

## **INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT IN GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS**

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### **Introduction**

The climate crisis is both the easiest and the hardest issue we have ever faced. The easiest because we know what we must do. We must stop the emissions of greenhouse gases. The hardest because our current economics are still totally dependent on burning fossil fuels, and thereby destroying ecosystems to create everlasting economic growth (Greta Thunburg Quotes, n.d.).

Since the inception of the UNFCCC in 1992, India has actively participated in global climate change negotiations, balancing economic and environmental concerns. Emphasising the responsibility of developed countries to reduce emissions since the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, India aligns its developmental needs with climate justice goals, advocating for equity and the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)(PIB Delhi, 2022). However, a feminist perspective highlights gaps in addressing gendered impacts and the roles of women in climate action. Socio-economic disparities and gender norms disproportionately affect Indian women, limiting their access to resources, information, and decision-making processes. Despite acknowledging the significance of gender equality, women remain underrepresented in India's climate diplomacy, hampering policy effectiveness. An intersectional analysis shows that adaptation strategies vary based on gender, caste, wealth, and age, influenced by socio-ecological contexts and institutions(Kaijser& Kronsell, 2014).

Existing literature on climate diplomacy overlooks the impact of feminist perspectives on India's climate diplomacy globally and domestically. This study addresses these gaps using a theoretical framework based on Ecofeminism, Feminist Political Ecology, and intersectional feminism. It employs rigorous content analysis of primary sources like official documents and government websites, and secondary materials such as academic journals. Through qualitative methods and diverse data sources, the study aims to bridge scholarly divides, enhance understanding of climate diplomacy, feminist narratives, and foreign policy

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objectives, and inform policy-making. However, focusing primarily on feminist discourse may overshadow critical factors like political movements, grassroots activism, and environmental regulations, limiting a comprehensive assessment.

Incorporating feminist perspectives into India's climate diplomacy can enhance its effectiveness and fairness. Empowering women as agents of change, recognising their leadership in adaptation efforts, and ensuring their meaningful involvement are essential. This includes strengthening women's rights, reforming gender-responsive laws, and funding women-led initiatives. This study analyses how gender dynamics shape India's stance and actions in global climate negotiations, emphasising the need for inclusive and gender-aware approaches. It examines the influence of gender and power dynamics on India's positions, the factors driving its evolving stance, and the implications for development and environmental priorities.

The study is structured into four sections. After the introduction, the first section discusses the conceptual framework of feminist analyses in climate diplomacy. The second part examines India's climate change policies, including feminist perspectives and women's participation. The third section investigates the gendered aspects of climate change adaptation and mitigation in India, highlighting successful examples. The final section outlines challenges, opportunities, and policy recommendations, concluding with a summary of findings.

#### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:**

According to political scientist Joseph Nye, soft power is "the ability to shape the preferences of others." Soft power and climate diplomacy intersect as countries use cultural influence and international partnerships to address global environmental issues, enhancing their global reputation. Climate diplomacy involves strategies like implementing the Paris Agreement, addressing climate-related peace and security issues, and enhancing international cooperation to mitigate climate change impacts on peace, stability, and prosperity. For vulnerable countries like India, climate diplomacy is crucial. India leverages it to emphasise responsibility, gain strategic advantages, and promote sustainable energy investments. Initiatives like the International Solar Alliance (ISA), established in 2015, showcase India's climate leadership and enhance its soft power through positive environmental policies.

The study uses intersectional feminism to analyse how gender intersects with caste, wealth, and age in India's climate adaptation strategies. Intersectionality, a concept from Black feminist thought by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights how different social categorisations intersect to create unique forms of oppression. Using this lens helps

policymakers address multiple overlapping power inequalities that exacerbate climate vulnerabilities. Intersectional feminism reveals diverse adaptation responses shaped by socio-ecological contexts and institutional dynamics. Understanding climate change through this lens in India is crucial, as factors like caste, class, age, and geography intersect with gender to affect climate impacts. For example, lower-income women may struggle to access climate-resilient resources, while rural women face greater vulnerability to climate disasters due to limited support networks(Kajiser& Kronsell, 2014).

