

Urdu as Soft Power: Language, Diaspora, and India's Cultural Diplomacy in the Gulf States

*Journal of Asian
Social Science Research*
2026, Vol. 8, No. 1: 87-114
<https://cassr.net/jassr/>
© The Author(s) 2026

Mohammad Shahnawaz*

Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

Abstract

Large-scale South Asian migration to the Gulf since the 1970s has created enduring linguistic and cultural connections between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council states. Despite the substantial Indian diaspora in the region, research on India's diaspora diplomacy has concentrated mainly on labour, remittances, trade, and strategic relations, leaving Urdu's role in cultural influence insufficiently examined. This article investigates how Urdu functions as a soft-power resource in the Gulf and assesses its place within India's official cultural diplomacy. Using a qualitative multi-method design based on secondary sources, it analyses peer-reviewed scholarship, policy documents, institutional reports, Urdu literary materials, news coverage, organisational records, and digital archives. The findings show that Urdu operates as a heritage language, lingua franca, medium of cultural memory, and platform for transnational interaction through literary events, organisations, cinema, music, education, journalism, and digital media. However, these activities are sustained largely by expatriate civil society and remain weakly incorporated into state policy. The article contributes to soft-power scholarship by conceptualising Urdu as relational linguistic soft power produced through diaspora networks. It concludes that stronger institutional partnerships with Urdu organisations could enhance cultural diplomacy, provided their autonomy and community-based character are preserved.

Key Words: Cultural diplomacy, diaspora networks, Gulf Cooperation Council, India-Gulf relations, linguistic soft power, mushaira, public diplomacy, transnationalism, Urdu

* Corresponding author:

Mohammad Shahnawaz

Centre For West Asian Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

Email: mdshahnawaz835@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Language is an important yet insufficiently examined dimension of the Indian diaspora's contribution to India's international standing. India's linguistic diversity has long attracted global interest, while its languages, literary traditions, and popular culture constitute significant resources for cultural diplomacy. Like many states, India supports the teaching and promotion of its languages abroad as a means of facilitating cultural exchange, sustaining connections with overseas communities, and enhancing its international visibility. Nevertheless, the role of particular Indian languages in producing diplomatic influence remains poorly understood.

This question is especially relevant to India's relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. India and the Gulf are connected by more than two millennia of commercial, maritime, and cultural exchange. Their contemporary relationship is commonly understood through three interrelated dimensions: economics, energy, and expatriates. Trade and investment have expanded, the Gulf remains central to India's energy security, and approximately nine million Indian citizens live and work in GCC countries. This diaspora is therefore not merely a source of remittances or labour. It also shapes everyday perceptions of India and contributes to the social foundations of India–Gulf relations.

Indian communities in the Gulf have generally acquired a reputation for being peaceful, adaptable, tolerant, and industrious, including under difficult working and social conditions. Such perceptions can reinforce goodwill toward India and support cordial bilateral relations. Yet, the Indian diaspora is neither socially nor linguistically homogeneous. Large numbers of migrants originate from the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana, while others come from northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan. Urdu is therefore the first language of a substantial section of the diaspora, although not of the majority.

Its influence, however, extends beyond the number of native speakers. Urdu functions as a widely intelligible medium of communication among sections of the broader South Asian population in the Gulf, including Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. Its circulation has also been strengthened by Hindi–Urdu cinema, music, television, and other forms of popular culture. As a result, Urdu possesses an interactive and cultural reach that exceeds its formal demographic position as a first language (Taukeer 2022). It connects communities across national and religious

boundaries and provides a shared vocabulary through which cultural familiarity, memory, and belonging are negotiated.

This article examines how Urdu operates as a cultural resource through which India's image, social presence, and relationships with the Gulf states may be strengthened. It approaches Urdu not simply as a language associated with a particular religious community, but as a shared literary and civilisational inheritance. Urdu is spoken as a first language by approximately 70 million people and as a second language by more than 100 million. Although it is Pakistan's official national language, it is also constitutionally recognised as one of India's scheduled languages. Substantial Urdu-speaking communities are present in the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, North America, and other parts of the world, while its mutual intelligibility with Hindi considerably expands its communicative reach (Britannica 2026).

The analytical starting point is Joseph Nye's concept of soft power: the capacity to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or material inducement. In Nye's formulation, culture, political values, and ideas can become sources of international influence when they are regarded as legitimate or attractive by external audiences (Nye 2004; 2008). Language is relevant to each of these dimensions. It carries cultural narratives, communicates values, sustains communities of interpretation, and can create durable emotional and intellectual connections across national boundaries.

Despite the extensive literature generated by Nye's work, language remains underdeveloped as a distinct category of soft-power analysis. Studies of public and cultural diplomacy identify foreign-language education, international broadcasting, and cultural institutions as important channels through which states and non-state actors engage foreign publics. Cull (2008), for example, includes international broadcasting and cultural diplomacy within his broader taxonomy of public diplomacy. More recent research shows that language education may be promoted through the diplomatic agency of teachers, cultural organisations, and other local actors (Cabaña Rojas 2025), while institutions such as Confucius Institutes combine language teaching, cultural programming, and academic engagement within broader public-diplomacy strategies (Shuto 2018). International broadcasters similarly seek to communicate national perspectives and strengthen international visibility, although their effectiveness depends on institutional support, credibility, and audience reception (Morales 2021; Santos 2024). Historical cases also demonstrate how states have used language to project cultural authority. France

promoted French as a language of diplomacy and elite culture, while Britain and the United States subsequently used international broadcasting institutions such as the BBC and Voice of America to disseminate political and cultural narratives.

Much of this scholarship, however, concentrates on globally dominant languages and on the institutions maintained by powerful states. It consequently tells us more about deliberate state projection than about the international influence generated through the everyday practices of mobile communities. Phillipson's concept of "linguistic imperialism" provides an important critique of the relationship between language expansion and unequal structures of power (Phillipson 1992). His analysis demonstrates how colonial languages were institutionalised in ways that marginalised local languages and reproduced political and economic hierarchies. Yet, this framework primarily addresses languages associated with colonial or geopolitical dominance. It offers less insight into how non-dominant languages may generate attraction, familiarity, and cultural influence without being imposed by a powerful state.

