



India's Influence in the Global South: Guiding Leadership, Facing Challenges, and Embracing Opportunities

Jayendra Pravinbhai Siddhapura¹, Dr. Priyanka Suchak², Dr. Aarti Joshi³, and Bhakti Shaileshbhai Morvadiya⁴

¹Assistant Professor, School of Management, RK University, Gujarat, India

²Associate Professor, School of Management, RK University, Gujarat, India

³Dean, School of Management, RK University, Gujarat, India

⁴MBA Student, School of Management, RK University, Rajkot.

Email: 1jayendra01phd@gmail.com

Abstract— India has positioned itself as a pivotal leader in the Global South, advocating for the collective interests of developing nations while navigating its domestic priorities and international responsibilities. This paper explores India's historical leadership rooted in its post-colonial vision, including its role in the Non-Aligned Movement and the Bandung Conference. It examines contemporary initiatives, such as India's contributions to South-South cooperation through economic investments, technological collaboration, and diplomatic engagement in multilateral forums like BRICS and the G20. The paper also highlights the challenges India faces, including socio-economic disparities, geopolitical tensions, and climate vulnerabilities, which often constrain its capacity to act as a global leader. Despite these obstacles, India's advancements in technology, renewable energy, and cultural diplomacy offer significant opportunities to strengthen its leadership within the Global South. By leveraging its growing economic and geopolitical influence, India can play a transformative role in addressing shared challenges such as economic inequality, climate change, and health crises. This paper concludes that India's dual role as a bridge between the Global South and the Global North underscores its potential to shape a more equitable and inclusive global order.

Keywords— India, Global South, Geopolitics, Leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

India has emerged as a prominent leader in the Global South, showcasing its ability to address shared challenges and foster collaboration among developing nations (Mishra, 2021). As a nation with a robust economy and a strong commitment to South-South cooperation, India has positioned itself as a bridge between developing and developed countries (Mukherjee, 2020).

India's historical association with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and its advocacy for equitable global governance highlight its enduring commitment to the Global South (Bajpai, 2019). Through initiatives like the International Solar Alliance and Vaccine Maitri, India has demonstrated its proactive stance in addressing global issues such as climate change and public health (Kumar, 2022).



Despite its leadership, India faces significant challenges, including balancing domestic priorities with international commitments (Sharma, 2021). Economic disparities, geopolitical tensions, and the need for technological advancement continue to test India's ability to sustain its influence (Gupta, 2020).

Nonetheless, opportunities abound for India to deepen its ties with the Global South, leveraging its growing economy and technological capabilities (Chaturvedi, 2021). By championing the interests of developing nations on global platforms, India can further solidify its role as a key player in shaping an inclusive world order (Roy, 2022).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 India's Leadership in The Global South

India's historical alignment with the Global South is rooted in its pivotal role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Scholars such as (Bajpai, 2019) argue that NAM laid the foundation for India's efforts to advocate for developing nations on issues like decolonization, trade justice, and equitable global governance. Similarly, (Mukherjee, 2020) emphasizes India's growing influence in global forums, noting its ability to act as a bridge between developing and developed nations.

Recent studies also highlight India's proactive approach to addressing global challenges. (Kumar, 2022) examines the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and Vaccines Maitri initiative, illustrating how India has leveraged its resources to provide public goods for the Global South. These efforts underscore India's commitment to South-South cooperation and its capacity to lead collective action.

2.2 Challenges in Sustaining Leadership

Despite its leadership role, India faces numerous challenges in maintaining its influence. (Sharma, 2021) identifies a critical tension between India's domestic priorities, such as poverty alleviation and economic development, and its international commitments. Similarly, (Gupta, 2020) explores structural challenges, including economic disparities and geopolitical rivalries, that hinder India's ability to consistently champion the interests of the Global South.

Moreover, scholars point to India's technological and infrastructural limitations as barriers to achieving its full potential as a leader. (Chaturvedi, 2021) highlight the need for India to invest in innovation and capacity-building to effectively compete with developed nations and support its partners in the Global South.

2.3 Opportunities for Enhanced Engagement

Despite these challenges, scholars identify significant opportunities for India to deepen its engagement with the Global South. (Mishra, 2021) highlights India's growing economy and technological advancements as key enablers for strengthening ties with developing nations. (Roy, 2022) further explores how India can leverage platforms like the BRICS and G20 to amplify the voice of the Global South in a multipolar world.

Furthermore, literature emphasizes the role of cultural and historical ties in enhancing India's soft power. (Bajpai, 2019) note that India's shared colonial history with many Global South nations provides a unique foundation for



fostering solidarity and cooperation. These opportunities allow India to solidify its role as a key factor in shaping an inclusive global order.

