, Ella Fitzgerald, Elvis Presley, Mark Twain, World Wrestling Federation, Marlboro Man etc. have all become a part of the global collective imagination (Sood, 2020). Knowingly or unknowingly these images have become a part of our subconscious mind today.

America's film, television, and music industries continue to set the pace and trends for the rest of the world. The New York Times, The Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, CNN, and other American news organisations control the worldwide agenda. The US's outstanding performance in Olympic competitions has also increased its soft power. Some of the most well-known businesses in the world, including Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, Twitter, Tesla, Microsoft, Airbnb, Uber, Netflix, KFC, Starbucks etc. are all based in the US. American universities like MIT, Stanford, Harvard, Chicago and

Princeton rank among the topmost in the world and are most sought after by the international students who take GMAT, GRE, IELTS and TOEFL tests in large numbers to get admissions in them.

China has also been increasing its investments in the domain of soft power to get rid of its authoritarian image and create a favourable image. Currently it is running around 550 Confucius Institutes in 162 countries which provide courses on Mandarin language, cooking, calligraphy, Chinese traditions, values, culture etc. It has been hosting major international events such as Summer Olympics (2008), Winter Olympics (2022) etc. Chinese performances at Olympic Games are also a projection of its soft power. In the recent years it is has emerged as a top destination for international students with universities like Tsinghua, Peking, Fudan and Zhejiang gaining top spots in world rankings. The tourist attractions like The Great Wall of China, Imperial Palace, Summer Palace, Terracotta Army (at Xi'an), Potala palace (Tibet) etc. have been attracting a large number of tourists.

1.1.4 Western media: powerful in shaping the global narrative

Narratives are for self-justification where the narrator presents their own interpretation of the events in order to justify themselves. They don't have to be grounded in reality. There is a persistent, overarching storyline, but depending on the situation at the time, there may also be sub-narratives. Narratives become perceptions with the passage of time and, ultimately, over generations, become a part of history. The control over the narrative is helpful for access to resources, markets, military and economic dominance. For example, the US justified the 2003 invasion of Iraq on the grounds that its ruler Saddam Hussein possessed the weapons of mass destruction. However, these presumptions were found false and untrue later on.

Media based in the western nations (mostly the ones located in the Global North- Europe, North America and Oceania) have been at the forefront when it comes to shaping the global narrative. The Western world had the means to create and sustain its narrative of superiority and justification, or the righteousness of its causes through the reach of its media – led by television, the wire services and now through the control of the mind via the internet and communications-based narratives (Sood, 2020). The ownership of major book publishing, news agencies, newspapers, magazines, music, films, advertising, social

media networking sites, search engines, radio and television channels continues to be in the hands of Western corporations.

If one looks at the list of 30 biggest media companies in the world published by Business Insider (2021) one can observe that most of the companies such as Alphabet, Walt Disney, Comcast, 21st Century Fox, Meta, Bertelsmann, Viacom, CBS Corporation, Baidu, News Corp are based in the Western countries. According to Global Web Index News Consumption Report (2019) the five most trusted global media brands are BBC News (52%), Reuters (49%), CNN (48%), The New York Times (48%), The Economist (46%). All of them are based in Western countries and their interpretation of news and media content becomes the dominant narrative. According to Schiller (1991) it was a form of cultural imperialism where the hard power tactics and military domination has been substituted by cultural domination.

Traditionally, the countries of the Global South were heavily dependent on the North for both software and hardware in the information sector. This resulted in one-way flow of information from Global North to South (from the centre to the periphery). The third world was hardly ever represented in the media of the first world (Mowlana & Wilson, 1990). Even if minuscule representation was there then it was mostly negative in its tone. The imbalance in information flow, the lack of reliable and diversified sources of information, and the absence of racial minorities in the Western media workforce were some of the factors that were responsible for the inaccurate portrayal of third world nations in the West (Shohat & Stam, 1994).

Countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa were misrepresented and stereotyped as the spaces with illiteracy, famine, diseases, despotism and poverty. Saxena & Mehra (2021) noted that Western nations continued to look at the developing countries with a pejorative lens and had a very deeply internalised saviour complex. Nouns and adjectives like hut, dark, tribe, King Kong, tribalism, primitive, nomad, animism, jungle, cannibal, savage, underdeveloped, third world, developing etc. were used frequently to describe when Africa was the news story (Chavis, 1998). Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie called this phenomena as the danger of a single story (TED, 2009). According to her, when media propagated a single story about another person or country again and again it led to critical misunderstanding. It led to stereotyping and the single story became the only story.

1.1.5 Evolution of India's image

India is a civilization state with a long history which goes back to thousands of years. Its image has evolved a lot with the progression of time. In this section India's image has been sub-divided into four time periods- ancient times, colonial era, post-independence and post 1991 economic reforms.

1.1.5.1 In ancient times

The name India has been derived from Sanskrit word Sindhu which was the name of Indus River. The other name Bharat was derived from the name of King Dushyanta and Shakuntala's son Bharata. The word Bharat also finds mention in the following shlokas of Vishnu Purana-

गायन्ति देवाः किल गीतकानि धन्यास्तु ते भारत भूमि-भागे ।
स्वर्गापवर्गास्पद मार्गभूते भवन्ति भूयः पुरुषाः सुरत्वात् ॥

Gayanti devah kil geetkaani

Dhanyastute bharat bhumi bhage

Swargapavarga spad margbhute

Bhavanti bhuyah purushah suratvaat

Even the gods sing the glory of the men who are born in this pious land of Bhāratavarṣa, which is the path to heaven and liberation. Such men and women are more fortunate than the gods.

उत्तरं यत् समुद्रस्य हिमाद्रेश्चैव दक्षिणम् ।
वर्षं तद् भारतं नाम भारती यत्र सन्ततिः ॥

Uttaram yat samudrasya

himdrischaiv dakshinam

Varsham tad bharatm naam

Bharti yatra santatih

The land which is located to the north of the ocean and to the south of the Himalayas is known as Bharat and people born on this land are called as Bhartiyas.

India's ancient image as a "golden bird", a land of spiritual knowledge, a land of spices, gold, diamond, ivories, enchanted merchants, explorers and navigators, is well established (Mahapatra, 2016). It has been a melting pot of religions, languages and cultures and was seen as the land of Gautam Buddha (The Light of Asia). Its prosperity was the reason why it saw many foreign invasions one after the another. India excelled not only in spiritual, religious or cultural field but also in the domain of science, mathematics and astronomy. It produced great scientists and mathematicians like Aryabhata, Bhāskara I, Varāhamihira etc. who contributed greatly to these fields.

Baudhayana calculated the value of pi(π) and discovered Pythagoras' theorem. Brahmagupta wrote books on mathematics and astronomy. Sushruta contributed in the field of plastic surgery and cataract removal. Charaka was a key proponent in the field of ayurveda. Patanjali codified the Yoga sutras. Chanakya wrote Arthashastra (treatise on polity and economy). Kanada discovered the principles of gravity and atomic theory. Nagarjuna contributed in the field of metallurgy and chemistry.

The Indus Valley Civilization (7000-600 BC) was among the largest and the most advanced in the ancient world (Rao, 2019). The evidence of town planning, dockyards, granaries, warehouses, public baths, baked brick houses, proper drainage system, flush toilet, metallurgy techniques etc. have been found from the excavation sites of this civilization. The ancient Indian universities of Takshashila, Nalanda, Valabhi, Vikramshila, Odantapuri and Jagaddala attracted students from distant countries such as Tibet, China, Korea, Central Asia etc. Buddhism proliferated in Southeast Asian nations when Buddhist monks were sent by king Ashok from India in 3rd century BC (Sengupta, 2017). Indian religion, culture, architectural styles, political thought, literature, mythology, artistic motifs etc. also spread in these regions with passage of time.

Ancient and medieval India was visited by several foreign travellers during different time periods and who left a detailed description about India. Greek traveller, historian and diplomat Megasthenes was the first person from the Western world to leave a written account of India. He visited the country during the reign of Mauryan Emperor Chandragupta Maurya and wrote a famous book i.e. Indica. Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang (Chinese pilgrims) visited India during the reigns of Chandragupta II and Harsha Vardhan respectively. Al-Biruni came to India with Mahmud of Ghazni and wrote Tarikh Al- Hind

in which he recorded the political, military, cultural, scientific, social and religious aspects of India.

