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REVIEW ARTICLE

India and the Changing Architecture of Multilateralism in 21st Century

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Abstract

India's engagement with multilateralism in the 21st century reflects its evolving role as a key stakeholder in global governance. As the world transitions toward a multipolar order, India has positioned itself as a bridge between the Global North and South, leveraging its democratic values, economic potential, and cultural influence. This paper examines India's strategic approach to multilateralism through active participation in global institutions such as the United Nations, G20, and WTO, as well as regional platforms like BRICS, SCO, and Quad. India's leadership in advocating for reforms in global governance structures highlights its push for greater representation and equity for developing nations. Additionally, India's initiatives in climate action, through the International Solar Alliance (ISA), and global health, particularly its vaccine diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore its commitment to addressing transnational challenges. Despite its growing influence, India faces challenges, including navigating geopolitical tensions, addressing criticisms of its domestic policies on human rights, and balancing economic aspirations with environmental commitments. This study explores how India's multilateral engagements reflect its vision of a just and inclusive world order, where sustainable development, peace, and equity remain central. By examining India's successes, limitations, and strategic priorities, the paper offers insights into the role of emerging powers in shaping 21st-century global governance.

KEYWORDS:
Multilateralism, Global Governance, 21st century, Global Heritage, G20, UNO, SCO, Vaccine Diplomacy, Geopolitical Tensions, Environmental Sustainability.

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1. Introduction:

Multilateralism, in its essence, refers to the practice of multiple countries working together in coordination on shared issues, often through international institutions or agreements. India's rise as a prominent global player in the 21st century has been accompanied by an evolving and increasingly assertive approach to multilateralism. As the world transitions into an era marked by shifting power dynamics, economic interdependence, and complex geopolitical challenges, India has embraced multilateralism as a central pillar of its foreign policy. Historically, India's commitment to multilateral frameworks has been rooted in its post-colonial aspirations for global equity, justice, and sustainable development. However, in the context of contemporary global governance, India's multilateral engagement has taken on new dimensions, shaped by its growing economic and military power, as well as its strategic interests In recent decades, India has actively participated in a wide array of multilateral institutions, ranging from the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to regional groupings such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, and the Quad. These platforms have not only allowed India to assert its voice on global issues—ranging from climate change and trade reform to counterterrorism and regional security—but also enabled it to navigate the increasingly complex web of global interdependencies. This paper seeks to explore India's evolving role in multilateralism in the 21st century. It examines the strategic motivations behind India's multilateral engagement, the challenges it faces in these forums, and the impact of its participation on global governance. By focusing on

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key sectors such as diplomacy, economic cooperation, security, and development, this research highlights the opportunities and constraints that define India's multilateral pursuits in an increasingly multipolar world order.

India and Multilaterl Strategies

The evolving dynamics of the global order, coupled with the growing uncertainty in international relations, are prompting nations to adopt more strategic approaches. The principles of non- alignment and strategic autonomy has guided India's foreign policy traditionally positioning country as a leader, avoiding formal alliances while preserving flexibility in its international bond. In 21st century, however, India's global power have surged and its foreign policy has evolved, led to heightened focus on engaging in multilateral institutions, which not only safeguard country's national interest but also promote more inclusive and equitable global order.

Economic Multilateralism

Prior to economic liberalization, India's economy was largely closed, with sate control over major sectors. However, the reform that began in 1991, it encompassed foreign investment policies, through dismantling trade barriers, igniting transformative era of rapid economic growth and modernization. The economic ascension has also elevated India's role in global economic governance. India plays an essential role in various multilateral economic platforms, such as:

World Trade Organization (WTO): India plays an important and influential role in WTO, advocating the interests of developing countries and striving to shape global trade framework to foster inclusive growth and fair-trade practices. India has also been strongly advocating for the Doha Development Agenda, which aims to reduce trade barriers and improve the trading prospects of developing countries. Further, the country has been involved in several high-profile cases that make evident its commitment to upholding the principles of fair trade.

BRICS: BRICS is an intergovernmental organization and its grouping of Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa represents an alternative voice in global economic order. Through BRICS, India advocates to reform in global financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, aiming to give more voices to emerging countries.

