

India's Role in Reinvigorating Multilateralism : A Critical Evaluation of Its G20 Strategies

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Abstract: Multilateralism is essential for preserving international peace, tackling global challenges, and guaranteeing fair and lawful global government. Multilateralism enhances the international system's ability to successfully address crises and manage diversity in a complex, interconnected world by fostering cooperation, inclusion, and rule-based decision-making. G20 is an important instrument multilateralism. India has played a significant role in the G20. This paper critically evaluates India's role in reinvigorating multilateralism through G20.

Keywords: Multilateralism, G20, India, Global South.

Introduction - The current international system is characterised by multilateralism. Generalised standards of conduct, agreed-upon regulations, and institutionalised procedures form the basis of this type of international collaboration, which involves three or more governments. It suggests international relations legitimacy, predictability, and reciprocity, moving beyond ad hoc coordination. The Group of Twenty (G20) is a prominent modern forum for informal multilateralism. Initially established among finance ministers in 1999 and elevated to a leaders' summit in 2008, the G20 unites significant developed and emerging economies to synchronise responses to global economic and governance concerns. Amidst the decline of conventional multilateral institutions and escalating geopolitical tensions, the G20 serves as a pragmatic platform for maintaining global collaboration. The formation of the G-20 reflected the significant changes in the international economic landscape over the previous decades. It accounts for around 85% of world GDP, more than 75% of global trade and around two-thirds of the planet's population¹. The growing importance of emerging economies, together with the increasing integration of the global economy and financial markets, highlights the need to widen the scope of international economic and financial cooperation. As part of its mandate, the G-20 was tasked with assisting in the formation of the international agenda, addressing economic and financial concerns in instances where a consensus had not yet been reached, and "leading by example." In particular, the Group was considered to be an essential venue for the discussion of measures to prevent and resolve financial crises that occur on a global scale. The G20 is a multinational mechanism that is not based on treaties and is driven by consensus. In contrast

to formal organisations such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organisation, the G20 does not have a permanent secretariat and does not make agreements that are legally binding. That is primarily dependent on political will and the influence of peers. This informal structure provides for flexibility, swift decision-making, and adaptation to developing global concerns. As a result, the G20 has become a platform for problem-solving rather than an institution that enforces rules.

India and the G20: Historical Trajectory: India was one of the original members of the G20. It was a reflection of its rising economic size and commercial potential, its greater integration into the global economy following the economic reforms that took place in 1991, and its recognition of its role as a representative of developing and emerging economies. During this period, the G20 largely served as a forum for finance ministers and governors of central banks, with the primary focus being on the maintenance of macroeconomic stability, the regulation of financial markets, and the prevention of crises. India's strategy during this period was influenced by its status as a developing economy, awareness of external conditions, and dedication to strategic autonomy in global economic governance. The G20 was perceived primarily as a technical coordination gathering rather than a significant platform for geopolitical or normative leadership.

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis signified a pivotal moment for the G20 and for India's involvement therein. The upgrading of the G20 to a Leaders' Summit status converted it into the foremost forum for international economic collaboration. India's involvement throughout this period became increasingly forceful and prominent. India endorsed a unified fiscal boost to stabilise the global

economy. It fervently supported reforms of IMF quotas and governance to accurately represent the realities of emerging economies. India underscored the necessity of safeguarding developing nations from the repercussions of financial crises emanating from industrialised economies. This time signified India's evolution from a participant to a stakeholder with the ability to shape the agenda inside the G20.

The political leadership of India underwent a change in 2014, which resulted in India's engagement with the G20 becoming more strategically integrated with its broader foreign policy aims. Establishing a connection between India's participation in the G20 and its goal of becoming a leading power rather than a balancing power was one of the most important aspects of this phase. There should be a greater emphasis placed on the establishment of norms, particularly in areas such as environmentally responsible growth, financial inclusion, and renewable energy. Participation in discussions regarding the plans for global growth and the structural improvements that are possible. Additionally, India started to present itself as a bridge between rich nations and emerging economies, which strengthened its middle-power diplomacy inside the G20.

India's G20 Strategies for Reinvigorating Multilateralism: India's G20 strategies should be contextualised within a larger systemic problem of multilateralism that has developed over the last two decades and has deepened after 2008. This crisis signifies not the outright collapse of international institutions, but rather a deterioration in their efficacy, legitimacy, and capacity to resolve issues. Certain developments are notably consequential. The escalating great-power competition, particularly between the United States and China, as well as Russia and the West, Stagnation in formal institutions like the UN Security Council and WTO, diminishing trust between the Global North and Global South, global crises particularly in financial instability, climate change, and pandemic recovery. These issues necessitated collaborative resolutions. In this backdrop, India perceived the G20 as a versatile yet powerful forum for revitalising international collaboration, unencumbered by inflexible institutional impasses. In the past India seemed to focus on just one kind of multilateralism- the UN and the NAM. New Delhi now participates in multiple kinds of multilateral institutions. This diversity of India's multilateralism reflects the structural imperatives of global politics².