1.1.5.2 In colonial times

In this period mainly two types of images of India are visible. In the nationalist imagination India was seen in the form of mother i.e. Bharat Mata. The famous writer Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay created the literary image of Bharat Mata through his songs Vande Mataram (1875) and his novel Anandmath (1882). The first pictorial image (painting) of Bharat Mata was created by famous painter Abanindranath Tagore in 1905 when Bengal was divided along religious lines by Lord Curzon. Bharat Mata was seen in this painting dressed in a saffron colour saree holding a book, a small bundle of paddy, a piece of white cloth and a rudraksh rosary in her four hands (Biswas, 2016). The image of India as mother helped the freedom fighters to create a sense of national unity and a deep sense of love for the motherland.

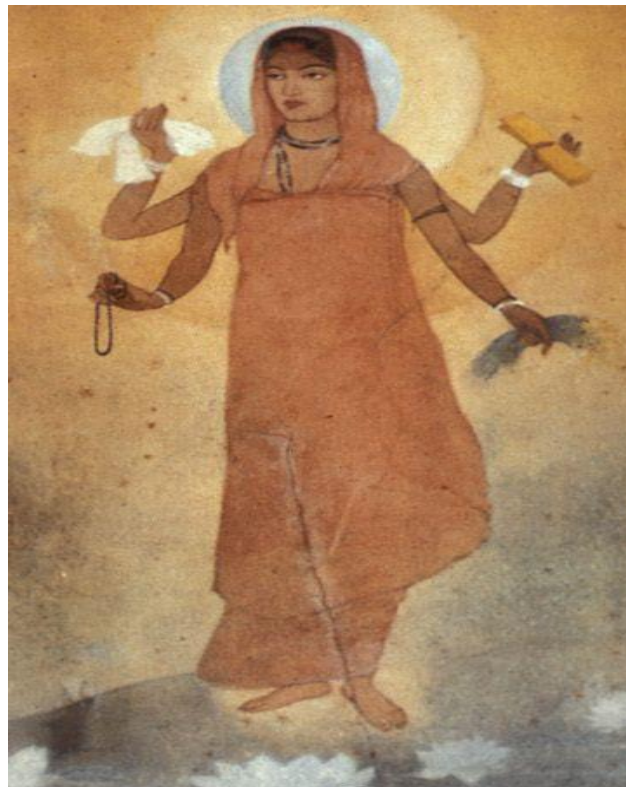


Fig. 1.1: Image of Bharat Mata: India as a mother.
Source: The Hindu, 2nd March 2015.

India was famous in the western world for its textiles, spices and jewels and this attracted European powers such as the Dutch, the French, the Portuguese and the British to establish trade links with India (Ahamed,2021). The British landed in the Indian subcontinent on August 24, 1608, at the port of Surat. The British East India Company came to India as traders in spices, a very important commodity in Europe back then as it was used to preserve meat. Apart from that, they primarily traded in silk, cotton, indigo dye, tea and opium. Once they established trade ties with India, the British saw a political opportunity in India due to the breakup of the Mughal empire (Nehru, 2004). They occupied territories here through diplomatic treaties and wars with the local rulers.

The Government of India Act, 1858 was approved by the British Parliament, transferring all Company powers to the British Crown. As a result, Queen Victoria, the British monarch at that time, assumed administrative control over India. Under the colonial rule India became a supplier of food stuffs, raw materials; market for the metropolitan manufacturers and field for the investment of British capital (Chandra et al, 1989). The British monopolised the trade with India and the social, economic and political exploitation of Indians continued for a very long time under the British rule. At the beginning of the 18th century India contributed 23% to the world economy which went low up to just over 3% by the time the British left India (Tharoor, 2016). India would provide men, materials, resources, economic and military support to British which helped them to maintain their empire in Africa, East Asia , the Pacific islands and the Caribbean. It helped Britain to overcome its limitations of size, small population and lack of natural resources (Pande, 2017).

