

# Nation Rebranding Through a New Approach to Cultural Diplomacy: A Case Study of Mauritius

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Santosh Kumar Pudaruth<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Whenever the word “power” is uttered in the context of international relations, notions such as force or payoff immediately come to mind. These, put together, connote the idea of hard power as this involves leveraging hard resources and capabilities to reach desired outcomes when dealing with the other countries of the world. Soft power, also known as the second and third face of power, however, refers to a country’s use of attractions to achieve certain positive diplomatic results without ‘twisting the arms of others’. Several resources could be used as soft power, including a nation’s tangible and intangible cultural assets. Based on a theoretical framework built up from existing literature on power and soft power, and the author’s experiences in the performing arts for more than 40 years now and observations of the functioning of Mauritian diplomacy, this article reflects upon two potential soft power resources, namely, music and dance, two important intangible cultural expressions, thriving on the Mauritian soil for more than 180 years now, and attempts to elucidate how these art forms could be factored in as added value to Mauritian diplomacy for nation rebranding. Such a proven strategy, which has been adopted by other countries, has not had the required attention from Mauritian policy makers and technocrats so far. The author is convinced that a judicious utilization of music and dance in Mauritian international relations will contribute immensely to the country’s overall development, not only politically and economically, but also culturally.

## Keywords

hard power, soft power resources, rebranding, international relations, music, dance, policy

## Introduction

Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable.

—George Bernard Shaw

It is an undeniable fact that the application of power is an important exercise in International Relations. Power can be defined as the capacity to influence the behaviours of others to obtain the outcomes one wants (Lukes, 2005). In the words of Samuel Joseph Nye Jr., the former Dean of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, power can be exercised in three ways, namely, (a) by using, or at least threatening to use, military force, sanctions, or embargos (sticks); (b) by providing economic and/or commercial incentives, or making payments (carrots); and/or (c) by using “soft power” to make things happen and “to get others to want what you want.”

Given its size and other limitations, and friendly relations and nonalignment position, or rather its “multi-alignment”<sup>1</sup> with most of the countries of the world, especially the super powers, the Republic of Mauritius has never felt the need to have an army with a view to demonstrating its power, nor can

it afford to wield forces for its rights and advantages on the regional and international fronts. This is due to the fact that there is an asymmetrical power relation between this country and the bigger countries of the world (the United Kingdom, the United States, India, China, and the likes). Hence, its foreign policy, which is geared more toward attracting and acquiring the support of other countries, is based and implemented through, primarily, a blend of the instruments of economic and commercial incentives, which Mead (2004, as quoted in Melissen, 2005)<sup>2</sup> calls “sticky power,” including business facilitation services, tax exemption, and support to other vulnerable nations.

The author is convinced and argues that, in addition to these economic and commercial attractions, the country could very well leverage its main cultural assets and capabilities such as music and dance, in all their systems, styles, forms, and genres, to influence the outcomes of its foreign politics. Hence, together with its “carrots” approach, Mauritius can

<sup>1</sup>Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, Mauritius

### Corresponding Author:

Santosh Kumar Pudaruth, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, Mauritius.  
Email: skpudaruth.mgi@intnet.mu



wield its soft power as another influential strategy to further consolidate its position in its international relations and make a long-lasting imprint on the psyche of other nations for the benefit of one and all. Up to now, in Mauritius, music and dance performances put up on various official occasions at national level to welcome dignitaries from around the world or to project the country's image overseas have been considered as optional "adjunct to inter-state relations" (Melissen, 2005, p. 22), or frills placed on the periphery of mainstream international relations meets based on the "hierarchical" model (Hocking in Melissen, 2005, p. 29) such as conferences, trade fairs, talks, and official visits. Very little attention, if at all, is paid by policy makers to leverage music and dance as soft power resources and capabilities in their own right. Several reasons account for such an unhappy situation and the most important ones are as follows:

- i. Absence of a national cultural policy, thus no clear-cut policies with regard to culture, in general, and music and dance as soft power resources and capabilities, in particular.
- ii. Lack of infrastructural, logistic, technical and financial support to leverage music and dance as soft power resources and capabilities.
- iii. Blurred messages as regards the projection of the cultural identity of the people of Mauritius.

Suffice it to say that any head of state, or any high official from overseas, or any one from the global publics is interested to know what the culture of the people of Mauritius is, to what extent her or his own culture, if any, has been preserved and propagated in the host country, and, above all, what originality the people, as a nation, can project to the whole world. This is an important diplomatic sell, for it has the potential to project the greatness, respectability, credibility, noble intent, values, and maturity of the nation, at large.

## Focus and Purpose of Inquiry and Inquiry Questions

As mentioned above, soft power can be understood as the "soft" resources and capabilities a country uses in its diplomacy. The focus of this article is on soft power as resources and utilization capabilities, and not their outcomes and impact (effectiveness), and the soft power resources under discussion are music and dance, in all their hues and textures. In a bid to bring some more definitional and conceptual clarifications to this discussion, Qingguo (2010) is quoted as stating that soft power resources refer to a country's quantity and quality of "culture, education, governance, values, ideas, and visions" it can make use of to attract others (pp. 1-2). Its capabilities denote its "ability to translate (those) soft power resources into actual soft power." Soft power effectiveness, however, refers to the "actual impact of soft power, that is,

whether the projection of soft power actually produces the desired results" (Qingguo, 2010, pp. 1-2).

The main purpose of this article is to shed light on one of the most important civil society's contributions to further develop and enhance the Mauritian diplomacy. And this refers to the artistic talents and aptitudes and cultural richness of the people, which, if fully tapped and supported by the State, have the potential to become important soft power resources and capabilities of this country. This is a sphere of activities in the diplomatic domain, which has caught, if at all, very little attention of our country's policy makers and technocrats so far.

The present author, thus, puts forth the following questions:

**Research Question 1:** What are the soft power resources and capabilities as far as music and dance are concerned in Mauritius?

**Research Question 2:** Who are the main stakeholders?

**Research Question 3:** What could be done in the short, medium, and long term to leverage music and dance as efficient soft power national resources and capabilities?

