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Economic and soft power component of india's city diplomacy: With special reference to Mumbai and Kolkata

Lulubala Nayak*

ABSTRACT

India's coastal cities have been playing a pivotal role in international relations through culture, commerce, and connectivity since the hoary past. In modern times, coastal cities such as Mumbai (formerly Bombay) on the Arabian Coast and Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) on the Bay of Bengal have been active actors in international affairs. While Mumbai has been the hub of international trade and commerce, Kolkata has been the junction of cultural bonhomie with Bangladesh and Southeast Asian countries, which gained more traction due to cross-border movements of technology, information, education, trade and finance, and

artistic tools bolstered by the New Economic Policy beginning in the early 1990s. Indian states and metropolitan cities are enhancing their positions in international affairs with tangible gains. Mumbai is referred to as India's financial capital and the home to the headquarters of great global business houses and financial organisations. Similarly, Kolkata is known as the cultural capital of India (Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Shanti Niketan, Bengali folk art and culture etc.) and a destination for foreign tourists, artists and curious researchers. This paper examines the growth and impact of city diplomacy in India through the prism of federalism in advancing local interests in international politics. It attempts to assess the

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role of Indian cities from a comparative perspective in the conduct of city diplomacy from economic and cultural aspects.

Key words: New economic policy; coalition politics; federalism; commerce; culture; connectivity.

El componente económico y de poder blando de la diplomacia de ciudades en India: con referencia especial a Bombay y Calcuta

RESUMEN

Las ciudades costeras de la India han jugado un papel fundamental en las relaciones internacionales a través de la cultura, el comercio y la conectividad desde el pasado lejano. En los tiempos modernos, las ciudades costeras como Mumbai (antes Bombay) en la costa árabe y Kolkata (antes Calcuta) en la bahía de Bengala han sido actores activos en los asuntos internacionales. Si bien Mumbai ha sido el centro del comercio internacional, Kolkata ha sido el punto de unión de la bonhomía cultural con Bangladesh y los países del sudeste asiático, que ganó más fuerza debido a los movimientos transfronterizos de tecnología, información, educación, comercio y finanzas, y herramientas artísticas reforzadas por la Nueva Política Económica que comenzó a principios de los años noventa. Los estados indios y las ciudades metropolitanas están mejorando su posición en los asuntos internacionales con ganancias tangibles. Mumbai se conoce como la capital financiera de la India y la sede de grandes casas

comerciales y organizaciones financieras globales. Del mismo modo, Kolkata es conocida como la capital cultural de la India (Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Shanti Niketan, arte y cultura popular bengalí, etc.) y un destino para turistas, artistas e investigadores extranjeros. Este artículo examina el crecimiento y el impacto de la diplomacia de las ciudades en la India a través del prisma del federalismo en la promoción de los intereses locales en la política internacional. Intenta evaluar el papel de las ciudades indias desde una perspectiva comparativa en la conducción de la diplomacia de la ciudad a partir de los aspectos económicos y culturales.

Palabras clave: nueva política económica; política de coalición; federalismo; comercio; cultura; conectividad.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of foreign policy has remained confined to a state-centric approach since the emergence of the treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which championed the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, gradually the emergence of regional consciousness by other actors (federated units, cities, and non-state actors) resulted in making room for themselves in the international orb. Recently, academics have focused increasingly on the function of cities as global players, giving rise to the emerging area of city diplomacy that integrates the fields of international relations and urban studies. State sovereignty and territorial integrity have changed due to the development orientation of such actors. "Additionally, it has been seen that domestic and foreign policies intersect, and low-level political issues

impact global dynamics” (Nicolson, 1953, p. 83). Education, health, culture, and environmental protection have a worldwide agenda to influence the international domain. In this regard, the Former president of the USA, Nixon, said that “foreign and domestic policy is like Siamese twins; Separate them, and they die” (Chaudhury, 1993, p. 449). As a result of their continued demand for freedom and autonomy, union governments of federations have also started giving more independence to their provinces and cities to promote their interests in the international sphere by strengthening cultural and economic collaboration with foreign countries and their units (federated units and municipalities). Hence, provinces, cities, and non-state actors have become active participants in international affairs, and they are no longer an exclusive domain of union government.

