



**CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL SOUTH
Epistemology of Small Island Developing States**

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Received- 27.06.2021, Revised- 28.06.2021, Accepted - 01.07.2021

Abstract: *Changes in Climate are already felt across the globe, but some countries are more vulnerable to climate impacts than others and small island countries lie in this zone. This paper discusses the plight of small island states who are at risk of extinction and at the same time it presents the epistemology of Global South in dealing and influencing climate change policies. The main aim of this paper is to manifest in the identities of small island states which are being subjected as the object of the western knowledge discourse and thereby lacking in development of any substantive platform to voice their needs and demands. The subaltern school provides a different vantage point while dealing with the problem of climate change as it re-locates the power of knowledge from the west to the Global south (SIDS). Thereby, bringing out the paradox that some countries are bearing the burden of extinction because the powerful west is more concerned about their development or egotism.*

Key words-Climate Change, Global South, Subalterns, Contribution.

The changing climate condition is widely regarded as one of the most serious global threats of the 21st century. Until the middle of 20th century the Earth's climate was regarded as unchanging, but it is now known to be in a continuous and delicate state of flux. Climate disasters like floods, droughts, tsunamis, cyclones and recently the disastrous fires in Amazon basin in Brazil, the bushfires in Australia, rise in sea level and increased frequency of tsunamis and cyclones we face every year is a clear sign that it is one of the major threats that the world is facing today which has no sovereign boundaries. But for few, the change in climatic conditions have cost their lives and these are mostly small developing islands who are the worst affected due to rise in sea level. It isn't a lesser-known fact that various low-lying island states such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Solomon Islands and even Sundarbans are facing crisis due to the rise in sea level. The problem of rise in sea level and changes in climate is not new to the world. It was realized way back in 1992 with the formation of UNFCCC, and adoption of Kyoto Protocol in 1997, but with another year of failure of COP-25 it seems climate change is a hoax. Failure in implementing the

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Paris Agreement, a call to keep the temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius and continuous reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) regarding the dangers most of these low-lying island countries are facing have raised certain concerns about the frivolous attitude of the world towards fighting climate change. (IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C, 2018) This raises certain questions that need addressal, questions like Is Global Climate changing or is it a hoax? Who are the worst affected by change in climatic conditions and do they have a voice of their own? Will the changes in the institutional structures improve their conditions or there is a need for substantive effort in their representation? SIDS currently are at the mercy of international conferences where policies are dominated by the western interests. Hence this paper analyses the way in which voicing the small islands could bring out new insights while dealing with climate change. In the wake of climate change ever since the Paris Agreement in 2015, there has been growing concern regarding rise in sea level and limiting the emission of greenhouse gases. Looking at the Special Report on Ocean and Cryosphere in a changing climate by IPCC, which states that even if we try to limit the greenhouse gases emission to desirable limits coastal cities across the world would see storms of the century. (IPCC, 2019: Summary for Policymakers. In: IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate, 2019) According to Antonio Guterres, UNFCCC secretary general, "we are running out of time", he emphasized on the issue of 1.5 degrees temperature increase, this could be devastating for coastal and island dwellers (Harvey, Doherty, & Watts, 2018) Evidence like these have continuously been displayed in conferences and another year of failure-COP-25, has shown the serious lack of intent by major countries. America's claim to depart from the Paris Agreement, after the election of Trump as the President, and



his continuous remarks regarding hampering of economy because of environment regulations seems incongruent with climate change mitigation. His criticism against the Green Climate Fund, calling it a scheme to redistribute wealth from rich to poor countries only show that, climate change for rich and powerful countries like U.S isn't occurring. (BBC, 2018) Similarly, Brazil's new President Jair Bolsonaro has grumbled that environment policy is 'suffocating policy'. He has also threatened to withdraw Brazil from Paris agreement on climate change and has also promised to remove some protection for the Amazon rainforest. Saudi Arabia on the other hand has been delaying the process of carbon limitation on one hand and on the other has positioned itself as the voice of developing states even though it has vast oil wealth. (Intercept, 2019) There are a lot of issues ranging from implementation of Paris Climate Accord, Carbon market, Financing and challenges involved with mitigation and adaptation. Even though 2020 was the deadline for the developed countries to cut their emissions as discussed in the Cancun and Copenhagen summit. Similarly, 2020 was also the deadline for 100 billion dollars to be provided to the poor countries by the developed as well as to clarify their National Determined Contribution as pledged in the Paris Climate Agreement. In a nutshell these conferences have been a failure, rising from lack of commitment as well as determination in mitigating climate change by most countries. Despite continuous alarms by IPCC and data of lives lost due to climate change disaster certain countries have chosen to stay immune. But one thing is clear that if the 1.5 temperature is not maintained low lying islands like Maldives, which is considered as a paradise may not remain.

