

# India's G20 Presidency and the Role of Soft Power

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## ABSTRACT

The end of the cold war brought tectonic changes in world politics. The world witnessed changes in its structure, actors as well as politics. With changing actors in world politics emerged new trends, fresh goals, advanced aspirations, and modernistic expectations. Besides the usual theoretical traditions common to International Relations, novel theories, and actors emerged that became impossible to ignore. The genesis of the concept of 'soft power' and institutions such as G20 is the upshot of this development. This period also marked the amazing emergence of developing countries such as India consolidating its capabilities and quietly asserting its ability to safeguard its core 'national interests'. From being placed at the 'receiving end' now India is reinforcing its position of being at the 'giving end'.

India took up the G20 presidency in 2023, which is viewed as a critical juncture for furthering its goals and raising the nation's profile internationally by holding the attention of countries that account for 85 percent of global GDP, 75 percent of international trade, and two-thirds of the world population. The theme of India's G20 Presidency, "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or "One Earth · One Family · One Future," aims to drive transformative actions globally, leading to inclusive and equitable growth for all and a more sustainable future.

The purpose of this paper is to answer two research questions. The first one is how India utilizes its presidency for furthering its soft power resource internationally through civilizational and cultural prisms, and the second will G20 presidency prove to be an opportunity for India to transform its image from "rule-taker to being a rule-maker" in the current geopolitical and economic complexities.

**Keywords:** Culture, G20, India, Soft Power, Presidency, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

## INTRODUCTION

International politics is dynamic in nature, with each happening around the globe there is a shift in the perception and condition. The end of the cold war marked a significant change in world politics leading to changes in the global power structure, spur in national economic integration, and the convergence of policies in different domains leading to global governance which was the product of neo-liberal paradigm shifts in international political and economic relations (Jang et al., 2016). This period also witnessed the emergence of new types of agencies and actors in addition to national governments that go beyond the "traditional forms of state-led, treaty-based regimes" (Biermann & Pattberg, 2008:80) aiding the phenomenon of *globalization*. There had been a spike in the interconnection among nations, people-to-people contact, exchange of knowledge, cultural linkage, and increased international collaboration. During this period, a concept that caught fire and defined the post-Cold War era was the concept of 'Soft Power'.

Traditionally, Power has always been akin to military, security, arms, coercion, and economic might, which can be seen and touched and can have a strong deterrent effect (Jervis, 2013). These powers were known as ‘hard power’. Hard power is rooted in the concept of realism which emphasizes the importance of power, interest, and security in international relations (Morgenthau, 1948). The use of hard power can provide a sense of ‘security for a state’s citizens and allies’ (Haass, 2008). But they had certain disadvantages too. Firstly, they are costly in terms of resources, and human lives (Nye, 2009). Secondly, it can escalate the arms race. Thirdly, more of its usage can lead to long-term hostility between the states (Keohane, 1984), and most importantly, escalation in the conflict can give rise to more violence and more animosity among the states (Mearsheimer, 2014).

With the end of the cold war, the need was felt to look beyond the traditional conception of power and focus on the tools of foreign policy that can help in overcoming this anxious state of affairs and the concept of ‘soft power’ perfectly fits into the criteria. Unlike hard power, which relies on military and economic might, soft power is based on ‘attraction and persuasion’, and includes elements such as culture, values, norms, attraction, and institutions. It reduces the chances of war and conflict and offers peaceful solutions to violence (Kissinger, 2015).

This term was first coined by Harvard University Professor, Joseph Samuel Nye Jr. in 1990, in his book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*.

He defined ‘Soft Power’ as:

*“A country’s ability to influence the preferences and behaviours of various actors in the international arena (states, corporations, communities, publics, etc.) through attraction or persuasion rather than coercion.”*

Nye (1990) highlighted the importance of a country’s cultural, ideological, and institutional appeal in influencing others. Nye’s quest for establishing the concept of soft power did not end here. He further elaborated the concept in his book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* in 2009. In this book, he stated that:

*Soft Power in international politics arises from factors such as the dominant values, internal practices and policies, and the manner of conducting international relations of a State.*

Simply put, the soft power of any state government depends mostly on three fundamental resources: a) The *culture of the state* which emphasizes on its people and their way of thinking, lifestyle, ancient tradition, heritage, custom, ancient history, literature, etc. b) The political system or values of the state; such as democracy, the quality of political institutions, human rights, commitment to freedom, etc. and c) The foreign policy of the government, which is framed keeping in view the interest of the nations and to increase country’s image in the international sphere in a non-coercive manner. These three are the cardinal principles of soft power.