The effect of rising cities on the global economy and human geography is giving rise to the fledgling discipline of city diplomacy. “A dual evolutionary trend in both international relations and city management has led to modern-day city diplomacy. Cities’ influence in global politics and international affairs has grown gradually over the past century” (Grandi, 2020, p. 38). The concept came across various stages throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. From cultural exchange and bilateral city-to-city contacts to complex networks for forming international alliances and spreading policies, it includes interactions between municipal governments and foreign nations. Initially, there were bilateral relationships during the early 20th century. City diplomacy created

the foundation for cooperatively organised municipal cooperation during the post-World War II period. The first signs of change appeared in the expansion of twinning activities and the creation of networks like the Sister Cities International network. “Numerous first-generation city diplomacy tactics were used throughout the early 1990s and the last years of the Cold War. (e.g., Mayors for Peace in 1982). In addition to city-to-city exchange, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), which was founded in 1990 to support governments in pursuing sustainability practices, is an example of a novel form of city networking that facilitated collaborations and the sharing of resources and knowledge” (Acuto, Kosovac, & Hartley, 2021, p. 3). Around the same time, similar network-based initiatives were launched by UN organisations, including the World Health Organization for public health, UN-Habitat for urban settlements, and UNESCO for culture. These programs helped tens of thousands of local governments go from inadvertent or symbolic twinning to genuine diplomatic participation. An increasing number of academics studying these transnational municipal operations and their influence on international affairs arose in the 1990s and 2000s. Currently, we are seeing extensive participation of cities in achieving international interest, and India is no exception. Indian cities promote themselves in every sphere, including economic, political, and cultural.

Cities have been important throughout history, distinguished by their cultural influence or economic strength. “From Singapore, a sovereign city-state, being named one of the strongest financial hubs in Asia, to Athens be-

ing named the first “European City of Culture” the list is endless” (Bhowmick & Basu, 2021, p. 1). The United Nations has also considered the significance of cities in developing national and global agendas. “The New Urban Agenda, adopted at Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, is focused on partnerships in urban areas, prosperity for all, peace, and harmony. It outlines three key priorities: governance, planning, and finance for achieving sustainable urban development” (Birch, 2016). Despite this, a City Diplomacy Lab was established in Columbia Global Centres, Paris, to explore and analyse the role of cities and their relevance in diplomacy. The ability of municipalities to analyse local impact, due to local changes, and their coordination with international bodies in conveying the same make them inevitably influence several aspects of global importance. To take city diplomacy forward and promote more collaboration between Indian cities and cities in the USA, “there are five sister states and 23 sister cities between the two countries. Sister Cities International’s president and CEO, Mary Kane, also explicitly acknowledges the partnerships’ upbeat nature” (Chatterji & Saha, 2017, p. 16). Various issues of global importance, like diseases, climate change, economic transactions, and cultural exchange, and cities play a crucial role in influencing each aspect of diplomacy worldwide.

The massive urbanisation in the post-World War period and the institutional dynamics resulted in decentralised policy-making cooperation. Keohane and Nye have rightly observed and analysed the international par-

ticipation of non-sovereign bodies (constituent units, cities, non-state actors, etc.) in global affairs through the prism of the theory of complex interdependence. “There are increasingly global issues that the world is grappling with that cannot be resolved by governments acting alone, such as disease outbreaks and environmental deterioration.” (Robert & Feilleux, 2017). A clear demarcation between the foreign and domestic policy is challenging because of their strong interdependence. “Rosenau popularised the term ‘linkage politics,’ asserting that political scientists must look beyond the arbitrary distinction between domestic and international politics to evaluate the external ramifications of internal concerns, and vice versa” (Ma, 2014, p. 102). As a result, the nation needs a collective way to look at these issues, and diplomacy is an essential component of this endeavour.

Claims of the impending collapse of diplomacy as the world knew it was supported by the rethinking of foreign affairs institutions that occurred after the Cold War, the inclusion of businesses, cities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the widespread adoption of information and communication technologies like the Internet. (Kelley, 2010)

Factors like urbanisation, globalisation, and liberalisation of the economy make room for multilevel interactions within the pyramidal structure of institutional hierarchy among institutions, strengthening the city’s international role. Cities have gained significant importance in international affairs in discussing and influencing policy decisions, preserving, and promoting culture, and strengthening the

regional economy, and concrete initiatives on substantial issues like the environment, human rights, health, technological innovations, etc. “The first ‘Global Parliament of Mayors’ gathering of about 60 cities’ residents took place in 2016 to foster ties with international organisations, civil society organisations, and commercial enterprises” (Mankikar, 2021, p. 2). Hence, city diplomacy provides cities space in international affairs by establishing solid international relationships and a shareholder in global change.

