



Echoes Beyond Borders:- The Global Journey of Performing Arts as a Tool of Cultural Diplomacy in Post-Independence Era



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Abstract

Art and culture are the roots of any country. India is a nation of rich and diverse cultural beliefs with numerous art forms and an age-old tradition, has achieved a global status. In post-colonial era India empowered arts through policies global opportunities and government took digital initiatives in 21st-century- the age of digitalization. To emerge as a powerful nation many factors are responsible like military capabilities, geopolitical influence, education, healthcare, etc. Cultural diplomacy is a type of power that includes exchange of ideas, information, art and language to boost their mutual understanding. Gradually India gained status with its cultural power and diplomacy, strengthening its influence and engagement on global diaspora. To achieve this India has organized and participated in many cultural exchange programs, art and music festivals etc. globally. This paper will discuss India's extensive cultural journey in attaining global status, with an interdisciplinary approach paper will explore the extensive role of performing arts in transforming independent India as a developed nation, by analyzing the impact of various events and festivals, academic initiatives, policies, the chain of efforts made by Government of India to empower performing arts of India.

Keywords : Indian Performing Arts, Soft Power, Global cultural diplomacy, Indian Government

Research Paper

Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to understand the progressive developments led to the improved cultural relations worldwide and establishing India as a powerful country. The efforts made by Indian Government to mobilize Indian performing arts to International cultural projection through formation of different policies, cultural exchange programs, formation of ministries and establishment of institutions and apex bodies.

Introduction

India is a country of diverse traditions, rituals and artforms inclusive of visual arts, performing arts, folk traditions, handloom, craft, puppetry, theatre etc. Indian performing arts i.e., any kind of Indian art where artist uses their presence, body, voice, creativity or expression

to present on stage. India has 8 classical dance forms Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Manipuri, Sattriya; folk dances like Kalbeliya, Lavani, Bhangra, Ghoomar etc.; folk tradition and theatre like Koodiyattam, Pandavani, Baul, etc.; North Indian classical and Carnatic vocal tradition and instruments of India. It has always been an integral part of cultural experience and expression of India's social, political, mythological and ritualistic tradition. The legacy of performing arts has an age-old history influencing and exchanging art and culture with other countries mainly neighboring countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia etc. especially in East Asian, South Asian and South East Asian countries in the history. Now in past few decades after Independence India has made a global presence on International platforms. In changing dynamics of 21st

century idea of cultural diplomacy has been widely adapted to foster understanding between nations.

Cultural diplomacy is the use of the artistic expression and exchanges of the idea for the promotion of mutual understanding (Schneider). It is described as the ability to build mutual understanding with others through its art, culture, philosophy, tradition, food, literature and rituals, a means to success. It has emerged as an important factor and an asset in globalizing world for developing nations seeking higher status and power over the world. India has strategically embraced its diverse art and cultural heritage to present itself as a vibrant and globally influencing country (Chandra), by sharing its arts, culture, food, etc. over the world.



In the era of Post-Independence, Indian Government has done a tremendous work to regain and nourish the ethnicity in last decades by taking numerous initiatives like formation of apex and statutory bodies, separate ministry for preservation and promotion of art and artist, strengthening bond with other nations to achieve the vision of empowering artists globally. According to the Brand Finance, India ranks at 27th position as of 2023 by making a growth in last two years from being at 36th position in 2021.

World famous Indian artists - an example

The visible growth can be seen with the examples—Odissi being featured in Michael Jackson's album Black or White in 1991, Bharat Ratna Pt. Ravi Shankar ji a renowned Indian Sitarist and receiver of three Grammy Awards and significantly taking Indian music to a wider International audience specially to west; Padma Vibhushan Teejan Bai ji a renowned Pandwani traditional folk singer who spreaded the folk of India and stories of Mahabharata to International recognition. Classical dancers like Padma Vibhushan Sonal Mansingh ji has been appointed as a UNESCO artist for peace in 2003, Padma Vibhushan Pandit Birju Maharaj

ji has taught kathak to many foreign students from China, US, Canada, Europe etc., and has composed and choreographed dance pieces for famous Bollywood movies. Padma Vibhushan Padma Subrahmanyam's work on "Karana" mentioned in Natyashastra has been globally recognized, and countries like Japan, Russia, Australia have made documentaries and films on her. Many others have also contributed to their respective art forms by getting recognition to their performing art on global platforms like world famous Shehnai player Bharat Ratna Ustad Bismillah Khan ji, Padma Vibhushan Hariprasad Chaurasia ji, Padma Vibhushan Ustad Zakir Hussain, Indian percussionist Padma Shri Sivamani ji, Padma Shri Gulabo Saperia etc.

