

Climate Change Issues Beyond Copenhagen

Prof. P. C. Joshi
Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi,
Delhi – 110007

Kalindi Sharma
ICMR doctoral Candidate
Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi, Delhi - 110007

The global community response to the issue of climate change can be compared to the village council *khumri* meeting of cis-Himalayan Jaunsari scheduled tribal community. In any typical *khumri*, the participants discuss with the aim to be fair, impartial, just and honest to the cause of dispute but while doing so they look at the reality from their vantage point and contest their claim in all fairness so that they are able to harvest the accrued benefits. The world community is behaving in the same manner with respect to the climate change issue. While every nation is trying to be fair and just, it is eventually contesting to minimize its liability and maximize its benefits. The self-interest alone is thus resulting in formation of new alliances and blocks and therefore India and China who generally do not agree on many international matters have formed a very close bond to voice under the rubric of BASIC countries. The Copenhagen meeting has been some kind of a failure with the powerful and elite countries not exactly agreeing to some suggestions and thus the hopes are now fixed in the next meeting in Mexico. What can we expect in the future and what really is going to happen to the highly vulnerable island nations and economically poor countries are the legitimate questions emerging out of the Copenhagen. Additionally, it is also a matter of concern that climate change will have adverse impact on all and sundry, rich and powerful countries being no exception.

Over the last decade there has been considerable concern over the issue of global warming world over. Countries around the world have acknowledged the urgent need to discuss the much anticipated environmental hazards that face the earth. There has been marked increase in the average global temperature of earth in the past century. The increase has particularly accelerated in the last two decade due to acceleration in the industrialization and globalization. This global rise in temperature, which is caused by the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, has resulted in excessive change of the climatic conditions (Crowley Thomas, 2000). These greenhouse gases have become a major cause of unrest for the global leaders as most of it can be attributed to the anthropogenic factors which leaves them with limited capacity to curb the emission in event of developmental demands, economic growth and enhancement of comforts. The heedfulness in the matter has evoked worldwide debates and to a great extent a combined but irresolute response. Climate shifts and global warming have not only perturbed the world harbingers but they have also had severe implications on the human society which may seem ironical as it's the human action that has been held responsible for it the most. The human action contributing to climate change necessitates investigation in the post

cold war changing scenario of global power framework wherein basically five different types of voices and concerns are being voiced for the remedial actions. These are the U.S.A., the EU, the BASIC countries, Sudan leading a block of African and Latin American countries and finally the island nations. The climate change issue, which is quite real for its averse consequences has also become a discourse wherein the facts, realities and scientific evidences are heatedly contested to put forth a particular aetiology of causation as well as a remedial line of action to mitigate adverse climate impacts.

Several hypotheses have evolved in order to explain the global warming phenomenon. One of the many theories being the, Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW), that has emerged as the leading theory endorsed effectively to the world by esteemed panel of the Inter-Governmental Panel of Climate Change, according to which the global temperature rise is caused by human activity. The theory has put large part of the blame on human activities which involve industrial emissions, vehicle emissions, etc. for having caused excessive greenhouse gas emission. These emissions have modified the optimum level of atmospheric gases which has resulted in altering of the complex systems that affects almost all of the life thriving on earth. Since these natural systems facilitate life on the planet hence slightest interference with them results in an imbalance within the ecosystem altogether which only proves that most of geographical, topographical and climatic features are gradually shifting. The question that looms large on mankind is how favourable is the shift? The inevitable shift in the condition has been evident in the form of receding snow cover, rising water level, extremes of temperature, irregular precipitation, extinction of various species, etc., and if the current rate of disruptive change continues, then it would not be entirely wrong to anticipate a major holocaust.

In order to assess these dynamic features and to substantially quantify them, an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was formed in the year 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which included an international group of experts. The IPCC till date remains the authority on climate change in the world. This highly acclaimed panel and recipient of Nobel Prize for peace has been actively engaged in reviewing the anthropogenic risks to the climate and has been publishing reports based on the recent researches carried out in the area. Though denounced and debated for employing inaccurate and rather complicated methods for calculating risks in past four assessment reports and recently for having relied on delusive data for its report on retreating Himalayan Glaciers (Schiermeier Quirin, 2010), the panel continues to publish special reports relevant to UNFCCC (United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change) implementation, an international treaty that fully identifies the potential risks resulting from the climate change. The implementation of UNFCCC in 1992 led to the Kyoto Protocol adopted in the year 1997 (COP3) aimed at combating the global warming issues. The protocol demands commitment from various nations towards reducing the GHG emission, working in the lines of the 1987 Montreal Protocol of Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985)a, which takes into account all the substances causing ozone layer depletion (UNEP,2000). Kyoto protocol on the other hand employs measures to curb the emissions of gases not covered under the Montreal protocol. The first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires

The Montreal Protocol:

The Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer (a protocol to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer) is an international treaty designed to protect the ozone layer by phasing out the production of a number of substances believed to be responsible for ozone depletion. The treaty was opened for signature on September 16, 1987, and entered into force on January 1, 1989, followed by its first meeting in Helsinki, May 1989. Since then, it has undergone seven revisions, in 1990 (London), 1991 (Nairobi), 1992 (Copenhagen), 1993 (Bangkok), 1995 (Vienna), 1997 (Montreal), and 1999 (Beijing). Owing to its widespread adoption and implementation it's been claimed to be an example of exceptional international co-operation initiative with Kofi Annan quoted as saying that "perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date has been the Montreal Protocol". It has been ratified by 196 states (http://ozone.unep.org/Ratification_status/). The Kyoto Protocol was as an extension of the Montreal Protocol as the framework was designed so that it took into account all the commitments of Montreal Protocol such that no GHG emission could be ignored with the adoption of Kyoto Protocol (UNEP 2006).

in the year 2012 hence the COP 15/MOP 5 held recently in Copenhagen, Denmark concentrated upon reaching an ambitious agreement for the post 2012 period. The much awaited and highly publicised summit of 2009 did not succeed in reaching a consensus between the 192 countries that took part in it (UNFCCC, 2009). Though the summit failed to construct a binding agreement between the various stakeholders it can well be acknowledged for setting up a stage for beginning cooperative action in post Kyoto agreements that are now the agenda for the COP 16/MOP 6 in Mexico and also for raising an alarm in favour of quicker action. A thirteen paragraph political accord supported by around 25 parties was noted in the COP 15 due to lack of any consensus, which reflects the commitment and the path of action by the Annexe-II countries' towards global warming and which was held to be operational immediately. As was anticipated by many that COP 15 would only lead to confusion over the future goals, the summit did project prominently the differences between UNFCCC categorised brackets of Annexe I, Annexe II countries and the non-annexe or the developing nations (UNFCCC,2009).

Seen from a completely different frame of reference the COP 15/MOP 5 and even the current climate measures seem to be partially driven by the personal indulgences of the Annexe I/II nations. The UNFCCC's category of annexe I involves parties which are completely industrialised and also those with their economies in transition while Annexe II has industrialised economies but not the ones in transition. Annexe II nations are expected to provide financial assistance to developing nations in order to make them capable enough to undertake emission reduction activities under the convention and to also assist them in adopting the adversities of the climate change. These parties are also required to provide aid and assistance towards the development of countries with economies in transition (EIT). The Non-Annexe partes are mostly developing nations and have been found to be highly vulnerable to climate change effects for various economic reasons. UNFCCC also recognizes some 49 nations classified as least developed countries and ensures special concern to their inability to respond to climate change actions and also to adapt to the ill effects of climate change.

In the above categorical division the convention clearly draws a line between nations that are economically powerful,

United States of America, a Significant Stakeholder in Climate Response Measures:

The focus on USA in the recent COP 15 could be attributed to a number of reasons, first being its status as a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol and not as ratified nation, second being the change in power and finally its scepticism regarding the structure of Kyoto protocol. The US has not ratified a major international environment treaty since 1992 and President Clinton never submitted the [Kyoto protocol](#) for approval as the economists claimed a downfall in the GDP with a new climate programme as released in an economic analysis in 1998 (Guardian, 2009). USA not satisfied with the Kyoto architecture has been focussing on unilateral rule setting of the treaty to which other developed nations have protested (Guardian, 2009). President [George W. Bush](#) did not submit the treaty for Senate ratification based on the exemption granted to China and also cited the stress on US economy as the reasons (Harrabin, 2008). The present Obama government has been committed to the issue as was evident in the COP 15, however there has been no further action in the status of USA regarding the protocol.