By means of various beneficial mechanisms, including representation, cooperation between organisations, placement of management units, participation of diplomatic missions, facilitation of signing agreements by cities, participation of cities in active networks typical of the post-pandemic cycle and climate issues, among others, cities are effectively making rooms in the context and conduct of diplomacy. Starting with institutional engagement, the concept of city diplomacy is now interacting internationally through many other mechanisms such as cultural exchange, promoting trade and tourism, etc. “Another intriguing example of participation in global governance is the format of the U20 Mayors Summit. The U20 cities make up the third-largest economy in the world, after China and the United States. The Urban 20 (U20) seeks to explore and develop consensus on various topics, including climate action, social inclusion, integration, and sustainable economic growth.” (Marchetti, 2021). Sports is another factor that plays a role in making a place for cities. The 2023 Hockey world cup, and international cricket matches in Mumbai

and Kolkata pave the way for cities. “The 2012 London Olympics example examines the diplomatic function of cities and draws a clear distinction between international and urban politics. It offers additional proof of how major cities may exercise significant political influence by participating in global governance. To underline the unique standing of city leaders in the governance of sport and subnational diplomacy, the Greater London Authority (GLA), the local government body in charge of the larger metropolitan area of London” (Acuto M, 2013, p. 288). Several Twinning agreements took place internationally between cities after World War II. “Nuclear proliferation: In 1984, over 160 US communities approved nuclear-free zone ordinances forbidding production activity within their borders; the inaugural International Nuclear Free Zone Local Authorities Conference was held in Manchester” (Leffel, 2018, p. 514). Around the world, more than 3,800 cities adopted a similar strategy. They made use of their knowledge of city networks, twinning/cooperation/friendship agreements, and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) as tools for long-term bilateral and international cooperation. The main force behind city diplomacy nowadays is economic development. Since the 1990s, municipalities have become more eager to focus their international efforts on initiatives that offer quicker and simpler returns on investments, which is why this diplomatic action has been expanding very quickly. For instance, to finance its Dabhol project, Maharashtra signed a financial deal with General Electric, Texas, and Enron in

1992. Along with the funding, it also secured a sovereign guarantee from the union of India.

In order to demonstrate a municipal united front in the fight against climate change, Anne Hidalgo, the city's mayor, gathered 1,000 of her colleagues from around the world to the Climate Summit for Local Leaders in December 2015, while head of state and government representatives were attending the United Nations' climate change conference in Paris (COP21) (Grandi, 2020, p. 112).

This stance is mostly supported by municipal authorities' recognition that cities are the primary source of climate change. Added to this, for the period between 2016 and 2018, city networks collaborated with universities and UN organisations to increase the visibility of cities in the IPCC. The Global Green New Deal was the inspiration for the COVID-19 recovery agenda that the C40¹ mayors developed in 2020.

Culture and creativity are regularly included in the economic plans intended to boost local economic growth and the employment market, serving as both a fundamental aspect of bilateral ties and a driving force behind twinning or cooperation agreements. Cultural promotion by the city of Mumbai and Kolkata is another aspect of practising diplomacy. The Bollywood film industry, South Asia's largest cultural export, is also based in

Mumbai. The literature and rich culture of Kolkata is widely known in the world by the largest diaspora. Apart from this, the cooperation potential between international organisations and cities is clearly demonstrated through the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. UNESCO established the network in 2004 in order to "strengthen cooperation with and among cities" and "recognised [their] creativity as a strategic factor of sustainable development". (Grandi, 2020, p. 134)

The next section of the article looks at the role of Indian cities in establishing cultural and economic ties abroad. India is a federation with the most extensive and fastest-growing economy. It is a territorial entity consisting of three levels: the union, state, and local bodies (urban and rural). Each level has been assigned a separate sphere of action by the constitution. And foreign policy as a domain exclusively falls under the jurisdiction of the state. However, in recent years, despite the constitutional demarcation, cities have had a clear shift in achieving their regional interests in the international sphere. "The establishment of five Zonal Councils, under the State's Reorganisation Act of 1956, setting up of the National Development Council (NDC), in August 1952, may be regarded as the most significant step for promoting understanding and manifesting cooperative federalism" (Rajashekara, 1994,

¹ The C40 initiative was started in 2005 by the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, who brought together major cities committed to protecting the environment with the idea that their combined influence would have a greater global impact than any one action. C40 has risen to become a key advocate of the international action of cities against climate change. The "C40 Cities Bloomberg Philanthropies Awards" was introduced in 2013 and given to six cutting-edge projects by member cities within the scope of the yearly C40 World Mayors Summit. It is the C40's own annual award through which it recognises the most ambitious and significant projects undertaken by its member cities.

p. 144). Additionally, several institutions of recent emergence provide the opportunity for Centre-state bargaining, notably the state division, NITI Aayog, and MEA's branch offices in cities (Chennai, Guwahati, Hyderabad, and Kolkata).

India is a Union of States built on a cooperative federalist framework. Creating competitive advantages for the States within the cooperative framework is also necessary for its states/cities to succeed on both national and international scales. To survive and thrive in the rapidly changing world of today, these are necessary. (Singh & Srinivasan, 2006)

However, the study takes Mumbai and Kolkata to represent economic and cultural aspects of city diplomacy, respectively, due to their proactive role in international affairs.