Nye (1990), opines that

*If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow*

This novel concept of power soon became popular among policy makers, academicians, and international media all around the world. It started pulling every country towards itself. Not only developed but developing countries too started using it as a foreign policy tool because it was cost-effective and easy to use. Soft power soon became the key to improving one’s global image, reputation, respect and admiration from other countries. This concept became so popular that it became the artifact of the post-Cold War world (Mukherjee, 2014). It was commonly accepted that for a nation to be attractive and a role model for

others, its overall reputation must be strong, positive, and attractive.

The concept of 'soft power' kept expanding at its pace. In an extended definition, soft power means (Kurlantzick, 2008)-

*'Anything outside of the military and security realm, including not only popular culture and public diplomacy but also more coercive economic and diplomatic levers, like aid and investment and participation in multilateral organizations.'*

Soft Power is exercised in many ways ranging from culture and heritage, business and trade, governance, international relations, media and communication, people and values, and education and science (Thomson, 2020). The conduct of foreign policy through international institutions and organizations is also another channel through which states soft power gets projected (Vuving, 2009). It has become a vital instrument for shaping a broader narrative in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in the foreign policy of nations. Because of globalization-driven economic interdependence and the rise of non-state and transnational actors, the sub-state or societal level also came within the scope of soft power (Mattern, 2005). Today the horizon of soft power has broadened so much that it is impossible to ignore its effectiveness.

## INDIA'S SOFT POWER

When the concept of soft power was gaining so much currency across the globe, India also couldn't remain cold-eyed. India being an ancient civilizational state, its soft power rootlets are very deeply penetrated. It draws its soft power from traditional, religious, ethnolinguistic and cultural relations with other nations and its considerable success in weaving together so many ethnic, religious, caste, and other strands within its society (Malone, 2011). This blend of diversity is a strong advertisement for its eminence. The fact that India is the birthplace of Hinduism and Buddhism, carries a rich legacy of spiritual and scientific knowledge is the testimony of India's rich cultural heritage (Mullan, 2015). Whether it is Indian spiritualism, cuisine, handicraft, Bollywood, classical and popular music, writers or intellectuals, all have been the levers of India's soft power. These factors place India in the position where 'India could always count itself among the few nations with strong cards in the arena of soft power' (Mohan, 2003) and boost its capability to connect, strengthen and fix the cleavages shaped by history and politics.

The impact of soft power on Indian foreign policy is visible from the time of Pt. Nehru. Malone et al. (2017) quote one of the statements issued by John F. Kennedy:

*Nehru's sense of moral importance in public diplomacy and his preferred use of soft power over hard power shaped the nature of India's early foreign policy.*

During the Cold War, India sought to create a shared sense of identity for the developing world characterized by anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism opposition to apartheid, disarmament, use of peaceful means for conflict resolution and commitment to multilateralism such as support for UN. These principles helped has earn tremendous reputation and legitimacy at the international arena. The foundation of NAM was certainly the high point of India's international success. India's growing economic prosperity and success of its development model mediated through peaceful democratic means are also being considered a great source of attraction for other developing countries. Though the military defeat against China in 1962 and the subsequent deteriorating regional and global environment pushed India to pursue a hard power strategy but over the years, India has been trying to project its soft power to improve its image among the comity of nations. Since the 1990s was the age of growing interdependence and economic liberalization, the use of hard power appeared increasingly difficult. During this period the issue of

influence, perception, and cultural diplomacy gained significant attention among policymakers. Concurrently India also exerted itself to support peaceful advancement and a good friendly policy towards its neighbours and the soft power to cater to its legitimacy in South Asia and create a space for itself in the unipolar world.