Ecofeminism and Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) provide insights into the interconnectedness of women, nature, and climate change. Prominent in India through Vandana Shiva's work, ecofeminism links the environment, women's rights, and social justice. It emphasises how patriarchal structures contribute to environmental degradation and the marginalisation of women, especially in rural and indigenous communities. Ecofeminism advocates for a holistic development approach prioritising ecological balance and gender equity, addressing environmental degradation's root causes like patriarchal exploitation. It promotes policies supporting sustainable livelihoods, and environmental stewardship, and empowering women in decision-making related to land use, resource management, and community development(Shiva& Mies, 2014).

FPE explores power dynamics in environmental decision-making and resource distribution, focusing on how gender, environment, and power intersect. It analyses how social and political structures, such as patriarchy and capitalism, affect resource access and environmental justice. In India, legal protections for land ownership are hindered by cultural norms limiting women's public involvement. FPE recognises these entrenched norms and advocates for resolving them to ensure fair natural resource management, guaranteeing women equal participation in decision-making and resource allocation (Elias et al., 2021).

Theories advocating inclusive climate policies that consider gender dimensions highlight the critical role of feminist perspectives in climate discourse. They emphasise recognising women's significant contributions to mitigation efforts and adopting a comprehensive approach to climate change. These theories stress grassroots activism and women's engagement in environmental conservation. The Chipko movement exemplifies how ecofeminist principles can guide sustainable and inclusive climate policies, particularly in India. Climate change disproportionately affects women, especially in vulnerable communities, as their roles in household management and resource access make them more susceptible to environmental shocks like water scarcity and climate disasters. A feminist perspective is crucial for understanding these differentiated impacts on women in

vulnerable communities.

### **INDIA'S CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES:**

India's climate diplomacy journey has seen significant milestones. It ratified the UNFCCC in 1992, initiating global climate engagement. This commitment was reinforced in 1997 with support for the Kyoto Protocol, emphasising Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). By 2015, India made ambitious commitments under the Paris Agreement, focusing on renewable energy and sustainable development. At COP26, India pledged net-zero emissions by 2070 and a substantial increase in renewable energy capacity. This transformation reflects growing concerns about climate vulnerability and aspirations for global leadership. Given its vulnerability to climate challenges like flooding and droughts, India emphasises climate action for domestic development and global leadership, leveraging its size and economic prowess in diplomacy(PIB Delhi,2022).

India has showcased strong commitments to climate action through initiatives like the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) under the Paris Agreement, the Panchamrit strategy, and the Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) movement. INDCs set ambitious targets, including a 33-35 percent reduction in emissions intensity by 2030, 40 percent reliance on non-fossil fuel power, and the creation of a carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. The "Panchamrit" strategy aims for 500 GW of non-fossil energy by 2030, 50 percent energy generation from renewables, a billion-tonne emissions reduction, and a 45 percent cut in carbon intensity. At COP26 in 2021, India introduced LiFE, advocating for an environmentally conscious lifestyle focused on mindful consumption. It aims to shape social norms related to climate action through social networks and establish a global community called "Pro-Planet People"(PIB Delhi,2022).

India's climate diplomacy is pivotal in shaping its foreign policy, aligning with sustainable development and global leadership objectives. Strategically, India leverages climate policies to boost global influence, advocate for sustainable energy, and tackle climate change through diplomacy. This approach yields economic, and strategic benefits while bolstering India's standing in the Indo-Pacific region and promoting eco-conscious global trade. Regional engagements like the International Solar Alliance and partnerships with countries such as Sri Lanka highlight India's commitment to climate action across various levels (PIB Delhi,2022).

India's climate diplomacy reflects global leadership ambition and commitment to sustainable development internationally. Integrating climate concerns into broader foreign policy objectives, India balances environmental priorities with economic growth imperatives. Climate initiatives targeting neighbouring countries, such as climate-resilient agriculture

and sustainable trade practices, enhance influence in developing nations and advance global interests. Overall, India's climate diplomacy is pivotal, offering strategic advantages, economic gains, global leadership, and focused regional engagements.