G20: India's role in G20 highlights country's growing influence in global governance through championing inclusivity, sustainability, and equitable economic practices. India positions itself as a bridge between developed and developing nations. India's presidency of G marked a transformative phase, with a focus on inclusivity under the theme " Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (The World is One Family).

Security Multilateralism

As a rising global power, India actively participates in multilateral security initiatives to promote regional stability, combat transnational threats, and foster a rules-based international order. Its approach to security multilateralism reflects its commitments to addressing security challenges through cooperative framework.

United Nations (UN): India has been an upholder of UN reforms, participating in numerous peacekeeping missions worldwide. India advocates the reforms for stronger mandates, better resources and accountability in peacekeeping operations, with its demand for a permanent seat on UN Security Council (UNSC).

Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA): Its Maritime Security Leadership where India spearheads initiatives to address piracy, illegal fishing, and trafficking in the India Ocean region. It also advocates for a rule-based order in maritime security to ensure open sea lanes and regional stability.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD): India's participation with United States, Japan, and Australia in QUAD reflects its strategic alignment to ensure free and open Indo-Pacific, countering security challenges and promoting regional stability.

Environmental Multilateralism

India has emerged as an important player in global environmental governance, leveraging its position as a developing nation with notable environmental challenges and opportunities. Through participating in multilateral frameworks, India seeks to address climate change,biodiversity loss and promote sustainable development.

Paris Climate Agreement: India has been a key player in United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations and Paris Climate Agreement. India pledged ambitious targets under its Nationally Determined

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Contributions (NDCs), including reducing emissions intensity by 45% by 2030 and achieving 50% of its energy capacity from non-fossil fuel sources.

International Solar Alliance (ISA): The ISA is a landmark initiative spearheaded by India to foster global cooperation in harnessing solar energy. Launched during the COP21 Paris Climate Conference in 2015, which aims to mobilize efforts from solar resource rich countries to address energy security, promote sustainable development, and combat climate change.

SAARC Environmental Initiatives: Being a founding member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), India plays a pivotal role in addressing environmental challenges within the region. Advocates issues like transboundary pollution, glacier melting, and disaster management.

Challenges to India'S Multilateral Diplomacy

India's pursuit of multilateral engagement in 21st century has faced intricatre geopolitical and institutional challenges, reflecting the evolving global order and regional complexities.

Structural Imbalance: The major criticism leveled against the existing multilateral institutions which failed to reflect the current global power divisions. India's demand for permanent seat at UN Security Council, for instance, reflect this critique.

Geopolitical Tensions: India's relation with Pakistan and China often complicate its multilateral engagement. India's growing security alliance with the United States and other Western countries has been the major concern for China, making multilateral cooperation more challenging.

Economic Disparities: While India benefits multilateral economic cooperation, it also faces challenges in reconciling the interests of developed and developing countries. As a member of both the G20 and BRICS, India must navigate the complexities of balancing the interests of richer, more powerful states with those of less developed economies.

India'S Future Role in Multilateralism

India's increasing involvement in multilateral institutions is likely to continue as its influence on the global stage grows. As the world's largest democracy and an emerging economic power, India is expected to play a more significant role in shaping global governance in the 21st century.

Leadership in Climate Action: India has been at the forefront of global efforts to combat climate change, with leveraging its advancement in renewable energy. India is committed to achieving ambitious targets such as 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, demonstrating its dedication its dedication to sustainable development.

Digital Diplomacy: Recognizing the transformative potential of technology, India has advocated for equitable access to digital tools and infrastructure, focusing on bridging the digital divide across developing nations. It also seeks to establish robust internationalnorms for cybersecurity and data protection, ensuring a secure and inclusive digital economy.

Strengthening Regional Ties: India is revitalizing SAARC and BIMSTEC to enhance regional stability and economic integration. By prioritizing projects access that improve connectivity, trade, and disaster management, India aims to foster collaboration on shared challenges such as climate change, energy security, and poverty alleviation. These efforts align with its vision of creating a resilient and cooperative South Asia.

Conclusion

India's engagement with multilateralism in the 21st century is a testament to its evolving role as a global power. By actively participating in economic, security, environmental, and cultural multilateral initiatives, India seeks to shape global governance in ways that align with its national interests and values. The challenges it faces, however, underscore the complexity of global diplomacy, where balancing national priorities with international cooperation is often difficult. India's success in navigating these challenges will determine its influence in the multilateral order in the years to come.

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