

India as the Leader of the Global South in G20: Implications, Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract: India has emerged as a reliable leader among Global South countries, demonstrating its willingness to collaborate by engaging with more than 120 nations to develop the G20 agenda. The inclusion of the African Union (AU) and the joint communique, thought impossible due to the political situations that prevailed then, showcases India's capabilities and resurgence in the global arena. With the leadership for the Global South tightly contested with China and Russia in the fore, the significance of India's G20 presidency cannot be overstated, and it is a topic of great interest and engagement. Through an extensive literature review, this research paper intends to do a qualitative analysis of the potential ramifications India's G20 presidency could make in shaping the current global economic order and its role in amplifying the voices of the Global South. The anticipation of the positive impact of India's ascendancy to leadership is palpable, given the challenges it may face in achieving its objectives.

Keywords: India, G20, Global South, Development Agenda, Challenges.

Nations of the Global South, a term that refers to developing countries primarily located in the southern hemisphere, are in the limelight amidst escalating doctrinal antagonism between the West and the China-Russia embrace. The resurgence of the concept of Global South, a historical term that has gained new relevance in the current global context, is a way for these developing nations to seek leverage via solidarity on the world stage. In many situations, these rising and developing nations align with neither and decide on a separate route, drastically changing global power relations. They have often been embroiled in the crossfire of stronger states like the United States and China.

China appears to have the advantage regarding shaping the Global South. In early March 2023, Beijing brokered a peace deal between regional adversaries Saudi Arabia and Iran, a gesture that reverberated globally

(Akita, 2023).

In this mix comes India. At the G20 summit held in India in 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi presided over a virtual summit titled 'Voice of the Global South for Human-Centric Development,' an initiative to promote a development model prioritising human welfare and sustainability. In this event, Prime Minister Modi declared that India will assume the role of representing the concerns and perspectives of the Global South. As the 2023 president of the G20, India had the authority to express its agenda and prioritised priorities significant to developing nations, including sustainable financing, food security, health infrastructure, multiparty bank reform, and climate financing (Miller, 2024).

A battle royale for supremacy is taking place for the crown of the Global South. India is not the only country using the shared experiences of colonial rule or Western imperialism and the ensuing solidarity to deepen connections with states in the Global South. China has regularly reminded former colonies in the Global South of the harshness of the Western world while also attempting to build goodwill among politicians and civil society. However, although the wounds elicited may be the same, the cure provided is very different. The Indian approach to the Global South, which does not remind countries of their history to exact retribution but rather to encourage more equitable collaboration with the West, is unique and intriguing. This approach sets India apart from other contenders for leadership, such as China, and signifies the importance of the assumption of leadership.

Review of Literature

The world is currently on the cusp of multi-polarism, a term that refers to a global order with multiple centres of power, with the ascent of Asian giants such as China and India, giving credence to shifting power from West to East, thereby ushering in the Asian Century. However, even then, this growth cannot happen in isolation. The rise of India and China has enormous implications, particularly for the nations of the global South, who are currently looking to understand their respective growth strategy and the historical potential of south-south collaboration to alter global order has come back into focus as it has once again assumed a central role in international politics and economics. This literature review seeks to understand the dynamics involved in the elevation of the global South and the role India may play in it.

At present, many papers have been written on Global South. However, the literature on India and the Global South is at the lower end. The study conducted by Haug et al. (2021) examines the concept of the Global South as a meta-category within global politics. The authors analyse the growing number of references to this concept in academic literature. The utility of the North-South dichotomy and the concept of the Global South in

comprehending global dynamics is called into doubt. The notion of a singular narrative of the Global South is called into question by Weisbuch et al. (2021). This statement underscores the significance of accepting a wide range of viewpoints and narratives to comprehensively understand the intricate and subtle aspects of the Global South. The authors propose adopting a polyphonic perspective in comprehending the Global South, emphasising its dynamic nature, diverse composition, and progressive capacity for action. Cooper (2020) states that China and India maintain a balance between their increasing strength and their support for the Global South in the G20 and BRICS. China's deliberate lack of transparency in its strategic approach contrasts India's democratic deliberations. The presence of ambivalence significantly impacts individuals' patterns of interaction and decision-making within international forums. In their study, Haug (2020) utilises Edward Soja's concept of Third space to examine the intricate nature of the 'Global South.' They specifically focus on the dialectics surrounding material, imagined, and lived spatialities within international development communication. Cooper (2020) examines the involvement of China and India in the G20 and BRICS, emphasising their conflicting feelings of increasing power and support for the Global South. This has consequences for their participation in international organisations. Chakrabarti (2016) examines India's historical engagement in advancing Third Worldism and fostering solidarity among the Global South. The author emphasises the combination of *realpolitik* and authentic solidarity in India's foreign policy under the tenure of leaders such as Indira Gandhi. The essay also comments on the continuous relevance of the Global South discourse in India's diplomatic initiatives, despite the shift towards economic liberalisation and the importance of managing global problems while portraying its ascent in the world arena.