With the beginning of new millennium, the world politics took a new turn. Consequently the nature of international relations in the developing world too began to change in a big way (Mohan, 2022) The changed scenario affected the foreign policy of India also. It began a concerted effort to channel its soft power capabilities. There had been a growing consensus that India possesses considerable soft power resources arising from its universalist culture, democratic political institutions, and tradition of leadership among developing nations (Mukherjee, 2014) and India seemed to have skillfully combined the hard and soft power strategy to fulfill its global power ambitions.

Shashi Tharoor, former Union Minister of State for External Affairs is of the view that “it is not the size of the army or the economy that matters but instead, it was the country that told the ‘better story’ would qualify as a global player.” He opines that India’s Soft power has enhanced its international standing. He also identifies the components of India’s soft power as “as diverse as films and Bollywood, yoga, ayurveda, political pluralism, religious diversity and openness to global influences.” (Mazumdar, 2018). ‘Incredible India’, the nation’s possibly most significant worldwide marketing campaign, launched in 2002 was the initiative that was designed to create a ‘distinctive identity and attraction for the country’ (Mazumdar, 2020). It highlighted India’s immense diversity through historic and religious sites, which included Hindu temples, Islamic mosques, Buddhist stupas, Christian churches, Sikh shrines, and mausoleums. India’s showcased itself as a mosaic of various faiths. The Taj Mahal, the nation’s most recognized notable monument was also highlighted. Other than that, the cultural sites, wildlife sanctuaries, mountains, beaches, pilgrimage sites, and many more were included as additional attractions. The promotion has been extremely effective in increasing annual tourism arrivals to the nation (Thussu, 2013) and boosted its international image and projected it as a peaceful rising power.

India is the only country that has emerged with a geopolitical heft that is part of the international consensus – democracy, vibrant civil society, free press, and judiciary – and yet, is different from the Western system. All other countries that emerged on the global stage during this period were either part of the Western consensus or not part of the international consensus or too small to matter on the global stage. This places India in a unique position that has not been available to any other country in recent centuries (Mishra, 2022). India’s ideals, democratic institutions and principles like non-violence has helped to improve its relations with other countries and help attract foreign investment, technology, and tourists to promote economic growth and development (Mazumdar, 2018). The government is making attempts to project India globally through its soft power and link overseas Indians with the country’s geopolitical aspirations (Pant & Ratna, 2023). This is likely to have significant implications for the conduct of Indian diplomacy and the broader role of India in global politics in the coming years (Pant, 2022). Accordingly, India has pursued a foreign policy agenda backed by the ‘power of moral arguments rather than arguments of power’ and used soft power to compensate for its hard power deficiencies (Kugiel, 2016).

Today the structural realities of contemporary global politics had sharpened the fault lines between various powers. In the din of this great power politics, India’s growing capabilities and its rising aspirations to play a larger role and willingness to take on greater responsibilities make it an appropriate host for the G-20 event. India has always shown commitment to multilateralism. It believes “that national good and global good can be entirely in harmony” (Pant, 2022b). The abundance of political will and compassion

towards all is the quality that makes India a potential global leader. This presidency can be an opportunity for all the participating countries to strategize on a collective agenda and use this platform for a prosperous future.

## **G20 AS AN INSTITUTION**

The G20, an organization rooted in the concept of international governance was established in 1999 after a series of major international debt crises. Initially, it was a platform for Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to discuss international economic and financial issues but now it is a crucial forum for addressing global challenges. Since its creation, the G20 has comprised the European Union and 19 individual countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Spain is invited as a permanent guest. In addition, there are standing invitations for major international organizations to participate, albeit not as formal members. Among those organizations are the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (Bonner, 2023).

The forum aimed to provide financial stability and bring parity among the member states from all regions of the world, that included both developed and developing countries. A key requisite for membership is economic size and influence within the global economy. From being a platform exclusively committed to discussing economic issues now G20 has widened its scope and structure to include Heads of State or Government in the discussions apart from Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors. It happened in the wake of the global economic and financial crisis of 2008. Within G20 other issues of global concern such as global security, terrorism, environment, pandemic, etc are also getting included. But still, its major issue of concern is economic matters to the extent that it is designated as the “premier forum for international economic cooperation” (Ministry of External Affairs, 2022).