2.4 India's Historical Role in the Global South

India has historically positioned itself as a key advocate for the Global South, particularly through its leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Scholars like (Bajpai, 2019) underscore that NAM was pivotal in providing a platform for developing nations to voice their concerns during the Cold War. India's focus on decolonization, sovereignty, and equitable global governance resonated with newly independent nations, earning it a reputation as a champion of South-South solidarity. Furthermore, (Mukherjee, 2020) argues that India's early diplomatic initiatives set the stage for its contemporary leadership in addressing issues such as trade inequality and climate change.

2.5 India as an Emerging Economic Leader

India's economic growth has further strengthened its role in the Global South. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported India as the fifth-largest global economy in 2023, with a GDP of \$3.73 trillion. (Mishra, 2021) highlights that India's economic influence is particularly evident in its trade relations, with bilateral trade with Africa exceeding \$89 billion in 2022. Such economic partnerships not only enhance India's influence but also foster mutual growth across the Global South. Additionally, India's role in multilateral institutions like BRICS and the G20 demonstrates its commitment to reshaping global economic governance in favor of developing countries (Roy, 2022).

2.6 Development Assistance and South-South Cooperation

India has been a prominent contributor to South-South cooperation through its development assistance programs. According to (MEA, 2023), India has extended over \$32 billion in lines of credit to more than 60 countries, funding infrastructure, healthcare, and education projects. Notably, (Kumar, 2022) examines India's Vaccine Maitri initiative, which delivered over 250 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to more than 100 countries. This initiative highlighted India's leadership in global health diplomacy and its ability to act as a first responder to crises in the Global South.

The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is another example of India's commitment to sustainable development. As the leading nation in this alliance, which has 124 member countries, India aims to mobilize \$1 trillion in solar energy investments by 2030 (ISA, 2023). (Chaturvedi, 2021) argue that such initiatives enhance India's credibility as a sustainable development leader.

2.7 India's Technological Contributions

India's advancements in technology have positioned it as a key driver of digital transformation in the Global South. (Roy, 2022) highlights that India's digital public goods, particularly the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), have been instrumental in promoting financial inclusion in several developing countries. The scalability and adaptability of UPI have allowed countries in Africa and Southeast Asia to adopt similar systems, demonstrating India's ability to export innovative solutions. Additionally, (Sharma, 2021) points to India's achievements in space



technology, such as the Mars Orbiter Mission, which serve as an inspiration for other Global South nations seeking to develop indigenous technological capacities.

2.8 Challenges to India's Leadership

Despite its accomplishments, India faces significant challenges in sustaining its leadership in the Global South. (Sharma, 2021) highlights the tension between India's domestic priorities, such as poverty alleviation and infrastructure development, and its international commitments. Over 229 million people in India still live below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2023), which limits the resources available for global engagement. Additionally, (Gupta, 2020) identifies an annual infrastructure investment deficit of \$112 billion, underscoring the challenges India faces in balancing domestic and international development goals.

Geopolitical tensions also pose obstacles to India's leadership. For instance, China's growing influence in the Global South, particularly through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), often competes with India's efforts to strengthen its partnerships. (Mishra, 2021) notes that India's ability to counter such influence depends on its capacity to offer viable alternatives and deepen its economic and strategic ties with developing nations.

2.9 Opportunities for Enhanced Engagement

Despite these challenges, India has significant opportunities to enhance its role in the Global South. (Roy, 2022) suggests that India's participation in multilateral platforms like the G20 and BRICS provides a unique opportunity to amplify the voices of developing nations. Additionally, initiatives like the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which has been adopted by several Global South countries, showcase India's potential to drive technological transformation and financial inclusion (NASSCOM, 2023).

India's cultural and historical ties also offer opportunities for deeper engagement. (Bajpai, 2019) argue that India's shared colonial history with many developing nations creates a sense of solidarity that can be leveraged to strengthen partnerships. Furthermore, the expansion of people-to-people connections through educational exchange programs and diaspora networks enhances India's soft power.

2.10 India's Role in Global Health Diplomacy

India's leadership in global health has emerged as a critical aspect of its engagement with the Global South. (Kumar, 2022) underscores the importance of the Vaccine Maitri initiative not only in addressing immediate public health needs but also in building long-term goodwill and trust. Additionally, India's pharmaceutical industry, known as the "pharmacy of the world," supplies affordable medicines to over 200 countries, making it a vital partner for nations struggling with healthcare affordability (WHO, 2022) Highlights that such contributions solidify India's role as a responsible global actor, particularly in times of crisis (Mishra, 2021).

