

Untangling India's Non-Traditional Security Challenge of Climate Change: Is Soft Power Diplomacy a Panacea for Anthropocentric Abuses?

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Abstract:

India's pursuit towards a sustainable future has been accompanied by the centrality of climate diplomacy while leveraging its soft power apparatus in spearheading global trust-building, capacity-building and managing global common resources. Irrespective of the post-COVID ramifications, India has remained the only G20 nation on track to meet its climate change mitigation commitments, as India continues to maintain an ambitious target of 450 gigawatts by 2030 for itself on renewable energy, adhering to cutting down carbon emissions by 33% by 2030, keeping its promise on global warming mitigation to below 2 degrees. Predicating its approach towards multilateral action on respect, peace, prosperity, dialogue and cooperation, India has marshalled multilateral action on climate change in the international arena, from being the founder of the International Solar Alliance, leading the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, to constituting an integral component of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue's Climate Working Group, aiming at strengthening climate actions on mitigation, adaptation, resilience, technology-building capacity and climate finance. The paper problematizes climate change in international politics, focusing on India's soft power dimension while assessing the vulnerabilities associated with climate change, emphasizing exclusively on the evolution and the emerging multifaceted dynamics of India's climate diplomacy.

Keywords: COVID-19; Soft Power; Climate Diplomacy; Climate Change; Sustainable Development; Non-traditional Security; Capacity-building; Multilateralism.

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Research Objective:

The research paper attempts to decode the non-traditional security challenge of climate change, which has recently affected India's foreign policymaking establishment and strategic behavior. It aims to highlight the vagaries of climate change, the evolution of climate diplomacy vis-à-vis India's soft power apparatus, emphasizing the changing dynamics and the contemporary scenario in international relations. Finally, it strives to speculate the way forward in the future, analyzing whether the various elements associated with India's climate diplomacy efforts as a subset of India's robust soft power apparatus can mitigate, if not alleviate the wide-ranging ramifications of climate change in a high flux world order debilitated by the COVID-19 pandemic as nature's retribution against the gross anthropocentric abuses.

Research Methodology:

The paper is entirely predicated on the application of qualitative research tools. It is constructed on an edifice of secondary sources of knowledge, information, and non-numerical data. The study is thus the result of a compendium of academic information gathered from a plethora of journals, online articles, research papers, issue briefs, books, and YouTube videos.

Introduction:

The ubiquity of climate change and its spillover effect has made it one of the most alarming issues affecting humanity at large, and essentially, environmental catastrophes constitute a major obstacle in the pursuit of sustainable development. The advancement in science and technology in tandem with the success of the industrial revolution and capitalism contributed to increased emissions of carbon dioxide, heightened usage of fossil fuels, excessive exploitation of earth's renewable energy sources, culminating in global warming due to the alarmingly high concentration of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere (Moncrief, 2021). As climate change and its ramifications are connected with international politics, international trade, global development, and security, there are additional socio-economic repercussions arising due to major transformation in the means of energy production and its consumption pattern across the globe (Dimitrov, 2010).

Climate change typically entails sustained, long-term shifts in the temperature and weather pattern conditions over time, arising either due to anthropogenic actions like deforestation and burning of fossil fuels or natural variability while triggering ecological imbalance (“Global Issues: Climate Change”, 2019). The phenomenon of climate change accompanied by global warming and the greenhouse effect has been a menace, shaping the political agenda of nation-states since the late 1960s, re-orienting the strategic imperatives of all nation-states and raising the eyebrows of the international community (Carter, 2007, p.1).

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), viz. the special United Nations (UN) body designated to assess and analyze the scientific vagaries of climate change, the phenomenon of climate change denotes an alteration or change in the state of climatic conditions, that is empirically detected through the usage of statistical tests and can be identified through transformations in the arithmetic mean or the variability of its specific properties, persisting over an extended period of time, ideally for decades or longer than that. Typically, climate change is a byproduct of natural internal processes which involve external forcings like floods, volcanic eruptions or organically occurring solar cycle modulations, and persistent anthropogenic modifications in the atmospheric composition or land usage over a prolonged period of time (Karakir, 2018). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in its Article 1 explicitly defines climate change and makes a categorical differentiation between climate change ascribable to anthropogenic or man-made activities transforming the earth’s atmospheric composition, and climate variability on account of change in the natural environment (Moncrief, 2021).