## Importance of the Inquiry

The plausible answers and proposals put forth in this article are significant ones, for they will inform not only musicians and dancers but also policy makers, diplomats, and high office-bearers in the fields of arts and culture, and foreign affairs, of the importance of using the country's "soft" resources and the people's creative ideas to help facilitate and enhance diplomatic relations, choices, and outcomes. Moreover, this submission can trigger interest among other researchers to embark on further studies on soft power and diplomacy in Mauritius.

## Academic Review

Diplomacy is one of the most important instruments used by a nation-state through its officials based at home and overseas for conducting its relations and communicating with other sovereign states (Berridge, 2010; Makhan, 2004<sup>3</sup>). Diplomacy in international relations is a major factor of power. Through diplomacy, nation-states are able to secure the objectives of their foreign policies without military force (Berridge, 2010). Diplomacy can be of two types: high visibility and discreet diplomacy (Makhan, 2004). Today, due to the complex and varying nature of international environment, the concept of public diplomacy is being given a fresh look and, thus, redefined for the following reasons: (a) increasing need for more public involvement in diplomacy; hence, the civil society is acting more as a generator, rather than a bystander or target, of diplomatic activities. Hague (2013) argues that "(F)oreign policy today is no longer the preserve of governments. There is now a mass of connections between individuals, civil society, businesses, pressure

groups and charitable organizations which are also part of the relations between nations” (p. 2); (b) globalization and its resulting increase in global social relations and networks, thus influencing the way people view their place in the local and global environments and urging them to solicit a convergence of domestic and foreign policy agendas; (c) rapid development in information and communication technology (ICT); (d) growth of electronic media more of a partner rather than a tool in foreign policy strategies, for example, private radios and television (TV) channels acting as agenda-setter; and (e) growing need to enhance a country’s image to boost up its exports, attract foreign investments, and project itself as the most attractive tourist destination (Hocking in Melissen, 2005).

Such an enhanced role of public diplomacy has paved the way for other modes of “powers,” some of which can be termed as *soft*, *sticky*, or *smart* power, which could be more attractive than hard, or military, power, to make their entry in the realm of general diplomacy. Through the use of soft power, which can be in the form of activities involving, but not restricted to, arts and culture for nation-branding purpose, a country can encourage other countries to want what it wants.

### ***Nation-Brand and Nation-Branding***

Due to the fact that soft power is closely linked to both nation-brand and nation-branding, it is worth mentioning, in passing, that there is a distinction between these two concepts. Quoting Anholt (2006), Fan (2008) makes it clear that nation-brand is the sum total of the perceptions other countries have with regard to the image of one’s country (i.e., the “what”), which might be strong or weak, attractive or dull, whereas nation-branding refers to the conscious and perpetual effort (i.e., the “how”) of a country, as a whole, namely, government, individuals, and civil society, to create and project its image to the international audience (p. 19). The new public diplomacy is very much concerned with nation-branding.

### ***Steven Lukes’ Theory of Three Faces of Power or “Three-dimensional” Understanding of Power***

To make a case for leveraging music and dance in strengthening and enhancing Mauritian cultural diplomacy, the author has based his reflections on, inter alia, Steven Lukes’ theory of Three Faces of Power to argue that power is not unidimensional in nature and Joseph Nye’s concept of Soft Power together with literature and scholarly views on soft power resources and capabilities. The conceptual framework embraces soft power, music and dance, and new public diplomacy.

To facilitate understanding of the multidimensional aspect of power, let us, first of all, brush over Lukes’ three faces of power put forth in the context of domestic national power and policy debate in 1974 in his book, titled *Power: A*

*Radical View*, and his second edition of 2005 as (a) Power Through Decision Making, (b) Power Through Agenda-setting, and (c) Power Through Domination or Preference-Setting or Belief-Shaping.

### ***Power Through Decision Making***

In this dimension, power of one actor or group is exerted openly over others in policy debates. In this power struggle scheme of things, the interests and desires of each actor and their preferences together with the conflict that may ensue in decision making are brought to light and are subject to analysis. Obviously, the actor having the better argumentation and stronger influence will rule the roost. Whosoever gets her or his way has power. This is the pluralists’ approach to power.

### ***Power Through Agenda-Setting***

This second way of exerting power, unlike the first one, lies in non-decision-making through manipulation of policy agenda or by controlling the agenda of a debate. In other words, a powerful actor/actors can prevent certain issues from being taken up for debate because of conflicting interests and decisions already made thereof. In the field of diplomacy, one can say that those actors have the means and resources to prevent actions in foreign affairs that would be detrimental to their interests and to press forward those that would be beneficial to them. There is bound to have open confrontation in discussion when the weaker group/s, thus, cannot have their important issues taken up for debate. Here, there is tight control over the agenda by the powerful actor or group, hence, restricting the decision making as well.

### ***Power Through Domination or Preference-Setting or Belief-Shaping***

In this third dimension of power, the more powerful actor/s or group/s can go to the extent of shaping the wishes, preferences, and interests of others. More often than not, the subjugated are made to accept views that are not really to their advantages, but the powerful groups can go to the extent of “shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things” (Lukes, 2005, p. 28). In this power exertion model, open conflict ensues when knowledge of the real interests of the more powerful groups dawns upon the oppressed and when there is realization of how they were made to divert from their real interests through previously exerted power. This third face of power is known as Lukes’ radical view of power.

From the above-stated three faces of power came into existence the distinction between hard and soft power. As stated earlier, hard power refers to military action or economic coercion like embargos and sanctions to obtain what one wants, whereas soft power denotes the use of attractions

to make others want what one wants either of their own accord, or without them even knowing. Lukes' second and third faces of power, namely, agenda-setting and preference-setting, respectively, are more applicable with a view to wielding soft power.

