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# Studying Climate Change in India

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**N**otwithstanding the global inability to accept the challenge of reducing global warming and resultant climate change, these topics have rightly been the subject of numerous books published the world over in the past several years. The book by Dubash is an important addition to that list. Over the last decade the fundamental processes of global warming had emerged as a very serious divide between the near-unanimous consensus opinion that the present global warming is largely human-made, and that of a small but influential group of scientists described as the “denialists”.

Powell (2011) has argued that “in the denial of global warming, we are witnessing the most vicious, and so far most successful, attack on science in history”. Indeed, there is possibly no other topic that demands a higher level of public knowledge than global warming and climate change.

## Cumulative Knowledge

This handbook is an attempt to put together a number of papers and articles relating to this crucial subject of global import for readers in India. It includes articles written from diverse points of view, by authors who are activists, researchers, diplomats, policymakers, and politicians. As the editor mentions in the preface,

...the handbook is also a testimony to the growing community of scholars, activists and professionals seeking to make sense of climate change from the vantage point of deep engagement with development debates.... This volume is, then, in large part a collective enterprise, and owes its existence and any impact it might have to the cumulative knowledge and wisdom of the contributors (p xxiii).

Indeed, the collection of diverse chapters in one volume does help in addressing important gaps in public knowledge in India on this crucial topic.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Handbook of Climate Change and India: Development, Politics and Governance** edited by Navroz K Dubash (*New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011; pp xxiv + 400, Rs 1,250.*)

The chapters in the book have been divided into six parts, in addition to a foreword by Jairam Ramesh, former minister for environment and forests. Ramesh has given a broad overview of the approach of the government to the challenges posed by global warming and climate change, at the national, inter-governmental and the south Asian regional platforms. The editor’s introduction to the book is elaborate and useful to the readers whose knowledge of this subject is not very deep.

In Part I, on climate science and potential impacts, four contributions have been included. However, the editor’s position that “an appropriate starting point for discussion of climate science is an understanding of the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] itself” (p 5) is untenable for two reasons. First, prior to the establishment of the IPCC, very important scientific contributions to global warming and climate change have been made by a number of scientists, from German astronomer Herschel to Arrhenius of Sweden. Second, as Powell (2011) has so meticulously analysed, arguments of denial are continuously being generated and circulated from outside the intergovernmental platforms. A wider description of these viewpoints should be part of a handbook on climate change.

In the chapter “Impacts of Climate Change on India”, J Srinivasan correctly distinguishes between changes that are caused by global factors and others that are caused by local and regional ones. He elaborates on the nature of changes in the temperature, rainfall, status of

glaciers and the sea level. He declares that “there is clear evidence of global warming in India in the 20th century and this will accelerate in the 21st century” (p 38).

In the chapter “India in the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change”, Ramachandran gives a description of the process that guides the functioning of the IPCC. He clarifies that “the IPCC itself does not carry out new research nor does it monitor climate-related data. The assessment in its reports is based chiefly on published and peer-reviewed scientific literature” (p 63). Commenting on the status of climate change research in India, he observes that there is a great knowledge gap in India in the study of both climate and climate change. He then goes on to note that the level of participation of Indian scientists in the IPCC process is low. “Is it a reflection of the level of expertise and the quality of research being done in the country? Or does the fault lie with the MOEF [Union Ministry of Environment and Forest] in not identifying the right kind of people?” he asks.

## Covering for the Rich

Part II of the book is titled “Past as Prologue” and contains two articles. The first one is by Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain published in 1991 and ideas in that article coincide with India’s negotiating position till about the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC, COP) in Copenhagen. This article, which spread waves in the developing world during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, provided an easy way out for the rich in India to diffuse their greenhouse gas (GHG) intensive lifestyle by the large number of poor in the country who generate hardly any GHG. Thus came to the fore the concept of “per capita GHG emission” by nations. In rapidly urbanising countries with large populations of poor people, the average national figures provided a cover for the rich.

In another article, Chandrasekhar Dasgupta presents a comprehensive and detailed picture of the making, and possibly

unmaking, of the global agreements on climate change. Catching the true state of the negotiations, he rightly states that “we stand at the crossroads in the (climate change) negotiations. One road leads to enhanced implementation by all countries – developed and developing alike – of their respective obligations under the existing climate change regime. The other road leads to the effective dismantling of this regime, reopening of every basic issue and returning the negotiations to the starting point in 1991” (p 96).

