

India and G20

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The Group of 20 (G20), which India is chairing with much fanfare, was formed in 1999 to deal with broader issues concerning global economy. It was formed when neo-liberalism was widening its influence world over, but the group failed to keep track with economic trends and could not avert the financial meltdown of 2008. Consequently, the G8/G7 groups became more and more prominent when it came to influencing the policies in turbulent times. When charges of exclusion were raised on these very limited groupings, G20 again became a platform which was apparently inclusive, though quite restricted when compared with the United Nations. The Non-Aligned Movement or the G77 grew out of NAM and currently has a membership of 134 developing countries. India's Presidency of the G20 has both domestic and international implications and we must look at both in terms of how much it would benefit people, at home and abroad.

To begin with, the BJP and media have transformed this routine transfer of chair into a mega-event and an evidence of India's growing clout at international level. People are being fed with the myth that prime minister Modi's personal charisma and clout are turning diplomatic tides the Indian way. The sober fact, that India got the chairmanship only because of rotation, in itself is not a major accomplishment for India. According to the G20's group system, India was supposed to become the Chair last year only. Prime minister's achievement here, if any, is deferring it for one year and schedule it for 2023, when nine states will go for assembly elections and the 2024 general elections will only be months away. Rallying foreign dignitaries all over the country for various G20 meetings with large hoardings of the prime minister greeting them will make a great electoral springboard for the BJP. Expenses would be on Exchequer only.

Prime minister elaborated on the stated agenda of chairing the G20 in a blog-post. The discord between rhetoric and reality is most evident here. His words were "India is a microcosm of the world" with "immense diversity of languages, religions, customs and beliefs". This diversity has been India's greatest strength

over the years, but under the Modi regime, it has been facing unprecedented strain. The RSS-BJP are obsessed with homogeneity and try to flatten out diversity and differences proactively. Whether it is imposition of Hindi or discrimination against religious minorities, lynching people for what they eat or targeting them for their clothing, the RSS' idea of uniformity ever remains active. Dismantling the federal structure of the country has been a consistent feature of the Modi government.

Further, PM wrote, "India contributes to the foundational DNA of democracy," while the democratic character of India is being stormed against by majoritarian aggression. Parliament is being made redundant and judicial independence is encroached upon. Central agencies are being used against opposition and media is made to look the other way. Dissent is being criminalized and civil liberties gasp for breath. Draconian laws are invoked against those who dare question the regime and expose them. The basic secular, democratic and argumentative DNA our freedom struggle intended to inculcate is under threat. Critical questions about the corporates like Adani and the role of finance capital were not allowed to be raised in Parliament. This gag has been worrisome for the "foundational DNA of democracy" and shows again the huge gap between rhetoric and reality.

'One Earth, One Family, One Future' is the mantra PM gave to the G20 summit. This slogan is also a good yardstick to gauge the Modi administration. A family does not discriminate amongst its members. Under Modi, discrimination with minorities has become institutionalized. The controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) openly discriminates with a section of people on the basis of their religion. The CAA was also a test of Modi's foreign policy as this discriminatory law brought international condemnation for India, followed by the Delhi riots. The high-priest of the RSS, MS Golwalkar said even before independence and partition that the minorities "may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment not even citizen's rights." It is on this divisive and communal foundation that RSS-BJP is trying to build 'family' in the country. Under the RSS-BJP rule, communal, casteist and misogynist elements have got

emboldened and pursuing their future goal of building up a unitary, theocratic and hierarchical Hindu Rashtra. Is it difficult to imagine what the 'One Future' would look like?

India rose to prominence in global affairs when it followed a non-aligned approach. However, in the last few years, India's growing proximity with the US-led Western group has created multiple problems for us and we can notice the erosion of traditional goodwill of many nations in the Global South. Prime Minister chaired an all-party meeting immediately after assuming the presidency of G20. In that meeting, there were references from Government side about the Global South and reforming and reorienting global financial institutions. But there was no clarity what this would mean for India as the Chair of G20. However there are indications coming from G20 Expert panel on Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs). The panel would come with possible skeptics that its report would recommend measures that could make critical difference, including new mechanisms to raise private capital, and also for specific investment and spending priorities (evolution of the World Bank Group 2023).

Leaders of our freedom movement were very vigilant about forging and extending solidarity and support to those who needed it. Post-independence, this legacy of unity of the oppressed institutionalized itself as the Non-Aligned Movement and India emerged as the most significant voice for decolonization, Afro-Asian unity and peace. These credentials are being watered down with India moving closer to the West and being drawn into US-led military alliances. This policy is resulting in a failure to take meaningful positions on important issues and precludes a unity between countries of the Global South against western hegemony.

Over the years, India's foreign policy priorities have become narrow. Instead of pursuing a policy of cooperation, solidarity, peace and progress, the energies of our diplomatic corps are being invested in only propagating and protecting the larger-than-life image of the leader. It is appalling that when foreign policy of other countries is focused on concrete deliverables, our foreign policy discourse is not focused on taking into consideration the independent foreign policy positions India is expected to pursue.

One of prime minister's favorite phrases, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' does have a message of belonging harmoniously. And it is for the entire world as one family. The verse says further, "this person is mine, and this one is not- is made only by the narrow-minded". The G20 chair is one way for the regime to show that they are capable of magnanimity and start treating people equally as family. A larger family of the Global South awaits us. It is on us to walk the talk on *VasudhaivaKutumbakam*, both at home and abroad.