

DANA OR GENEROSITY AS A SOFT POWER: A MORAL JUSTIFICATION

* Amrit Pal

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Abstract:

After reading the line—'সকলের তরে সকলে আমরা, সকলে আমরা পরের তরে।' that is 'We are all for each other, and everyone is for the sake of others.' composed by one of the Bengali poets, Kamini Roy in his poem— 'সুখ' (Happiness); though one may think, it reflects altruism, this line, is itself an imperative. Amongst the different ways through which one can stand for the sake of others, dana or generosity is one. Gandhian concept of trusteeship, being a procedure of dana or generosity in some forms or others advocates—the affluent to manage their surplus wealth for societal benefit for the others so that it can promote equality and dignity. Following this imperative, those countries which are economically wealthier help the economically weaker countries. In this age of fourth industrial revolution, it is observed that the economically weaker countries are getting help by the economically stronger countries not for the sake of dana or generosity, rather for the sake of promoting soft power which is known as Economic Imperialism. This paper will focus on the moral justification of Economic Imperialism based on escalating soft power through dana or generosity.

Keywords: Dana, Economic Imperialism, Soft Power, Global, Power Index, Trusteeship

**Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University*

Introduction

It is a matter of research, whether Darwinian law—survival of the fittest has any connection with the proverb— ‘জোর যার মুল্লুক তার’ that is ‘Might is right’; it is a fact, the political history of the world is the history of shifting power. In the early ages this shifting used to depend on the direct action amongst the countries, later on through cold war based on power hawk policy, but from the 21st century, the nature of holding political power by a nation has been changing. Though it is true that the war between Israil Vs. Gaza and Rusia Vs. Ukraine by using modern technologies has been going on. Coercive ‘hard power’ military might and economic sanctions is increasingly supplemented by ‘soft power,’ or the ability to co-opt rather than coerce. A country’s soft power rests on its culture, political values, and foreign policies. While many nations project soft power through media, education, and entertainment, countries with ancient civilizations, such as India, have a unique reservoir of soft power

rooted in spirituality, philosophy, and ethical conduct. One such profound concept is *Dana* (giving/generosity), which goes beyond simple philanthropy to include the sharing of knowledge, culture, and resources.

Objective

‘Soft power’ is a term coined by Joseph Nye to describe a country’s capacity to sway other countries by appeal, culture, and ideals as opposed to force or money.¹ Although popular culture, technology, and diplomacy are frequently used to understand soft power in modern geopolitics, the concept’s foundations frequently draw from more profound philosophical, civilizational, and ethical traditions. This essay examines the relationship between *Dana*, the traditional Indian notion of altruism, generosity, and selfless giving, and contemporary soft power politics. *It contends that Dana is a powerful instrument for bolstering a country’s moral authority and worldwide influence when it takes the form of sustainable development,*

¹ ‘What is soft power? It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the

eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced.’—
Nye, Joseph S: *Soft Power the Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004,
P—x

humanitarian aid, and cultural exchange in international relations.

Discussions

The tactic of a dominating nation using economic pressure instead of direct military or political control over a less developed nation is known as Economic Imperialism.

The ability of a country to sway others by attraction—more especially, culture, political ideals, and foreign policy—instead of coercion or force is known as soft power politics. This strategy, which was pointed out by Joseph Nye, employs persuasion to create enduring, constructive connections and accomplish desired results by influencing the preferences of other nations. Let it be noted that, though Economic Imperialism through soft power politics was pointed out by Joseph Nye in the beginning of twentieth century, British Colonialism was expanded through soft power politics in the form of missionaries' activities especially in the remote areas of the Asia.

Before delving further let us concentrate on the concept of Dana or generosity. An ancient Indian idea known in Sanskrit and Pali as 'Dāna' denotes the virtue of charity, generosity, or almsgiving. The selfless act of giving up ownership of a possession to a recipient without anticipating anything in return is a fundamental practice in Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism. In fact, 'Dana is another aspect of dharma stressed in the Puranas. It is a social duty based on the ethical virtues of *dayā tyāga ārjava* and *samatā* (equanimity). Its greatness is illustrated through stories of Sibi, Karna, Dadhici and so on. The ethics of dana consists in the fact that it benefits both the giver and the receiver. While it humanizes and sublimates the former it materially benefits the latter and conduces to contentment and harmony in society allowing for a fair distribution of riches.'²

Contribution to Policy and Theory by offering a sophisticated picture of the complex aspect of soft power, it increases knowledge of the constitution. This

² *The Cultural Heritage of India Volume ii Itihāsas, Purānas, Dharma and Other Sāstras*

(Ed.), The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1975, P—290

constitutional development is important for academics who want to comprehend modern power since it is based on constructivist theories that underpin the study of soft power. It sheds insight on the dynamic interaction between hard and soft power in society and adds to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex landscape of international conceptions of power centred on military or economic capacities. The study on the role of soft power in international relations makes significant contributions to both constitutional discourse and practical policy making. It strengthens understanding of the interplay between soft power and hard power and offers insights for policy makers seeking to enhance their country's global influence through soft power. It frequently challenges the dichotomy between the two forms of power by nature and states employ a combination of these to achieve their foreign policy objectives.

