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India's views on climate change from Rio to Paris: A global discourse analysis

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Abstract
India has been advocating strongly on the climate change related initiatives for a long period of time. This research paper studies India's discourse during international climate change negotiations. This paper significantly analyses India's views on climate change from "Rio Summit as known Earth Summit" to the "Paris Agreement". The paper analyses the decisions made by the Indian government during international climate negotiations. This paper describes what is India's vision on the global climate change issue at present. This paper also studies how incumbent Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and his government has launched active efforts on climate change issues.

Keywords: CBDR, Climate Change, Conference of the Parties, Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement, UNFCCC

Introduction

Climate change is witnessing a long-term shift in the statistics of the weather, and the global climate is currently changing. India can be categorised under the most vulnerable country in the world as it is facing immense challenge of climate change (Thaker and Leiserowitz, 2014: 108) [19]. India has traditionally been a very active and critical player during international negotiations. Since the start, much more than other countries, it is playing a key role at comparable levels of per-capita income, and much more than other large developing countries (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2011: 2) [19].

India's views on climate change in initial stages were based on the central principle of country's approach guided by the principles of "historical responsibility" for "greenhouse gas" (GHG) emissions and "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) and respective capabilities (Rajan, 1997: 19; Sengupta: 2019: 115) [11, 14]. In practical terms, this meant that "India refused to take on emission reduction obligations, but rather pushed for developed nations to take financial responsibility for addressing the climate problem", which India clearly considers as a responsibility of the North who generated the problem in the first place (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2011: 6) [5]. Therefore, pre-Rio Indian position is about the historic responsibility of the developed countries of "carbon colonialism" and per capita rights to global environmental resources. The roots of the per capita or equity discourse in the climate change field are found in the pre-Rio era negotiations (Vihma, 2011: 11) [18]. In climate change negotiations, it continued to see itself as a part of, and as representing, the voice of the South (Narlikar, 2017: 97) [8].

After mid-2000s decade, India's policies on climate change are both hard and flexible, and India changed its policies from the motion of global politics. Now, India argues that the developing countries also take responsibilities with developed countries but not binding negotiation for developing countries and for the development of renewable energy, it is the responsibility of developed countries to transfer the technology to the developing nations. India had changed policies on climate change because of India's domestic factor, the emergence of India's economic order. The international aspirations of India are growing, the global geopolitical alliances have also impacted on India's climate change policy, and India is increasingly facing criticism, and isolation, from its traditional developing and underdeveloped partner countries.

Rio to Kyoto Protocol: Discourse of Historical and Differentiated Responsibilities

Indian government relied significantly on the report. It successfully incorporated the important words like "historical emissions" and "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) into UNFCCC (Saha and Talwar, 2010: 164; Dröge, S. and C. Wagner, 2015: 3) [12, 2], which is based on sound principles of practicality and equity (Raghunandan, 2013: 11) [10].

India's views that the developed countries must be held accountable and need to combat climate change and its underlying impacts. Implications of the CBDR needs to be taken into account (Dubash, 2009: 2) [3]. India's main assessment was that the outcome of the convention negotiations was 'entirely satisfactory' from the country's point of view (Sengupta, 2019: 117-118) [11]. Therefore, principles of Equity and CBDR has been inherent in India's positions to protect sovereignty, equity, and economic development and independence enshrining Indian foreign policy changing over time (Vihma, 2011: 10; Mohan, 2017: 25) [18, 7].

Towards the mid-1990s, the Indian negotiation strategy begins to clearly show some initial, novel features as compared to its traditional stance. From a defensive, distributive strategy, India switched, at least temporarily, to the role of a dynamic broker (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2011: 6) [15].

India attempted to use its coalition skills to considerable effect to ward off this Northern demand from the first COP 1 to the 1995 UNFCCC in Berlin. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the European Union (EU) under the leadership of Germany have been strongly favouring to

frame a new protocol to the UNFCCC. It was done to ensure the greater powers to the Convention laying down specific legally binding targets for countries to achieve 'targets and timetables'. However, it has been opposed by the US-led coalition which included New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Japan and also members of the OPEC. India was a convenor of the 'Green Group' of 77, which had like-minded developing states including AOSIS but excluding OPEC that "jointly called for the development of a strong legally binding protocol but without any additional commitments for developing countries" (Sengupta, 2019: 118) [14].

"Berlin Mandate", which would guide two years of negotiating processes for the legal instrument focused on mitigation actions and the Kyoto Protocol (KP) to the UNFCCC was formally adopted at COP 3 in December 1997 (Mohan, 2017: 6; Sengupta, 2019: 119) [14]. In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol, the world was divided into Annex I (developed countries) taking responsibility for reducing emissions, and Non-Annex (developing countries) being exempted from emissions reduction (Sinha, at el., 2017: 3). The Kyoto Protocol was concluded which established for the first time, legally binding obligations for only developed countries to reduce their GHG, while exempting the developing countries (Saha and Talwar, 2010: 161).

