

India's Quest for Global South: Challenges and Opportunities

Event Summary

Thursday, 15 February, 2024

- The Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) hosted the 22nd edition of its Foreign Policy and Security Tiffin Talk series on '**India's Quest for Global South: Challenges and Opportunities**' with **C. Raja Mohan**, Non-Resident Distinguished Fellow, Asia Society Policy Institute.
- The speaker questioned the analytical relevance of the term 'Global South' and suggested the need for an alternative frame of reference to study the complexity of the current world order. The discussion explored India's strategic role within the framework of a 'Global South' and the implications for regional and global dynamics. Participants also shed light on how a research agenda on the Global South can be developed from an Indian perspective.
- The discussants included **Shivshankar Menon**, Distinguished Fellow, CSEP and **Malancha Chakrabarty**, Senior Fellow and Deputy Director (Research), Observer Research Foundation. The discussion was moderated by **Veda Vaidyanathan**, Associate Fellow, CSEP. Participants included officials from various embassies and missions, scholars from leading think tanks and universities from India and abroad.
- The Tiffin Talk series features scholars presenting their recent, evidence-based research to peers and practitioners. This series of closed-door seminars seeks to facilitate dialogue between researchers and policymakers on India's foreign and security affairs.

Demystifying the Global South

The speaker initiated the conversation by discussing the origin and evolution of the term 'Global South.' Referring to it as a post-colonial movement that offered an alternative to the Western-led order and was abandoned as individual nationalisms grew. Re-emerging now into mainstream international discourse after a period of academic hibernation, it was argued that the idea of the 'Global South,' is increasingly outdated in the contemporary world. Describing it as an 'emotionally rich' concept that

appeals to a desire for political and economic equity, the speaker warned against idealising a harmonious past or a false sense of unity within the non-Western world.

Encompassing 120 countries that vary greatly in economic interests, development trajectories, resource endowments, and political landscapes, the speaker underlined how the term is intellectually elusive. Additionally, it was advised that the renewed interest in a 'Global South' must not be viewed as divorced from its underlying political and strategic motivations.

The discussants acknowledged the oversimplification inherent in the North-South binary but recognised some practical utility of the term. Particularly in areas like climate action, trade policy, and technology, where the Global South has remained relevant and in broad agreement. Arguments were also made for a more nuanced understanding of the Global South, advocating for selective engagement based on economic considerations rather than ideological alignment.

India's Strategic Positioning within the Global South

A significant part of the seminar focused on India's strategic positioning within the Global South. India's desire to assert itself as one of the leading voices of the Global South comes at a time when other actors are competing for influence in the developing world. Participants further discussed the complexity of India's position, emphasising its dual role as a developing economy as well as a strategic partner to the developed world. They noted the identity conundrum that comes with India's ambition to become a major power given its historical position in anti-hegemonic movements.

The scholars stated that it is essential to examine what India's rise in the global order signifies and explore opportunities to enhance its footprint in the non-Western world. Further, the importance of a balanced and inclusive strategy in asserting India's position globally was highlighted. A suggestion was for India

to capitalise on its unique position by fostering triangular cooperation between Western powers and other developing states. Participants concurred that India must play to its strengths when engaging with the non-Western world, rather than mimic the strategies of other major powers.

Opportunities for Research

One of the main objectives of the seminar was to initiate a discussion on how the Global South could be studied from an Indian perspective. Participants deliberated on ways to develop this research agenda, with a pronounced emphasis on economic and strategic partnerships. They underscored the need to investigate various aspects of India's engagement with the Global South like the effectiveness of its aid policies and Lines of Credit. One of the discussants proposed studying the perspectives of aid-recipient nations as a crucial area of focus. This would help craft an Indian strategy that delineates successful approaches and areas needing improvement in India's initiatives. Questions were also raised about the role of Indian capital and military abroad, the possibilities for expansion and what an Indian developmental agency could look like. Additionally, there were suggestions to examine private sector involvement in development projects abroad, and how they can be leveraged to bolster South-South cooperation.

The session concluded with participants noting the ongoing work on the Global South and the potential to explore new avenues for research.

All content reflects the individual views of the participants. The Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) does not hold an institutional view on any subject.

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