In the same line of thoughts, one can say that to initiate actions in foreign affairs, there is need for foreign policies, and foreign policy actions are carried out through foreign policy instruments, which are different modes of exercising power. The different foreign policy instruments could be divided into two broad categories, namely, military and non-military (Baldwin, 2000). Military implies *twisting the arms of others*, whereas nonmilitary could include such instruments like economic sanctions, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, propaganda, nation-branding, and financial or commercial incentives (Melissen, 2005), among others.

By coining and using the phrase "soft power" in his book, titled *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, some 25 years ago, Nye is, more than ever before, convinced that attraction and persuasion, or the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce or force, are the alternative strategies to guide foreign policies and their implementation in today's world. He further states that the soft power can be not only a complement to hard power but also a powerful substitute. Nye believes that the attractiveness of a country can be as important as, if not more important than, guns and money, and/or economic and commercial incentives in its effort to induce voluntary international acquiescence. According to his theory, power lies along the continuum comprising Command–Coercion–Inducement–Agenda-Setting–Attraction–Co-Optive Power. Hard power is on the Command side, whereas soft power is on the Co-Optive side.

It is worth noting that Nye (2005b) mentioned three sources of power in the United States, namely, "the attractiveness of its culture, the appeal of its domestic political and social values, and the style and substance of its foreign policies" (p. 9). Out of these three sources, the third, that is, U.S. foreign policies, is not different from its hard power, for its main policies comprise mainly military intervention and economic sanction. However, its values are nothing but its culture. As a result, we can say with much certainty that soft power of the United States is its culture and its diverse expressions. As Fan (2008) succinctly puts it, "soft power is cultural power" (p. 4). But it is important to note that cultural resources are not soft power by themselves. They have to be worked upon for conversion into soft power (Fan, 2008). Therefore, a country rich in culture may be poor in soft power and vice versa. Thus, a country must have the capacity, resources, ability, and means to convert its cultural resources into its soft power.

Prior to Nye, the concept of soft power was hinted at by such writers as E. H. Carr (1964), Hans J. Morgenthau (1967), Klaus Knorr (1956, 1973), and Ray S. Cline (1975, cited in Fan, 2008). Even in ancient times, soft power was more favored than hard power. The Chinese philosophers,

Confucius and Lao Tse, had both talked about the merits of virtue (soft power) over force to win the allegiance of people. Ancient and modern Indian literature on politics is replete with examples of the superiority of soft power in public affairs dealings. Chanakya's conception of "samman" (respect) and "dana" (gift) clearly points at the importance of soft power in ancient Indian politics. The Upanishads have, unequivocally, taught that the whole world is my family (Vasudaiva kutumbakam).

Having said this, it is equally important to remember that the effect of soft power may not be in the form of an immediate, specific, and observable action occurring at a given time and place, but rather a diffused one spread over time, which can be cashed in on in the future (Nye, 2004b).

Conversely, disbelievers of soft power argue that popularity and attraction are ephemeral and should not have their place in a country's diplomatic exercises. Womack (2005) also argues that attractiveness and its judgment are often subjective and debatable on the political front. There are certainly opposing views as regards for example, the attractiveness of an artiste and her or his music that a country might be proud of; some may view this as corrupting, others, enriching. Wang (2006) believes that soft power produced by different actors of a country can have varying effects on different groups of the receiving country. Gray (2011) argues that soft power relies too much on the receiving country's perception, thus not appropriate for foreign policy direction. Others maintain that soft power is nothing but a shadow of hard power, "the gleam on the sword" (Womack, 2005, p. 3). George W. Bush's oft-cited "soft" phrase, "(Y)ou are either with us or with the terrorists" is no less an expression of hard power. For many American and Indian skeptics, threat of terrorism, for instance, cannot be tackled with the instrument of soft power. The use of hard power is the one and only means through which one can obtain what one wants. In this regard, it is not surprising that even Nye (2005a, 2005b), himself, admits the ineffectiveness of soft power at some point in time. He states that if soft power cannot influence policy-making, it can at least influence the "environment for policy."

## China's Soft Power

For the past decade, China has been investing billions of dollars in building up its soft power arsenal. The opening of some 300 Confucius Institutes all over the world, on the same line as that of Alliance Française and the British Council, to promote Chinese language and culture, the opening up and the slow but sure worldwide spread of the Shaolin Kung fu, the elaborate holding of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010, among others, have been some of the laudable efforts put in by China to increase its soft power. But, given its domestic "hard" cracking down on civilians, artists, lawyers, and activists upholding and fighting for human rights, not many countries are

convinced of the sincerity of its purpose, thus undermining its own credibility in the eyes of international audiences.

### India's Soft Power

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's never-ending official visits to more than 25 countries since his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) party came to power in 2014 is a clear-cut indication of today's India's effort to leverage its soft power to its optimal level. India's soft power can be discerned by most of the countries of the South-East Asia, besides its diaspora like Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, Malaysia, Surinam, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad, due to their shared values, heritage, culture, and civilizational links (Purushothaman, 2010). For India, culture is the main source of soft power, for no one can deny the contribution of India's yoga, Ayurveda, Indian cuisine, Bollywood movies, spirituality, and classical music and dance in enhancing its global image.

### Mauritian Diplomacy: Now and Hereafter

As mentioned above, Mauritius' primary foreign policy instrument with regard to other nation-states is its diplomacy, which is, primarily, economic and commercial, political, and, to some extent, cultural, especially with India and China. It is noteworthy that the small size of Mauritius, its remoteness, and lack of natural resources have compelled it to be perpetually aware of what goes on at the regional and international levels and position itself in the limelight of international debates. Such a stance is crucial to enable it to put forth and integrate its agenda into that of the assembly of sovereign states and thus make them listen to its needs and aspirations as a high middle-income Small Island Developing State (SIDS) (Makhan, 2004).

Mauritius' economic and commercial diplomacy operates through and consists mainly of its bilateral and multilateral relations and economic and commercial ties with such main intergovernmental bodies as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), the European Union (EU), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and South Africa (COMESA), the Commonwealth, Francophonie, and the United Nations (UN). This country has trading partners for both imports and exports of products throughout the world; hence, consolidating and maintaining a sound economic and commercial diplomacy is crucial.