But despite all these economic gains, India in the eyes of the British rulers was an uncivilized, backward and primitive nation. The colonial rulers believed that Indians didn't had the capability to govern themselves and if it was left to its own fate then it would lead to anarchy. They believed that it was the duty of the white men to civilize Indians i.e., White Men's Burden. The then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill believed that British rule was a blessing for India because if they left India then all the public service institutions would collapse and Indians would fall back quite rapidly through the centuries into the barbarism and privations of the Middle Ages (Guha, 2007). India had an orientalist image in the popular western imagination as the land of maharajas, elephants, snake charmers and Taj Mahal (Miller,2014).

For Lord Macaulay it was a nation whose entire native literature was not worth a single bookshelf of western writing (Luce, 2008). However, some European scholars had a different viewpoint about India. These scholars discovered the richness of ancient Indian civilization through the translated literary works such as Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Yog sutras, works of Kalidasa, Panini, Kautilya etc. and came to the conclusion that Europe had many things to learn from India. The Asiatic Society was founded in Calcutta in 1784 by William Jones to study ancient manuscripts, texts and scriptures.

In the first half of 20th century India's image was often associated with Mahatma Gandhi who had gained global recognition for his unique method of struggle against the British rule which was based on truth and non-violence. He had won admirers and followers across the world including people like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr. India is still seen as the land of Gandhi and he continues to be one of the most famous global ambassadors of India's soft power until now (Mahapatra, 2016).

1.1.5.3 Post-Independence- The socialist era (1947-91)

Economic underdevelopment, gross poverty, high illiteracy, wide prevalence of diseases, stark social inequality and injustice were the characteristic features that defined India when it became independent from the colonial rule in 1947 (Chandra et al., 2008). The long colonial rule had left a society with 16 per cent literacy, no domestic industry and over 90 per cent people living below the poverty line (Tharoor, 2012). Independence was followed by the partition of India. The violence that followed killed up to a million people and led to the migration of twelve million people across the newly drawn borders (Luce, 2008).

Under such grim circumstances predictions were made in the international press that the nation in its present form was not going to last long. Foreign observers were of the opinion that the social, linguistic, religious and ethnic diversities would lead India to break up into separate nation states or it will turn out as a failed state under some sort of military authoritarian, dictatorial regime (Luce, 2008; Chandra et al., 2008). In 1951, when Chester Bowles chose to go to India as ambassador, President Truman was shocked at his choice. To him India was a place pretty jammed with poor people and cows wandering around the streets, witch doctors and people sitting on hot coals and bathing in the Ganges.

Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, inspired from USSR introduced planning commission for the development of India. Policies like centralised planned growth, welfare economy, large role of public sector, nationalisation of key industries etc. were adopted by him. Institutions like National Physical Laboratory, Indian Institutes of Technology, Department of Atomic Energy etc. were set up to rebuild India. In the domain of foreign policy, India decided that its interest would be better served by staying out of the competing alliance systems and it committed itself to non-alignment instead of joining any power blocs (Saran, 2017).

India was seen as one of the leading members of Non-Aligned Movement which was formally established in 1961 at Belgrade (Yugoslavia). In 1962, India went into a war with China over border issues in which it suffered a humiliating defeat. The loss in the war was Nehru's biggest failure as Prime Minister (Guha, 2007). This defeat dented the global image of India and it was seen as a weak nation highly dependent on others for each and everything i.e. it needed arms to defend its territories, food grains to feed its population and economic aid to keep its economy going.

Lal Bahadur Shastri became the next prime minister in 1964. The nation continued to face the shortage of food supplies and massive starvation. Production in agriculture sector had declined and there was severe drought in several states (Chandra et al, 2008). The buffer food stocks were also on the verge of depletion. These situations were the cumulative result of economic impact of the wars of 1962 and 1965 with China and Pakistan and failure of two consecutive monsoons in 1965 and 1966 (Menon, 2021). In 1965, India won the 1965 war with Pakistan and this restored the pride of the nation to some extent. The war came to an end with the signing of the Tashkent declaration with Ayub Khan in Russia. Shastri died of a massive heart attack in January, 1966 soon after signing this document.

Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister in January 1966. Until then, India was so much dependent on American food aid that it was said the country was 'living from ship to mouth' (Tully, 2008). The use of high yielding variety seeds, fertilizers, irrigation facilities helped to usher in an era of Green Revolution which made India self-sufficient in food grains production and ended the 'begging bowl' image of India (Chandra et al, 2008). India's victory in the 1971 war significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, strengthening India's position in the region and establishing Bangladesh as a

sovereign nation. In 1974, India conducted its first nuclear test at Pokhran and established itself as a nuclear power.

In June 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a nationwide emergency which suspended the normal political processes, federal provisions of the constitution, fundamental rights and civil liberties (Chandra et al, 2008). There was censorship over activities of press and all forms of protests and opposition to the government were banned. International media and in particular media based in the US and the UK were unequivocal in their criticism of Indira Gandhi (Chaudhuri, 2018). In 1977, Janata party was the first non-congress government which came into power in India. This government was initially led by Morarji Desai (1977-79) and later by Charan Singh (1979-80).

The government could not last long and Indira Gandhi returned into the power in 1980. The Asian Games (1982) was another major event which helped India to improve its image. It was at this moment when colour television was introduced in the country for the first time. Indira Gandhi was assassinated on 31st October 1984. After her sad demise, Rajiv Gandhi took charge as the next Prime Minister. He was the youngest Prime Minister India ever had. He initiated telecom, IT and computer revolution in the country. He wanted to reset India's relationship with the US and made two highly successful, and publicised visits to the US in 1985 and 1987 (Thakur, 2021). He also made an official visit to China in December 1988 which was the first visit to China by an Indian prime minister in 34 years. Anti-defection laws, lowering of voting age from 21 to 18, introduction of National Policy on Education (1986) were some key achievements of his government.

In 1985, the 'Festival of India' cultural exchange programme was started by his government to showcase Indian painting, sculpture, dance, films, music, theatre, costumes, crafts, science, architecture, and design to the Western audience. The main motive behind this initiative was to boost the image of India and earn goodwill for it. Rajiv Gandhi was tragically assassinated on 21st May 1991 in a suicide bombing at a poll rally in Tamil Nadu. V.P. Singh (1989-90) and Chandrasekhar (1990-91) became prime ministers for a very short period of time but these governments could not survive for long.

Two important features which were visible in the Indian politics until 1990's were: the hegemony of the Congress Party and a mixed economy characterised by centralised planned growth (Thomas, 2010). Under Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi,

India remained a comprehensively and stringently controlled economy, both internally and externally (Nayar, 1998). In the era before the 1991 economic reforms, India in the western view was all about disease, dirt and deities and it was assumed that it would always be like this. It was a nation which was exotic, eternal, to be admired and patronized, but incapable of helping itself; a nation which was dependent on the charity of outsiders and was not seen as a country that can ever take off and revitalize itself (French, 2011).

Post 1991 economic reforms (1991- 2023)

India went through a major financial crisis in 1991. Its foreign exchange reserves fell from \$5.85 billion in 1980-81 to \$4.1 billion in 1989-90 and in the next year 1990-91 they fell to \$2.24 billion which was enough only for one month's import cover (Chandra et al, 2008). India's international credit rating suffered badly. To overcome the balance of payments crisis the government had to sell 20 tonnes of gold to the Union Bank of Switzerland in March 1991.

Under such situations, Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao (June 1991-May 1996) decided to open up the Indian economy to foreign and private investment (Tully, 2008). The public sector monopoly and license permit raj had to give way to free market policies and decreased government's intervention. India adopted the path of liberalization, privatization and globalization. The reforms provided an opportunity to the Indian companies to expand abroad and make foreign acquisitions for the first time (Sanyal, 2015).

Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the next Prime Minister but only for 16 days from 16th May 1996 to 1st June 1996. He was followed in the office by H.D. Dev Gowda (June 1996 to April 1997) and I.K. Gujral (April 1997 to March 1998) for brief periods. Vajpayee was once again elected as the Prime Minister (March 1998 to May 2004) and he became the first non-Congress Prime Minister to complete a full term.