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, India invoked the concept of 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam', which translates to "One Earth, One Family, One Future." This idea was not merely symbolic; it served to emphasise ethical multilateralism over transactional diplomacy, reinforce shared responsibility for global public goods, and re-legitimize cooperation during a time of polarisation. Through adopting this perspective, India was able to establish itself as a norm entrepreneur, so promoting the principles of

inclusion, sustainability, and collective well-being. Instead of viewing multilateral cooperation as a transactional or power-driven activity, India aimed to recast it as a moral and collective responsibility within the context of the international community.

In the course of its presidency of the G20, India made a conscious decision to broaden the scope of the G20 agenda to include climate action and green development, digital public infrastructure (DPI), inclusive growth and social protection, women-led development, disaster resilience, and health systems. By doing so, India aimed to turn the G20 from a limited forum for economic cooperation into a full international governance platform, hence increasing the significance of the group. The fundamental objective of India's policy was to establish itself as a bridge-builder between rich and developing economies, between competing power blocs (the G7 and BRICS), and between economic priorities and development imperatives. Throughout its history, India has often avoided ideological alignment, placing an emphasis instead on strategic autonomy and debate. In spite of geopolitical pressures, notably those associated with the war between Russia and Ukraine, this strategy was helpful in maintaining solutions that were driven by consensus. India enhanced multilateral legitimacy by prioritising Global South issues, such as sovereign debt distress, climate finance and adaptation funding, development financing gaps, and access to technology and digital divides.

India's Effectiveness at Johannesburg Summit: In order to evaluate India's efficacy within the G20, it is necessary to go beyond merely providing descriptive reports of initiatives and instead evaluate the consequences, limitations, and structural constraints. In this context, the term "effectiveness" refers to India's capacity to shape agendas, build consensus, translate normative concepts into institutional or policy outcomes, and enhance the legitimacy and functionality of multilateralism. Despite the fact that India's participation in the G20, particularly during its presidency, was widely seen as proactive and ambitious, the success of India's participation needs to be evaluated in a manner that is both critical and balanced.

This year the G20 summit took place at Johannesburg in South Africa. This summit was boycotted by America over allegations that South Africa was trying to prosecute its white African minority³. This vacuum left by US gave India an opportunity to step in. During the summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed six initiatives that India should lead in order to solve some of those concerns. In particular, he emphasised the necessity of rethinking the criteria of global development. A Traditional Knowledge Repository, a G20-Africa Skills Multiplier Initiative (in which India proposed to train one million people across Africa), a Global Healthcare Response Team, an Initiative on Countering the Drug-Terror Nexus, a "Open Satellite Data Partnership" to share information related to agriculture, fishing, and

disasters, and a “G20 Critical Minerals Circularity initiative” were some of the initiatives that were included in this list⁴. The problem of artificial intelligence was brought up during the summit that was held by the Prime Minister of India. He stated that it is the responsibility of the group to ensure that artificial intelligence is utilised for the benefit of the entire world and that its misuse be prevented. Creating a worldwide compact on artificial intelligence that is founded on certain basic principles is necessary in order to accomplish this goal. These principles include effective human oversight, safety-by-design, transparency, and stringent prohibitions on the use of AI in deepfakes, criminal activities, and terrorist activities⁵.

The establishment of a G20 Global Healthcare Response Team is something that India has proposed. When it comes to dealing with things like natural catastrophes and health crises, Prime Minister Modi has stated that the world is stronger when we work together. As part of our efforts, we should work to establish teams of medical professionals from other G20 countries who have received training and are prepared to be sent quickly in the event of any crisis. India has proposed a G20 Initiative on Countering the Drug-Terror Nexus in order to address the problem of drug trafficking, particularly the proliferation of exceedingly hazardous chemicals such as fentanyl. He urged the world leaders to make the economy of drug-related terrorism weaker⁶.

Conclusion: The domains in which India's G20 influence was restricted or merely symbolic illustrate the structural limitations of modern multilateralism rather than deficiencies in Indian leadership. Although India successfully influenced discourse, enhanced inclusion, and rejuvenated normative

dedication to collaboration, significant structural reforms—especially in climate finance, global financial governance, and decision-making authority—continued to be unattainable. This highlights that symbolic and normative advancements are frequently the initial, nevertheless not conclusive, phase of multilateral revolution. Rather than relying on coercion or dominance, India's G20 policies constitute a significant attempt by a rising power to revitalise multilateralism through the use of ideas, inclusivity, and the forging of consensus. The leadership of India strengthened the normative foundations of global cooperation and boosted the G20's significance in a world order that is split. This was accomplished despite the fact that structural restrictions hampered the implementation of real reforms. To put it another way, India's effectiveness does not rest in radical reform; rather, it lies in stopping multilateralism from further declining and reframing it as something that is ethically anchored and development-oriented.

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