Unlike most international organizations, the G20 has no permanent headquarters, staff, or secretariat, rather it is a group that functions primarily as an informal policy-debating club (Kaul, 2019). It is one of the few existing global platforms where different international institutions and regional organizations can coordinate across a vast array of issue areas and emergent policy fields (Benson & Zürn, 2019). Currently, the EU and G20 nations comprise “around 85 percent of the global GDP, over 75 percent of the global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population.” (Ministry of External Affairs, 2022). The presidency of G20 rotates annually among the member states. The nation in charge of the presidency proposes an agenda and does the required setting to organize various meetings for that year’s summit. For continuity and ease current presidents are assisted by their immediate predecessors and successors, forming a ‘Troika’. The G20 presidency does not offer any formal power to the host nation but it does present an opportunity to influence the collective economic agenda of some of the most powerful and influential nations in the world. This may give India the chance to turn the discussion towards its preferred direction and further its economic agenda (Basu, 2022) when it is getting the opportunity to host this prestigious forum.

## **INDIA’S G20 PRESIDENCY: A WATERSHED EVENT**

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 India assumed the presidency of the G20 forum, taking over from Indonesia. This presidency will continue until 30 November 2023. Thus, the year 2023 is surely going to be an eventful year for India. India joined the G-20 in 1998 when it was still a group of finance ministers and central

bank governors. Since then, India has been actively involved in shaping the G-20's agenda and advancing its interests on the world stage (Vaid, 2023). This Presidency is regarded by experts as an exceptional and unprecedented opportunity for India to showcase its growing influence, reputation, economic stability, and prosperity on the global stage and demonstrate its emerging soft power, and promoting the universal virtue of oneness and mutual cooperation amongst the member countries.

Simon Anholt, an independent policy advisor argues that a nation's brand can be "enhanced through strategy, substance, and symbolic actions" (Anholt, 2011). The centrepiece of every international activity organized by any state is to enhance its stature so that it can achieve the maximum possible benefits and reputation among the global community. The platform is expected to be a mirror of India's independent foreign policy driven by its increasing economic might (Niranjan, 2023) and a harbinger of harmony and peace. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has also reiterated the fact that hosting the G-20 is an "opportunity to leverage India's growing strategic and economic heft" (Jamrisko, 2023). Overall, the G-20 summit could provide the ideal platform for India to set the tone for its emerging global leadership and communicate what responsibilities it wants to bear under that leadership.

The logo chosen for India's G20 Presidency juxtaposes planet Earth with the lotus in tricolour which reflects the vibrant colours of India's national flag – saffron, white and green, and blue symbolizing growth amid challenges. The lotus in the logo with seven petals depicts seven continents and seven notes of music, signalling that India's presidency will transcend the limitations of geography and groupings to embrace the whole world, where no one should be left behind (Chinoy, 2022a) and the world together will live in peace and harmony. The Earth below the G20 logo is "Bharat", written in the Devanagari script symbolizes India's rich cultural heritage.

The theme of this G20 is "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," which conveys the meaning "One Earth, One Family, One Future," It is inspired by the Maha Upanishad, an old Sanskrit scripture. This theme fundamentally highlights the importance of all life—human, animal, plant, and microorganism—as well as their interdependence on Earth and across the universe. It focuses on sustainable development. It also exemplifies LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), which highlights the importance of environmentally sustainable and responsible lifestyle choices, both at the individual and national level, in creating a cleaner, greener, and bluer future.

Generally, any discussion about climate change focuses on the behaviour of the states and their responsibilities. But a major loophole of these initiatives is that the behaviour at the individual level takes a back seat. As Plato in his *Republic* mentions that *State is an individual writ large* so, it is the behaviour of the individual which shapes the behaviour of the state and thus the LiFE initiative set its sight on the behaviour of the individual. It puts the individual at the center of the discourse and to sensitise every human being, regardless of nationality and geography. If individuals make changes in their behaviour, become more conscious of their lifestyle choices, and act more responsibly, it can make a huge difference. The focus on LiFE is a step forward in the right direction considering that the pernicious effects of climate change are being felt all over the world and the most vulnerable are the developing countries given the fact that they won't be able to afford the mitigating tools to lessen the effect of climate change (Chinoy, 2022b). Thus, there is a need for 'mindful and deliberate utilization' of resources rather than 'mindless and wasteful consumption'.