economically self sufficient and struggling economies, thus making the climate change programmes, a ground potent enough for capitalistic power struggle. Definitely the attempt at segregation is made with the intent of providing clear cut guidelines to the annexe I nations for assisting those nations which lag behind in climate change response measures. However what became evident in the COP 15 was the divide between the Annex and Non-Annex nations over the distribution of funds and the level of emission commitment. The divide between the nations was so deep that reaching a consensus agreement was impossible till the differences are resolved. For one the developing countries were not satisfied with the financial assistance they were getting hence denied any binding agreement, the other being the demands of developed nation who did not agree to financial assistance if a binding agreement was not given to them which was way below the expectations of the developing nations. The Copenhagen summit fell short of any agreement as the two parties were not willing to compromise on their respective demands, however if any consensus were reached, COP 15 agreement would have been a major step in the climate change protocols, thereby maintaining a continuum of climate change response measures initiated with the Kyoto Protocol. The Copenhagen accord between nations does not bring about any major breakthrough in the already promised commitments of Kyoto protocols but what may be termed as a milestone would be the active and favorable response of United States in agreeing to the emission commitments as it has till date not ratified the Kyoto Protocol but is a symbolic signatory of the protocol. The accord was also criticized by researchers as the present accord would lead to a temperature rise of of 3.9 °C by the year 2100 as opposed to commitments of a rise not more than 2°C. One of the implicit reasons for the failure of talks can be attributed to the fact that if developing nations are given international aid then they would be required to submit regular audit reports of any emission measures they would undertake and also need to get international verification done for any document, which means that the annex I nations would easily get an upper hand in all the decision making regarding climate friendly measures, which automatically evokes skepticism from developing nations. But developing nations are trapped in a sort of vicious circle, though they do not wish to have alliance of this sort with developed countries, they are forced into a capitalist environment owing to their lack of wealth in order to cope with climate change effects and progress toward sustainable development.