The people of Tuvalu who survive on agriculture and fishing are not giving up yet. But they may have to evacuate their home in the coming 10 years. Tuvalu may well become the first nation in the world to disappear due to global warming. Another such case is of Sundarbans, it contains the world's largest mangrove forest and has been recognized as a world heritage site. As per the University of Kolkata it is 4,150,000,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide are soaking in this part of India. According to Indian express (2015), one island on the Bengal Bay 'shrinking island', which can lose 22000 bighas of land and multiple villages and could even be removed from the map soon. 'Ghoramara' and 'Lohachara' island of Sundarbans delta is the most affected zone of coastal India due to climate change. With the risk of getting submerged arises the problem of refugees, where already 10,000 people have become refugees by moving to either Sagar Island or Kolkata. Maldives has a fragile low-lying small island ecosystem. It is extremely vulnerable to climate change, with rise in sea level. The IPCC estimated a projected sea level rise of 0.09m to 0.88m from 1990-2001 (IPCC, 2001). The magnitude rise in sea level threatens the very existence of life

and livelihood of Maldives. Climate change and consequent rise in sea level poses danger to the country as half the population of the country live within 100m of coastline and 1m rise in sea level would submerge 80% of the country's land. (Paradise almost lost: Maldives seek to buy a new homeland, 2008) Maldives is a perfect example to illustrate the link between climate change, humanitarian, and migration. "We do not think we are asking for much. We are just saying please do not kill us". Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed even held an underwater cabinet meeting in lead-up to the Copenhagen conference in 2009 to illustrate the threat that climate change poses to their very existence. (BBC, 2009)

Major Challenges Faced by Small Island Developing States. The IPCC special report on 1.5 degrees of warming, which created international media waves upon its publication in October 2018, specifically highlights the inequities in the distribution and severity of the effects of climate change and the gravity of the disaster that global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels will bring (IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C, 2018).

In Global Warming of 1.5°C, 2018) They will be most severely impacted, and small island nations were underscored as being a particularly vulnerable group (Darby 2018). Significant and institutional behavior change, and effective multilateral governance will be necessary to have adequate adaptation and mitigation efforts, and with current climate governance and policy, it is likely that global warming will exceed 2 degrees. Today there is rampant inequity in power and representation of different groups in climate negotiations. The problem while dealing with climate change for small developing states is that they lack the resources to fully participate in the development of new international norms and policies and currently there is no framework to enhance their capacity to have meaningful participation in the development of climate policies or to implement them at national level.



Furthermore, there is no existing framework that will help these nations develop technical power necessary to participate and carry out climate policies. Another challenge is that Multilateral Environment Agreements such as the Paris Agreement have different locations for the secretariat and venues for COP, which makes it difficult for small countries with limited budgets to send their representatives. This eventually leads to the problem of participation by the countries who are most vulnerable. The power disparity between developed and developing nations has not gone unrecognized. For instance, if we look at this problem from a legal perspective the idea of common but differentiated responsibilities was incorporated in the global response to climate change during the Earth Summit. As far as transfer of resources are concerned many developed countries are not willing to channel funds through the Green Climate Fund and it continues to be a tiny player in International Climate finance (Kumar 2015; BBC 2017). Data of 2015 reveals that the Green Climate Fund had received pledges worth 10 billion dollars but had only received less than 1 billion dollars (Upton 2015). Another year of failure was COP-25, where countries were supposed to review and submit their NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution) as pledged in the Paris Agreement. But there is no commitment to it as well.

Conclusion- Governments have been reluctant to take into consideration the questions and issues related to environment justice and equity that is "who gets what, why and how much, who can afford help and who cannot, why some communities are poisoned and others escape and why some populations are studied while others get left off the research agenda (Paehlke, eds. 1995:250) But, the case is just opposite, where nations have been ignored due to their lack of resources and as mentioned above because of power disparity. Various reports of IPCC or any organization working on climate change have clearly shown the signs that global climate is changing, and it is not just in these reports, but people have started experiencing it. Countries might have ignored the efficacy of the agreements on climate change and the urgency to adapt the regulations but people across the globe have come up to speak against their governments as well, even kids like Greta Thunberg have made it clear that they would not give up without a fight. Climate change might lead to doomsday for everybody but for some it will come soon. People living near the small islands run the risk of extinction as their livelihood is at risk. Major concern then arises from the fact that even if we acknowledge the alarming situation and the need for urgency, the central query remains unsolved, that is what has been done so far to accomplish it. Efforts of organizations like AOSIS working on the behalf of small island states have partially been successful but the challenges are far more than the success

stories. These small island countries face financial as well as technical obstacles but most importantly they lack the powerful advocacy. Even though they were able to voice their demands at the policy level, but they lack in creating their own identity within the global framework. AOSIS as an organization has made its way through the global platform but the lack of technical and economic assistance has made them rely on powerful countries. Reliance on the West then again leads to the paradoxical discourse of creating subjectivity. Acknowledging the fact that small island countries lack the knowledge to deal with climate change, but this knowledge needs to be locally produced and in the interests of its people and to suit the interests of the west.

The Third World Approaches to International Law school argues that treaties take a west-centric approach and embody explicit and implicit norms that institutionalize inequalities by prescribing standard solutions to an unequal world. Like AOSIS, contributions of these small island states to international climate policy might be effective if they are provided with resources and listening, engaging, and empowering those who are most severely impacted must be the cornerstone of global climate governance now and in the future.

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