The logo and the theme of G20 together set the stage for meaningful and steering discussions and deliberations, responsive decisions, and concrete actions, striving for just and equitable growth for all in the world. India is a responsible country is poised to work and bring the attention of the world towards the

fact that rather than categorizing the countries into different groups such as first world, second world, and third world or developed, developing and underdeveloped, or North and South, collective efforts should be made to have an equitable world order so that we can collectively navigate through all the turbulent times, in a “sustainable, holistic, responsible, and inclusive manner” (PIB Mumbai, 2022).

### **INDIA SHOWCASING SABKA SAATH, SABKA VIKAS, SABKA VISHWAS, SABKA SAHBHAG**

Being the host of this high-profile international gathering, in which the country is set to hold nearly 200 meetings in 32 different sectors in multiple locations across different states, India is pushing for “a new world order with the core vision enshrined in the cultural ethos of serving humanity and mankind for the benefit of all” (Omer, 2022). This summit is significant in the sense that the vision of our Prime Minister is getting reflected in its every aspect. One of the key facets of the Modi government since 2014 has been “people’s participation, people-centric governance, people-oriented policies, and people-led development”. This dimension is visible in G20 too. This G20 has moved away from a “protocol-driven G20” to a “People’s G20” (Poonawala, 2023).

To connect this summit with the common people, University Grant Commission (UGC) has made a special recommendation to the schools and higher educational institutions across the nation, to conduct and organize special programmes on G20 themes. These include Special G20 sessions in Schools/Universities, G20 University Connect programmes, lecture series, and events based on G20 including ‘Know Your G20’ quizzes, seminars, crossword, painting, marathon, declamation, Insta-Reel, etc. It has also been advised that the scheduled events of institutes, such as annual days, convocation events, cultural programmes, and sporting events, should be branded as G20 events (Sharma, 2023). UGC chairman professor M. Jagadesh Kumar stated that these programmes based on the theme of G20 aim at projecting the “youth as cultural ambassadors” who can create “long-lasting relationships with the G20 fraternity”. (Business Standard, 2023).

Not only educational institutions, but there are also instructions for civil society and the private sector by the government that they should organize model G20 meetings, G20 Pavilions in major festivals, Selfie competitions, #G20India stories, and hundreds of other G20-theme events. Civil society is playing a significant role in shaping India’s G20 agenda through eleven engagement groups, namely: Women20 (W20), Think20 (T20), Business20 (B20), Youth20 (Y20), Science20 (S20), Labour20 (L20), Parliament20 (P20), Youth 20 (Y20), Supreme Audit Institutions20 (SAI20), Urban20 (U20), Civil20 (C20), and Startup20, which has been proposed under India’s Presidency for the first time (Kant, 2023). As per the MEA, in-person participation during India’s G20 Presidency is among the largest ever (MEA, 2023).

This presidency is also unique in the sense that, unlike previous events, this event encompasses the participation of smaller cities including Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, apart from big metros. The prioritization of provinces/regions showcasing their history, local culture, local arts, crafts, cuisine, traditions, and scenic beauty reflects the principle of inclusive growth for all (*sabka saath sabka vikas*). The delegates of G20 actively participating in events such as the Manipur Sangai Festival 2022 in Imphal, International Sand Art Festival 2022 at Konark, Odisha, the Hornbill Festival 2022 in Nagaland, International Kite Festival 2023 in Gujarat, Surajkund International Crafts Mela in Faridabad, International Food Festival in Delhi, cultural festival in Ladakh, Ganga Aarti in Varanasi, Chapchar Kut festival in Mizoram, and most significantly attending G20 working group meeting in Jammu and Kashmir reflect India’s growing stature in the world. India by organizing working group meeting in J & K despite objections raised by China and

Pakistan reaffirmed its sovereignty over J & K firmly. This pan-India approach of the government to host the meetings and emphasize the concept of 'Jan Bhagidari' (citizen's engagement) truly demonstrates that this Presidency aims to make the G20 truly by the people, and for the people (Kant, 2023)

The government has also emphasized on the role of the Indian diaspora as an important dimension of 'soft power'. C. Raja Mohan (2003) opines that "people of Indian origin are extremely important sources of support for the Indian government in the execution of its policies through the influence and respect they command in the countries in which they live." They are the "bridge-builders" between their home and adopted countries. Prime Minister Modi has also repeatedly urged the non-resident Indians to share the glory of India with the next generation of Pravasi Bharatiya. As India has taken over the G-20 Presidency this year, the responsibility of the Indian Diaspora gets larger to make the world aware of the country's glorious achievements and magnificent past, which is sure to help it attain a sustainable future (Kumar, 2023).