Part III of the book is on “The International Climate Negotiations: Stakes, Debates and Dilemmas” and contains seven articles, which take the reader further from where Dasgupta had stopped in Part II. In this section Lavanya Rajamani has made a detailed analysis of “The reach and limits of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities in the climate change regime”. Indeed, this subject had been the core of intergovernmental negotiations and is a central concept in India’s negotiating position. Hence, it

constitutes an important part of public knowledge on a subject that is complex to the core.

Prodipto Ghosh takes a close look at India’s position in the global debate on climate change, that extended a conceptual basis for the design of the Kyoto Protocol. He stresses the argument that India is a country with about 800 million poor people, for whom rapid economic development is a necessity. Such arguments are increasingly becoming ineffective as India started to stand fourth or fifth in the global ranking of billionaires. Side-tracking the internal inequity in climate negotiations started to be counter-productive as India became the fourth largest emitter of GHGs and, as United States President Barack Obama stressed, the lifestyle of about 300 million Indians is comparable to that of many European countries.

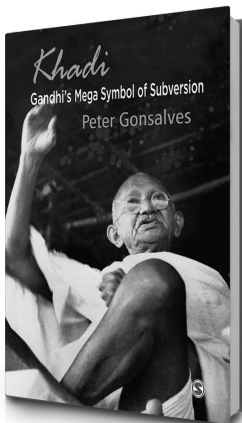
In the next article D Raghunandan critically comments on India’s official position based on science. He takes a clear position that in the COP in Copenhagen, “certainly as far as India goes, poor

understanding of the science combined with poor geopolitical understanding and tactics has meant ceding the upper hand to the us and its allies to the detriment of global climate control” (p 170). It needs to be mentioned here that the Chinese have been preparing their interventions quite meticulously, keeping national interest in mind. Chen (2012) provides important information on this.

The last chapter in Part III is a collection of short statements by professionals from a number of countries. Chinese scholar Yiang Chen has praised the role played by India in intergovernmental negotiations and the growing cooperation between China and India in matters related to climate change. He wrote “What explains enhanced cooperation (in climate negotiations) between the two largest developing countries? From the Chinese perspective, it is the universal principles of justice and equity as well as common political and economic interests for both” (p 189).

This interest of governments in economic development is the subject

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**KHADI: GANDHI'S MEGA SYMBOL OF SUBVERSION**  
Peter Gonsalves

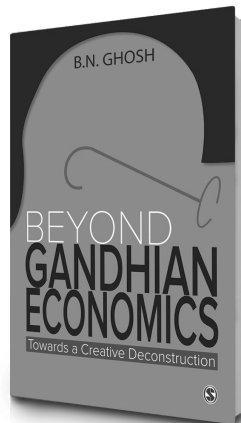
*The significance of khadi has already been explored by a number of scholars from different angles. Peter Gonsalves has made his foray into this area, writing largely from a communication perspective, first in his book Clothing for Liberation (SAGE, 2010), and now in this sequel, which lays out the historical foundation for the theoretical claims on Gandhian sartorial communication published in his previous work. It covers new ground by highlighting the 'subversive' nature of Gandhi's sartorial choices through a range of disciplines, and*

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John S Moolakkattu Editor, Gandhi Marg and Professor, IIT Madras

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of Part v of the book. Relating energy, development and climate change, Girish Sant and Ashwin Gambhir discuss the energy imperatives of India and follow the traditional argument that India should not accept binding GHG reduction targets at least till 2030. Poverty in India has come handy for such an argument, irrespective of a long history of the parallel growth of the economy and poverty in the near past.

The collection indeed constitutes a major resource for advancing public knowledge in global warming and climate change. However, it is rich in the analysis of intergovernmental negotiations but fares less well in its collections on the basics of climate warming processes and the scenarios for India. Thus, it is a handy book on climate change but falls short of expectations from a handbook. This does not reduce the need for and timeliness of the

efforts of Dubash to throw some light on a topic which has generated mainly a lot of sound.

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