The Constitution of India defines the Union List, State List, and Concurrent List, where the state and the centre share jurisdiction. However, the centre always has the upper hand in disputes involving the Concurrent List of laws. The Indian Constitution establishes foreign affairs According to Article 246 of Schedule 7, List I (Union List), which deals with conducting foreign affairs, "all matters which bring the union into interaction with any foreign country" (Maini, 2018). As a result, the Constitution has given unanimous autonomy to the central government to execute foreign policy. However, a recent trend has emerged, and the monopoly of union government in foreign policy decisions was affected by the participation of cities and other actors. The movement has gained immense importance in western federations, and India

is no exception. In various ways, Indian cities influence international dynamics by actively engaging in economic activities with foreign nations through FDI and sharing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties with foreign countries. Leaders from around the world have begun to pay notice to the expanding international role of Indian cities. Former US President, Barack Obama, visited Mumbai in 2010 before arriving in the capital after moving from Delhi. Other leaders have visited the state capitals of Chennai, Ahmadabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, etc. Then in 2012, "Before going to New Delhi, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stopped in Kolkata. There, she spoke with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on the possibility of US investment in the region" (Hazarika, 2014, p. 40).

To protect and advance their interests, values, and identities as well as to advance universal goals like solidarity, peace, development, or cultural pluralism, cities are encouraged by globalisation to adopt specific policies. It reduces financial and cultural barriers and expands the range of options available to federated entities in the global arena. (Kuznetsov, 2015)

The decentralisation of governance, administration, and the economy resulted from economic liberalisation, which enabled Indian states to grow internationally. Economic liberalisation, a product of the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1991, gives the state an opportunity to participate in the global economy by limiting the central government's monopoly. Indian cities such as Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, etc., came forward to achieve their respective interests in the inter-

national sphere. “When Maharashtra entered negotiations with Enron, a Texas energy behemoth, in 1993, Susan and Lloyd Rudolph pointed out that sub-national economic diplomacy was visible. It inked the largest Power Purchase Agreement in history” (Hazarika, 2014). The institutionalisation of coalition politics in the last decades of the 20th century is one of the crucial factors behind driving Cities into foreign policy. Being a part of a larger coalition, regional leaders often bargain with foreign nations and their constituent units to safeguard their respective interests. Internationalisation of ethnic commonalities, cultural affinities, and geography are significant factors behind promoting Indian states/ cities in foreign affairs. City diplomacy is a mechanism of local government aimed at promoting cohesion, conflict resolution, and economic development to provide a stable environment to its citizens.

During several conflict situations, contacts have been made to advance democracy in these regions, and relationships have been built with cities in the former Yugoslavia, Palestine, Israel, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Local authorities are being included in UN and NGOs’ attempts to bring about peace on a more frequent basis. (Paquin, 2020, p. 179)

However gradually, along with peacebuilding and conflict prevention, factors like the protec-

tion of cultural and tourism and other ethnic and nationalistic concerns became essential dimensions of city diplomacy. Traditionally, the prime motive behind city diplomacy was the region’s economic development which has now become increasingly multidimensional by focusing on sociocultural, political, environmental, ethnic-nationalistic, and technological aspects. Out of Alexander S. Kuznetsov’s 11 dimensions² of Paradiplomacy, global economy and border studies dimensions are two aspects this paper will deal with and show how cities have taken a shift in their international involvement in this aspect. Due to their geographical proximity, cultural similarities, and other historical ties to their neighbours, cities of Indian border states are more engaged in transregional links. Kolkata, for instance, is leaving no stone unturned to make it the country’s cultural hub and promote Bengali culture worldwide.

In keeping with the consensus on this issue worldwide, the Indian government has also realised the need to involve cities in foreign policy decisions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised that people’s participation in foreign policy, instead of the unanimous choices of the union government, should decide on foreign policy to transform the nation. “To serve as a focal point for engagement with the Indian states and to offer states a greater prominence in MEA activities, the Indian gov-

² To understand the underlying intentions of the region’s international participation and academic discourse of it, Kuznetsov has advocated for eleven dimensions such as; Constitutional, federalist, nationalism, international relations, border studies, globalisation, security/geopolitical, global economy, environmental, diplomacy and separatist dimension.

ernment formed a “States Division” under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in 2014” (Asthana & Happymon, 2017, p. 2). Hence, despite constitutional restrictions, a new era of decentralisation in foreign policy has taken place. “A structured paradiplomacy framework gives India one more mechanism to support its inclusive growth strategy since it will give all Indian states an equal opportunity to participate in India’s foreign policy decision-making” (Natarajan, 2019).