Role of Organizational Bodies and Ministry

In pre-independence era India was tied in stereotypes globally and has faced social, economic, political, and cultural deterioration. In order to leverage its power on global level, important measures were taken to boost its socio-political power and cultural influence over other countries. Some major strategic initiatives have been taken by the Government of India (GOI) to spread India's art and culture to global stage. Statutory Bodies, Governmental Organizations, autonomous bodies, National academies, apex bodies, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of External Affairs were established to work for preservation and promotion of art and culture and to foster cultural cooperation on bilateral and multilateral platforms. Now we will look at some of the organizations: -

Note -The details of the organization are taken from their official website.

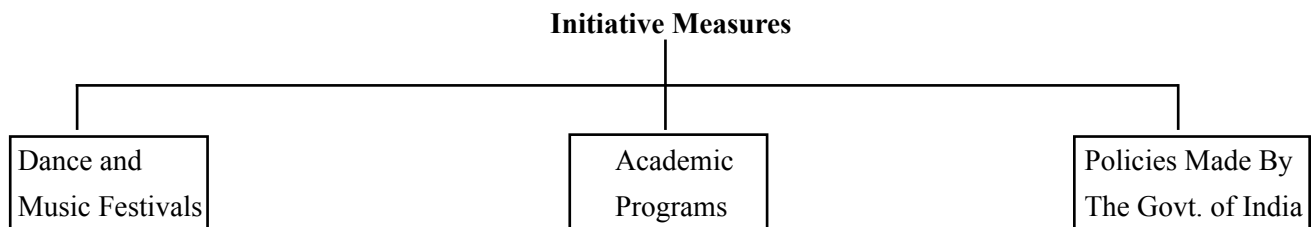
- 1. Indian Council for Cultural Relations:—ICCR** is an autonomous organization of India founded by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad on 9th April 1950 in New Delhi it has opened regional offices in Bangalore, Guwahati, Kolkata, etc. It is a result of historic conference on Asian relations held in the 1946, New Delhi and resolved to set up ICCR. Its main objective was to revive, establish and strengthen cultural relations, cultural exchange, improved understanding between India and other countries by organizing seminars, symposiums, art exhibitions and festivals and to further adopt required measures to achieve the objective. It also maintains and establish chairs of Indian studies in universities abroad and administers awards for various academic schemes. The Council has been operating 37 full-fledged Indian Cultural Centers (ICCs) in different parts of the world..



- 2. Ministry of Culture (MOC) :-** It is a Ministry of Indian Government which took the charge of preservation and promotion of Indian culture . Its main objective is to conserve our heritage, monument, libraries, arts of India, promotion of Buddhist and Tibetan studies, cultural agreements with foreign countries etc. Under MOC there are 3 attached offices, 8 subordinate offices, 27 autonomous bodies and 7 zonal cultural centers based on Indian cultural zones.
- 3. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA):-**It is a Foreign Ministry which was established in September 1946. MEA represents India on global platform, it is the leading body that formulates and implements India's foreign policy on global stage. It plays an integral role in promoting arts and culture by supporting initiatives of ministry and highlights the bilateral ties with rest of the world.

Initiative Measures

Now the paper will discuss few initiatives and plan of actions like seminar, conferences, art exhibitions, Dance and Music Festivals etc. held in India and abroad, that were implemented and organized by the government on national and international sphere to tie bilateral and multilateral cooperation and exchange of art and culture through various programs. These were directed accordingly through different ways, depending on the need of time, place and motive. We will study them by dividing it into three main categorizations which are presented through the chart below :-



After independence many festivals were organized worldwide and India was part of them. Festival de l'Imaginaire was the earliest platform, Festival of India abroad in 1982 was the first government backed large scale cultural diplomacy initiative, showcasing India's soft power through music, cinema, cuisine etc.. Some International Seminar and Conference on Indian performing arts were also organized like IFMC, Oxford Dance Symposium etc. Such efforts were making India into world diplomacy and improved international relations in early 2000s.