This limitation is also visible in scholarship on Indian diasporic cultures. Recent research shows that literature, film, photography, social media, and other representational practices shape how South Asian diasporic communities negotiate identity, memory, belonging, and their relationships with real or imagined homelands (Clini and Valančiūnas 2021). Indian-language cultural production is also increasingly transnational. Bengali- and Marathi-language digital creators, for example, build relationships with dispersed audiences through shared linguistic and cultural affiliations (Mehta 2020). In the Gulf context, Malayalam literature has begun to receive scholarly attention as a medium through which migrants represent displacement, political exclusion, and the relationship between homeland and host society, although the literary and cultural dimensions of Indian migration to the region remain less studied than its economic and anthropological aspects (Dakkak 2023). More broadly, Indian literary production continues to be mediated disproportionately through English, even as translations from Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, and other Indian languages have gained greater institutional recognition (Vytla 2026; Telugu 2022). Within this uneven field, research connecting Urdu diasporic cultural practices to Indian foreign policy or cultural diplomacy in the Gulf remains limited.

The available scholarship nevertheless provides important foundations. Research on Urdu-speaking families in the United Kingdom shows that Urdu is maintained through home communication, literacy practices, and

parental language management as a means of sustaining cultural continuity and enriching children's multilingual repertoires. Such efforts, however, are constrained by English-dominant education, unequal access to literacy resources, and wider sociopolitical conditions (Curd-Christiansen and La Morgia 2018). More broadly, heritage-language scholarship conceptualises language as a form of cultural heritage that carries collective memory, knowledge, identity, and intergenerational belonging (Eaton and Turin 2022). Research on Urdu-speaking communities in North America similarly indicates that Urdu functions as a marker of cultural memory, collective identity, and distinctiveness. Its preservation is not limited to Muslims but also involves Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other South Asians, challenging attempts to associate Urdu exclusively with a single religious identity (Chapparan and Shaheen 2025).

Comparable multilingual processes are evident in the Gulf. Alasmari et al. (2026) show that Urdu remains central to cultural identity among North Indian Muslim families in Saudi Arabia, while Arabic supports religious education and social integration and English facilitates academic and professional aspirations. Research involving other migrant communities in Saudi Arabia likewise finds that heritage languages sustain identity and social cohesion through family interaction, community networks, and digital communication, even as Arabic dominates many public domains (Al-khreshah 2026). This multilingual configuration suggests that Urdu's cultural influence in the Gulf does not depend on replacing Arabic or English. Instead, it operates relationally alongside them, serving different but interconnected cultural, religious, social, and professional functions.

A significant research gap therefore remains. Existing studies rarely investigate non-dominant languages as resources of soft power, particularly when their influence emerges through diasporic interaction rather than coordinated state policy. Even less attention has been paid to Urdu's role in the Gulf, despite the size of the Indian and wider South Asian populations, Urdu's cross-community intelligibility, and the strategic importance of India–GCC relations. Scholarship has examined Urdu as a literary tradition, identity marker, heritage language, or medium of communal belonging, but has not adequately explained how these functions may produce wider diplomatic effects.

To address this gap, the article develops a relational understanding of linguistic soft power. Relational soft power differs from models centred exclusively on deliberate state projection. It arises through repeated social encounters, cultural practices, emotional attachments, and networks of interaction. Diaspora communities are not simply passive carriers

of a national culture designed by the state. Through their everyday communication and cultural activities, they participate in producing, negotiating, and sometimes transforming the meanings associated with their country of origin.

From this perspective, Urdu mushairas, ghazal evenings, literary associations, cultural festivals, films, music, and digitally circulated cultural content can generate soft-power effects even when they are not organised as official instruments of Indian diplomacy. Such practices sustain emotional connections between migrants and the homeland, create spaces of interaction among diverse South Asian communities, and introduce Arab audiences to cultural forms associated with India. Urdu's diplomatic relevance therefore lies not only in the number of people who speak it, but also in the relationships, cultural memories, and shared experiences that it enables.

The article asks two related questions: How does Urdu function as a relational soft-power resource among Indian and South Asian communities in the Gulf? To what extent has the Indian state recognised and incorporated this diasporic cultural resource into its engagement with GCC countries? The central argument is that Urdu already produces meaningful soft-power effects through diasporic and cultural practices, but these effects remain largely informal and insufficiently recognised within India's cultural-diplomacy strategy. India has benefited from Urdu's relational influence without systematically supporting, coordinating, or integrating it into its Gulf policy.

The article makes three contributions. First, it extends soft-power scholarship by conceptualising language-based influence as relational and diaspora-generated rather than exclusively state-directed. Second, it brings a non-dominant and postcolonial language into a literature still shaped primarily by the experiences of globally powerful languages. Third, it connects Urdu cultural practices in the Gulf with the broader study of India–GCC relations, demonstrating that expatriate communities contribute not only economically but also culturally and diplomatically.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative, multi-method design based entirely on secondary data. It combines documentary analysis of Indian diplomatic and cultural policies, textual analysis of Urdu literary and cultural materials, and qualitative content analysis of digital archives relating to Urdu activities in the Gulf states. This approach enables comparison between formal,

state-led cultural diplomacy and informal cultural practices generated by diaspora communities.

The sources include official documents, institutional reports, peer-reviewed scholarship, Urdu literary materials, news articles, blogs, organisational websites, and digital records of cultural events. Urdu-language news and blogs were included because peer-reviewed research on Urdu cultural activity in the Gulf remains limited. These sources were used mainly to identify events, organisations, cultural practices, and public representations.

The materials were analysed thematically. Official sources were examined to determine whether and how Urdu appeared in India's diaspora and cultural-diplomacy policies. Literary and digital materials were analysed to identify how Urdu circulated through poetry gatherings, literary associations, music, films, festivals, and online cultural content. Findings across source types were compared through triangulation and interpreted using the concept of relational linguistic soft power.

The study involved no participants, recruitment, interviews, surveys, focus groups, or ethnographic observation. As it relied on publicly available secondary materials, no private personal data were collected. However, institutional and promotional sources were treated cautiously because they may exaggerate audience size, impact, or public significance.

The reliance on secondary data limits the study's ability to capture participants' motivations, linguistic identities, and perceptions of India's cultural diplomacy. It also cannot establish a direct causal relationship between Urdu cultural activities and changes in public attitudes toward India. The findings should therefore be understood as an analysis of potential and observable soft-power processes rather than a measurement of diplomatic impact. Future research should combine this approach with interviews, participant observation, and a more systematic search and coding protocol.

RESULTS

India's Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy has become an important dimension of international relations. It involves the exchange of language, art, ideas, and other forms of cultural expression between countries. As an instrument of soft power, cultural diplomacy enables states to build relationships, advance national interests, and support wider political and economic objectives.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) provides the principal institutional foundation for India's official cultural diplomacy. Established in 1950, it seeks to develop, strengthen, and revitalise cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries. The earlier establishment of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in 1943 also contributed to the institutional development of India's international cultural and intellectual engagement (Kundra, Bhattacharya, and Sarwal 2025).