City diplomacy is becoming more widely acknowledged as a potent instrument for helping local communities thrive in a globalised environment. They are adopting international relations to promote their urban interests, such as economic growth and intercultural exchange, and addressing common problems like cybersecurity, the environment, and disaster preparedness. Hence, the phenomenon is crucial in attracting investments and promoting cross-cultural understanding. Mumbai and Kolkata have taken case studies to replicate the above objectives and broadly study those two significant aspects of city diplomacy in India.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a descriptive method to present the evolution of the Indian city’s role in international affairs. An analysis of historical instances and statistical information has been conducted to provide a detailed understanding of the study. The study involves primary (Govt. Reports) and secondary (Books, Articles, Documents from websites) sources for collecting required data. The underlying intentions and increasing role of Indian cities in

international affairs can better be understood qualitatively. The study aims to discover the global participation of Indian cities and its impact on India’s federalism which advocates the monopoly of union government in foreign policy making.

Mumbai on the World Stage

Continuous evolution and rapid economic transition made Mumbai the financial capital of India. Primarily, the city serves as the hub for corporate headquarters, smaller companies with a worldwide reach and the primary location for foreign investment and joint ventures.

From home to Buddhist and Hindu religions under the emperor Ashoka’s rule, it was also handed to several domestic dynasties before the Portuguese’s arrival. When Charles II of England married Catherine of Braganza in the 17th century and obtained the seven islets of Bombay as part of the dowry, it was acquired by the East India Company. At the initiative of the then-Bombay governor William Hornby, the city expanded by creating land out of the sea. Over the following decades, causeways were built to connect the seven islets. (Mankikar, 2021, p. 2)

Thus, as India’s ‘Gateway to the world, Mumbai has long been a melting pot of influences worldwide.

Among all, the state of Maharashtra receives the most FDI inflows in India. The state attracted 28% of foreign investment into the country in April-June 2022 (Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), 2022). “Mumbai received \$11.4 billion in FDI in 2018–19, down from \$13.4 bil-

lion in 2017–18 and \$19.7 billion in 2016–17, as per DPIIT reports. However, among Indian cities, Mumbai remains the top FDI destination” (Mishra, 2019, p. 2).

Reports of New World Wealth in September 2022 says Mumbai ranked as the 25th wealthiest city globally, expected to be in the top 20 list by 2030. Bombay stock exchange and national stock exchange marked the top 10 largest stock exchanges by the market cap. (Amoils, 2022)

Apart from this,

The two main seaports in India, Mumbai Port and JNPT, along with 53 more ports, which handle around 22% of all cargo shipping in India, are accessible to businesses when they are in Mumbai. The region has drawn companies like Pfizer, Haffkine, and GSK. Electronic system design and manufacturing, which accounts for 30% of India’s industrial output and is another strength of Maharashtra, has drawn significant investment from companies like HP, CISCO, and Schindler. Additionally, Maharashtra contributes more than 20% of all software exports from India; Mumbai serves as the area’s regional hub in IT. (Shehadi, 2021, p. 9)

Both political and geographical factors are crucial for promoting Mumbai as an investment destination. Political leaders of the regions are more vibrant in taking initiatives to get foreign investment with better-governing systems and hassle-free procedures to invest.

Devendra Fadnavis, the chief minister of Maharashtra, met with representatives of the Korean government in Seoul in September 2017, where they signed an MoU [Memorandum of Understanding] for escalating and improving cooperation on infrastructure projects, such as smart cities, roads, airports, metros, and water transportation. Korea also has consulates in Mumbai and Chennai, as well as honorary consulates in Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Chandigarh, in addition to its embassy in New Delhi. (Dhawan, 2019, p. 8)

The extensive coastline of peninsular India makes ports and international marine trade routes easily accessible.

In the state, 29 SEZs are now in operation. Seven of these are situated in Thane, Navi Mumbai, and Mumbai. The emergence of manufacturing hubs around Mumbai and the large concentration of SEZs has increased the region’s industrial and warehousing clusters’ allure. Outskirts of Mumbai is also a significant hub for warehousing for businesses like Amazon, Samsung, BMW, and Flipkart. Industry estimates claim that the region brings in INR 20,000 crore (\$2.8 billion) in revenue each month. (Shira & Associates, 2019, p. 6)

Ushering in a crucial new era of cooperation with states and intending to promote their international participation, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj opened the nation’s first Videsh Bhavan³. On this occasion, the then External affairs minister said, “Unlike

³ At the Bandra Kurla Complex, Videsh Bhavan unifies all Regional Passport Offices and affiliated divisions under a single roof, including the Protector of Emigrants (PoE) office, Branch Secretariat, and Regional Office of ICCR (BKC). The Videsh Bhavan is an integral part of the MEA’s effective management which aims at cooperative engagement with the state government of Maharashtra.