**Feminist Insights into India's Climate Diplomacy:**

India's progress in national climate policies, like the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) since 2008, lacks robust integration of gender perspectives. While acknowledging gender disparities in climate impacts, the NAPCC lacks specific strategies or targets for gender equality. Similarly, India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement does not explicitly address gender dimensions or women's participation targets in climate action. Initiatives such as the National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) prioritise women's involvement in adaptation efforts, and the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) incorporates feminist perspectives into climate-related initiatives; however, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) research indicates that comprehensive integration of gender into national climate policies, beyond some state-level climate action plans, is lacking. This highlights the necessity for capacity enhancement, gender-disaggregated data collection, and increased funding for gender-sensitive climate actions (Parikh, 2007).

Gender-responsive climate financing has been showcased in successful pilot projects like the Indian Bagepalli Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Biogas Program. This initiative distributed biogas plants to rural households, leading to reduced fuelwood consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Notably, the project prioritised women, recognising their crucial role in household energy management and the health advantages of cleaner cooking fuels for women and children (Subbarao & Lloyd, 2011).

In 2015, the NAFCC was launched, focusing on women's involvement in adaptation projects. One such project under NAFCC, "Enhancing Adaptive Capacity and Increasing Resilience of Small and Marginal Farmers in Purulia and Bankura Districts of West Bengal", targeted women farmers to improve their capabilities in climate-resilient agriculture (Alam, 2024). The Pilot Program for Climate Resilience (PPCR) supported gender-responsive climate finance projects in India, such as the "Climate Resilient Agriculture in Rainfed Areas of Himachal Pradesh" project, which aimed to empower women farmers in climate change adaptation decision-making. These initiatives highlight the significance of targeting women and empowering them as active participants in climate action, especially in energy management and agriculture. However, there is a need for more projects and customised funding mechanisms to expand the reach of gender-responsive climate finance initiatives in India.

India's global climate engagement influenced domestic policies with a feminist perspective, focusing on gender considerations in climate action seen in NDCs and the Gender Action Plan at COP24. India prioritised integrating gender perspectives, emphasising women's roles in decision-making and climate initiatives. Empowering women in leadership, ensuring resource access, and addressing climate impacts on vulnerable groups, including women, have been key priorities. India also valued indigenous knowledge, recognising contributions from indigenous communities, particularly women, in conservation efforts.

Several Indian states have integrated gender-responsive climate financing into pilot projects. Madhya Pradesh included gender aspects in its State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) under the "Gender and State Climate Change Action Plans in India" initiative, promoting climate-resilient agriculture and addressing gender disparities. Uttar Pradesh also integrated gender elements into its SAPCC, adjusting policies through activities like policy roundtables. Similarly, Uttarakhand and West Bengal participated in mainstreaming gender considerations and advocating for climate-resilient agricultural practices in SAPCCs. (Project: Gender and State Climate Change Action Plans in India, 2013).

India mainstreams gender in climate policies but lacks precise gender-responsive targets. The NAPCC recognises climate impacts on women but lacks strategies for gender inequalities. Similarly, India's NDC under the Paris Agreement lacks gender dimensions and participation targets. To enhance gender mainstreaming, thorough gender analyses, specific targets, dedicated funding, capacity building, and meaningful participation are crucial. Prioritising gender mainstreaming makes climate action more inclusive and effective, addressing diverse needs. Strategies like gender analysis, specific targets, funding, capacity building, and meaningful participation are essential.

### **Women's Participation in India's Climate Diplomacy:**

India's climate negotiation teams lacked sufficient female representation, with women making up only about 34 percent of teams at COP27 in 2022 in Egypt (PIB Delhi, 2022). This gender gap is concerning due to women's disproportionate climate change impacts. Enhanced female participation is crucial for effective solutions, as research shows a link between female political representation and stricter climate policies. However, women leaders face obstacles like cultural norms and limited opportunities. Achieving at least 50 percent female representation requires investments in education and addressing economic disparities. While India has pledged gender-responsive climate actions, progress has been slow. Prioritising women's leadership promotes economic empowerment and sustainable adaptation, emphasising the need for investments in women-led climate initiatives and

gender-responsive financing.