Problematizing Climate Change in International Relations:

Academic scholars and theoretical practitioners in the domain of Security Studies and International Relations have time and again stressed the categorization of environmental problems as a global security threat while according more importance to climate change, and necessitating the urgency of constructive deliberations and multilateral agreements in tackling global commons issues like the depletion of the ozone layer in the earth’s atmosphere, greenhouse effect, and global warming (Sosa-Nunez & Atkins, 2016). Quite paradoxically, climate change has also played the role of a catalyst in international politics. As a matter of fact, climate change has managed to deliver certain

incentives by producing dynamic opportunities for advancing geoeconomic interests for state actors while constituting a vital instrument of their respective foreign policies (Citti Media, 2021).

Neil Carter (2007) maintains that both at the international and at the state-centric domain, governments and state actors have championed the cause of climate change as a subset of environmental issues by introducing a plethora of environmental protection standards, policies, regulations, and ecologically friendly norms by formally adhering to the normative elements of sustainable development, viz. equity, participation, justice, gender equality, and common but differentiated responsibilities. As a result, the fruition of climate diplomacy as a corollary to environmental diplomacy, with the proliferation of international treaties, agreements, policy initiatives, green legislation, institutional arrangements, clearly demonstrates the success of the international community and the de facto liberal international order with its multilateral status quo in effectively taking cognizance of the problems of the global commons. Notwithstanding the maladies associated with institutional responses in the form of multilateral environmental arrangements and the climate change treaty like serious implementation gaps and regime strengthening problems, international climate cooperation still holds the potential of presenting a teleological blueprint of an almost flawless rational strategy for the state actors to pursue (Carter, 2007, p.268).

As far as the architecture of global climate governance is concerned, there are certain legal instruments and multilateral frameworks to address the global commons issue of cardinal importance. In this context, the introduction of the UNFCCC at the historic Rio Earth Summit of 1992 as an international framework for the global engagement of state actors on climate change is a major milestone (Dimitrov, 2010). Subsequently, the developed nations of the Global North as per the UNFCCC deliberations undertook the responsibility of climate mitigation and spearheading the fight against global climate change by conforming to stringent emission reduction commitments while actively providing technological, financial, and scientific assistance to the developing nations of the Global South (Moncrief, 2021).

On the other hand, the developing nation-states were freed from emission reduction obligations as compared to the developed nations of the Global North, on account of lower per capita emission rates in relative terms and the necessity to advance comprehensive economic development

(Karakir, 2018). According to the UNFCCC negotiations, there was a subsequent recognition of the fact that there had been a disproportionate contribution to climate change and global warming as far as the developed and developing nations were concerned, and thus such uneven contribution to climate change prompted the crystallization of the famous Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) notion under the Article 3 of the UNFCCC (UNFCCC, 1992). Further, it was decided that under the jurisdiction of the UNFCCC, the member nation-states had to meet and join the table of deliberations at the Conference of Parties (COP) on a yearly basis, while renegotiating pacts or agreements and assessing respective achievements in policy implementation (Dimitrov, 2010).

Similarly, the Kyoto Summit of 1997 was another milestone and the second UN meeting on global climate change, which subsequently adopted the Kyoto Protocol as the legally binding instrument or the first legally binding climate change agreement in the international system. During the Kyoto Summit's deliberations which were partially constructive in consensus-building, the gulf between the Global North and the Global South was widened as the developed countries of the Global North were legally committed and morally obligated to conform with emission reduction guidelines, while the developing nations were still free from such commitments (Zhang, 2017). The Kyoto Summit was soon followed by the Copenhagen Summit of the UN Climate Change Conference in 2009, which came up with the Copenhagen Accord as a non-binding political declaration that suffered from many shortcomings (Allan, 2018).

Subsequently, the COP 21 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris or the 2015 Paris Summit was instrumental in developing the Paris Agreement as a legally enforceable and binding global agreement on climate change, where all the member nation-states were obligated to follow its provisions, and the Paris Summit was extremely successful in establishing a highly effective international transparency system in the realm of global climate action, regarding climate mitigation actions and the provision of development aid or financial assistance, bridging the barrier between the Global North and the Global South nations (Karakir, 2018). As far as the contemporary scenario of global climate action is concerned, the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in 2021 managed to establish the Glasgow Climate Pact as a non-binding legal agreement for shaping the global climate agenda for the next decade, whereby nation-states

pledged to commit themselves to cut down emissions by 2030, reduce carbon footprints while setting net-zero emission targets by the mid-century (“COP 26”, 2021).