Developing countries like India have refused to commit to "binding emissions reductions based on arguments of equity, low per-capita emissions and the historical responsibility of developed countries to reduce their emissions first. For example, the per capita emission of India, with 17 % of world's population, is 1 ton of CO2 emissions in 2013, whereas in the United States, with less than 5 % of the world's population, per capita emissions are 17 ton CO2" (Thaker and Leiserowitz, 2014: 108) [19]. India has been able to secure its space for socio-economic development successfully while pushing the developed world to bear additional responsibilities (Mohan, 2017: 6).

In operationalising the Kyoto Protocol, the time frame from 1997 to 2001 significantly focused on developing the different rules and modalities to include the flexible market-based mechanisms to be negotiated within the treaty and to help developed countries in meeting their targets to mitigate (Sengupta 2019: 119) [14]. Despite the criticism, India did not deviate from its negotiating position until the early 2000s. In most negotiating platforms, it argued against binding mitigation commitments and called for financial aid for the adoption of new technologies and for adaptation measures (Powell, 2015: 8).

New Delhi to Nairobi: Discourse of Flexible and Seismic Shifts

For helping developing countries in adapting to the adverse impacts of climate change, India hosted COP 8 and emphasised the need for financial resources to help in 2002. The so-called "Delhi Ministerial Declaration" reflected India's position that adaptation is as important as mitigation and focused on ways to help developing countries to adapt to climate change (Powell, 2015: 8).

Indian climate policy witnessed the shift towards realistic assessments of benefits and trade-offs. India reversed "its long standing scepticism of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol and Indian entrepreneurs began to engage with the mechanism to gain funding for projects in India" from 2002 (Mohan, 2017: 16). At the initial stage, India was "skeptical of market-based mechanisms such as the CDM, but due to increased lobbying by Indian business for access to international markets, it quickly established the national CDM project approval authority in December 2003 and is currently the second largest CDM host country in the world" (Thaker and Leiserowitz, 2014: 110) [19].

According to Mohan, "the primary shift in the climate discourse in India as a result of a growing recognition of the co-benefits approach where policies to address climate change are mainstreamed into domestic priorities of poverty alleviation and economic growth, a process that gained momentum with Indian engagement with the CDM" (Mohan, 2017: 17-18).

Sengupta argues that "the period of regime building came to an end when all the rules for implementing the KP were formally adopted in the form of the 'Marrakesh Accords' at COP 7 in 2001 and when the Protocol formally entered into force in 2005, just prior to COP 11 in Montreal" (Sengupta 2019: 120) [19]. Moreover, Thaker and Leiserowitz finds that "the Indian government, however, continues to argue that differentiation between developed and developing countries should remain a key principle of any new international agreement, and the right for "development" carbon space" (Thaker and Leiserowitz, 2014: 109) [19].

From Bali to Cancun: Discourse of Deal-maker and not a Deal-breaker

As per the views of Mohan, the "strong economic growth in the early years of the new millennium for developing countries such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa (together referred to as BASIC) had led to an increasing expectation on these countries to take the lead in influencing the outcomes of global governance. These countries began to be termed emerging economies and distinguished as different from the G77 bloc on the basis of their economic power and carbon footprint" (Mohan, 2017: 6-7).

Sengupta argues that the "climate change began to be discussed not only within the multilateral UNFCCC framework but also in other politically important 'mini-lateral' forums" (Sengupta, 2019: 122) [14]. "Developed countries also began initiating dialogues with the emerging economies. For example, in June 2007, Germany invited the leaders of the five largest emerging economies such as India, Brazil, South Africa, China, and Mexico to attend the G8 Summit in an enlarged G8+5 setting and made climate change a key focus of its agenda" (Mohan, 2017: 7; Sengupta, 2019: 122) [14].

At COP 13 in Bali in 2007, the countries agreed on a plan for producing a new agreement that would work alongside and eventually replaced the Kyoto Protocol (Saha and Talwar, 2010: 161). When the Bali Action Plan endorsed the principle of "Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions" (NAMAs) in developing countries. It probably reflected India's position fairly well, preserving the opposition against binding commitments for developing countries (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2011: 8) [6], but "India surprisingly accepted that developing countries should participate in the global mitigation effort, at least on a voluntary basis in line with their capabilities" (Mohan, 2017: 7). According to Sengupta, "the Indian government took a number of steps domestically at this time, which signalled the growing importance that it accorded to tackling this issue, including the launch of a National Action

Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2008 that outlined concrete measures across key areas to promote 'development objectives while also yielding co-benefits for addressing climate change effectively" (Sengupta, 2019: 122) [14].