before, the ministry is now more “people-oriented” and places a higher priority on rescuing Indian nationals” (The Economic Times, 2017). Apart from economic dimensions,

[The] Bollywood film industry, South Asia’s largest cultural export, is also based in Mumbai. Bollywood is now a \$4 billion global enterprise, with most of its income coming from outside the country. Collections for Indian movies abroad increased to US\$ 367 million in 2017. (Mankikar, 2021, p. 2)

On the better side, the state has also made enormous efforts to establish itself internationally. Mumbai is the sister city⁴ to 15 cities worldwide, which is another milestone in enhancing its interest in the international orb. “The Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) will include a “sister city square” that will house a variety of tourism attractions for both local and foreign visitors, according to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)” (Hindustan Times, 2022, p. 1). In addition,

Aditya Thackeray, the ministers for state environment, tourism and protocol, said, we made history when Mumbai joined the C40 initiative in December 2020, a global network of cities working to address the problems caused by climate change, and by bringing Women to the forefront for Mumbai climate action plan, We trust them to lead us all to contribute significantly to the worldwide fight against climate change. (Bose, 2021, p. 4)

The city also has a story to tell regarding diaspora. “For more than 1,500 years, traders and travellers from Africa and Asia have traded products, languages, and religious beliefs. The Arabian Peninsula, the Makran coast, and western coastal India’s cosmopolitanism are defined by the consequent cultural connectedness” (Eyssallenne, 2022, p. 1).

After all the notable developments that took place to promote city diplomacy in Mumbai, “it is ranked at the bottom(48th) in the Global Power City Index 2021 in attracting people, power, and enterprises to their region” (Global Power City Index, 2022, p. 6). Due to of the lack of infrastructural amenities (modern public transport, housing etc.), cities like Gurgaon Ahmadabad have gained immense importance over Mumbai. “The International Finance Centre (IFC) at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) was announced in 2015, but it now appears difficult to complete. Instead, the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT) city, the up-and-coming IFC close to Ahmedabad, has been given high priority.” (Kumar, 2018). There are several other relevant issues that Mumbai needs to look at through the prism of city diplomacy for its development, such as; strengthening ties with sister cities and others through more collaborations, attracting people, enterprises, technology, and cultural exchange through the prism of paradiplomacy etc. These are indispensable for glorifying the status of the financial capital

⁴ Los Angeles, St. Petersburg (Russia), Stuttgart, Yokohama, Honolulu, New York City, Zagreb, Barcelona, Busan, Port of Odessa, Jakarta, Nadi, Antananarivo, and Shanghai are among Mumbai’s 15 sister cities. A sister city also known as Twin city in Europe, is an arrangement that promotes cultural and business relationships between villages, cities, and even counties in geographically and politically different regions.

of the country and gaining the international status of Mumbai again.

Kolkata's Cultural Ways of Practising City Diplomacy

In the modern era, power is characterised by various additional elements along with political, economic, and military aspects, such as culture, values, ethnicity, technology, education, tourism, etc., widely known as determinants of 'soft power'. Soft power elements are also immensely gaining international attention and represent cities in the global arena. A nation's foreign policy is shaped by the interaction of internal and external conditions, as seen through the leadership's cultural, historical, and personality traits, and India is no exception. Sashi Tharoor emphasised the relevance of soft power and said, "While soft power without hard power is a confession of weakness, hard power without soft power creates animosity and hatred" (Malone, 2011, p. 36). Hence, the cultural aspect is one of the crucial aspects of today's diplomacy. Cities that share common cultural affinities with foreign nations easily secure their interest in the international orb. Linguistic, ethnic, and cultural ties of a municipality with foreign countries or their constituent unit encourage them to have diplomatic relations with them. The Kolkata issue is a prime example in this regard.

West Bengal has occupied a unique place in India and worldwide for its distinct culture, language, literature, and other historical dimensions. Thus, the active participation of Kolkata in international affairs lies in its cultural aspects. The capital city of West Bengal

is also popularly known as the Cultural capital of India. Cultural diplomacy is a crucial instrument of foreign policy that strengthens a country's image, deepens friendships, and links various ethnicities to the international orb.