Dance and Music Festivals

Sno.	Festival	Year	Place	Specialty
1.	Festival de l'Imaginaire	1997	Europe	Indian tribal and folk dance were performed
2.	Festival of India abroad	1982	France	The first Government backed large scale cultural diplomacy initiative.
3.	Insight	2000	Malaysia	An International Bharatanatyam Festival
4.	The Asia-Pacific Dance Festival	2002	Hawai	Brought together tradition and contemporary dancers from across Asia.
5.	Dance Intense Festival	2004	UK	
6.	Darbar Festival London	2006	London	Rooted in tradition but curated with modern presentation
7.	Samarpana –Asian Festival of Classical Dances	2010	Singapore	Fusion performances
8.	Maximum India Festival	2011	USA	Brought together 500 artists

Note- The detail of the festival is taken from the written experiences shared by the Indian critic Dr. Sunil Kothari from an online platform called Narthaki . (D. S. Kothari, Narthaki.com).



Engendered Dance Festival, New York

Engendered Dance Festival, New York from 20th April to 25th April, 2010, was designed to raise awareness and address issues of LGBT community, it is a matter of pride and power for India. (D. S. Kothari, Engendered Dance Festival, New York, April 20-25, 2010)



Engendered Dance Festival Poster
Source- Narthaki.com/info/gtsk17.html

It was a historical celebration as many Indian artist like Chandralekha, Nighat Choudhary, Uttara Asha Coorwala, Gulab Hussain Maharaj, Madhavi Mudgal, Alarmell Velli etc. were there, some contemporary choreographies and classical and traditional dances of India were also performed.

The festival of India in U.S.A.

In March 2011, a major cultural festival was held at the Kennedy Centre, USA, in collaboration with ICCR and the U.S. Federal Government, curated by Alicia Adams. It showcased India's rich cultural diversity through dance, theatre, music, crafts, art exhibitions, Indian cuisine etc. ranging from folk Bhangra to classical performance of maestro like Ustad Zakir Hussain. Highlights of the program included Ratan Thiyam's Manipuri adaptation of "When We Dead Awaken" by Ibsen which was immensely praised by The New York Times, classical dance segment called Samanvaya

and actors like Naseeruddin Shah and Shabana Azmi also made a strong presence. The festival showcased India's cultural strength and enhanced appreciation on global diaspora. Curator Alicia Adams emphasized its role in fostering cross-cultural understanding specially amongst American audience, while Suresh Goel quoted "through this impact of Indian arts would be making on American audiences and India being looked upon as a major power in international political arena". (D. S. Kothari, Maximum India)

Samarpana Festival

In 2012 from 14th to 16th September the University of Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore conducted the first edition of the Asian festival of classical dance as Samarpana . It featured renowned Indian classical dancers globally, specially from kuala Lumpur, Indonesia, Minneapolis, etc.



Ramakatha
Photos courtesy: Shrutilaya



Priyadarsini Govind
Photo courtesy: Shrutilaya



Academic Initiatives

Sno.	Academic Initiative	Year	Place	Purpose
1.	IFMC (international folk music council conference)	1950	London, United Kingdoms	To preserve, study, and promote folk music and dance globally.
2.	Oxford Dance symposium UK- in Amsterdam	1999	Amsterdam, UK	Indian classical dances were featured through papers and lecture–demonstrations, seminar etc.
3.	DanceIntense residency	2009	Birmingham, United Kingdom.	indicated the craze of Indian dance in UK and Canada.
4.	Indian Dance in Global Age Symposium	2013	Berlin	To discuss the evolution, challenges, and global positioning of Indian dance.
5.	Oxford Odissi Festival and workshops	2016	Oxford, United Kingdom.	To showcase Odissi and promote its learning among global audiences.
6.	Dances of India	2021	New Delhi	a global virtual celebration of Indian dances

Seminar Organized in Amsterdam on Indian Dance

A three-day seminar from 19th November to 21st November 2008 was held as CREA auditorium of department of

Musicology in the University of Amsterdam. The theme of the seminar was connected with a broader vision and project called “India and the World: The Performing Arts”. It aimed to explore the connection of Indian music with the global music traditions, Mohan Ayyar Photos courtesy: Prof. Sanjoy Bandopadhyay Kolkata inviting scholars from Afghan, Iran, Africa, it also included the screening of films on an excellent scale. It was a kind of sequel to the conference that ITC Sangeet Research Academy did to look upon the music of India and to west.



Mohan Ayyar
Photos courtesy: Prof Sanjoy
Bandopadhyay Kolkata

Dance Intense Toronto, Canada

It was held at York university from 25th July to 9th August, 2009, it was a choreography workshop named “Hot on The Heels”, organized by Sampradaya Dance Creation and Sampad organization of South Asian Dance Birmingham, UK and the Faculty of Fine Arts and Dance Department of York University. Sampradaya dance creations were showcasing Bharatanatyam on global level as world art form, through this workshop for kathak, Odissi, Mayurbhanj Chhau and contemporary dance by Kumudini Lakhia ji, Ramli Ibrahim, Santosh Nair, Brian Brophy, Shobha Jeyasingh respectively, took place, many other artists were also a part of it. Workshop was videotaped, indicated the craze of Indian dance in UK and Canada.