Understanding Global South and India's Role

Global South encompasses many regions worldwide, including Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Australia. This phrase is part of a group of terminologies, such as 'Third World' and 'Periphery', which refer to countries outside Europe and North America. These areas are chiefly characterised by low-income conditions and recurrently experience political or cultural marginalisation. Adopting the term 'Global South' implies transitioning from a primary emphasis on development or cultural distinctions to greater recognition of geopolitical power dynamics (Dados & Connell, 2012).

However, the origins of this geographical concept can be attributed to a 1926 essay titled "The Southern Question," authored by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist thinker. In this book, Gramsci initially introduced the notion of a less-developed southern region. Gramsci conducted a comparative analysis between the industrially advanced and economically

prosperous northern area of Italy and its comparatively less developed southern region, ultimately deducing that the latter had experienced colonisation by capitalists originating from the former (Gramsci & Verdicchio, 2005). His findings advanced during the Cold War when French demographer Alfred Sauvy categorised international society in 1952 into distinct realms based on affluence and ideology. The First World consisted of the capitalist West, the Second consisted of the Soviet Union and its socialist allies, and the Third consisted of the recently decolonised and predominantly destitute states. In 1969, Carl Oglesby, an American Left-wing advocate, used the term 'Global South' to describe the Third World, expressing his concern over the prevailing influence of the northern countries over the global South (Acharya, 2024). The link with colonialism was reignited in another backdrop of development economics. Raúl Prebisch, an Argentine economist, popularised the concept of differentiating between the 'core' and 'periphery' of the global financial system throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Alongside other scholars who criticised traditional economics, Prebisch analysed underdevelopment and actively advocated reforming the global trade system. This conflict propelled the inclusion of the terms 'North' and 'South' into the international political vocabulary. Developing nations, primarily once colonies, started to express the notion of a Global South whose interests contravened with those of the industrialised powers, encompassing both capitalist and communist ideologies, transcending the distinctions established during the Cold War (Dados & Connell, 2012).

The Global South narrative tremendously impacts India's representation as a 'growing power' in world politics, moulding its identity and standing in the global arena. India's affiliation with the Global South discourse demonstrates its commitment to promoting developing countries' interests while challenging old power structures dictated by the Global North. By actively participating in Global South efforts and pushing for causes such as economic justice, social equality, and decolonisation, India positions itself as a champion of the Global South agenda. This picture positions India as vital in establishing a multipolar world order in which developing countries' voices and concerns are accorded more weight. Furthermore, by identifying with Global South rhetoric, India boosts its diplomatic ties with other growing countries while reinforcing its image as a progressive and inclusive global leader dedicated to forging cooperation and solidarity among nations experiencing comparable issues (Chakrabarti, 2016).

India assumes a crucial role within the Global South as a prominent global leader, actively championing the interests of developing nations across the globe. With a rich history of participation in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and continued engagement in Global South initiatives, India actively advocates solidarity among countries coping with common concerns such as economic development, social injustice, and the legacy of

colonialism. India's foreign policy highlights the significance of fostering collaboration, promoting mutual understanding, and advocating for a more equitable global framework. By actively engaging in platforms like the NAM and lobbying for crucial issues like trade, sustainable development, and climate change, India contributes significantly to establishing a more inclusive and equitable international order. Moreover, India's persistent support for ideals of social justice, democracy, and human rights resonates powerfully with many nations in the Global South, bolstering its position as a vital influencer in advancing the collective interests and ambitions of developing countries globally.

India as Leader of Global South: Prospects & Implications

Since its independence in 1947, India has adopted and propagated the non-alignment principle and neutrality and was self-excluded from Cold War politics. Because of India's regional diplomacy and neutrality stance, the country emerged as a representative of all the newly emerged independent countries of the third world, balancing capitalistic and socialistic ideologies (Tripathi, 2016). G20 Summit 2023, held in New Delhi under India's Presidency, is a testimonial to India's strengthening of its status as a front-runner in the Global South. India's G20 presidency arose when the world was recovering from a pandemic and was more susceptible to economic, political, and socio-psychological shocks than ever. With the economic crisis, the globe was going through two major wars in a very close vicinity of India, i.e., the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Palestine Crisis. Amidst COVID-19, India performed a "Vaccine Miracle" by providing up to 300 million vaccines to 100 countries of the Global South, increasing India's goodwill in multifold, and India received an image of a leading country.