Macroscopic Background: The Vicissitudes of Climate Change in the Indian Context

The Indian ruling dispensation has similarly been plagued by the predicament of climate change, subjected to multiple geographical and ecological challenges that quantify its security risks (Mumbai Centre for International Arbitration, 2021). Climate change has been an issue of critical importance, ranking high on the multilateral agenda, and there has been an umbilical connection between India’s foreign policy dispensation and its agenda of climate diplomacy, which has been characterized by both tactical adroitness and strategic vacuity. India’s External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar (2020) asserts that as the traditional perception surrounding globalization and multilateralism as the amalgamation of myriad national interests has altered on account of contemporary geopolitical shockwaves, tremendous political and economic re-balancing; macroscopic realities like terrorism, pandemics, and climate change have necessitated a giant leap from the narrow confinement of state-centric negotiations and calculations to modifying the deliberative scope on issues of global importance while navigating a common ground (Jaishankar, 2020, p.206).

During the Cold War-era, the bipolar world order was characterized by the primacy of bloc politics; arms race, security pacts, nuclear blackmailing, and Third World nations like India had championed the cause of disarmament while prioritizing non-alignment and national sovereignty as foreign policy goals (Karakir, 2018). Shedding its past dormancy and aversion towards proactive climate action, India has gradually emerged as a strategically important state actor in global climate negotiations, and since 2009, India’s behavior towards international climate diplomacy has been characterized by effective constructive engagement with global partners while playing a vociferous role vis-à-vis the UNFCCC negotiations (Atteridge, 2010).

In a transformative world order with the revised balance of power equations, India has been veering towards strategic autonomy while tending to prioritize geoeconomic choices more than conventional military buildup, and in this case, India’s new climate policy typifies cooperative geoeconomic strategy where India’s revamped diplomatic clout and emerging global profile has been reflected on fostering enhanced issue-specific partnerships, development cooperation on

climate change, and climate financing as a globally responsible actor while focusing on enhancing its international influence through its soft power apparatus. As action and measures regarding climate change constitute an integral component of India's geoeconomic posturing, climate policy prescriptions are assimilated into the broader geostrategic discourse (Hakala, 2019).

In this context, experts like Arvind Gupta (2018) stress the urgency of embracing a plethora of non-traditional security challenges by accommodating them in India's national security framework while building capacities for tackling them, purely out of the insecurities growing out of non-traditional security matters like climate change that are enlarging in their lethality and scope in recent times. Interestingly, there is no concrete watertight definition of a non-traditional security issue and the differentiation between traditional and non-traditional security matters is nebulous and epistemologically obscure. The security literature classifies traditional security issues as such matters which evoke an organized state-driven military response, involving the application of military force of some degree and extent, whereas it is impossible to apply force or coercion in the case of combating non-traditional security matters, however, these issues might give rise to specific circumstances which might involve a military response or need the application of force of some sort (Gupta, 2018, p.54). India's policymaking establishment is confronted with a series of non-traditional security challenges and such issues range from refugees and migration; cybercrime; terrorism; organized criminal activities; arms, drug, and human trafficking; natural disasters; pandemics and epidemics; water, food, and energy security to the ramifications of climate change and global warming (Manohar Parrikar IDSA, 2012).

As climate change is a problem of the global commons, transcending political structures, national boundaries, and state jurisdictions while defiling the earth's atmospheric composition due to man-made activities like greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, combustion of fossil fuels, developing nations of the Global South like India have historically turned a deaf ear in the past to mitigate its carbon footprints (Sosa-Nunez & Atkins, 2016). Heavily coal-dependent rapidly industrializing countries like India and China, despite advocating decarbonization, green transition, and non-renewable resource exploration in recent times, have refused to make commitments in the past for reducing industrial emissions, as contained in the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol (Carter, 2007, p.3).