A clear shift in India's position towards offering some form of commitment to reduce emissions became evident at the G8 forum in 2009 (Powell, 2015: 12). Before the Copenhagen COP meeting, the Minister of Environment & Forests to the Prime Minister of India, Jairam Ramesh had asserted that India should be seen as "deal-maker and not a deal-breaker" and that India's stance should be "pragmatic and constructive and not argumentative and polemic" (Sinha, at el., 2017: 5). Jairam Ramesh also stated that India would march to Copenhagen with a 'positive frame of mind' and was willing to be prepared to be 'flexible', but stressed that there were 'non-negotiables' which will not be compromised (Sengupta 2019: 123-124) [14]. Minister Ramesh argued that since mitigating climate change was in India's national interest, the country must play a more positive and pragmatic role in negotiations (Atteridge, 2010: 3).

The shift away from the per-person emission argument was seen as a compromise on India's development agenda and was not well received domestically. Therefore, before the Copenhagen Summit, articulating that India should take radical steps to curb emissions for its own interest, even without a guarantee of finance and technology from the developed block. India should ease itself out from the G77 and become more engaged with the G20 (Sinha, at el., 2017: 4).

At COP 15 in Copenhagen in December 2009, provided a powerful illustration of the extent to which 'North-South imaginaries' pervaded the frames of India's negotiating elite (Narlikar, 2017: 97) [8]. The Copenhagen Summit came in the wake of strong US resistance to accept Green House Gas (GHG) emission reductions until emitters like India and China equally took commitment actions (Sinha, at el., 2017: 4).

In Copenhagen itself, India again took a leading role, enhanced through the newly formed BASIC alliance to jointly resist the mounting pressure that they now each came under from a largely unified US-led North (Sengupta 2019: 123-124). The alliance thus had a qualitatively very different meaning for India than its traditional coalitions within the G77 (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2011: 9) [6].

India was strongly attached to building a closer bilateral relationship with the US and the material and security benefits that it secured in return, such as the 2005 Indo-US nuclear deal (Sengupta, 2019: 136).

Post-Copenhagen, while the binary differentiation between developed and developing countries has been reduced, there is now more of a division between the emerging economies and the rest of the developing world. Likewise, large developing countries have formed BASIC and Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), a group that includes India, China, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and other low and middle-income countries (Sinha, at el., 2017: 5). On the front of carbon footprint, and economic power, these countries began to be termed emerging economies' and distinguished as different from the G-77 bloc.

Moreover, ahead of the Copenhagen summit, "India along with other BASIC countries announced voluntary targets to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 20-25 percent against 2005 levels by 2020 and never exceed the per capita emissions of Annex I countries" (Mohan, 2017: 7; Malhotra, 2015). India's view has been "all countries must take binding commitments in appropriate legal form" at the 2010 COP 16 meeting in Cancun (Sinha, at el., 2017: 5). India also active role in negotiating compromises on transparency issue, based on gaining widespread recognition (Vihma 2011).

India has been of the view in the international negotiations that "historic and per-capita emissions, not national emissions, should be the organising frame for future UNFCCC conventions, which is increasingly looked upon as a barrier to a globally binding deal, given India's rising national emissions" (Thaker and Leiserowitz, 2014: 108) [19]

From Durban to Paris: Discourse of Top-down to Bottom-up

At the Durban conference in 2011, the clearest evidence of which way the winds were blowing became apparent in the conference. As per the MoEF, dilution of the CBDR principle is completely unacceptable to India, and it believes that it serves as a firewall ensuring the Equity (MoEF 2011). However, the final outcome of the conference could not be more different (Sengupta 2019: 125-126). Environment Minister Jayanthi Natarajan was on a strong public position on defending equity, insisting on CBDR as the centrepiece of India's climate discussion (Sinha, at el., 2017: 5).

Therefore, an attempt has been made to "reverse the shifts in India's climate policy and fall back on traditional arguments" (Michaelowa & Michaelowa 2012; Thaker & Leiserowitz 2014) [19]. According to Mohan, "the negotiating track that began in Durban in 2011 decisively marked a shift towards a bottom-up architecture for climate governance wherein all countries would make pledges for climate action under a system of peer review" (Mohan 2017: 10).

In 2013, COP 19 was organised in Warsaw, where "all parties to the UNFCCC were invited to voluntarily prepare and communicate their 'bottom-up' national level pledges on climate action or "Intended Nationally Determined Contributions" (Sengupta 2019: 126 -127) [14]. According to Mohan, "the idea of Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs) was first mooted and eventually led to the final version of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) which was adopted by countries in 2014 at COP 20 in Lima (Mohan 2017: 10-11).