India has taken numerous steps to boost female involvement in climate diplomacy and create more gender-responsive climate policies. The National Action Plan on Climate Change, along with state-level plans, includes dedicated sections on gender and climate change, recognising women's disproportionate vulnerability. However, female representation in climate policy and diplomatic processes remains insufficient. India endorsed the Gender Action Plan under the UNFCCC in 2016, outlining efforts to make climate policies, including energy transition, more gender-responsive. For instance, West Bengal saw significant female engagement in planting 150 million mangrove saplings, leading to environmental benefits and livelihood opportunities. Tamil Nadu is setting ambitious targets to involve women, aiming to plant 55 million trees in one year to increase green cover from 23.7 percent to 33 percent within the next decade. Bihar is integrating gender and environmental budgets into climate policy planning, while Kerala is addressing the lack of gender-disaggregated data in climate policies, which has hindered gender-responsive governance. (Leading with Impact: Women in India's Climate Governance, 2023).

In 2023 at COP28, India joined the Gender-Responsive Just Transitions & Climate Action Partnership to promote gender-sensitive energy transitions and boost women's leadership in climate action. However, women's representation in India's climate diplomacy remains limited. Enhancing their involvement in decision-making across all levels is vital for inclusive and effective climate policies. To achieve equitable representation of women in climate diplomacy, further progress is necessary. Investing in girls' education, tackling economic disparities, and engaging women in decision-making roles will be essential for fostering an inclusive green transition in India.

### **INDIA'S GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION**

Climate change in India poses significant risks to women's health, livelihoods, and well-being, exacerbated by gender disparities, societal norms, and discriminatory practices. In rural areas, extreme weather often leads to male migration, burdening women with additional household and agricultural responsibilities. This situation also increases the risks of gender-based violence, early marriage, and human trafficking. Women are dual actors in climate change, facing its impacts and driving change in adaptation and mitigation efforts. Their traditional knowledge of natural resource management, energy, and agriculture is crucial for crafting effective climate solutions. In India, women lead community-based adaptation initiatives like water conservation and disaster risk reduction.

Female farmers encounter challenges in agriculture due to climate variability, impacting

food security and livelihoods. Their role in water retrieval increases workloads and health risks during water scarcity. Climate change disproportionately affects women's health, especially in reproductive aspects. Climate-induced displacement heightens vulnerability, exposing women to exploitation. Integrating gender equality into climate policies is crucial. India integrates gender considerations in climate initiatives like the National Action Plan on Climate Change and Nationally Determined Contributions. Key strategies include promoting women's participation in climate decision-making, allocating climate finance for gender-specific needs, addressing vulnerabilities, and recognising women's roles as environmental stewards.

#### **Successful Examples of Gender-Inclusive Climate Projects in India:**

Gender-inclusive climate projects in India, like the "Solar Mamas" program by Barefoot College in Rajasthan, have been highly successful. This program trains rural women as solar engineers, empowering them to implement renewable energy solutions and drive sustainable development. Their contributions not only reduce carbon footprints but also drive positive socio-economic changes (Vaidyanathan, 2023). The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) promotes sustainable agriculture and water management among women farmers, enhancing adaptive capacity and resilience.

Programs such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) offer women equal wage opportunities in climate tasks like afforestation and water harvesting, vital for climate resilience. In Kerala, the Kudumbashree program mobilises women's self-help groups for climate resilience through activities like organic farming and disaster preparedness (Shaji, 2023). These projects highlight the importance of integrating gender perspectives into climate adaptation strategies and empowering women's leadership in environmental initiatives for inclusive and effective climate action.