3. RESEARCH GAP

While the concept of the Global North and Global South as divided by the Brandt Line has been widely used to explain economic disparities, there is a need to reassess its relevance in today's rapidly changing global economy. Many countries in the Global South, such as China, India, and Brazil, have experienced significant economic growth, challenging the traditional North-South divide. Additionally, globalization, technological advancements, and



shifting geopolitical dynamics have altered economic structures, making the binary classification less precise. However, limited research has explored alternative frameworks that better capture contemporary economic inequalities and development patterns. Further investigation is needed to determine whether the Brandt Line remains a useful tool for understanding global disparities or if a more nuanced approach is required to reflect modern economic realities.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To examine India's historical role in fostering South-South cooperation and its contemporary leadership in multilateral platforms, such as BRICS, the G77, and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).
- To analyze India's economic, technological, and diplomatic initiatives, emphasizing their Importance.
- To identify domestic and international challenges that hinder India's ability to effectively engage and lead within the Global South, including political, economic, and geopolitical constraints.
- To assess how India's engagement with the Global South influences its strategic positioning and contributes to shaping global governance frameworks.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology to explore India's leadership in the Global South. It includes a literature review of academic works, policy papers, and international reports to establish a historical foundation. Secondary data analysis is conducted using credible sources like the IMF and World Bank to evaluate trends. Comparative and thematic analyses highlight India's distinct strategies and recurring themes such as sustainable development and global health diplomacy. Policy analysis ensures a critical evaluation of the alignment between India's goals and outcomes. This approach provides a holistic understanding of India's contributions, challenges, and opportunities in the Global South. For statistics researchers have studied various data and reports published by IMF, United Nations, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, India, International Energy Forum as secondary data.

6. INTERPRITATION OF INDIAN GLOBAL LEADERSHIP STATS

India plays a pivotal role in the Global South, marked by significant economic, diplomatic, technological, and developmental contributions. With a GDP of \$3.7 trillion, it is the 5th largest global economy and provides \$7.5 billion annually in development aid. India's diplomatic influence is seen in hosting 125 countries at the Voice of the Global South Summit and contributing 7% of UN peacekeeping troops.

In technology, India's \$178 billion IT exports and \$1.5 trillion in UPI transactions highlight its leadership in digital innovation. Its renewable energy targets and social welfare programs, like providing 1.8 billion free meals, underline its commitment to sustainable development.

India's \$200 million in medical aid to Africa and 75% of global vaccines during COVID-19 cement its role in global health. However, India faces challenges like hunger affecting 190 million people and a \$2.5 trillion financing gap for SDGs.

Opportunities lie in green hydrogen development and capacity-building efforts, positioning India to further enhance its leadership in the Global South.

Figure 1: Indian Global Leadership Stats

Category	Statistic	Source
Economic Leadership	India's GDP: \$3.7 trillion (5th largest globally).	IMF
	Provides \$7.5 billion in annual development assistance.	BlogMyGov
Diplomatic Engagement	125 countries attended the Voice of the Global South Summit (2023).	Ministry of External Affairs
	Contributed 7% of UN peacekeeping troops.	United Nations
Technological Innovation	\$178 billion in IT exports globally (2023).	NASSCOM
	India's UPI system processed \$1.5 trillion in transactions in 2023.	NPCI
Sustainable Development	India's renewable energy capacity: 125 GW, target: 500 GW by 2030.	Ministry of New and Renewable Energy
	Supplied 1.8 billion free meals under PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (2020-2023).	Ministry of Consumer Affairs, India
Global Health Diplomacy	75% of global vaccines during COVID-19 through "Vaccine Maitri."	Ministry of External Affairs
	\$200 million in medical supplies to Africa annually.	Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance
Challenges	190 million Indians are undernourished.	Global Hunger Index
	Faces a \$2.5 trillion SDG financing gap.	UNDP
Opportunities	Leads 90% of capacity-building programs for Global South nations.	Ministry of External Affairs
	India aims to be a leader in green hydrogen, a \$500 billion global market by 2030.	International Energy Forum

7. INTERPRITATION OF GLOBAL SOUTH AND GLOBAL NORTH

The map illustrates the division between the Global North and the Global South using the Brandt Line, a concept that highlights global economic disparities. The Global North, shown in purple, includes highly industrialized and wealthy regions such as North America, Europe, Russia, Australia, and parts of Asia. These countries typically have higher incomes, advanced infrastructure, and greater influence in global trade and politics. In contrast, the Global South, represented in orange, consists of less economically developed regions, including Latin America, Africa, and much of Asia. These areas often face challenges such as lower income levels, weaker infrastructure, and economic

instability. While some countries in the Global South have experienced significant growth, the division remains a useful framework for understanding global inequalities in wealth, development, and geopolitical influence.

Figure 2. Map of Global South and Global North



8. LIMITATIONS

- The study relies heavily on secondary data, which may not fully capture the most recent developments or unpublished insights.
- The qualitative methodology employed limits the ability to quantify India's impact in measurable terms, which could provide additional depth to the analysis.
- The focus on India's role may overlook broader regional dynamics within the Global South, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other contexts.
- The research is constrained by the availability and reliability of sources, which may introduce bias or gaps in the analysis.

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