It is interesting to note that such emerging economies helmed by India, have re-calibrated their diplomatic and domestic policy imperatives while playing a vociferous role in the international climate order ever since the genesis of climate change negotiations and multilateral deliberations, and in this regard, since the Copenhagen Summit or the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2009, BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) managed to resist the criticism and pressure exerted by the Global North, viz. historically polluting nations to conform with one-sided emission reduction commitments in the international system. Following dysfunctional policy outcomes and multilateral ennui post-Copenhagen, the stance taken by BASIC countries like India on climate change has evolved and altered over time, until the initiation of the COP21 or the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris (Shukman, 2015). However, as climate change and its repercussions on the international system have translated into major power shifts, India could not rule out the urgency of global environmental cooperation and climate diplomacy by inducting new tools into its policymaking dispensation, prioritizing principles of climate justice and equity, while pushing for an ambitious carbon reduction target in its development agenda (Hakala, 2019).

Dhanasree Jayaram (2021a) contend that India has been perennially demanding technological, scientific, and economic assistance from the developed nations of the Global North, chiefly on account of the latter's historical responsibility towards sowing the seeds of climate change and aggravating ecological stability, and such demands paved way for the materialization of result-oriented approaches driven by pragmatic considerations, like forging bilateral partnerships and strategic bonds while emboldening national capacities. Notwithstanding India's traditional ideational equations on equity and climate justice, there has been a seismic shift in its domain of climate diplomacy in the contemporary period, taking into consideration a series of factors, for instance, augmenting India's clean energy base, green technology, renewable energy sources like solar power while promoting comprehensive energy security; strengthening foreign policy goals and strategic imperatives; reducing the increased vulnerabilities associated with climate change (Jayaram, 2021a, p.91).

All in all, as a vital component of India's overall foreign policy agenda, climate change has multifaceted connotations and it is imperative to decode all the aspects of climate change as a geopolitical construct involving power hierarchies, strategic alignments, tactical coalitions, power

blocs; a development issue characterized by economic hardships and poverty; a cultural norm associated with human interest in assimilating normative values like cultural and civilizational elements; a vulnerability or predicament or crisis or challenge; an international leadership opportunity or an issue with domestic socio-economic leverage (Belis et al., 2018).

India's Climate Action: Untangling Soft Power and Climate Diplomacy

In international relations, diplomacy constitutes a key element and an important tool in a nation's foreign policy, and essentially it stands for a special method of influencing a nation-state's negotiations, interactions, and transactions with other countries. Historically, diplomacy stood for an effective traditional dialogue mechanism and an efficacious instrument to pursue foreign policy goals and strategic interests, while modern public diplomacy applies a soft and normative mechanism of political dialogue, also known as "soft power" as popularized by Joseph Samuel Nye (Bharti & Bharti, 2021). As a cultural artifact, soft power typifies a credo or body of thought primarily associated with resources employed in attraction-power and with several strategies for applying such resources to advance the interests of state actors (Nye, 2004, p.5).

Soft power has managed to promote national interests and the role of a nation-state in its multilateral, plurilateral or bilateral negotiations and the application of soft power are ensured through the usage of elements like humanitarian aid and development policy, constituting the crux of public diplomacy (Chitty, 2017, p.1). Nye illustrated different determinants as soft power resources, which involve legitimate policies and measures; normative values; culture; a robust positive domestic model; competent and efficient military setup; and a successful economic system, and thus, soft power varieties can be compartmentalized into political, military, legal, ethical, economic, and cultural categories (Nye, 2011, p.99).

Although normative values, cultural elements, and government policies constitute the soft power resources, any nation's foreign policy can serve as a soft power asset or an effective mechanism for leveraging soft power in international politics. In order to boost the image of a country abroad, increase its diplomatic clout and bargaining power while improving the prospects for the achievement of preferred policy goals, the process of public diplomacy is the ideal option vis-à-vis the construction of development and strategic partnerships, effective strategic communication in foreign nations, forging robust and enduring bonding with policymakers by capacity-building,

training, scholarships, and other capability-building tools (Mullen, 2015, p.192). In the case of India, climate diplomacy as a corollary of public diplomacy efforts has been applied as a tactic to persuade, attract, and influence other nations of the international community, just like the meteoric rise of vaccine diplomacy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic to bolster India's soft power apparatus (Bharti & Bharti, 2021).

At the rudimentary level, climate diplomacy can be interpreted as the concerted effort and systematic attempts towards global agreement through respective nation-states' foreign policies on climate change, and thus climate diplomacy is the superset that encompasses the application of diplomatic tools, viz. at the individual, institutional, instrumental, and global level, to support the ambition and functioning of the international climate change regime, thereby attenuating the negative repercussions climate change as a global menace poses for peace, prosperity, and stability (Srivastava, 2021).