The extensive Bengali diaspora, in addition to the state government's initiative, aids in spreading Bengali culture around the globe. For instance, Kaushik Basu, an artist, and clay modeller, produced a 10-foot-tall idol of Goddess Durga on the desire of the Indian diaspora living abroad. This idol was brought to the United States, while another was delivered to Berlin, Germany. (Get Bengal, 2021, p. 2)

"India, with 18 million people living outside of their nation of birth as of 2020, would have the highest diaspora population in the world, according to a United Nations projection" (The Economic Times, 2021, p. 3). The Indian Diaspora includes the Bengali Diaspora as a vital component. Given the sizeable Diaspora that has spread throughout the world, the West Bengal government has begun concentrating on promoting its culture and language abroad in order to further the possibility of West Bengal being a popular tourist destination. In 1971, a group of enthusiastic Bengali immigrants from New York founded the Cultural Association of Bengal (CAB; with the goal of promoting cross-cultural contact and appreciation with a focus on Bengali literature, art, and cultural heritage. The modest organisation has grown into a massive tree over time and spread across all of North America, including the United States of America and Canada.

Biswa Bangla is another significant initiative to take Bengali art and craft to the global

level. It also gives opportunities to the artists to preserve, promote and enhance their dying indigenous art and craft through strategic marketing. It has both stores in Kolkata and ECommerce facilities in the name of a website, 'Biswa Bangla'.

In Sept 2015, Biswa Bangla participated in the London Design Festival, and after this, another exhibition of Biswa Bangla took place in May 2016 in London. Several other international visits were made to Taipei, Yangon, Bahrain, Paris, France etc., to showcase the uniqueness of Bengali art and craft. (Dutta, 2016, p. 3).

The city of culture is also the homeland of many international personalities such as Rabindranath Tagore⁵, Satyajit Ray⁶, Mother Teresa⁷ and Sister Nibedita's⁸ workplace. Tagore is globally known for contributing to Bengali literature and music; he is also a philosopher and social reformer. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. He established Vishwa Bharati university to promote open art and literature and to enhance the world's communication with In-

dia. As a hub for education and universities, Kolkata plays a vital role in academic exchange programmes.

Several MoUs regarding academic exchange programmes have been signed between The University of Cambridge and Presidency University, Kolkata, have collaborated on projects in the arts and humanities, and Presidency and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London have worked together to study Bangla. (Business Standard, 2015)

The Indian Council of Cultural Affairs, located in Kolkata, represents the shared culture of west Bengal and Bangladesh in several programmes in collaboration with the Bangladesh Shilpokala Academy and the Bangladesh High Commission.

Besides the cultural aspect, "Kolkata also has Strategic relevance. In the context of India's Act East Policy, Kolkata is crucial to fostering regional ties as "gateways" to Southeast Asia via Myanmar and Thailand" (Bhowmick & Basu, 2021). "West Bengal is also well-connected historically and physically to provide, for in-

⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, is the first Indian person and also the first non-European citizen to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Tagore was a prolific composer, having written about 2,232 songs. The tracks are reminiscent of Bengali music, which has occupied a prominent place in the world of music. Rabindra Sangeet is an amalgamation of all his songs, that is still valued for its richness in Bengali culture.

⁶ Satyajit Ray was born in Calcutta and was an Indian filmmaker, screenwriter, documentary filmmaker, author, essayist, lyricist, magazine editor, illustrator, calligrapher, and music composer. In 1992, he became India's first Academy Award winner. He won 36 national awards and forever changed the face of Indian cinema. In 1992, the Indian government presented him with the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honour.

⁷ Catholic nun Mother Teresa, who was of Indian and Albanian descent, established the Missionaries of Charity in 1950. Along with other accolades, she was awarded the 1962 Ramon Magsaysay Peace Prize and the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. Mother Teresa was a divisive figure both during her life and after her passing, although many people revered her for her humanitarian efforts.

⁸ Sister Nivedita (Margaret Elizabeth Noble), an Irish educator, writer, and social activist who founded a school and was a follower of Swami Vivekananda, was also a teacher. She made contributions to the education of Indian women.

stance, port facilities to landlocked nations like Nepal and Bhutan or medical tourism to Bangladesh.” (Basu & Bhowmick, 2021, p. 3). “In addition to its embassy in New Delhi, honorary consulate offices were opened by Korea Trade Promotion Corporation (KOTRA) in Kolkata in 2017 and Ahmedabad in 2019 as part of a project to understand the country’s cultural diversity” (Dhawan, 2019, p. 8). The capital of West Bengal, Kolkata, has intriguing connections to several global infrastructure projects including the maritime and transportation sectors. “the Bangladesh China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor seeks to connect Kunming and Kolkata through Bangladesh and Myanmar” (Hazra, 2020, p. 4). International Institute of Hotel Management (IIHM), Kolkata, also significantly brings many chefs and professionals to its land. “The organisation of Young Chefs Olympia (YCO) in 2019 by IIHM was a fascinating event where 55 young chefs from 55 countries with 55 mentor chefs were held in Kolkata” (Choudhury, 2019, p. 3). According to the Ministry of Tourism’s India Tourism Statistics 2020, “Kolkata is now the fifth most popular tourist destination in the world. 1,656,145 foreign tourists visited Bengal” (Nandi, 2020, p. 1).