Conference on Indian classical music and dance

Three days conference in 27th to 2-3 October 2009 in Raleigh Durham, North Carolina center for south Asian studies and NC Arts council on Indian classical Music and Dance Society conference. The theme for the conference was traditional art form responding to contemporary realities.

Government policies

Indian government has taken numerous initiatives in post-independence era like foundation of institutions for cultural expansion in India and abroad, it established SPIC MACAY and CCRT for promotion of arts amongst

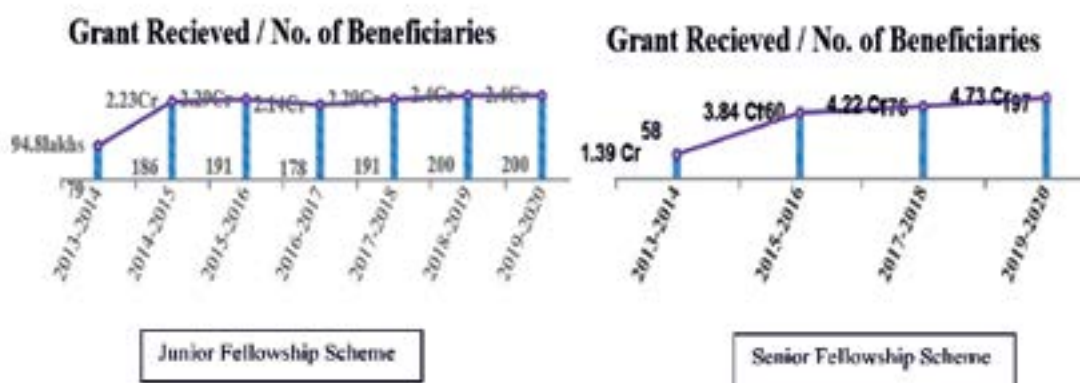


youth and integrate arts into school education. Under cultural exchange program (CEP) India hosted many festivals of India in abroad which have discussed above, 1993 onwards India started establishing Indian Cultural Centers abroad (graphical representation is given below from 2003- 2023). In 1995 Guru shishya Parampara scheme was launched for revival of traditional training methods. ICCR and MEA began integrating official outreach programs. In 2000 bilateral cultural exchange agreements were signed and afterwards “Incredible India” campaign included performing arts branding worldwide. 2015 was a turning point as under Kala Sanskriti Vikas Yojana financial assistance were given to the artist by launching Scheme for financial Assistance to cultural organization and scholarships for foreign nationals were launched under ICCR. 2018 – Artist pension scheme under Seva Bhoj Yojana. In 2020 because of covid-19 hit digitalization took over and concerts, online workshops, online festivals etc. were held, leading to digital initiatives. A2A portal launched in 2017-18 by MEA for student management, junior fellowship, senior fellowship, General Cultural Scholarship and scholarship to young artists. Digitalized efforts for training have been taken by ICCR in collaboration with Routes 2 Roots and CCRT to provide online classes of Indian classical dance forms.

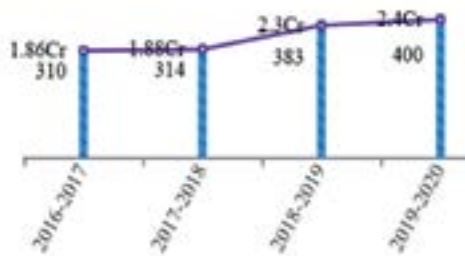
Data driven analysis - Soft Power Expansion Through Indian Performing Arts

As per Press Information Bureau (PIB) govt. of India, MOC implemented a scheme called “Global Engagement” on 27th march 2025. It aims to promote India’s culture globally, foreign ties, bilateral contact, projection of cultural identity on world stage. As on date MOC has undergoing negotiation with 144 countries under CEP (cultural exchange program), in above listed countries there are 26 African, 21 Asian, 22 European, 14 American Countries, and Australia. After going through the in-depth study of the funds granted for financial assistance by MOC, MEA and Ministry of Tourism, and ICCR. A table is presented below showing the grants given for growth for performing arts (as per Ministry of Culture).