The Pokhran nuclear tests (1998) conducted under his leadership projected the image of India as a resilient nuclear power. India's move was criticised heavily in western media and many international sanctions were imposed on it. Indian government wanted the removal of sanctions but most major powers including France, Russia, and Japan wanted India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (Swamy, 2001). On the foreign policy

front, Vajpayee wanted to improve bilateral ties with Pakistan for which he undertook 'bus yatra' to Lahore in 1999. Soon after this bus diplomacy, the Pakistani armed forces intruded deep across the LoC in Kashmir and occupied key strategic peaks in the Kargil area and what followed was a war between the two nations (Chandra et al, 2008). India's victory in the Kargil War (May-July 1999) re-affirmed its image as a powerful military power in the subcontinent.

Manmohan Singh (2004-14) was the first Sikh to become the Prime Minister of the country. On the economic front, his government delivered a robust 8.5 per cent GDP growth for most of his tenure. Several important bills were passed by his government. The Right To Information Act (2005) led to democratization of information in the country. The Right To Education Act (2010) made education a fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 and 14. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2006) provided a legal guarantee of at least 100 days of paid work to adult members of rural areas.

National Food Security Act (2013) entitled 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidised food grains. On the foreign policy front he tried to improve relations with the US. Despite huge opposition, he displayed a strong determination to go ahead with the Indo-US civil nuclear deal (2008). In 2009 he was the first head of state to be invited for a White House dinner by President Obama. He tried to improve the bilateral ties with China by visiting the country in 2008 and in 2013.

But, in its second term (2009-14) the government was tainted by multiple corruption scandals. Whether it was the allotment of leases for coal mining, the mismanagement of commonwealth games or the auction of 2G spectrum, the government was dogged by grave charges of pilferage and cronyism. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh began to be viewed as an ineffective and weak leader who had no control over his cabinet or party (Dasgupta, 2019). Incidents like Nirbhaya gang rape case (2012) created an image of India as a place which was not safe for women. The 26/11 terror attacks in which more than two hundred people were killed gave the message that India was unable to prevent terror activities flourishing on its soil.

The next government came into power in 2014 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In the 2014 general elections, the BJP won 282 out of 543 Lok Sabha

seats and formed the government. In 2015, the Planning commission was replaced by NITI Aayog. Until 27th October 2022, a total of 472 million bank accounts (mostly belonging to the underprivileged sections) were opened under the PM Jan Dhan Yojana (Jayaswal, 2022). In the ease of doing business index, India was on the 142nd position in 2014 and it improved to 63rd position in 2022. The construction of toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission to end open defecation, distribution of gas cylinders under Ujjawala Yojana, use of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme to transfer subsidies etc. were some steps which gave an impression that governance was improving in India.

Prime Minister Modi tried to improve relations with all the major powers of the world. Until April 2019, he made 92 trips to 57 countries since coming to power in May 2014 which helped in boosting India's global profile (Sundaram, 2019). PM Modi tried to use his trips to bolster India's global image as an investment destination and a rising global power. His visits helped to attract foreign direct investments, finalise trade deals and strategic agreements. For example, in 2016, Modi signed an \$8.7 billion deal for 36 Rafale fighter planes from France. During the Covid-19 period, India supplied *over 235 million* total supplies of Covid-19 vaccines to 98 countries of the world under the Vaccine Maitri initiative and it earned huge goodwill for India.

On the other hand, anti-CAA protests, award wapsi, ghar wapsi, mob lynching, hate crimes etc. attracted negative global media coverage. There were many reports in the international media which said that India under PM Modi had become an intolerant country and there was an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in the minorities. A report published in The New York Times said that journalists felt unsafe and the press freedom had declined under the Modi government (Goel et al., 2020).

1.1.5.4 The overall image evolution

In contrast to the India of the 1990s, which drew the spiritual seekers and dedicated academics, today's India is just as likely to draw deal-seeking investors and Fortune 500 CEOs trying to increase their company's bottom line (Ayres, 2018). The India of today is a far cry from the poverty-stricken, militarily weak, socially fractured, and diplomatically isolated country of the Cold War (Ganguly, 2012). Its total GDP stood at ₹ 2.7 lakh crore at independence while it reached ₹ 135.13 lakh crore in 2021 (Rao, 2021). The country's

GDP grew at an annual rate of 6.8 percent on average from 2004 to 2020 and today it is the fifth largest economy of the world (Mukhopadhyay, 2022).

