



Knowledge Diplomacy

This article is based on [“Knowledge and diplomacy”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 03/03/2021. It talks about the declining role of India in knowledge diplomacy.

Recently, the launch of Brazil’s Amazonia-1 satellite by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the export of the Covid-19 vaccine to Brazil, as part of its “Vaccine Maitri” diplomacy, reflects how India’s knowledge economy can contribute to the diplomatic capital of the country.

Space and pharma sector’s global success points to the knowledge industry’s diplomatic potential and to India’s “soft power.”

In the past, India’s knowledge sector has helped the country to become a role model for other developing nations to develop into the knowledge economy.

However, in recent times India lost this leadership in the knowledge economy, barring sectors like space, pharma, and information technology.

What is the Knowledge Economy?

- The knowledge economy is an economic system in which goods and services are based principally on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to a rapid pace of advancement in technical and scientific innovation.
- The key element of value is the greater dependence on human capital and intellectual property for the source of innovative ideas, information and practices.
- Knowledge economy features a highly skilled workforce within the microeconomic and macroeconomic environment; institutions and industries create jobs that demand specialized skills to meet global market needs.
- In principle, one’s primary individual capital is knowledge and the ability to perform to create economic value. Knowledge is viewed as an additional input to labour and capital.

What is Knowledge Diplomacy?

- Knowledge diplomacy refers to international higher education, research and innovation, in building and strengthening relations between and among countries.
- It presents a new approach to international relations where education, science, technology, and innovation, play an important role in global developmental politics.
- Knowledge diplomacy recognizes that many domestic issues are now global issues; and conversely, many global challenges are now domestic challenges.
- Knowledge diplomacy recognizes that as the world becomes increasingly globalized, the interconnected and interdependent world presents new issues, threats, and opportunities that one nation cannot address alone.

Examples of India’s Knowledge Diplomacy

- India's knowledge diplomacy history goes back as early as the 1950s, when many developing countries looked to India to access development-oriented knowledge.
- Students from across Asia and Africa sought admission to Indian universities for postgraduate courses.
- Indian expertise was sought by global organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).
- South Korea's government even sent its economists to the Indian Planning Commission till the early 1960s to be trained in long-term planning. By the 1970s, Korea was beginning to overtake India as a modern industrial economy.
- Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES), which was also established by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1974, acquired a global profile with business in Africa and Asia.
- The development of India's dairy and livestock economy also attracted global interest.
- Today, due to self-sufficiency in space and the pharma sector, India can place satellites of several countries into space at globally competitive rates and can supply drugs and vaccines at affordable prices to developing countries.

Challenges to Leadership in Knowledge Diplomacy

- **Brain Drain:** In India, the flight of Indian talent began in the 1970s and has since accelerated. Due to the better career prospects, this has sharply increased in recent years.
- **Competition From China:** China has emerged as a major competitor offering equally good, if not better quality, S&T products and services at a lower cost.
 - While India has maintained its lead in IT software, China has developed competitive capabilities in space, pharma, railways and several other knowledge-based industries.
- **Racing South-East Asian Countries:** The Indian familiarity with the English language and the still good quality of teaching in mathematics and statistics have enabled Indian firms to remain competitive in data processing, business process outsourcing, and software services.
 - However, the competitive edge is beginning to blunt due to the competition from south-east Asian countries.
- **Deteriorating Education Standards:** The biggest setback in India's knowledge economy's global appeal has been in higher education.
 - Overseas students were drawn to Indian universities and institutions because they offered good quality education at a fraction of developed country institutions' cost.
 - The appeal of education in India for overseas students has waned.
- **Deteriorating Social Environment:** Further, Indian institutions attract fewer foreign students not just because the quality of education offered in most institutions is below par, but due to the growing assertion of narrow-minded ideologies, the social environment offered here is no longer as cosmopolitan as it used to be.

Way Forward

- **Replicating Space and Pharma Success Story:** If ISRO's global competitiveness is a tribute to public policy and government support, the pharma sector's global success is a tribute to private enterprise and middle-class talent in pharmacology and biotechnology.
 - India's current global diplomacy in the fields of space and pharmaceuticals, engaging several countries around the world, is the fruit of 50 years of sustained state support for "atmanirbharta" in both fields.
 - Thus, there is a need for replicating the success story of Space and Pharma in other knowledge sectors.
- **Addressing Brain Drain:** The government and private sector needs to create better career prospects for Indian talent. This can help create a "brain bank" on which India can draw for its own development.
- **Raising Education Standards:** India's education sector is in a dire need of education reforms if India wants to make its human resource compete with the global talent.
 - It is not only imperative for leveraging knowledge diplomacy but fulfilling the aspiration of a billion-plus country.

Conclusion

Today, space and pharma are at the apex of a narrow pyramid of India's knowledge diplomacy. However, much more is needed to be done to leverage the full potential of knowledge diplomacy.

Drishti Mains Question

Indian 'atmanirbharta' in space and pharmaceuticals is an exception. It must be the norm. Comment.

This editorial is based on [“Reviving the Iran deal: On Biden attempt to revive JCPOA”](#) published in The Hindu on February 26th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.

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