The ICCR operates cultural centres, administers scholarship and exchange programmes, supports chairs in Indian studies at foreign universities, and organises cultural activities through Indian diplomatic missions. Since independence, India has used its diverse cultural heritage, including classical arts, spiritual traditions, cuisine, cinema, and languages, to strengthen international relationships and promote mutual understanding. Its cultural diplomacy has increasingly combined the promotion of national heritage with efforts to convert international interest in Indian culture into durable diplomatic connections. Initiatives such as International Day of Yoga celebrations, film festivals, language programmes, and academic exchanges have played an important role in cultivating goodwill and building relationships based on shared values and respect for cultural diversity (Pattnaik and Panda 2025).

Within this broader framework, language serves both as a medium of communication and as a vehicle of cultural exchange. Every language embodies the histories, values, and cultural practices of the communities that use it. Language promotion can therefore extend a country's cultural presence beyond its territorial boundaries and create new forms of social and diplomatic connection.

Urdu is particularly significant in this regard. It has an international presence and functions as a lingua franca among many South Asian communities in the Gulf. Its influence is not limited to everyday communication. Urdu also circulates through literature, poetry, music, cinema, education, and cultural events. Its inclusion in university programmes and formal curricula in several countries further demonstrates its continuing intellectual and cultural relevance. These characteristics make Urdu a potentially important, although still insufficiently recognised, resource within India's cultural diplomacy.

History of Migration and the Urdu Diaspora

Migration is a fundamental feature of human history. People relocate for economic, political, social, cultural, and personal reasons, creating enduring connections between places of origin and destination. These movements often produce new communities and hybrid cultural identities. As Telugu observes, “in this context of new community formation, the term diaspora finds its place in literature” (Telugu 2022).

The term *diaspora* derives from the Greek words *dia*, meaning “through” or “over,” and *speirein*, meaning “to scatter” or “to sow.” In its broadest sense, diaspora refers to migrant communities that live or settle outside their place of origin while retaining an awareness of their collective identity and maintaining social, cultural, political, or emotional ties with their homeland (Abraham 2012). Historically, the term was used by the ancient Greeks to describe populations who moved into conquered territories as part of colonial expansion. It later became closely associated with the dispersal of Jewish communities. Over time, however, its meaning expanded to include migrant groups characterised by deterritorialised or transnational identities (Vertovec 1997).

Diaspora should not be understood solely in geographical terms. It may also be organised around language, region, culture, or shared historical experience. This is evident in the formation of numerous Indian linguistic and regional diasporas, including Kashmiri, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Odia, and Malayali communities.

The Urdu diaspora similarly maintains a strong sense of linguistic and cultural belonging across national borders. Urdu-speaking migrants from South Asia often preserve the language not merely as a means of communication but also as a marker of identity, heritage, and cultural sensibility. In diasporic settings, Urdu can provide an emotional sense of home and continuity with the past (Chapparban and Shaheen 2025).

Chapparban and Shaheen define the Urdu diaspora as the sociocultural formation or reorganisation of Urdu-speaking communities following their migration to non-Urdu-speaking national and transnational spaces. These communities have largely migrated from Urdu-speaking regions of India and Pakistan to Europe, North America, Australia, the Caribbean, Africa, and the Gulf states (Chapparban and Shaheen 2025, 30).

Modern Indian migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries expanded substantially after the oil boom of the 1970s. The resulting diaspora now comprises more than 8.5 million people. As these communities grew,

poets, writers, journalists, and literary enthusiasts also established cultural networks across the Gulf.

This development encouraged the publication of Urdu newspapers, magazines, and regional Gulf editions. Literary organisations were founded, while poetry recitals, literary gatherings, and cultural festivals became increasingly common across GCC countries. Local writers and poets participated alongside prominent expatriate poets, authors, and literary critics from India and Pakistan. These activities strengthened Urdu's literary presence and contributed to the emergence of the Gulf as an important transnational centre of Urdu cultural production.

Migrant or *Mahjar* Literature: Urdu Between Homeland and Host Society

The term *Mahjar*, derived from the Arabic word *hijrah*, meaning migration, originally referred to the literary movement created by Syrian and Lebanese writers who migrated to the Americas during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Mahjar* writers contributed to several literary genres and were also active as journalists and political activists, although their most influential work was in poetry. Ameen Rihani and Kahlil Gibran were among the movement's most prominent figures (Abu-Remaileh 2023). The writings of *Mahjar* poets and intellectuals also influenced Arab nationalism, particularly during the *Nahda* and subsequent anti-colonial movements.

Urdu developed in northern India from the Khari Boli dialect during approximately the twelfth or thirteenth century. It emerged through the interaction of local speech with Persian and Arabic vocabulary and was known by names such as Hindavi and Rekhta before the term Urdu became widely established in the late eighteenth century (Naqvi 1997). Once largely confined to the Indian subcontinent, Urdu has since developed a substantial international presence. It is now used and studied across Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and Australia. Universities and other institutions in countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia teach Urdu for academic, cultural, geopolitical, and diasporic purposes (Chapparban and Shaheen 2025).

As Urdu-speaking communities migrated in search of employment and security, the language travelled with them. New Urdu-speaking communities consequently emerged outside South Asia. Urdu-language radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, literary associations, and poetry gatherings became increasingly prominent in the United States, Canada,

the United Kingdom, and the Gulf states. These institutions helped migrants maintain connections with their homelands while also adapting their language and cultural practices to new social environments.

An earlier form of Urdu migration followed the First War of Independence of 1857, when many people from the Indian subcontinent were transported, sometimes forcibly or deceptively, to colonies such as Mauritius, Fiji, and Suriname. A substantial proportion of these migrants spoke Urdu. Despite displacement and difficult living conditions, they preserved elements of their cultural identity through language, and Urdu continues to be used in some of these communities (Ekramuddin 2024).

Later migration produced more permanent Urdu diasporas in Europe and North America. Many migrants acquired citizenship in their host countries while continuing to use Urdu as a language of identity, memory, and literary expression. Their writings may be classified as diasporic or *Mahjari* literature because they reflect the experience of permanent settlement, cultural displacement, and negotiation between homeland and host society.

Ekramuddin (2024), however, distinguishes this literature from the writing of temporary expatriates. Expatriates live outside their home countries, usually for employment, without necessarily acquiring citizenship or settling permanently. Their work is therefore described as expatriate literature rather than *Mahjari* literature. This category is particularly relevant to Urdu-speaking migrants from India and Pakistan living in the Gulf states.