The political diplomacy of Mauritius is geared, but not restricted, toward the following methods: election and appointment of its nationals to high-level positions in regional and international organizations (Makhan, 2004); hosting of high-level regional and international events, for example, summits and conferences; defense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, for example, its claims on the Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin Island; and undertaking

and receiving high-level official visits and signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and Agreements, among others.

Notwithstanding its proactive engagement in the above-stated areas of diplomacy, Mauritius' real GDP growth rate finds it difficult to cross the 3.7%, as in July 2016, exports decreased from 6,819 MUR million in March 2016 to 6,364 MUR million in April 2016 and foreign direct investment (FDI) fell from 20,373 MUR million to a low 7,214 MUR million in 2015 (Statistics Mauritius).<sup>4</sup> Added to these, the recent hue and cry and uncertainties in respect of (a) the changes India brought to the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAA) to check treaty abuse, round-tripping of funds, double nontaxation on capital gains, and revenue loss for both the countries; (b) Brexit—Britain leaving the EU; and (c) the geopolitical dynamics as regards the termination of the British lease on the Chagos Archipelago and the ceding or not of the Sovereignty of Tromelin to Mauritius by France are sufficient reasons to review and further consolidate its diplomacy through a thorough democratization process whereby foreign relationships between countries are, henceforth, made to be based not only on relationships between heads of states and officials but also on those between the peoples. In such a scenario, a country's culture could be used to reach out to the international audiences with a view to enhancing and projecting a more positive image.

### *Lukes' Three Faces of Power and Bourdieu's Symbolic Power in Mauritian Diplomacy*

Strictly speaking, neither of the three faces of power mentioned earlier has been used in Mauritian diplomacy. The country has never won over others because of superior resources or force, nor has it changed, controlled, or manipulated the agenda in international debates, nor has it shaped the preferences and wishes of others, at least, not in a radical manner. For example, the changing of DTAA by India, the resistance of Britain to cede the sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius, and the French refusal to sit at the negotiating table as regards the sovereignty of Tromelin Island, among others, have not triggered the necessity for Mauritius to use any of these powers, at face value, in international fora. A closer analysis of the third face or dimension of power, as Lukes (2005) has mentioned, however, reveals that there are different types of power, or rather "power over" within it and "not all of which are zero sum and negative in their effects on subordinates" (Swartz, 2007, p. 3). Lukes (2005) mentioned in this regard that "power over others can be productive, transformative, authoritative and compatible with dignity, . . ." (p. 109). In the same vein, Swartz (2007) mentioned "power not only represses but also creates new significant effects" (p. 2). Impressed by Michel Foucault's later writings and reinterpretation of power and their effects on the scholars of his time, Lukes is convinced that Foucault has exercised an "interesting kind of power"—the "power of

seduction” (Lukes, 2005). This could be an interesting hint at yet another kind of power. Likewise, Lukes falls back on Pierre Bourdieu to explain his third dimension of power and thus his new definition of power as domination (Swartz, 2007).

Bourdieu’s (1986) conception of symbolic power, however, if applied to the country as a whole, is interesting for the purpose of explaining, to some extent, the type of soft power that Mauritius can leverage in its diplomacy, especially its cultural diplomacy. In simple terms, one can state that Mauritius could wield symbolic power over other nation-states by virtue of its rich cultural resources, including music and dance, its symbolic cultural capital of reputation of being a model of unity-in-diversity, and a model of peaceful co-existence in the whole world, on the one hand, and of having the possibility of converting its economic capital into cultural capital by setting up cultural institutions, on the other. Having acquired such a reputation and a kind of authority in this field, it has the potential to become a “dominant” nation-state, without actually taking recourse to any direct acts of domination. The “dominated” nation-states, however, do not possess the same kinds of cultural capital and symbolic cultural power to remain neutral to the cultural charms of Mauritius (Cronin, 1996, p. 70). In such a scenario, the state has a crucial role to play, for it becomes the locus and guarantor of this symbolic cultural power and its diverse sources and manifestations.

### *Need for a Nation Rebranding: Cultural Diplomacy*

The cultural diplomacy of Mauritius is yet to reach its optimal level to enhance and consolidate its image to the international audiences and foster mutual understandings through exchange of ideas, information, arts, and culture among nations. Suffice it to say that the country does weave cultural relations, though timidly, with countries such as India and China and those in the commonwealth with which it has historical links. The setting up and running of embassies and cultural institutions (Indira Gandhi Centre for Cultural Relations, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Rabindranath Tagore Institute, China Cultural Centre, receiving of scholarships, introduction of visa-free regime (up to 60 days) for Indian tourists visiting Mauritius and “*gratis* E-Tourist Visa” for Mauritian nationals visiting India, possibility of inclusion of Mauritius in the 21st-century new Maritime Silk Road, and hosting of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Chairs are some of the outcomes of the cultural ties Mauritius has with those countries (Indian High Commission Website, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China Website & Anchraz, 2008).

The most pertinent question that requires more attention with regard to cultural diplomacy of Mauritius is how Mauritius uses its cultural assets to produce soft power and reap the benefits thereof. Harping on the historical and

cultural links that bind those countries and perpetually remaining at the receiving end for donations, loans, and grants do not suffice to produce the required results. Such a strategy has started showing some signs of breathlessness. The way India changed the DTAA, the resistance of Britain to cede the sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius, China’s possible relinquishment of the Jinfei Project (Wan, 2015), and the French refusal to sit at the negotiating table as regards the sovereignty of Tromelin Island add substance to this argument. There is need to further enhance the image of the country and build its soft power capacity for it to command greater respect in the international arena and, thus, increase mutual benefits between countries.

### *Cultural Diplomacy Focused on Music and Dance Resources*

Cultural diplomacy has the potential to create a unique atmosphere of openness, often through a shared experience of a cultural event. (Cynthia Schneider, *Best Practice*)

Before discussing any further music and dance as potential assets and sources of “soft” power for Mauritius, let us briefly brush over the reasons, in line with Nye’s, why this country stands a good chance of gaining from “wielding” its soft power: (a) It is a multicultural, multilingual, and multi-ethnic country fostering pluralism, liberalism, cooperation, freedom, and equity, thus in line with global norms; (b) it has access to different channels of communication; and (c) its domestic and international positive performances are taken as model by many, especially the African countries.