### THE GEO-STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

The world is undergoing a change that is profound and unprecedented in nature. It is a post-western world where the U.S. is reaffirming its position, China, being the revisionist power is flexing its muscles and making its active offensive presence in world affairs, and emerging powers such as India are trying to act on their own terms and conditions and resisting being caught in a battle between U.S. and China. The G20 Presidency undoubtedly is a chance for India to understand the dynamics of various nations across the globe and to display its leadership role. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi took on the mantle of G20 Presidency on behalf of India during the Bali Summit, he chose four crucial words to outline India's G20 agenda - 'inclusive, ambitious, action-oriented and decisive' (The Hindu, 2022). These are the practical tools in the changing world order. These four keywords reflect the fact that G20 is going to have a significant impact on shaping the global order.

This presidency is also a chance for India to build upon the momentum generated in 2022 in Indonesia to push not only for the Global South's leadership but also a rebalancing of priorities among G-20 members so that the redistribution of world power can be attained equitably. India has often demanded space for the global south in world politics. It has emerged as a strong and clear voice of the global South and has tried to raise issues that are pertinent to the region. There is an enduring feeling among several small countries that their issues, concerns, and problems do not get the due attention of the world. India is inclined to break this notion.

Through a remarkable trailblazing initiative, India organized the "Voice of the Global South for Human-Centric Development" virtual Summit on 12th -13th January 2023. The theme of the Summit was "Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose" which was inspired by PM Modi's vision of *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas*, and the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (Sajjanhar, n.d.). In this summit PM Modi gave a 4R mantra: 'Respond, Recognise, Respect, Reform'.

India since its independence has raised its voice against colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, racism, north-south divide, neo-colonialism, and other unjust global practices. India holds the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility'. Reaffirming its position as a natural leader, India assured the leaders of the global south that it will ensure that the voice of the South gets heard on international platforms and their due interest should be taken care of by the world community.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

This G20 summit is undoubtedly different from its previous summits as well as previous multilateral summits that India has hosted. It is much broader in scope. The kind of attention that is given to “women’s empowerment, digital public infrastructure, health, agriculture, education, culture, tourism, climate financing, circular economy, global food security, energy security, green hydrogen, disaster risk reduction, and resilience, fight against economic crime and multilateral reforms” (*Big Data - Uniquely India*, n.d.) is worth admiring. None of the previous summits had been so extensive in nature. The G-20 summit is the first of its kind in Indian history also, as for the first time entire P-5 members were present (Mishra, 2022). In a meeting hosted in India. This demonstrates the rising profile of India in the world.

India is surely flaunting its emerging soft power. Practicing the norm that food and culture have always been integral parts of cultural diplomacy that transcend barriers and boundaries (Sanu, 2022). India has made all the necessary arrangements for the visiting delegates of the G20 to get a glimpse of India’s soft power. Starting from cuisine to practicing Yoga, excursions, or wide range of cultural performances, no stone remains unturned to showcase India’s rich cultural heritage. Every event organized for delegates is the reflection of the rich tradition of the past and achievements of the present as well as of the pluralistic traditions of the nation.

Not only this, this G20 has been “people’s G20” in the sense that no previous host of the G20 had paraded such an extensive list of locations for meetings as India had done. Most of the earlier summit meetings were confined to their capital city or perhaps a few other important locations. India’s decision to involve small cities is not just significant for exhibiting the country’s tourism prospects; it truly reflects a decentralized and cooperative federalism approach to widespread the G20 presidency and make every state, and indeed every Indian, feel that he or she is a vital stakeholder in this massive international event. India through this platform has also raised its voice against the fallacies present in the West-dictated world order. India had emphasized that in the era of multilateralism, institutions should be democratic in nature, therefore, democratizing the international institutions by bringing reforms in the IMF, WTO, WHO, and other UN bodies is one of the top priorities for achieving multilateralism. We all are moving towards equitable world order, if multilateral institutions will be despotic then we can never think of human rights and peace to prevail in the world. Western world order had taken the world towards disorder. The list of the plethora of goodies from “Pandora’s Box” is unending. India is striving for a rightful place for all whether it is developed or developing.

