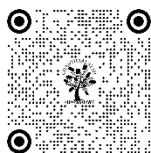# BALANCING IDEALS AND ACTION: EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FORMULATION IN INDIA

George Joseph [1] ✉

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, St. Thomas College Palai, Kottayam, Kerala-686574

Corresponding Author
George Joseph, georgejoss@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex relationship between political ideology and environmental policymaking in India. It analyses the impact of political actors' ideas and values on legislative goals, governance structures, and policy results in tackling the nation's intricate environmental issues. This study examines historical patterns, ideological dynamics, and significant case studies to underscore the substantial influence of ideology on policy formation and implementation. It examines the issues presented by ideological polarisation and institutional limitations while proposing methods to promote collaborative and inclusive environmental governance.

Keywords: Political Ideology, Environmental Policy Formulation, India, Governance, Sustainable Development

1. INTRODUCTION

India, as a federal democracy characterised by varied political ideology and developmental priorities, offers a distinctive framework for examining the relationship between political ideologies and environmental policy formulation. Political ideology functions as a foundational framework for policymakers, influencing their understanding of environmental issues and the approaches they implement to tackle them. India confronts the twofold challenge of attaining sustainable development amidst its extensive ecological diversity and socio-economic inequities, while reconciling competing interests and goals. This research paper examines the ideological factors that influence environmental policymaking in India. It examines the historical development of environmental policies, the range of ideological viewpoints influencing government, and the tangible results of these ideologies in practice. The paper analyses the successes and challenges of significant policy initiatives, providing insights into reconciling ideological divisions for comprehensive and sustainable environmental governance.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF IDEOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN INDIA

The environmental policy landscape of India has undergone various unique eras, each mirroring the prevailing political beliefs of the times. Upon gaining independence in 1947, India's government prioritised economic development, industrialisation, and poverty reduction. Guided by socialist principles, the state implemented a centrally planned development strategy, prioritising industrial growth and resource mobilisation over environmental considerations.

The 1970s signified a pivotal transformation in India's environmental dialogue. Increased awareness of ecological degradation, together with global initiatives like the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, resulted in the establishment of significant environmental legislation. The Wildlife Protection Act (1972) and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act (1974) were among the initial legal frameworks to tackle environmental issues(Ramakrishna, 1984). These programs embodied a progressive mindset that emphasised the necessity for governmental action and environmental preservation. The Chipko Movement, a grassroots environmental initiative from the 1970s, emphasised the significance of local communities and social movements in influencing environmental policy(Kureethadam, 2015). This era witnessed the rise of environmental awareness as a crucial element in policymaking, propelled by the increasing recognition of the interdependence between development and ecological sustainability.

The liberalisation period of the 1990s presented a novel array of difficulties and opportunities for India's environmental policies. Neoliberal-driven economic changes emphasised market-oriented growth, frequently compromising environmental sustainability(Shome & Mukhopadhyay, 1998). This era had swift industrialisation and urbanisation, which also prompted heightened examination of environmental degradation, resulting in the establishment of regulatory frameworks like the Environment Protection Act (1986) and the Forest Conservation Act (1980). These initiatives aimed to reconcile economic expansion with ecological protection, illustrating the intricacies of merging conflicting ideological viewpoints.

3. THE IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FORMULATION

India's multifaceted political landscape includes a wide range of beliefs, each influencing environmental policymaking in unique manners. Conservative philosophies emphasise economic growth, industrial advancement, and infrastructure development. These viewpoints frequently underscore market-oriented solutions and technical advancements as means to tackle environmental issues. The endorsement of coal mining and extensive infrastructure initiatives under conservative leadership exemplifies a development-centric strategy that prioritises economic value over environmental considerations(Graebner, 1976).

Progressive and socialist philosophies on the left promote state action, environmental justice, and equitable distribution of resources(Pepper, 2002). These philosophies support efforts like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which includes ecological restoration projects, and the National Solar Mission, which seeks to shift India towards renewable energy. The focus on social fairness and ecological sustainability corresponds with wider progressive pledges to environmental stewardship and community empowerment. Centrist ideas in India seek to reconcile developmental ambitions with environmental sustainability. These methodologies are frequently defined by pragmatism and collaborative governance, exemplified in public-private partnerships and integrated urban development initiatives. The Smart Cities Mission represents a balanced strategy, merging technical advancement with sustainability goals to tackle urban environmental issues(Schwarz-Herion, 2020).