As the focus of this article is on music and dance as sources of soft power, the following are some of the reasons why these art forms are rated high on the scale of cultural diplomacy: first, they are inherently expressive in nature and thus appropriate means of communicating the “unspoken”; second, they thrive on human emotions and affect the latter positively to a considerable extent; third, they have the capacity to trigger prompt intellectual and emotional reactions, thus producing immediate, desired outcomes; fourth, in the event they project and promote values that most people can identify with, they become important attractions and can have universal reach and appeal; and finally, they are products of the creativity and talents of private individuals and civil societies, hence, diverse in form and content, and thus more effective in generating trust among peoples and better influencing diplomatic choices and outcomes. Purushothaman (2010) rightly says, “(T)he power of music can bridge borders and bring people closer” (p. 5).

Mauritius, a multicultural and a “multi-musical” country, has a lot to offer to the world in terms of its cultural diversity and capitals. The different cultures thriving on the Mauritian soil have rich cultural and artistic heritages, including tangible as well as intangible ones. The tangible heritage

comprises historical sites, monuments, gardens, paintings, sculptures, crafts, artifacts, archival materials, and books, among others. Intangibles include, inter alia, music, dance, drama, languages, literature, poems, rituals, cultural practices, cultural and social knowledge and skills, customs, and traditions.

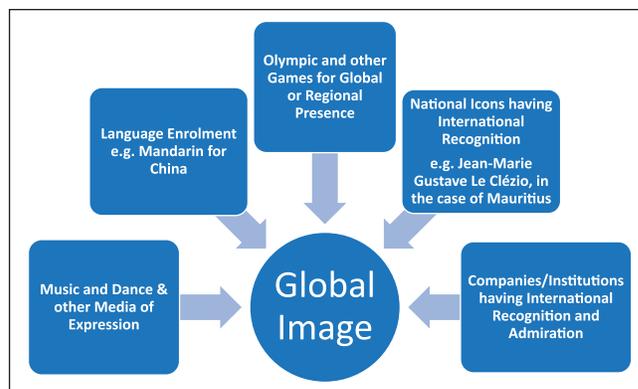
Different systems of music and dance, namely, Indian, Western, African, Chinese, and Sega have long been flourishing on the Mauritian soil now. Their close encounter and interface have given rise to cultural and musical dialogues and sharing among them; thus came into being a specific genre of “free”<sup>5</sup> music and dance, which fuses some of their common elements. These diverse art forms are performed, appreciated, enjoyed, practiced, shared, and taught and learned by the population and are used, primarily, as means for enhancing self-expression, reaffirming identities, sustaining community involvement, maintaining social cohesion, fostering social and communal integration, arousing religious and spiritual sentiments, besides being means of entertainment, relaxation, and recreation. These art forms are also potential sources of “soft power,” though still unexplored yet. The Chinese writer Shan Sa rightly says in this regard, “Culture is not only a form of entertainment, but also an economic asset, and a political asset.”<sup>6</sup>

The soft power variables as stated by Ernst & Young in its *Rapid-Growth Markets Soft Power Index, Spring 2012*, clearly point out to music and dance as a constituent to building up a country’s Global Image (Figure 1).

Based on his close interaction with the aforesaid systems of music and dance, and the data gained from his observation over the years, as a teacher, performer, and researcher, the author submits that in Mauritius the quality of music and dance performances, irrespective of cultures and systems they belong to, has improved considerably since the 1960s. New institutions dispensing courses in music and dance have seen the light of day, and various programs of studies in different systems of music and dance are offered at secondary and tertiary levels. Today, many more people are showing interest not only in perpetuating these different art forms but also to know more about and professionalizing them. Although music and dance concerts, involving any one or more genres of music and dance, are put up on a regular basis throughout the year to mark historical, social, and religious events, there is still a long way to go to make them sources of soft power.

The five main systems of music and dance developed and practiced by the progenies of immigrants coming from India, China, Europe, and Africa to Mauritius are represented in the diagram below (Figure 2).

In each of these systems, there is a plethora of genres, forms, and styles. In some of these systems, for example, Indian and Western, the music and dance vary from pure classical, semiclassical, to light and folk forms. The Mauritian Sega music and dance have evolved from remnants of whatever African music and dance the African slaves and their



**Figure 1.** Constituents of a country’s global image. Source: Ernst and Young (2012), *Rapid-Growth Markets Soft Power Index*.



**Figure 2.** Five main systems of music and dance.

descendants could draw and perpetuate from within their collective memory in addition to local musical influences, especially Indian and Western.

As a general remark, one can say that there is a clear indication on the ground, from the number of music and dance shows put up at national level every year, local cultural programs produced and aired on radio and TV, and the number of compact discs (CDs) produced that the Mauritian performers and “culturati,” irrespective of any cultural groups, are striving hard to make their music and dance art forms more remarkable, marketable, viable, and worthy of appreciation by not only the locals but also tourists visiting the country. There should, therefore, be no compromise on the part of all stakeholders with regard to inputs, quality, and accessibility insofar as their creations and performances are concerned. There is no doubt that their past achievements

would act as incentives to be more proactive, innovative, and creative in their approaches and undertakings.

Mauritius could leverage cultural diplomacy taking recourse to a “people-to-people approach” with regard to countries where diplomatic relations are strained in respect of certain important issues, for example, Great Britain (Chagos Archipelago issue), France (Tromelin issue), and India (DTAA issue). Cultural exchanges involving music and dance between peoples of Mauritius and those of any of these countries should be encouraged, as such initiatives engender neutral and mutually accepted platforms for transmission of ideas. Such an initiative could have a significant impact on the general populace and high-ranking members of these societies, who could, in turn, advise their policy makers and decision takers with a view to establishing more cooperation and reconcilable approaches as regards foreign relations and issues at stake. In this regard, Nye (2004a) points out that these governments then “cannot remain totally indifferent to the views of the people” (p. 4). This is the crux of the working of soft power. Activities targeted toward specific audiences for this purpose in the host countries will comprise music and dance festivals, and staging of dance-ballets, chorales, and other forms of multicultural music and dance ensembles to address issues pertaining to the vulnerability and economic frailties of SIDS such as Mauritius, women empowerment, drug prevention, social inclusion, and protection of environment, among others, and to praise and promote human rights, justice, and world peace.