Moreover, India has prioritised representing the Global South during its G20 presidency and has taken steps to voice concerns. (Economic Times, 2023). India presented its civilisation, spirituality, grandeur, and cultural diversity through the G20 summit, which boosted India's soft power. Chandrayaan 3- where India became the first nation to reach the moon's southern pole and recognise the Shiv Shakti point at around the same time provided India with much-needed recognition in technological advancement and space exploration. Moreover, India hosted the Voice of Global South Summit with representatives from 125 countries, a foundation for India's emerging as a firm representative of the Global South. (Puri, 2023)

The theme of G20 was *Vasudeva Kutumbakam*-One Earth, One Family, One Future. The New Delhi Declaration represents a revitalised spirit of cooperation across these critical priorities, emphasising policy consistency, steady trade and determined climate action. It is a source of pride that during our Presidency, the G20 accomplished 87 outcomes and

118 adopted papers, a significant increase over previous years. (PIB,2023)

Some significant highlights of G20 establishing India as the Leader of the Global South are as follows:

A. Sustainability and Mitigation of Climate Change

Carbon footprint and escalating climate change have been a long-standing dispute between the Global South and the Global North. According to the Leader's Declaration, developing countries will require USD 5.8-5.9 trillion in the pre-2030 period to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. The G20 Summit reiterated the same, and most developing countries reached a consensus for the first time (Koshy, 2023).

B. Economic Reconstruction and Partnership

Post-pandemic efforts and collaborations had already set the stage for economic recovery. Agreements and partnership opportunities through the summit made the economic reconstruction resounding. Further, India has also emphasised the digital economy and bridging the digital divide between North and South (Ali & Kamraju, 2023).

C. Membership to African Union in G20

India further affirmed the voice of the Global South by announcing the permanent membership of G20 countries in the African Union. This is a milestone in establishing India as a leader of the Global South (Associated Press, 2023).

D. Development Agenda

India has holistically advocated for poverty alleviation, structural reforms, and infrastructure development, which are urgent needs for the countries of the Global South.

Many prospects are ahead after the G20 summit, especially the expanded G20, as the African Union is a part of it. The AU, China, and India collectively comprise 53.6% of the world's population (2023). Ten nations are represented in the pre-expanded G-20 group by 1% or less. There is also much variation in the member countries' age profiles. India, which is expected to make up 17.8% of the world's population, is in a unique position in terms of both population share and median age. Given its lower government debt-to-GDP ratio and comparatively better control over inflation, India's prospects for economic growth are favourable. With a growth rate of at least 6% in the near to medium term, it is expected to drive global growth (Srivastava, 2023).

Challenges for India Ahead

While India's G20 presidency was successful, with all the participating nations coming to a consensus, fulfilling the fixed goals and targets required much effort and commitment.

Some of the significant challenges for India are as follows:

The African Union's entry into the G20 was a potent symbol of the Global South's importance. However, it may also lead to calls for further expansion, which must be balanced against the grouping's ability to reach consensus. Furthermore, this must be maintained as conversations in pertinent forums move forward and should not be seen as a one-time effort.

The New Delhi Declaration notes that only 13% of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals targets are on track. It then lays out several commitments, with the respective nations and organisations acting. These commitments include mobilising sufficient and easily accessible funding for developing nations and having developed nations fulfil their official development assistance (ODA) obligations. Green development pertains to the efficient execution of the Paris Agreement and the promotion of affordable financing for clean energy transitions. These endeavours necessitate a substantial yearly investment exceeding \$4 trillion worldwide. In this regard, it was recently reported that nine months after the Bali summit, a \$20 billion climate change finance deal to wean Indonesia off of coal still needs to be finalised (Sabarwal, 2023). The other issues to tackle encompass the necessity to improve operational capacity, fulfil infrastructural demands, deficiencies in human resources and overcome a long-standing inclination to disengage from actively assuming leadership roles within the G20 framework, which could act as limiting factors when assuming Global South leadership (Cooper, 2020).

Conclusion

India's rise as a prominent figure in the Global South offers promising opportunities and substantial obstacles. The G20 presidency, headed by India, played a significant role in consolidating its position. India's long-standing dedication to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), active support for developing nations' interests, and effective organisation of the G20 summit with a specific emphasis on the Global South agenda have collectively enhanced its reputation.

India's leadership will encounter numerous obstacles in the future. The goal of achieving consensus within the larger G20, which now includes the African Union, will require careful consideration and negotiation. To achieve the lofty objectives outlined in the New Delhi Declaration, namely those about sustainable development and climate change financing, India and the international community must demonstrate unwavering dedication. Furthermore, India must confront its internal constraints, including deficits in infrastructure and a possible hesitancy to assume a more assertive leadership position.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, the ascent of India as a prominent figure in the Global South exhibits significant potential for fostering a fairer and

more diverse global arrangement. India may promote unity among developing countries and push for their shared perspective on the international platform by utilising its influence, technological progress and diplomatic expertise. The success of India's leadership will rest on its ability to navigate the complexity of the international arena, bridge the gap between rhetoric and action and encourage other developing nations to unite for a shared future.

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