Urdu has become an important language of communication among these expatriate communities. Literary organisations, poetry gatherings, newspapers, magazines, and cultural events have provided spaces in which Urdu speakers sustain their linguistic heritage and interact across national boundaries. Although diasporic and expatriate writers occupy different social and legal positions, both groups contribute to the international circulation of Urdu. This study therefore considers how their literary and cultural activities strengthen Urdu's presence in the Gulf and contribute to India's wider cultural diplomacy.

The Indian Expatriate Community in the Gulf States

The Indian diaspora has a long history of cultural exchange with West Asia and has contributed significantly to India's cultural diplomacy in the region. India's connections with the Arab world date back to antiquity, as reflected in trade between the Harappan and Dilmun civilisations. In

the pre-Islamic period, Arab merchants also facilitated trade between merchants in Bharuch, Gujarat, and Mediterranean markets through Alexandria. The widespread surname *al-Hindi* in Arab societies and the continued use of *Hind* as a female name further reflect these longstanding connections (Nadvi 1993).

These relations expanded during the Islamic period. Under the Abbasid Caliphate, Indian knowledge in mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and cosmology influenced Arabic scholarship. Indian intellectual traditions also contributed to Islamic legal and Quranic studies over several centuries (Ahmad 1969). Scholars such as Shah Waliullah, Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, and Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadvi later strengthened intellectual and cultural links between India and the Arab world. Many of these scholars wrote in both Urdu and Arabic, demonstrating the importance of language in sustaining cross-regional exchange.

Indo-Arab interaction also shaped literary traditions. Several Indian works were translated into Arabic during the Abbasid period. The *Panchatantra*, for example, circulated in Arabic as *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and became part of a wider tradition of transregional storytelling associated with works such as *Aesop's Fables* and *The Arabian Nights*. Arabic vocabulary entered Indian languages, including Urdu and Hindi, while Arab scholars acknowledged the adoption of Indian numerals (Nadvi 1993).

These civilisational ties developed into broader political, commercial, and cultural exchanges during the medieval period, particularly through relations among the Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman empires. Gulf Arab merchants also maintained close connections with Indian coastal regions, especially Kerala, where an early mosque was established in 629 CE. Over time, commercial interaction expanded into social, religious, and linguistic exchange.

This prolonged contact encouraged mutual borrowing between Arabic and Indian languages (Table 1). Arabic terms entered Urdu, Hindi, and other Indian languages, while words of Indian origin became part of Gulf Arabic dialects. One example is *seedaa*, meaning “straight,” which derives from Hindi or Urdu. In the United Arab Emirates, it is used in directions, as in *ruh seeda* (“go straight”), and metaphorically, as in *ana insan seeda* (“I am a straightforward person”) (Salisu 2020).

These historical and linguistic exchanges provide the wider context for understanding the contemporary Indian expatriate community in the Gulf. They show that present-day migration and cultural diplomacy are rooted in older patterns of trade, intellectual exchange, religious interaction, and linguistic adaptation.

Table 1 Samples of Hindi/Urdu Loanwords in Gulf Arabic Vernacular

English Transliteration	Arabic Script	Meaning in English
Karak	كَرَكْ	(A strong) tea
Jāwal	جاول	Steamed rice
Bīmāh	بيمه	Insurance
Jūla	جولة	A traditional stove
Jūtī	جوتي	Shoes
Dūbī	دوبي	Laundry man
Al Bardah	البردة	Curtains
Bankāh	بنكة	Fan
Gāri	قاري	Car (or a bicycle)
Rasta	رستا	Street
TiJūri	تجوري	A safe box
Ajār	أجار	Pickles
Kajjah	كچة	Inexperience; literally “a permit to drive”

Source: Ahmed Mizwan, taken from Mohammed Salisu (2020)

During the colonial period, relations between India and the Gulf were shaped by British imperial administration. British India’s interests in the region were managed largely through the Bombay Presidency, while the Indian rupee served as legal tender in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the Trucial States, now the United Arab Emirates, until the early 1960s.

After India gained independence, the oil- and gas-rich Gulf states became increasingly important trading partners. Economic relations expanded during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as India’s demand for imported energy grew. The oil boom of the 1970s also accelerated Indian migration to the Gulf by creating extensive employment opportunities. Migrants included unskilled labourers as well as skilled professionals such as engineers, doctors, scientists, bankers, information technology specialists, and businesspeople.

The rapid economic development of the Gulf states encouraged the formation of a large and economically diverse Indian expatriate community (Biswas 2020). Over time, this community became increasingly significant to India’s relations with the region. The continued growth of Indian migration for employment and business, as shown in Table 2, has

strengthened social, economic, and cultural ties between India and the Gulf countries.

Indian expatriates have also contributed to India's cultural presence in the region. Through their everyday interactions, professional activities, and community institutions, they have acted as informal cultural ambassadors and promoted greater familiarity with Indian society and culture in the Gulf states (Abraham 2012, 126).

Table 2 Indian Expatriate Population in Gulf States (2025)

No.	Country	Estimated Number of Indians
1	Oman	676,781
2	Qatar	830,491
3	Kuwait	1,036,389
4	Saudi Arabia	2,747,551
5	Bahrain	317,564
6	UAE	4,326,248

Source: Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No- 982 Answered On- 05/12/2025

The Emergence of Urdu-Speaking Communities in the Gulf States

Urdu in the Gulf has entered a new phase shaped by digitalisation, institutional support, and sociocultural integration. Digital platforms such as the Rekhta Foundation and online *mushaira* archives have expanded access to Urdu literature among Gulf-based audiences. Social media platforms, including Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook, have also created informal but sustained channels for cultural transmission.

Urdu now serves several functions in the region. It is used as a language of identity within families, a medium of transnational entertainment and media, a lingua franca among South Asian expatriates, and a performative language at literary events such as *mushairas* and ghazal gatherings. These developments have extended Urdu beyond traditional literary preservation into digitally mediated and socially embedded forms of cultural circulation.

International poetry gatherings are regularly held in cities such as Doha, Riyadh, and Dubai, featuring poets from India, Pakistan, and the Gulf. Poetry recitals, literary discussions, commemorative events, and cultural ceremonies have strengthened Urdu's public presence.

Educational institutions established by Indian diaspora communities have also contributed to its promotion by including Urdu in their curricula. King Saud University, for example, offers Urdu as an optional language, allowing Saudi students to study it for academic and cultural purposes.

Urdu journalism has played an equally important role. Newspapers and publications associated with the Gulf, including *Kuwait Times*, *Sawt al-Khaleej*, *Arab Times*, *Gulf Times*, *Al-Madina Urdu*, *Urdu News*, and *Al-Riyadh Daily*, have contributed to Urdu-language communication in the region. Radio and television have further supported this development. South Asian migrants have long followed Urdu broadcasts from All India Radio, Radio Pakistan, Radio Ceylon, the BBC, Voice of Germany, and Voice of America to remain informed about developments in their home countries. Sharjah TV also gained popularity after introducing Urdu programming, encouraging other Gulf television channels to expand their Urdu-language broadcasts.