Highly official overseas state visits must include Mauritian multicultural music and dance to project Mauritian society and its cultural mosaic around the world. State-sponsored interactive meets between artistes of Mauritius and performers and general public of the other countries must be organized to foster transcultural dialogue, exchange, and understanding. Such cultural get-togethers could provide a neutral platform for mobility of ideas.

It is an undeniable fact that cultural diplomacy is carried out by not only governmental bodies but also nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private individuals. To help the latter succeed in this endeavour, the overt and covert helping hands of the government as facilitator are vital. These can include state initiative in opening “Mauritian Cultural Council” in other countries; consolidating the cultural wings of existing embassies and establishing new embassies; setting up a “Fund-Raising Concerts Fund” to enable Mauritian artistes to come together to put up high-quality cultural programmes with a view to raising funds for relieving people affected by natural calamities like earthquakes, floods, and cyclones, and for healing people having experienced conflicts and wars in other countries; providing facilities/pecuniary incentives for local and foreign performers to participate in cultural meets in Mauritius and overseas; encouraging the private sector through tax relief and other incentives to sponsor performers for participation in cultural activities; and encouraging the private sector to make use of

the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Fund to support artistes and performers financially in projecting and enhancing the image of the country overseas.

Reckoned as an African country, Mauritius has a lot to gain if it does not restrict its national interest to its physical boundaries. Its close association with the regional countries and their cultural actors is of utmost importance. It is high time to further strengthen relations among African countries through, for instance, the organization of an All-African Music and Dance Competitions and Pan-African Music and Dance Festivals via SADC and COMESA that could bring to the forefront the exceptional talents of those countries and consolidate further the bond and camaraderie that exist among those countries.

Mauritius can also leverage its cultural diplomacy to acquire soft power via ICT. Nye (2004a) points out that “. . . power in the information age will come not only from strong defenses but also from strong sharing” (p. 261). He also adds that “. . . such sharing not only enhances the ability of others to cooperate with us but also increases their inclination to do so.” Academic and cultural activities related to music and dance depicting the cultural identity of Mauritius should be exported via the Internet and social networking services (SNS) like Facebook and Twitter with a view to establishing connections between peoples around the world and projecting the country’s cultures, cultural values, and cultural diversity. Mutual sharing of those pieces of information will go a long way in establishing more positive foreign relations.

### *The Roles and Capabilities of the Main Stakeholders*

The author has identified two categories of stakeholders, namely, Inner and Outer Stakeholders. Inner stakeholders are those individuals who are directly engaged in the creation, production, “packaging,” distribution, and delivery of music and dance products. Outer stakeholders are involved in the consumption of the arts or in providing different kinds of support to the inner stakeholders in the form of facilities, patronage, sponsorship, donation, and the like for the presentation, preservation, promotion, and perpetuation of these art forms and for giving a boost to the development and professionalization of their capabilities, hence, making a much greater impact on others.

#### *The inner stakeholders*

*Artistes or performers (musicians and dancers).* Music and dance performers constitute the core of the performing arts sector. The term *artistes* (with an “e”) refers to practicing professionals in music or dance, rather than “hobbyists or leisure-makers.”<sup>7</sup> Professional performers have the knack to attract and please not only other professional musicians and dancers and music and/or dance connoisseurs but also music and/or dance lovers and the public, in general. Thus, they are important generators of attraction.

Included in this category are the service providers, such as light and sound engineers and technicians, events managers/suppliers of logistics, suppliers of sound equipment, suppliers of light equipment, and suppliers of decorations and props, among others.

#### *The outer stakeholders*

*Educational and training institutions.* Public and private educational and training institutions in music and dance have contributed and are still contributing immensely to capacity building. However, formal programmes of studies at secondary and tertiary levels focus more on acquisition of knowledge and skills for producing connoisseurs, amateurs, and teachers. Scope for capacity building in the art of professional performance, irrespective of educational background, age, genres, styles, and forms, in any of the art forms, is yet to be explored.

*Sociocultural organizations.* A great many sociocultural organizations in the country are funded directly by the government. Though the different communities/ethnic groups turn to those organizations for consolidating identities, fostering social cohesion, and perpetuating certain cultural practices, beliefs, customs, and traditions, much is yet to be undertaken by them to give a helping hand in promoting the performing arts and develop audiences worldwide.

*Civil society.* The civil society comprises, primarily, the Mauritian families, the NGOs, professional bodies or forums, artistes' societies and unions, researchers and academia, students and youth, and, above all, the consumers of arts and culture. Stakeholders in this category have a crucial role to play to persuade the government to, first and foremost, take the much-awaited decision to formulate and implement a multisectoral National Cultural Policy at the earliest. Such an endeavor should not be based on a unidirectional communication, as is the case presently in respect of the scanty cultural principles in use.

*The private sector.* Individuals and enterprises that form part of this category operate in non-music and dance environments. However, they can provide their contribution in terms of patronage, sponsorship, and donation for the development and promotion of music and dance as soft power resources. Their actions are very often hesitant due to lack of clear public culture policies, strategies, and plans of actions.

Bigger conglomerates, which can be the benefactors and patrons of music and dance and their performers, have been contributing rather timidly to the development of these art forms. But we believe that those big corporates need to embark on a revamping exercise of their own thinking and actions with regard to the development of music and dance and their economic and political potentials.