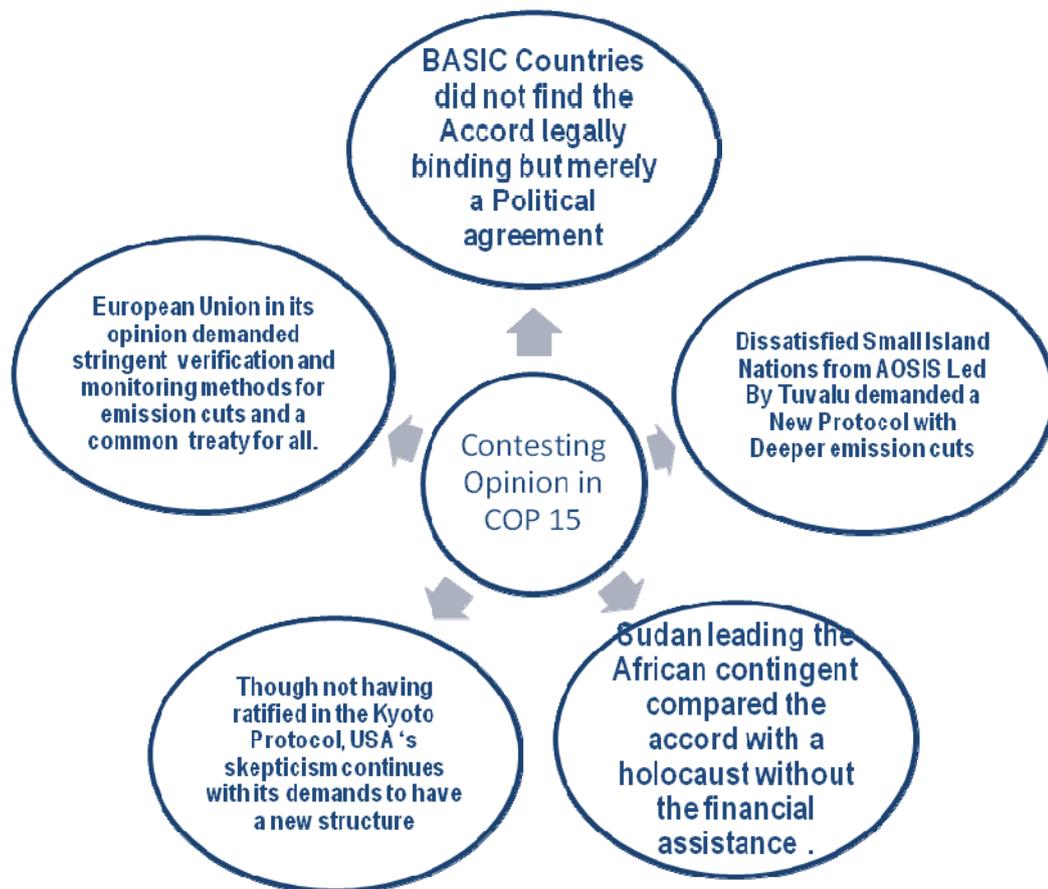


Fig 1: The rift between the Annex nations and Developing Nations in COP 15, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Among other debates the European Union demands a single treaty for all the nations without separate agreements but United States has exhibited doubts regarding verification procedures of the treaty. This multilateral agreement can be labeled as a myopic vision of various stakeholders of COP 15 who failed miserably to reach strict levels of commitments regarding emission control, the reasons to which rests in their vested interests and contesting opinions which scored over a common global cause. Hence we are faced with a very pertinent question, what next after an unsuccessful COP 15? As we see it, the COP 15 accord does not satisfy the world for emission control rate which is yet to be decided, how many out of 25 signatories would actually sit down to take some stringent steps against global warming is yet to be seen (UNFCCC, 2009). The accord was understood as a solemn beginning to the replacement of Kyoto protocol after 2012 with more viable targets and it stands legal for namesake. The issue should not be brandished uselessly between leaders of the nation, civil society advocates, economists, business stakeholders and inter-governmental panel of researchers, we need to focus beyond the Copenhagen Summit and it is high time for some revised and innovative action oriented goals aimed at optimum level of GHG and CFC emissions. In the present day, China and United States of America account for nearly half of the world's GHG emissions [UNFCCC GHG data] and the two countries have not ratified for the Kyoto protocol or have been exempted from the treaty framework respectively. United States of

America from the day of the symbolic signature by Al Gore in the treaty has come up with inhibitions ranging from losses in the GDP, a liability on economy that would more or less result in deficit or just disagreement with the structure of the protocol, it all adds up to reflect the attitude of developed nations towards the phenomenon of Global warming. The fact that they wish to keep themselves apart from such exercises assuming it to be a menace to the developing nations only, serves to project their utter ignorance of the holistic nature of the threat. In a recent interview with Economic Times R.K.Pachauri, the IPCC chair stated “There is a need to realise that some countries face the real prospect of becoming failed states. We need to create an understanding that we are all together on this spaceship earth. And beyond a point we can’t go on as we are now. There is a need to convince the public, especially in the developed countries of these realities”, a statement that clearly emphasizes the combined initiative of developed and developing nations in future in order to achieve a global drive for climate control (Economic Times, 2010).

Inter-Governmental panels serve a key role in guided intervention in climate change prevention strategies and programmes hence determined and persistent efforts are desired from them. It is for IPCC to not just predict ambiguous global warming risks and impacts but to come up with concrete numbers which forces leaders and other stakeholders to take into account the threats that stand against life on earth. Various Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations capable of suggesting viable solution to the threat should not only focus on their nation but should carry forward the inventive thoughts with effectiveness to other nations. This can only be possible if prolific solution exchange liaisons are established between countries and continents. Talking of such ingenious actions United Nations REDD a collaboration between UNEP and UNDP, can be put forth as one of these avant-garde initiatives, which primarily supports country efforts to build consensus and knowledge, and ensures consistency in approaches and economies of scale in the delivery of REDD (Reducing Emission from Deforestations and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries). The programme is likely to be involved in the post Kyoto phase after 2012 under the countenance of UNFCCC when all the countries of the world get together for a climate agreement. UN REDD has undertaken the responsibility of assisting nations in adopting REDD mechanisms and technology in order to make them self sufficient in coping with climate change impacts. Since the programme is largely based on forests, it has also taken into account forest based communities that are affected in an irreversible manner once their niche is threatened. UN-REDD has so far been one of the most comprehensive programme the planners have constructed, as it entails as stakeholders not only the government, civil society leaders, Non Government Organization but also the indigenous communities thriving in the forests. Quite likely the adverse effects of Global Warming may hit the urban population after few years but forest indigenous societies are the most immediate victim of global warming. So far the climate protocols and policies of various nations considered remedial steps towards Global warming which did not take into its purview the society or the culture that was susceptible to change. Simple societies or the indigenous society does not have advanced technology that is sufficient to counter the impact of climate change hence these climatic variations pose a serious threat to their existence. It is quite ironical in the light of the fact that it is not the indigenous communities which are party to such destruction of forests, but they are the ones to be affected first. Simple societies have