Diplomats and public figures with knowledge of Urdu have also supported its promotion. Unofficial estimates suggest that Urdu is among the most widely spoken languages in the Gulf, with nearly two million users. These speakers come not only from India and Pakistan but also from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Egypt, Sudan, Mauritius, the Philippines, Japan, and other countries.

Religious travel has further increased Urdu's visibility. Every year, large numbers of Urdu-speaking Indians travel to Saudi Arabia for Hajj and Umrah. In response, Saudi authorities provide Urdu-language information and services to assist pilgrims throughout their stay. Sermons delivered at the Grand Mosque in Mecca are also translated into Urdu, reflecting the language's importance for religious communication.

The practical value of Urdu became especially visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. GCC governments issued multilingual public-health information to reach expatriate communities, including Urdu-language guidelines. In the United Arab Emirates, the Abu Dhabi-based Arabic newspaper *Al-Ittihad* introduced a weekly Urdu edition to raise awareness among South Asian residents (Zain 2020).

Together, these developments demonstrate that Urdu has become an important linguistic and cultural presence in the Gulf. Its use in homes, schools, religious institutions, literary organisations, media, and digital platforms reflects the growth of a diverse Urdu-speaking diaspora embedded in the region's social and urban life.

Institutionalisation of Urdu and Cultural Networks in the Gulf States

The presence of a large South Asian diaspora has created a supportive environment for Urdu across the Gulf states. Many migrants who arrived for employment or business speak Urdu as a first or additional language and remain closely connected to Urdu literature. They have maintained ties with literary magazines and publishing networks in their countries of origin while also producing and publishing their own work in the Gulf. With the support of literary patrons and cultural activists, these writers and poets established literary organisations, magazines, and journals that strengthened Urdu's institutional presence in the region (Ahmad 2016).

This institutional infrastructure has been driven primarily by civil society and has developed largely independently of the Indian state. Bazm-e-Urdu Qatar, established in 1959, is regarded as one of the earliest Urdu organisations in the Gulf. Since then, more than a dozen literary organisations have emerged across the region. These organisations regularly conduct *mushairas*, seminars, literary discussions, and educational programmes for Urdu-speaking communities.

Prominent organisations include Bazm-e-Sukhan in Bahrain; Al-Thaqafa in Kuwait; Bazm-e-Urdu, Bombay Club Majlis-e-Farogh-e-Urdu, Emirates Urdu Society, Bazm-e-Sheer-o-Adab, Arts Promotion Bureau, Bazm-e-Iqbal, Bazm-e-Ilm-o-Fun, and Khavi Literary Circle in the United Arab Emirates; and Daira-e-Adab in Jeddah and Bazm-e-Urdu Dammam in Saudi Arabia. Through these organisations, poetry gatherings and other literary activities have become an established and continuing feature of Urdu cultural life in the Gulf.

Schools, colleges, and, increasingly, universities have also contributed to the promotion of Urdu. Their engagement has helped create a broader cultural environment in which Urdu is taught, performed, and preserved. At the same time, communities of readers, writers, and literary enthusiasts have developed in each Gulf country. These communities support Urdu cultural activities and serve as informal cultural bridges between India and the Gulf states.

The establishment of the Gulf Urdu Council further reflects efforts to connect Urdu-speaking expatriate communities across national boundaries. It demonstrates the growing institutional coordination of Urdu literary and cultural activities and the desire to sustain a vibrant transnational network among Urdu speakers in the Gulf (Ahmad 2016).

Qatar

Urdu literary activity has flourished in Qatar for several decades, particularly through *mushairas*, literary associations, and cultural programmes.

Majlis-e-Frogh-e-Urdu has operated for more than two decades and organises an annual international poetry symposium. Each year, it also honours one literary figure from India and one from Pakistan. The organisation has developed a strong reputation within Urdu literary circles (Nazmi 2017).

Bazm-e-Sadaf International, based in Doha, is another prominent literary and cultural organisation. Formally established in 2015, it promotes Urdu literature and culture internationally through the support of a fifteen-member advisory board and a network of Urdu enthusiasts across the GCC and beyond (Bazm-e-Sadaf International 2024).

Other organisations promoting Urdu in Qatar include Bazm-e-Urdu Qatar, Halqa-e-Adab Islami, Indo Qatar Urdu Markaz, Urdu International, Dastaan-e-Urdu, Anjuman Shura-e-Urdu Hind Qatar, India Urdu Society, Karwan-e-Urdu Qatar, Guzargah-e-Khayaal, the Indian Urdu Poets' Association, and Karnataka Urdu Markaz (Nazmi 2017). Together, these organisations preserve and promote Urdu by providing platforms for poetry gatherings, literary discussions, and cultural exchange.

Kuwait

Urdu was introduced to Kuwait in the early twentieth century and gradually became an important language of communication after Arabic. Initially used mainly in informal interaction among South Asian migrants, it later gained a wider presence in formal ceremonies, literary events, and cultural activities.

Afroz Alam's *Kuwait mein Adabi Pesh Raft* documents the publication of more than two hundred Urdu books in Kuwait across various genres of poetry and prose. This output demonstrates Urdu's substantial presence in the country's literary landscape (Alam 2015).

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has a large South Asian expatriate population, many of whom speak or understand Urdu. *Mushairas* have played an important role in sustaining Urdu literary culture in the country. These events are commonly organised by Indian and Pakistani diplomatic missions,

educational institutions, literary associations, business figures, and cultural patrons. They function as spaces of entertainment, literary exchange, and cross-cultural interaction, sometimes with the participation of Saudi poets and audiences.

The tradition of Urdu *mushairas* in Saudi Arabia expanded during the 1950s as migration from India increased. An earlier poetry gathering was reportedly held in Mecca in memory of Jigar Muradabadi and attended by poetry enthusiasts from India and Pakistan. In late 1956, Hassan Naeem, the Indian vice consul, organised what is described as the first official Urdu *mushaira* in Jeddah at his residence (Baloch 2010).

Urdu cultural life in Saudi Arabia also includes journalism, literary associations, and other cultural activities. *Daily Urdu News*, published in Jeddah, has circulated widely in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries (Baloch 2010). Interest in Urdu is not limited to South Asian expatriates. Some Saudi businesspeople, officials, and members of the public have developed familiarity with the language through sustained interaction with Indian and Pakistani communities.