Name of the Grant	Year from	Grants Received	Recipient	To Latest Year data	Grants Received	Recipient	Percentage Increase in Grants
Guru Shishya Parampara	2015-2016	42.69 Cr	577	2022-23	73.55 Cr	1977	72.29%
Cultural function and production	2018-2019	32.89 Cr	0	2022-2023	36.94 Cr	1878	12.31%
Senior Fellowship Scheme	2013-2014	1.39Cr	58	2019-2020	4.73Cr	197	240.29%
Scholarship to young artists	2016-2017	1.86Cr	310	2019-2020	2.4Cr	400	29.03%
Junior Fellowship scheme	2013-2014	0.95Cr	79	2019-2020	2.4Cr	200	152.63%

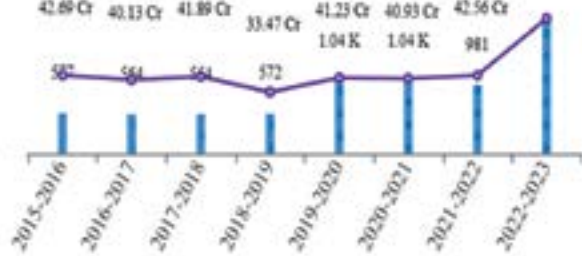


Grant Received / No. of Beneficiaries

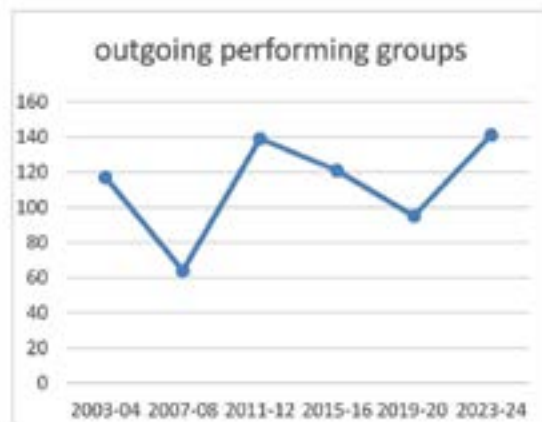
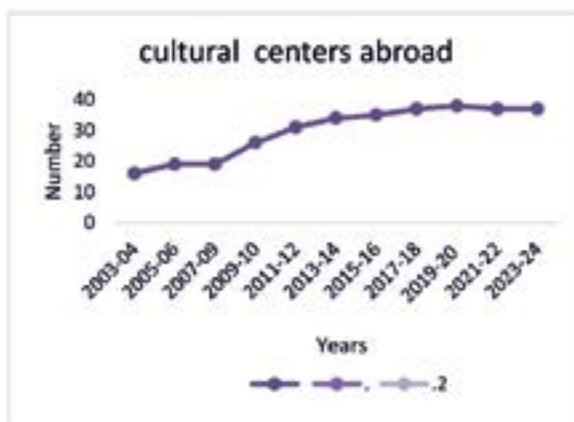


Scholarship to young artists

Grant Received / No. of Beneficiaries



Guru Shishya Parampara



With the analysis of the above data a significant growth in the grants can be seen, leading to more opportunities for the artist in India and abroad. These grants supported many artists in different ways from learning under the guidance of great gurus to showcasing India’s performing arts in the foreign countries. It also helped India to improved cultural relations and diplomacy on global diaspora, contributing India directly to become a soft power.

Conclusion

The objective visualized by the Government of India to establish, strengthen and promote cross-cultural relation, cultural diplomacy, global influence over the world, is visibly being achieved through efforts, historical events and art of legendary maestros. Analysis of initiatives, policies and measures, along with the data of ICCR, MOC, MEA, and various institution of government of India reveals a strategic growth in promotion of cultural diplomacy. Significant increase in grants for artist led artist flourish in world. Tourism and inflow of foreign students and performers showed a significant rise as its almost doubled in past 20 years, leading to economic growth of the nation. The 2023-24 report of ICCR states “with combined efforts of MEA the institute has acquired new dimensions towards promotion of India’s cultural heritage and has emerged as a soft power”. In the array of initiatives and in the journey to establish as a “soft power” India has named numerous Guinness world record related with performing art of the nation e.g. Largest number of dancers performing together Indian classical and folk dances, many such records are made by the individual art forms in different places and time. Making a worldly presence by creating a world record for the longest classical dance performance in world at famous Khajuraho Festival where 139 artists danced for 24 hours.

Indian Performing arts has globally transformed its image through the numerous initiatives taken by the Indian govt., shaping cross-cultural, relations, cultural diplomacy, and global influence, it is standing as an enduring bridge beyond geopolitical borders and as an instrument of soft power.



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