Multiple associated terminologies in this context are Green Diplomacy, Environmental Diplomacy, Green Summits, Green Growth Paradigm, Ozone Diplomacy, and in this regard, Pisupati (2015, p.4) defined climate diplomacy as the established method of international discourse or the art of managing international relations, chiefly through negotiations and dialogue, on issues related to the environment. In essence, the practice and process associated with the construction of the international climate change regime while guaranteeing its effective operation constitute climate diplomacy, and thus the evolution of climate diplomacy antecedes while shaping the creation of the climate regime (Joshi, 2021). Thus, climate diplomacy employs the interlocked role of the state, specifically in terms of international relations, foreign policies, institutional mechanisms, and non-state actors into play at the global level (Citti Media, 2021).

India's Climate Diplomacy: Anatomizing its Evolution

In its quest towards deep convergences, multi-alignment, and strategic autonomy, India's participation in the global climate politics vis-à-vis its active negotiations in the international arena has witnessed multiple shifts throughout history; from the establishment of the United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the Rio Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992 to the Conference of Parties (COP) 21 in Paris in 2015 (Mohan, 2017). In 1972, India's erstwhile Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's speech at the United Nations Conference on the Human

Environment chalked out the normative tradition of India's climate policy, pitting socio-economic development against environmental protection, while accusing the developed nations of the Global North of apathetically orchestrating global environmental problems (Vihma, 2011). Subsequently, following the developments leading to the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, the ideational underpinnings and ideological edifice of India's climate policy got crystallized. As an important milestone, the Center for Science and Environment's (CSE) report titled 'Global Warming in an Unequal World' put forward its observations that censured and categorically accused the developed nation-states of the Global North of endorsing carbon colonialism (Agarwal & Narain, 1991).

India has proactively maintained a firm position while promulgating deep cuts in the emissions of the industrialized nation-states, in continuity with their historical responsibility for towering levels of greenhouse gas emissions, and this position has been sustained following the Paris Summit on Climate Change in 2015 (Menon, 2021, p.329). Exuberantly arguing at the outset of negotiations in 1991 that the problem was exacerbated by excessive levels of per capita emissions of greenhouse gases, and the developed countries accounted for incremental global warming, India reiterated its position on making the principle of equity the touchstone for any proposal's decision (Dasgupta, 2011, p.89).

Following the 1992 UNFCCC negotiations, India effectively managed to formulate the specific position by representing the interests of the Global South along these lines, subsequently modifying the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) formulation of 'common responsibilities' across nation-states to common but differentiated responsibilities, and thus the resultant climate regime has been a witness to India's boisterous role in crystallizing and accommodating the Global South's environmental concerns into the legal framework and architectonic system of the UNFCCC (Dubash & Rajamani, 2015, p.664). Further, India has spearheaded in calling for new and additional funding, advocating the creation of a separate institutional mechanism for climate funding, while working actively with developing nations to ensure that the climate negotiation process was held under the jurisdiction of the UN General Assembly vis-à-vis a specially constituted negotiating committee, thereby judging that the UN framework would effectively articulate and defend its views (Joshi, 2021). Additionally, in tandem with the Kyoto Protocol and its associated climate negotiations since 1997, India has been instrumental in defending the notion of differentiated responsibility, convening a 'Green Group'

of 72 nation-states to support the idea of a legally binding protocol, subsequently promoting the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol, which enables developing nations like India to sell emission credits while undertaking major greenhouse gas reduction projects (Sengupta, 2011, p.107). Dubash & Rajamani (2015) maintain that after 2007, there was the beginning of a new phase in the global climate negotiations, as with the conclusion of the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period (2008-2012), this era involved three major milestones, viz. the Bali Action Plan of 2007, the Copenhagen Accord of 2009, and the Durban Platform of 2011, which determined the future of the climate regime predicated on the question whether negotiations would continue on the basis of a unitary framework or on the principle of differentiated responsibility.

Following the Durban negotiations, Doha and Warsaw negotiations in 2012 and 2013, India has managed to align itself with myriad nations having divergent interests, involving China, the members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the Bolivarian Alliance (ALBA) to spearhead the formation of the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs), in order to retain differentiation within the status quo of the climate regime (Srivastava, 2021).