*Ministries.* The different ministries indicated below have, more or less, similar mandates, as those of other ministries

in the world. What is being submitted hereunder are some new mandates those ministries could take on board to make of music and dance important resources in international relations. These could be expressed in different ways, namely, desire and will to formulate and implement a National Cultural Policy; efforts to set up institutions and put in place systems, mechanisms, and strategies geared toward the development of music and dance as soft power resources; and determination to embark on the tedious but gratifying venture of building up unique and unifying Mauritian cultural assets, especially its music and dance art forms worthy of calling "Mauritian."

The Prime Minister's Office could be responsible for, inter alia, setting up a National Centre for Performing Arts<sup>8</sup> that would build up and manage a National Troupe aiming at nurturing, preserving, promoting, and propagating a National Culture across the world.

The Ministry of Arts and Culture could be responsible for, inter alia, providing support to artistes and other stakeholders; developing audiences, local as well as overseas; consolidating cultural identity and social cohesion; and organizing music and dance concerts and festivals locally and overseas.

The Ministry of Education, Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research could be responsible for, inter alia, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in educational policies; consolidating and promoting music and dance education at preprimary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels; ensuring quality education and training in the arts and specialized high-quality training for artistes and other technical and administrative workers; and fostering Research and Development (R&D) in the fields of soft power and music and dance.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development could be responsible for, inter alia, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in national budgets and economic development policies; providing funding, subsidies, grants, concessions, and exemptions; setting up new funding structures for cultural workers; and fostering public-private partnerships (PPP) in the arts and culture sector.

The Ministry of Tourism could be responsible for, inter alia, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in tourism policies, thus promoting cultural tourism.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration, and International Trade could be responsible for, inter alia, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in foreign affairs policies; promoting cultural exports; strengthening the role of music and dance as "soft" power to enhance external relations and politics; organizing international cultural events and shows; and supporting regional and international mobility of artistes and cultural troupes.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports could be responsible for, inter alia, integrating issues, concerns, and matters

pertaining to arts and culture in youth and sports policies, and organizing and promoting cultural activities for and by the youth.

The Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training could be responsible for, *inter alia*, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in labor and employment policies, thus strengthening artistes' and other cultural workers' conditions of employment,

The Ministry of Local Government and Outer Islands could be responsible for, *inter alia*, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in local government policies; facilitating organization and development of cultural activities and support by local councils and municipalities; and putting up regional cultural and artistic ventures.

The Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation could be responsible for, *inter alia*, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in ICT policies; providing technological inputs in the creation and production of cultural products that have exportable value; providing Internet connection and easy accessibility for managing and controlling online file sharing; and devising protective measures.

The Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms could be responsible for, *inter alia*, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in civil service policies, facilitating professional artistes' employability in the public sector.

The Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment could be responsible for, *inter alia*, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in economic empowerment policies, thus empowering artistes and other cultural workers.

The Attorney General's Office could be responsible for, *inter alia*, integrating issues, concerns, and matters pertaining to arts and culture in legislation policies, amending existing legislation and spearheading the formulation of new ones, especially with regard to the Act for the setting up of the proposed National Center for Performing Arts, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), and work conditions of artistes.

It is true that there has always been a gap between government's rhetoric and financial support. Yet, there are no other alternatives to government attention, intervention, commitment, and, above all, funding to help boost up this new kind of soft power resources. Having said this, the author further argues that it is only through the most appropriate, efficient, and effective tools that the government can bring about this much-awaited paradigm shift and expedite development through the building up of a synergy between arts and culture and diplomacy. And these tools are cultural policies that could be formulated in such a way as to leverage arts and culture for cultural and socioeconomic development of the country and as soft power resources for bolstering global image.

## Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Proposals and Strategies (Max: 10 Years)

This segment of the article focuses on some short-, medium-, and long-term proposals that all stakeholders could consider with a view to revamping and reorienting their courses of actions in respect of the country's global image building and enhancement of its soft power leverage through, among others, music and dance resources for fostering better and more successful international relations.

### Short-Term Strategies

- I. Set up a National Centre for Performing Arts, the Vision and Mission of which should be geared toward revealing the multicultural and transcultural richness of the country and speed up their complete realization through high-level artistic and creative productions.
- II. Set up a National Cultural Troupe, the official and leading performing arts foundation in the Republic of Mauritius, under the agency of the Prime Minister's Office, to nurture, preserve, promote, and propagate Mauritian culture across the world.

#### Objectives of the Troupe:

- a. To foster excellence in the performing arts through training and creative action;
- b. To discover and develop talents in the performing arts;
- c. To build up a repertoire of high-quality artistic productions for national and international performances;
- d. To ensure that productions are geared toward both tradition and innovation; and
- e. To ensure that the Troupe's productions depict Mauritian culture and live up to the expectations and aspirations of all Mauritians.
- III. Make an Inventory, including age, academic, and professional qualifications, field of specialization, experience, audio-visual (AV) portfolio, and so forth, of all performers (musicians, dancers, writers, composers, and arrangers/choreographers) in Mauritius involved in creative works irrespective of any genres, forms, or styles.
- IV. Grade musicians and dancers into A, B, and C in different forms (classical, semiclassical, light, folk, and free) and genres through an assessment of their level of competences and knowledge and skills acquired.

The following reasons are put forth to justify this proposal:

- a. To know the level of competences and quality of performances/renderings of artistes involved in music and dance in Mauritius for categorization purpose;