“Indigenous knowledge also referred to as traditional or local knowledge refers to the large body of knowledge and skills that has been developed outside the formal educational system. Indigenous knowledge is embedded in culture and is unique to a given location or society. Indigenous knowledge is an important part of the lives of the poor. It is the basis for decision-making of communities in food security, human and animal health, education and natural resource management” – UNESCO

Indigenous knowledge is an extremely significant character of the simple societies. It is their social heritage which is commonly expressed through stories, folklore, legends, rituals, local songs and even cultural practices. Traditional knowledge is unique to every community and cultural context. Many of these practices are found to be environment friendly and compatible to sustainable development. Hence they can be used effectively against adverse climate impacts. (UN, 2008)

rather simple economy and simpler needs which does not require them to exploit the natural resources to the levels of causing climatic disturbance. Being intimately close to the nature what they do acquire over the years, is the ability to deal with regular hazards that their environment poses at them. They develop means and methods to cope with these natural phenomena, with their own peculiar way of understanding, which in most cases may appear to be non-scientific enough to ignore. Though their expertise with their environment can never be denied, the knowledge of which is passed on from one generation to the next through folklore and stories. Such indigenous knowledge needs to be put in the mainstream knowledge reserve for the understanding of researchers and scientists and even the common people in order to improve the existing mechanisms of climate control.

For solutions to this impasse, the world community once again needs to be inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, especially his philosophy of trusteeship in the sense of building of a mutually reinforced partnership between the haves and the have-nots, the rich and the poor, the developed and least developed, the industrialized and the non-industrialized, the mainland and the island populations. In Mahatma Gandhi's own words, "Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth – either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry – I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honorable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community" (Sarrukai, 2005). The partnership based on trusteeship is not guided by political and economic self-interests but stands on the moral pillar of compassion and humanistic values in the true spirit of the dictum 'survival of one is intimately related to the survival of all'. Copenhagen has posed a challenge but the unfathomable spirit of survival will bring the world community closer together to agreement and treaties which are not guided by self interest but are for the common good of the humanity at large for the present as well as for the posterity. We should not forget that the arrival of present day human beings, the *Homo sapiens sapiens* is very recent in

relation to the time that life forms have spent on earth. In comparison to the 3.5 billion years since the life is existing on earth, the human beings have only lived for 40,000 years. Time and again one lesson that we have learnt on the front of which species will survive and which will become extinct is this – overspecialization leads to extinction. The fate of dinosaurs, saber tooth tiger and even the Neanderthals is a saga of extinction

due to specialization. For the present day human beings, the industrialization and technological advancements (especially the non-sustainable ones) have become the specialization and this super specialization may become the bane for the future of human kind. Copenhagen therefore should not be seen as a mere meeting of the world community but a chance, probably the last chance, for us to make a rational choice between destruction and survival.

Reference:

1. Crowley Thomas.J, *Causes of Climate Change over the Past 1000 years*, Pp. 270-271, Vol 289, Science, July 14, 2000.
2. FAO, UNDP, UNEP Framework Document. UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD). 20 June, 2008.
3. Harrabin Roger, China 'now top carbon polluter' BBC News, 2008-04-14
4. Kyoto Protocol, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyoto_Protocol#cite_note-71
5. M. K. Gandhi, Compiled by Ravindra Kelekar, Trusteeship, April 1960, Printed and Published by : Jitendra T. Desai Navajivan Mudranalaya, Ahemadabad-380014 India, ISBN 81-7229-091-8
6. SARUKKAI Sundar, Friday, 27 May 2005, 'The Idea of Trusteeship in Gandhi and JRD Tata'
7. Schiermeier Quirin, Glacier Estimate is on Thin Ice, Nature, online publication, 19 January 2010.
8. The Economic Times. *Realise disadvantages of inaction, says Pachauri*, February 23, 2010.
9. UN. Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. 1998.
10. UNEP, Handbook for the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer - 7th Edition (2006)
11. UNEP. The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone layer. 2000. Nairobi, Kenya.
12. UNFCCC. Copenhagen Accord – Decision-/CP.15 (Advanced unedited version 18th December, 2009).
13. United Nations, United Nations Development Group Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, February 2008
14. US Department of Energy. *Comparing Cost Estimates for the Kyoto Protocol*". Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy. 2002-07-17. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/kyoto/cost.html>.
15. US planning to weaken Copenhagen climate deal, Europe warns <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/sep/15/europe-us-copenhagen>, 15 September, 2009