#### **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

India's involvement in global climate negotiations is crucial given its vulnerability to climate change impacts. However, it faces obstacles in addressing these challenges effectively. This section examines women's challenges in climate resilience and mitigation initiatives and explores integrating feminist ideologies into India's climate policies for more efficient, inclusive, and equitable outcomes.

#### **Identification of Challenges Faced by Women in Climate Resilience and Mitigation:**

Women in India face challenges in climate resilience due to societal norms, institutional barriers, and limited resources. Patriarchal norms and biases restrict their participation and resource access. Land and resource rights issues further limit women's involvement. Inadequate representation in decision-making marginalises women's voices, impacting



climate policy inclusiveness. Balancing economic growth with climate action is crucial for sustainable development. India's vulnerability to climate change complicates this, hindering development, especially for disadvantaged communities. Socio-cultural norms confine women to household roles, limiting their policy engagement. Limited education and resources hinder rural women's involvement. Institutional biases in decision-making create barriers, underrepresenting women in climate diplomacy. India's climate diplomacy needs feminist principles for inclusive policy-making and gender equality promotion. Improving resource access and governance can enhance climate resilience and citizen well-being.

### **Opportunities and Recommendations for Integrating Feminist Principles into India's Climate Policies:**

India has adopted feminist strategies in climate change negotiations, aligning with principles for women's empowerment and sustainable solutions. Opportunities in gendered climate diplomacy require persistent policy reforms, including mainstreaming gender into climate policies, ensuring women's voices in decision-making, and addressing gender-specific climate impacts. India should prioritise women's participation in climate decision-making, ensure representation in policy processes, and recognise rural women's unequal climate impacts. A feminist intersectional approach is needed, to combat caste discrimination, investing in education, training, and sustainable livelihoods for effective climate action and gender-responsive policies. Reforms should include gender-responsive laws and institutions, increased funding for women-led initiatives, providing capacity building and addressing climate vulnerabilities impacting marginalised communities such as Dalits and Adivasis through inclusive representation and advocacy for climate justice.

### **Feminist Foreign Policy:**

FFP offers a promising approach to the climate crisis by prioritising marginalised groups and gender equality, aligning with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s call for equitable climate action. FFP addresses structural inequities, promotes women's participation in climate decisions, and recognises their disproportionate climate impacts. It also integrates indigenous knowledge and advocates for gender-responsive laws to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (Mandal, 2023). However, India's climate partnerships lack a formal gender mainstreaming strategy, hindering the inclusion of vulnerable groups. A feminist foreign policy for India would prioritise grassroots knowledge, necessitating structural changes for effective climate cooperation (Khillare, 2023). India's adherence to global agreements like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) underscores its capacity to influence the FFP discourse globally. However,

bridging gaps in senior-level female representation is crucial for India to fully integrate FFP principles, fostering an inclusive foreign policy landscape (Patel, 2023). India's feminist strategies in climate negotiations demonstrate a comprehensive approach, but enhancing efforts requires improved representation, targeted climate justice measures, and inclusive access to resources, potentially through adopting an FFP approach drawing inspiration from Sweden and Mexico.

### **CONCLUSION:**

This research analyses India's global climate change engagement through a feminist lens, emphasising the need to integrate gender perspectives for inclusivity and equity in addressing climate change's disproportionate impacts on women and marginalised groups. It highlights gaps in addressing women's challenges and calls for gender-sensitive policies. The study also explores how climate change intersects with factors like caste, class, and socioeconomic status.

Feminist perspectives advocate for inclusivity, challenge power dynamics, and promote fair women's representation in decision-making. Future climate policies should integrate gender perspectives for inclusive decision-making, supported by intersectional research to understand vulnerabilities better. Empowering women and marginalised communities through education and economic opportunities is crucial for resilience and gender equality in climate initiatives. Adopting a feminist foreign policy can ensure equitable and impactful climate strategies, shifting India's climate diplomacy towards inclusivity and sustainability. Mainstreaming gender considerations in policies and collaborations among government, civil society, and grassroots organisations is vital for promoting climate justice.

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