



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Political Science

INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: CHALLENGES AND WAYFORWARD

KEY WORDS: Wildlife, Climate policy, DPSP's

Naveen Kumar

Assistant Professor, CRA College Sonapat

ABSTRACT

Not so long ago, many believed that the pursuit of clean air, clean water, and healthy forests was a worthy goal, but not part of our national security. Today environmental issues are part of the mainstream of Indian foreign policy. Environmental policy is aimed at balancing environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources with other policy goals, such as affordable energy as well as economic growth and employment. In the Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 48 says "the state shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country"; Article 51-A states that "it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures." At the international level, environmental protection is embedded in wider policy concerns and is being woven into broader foreign policy strategy of climate policy, while domestically; it is being shaped to serve national and sub-national development interests. India is emerging as a key player in climate negotiations, while at the national and sub-national levels; the environmental protection policy scene is becoming more active and more determined. It is essential to unravel this complex landscape if we are to understand why policy looks the way it does, and the extent to which India might contribute to a future international framework for tackling environmental degradation as well as how international parties might cooperate with and support India's domestic efforts.

INTRODUCTION:

India has transitioned from a protest voice on the fringes of global climate policy to one that is actively shaping international efforts to combat environmental degradation under the climate change. Analysis of the push behind India's negotiating positions on environmental protection thus far has focused on the competing motives of equity and co-benefits, which has however been insufficient to explain some of India's recent actions in this arena. There is a gap in the literature with regards to the analysis of Indian environment protection policy as situated in its larger foreign policy agenda and objectives. This paper studies the evolution of India's environment protection policy through the perspective of its broader foreign policy strategy, arguing that India's engagement with international environmental politics can be better understood by locating its environmental protection policy as a subset of its foreign policy agenda. Shifts in India's environmental protection negotiation stance in the past decade have been but a part of its overall foreign policy adjustments in favour of greater responsibility in management of the global commons.

Drawing on both primary and secondary data, this paper analyzes the material and ideational drivers that are most strongly influencing policy choices at different levels, from international negotiations down to individual states. We argue that at each level of decision making in India, in the international realm, it while our analysis highlights some common drivers at all levels, it also finds that their influences over policy are not uniform across the different arenas, and in some cases, they work in different ways at different levels of policy. We also indicate what this may mean for the likely acceptability within India of various climate policies being pushed at the international level.

In naming his cabinet, Modi renamed the "Ministry of Environment and Forests" the "Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change." In the first budget of the government, the money allotted to this ministry was reduced by more than 50%. The new ministry also removed or diluted a number of laws related to environmental protection. These included no longer requiring clearance from the National Board for Wildlife for projects close to protected areas, and allowing certain projects to proceed before environmental clearance was received. The government also tried to reconstitute the Wildlife board such that it no longer had representatives from non-governmental organisations; however, this move was prevented by the Supreme Court. Modi and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the COP26

climate summit in Glasgow on 2 November 2021. Modi also relaxed or abolished a number of other environmental regulations, particularly those related to industrial activity. A government committee stated that the existing system only served to create corruption, and that the government should instead rely on the owners of industries to voluntarily inform the government about the pollution they were creating. Other changes included reducing ministry oversight on small mining projects, and no longer requiring approval from tribal councils for projects inside forested areas. In addition, Modi lifted a moratorium on new industrial activity in the most polluted areas in the countries.

The changes were welcomed by businesspeople, but criticized by environmentalists. Under the UPA government that preceded Modi's administration, field trials of Genetically Modified (GM) crops had essentially been put on hold, after protests from farmers fearing for their livelihoods. Under the Modi government these restrictions were gradually lifted. The government received some criticism for freezing the bank accounts of environmental group Greenpeace, citing financial irregularities, although a leaked government report said that the freeze had to do with Greenpeace's opposition to GM crops. At the COP26 conference Modi announced that India would target carbon neutrality by 2070, and also expand its renewable energy capacity. Though the date of net zero is far behind that of China and the USA and India's government wants to continue with the use of coal, Indian environmentalists and economists applauded the decision, describing it as a bold climate action. Global carbon system is an interlocked system.