It has come a long way from being a nation looking for developmental aids to become a nation which gives foreign aid and soft loans to the needy nations. Before liberalisation, India was renowned for its mysticism and poverty, and understanding it was a specialist interest rather than a necessity, as it is now (French, 2011). In the words of ex-diplomat Shashi Tharoor (2012) 'India has ceased being a land that could be relegated to the margins, a place of exotic inconveniences, full of snake charmers impaled on beds of nails'.

1.2 Significance of the Study

On 16th April 2022, the Defence Minister of India Rajnath Singh said in Washington DC: 'The image of India has changed. The prestige of India has improved. In the next few years, no power in the world can stop India from becoming the world's top three economies' (PTI, 2022).

Some other political leaders have also been expressing the similar kind of opinions in the recent times. But, this picture has a flip side too. In September 2022, the External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar criticised a section of American media, for tarnishing the image of India by following a selective, agenda-based and ideologically biased coverage of India. He was responding to an article published by The New York Times which wrote that the Indian government was stifling dissent, side lining civilian institutions and making minorities second-class citizens.

Professor Shri Ram Chaulia (2019) believes that India has been the western media's info war target and they remain sceptical and cynical of its viability as one nation and its future progress and there exists a continuous motivated campaign against it. According to him the Western news establishment has been involved in agenda setting and the sight of a developing nation like India growing powerful is insufferable to the Western liberal media.

For example, during the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic, Western media focused intensely on the mass funeral pyres, queues for oxygen cylinders, shortage of medical supplies, overcrowded hospitals, harassed patients and overworked doctors. Aerial shots

of cremation sites were used as headlines to draw attention to the mounting fatalities and government was at the centre of criticism in all the editorial and opinion pieces (Zompa, 2021). Similarly, India's independent position on the Ukraine crisis drew sharp criticism in the western media. India was criticised because it refused to condemn Russia for the invasion; didn't join the West's sanctions; stepped up buying Russian fuel at a discounted price, and consistently abstained from UN votes on the war (Johny, 2023).

The agenda setting was also visible in terms of how India was ranked on different indices. The methodology of many such indices has been questioned by India. A survey report conducted by Thomson Reuters published on *theguardian.com* on 28th June 2018 declared India to be the world's most dangerous country for women even behind Afghanistan and Syria, which were ranked second and third (Goldsmith & Beresford, 2018).

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About this content
Belinda Goldsmith and Meka Beresford for Thomson Reuters Foundation, part of the Guardian development network

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Poll ranks India the world's most dangerous country for women

A survey of global experts puts Afghanistan and Syria in second and third place, with the US the only western nation in the top 10



Women in New Delhi take part in a protest against rape on International Women's Day.
Photograph: Rajat Gupta/EPA

India is the world's most dangerous country for women due to the high risk of sexual violence and being forced into slave labour, according to a poll of global experts.

Afghanistan and Syria ranked second and third in a **Thomson Reuters Foundation survey** of 548 experts on women's issues, followed by Somalia and Saudi Arabia.

Source: [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com), 28th June 2018

Similarly, India was placed on the 107th rank among 121 nations in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) report 2022. The Indian government sharply criticised this report calling it biased and disconnected from ground reality (Haq, 2022). The government issued a press release on this issue saying that this report was an effort to taint India's image as a nation that does not fulfil the food security and nutritional requirements of its population.

Another report prepared by the organization Freedom House published on *bbc.com* on 3rd March 2021, said that India's democratic credentials had declined under PM Modi and the nation had changed from a free country to the one which was "partly free". Dr. S. Jaishankar, when asked about this report, said that a set of self-appointed custodians of the world found it very difficult to stomach that somebody in India was not looking for their approval and was not willing to play the game they wanted it to play (Roy, 2021).

Next in this series was a cartoon mocking India's Mars mission published in The New York Times on 28th September 2014. It was India's first interplanetary mission and it became the first nation in the world to reach the Martian orbit in its maiden attempt. But the cartoon depicted a poor Indian farmer wearing a dhoti, holding a bull with a rope, knocking on the doors of the 'Elite Space Club' of the Western nations where two men are seen reading a newspaper in a casual manner ignoring the headline 'India's Mars Mission'.