Ian Hall (2019) holds that as the Indian foreign policy behavior has undergone a tectonic shift over the years, the re-orientation has reached its zenith under the era of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, wherein the application and usage of soft power as a strategic asset is a remarkable development. In the trajectory of India's climate diplomacy efforts, Narendra Modi has been instrumental in his vocal endorsement and successful bidding at the UN General Assembly for the celebration and declaration of a World Yoga Day, which has been internationally recognized on 21 June. Additionally, Prime Minister Modi advocated the incorporation and resuscitation of traditional Hindu codes of conduct, traditions, customs, and beliefs as the intellectual sources of wisdom for adapting and mitigating climate change, and he held that the ancient Indian Vedas put forward an entire spectrum of knowledge regarding climate change, which when amalgamated with Mahatma Gandhi's concepts of Swaraj (self-rule) and trusteeship could effectively yield dynamic public policy prescriptions in addressing the repercussions of climate change (Hall, 2019, p.92).

In the contemporary period, as a treaty-bound intergovernmental organization, Narendra Modi has been instrumental in formally revealing the International Solar Alliance (ISA) at the Paris Climate

Summit in 2015, which as a compendium of nation-states focuses on the sharing of information while financing major solar power projects in countries located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn (Hall, 2019, p.93). The ISA chiefly aims at funding 1 trillion US dollars worth of investment for constructing and managing solar power plants that are capable of generating at least 1 terawatt of power, which is the rough equivalent of the total generating capacity or the energy output from all renewable sources globally between 2018-2030 (Narendra Modi, 2018).

Presiding over the inaugural summit of the ISA in New Delhi in March 2018, Modi promulgated a comprehensive approach and re-invigoration of the ancient Vedic philosophy, which positioned the Sun as the soul of the world while tackling climate change (Bhaskar, 2018). Deconstructing the trajectory of India's climate diplomacy, Dubash & Rajamani (2015) mentioned three phases, namely the early years of negotiation; negotiating global pressures to ensure increased developing nations' commitments around the Copenhagen negotiations in 2009; and the resolution at the Paris Climate Accord in 2015. However, India's Sustainable Development Diplomacy and Climate Diplomacy as the key instrumentalities of multi-level governance architectonics are plagued with innumerable geographical and ecological challenges, augmenting its security risks in recent times.

Emerging Dynamics and the Future of India's Climate Diplomacy: Panacea or Utopia?

As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated a spillover effect on the Indian economy's efforts towards the commitment on adaptation, mitigation, conservation on carbon emissions, altering climate change equations dramatically, disrupting supply chains, destroying capabilities, limiting financial resources, as an act of perverse natural revenge against anthropocentric abuses, several extreme climatic events have culminated while destroying lives and affecting biodiversity (Joshi, 2021). Axel Nordenstam (2021) has identified a plethora of key drivers and challenges, both at the domestic and global level, impeding the evolution of India's climate diplomacy and overall climate negotiations at the international arena, and they include:

India's vulnerability to climate change; economic interests; domestic response mechanism to climate change; global leadership aspirations; moral claims in international affairs; domestic political leadership; domestic public opinion; lack of administrative capacity; Hindu nationalist ideology; authoritarian populist instincts; non-green economic

imperatives; lack of national budget and inefficient resource allocation for the low-carbon economy; lack of political will; low degree of political knowledge; inefficient conditions for foreign investment (Nordenstam, 2021).

During the 2015-2019 periods, subsequently accentuated by the COVID-19 Pandemic, later on, India managed to spearhead capacity-building, confidence-building, infrastructure, institution, policy and knowledge-building by securing a national consensus on issues related to climate change, notwithstanding severe economic and political re-balancing in the international system and heightened ecological dangers, ranging from the lacuna in UN-led climate governance regime to the unilateral withdrawal of U.S.A. as the Global Policeman state vis-à-vis its disavowal of the Paris Climate Accord during the Donald Trump presidency (Jayaram, 2021b). India has been an integral member of the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) in the international climate order, who as a unified group exhibited solidarity, held similar positions on climate issues like sovereignty, transfer of finances and technology, equitable sharing of development space and carbon resources, historical responsibility of the Global North nations, to name a few. However, multiple cracks and divisions have disrupted their unity, especially on issues like the operationalization of equity, and geopolitical shockwaves like trade and technological decoupling from China from India's perspective has constituted a new challenge, becoming a new priority in all spheres of climate diplomacy, on account of huge geoeconomic and geostrategic shifts ranging from India-China border clashes, strengthening of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or the Quad to the diversification of supply chains (Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies, 2021).