United Arab Emirates

The large Urdu- and Hindi-speaking population in the United Arab Emirates has influenced local patterns of communication. Words of Hindi or Urdu origin have entered colloquial Emirati Arabic and, in some cases, have also influenced local place names. This linguistic borrowing reflects the long-term interaction between South Asian communities and Emirati society (Salisu 2020).

In March 2015, the UAE government conducted a public consultation on which language, in addition to Arabic and English, should be used to provide official information online. Urdu reportedly received the highest number of votes.

Urdu literary organisations are also active across the UAE. The Urdu Press Club International, the Indian Islamic Centre in Abu Dhabi, and several other organisations regularly hold *mushairas* featuring poets from India and Pakistan. The *Jashn-e-Rekhta* festival has also been held in Dubai to promote Urdu literature, poetry, music, and performance. Participants have included Javed Akhtar, Shabana Azmi, Samina Peerzada, Mahira Khan, and other prominent poets, writers, artists, and intellectuals from India and Pakistan.

Bahrain and Oman

Bahrain has developed a supportive environment for Urdu literary activity. Majlis Fakhr-e-Bahrain has made a sustained contribution to the promotion of Urdu through poetry gatherings, seminars, publications, and educational programmes. Each year, the organisation focuses on a major Urdu poet, conducts thematic sessions, and concludes its programme with an international *mushaira*.

Its activities have also included seminars in Indian cities, book publication, quiz competitions, children's *mushairas*, poetry competitions, essay-writing contests, and awards for students who demonstrate excellence in Urdu (Azmi 2017). These programmes combine literary promotion with intergenerational language preservation.

Urdu also has a long-established presence in Oman, largely because of the country's substantial South Asian expatriate population. Literary organisations and community groups regularly organise *mushairas*, seminars, and cultural events featuring poets and writers from India and Pakistan. These activities have contributed to the preservation and promotion of Urdu language and literature in the country.

DISCUSSION

The Diaspora as a Soft-Power Resource in India–Gulf Relations

The findings suggest that the Indian diaspora contributes to India's soft power in the Gulf not only through its economic and professional presence, but also through everyday cultural interaction. Indian expatriates often function as informal cultural intermediaries by introducing languages, customs, food, music, literature, and social practices to colleagues, neighbours, and host communities. Their reputation for adaptability, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and professional commitment may contribute to favourable perceptions of India, although such perceptions should not be treated as uniform across the Gulf states or among different social groups (Khanday 2019).

This interpretation is consistent with scholarship describing the diaspora as an increasingly important component of Indian foreign policy. India's early post-independence approach was largely non-interventionist, but this position gradually shifted towards active engagement, particularly after economic liberalisation in the 1990s (Rahman 2019). Influenced partly by other states' use of overseas populations for development and diplomacy, India began to view its diaspora as a strategic resource for

economic cooperation, bilateral relations, and international influence (Kundra, Bhattacharya, and Sarwal 2025).

This policy shift was institutionalised through initiatives such as the High-Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, established in 2000, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, and the introduction of the Person of Indian Origin Card. These measures reflected a broader recognition that Non-Resident Indians, Persons of Indian Origin, and Overseas Citizens of India could strengthen India's international networks and public image (Blarel 2012; Biswas 2020). In the Gulf, where approximately nine million Indians live and work, the scale and continuity of migration have made the diaspora particularly important to bilateral relations (Ahmad and Rahman 2022).

The contribution of this study is to identify language, specifically Urdu, as one of the channels through which this diaspora-generated soft power operates. Existing research has generally emphasised the diaspora's economic value, professional contributions, social reputation, and role in promoting Indian cultural forms such as yoga, Ayurveda, Bollywood, cuisine, and sport (Biswas 2020). The present analysis shows that Urdu literary and cultural practices also create forms of attraction, communication, and social connection that have received less attention in studies of India's Gulf diplomacy.

Three related processes are particularly important. The first is cultural attraction. *Mushairas*, ghazal performances, literary festivals, and Urdu cultural programmes create spaces in which Indian cultural traditions are presented to audiences beyond the immediate Indian community. Available reports suggest that these events sometimes attract Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Arab, and other participants. Such participation does not by itself demonstrate a measurable improvement in attitudes towards India. It does, however, indicate that Urdu cultural practices can bring non-Indian audiences into cultural settings associated with Indian literature, music, performance, and intellectual life.

The second process is intercommunal connection. Urdu functions as a lingua franca among sections of the South Asian population in the Gulf, including Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and other migrants who understand it through education, social interaction, cinema, music, or shared linguistic traditions (Taukeer 2022). Its use can therefore facilitate communication across national boundaries and support cultural networks that extend beyond the Indian diaspora. This suggests that India's linguistic soft power may emerge through regional and transnational interaction rather than through a narrowly national cultural sphere.

Urdu's cross-border character is significant. Because the language is associated with both India and Pakistan and is used by diverse religious and national communities, its diplomatic value cannot be understood as an exclusive expression of Indian identity. Its potential lies instead in its capacity to represent India as part of a plural, multilingual, and interconnected South Asian cultural world. This makes Urdu a relational rather than proprietary soft-power resource.

The third process is communicative infrastructure. Urdu-speaking Indian professionals, educators, translators, administrators, journalists, businesspeople, and cultural organisers contribute to everyday communication within Gulf institutions and communities. Their multilingual abilities can facilitate interaction among Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, and English speakers. This communicative role is rarely recognised as a form of soft power, yet it supports long-term familiarity and interpersonal trust in ways that formal cultural programmes may not easily reproduce.

The findings therefore extend the concept of diaspora soft power in two ways. First, they show that cultural influence is not produced solely through official diplomacy. It can also emerge from routine social relationships, literary associations, media practices, educational institutions, and community events. Second, they demonstrate that a non-dominant language can generate cultural influence without functioning as a language of global political or economic dominance.

Urdu organisations in the Gulf illustrate this process clearly. Associations such as Bazm-e-Adab, Bazm-e-Iqbal, Bazm-e-Ilm-o-Fun, Khavi Literary Circle, Daira-e-Adab in Jeddah, and Bazm-e-Urdu Dammam sustain cultural activities through locally established networks. These organisations are generally rooted in civil society rather than created by the Indian government. Their activities indicate that cultural diplomacy may develop from below, with the state entering later as a supporter, partner, or beneficiary.

Official initiatives have nevertheless contributed to this environment. Indian diplomatic missions have supported cultural programmes, including ghazal and qawwali performances, cultural weeks, seminars, and historical exhibitions. The Indian Islamic Centre in Abu Dhabi and programmes focusing on Indo-Arab relations also demonstrate attempts to connect contemporary diplomacy with longer traditions of cultural and religious exchange (Abraham 2012). However, the evidence presented in this study suggests that official engagement with Urdu remains less systematic than engagement with more prominent symbols of Indian soft power.