India’s G20 presidency is certainly offering a vision for a more equitable and sustainable future. India can leverage its leadership to promote cooperation, and inclusive growth, remove the inequality between developed and developing countries, and tackle the challenges that need collective efforts. The theme of G20 “One Earth, One Family, One Future,” is an indication of its attempt to unite the G-20. This principle of the Advaita philosophy can help the world to overcome the divisions that thwart unity and progress, and it will certainly enable the world to look ahead with optimism.

## CHALLENGES

India’s G-20 presidency, however, will not be without challenges. The predominant challenge is the efficacy of ‘soft power’. As the world is passing through a turbulent time where revisionist powers like China and Russia are threatening the global order and the rise of extremist groups such as the Islamic State makes hard power necessary (Pant, 2022), there is a broader debate among the academia that whether soft power really holds any lasting, tangible value in a today’s milieu or it just a fallacy. India is aiming to be

*Vishwaguru* by flaunting its tradition and culture and attracting the world towards it but the current complex geopolitical and economic situation will make it difficult for India to sail through multiple crises without annoying anyone. While India's unique relationship with both the United States, Russia, and European Union seems like its *balancing act* is appreciable India needs to be more cautious to leverage for better outcomes in the situation where it is walking on the edges of the sword.

The reality of today's world politics is that it is difficult for India to bridge the divide that is getting deeper and deeper between the great powers. Although great power competition does not necessarily hinder cooperation in multilateral forums, it certainly makes significant cooperation much more difficult to achieve as 'relative gains concerns take precedence, threat perceptions are heightened, and balancing prerogatives take over in non-military issue areas as well' (Kashyap, 2023). Among the diverging and conflicting interests shaping any specific agenda will be an important diplomatic test for India. As had been reflected from the previous G20 meetings too, achieving 'consensus on contentious issues can be difficult, and global divergence of interest are likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

The relationship between East and West defined by strategic competition is in a completely fractured state. India's hope to obtain inclusivity and equality of all at the G-20 is surely not a cakewalk. India's aspiration to be the voice of the Global South needs to be strategically balanced along with its growing ties with the West to build a strong base for consensus at the G-20. It will have to show extra will and strong determination to lead on the issues most significant to the developing world. This G-20 will be a litmus test for India to demonstrate its credibility and whether as a growing economic power, it can also afford to have a strong influence at the global level of decision-making on a wide range of issues.

The biggest obstacle is that a certain negative perception of the country has been dug into the minds of outsiders by the international media. The allegations of human rights violations by security forces, horrific sexual assaults against women, religious intolerance, poverty and social inequality, corruption, red-tapism, police brutality, poor governance, and hyper-nationalism get highlighted almost daily in national as well as international media (Mazumdar, 2020). These allegations question the country's aspiration of being *Vishwaguru*. Overcoming these challenges will be a true testament to India's potential as a future global leader.

## CONCLUSION

India is optimally flaunting its soft power through its cultural diplomacy to get the world attracted to its diverse and peculiar civilization. This presidency is a unique opportunity for India to steer global governance and play the role of a bridge maker between the developed and developing world because collective problems demand collective solutions, the problems of the developing world are not exclusive in nature. It is an inclusive problem thus without substantive international cooperation it can't be resolved. It is now high time for India to reflect on its transition from being a "rule-taker to rule-maker" and hosting high-profile international events is the right step in this direction. However, one needs to bear in mind that soft power essentially is the 'power of attraction'. It is non-obligatory in nature. It is not the power to command others to obey one's orders. Thus, it has certain limitations but its importance can't be neglected. This presidency is certainly an opportunity for India to make the world realize the true potential of India through civilizational and cultural prisms, take the attention of the world towards a 'common minimum framework', and should try to seek cooperation through national, regional, and global institutions for reaching consensus and transform its image from "rule-taker to being a rule-maker".

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