However, notwithstanding the multifaceted ramifications of the COVID-19 Pandemic, significant social, political, financial, infrastructural, institutional loopholes in the Indian energy sector, chronic structural risks and multiple obstacles impeding India's just transition strategy from non-renewable to ecologically friendly renewable sources, India has been the only G-20 nation which is on-track to meet its climate mitigation commitments. Continuing to maintain an ambitious target of 450 gigawatts by 2030 for itself on renewable energy while adhering to cutting down carbon emissions by 33% by 2030, keeping its promise on global warming mitigation, net-zero emissions to below 2 degrees Celsius, India has been instrumental in channelizing its multilateral action on

climate diplomacy, basing it on the normative elements of respect, prosperity, peace, dialogue, and cooperation (FICCI India, 2021).

As diversification of India's soft power apparatus through forging cultural, commercial, and historical links have been an integral instrument of India's foreign policy, climate diplomacy plays a major role in this regard. Climate diplomacy holds the potential to cement India's sphere of influence in its South Asian neighborhood, and as a key maritime player in the Indo-Pacific region accoutered with bolstering its security architecture while spearheading the Quad along with the United States of America (USA), Japan, and Australia, India's climate diplomacy efforts transcend the economic and environmental realm to directly involve strategic considerations, especially in the littoral space of the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region, confronted with the assertiveness of a belligerent China motivated by unilateral revisionism and territorial expansionist designs (Marjani, 2019). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the Leaders' Summit on Climate 2021 illustrated India's teleological blueprint on climate diplomacy, and he had highlighted India's renewable energy target of 450 gigawatts by 2030, India-US joint climate and clean energy Agenda 2030 partnership, while describing global initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, LeadIT, Climate Working Group under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, among others (Jayaram, 2021b).

Despite a progressive rhetorical renaissance in the international system, India still has to travel a long journey towards the development of a robust climate action strategy, and in the aftermath of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference or the COP26 Summit at Glasgow in 2021, following the Glasgow Climate Pact, India still needs to address its domestic variables, espouse transformational shift in development planning, mobilize climate finance to facilitate climate resilience and adaptation measures, improve market access and credit facilities to multiple stakeholders across the clean energy spectrum (Joshi, 2021). In accordance with the Glasgow Summit, India has established a highly ambitious net-zero emission target by the 2070 deadline, while accompanying Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), the USA, China, and the European Union (EU) in a quest towards carbon neutrality, and cumulatively, nation-states that are boisterously campaigning for green transition and decarbonization while remaining strictly committed towards the realization of net-zero target, presently comprise 90% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), accounting for more than 85% of the total emissions globally (Bello, 2021).

Although it is realistically impossible for India to completely discard non-renewable energy sources as its economy is still heavily dependent on coal while accounting for 70% of India's total energy mix, India's climate negotiations and commitments presented front of the multilateral status quo are indeed historic. However, there are multiple practical impediments in its path. Constituting the world's third-highest emitter of greenhouse gases while being crippled with socio-economic maladies, massive poverty, skyrocketing unemployment, and wide inequalities in wealth distribution, India still has to combat a plethora of challenges at home before achieving ambitious climate goals (Joshi, 2021). Even though the renewed momentum associated with India's climate diplomacy can be attributed to hybrid multilateralism in the new landscape of international climate cooperation, global environmental activism mediated through both state and non-state actors in contemporary times has been an important factor (Srivastava, 2021). Thus, India's climate diplomacy, while acknowledging all major obstacles, holds the potential of yielding fruitful environmental gains in the future, without comprising inclusive growth and sustainable development imperatives, while emboldening India's soft power apparatus.

Conclusion:

The research paper demonstrated the issue of climate change as a global commons problem, problematizing it in the context of international relations at large. It also highlighted how climate change is a non-traditional security challenge for India's policymaking establishment while focusing on the concepts of soft power and climate diplomacy. Further, the paper traced the historical evolution, the emerging dynamics, contemporary challenges, and attempted to speculate the future of India's climate diplomacy in a highly transformative COVID-19 pandemic-induced world order, proving how India's robust climate diplomacy efforts as an extension of its soft power apparatus can mitigate anthropocentric abuses in the form of climate change.

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