At COP 20, held in Lima in 2014, continued to develop the contours of this new agreement. "Intense negotiations, particularly by the BASIC and LMDC groups, throughout the months leading up to COP 21 ensured that ideas of 'equity' and 'differentiation' remained registered in different operational parts of this new treaty and India played a key role in this process. Ultimately, the Paris Agreement agreed to at COP 21 with its nuanced and 'carefully calibrated mix of hard, soft and non-obligations" (Sengupta, 2019: 127) [14].

At COP 21 in December 2015, the Paris Agreement that was finally adopted included "the principle of differentiation within its text in a very different manner than had been originally conceptualised under the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol" (The Economic, 2019). The Paris Agreement builds on 'Intended Nationally Determined Contribution' from countries to reduce greenhouse gases, complemented by a normative expectation of progression and 'highest

possible ambition' that calls for these contributions to be strengthened over time (Dubash and Rajamani, 2019: 29).

India's Vision of Global Climate Change: Under the Modi's Government

India represented at COP 21 by a new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which welcomed the adoption of the Paris Agreement (Sengupta, 2019: 127-128) [14]. Climate change negotiations provide an important illustration of Modi's ability to use Indian traditions and thereby claimed and reshaped the agenda (Narlikar, 2017: 99-102) [8].

Modi's government strongly supports the Paris Agreement, highlighting the need for collaboration between countries to develop eco-friendly technologies, and to strengthen the 2009 Green Climate Fund to help developing countries achieve their goals (Sinha, at el., 2017: 5). India injected the Paris negotiations with a healthy dose of realism; it curtailed excessive ambition, particularly in relation to what could be expected of developing countries, by consistently reiterating the notion of 'common but differentiated responsibility'. It is worth recalling that India had firmly resisted a drive by the developed countries to impose binding emissions targets on poorer countries at Copenhagen in 2009 (Narlikar, 2017: 104) [8].

According to Sengupta, "at the Paris negotiations itself, India surprisingly accepted the 1.5-degrees goal for climate policy given that it could potentially be used to close the gates on carbon emissions from late industrialising nations such as itself, in the absence of more stringent emission reductions from developed countries" (Mohan 2017: 11). Incumbent Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi made active efforts to showcase Indian position as a country that was well aware of its responsibilities at the global level on the issue of climate change (Sengupta, 2019: 128). Not only did India try to present itself as a facilitator of the Paris Agreement, it had also played a major role in pioneering a new agenda on renewable sources of energy (Narlikar, 2017: 104-105) [8].

The Modi government launched a new initiative together with France the 'International Solar Alliance' under the global commitment to address climate change, aiming to significantly expanding the global adoption of solar energy which is quite essential (Sengupta, 2019: 128; The Economic, 2019). India's vision that it can leads on climate change issues by International Solar Alliance and it alliance has provided a substantial market (Dubash and Rajamani, 2019: 29). Mohan observes that in addition to the domestic decision that "Prime Minister Modi has announced a domestic goal of 175 GW renewable energy by 2022 in 2014, which if achieved would further demonstrate India's leadership in global climate action" (Mohan 2017: 11). The Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement was a discouragement, but it will only strengthen the resolve of Indian policymakers to go above and beyond the INDCs as agreed in the 2015 Paris summit. With the new ambitions to "Make in India", India may see an even more self-confident country in future climate change negotiations (Sinha, at el., 2017: 5). Mohan provides the following account of the Modi government:

"Under the Modi government, India is looking to play a greater role in solving global challenges and shaping the rules, norms and processes that guide those efforts. In short, India has transitioned from the 'role of a global opposition to that of a global agenda setter'. Perhaps as a result of this new strategic vision, India was perceived at its most progressive and flexible in climate change negotiations after the Modi government came to power. The Paris Agreement has signalled the dominance of the Progressive Internationalists narrative in Indian climate policy" (Mohan 2017: 22-23).

Providing insightful perspective, Sengupta argues that "the post-Paris phase of the negotiations, India's challenge will be to sensibly balance the imperative of securing a fair international arrangement, on the one hand, while taking concrete domestic climate action, on the other in a manner that minimises the country's vulnerability and maximises its prospects for national welfare, green growth, and smart development in a carbon constrained world" (Sengupta, 2019: 137) [14].

Conclusion

The research paper has traced the Indian position in climate change negotiations from the Rio Climate Summit to the time of the Paris Agreement. The Climate Discourse has been carefully discussed in a detailed manner providing multiple dimensions. India has always emphasised on the CBDR principle, where the burden of sharing the responsibility to address the issue of climate change is differentiated within developed and developing countries. India's approach has always been responsive to the apprehensions that developed countries are not deliberately arresting its growth potential through environmental obligation. India has therefore tried to find the middle ground in its approach towards climate change and has always maintained that the problem of climate change can only be dealt collectively with efforts of all nations. India's efforts to resolve the issues relating to climate change can be considered to be incorporating the voice of the Global South as well.

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