The global transition to low carbon systems has spillover effects -from changes in one economy to changes in another economy, changes in politics in one place to changes in politics in another place. Hence, the manner of transition is important for a low carbon economy.

If one country is honourable in the extreme and cuts its carbon emissions to the bone, that is going to be of little use if the others do not follow suit. They will suffer the consequences of climate change despite the extent of their sacrifice or effort. Equally, at the same time waiting for others to do something and not doing something oneself, is also not an option, especially in terms of adaptation. It is in this context that global leadership gets shaped by the policies and governance approach of a nation that is conscious of the significant impact of climate change.

India's Role and Responsibility on Climate Change Diplomacy:

India is a large economy, market, has the second largest population and it can play an important role in being part of these positive spillover effects.

- India needs to move climate change, global warming to the top of its foreign policy agenda. It is in this way that India can draw benefits from its own climate actions.
- India's stance on climate diplomacy has evolved from highlighting the issue of environmental colonialism in the 1990s through the principle of “**common but differentiated responsibilities**” (CBDR) to pushing for the establishment of an institution like **International Solar Alliance** in 2015.
- India's climate diplomacy needs to **construct a development model that takes into account all its needs, including climate change**, that is focussed on adaptation, and encourages the responsible engagement from the West on issues like finance and technology.
- A country's economic gain from technological cooperation for the environment can ensure its sustainable engagement with another country, which can, in turn, have a spillover effect on global engagement.
- The fall in renewable energy prices, driven by Germany's domestic programme that basically supported global prices for renewables, is an example.
- Therefore, if **India can frame its national priorities** more accurately and correctly, it can have a more reasonable engagement with the international process in climate change.

Steps towards better Climate Diplomacy:

Maritime Security:

SAGAR (translated as “sea” or “ocean”) – Security and Growth for All in the Region – is at the centre of India's maritime strategy.

- While India attempts to tap into its blue economy potential along with its regional partners in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), it also needs to undertake elaborate steps – technical, logistical, technological and regulatory – **to develop climate-resilient ports in the region**, an effort that could be steered by climate diplomacy.

Strategic relations:

Rising sea levels and sinking cities, number of tsunamis, cyclones, and floods have strategic concerns as well. India needs to align all its foreign policies with the issues of climate change.

For eg- India has taken a step toward cooperating with Sri Lanka on climate change. This initiative needs to be pushed further for India to gain an advantage over China, especially in the Indo-pacific region.

Food security:

Climate-resilient agriculture can be pushed by India in its bilateral and multilateral dialogues. Encouraging trade in sustainable agricultural products can create demand for the same and can also help address the issue of global food security.

Trade:

Economic engagements in climate supporting technology for instance in the renewable energy sector with Germany can promote climate change conscious global trade.

CONCLUSION

It is important for India to prioritize climate change as one of the key area of its foreign policy. Climate change should not be just considered from the environmental and economic point of view; it also stands to affect strategic considerations. India can start focusing on its neighbourhood to play a constructive role in the area of climate change through its Neighbourhood First policy. Making climate change an

integral part of its foreign policy ethics and moving towards climate diplomacy can project India as a sensitive and responsible global leader.

REFERENCES

- [1] Basrur, R. 2017. Modi's Foreign policy fundamentals: A trajectory unchanged. *International Affairs* 93: 1.
- [2] The Hindu. 2010. NGOs divided on Jairam's climate stance. Retrieved 23 June 2011 from <http://www.hindu.com/2010/12/11/stories/2010121156641500.htm>.
- [3] UNFCCC. (2008). Government of India submission to UNFCCC on long term co-operative action. Retrieved 21 Nov 2011 from http://unfccc.int/files/kyoto_protocol/application/pdf/indiasharedvisionv2.pdf.
- [4] UNFCCC. 2010. Government of India's communication on information on India's domestic mitigation actions.
- [5] Interim Report of the Expert Group on Low Carbon Strategies for Inclusive Growth. New Delhi, India: The Planning Commission of India; 2011. p. 114. [Google Scholar]
- [6] State Environment Policy: Including Rajasthan Environment Mission and Climate Change Agenda for Rajasthan, 2010–2014. Jaipur: Department of Environment; 2010. [Google Scholar]
- [7] Drishtias. 2019. <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/climate-diplomacy-for-india>