Global funding is driven by both large, top-tier economies and high-income small nations. While the United States,

China, and Germany lead in absolute development aid and wealth funds, small nations like Luxembourg, Norway, and Singapore dominate in per capita wealth, development assistance, and investment, often exceeding larger nations in efficiency.

Joseph S. Nye in this regard remarked, 'As world politics becomes more complex, the power of all major states to gain their objectives will be diminished. To understand what is happening to the United States today, the distinction between power over other countries and power over outcomes must be clear. Although the United States still has leverage over particular countries, it has far less leverage over the system as a whole. It is less well-placed to attain its ends unilaterally, but it is not alone in this situation. All major states will have to confront the changing nature of power in world politics.'³ The following Index may be helpful to understand the position how soft power plays an important role in the world.

³ Nye, Joseph S.: *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition*, China and Globalization, Springer, 2022, P—5

Global Soft Power Index Top 20

 1 = United States 79.5 78.8 +0.7	 11 ▲ Sweden 60.3 59.0 +1.3
 2 ▲ China 72.8 71.2 +1.6	 12 ▲ South Korea 60.2 58.0 +2.2
 3 ▼ United Kingdom 72.4 71.8 +0.6	 13 ▼ Spain 59.7 59.2 +0.5
 4 = Japan 71.5 70.6 +0.9	 14 ▼ Australia 59.6 58.6 +1.0
 5 = Germany 70.1 69.8 +0.3	 15 ▼ Netherlands 58.7 58.2 +0.5
 6 = France 68.5 67.3 +1.2	 16 = Russia 58.1 57.7 +0.4
 7 = Canada 65.2 64.4 +0.8	 17 = Norway 56.8 56.8 -
 8 = Switzerland 64.9 62.9 +2.0	 18 ▲ Denmark 56.5 55.5 +1.0
 9 = Italy 62.4 62.0 +0.4	 19 ▲ Belgium 56.0 55.2 +0.8
 10 = United Arab Emirates 60.4 59.7 +0.7	 20 ▼ Saudi Arabia 55.6 56.0 -0.4

<https://brandirectory.com/softpower>

With a score of 79.5 out of 100, the US continues to hold the top spot on the Global Soft Power Index. Once more, it scores top in three of the eight Soft Power pillars: media and communications, education and science, and international relations. It also leads in familiarity and influence. The polarizing character of the presidential campaign that was going on at the time of the polls and internal political tensions, however, are probably to blame for the country's overall score stagnating. Reputation has suffered as a result of this unstable environment, dropping four spots to 15th place worldwide.

Important pillars that support reputation have also seen a discernible

reduction, especially Governance, which fell four spots to 10th and People & Values, which fell ten spots to 36th. Perceptions of 'political stability and good governance' have declined for the third year in a row. Other important qualities, such as 'high ethical standards and low corruption,' 'generosity,' 'trustworthiness,' and 'safe and secure, have decreased. The US is ranked 124th for 'friendliness,' which highlights a serious flaw in its Soft Power profile. With President Donald Trump taking office again, the nation's reputation abroad might undergo more changes in the years to come, which would make its Soft Power hegemony and future course less certain.

Countries with old civilizations, like India, have a special pool of soft power founded in spirituality, philosophy, and moral behaviour, even though many other countries project soft power through media, education, and entertainment. For example, India has already applied Yoga as a soft power politics in order to power hack a few years ago. In case of power politics—one alignment perspective in cold war period, Broad power realist aspect in post-cold war period and Power hawk's policy there is direct relationship with the yoga. But India uses the yoga as a symbolic form of Power

hawk's policy. Similarly, *Dana* (giving/generosity) is one such fundamental idea that extends beyond basic philanthropy to embrace the sharing of resources, culture, and knowledge. History shows Bali, a king was famous for his *dana*. He was so concerned with his *dana* that he himself was very much proud as well as arrogance. Vishnu, in the form of Vamana, the son of Kashyap and Aditi, came to suppress the arrogance of the demon king Bali. He told Bali that he has three legs, amongst these the first one is in the haven, the second one is on the earth, but he is failed to keep his third leg because there is no place other than the earth and heaven. At this, Bali asked the Vaman to put his third foot his head. Though Bali was sent to the underworld as a punishment, he is forever remembered for this sacrifice.

Let us remember another important philosophical story from the Katha Upanishad which is known as 'Yama-Nachiketa Akhyan'. While donating everything he had to a sage in the *yajña*, Nachiketa noticed that his father was donating only old and sick cows, which were not good. Nachiketa was upset by the condition of the cows and told his father that donations should be made only for

those things that give happiness to oneself, are dear to one and are useful, and also for the one to whom the donation is made, so that it brings happiness and benefits to the one to whom it is made.