Source: The New York Times: 28th Sept. 2014

The New York Times also received criticism over a job advertisement published on their website in July 2021 for a South Asia Business Correspondent in New Delhi. The advertisement for the correspondent was accused of being 'anti-Hindu and anti-Modi' in

its tone by many Indians (Upmanyu,2021; Methri,2021). In March 2023, India's Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur criticised an opinion piece published by the New York Times on freedom of press in Kashmir. He called it mischievous, fictitious and a propaganda against India. He alleged that The New York Times was an agenda driven media which held a grudge against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and was engaged in spreading blatant lies.

In January 2023, first part of the BBC documentary titled 'India: The Modi Question' was released. The documentary questioned PM Modi's role in handling of the 2002 communal riots when he was the chief minister of Gujarat. The Indian government dismissed the film as anti- India propaganda and a reflection of bias and a colonial mindset and directed social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube to block links to the documentary (Rajvanshi & Syed, 2023). Mansoor (2023) called this phenomenon as the White media's burden i.e. the self-acquired responsibility of the Western media to create false and illogical discourse around those who are either far from their universe or those they are heavily biased against.

These examples make the point clear that there has been a highly divided opinion on the way the Western media has been representing India in the recent times. India is now the fifth largest economy in the world. From borrowing food grains in 1960s, it has emerged as a big exporter. It is an increasingly self-confident, materialistic, and globalised place in the early twenty first century (Luce, 2008). On The New York Times website, India is almost always in the Top 10 searched items (Ghose, 2010). Few decades back India would never figure on the US television screens but today it can be found everywhere on the US media (Tharoor, 2013). It is considered a much-coveted assignment for foreign correspondents now. It is a member of all important global institutions and has a more diverse collection and high number of foreign residents living here (Miller, 2014). Indian students are going abroad for their studies in large number. The image of India directly impacts them how they will be treated abroad.

India is world's largest democracy; second most populous country; fifth largest economy; aims to become a permanent member of UNSC; and a developed country by 2047. It is host country for G-20 summit this year. A study on its image becomes very important as the kind of representations it has in international media will affect its geopolitical interests, economy, tourism, trade, investments, bilateral relations etc. A better understanding of its image can help it in redefining its public diplomacy efforts and projection of its soft power.

1.3 Research Gap

During the literature review it was found that there is a severe dearth of academic literature on the subject except for a few research studies available. These image studies have been done on the media depictions of countries such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc. but India centric studies could not be found much. Even if they exist then these are mostly related to India's image depicted in the novels of famous writers like Shashi Tharoor, Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, VS Naipaul etc. but not from media's perspective. The contemporary studies done in the recent times were missing. This study aims to fill this research gap and understand the image of India in contemporary times.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how India as a country has been reported by the western media between 2009-2019.
2. To analyse the difference in the coverage of India by the news portals of The New York Times and The Guardian between 2009-2019.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What was the extent of coverage and frequency of news published about India in western media?
2. What were the major issues covered between 2009-19 in the western media?
3. How similar or different was the coverage on the news websites of The New York Times and The Guardian?
4. What kind of image of India was presented by the frequency and tone of the news stories?

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study looks at the image of India created by western media from 2009 to 2019. The study compares the reporting and coverage of India by two western news portals *nytimes.com* and *theguardian.com*. The study looks at number of stories, their frequency, percentage, tone, framing of headlines etc. International editions of the news portals were taken for the study.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to two western news portals only. The entire western media has not been included. It does not use the physical copy of newspaper as it was difficult for the researcher to access it. Radio, news channels, movies, newspapers, magazines, web series, advertisements, social media pages which also help in the image creation have not been taken into account in the current study. Image studies is a vast area. But this study is limited to image of India created by news stories only (their frequency and tone only). This is not a semiotic study of images. Survey of public opinion has not been included due to constraint of time.

1.8 Organisation of thesis

This study has been divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the study. Chapter two presents the literature review part and locates the study within the theoretical discourse. It looks at the role of global media and news flow patterns. Chapter three discusses the methodology used in the study. Chapter four provides details on data analysis and interpretation. It uses the content analysis method to analyse the data. Chapter five discusses the key findings and gives conclusion by answering the research questions. It also presents the limitations of the study as well as provides suggestions for future research.

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