- b. To provide an opportunity to identify excellences in the fields and make use of high-quality human inputs in the creation of music and dance products;
  - c. To enable and facilitate grants of support, direct and indirect, to artistes;
  - d. To inculcate a sense of professionalism in artistes with high potentials;
  - e. To provide an incentive for budding musicians and dancers to acquire more knowledge and skills, thus becoming more skillful in their respective art forms;
  - f. To help bring local practicing artistes to international standards; and
  - g. To identify training needs of potential performers.
- V. All government activities marking historical, social, and cultural events, should involve, primarily, the pool of graded artistes. These artistes should be remunerated for their participation in these activities. Such cultural events are free and are meant to promote the art forms, especially among the younger generation and to develop audiences in terms of quantity and quality. All artistes involved in such events could be provided with direct grants throughout the duration of the preparation to enable them to be fully involved with their creative work.
- VI. Organize bilateral and multilateral meets in Mauritius in such a way that the officials of the guest country/ies are provided with the opportunity of getting exposed to the music and dance of the locals. Similarly, as regards overseas diplomatic missions and meetings, explore possibilities of bringing along artistes and performers in the official delegations.
- VII. Continuously experiment with the creation of a unique and unifying Mauritian Music and Mauritian Dance. As the "Mauritian Persona" is a symbiotic entity, a Mauritian "homo-culturalis," continuously being culled from her or his daily interaction with the four main cultures of the world, namely, Indian, European, African, and Chinese, Mauritian music and dance could be contemplated as being the outcomes of a blend or an integration of the best values, elements, and practices pertaining to these four main traditions of performing arts. Although still in its embryonic form and, thus, still in the making or becoming, Mauritian music and dance have the potential of becoming unique cultural assets in their own right.
- VIII. A large chunk of important artistic, cultural, social, and economic activities in Mauritius, barring a few, come to a dead end by 9.00 p.m. This does not augur well for building up and enhancing the country's image. There have been timid efforts on the part of the concerned authorities to implement the "24 × 7" concept whereby different activities could be carried out till late in the night, or throughout the whole night till morning on all 7 days of the week. But this has not had many takers for want of proper planning,

monitoring, and awareness campaigns. Unfortunately, workers' federations and associations have taken it as a threat to their employment conditions and rights. We propose that such a concept, which has worked and is still working wonderfully in other developed and developing countries, be given a fresh look at, and proper actions be taken, for its implementation and perpetuation.

- IX. Publicize all major artistic and cultural events in the country on all social networking sites with a view to access and inform the global public, thus building up the global image and asserting a global presence. Joseph Nye rightly states that "Soft power is a dance requiring partners."

#### *Medium-term strategies*

- X. Set up Mauritian institutions, like the British Council and Alliance Francaise, to promote the interest of the country in different countries.
- XI. Formulate cultural policies with integrated multidimensional and cross-sectoral approaches to leverage music and dance as soft power resources on the global political arena.
- XII. Involve all stakeholders, artistes, for-profit, arts and culture-related micro, small, and medium enterprises; for-profit, nonarts and non-culture-related corporations; NGOs; researchers and academia; and the general public in cultural policy-making exercise.
- XIII. Commission expertise for qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis for building up a soft power index with regard to music and dance and their uses for enhancing global image of the country.
- XIV. Collaborate with governments of other countries to enable local artistes and groups of artistes to perform in international shows for greater exposure and presence.
- XV. Provide all infrastructural, physical, and human facilities for the smooth functioning of the proposed National Centre for Performing Arts.
- XVI. With a view to funding music and dance activities and bringing the corporate world closer to arts and culture, the creation of a Corporate Cultural Responsibility (CCR) is proposed here, which can either function within the ambit of the existing CSR by extending a share to arts and culture, or operate as an independent obligatory mechanism of the corporate world with a view to establishing a "dialogue" between arts and culture and the big conglomerates.

#### *Long-term strategies*

- XVII. Build and operate a state-of-the-art music and dance stadium that can accommodate 15,000 to 20,000 people for holding megaconcerts.

- XVIII. Set up a ministry solely responsible for promoting cultural tourism and for creating and leveraging soft power resources and capabilities.
- XIX. Initiate public/private joint ventures to build and develop an artistic and cultural village resort akin in spirit to and in line with the famous Chokhi Dhani in Jaipur, the unique five-star village resort, which captures the Rajasthani ethos and experiences, and the Lesedi African Lodge and Cultural Village in South Africa, which showcases the different African tribes and their cultures. The resort, as a permanent site, will capture the multiethnicity and multiculturalism of Mauritius and can receive between 3,000 to 5,000 visitors at one go. The proposed resort, which could be located in an easily accessible region, will comprise a plethora of new and unique attractions, including permanent music and dance classes and shows.

## Concluding Remark

The use of power in weaving any relation is of utmost importance and cannot be overlooked. What differentiates the outcome of such a relation from another is the nature of the power that is used. Soft power uses soft resources to achieve desired results without using any kind of force or payoff. In Mauritius, the use of music and dance, as soft power resources, capabilities, and effectiveness, has a huge potential in bolstering the country's image and foreign relations. Up to now, very little attention has been given by policy makers to leverage these resources to make a positive impact on foreign relations and their outcomes. While identifying the different genres of music and dance thriving on the Mauritian soil, the author focuses his reflection on the roles of the main stakeholders and what they ought to do to make these art forms efficient and effective means to enhance Mauritian diplomacy. He further wraps up the discussion by submitting a list of proposals that policy makers could take on board with a view to making the rich cultural assets of the country occupy an honorable position in its diplomacy.

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## Notes

1. Shashi Tharoor quoted in Amitabh Mattoo's article, *A doctrine of economic levers, soft power*, in *The Hindu* (Mattoo, 2014).
2. As quoted in Melissen (2005).
3. Retrieved from <https://www.lexpress.mu/article/foreign-policy-perception-and-reality>

4. Retrieved from <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/mauritius/gdp-growth-annual>
5. The word "free" is used to indicate freedom *from* any appellation, freedom from any cultural label, freedom from any rigid rules and regulations pertaining to genres, styles, and forms of music and dance, freedom from any form of religious, cultural, and artistic barriers that can separate people, freedom *for* experimenting with new artistic and aesthetic ideas and concepts, and, finally, thus, freedom for "thinking out of the box."
6. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPcVwZtjNw>
7. Throsby (2004).
8. Proposed in the 2015 national budget.

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### Author Biography

**Santosh Kumar Pudaruth** is an associate professor teaching Hindustani classical vocal music at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. Besides, he is fully involved in organizing cultural events at national level, and these are very much appreciated by both locals and overseas guests. He is also very much involved in research activities and publications, and his areas of interest include Indian music, aesthetics, cultural industries, cultural tourism, cultural policy, cultural and ethical values, and soft power and diplomacy.