Giving away things that are harmful and useless is a pretext for bringing harm to oneself and deceiving the recipient of the gift. Nachiketa tries to convince his father by describing the low-level sacrificial results of this type of donation. In fact, through Nachiketa, the true nature of donation is also explained here. If the donor thinks that he will become great by donating, then that is his wrong idea. Rather, he gets the worst result. This part of the story also describes the donation of good things, the purity of the donor's mind, and the recipient of the donation. Nachiketa's father donated a worthless cow, as a result of which he lost Nachiketa for some time. Since Nachiketa has the right knowledge about the donated object, he has also highlighted the purity that needs to be brought into the mind of not only the father but also every human being in the society while donating.

However, there is a need for a new interpretation of the gift that can force us to question our predominant values and that offers an alternative to the current

paradigm of greed, self-interest, and hyper-individualism. In our examination of the gift and its logic, we must remember that the gift is not inherently new; rather, it involves a transformation of perspective, as well as a paradigm shift in the values we apply when critiquing our relationships in and with the world.⁴

Mahatma Gandhi was also in favour of Dana or generosity in some forms or others through the notion of Trusteeship—a socioeconomic theory, the wealthy manage their excess income as ‘trustees’ for the benefit of society and the impoverished rather than for their own personal gain, advancing equality and human dignity via free will rather than coercion. It is a nonviolent approach to changing capitalism by moral persuasion, striving for fair resource allocation, acknowledging the worth of labour, and lessening class strife by encouraging accountability in both employers and employees. The fundamental Ideas of Gandhi’s Trusteeship are: (a) Wealth as Trust: Instead of spending their extra money for personal luxury, the wealthy put

it in trust for the community. (b) Change of Heart: Unlike forced socialism, a moral revolution is required to convince the wealthy to participate voluntarily. (c) Dignity of Labor: Given the importance of all labour, both employers and employees should perform physical labour. (d) Non-Possession (*Aparigraha*): This religious theory holds that all resources are God’s property and ought to be used for the benefit of humanity. (e) Equitable Distribution: Strives to reduce inequalities by providing for everyone’s fundamental necessities, without necessarily attaining complete equality of goods.

That is why B K Lal in his book, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, remarked, ‘Thus, it is apparent that Gandhi’s doctrine of Trusteeship is based on a sense of morality and love. This doctrine is nothing but a sincere working out of the doctrine of non-possession. The rich also must be made to realise, through a loving process, the merit of non-possession. A critic of Gandhi might say that this doctrine is based on the assumption of honesty on the part of the

⁴ Kuokkanen, Rauna: *Reshaping the university: responsibility, indigenous epistemes, and the logic*

of the gift, UBC Press Vancouver, Toronto, 2007, P-24

rich. But this is no criticism of Gandhi because Gandhi's entire beliefs are based on the presupposition that every man inwardly is good.' ⁵

Goyder George, however, in this regard, rightly pointed out, 'Despite the wide variety of individual orientation, personal experience and the national backgrounds of the twenty-five participants who came from the United Kingdom, U.S.A., Australia, Germany and India, a measure of agreement was forthcoming on the relevance of the Gandhian concept of Trusteeship to the perennial problems of the exercise of power, exploitation, deprivation and alienation. Trusteeship was identified as a peaceful revolutionary alternative to State-owned or private forms of organising production and exchange of goods and services. A special value of the Trusteeship concept was that it provided incentives for the creation and development of enterprises while eliminating the defects of capitalism and the consequent government

intervention or the need for the State to own business undertakings.'⁶

Conclusion:

So far, the discussions, it is clear that the ability to accomplish desired results by attracting others and inspiring admiration for a nation's values is known as soft power. It is frequently referred to as the 'second face' of power and operates by cultivating goodwill and persuasion. Spreading popular culture is simply one aspect of soft power politics in the modern era; another is spreading universally appealing values. *Dana* provides a sustainable framework for establishing enduring, trust-based partnerships between nations as an ethical practice. A country can overcome the constraints of hard power and become a genuine '*vishwa guru*' or a respected, trusted leader on the international scene by incorporating the Dana ethos into its foreign policy.

⁵ Lal, Basant Kumar: *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Basant Kumar Lal, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi, 2002, P—144

⁶ George, Goyder: *Trusteeship A Possible Solution to Problems of Power, Exploitation, Conflict and Alienation*, Leslie Sawhny Programme of Training for Democracy, India, 1979, P—8

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4) William K. Frankena; Second Edition *Ethics*, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1973

5) S. Nye Joseph; *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition*, China and Globalization, Springer, 2022

6) Kuokkanen Rauna; *Reshaping the university: responsibility, indigenous epistemes, and the logic of the gift*, UBC Press, Vancouver, Toronto, 2007.

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