Despite the city’s significant contribution to the state’s and national economy, it has yet to have financial autonomy in many essential aspects. “The 74th Constitutional Amendment granted local governments functional but insufficient financial autonomy.” (Bhowmick & Basu, 2021, p. 4). Economic well-being is directly linked with a city’s cultural prominence; hence, to establish Kolkata as a destination for city diplomacy, it must make significant

strides toward conducting peaceful politics and effective governance mechanisms. Above everything, cooperation at the level of union-state is mandatory to carry out an advanced international partnership.

West Bengal will experience a turning point as a result of the united brand of federalism between Kolkata and New Delhi, not just in terms of how it will affect the domestic political climate but also how it will affect India’s relations with its immediate neighbours in the Indo-Pacific, particularly Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. (Bhowmick & Basu, 2021)

FINDINGS

The study reveals that international activities of Indian cities are primarily based on economic prosperity, historical factors, and cultural dimensions. Besides the constitutional demarcation over foreign policy, cities are crucial in foreign policy-making. The three Cs of Indian foreign policy are the cardinal objectives of Indian cities to achieve through the prism of city diplomacy. Cooperation of union government with its states and cities is indispensable in attaining values of democracy and regional development. India is a diverse land with different development structures in its city. Despite political differentiation, symmetry among cities should be maintained for the holistic development of the country. To utilise its various advantages, Mumbai must strengthen its international connections and study additional paradiplomacy projects, to promote the province and attract money to emerging industries like technology and financial services. It needs to become more vibrant

in international agreements involving local governments, such as establishing offices to attract investments. Cities collaborate with international entities to strengthen its economy and enhance its ability to work. India's existing federal system must be modified to embrace the shifting picture of centre-state dynamics and acknowledge the city's role international arena. Consultation with the concerned state in foreign policy decisions is inevitable for an effective foreign policy. The institutionalisation of city diplomacy ought to encompass improvements in how local governments interact with their citizens. To identify foreign policy areas of regional importance and comprehend potential alignment or misalignment with officials, city officials should build consultation procedures with residents on international affairs concerns.

The birth of city diplomacy itself demonstrates how a participatory drive utilising local imagination, energy, and aspirations can strengthen a truly cooperative horizontal cooperation between foreign partners. City diplomacy networks are putting more and more pressure on governments to grant them a seat at the global table. The consistent inclusion of their voice in the key decision-making processes influencing urban life in order to shift from being the primary actors in implementing the existing global agendas to co-creating the future ones, a position they think they deserve. Cities' multilateralism could, in fact, have a stabilising effect in a global framework characterised by common risks and problems, counterbalancing the combative stance that the world's top two powers have increasingly adopted in recent months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above discussion of the Indian city's role in city diplomacy has proved that it is time to make space for cities at the global table of international players. Like MEA's branch offices in Chennai, Guwahati, Hyderabad, and Kolkata, all the other cities required the city diplomacy office consisting of its leaders, think tanks, significant urban players from business, education and culture, and civil society domain, to accomplish international interests. To prevent constitutional conflict or any overlap, effective collaboration is indispensable for cities for the successful implementation of diplomacy in their spheres. Along with this, better coordination with other international actors is also a significant aspect of working together. Increased collaboration with multinational enterprises, international NGOs, global media outlets, think tanks, and other entities and, improved cooperation with peers in urban areas by participating in bilateral and, notably, multinational activities through city networks are some constructive recommendations for the growth and accomplishment of city diplomacy in India.

CONCLUSION

City diplomacy as a phenomenon comes with democratisation and decentralisation, which are the cardinal principles of Indian federalism. It is a medium of bringing formal diplomacy from the union government closer to the people and representing their interests in the international sphere. City diplomacy can contribute to many national and international issues,

such as international peace, cultural preservation of minorities, environmental concerns, etc. Along with the positive impacts, there are risks in exaggerating cities' international activity in the federation. In a country with diverse cultures, allowing a unit with a strong ethnic or cultural identity to engage in paradiplomacy through independent representation may fuel additional ethnic mobilisation and internal strife. The state's unity may be weakened as a result of this. Hence, city diplomacy has also sparked a discussion regarding its effects on democracy, federalism, and sovereignty. However, to achieve alignment between the central government's foreign policy and that of the units, the diplomatic practice of its cities must be coordinated, regulated, and encouraged by the central government. There is a strict requirement for suitable constitutional mechanisms to accommodate local and federal interests in the international sphere. Moreover, the decentralisation of foreign policy is inevitable for the growth of the nation and cities.

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