Implications

The findings have several practical implications for India's cultural diplomacy in the Gulf. The most important is that India does not need to create Urdu cultural networks from the beginning. A substantial civil-society infrastructure already exists through literary associations, educational institutions, media organisations, cultural festivals, and digital communities. The policy challenge is therefore to recognise, support, and connect these networks without undermining their community-based character.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Indian diplomatic missions, and relevant language and cultural institutions could treat Urdu organisations as partners in Gulf cultural diplomacy. Such recognition could include logistical assistance, access to venues, support for visiting writers and artists, translation funding, documentation of literary activities, and collaboration with Gulf cultural institutions. The objective should not be to place community organisations under direct state control, but to strengthen initiatives that already possess local credibility and cultural expertise.

This distinction is important because the relational soft power identified in this study derives partly from the autonomy of diaspora organisations. Their influence is based on sustained community participation rather than on their presentation as official instruments of the Indian government. Excessive state direction could politicise activities that currently attract audiences because of their literary, social, or cultural value. A partnership model is therefore more appropriate than a centralised model of cultural management.

Media and digital platforms offer another area for development. Urdu and Hindi entertainment already circulate widely among South Asian populations in the Gulf. Online poetry archives, digital festivals, social media, podcasts, subtitled films, and multilingual cultural programmes could extend this reach to younger and more diverse audiences. Support for digital publication and translation could also make Indian Urdu literature more accessible to Arabic- and English-speaking readers.

Urdu-speaking professionals who are also proficient in Arabic and English could play a particularly important role in this process. Alasmari et al. (2026, 3) observe that Urdu may complement Arabic as a cultural and religious bridge because of shared vocabulary and script traditions. Multilingual scholars, teachers, translators, and cultural organisers could support the translation of Indian literary, historical, philosophical, and

social-scientific works into Arabic. Such initiatives could renew older traditions of intellectual exchange between India and the Arab world while avoiding the reduction of cultural diplomacy to entertainment alone.

Universities and research institutions also provide opportunities for sustained cooperation. Joint conferences, translation projects, visiting professorships, Urdu and Indian studies programmes, and research on Indo-Arab cultural history could deepen intellectual engagement. Partnerships between Indian institutions and Gulf universities would give Urdu cultural diplomacy a stronger academic foundation and generate more durable forms of exchange than occasional ceremonial events.

The findings also suggest that diaspora members should be understood as cultural partners rather than simply as target populations of diplomatic outreach. Their linguistic knowledge, institutional experience, and local relationships enable them to interpret both Indian and Gulf social contexts. Engaging them as cultural facilitators could improve the relevance of diplomatic programmes and reduce the risk of imposing initiatives that do not reflect local interests.

Limitations

These recommendations should, however, be approached cautiously. The study does not establish that greater state support for Urdu will automatically improve India's image or produce identifiable foreign-policy outcomes. Cultural participation may arise from literary interest, nostalgia, entertainment, community attachment, or religious and linguistic identity rather than from attraction to India as a state. Soft-power effects are therefore likely to be indirect, uneven, and difficult to measure.

The analysis is also limited by its reliance on secondary sources. It does not include interviews with event organisers, participants, diplomats, educators, or host-country audiences. Institutional reports and media coverage may emphasise successful events and overstate participation or cultural impact. The study can therefore identify plausible mechanisms of relational soft power, but it cannot determine how audiences interpret these activities or whether they change attitudes towards India.

Future research should test these arguments through interviews, participant observation, audience surveys, and comparative research across individual Gulf states. Such work could examine whether Urdu cultural activities are perceived primarily as Indian, Pakistani, South Asian, Islamic, literary, or transnational, and how these different interpretations affect their

diplomatic significance.

Within these limitations, the study demonstrates that Urdu constitutes an under-recognised element of India's cultural presence in the Gulf. Its significance lies not in replacing Arabic or English, nor in claiming exclusive ownership over a shared South Asian language. Rather, Urdu contributes to India's relational soft power by sustaining literary networks, enabling cross-community communication, and connecting diasporic cultural life with the wider social landscape of the Gulf.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that Urdu functions as a relational soft-power resource in the Gulf Cooperation Council states through literary events, media, cultural organisations, education, and everyday communication among South Asian expatriate communities. These activities sustain diasporic ties to the homeland, circulate Indian literary and cultural traditions, and create opportunities for cross-community interaction. However, Urdu's contribution to India's cultural diplomacy remains largely informal and driven by expatriate civil society rather than by a coordinated state strategy. Although Urdu organisations have established an important cultural presence, their impact is constrained by limited coordination, uneven institutional support, and an emphasis on occasional poetry gatherings rather than sustained programmes in publishing, translation, education, research, and digital engagement.

The article contributes to soft-power scholarship by demonstrating how a non-dominant language can generate cultural influence through diaspora-led networks rather than direct state projection. Its findings imply that Indian cultural-diplomacy institutions should recognise and support existing Urdu organisations while preserving their autonomy and community-based character. Such support could strengthen cultural exchange and deepen people-to-people relations between India and the Gulf states. Because the study relies entirely on secondary sources, it cannot directly establish how participants or host-country audiences interpret Urdu cultural activities or whether these activities change perceptions of India. Future research should therefore use interviews, participant observation, audience studies, and comparative analysis across GCC countries to examine the reach, reception, and diplomatic significance of Urdu more systematically.

Conflicts of Interests

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest regarding the publication this article.

Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- Abraham, Rhea. 2012. "India and Its Diaspora in the Arab Gulf Countries: Tapping into Effective 'Soft Power' and Related Public Diplomacy." *Diaspora Studies* 5 (2): 124–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2013.807544>.
- Abu-Remaileh, Refqa. 2023. *Country of Words: A Transnational Atlas for Palestinian Literature*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.21627/2023cw>.
- Ahmad, S. Maqbul. 1969. *Indo-Arab Relations: An Account of India's Relations with the Arab World from Ancient up to Modern Times*. New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations.
- Ahmad, Waseem, and Anisur Rahman. 2022. "India's Soft Power Diplomacy towards the GCC Countries." *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Trends* 4 (1): 209–13. <https://www.multisubjectjournal.com/article/170/4-2-15-613.pdf>.
- Alam, Afroz. 2015. *Kuwait Mein Adabi Pesh Raft*. Delhi: Educational Publishing House.
- Alasmari, Muhammad, Rashad Ahmed, Amna Shamim, and Nief Aied Al-Gamdi. 2026. "Navigating Language, Faith, and Identity: A Case Study of Language Policies in Indian Transnational Families in Saudi Arabia." *Languages* 11 (3): 42. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages11030042>.
- Al-khresheh, Mohammad Hamad. 2026. "The Role of Heritage Language Maintenance in Shaping Identity and Cohesion among Migrant Populations: A Case Study of Saudi Arabia." *International Journal of Population Studies* 12 (1): 46–66. <https://doi.org/10.36922/ijps.7070>.
- Baloch, Imtiaz Hussain. 2010. "Saudi Arab Mein Urdu Shā'irī." *Journal of Research (Urdu)* 17 (1): 145–52. <https://jorurdu.bzu.edu.pk/website/journal/article/5e7d28bb873c5/page>.

- Biswas, Swapneel. 2020. "Indian Diaspora in the Middle East." *The Kootneeti*, June 18, 2020. <https://thekootneeti.in/2020/06/18/indian-diaspora-in-the-middle-east/>.
- Blarel, Nicolas. 2012. "India's Soft Power: From Potential to Reality?" In *India: The Next Superpower?*, edited by Nicholas Kitchen, 28–33. LSE IDEAS Special Report SR010. London: London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/reports/LSE-IDEAS-India-Superpower.pdf>.
- Cabaña Rojas, Isabel. 2025. "Japanese-Language Promotion in Chile: A Case of Everyday Cultural Ambassadors." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, published online July 23, 2025, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2025.2538047>.
- Chapparban, Sajaudeen Nijamodeen, and Shugufta Shaheen. 2025. "Urdu Diaspora in Canada: Unveiling the Transnational Experiences through Jawaaid Danish's *Hijarat Ke Tamashey*." *Muslim English Literature* 4 (1): 26–43. <https://doi.org/10.15408/mel.v4i1.44289>.
- Clini, Clelia, and Deimantas Valančiūnas. 2021. "Introduction: South Asian Diasporas and (Imaginary) Homelands: Why Representations Still Matter." *South Asian Diaspora* 13 (1): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2020.1812180>.
- Cull, Nicholas J. 2008. "Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (1): 31–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311952>.
- Curdtt-Christiansen, Xiao Lan, and Francesca La Morgia. 2018. "Managing Heritage Language Development: Opportunities and Challenges for Chinese, Italian and Pakistani Urdu-Speaking Families in the UK." *Multilingua* 37 (2): 177–200. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2017-0019>.
- Dakkak, Nadeen. 2023. "Malayalam Literature as a Transnational Space of Political Change: Migration and Bahrain's 2011 Uprising in Benyamin's *Jasmine Days* and *Al Arabian Novel Factory*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 58 (1): 36–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219894221145213>.
- Eaton, Jonathan, and Mark Turin. 2022. "Heritage Languages and Language as Heritage: The Language of Heritage in Canada and Beyond." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 28 (7): 787–802. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2022.2077805>.

- Fatima, Sakina. 2024. "Jashn-e-Rekhta: Celebrating Urdu's Rich Heritage in Dubai." *The Siasat Daily*, December 30, 2024. <https://www.siasat.com/jashn-e-rekhta-celebrating-urdus-rich-heritage-in-dubai-3156710/>.
- Khanday, Adil Hussain. 2019. "Indian Diaspora in GCC Countries: Challenges and Prospects." *Think India Journal* 22 (14): 15263–80. <https://thinkindiaquarterly.org/index.php/think-india/article/view/17062>.
- Kundra, Sakul, Antara Bhattacharya, and Amit Sarwal. 2025. "Unraveling India's Cultural Diplomacy with Fiji: A Decade of Engagement, 2014–2025." *Cogent Social Sciences* 11 (1): 2555745. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2555745>.
- Mehta, Smith. 2020. "Localization, Diversification and Heterogeneity: Understanding the Linguistic and Cultural Logics of Indian New Media." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 23 (1): 102–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877919880304>.
- Morales, Pablo Sebastian. 2021. "International Broadcasters and Country Image Management: Comparing Audience Perceptions of China, Russia and Iran in Latin America." *Global Media and China* 6 (1): 100–115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436420960882>.
- Nadvi, Syed Sulaiman. 1993. *Arab-o-Hind Ke Talluqat*. Azamgarh: Maarif Press. <https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/detail/arab-o-hind-ke-talluqat-syed-sulaiman-nadvi-ebooks-2>.
- Naqvi, Noorul Hasan. 1997. *Tareekh-e-Adab-e-Urdu*. Aligarh: Educational Book House.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2008. "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (1): 94–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>.
- Pattnaik, Jajati K., and Chandan K. Panda. 2025. "Indian Diaspora in Saudi Arabia: Migration, Cooperation and Soft-Power Strength." *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 81 (4): 421–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284251369649>.
- Phillipson, Robert. 1992. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Rahman, Anisur. 2019. "The Important Role of Indian Diaspora in Country's Gulf Policy." *Financial Express*, August 22, 2019. <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence/the-important-role-of-indian-diaspora-in-countrys-gulf-policy/1683095/>.
- Raja, Mudassir. 2018. "Doha Becoming a Centre of Urdu Related Activities." *Gulf Times*, September 27, 2018. <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/607565/doha-becoming-a-centre-of-urdu-related-activities>.
- Salisu, Mohammed. 2020. "Impacts of Foreigners on the Gulf Arab Vernacular: The Case of Indian Immigrants in the United Arab Emirates." *Journal of Cultural and Religious Studies* 8 (6): 337–45. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2328-2177/2020.06.002>.
- Santos, Augusto. 2024. "Structural Aspects of the Brazilian Experience in International Broadcasting." *Global Media and Communication* 20 (1): 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665241235490>.
- Shuto, Motoko. 2018. "Patterns and Views of China's Public Diplomacy in ASEAN Countries: Focusing on Confucius Institutes." *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 7 (2): 124–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2018.1553227>.
- Taukeer, Mohammed. 2022. "South Asian Migrants in United Arab Emirates: Impact and Challenges." *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 10 (3): 942–51. <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2022.1003.0258>.
- Telugu, Sireesha, ed. 2022. *Indian Literatures in Diaspora*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003182795>.
- Vertovec, Steven. 1997. "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora,' Exemplified among South Asian Religions." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6 (3): 277–99. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1997.0010>.
- Vytla, Harsha. 2026. "Prizing India's Literature in English: The JCB Prize and the Representation of Indian Novels." *Literature, Critique, and Empire Today* 61 (2): 255–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/30333962261448839>.
- Zain, Asma Ali. 2020. "UAE Newspaper Launches Urdu Edition to Raise COVID-19 Awareness." *Arab News PK*, May 1, 2020. <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1668061/middle-east>.