The influence of political ideology on environmental policymaking in India is seen through various significant projects. This section analyses three case studies: the Namami Gange Programme, the Forest Rights Act, and renewable energy policies.

The Namami Gange Programme, initiated in 2014, embodies a development-focused strategy for river conservation(Taskeen, 2022). The initiative, grounded in nationalist and cultural ideals, seeks to revitalise the Ganga River by tackling pollution and advocating for sustainable practices. The effort, although highlighting the river's cultural and economic importance, has been criticised for its inadequate effectiveness in tackling systemic problems including industrial effluents and urban garbage management. This case underscores the difficulties of converting ideological principles into successful policy results. This premier program of the Government of India integrates contributions from

diverse stakeholders, including central ministries, state governments, and local people, to tackle the complex issues of pollution, ecological deterioration, and river health. The program emphasises essential activities such wastewater management, riverside development, afforestation, and public awareness initiatives. It combines contemporary technology with traditional knowledge to purify and safeguard the river, which holds profound cultural, religious, and ecological importance for India.

One of the significant features of Namami Gange is its focus on urban wastewater management(Simon & Joshi, 2022). The program has financed initiatives to build sewage treatment plants (STPs) in urban areas along the Ganga and its tributaries, with the objective of preventing untreated sewage from contaminating the river. Also, it tackles industrial effluents by rigorously enforcing pollution control regulations and implementing effluent treatment facilities (ETPs). The program encompasses solid waste management in metropolitan regions and rural sanitation initiatives to prevent direct waste discharge into the river. An essential component of the program is community engagement and public participation. Initiatives like "Ganga Grams" encourage local villages to sustain river health and implement environmentally sustainable practices(Kaushal et al., 2019). Further, educational and awareness initiatives foster a collective responsibility for the conservation of the Ganga. Notwithstanding these endeavours, obstacles such as inter-agency collaboration, financial limitations, and the magnitude of pollution exist. The program has established a precedent for extensive river rejuvenation in India, yielding quantifiable enhancements in water quality and biodiversity in certain sections of the Ganga.

The Forest Rights Act (2006) serves as a progressive legislation designed to empower indigenous communities and enhance ecological sustainability. The act aims to rectify historical injustices by acknowledging the rights of forest inhabitants and promoting community-oriented conservation efforts. Nonetheless, its execution has been hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and tensions between conservation goals and developmental demands. This highlights the difficulties of reconciling progressive aspirations with real governance issues. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), was a crucial legislation aimed to rectify faced by forest-dwelling people in India. It acknowledges the rights of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and other indigenous forest inhabitants who have resided in and relied upon forest land for generations. The Act aims to empower these people by conferring ownership and access rights to forest resources, thereby enabling sustainable protection and management of these regions. It also protects their cultural heritage and livelihoods by formally acknowledging their traditional practices and government structures.

The Forest Rights Act establishes individual and community rights, encompassing rights to land for residence and agriculture, access to minor forest products, and the authority to maintain and manage community forest resources(Larson, 2010). It also stipulates a democratic procedure for acknowledging claims, necessitating village assemblies or Gram Sabhas to verify and approve applications. This decentralisation seeks to guarantee that decisions align with the local context and community requirements, so diminishing the probability of arbitrary evictions or exploitation by external agencies. The Act incorporates provisions for community ownership, enabling villages to collaboratively manage their forest resources(Kumar & Kerr, 2012). The Forest Rights Act has empowered numerous forest-dependent communities; nonetheless, its implementation has encountered obstacles. Challenges like delayed processing of claims, lack of awareness among beneficiaries, and resistance from forest officials have impeded its performance in certain areas. Further, contradictions exist between conservation policies and the rights conferred by the FRA, with some contending that the Act may promote deforestation or resource overexploitation. Nevertheless, the FRA signifies a substantial advancement in inclusive development, acknowledging the importance of indigenous knowledge and community-based governance in sustainable forest management(Kashwan, 2016).

India's renewable energy projects, especially the National Solar Mission, exemplify a centrist strategy that combines market mechanisms with policy endorsement. These programs seek to fulfil India's energy requirements and mitigate carbon emissions using public-private partnerships and international cooperation. The efficacy of these programs illustrates the capacity of centrist approaches to reconcile ideological differences and attain sustainable results. The National Solar Mission, initiated in 2010 as part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), represents one of India's most ambitious renewable energy endeavours(Quitzow, 2015). It seeks to establish India as a global leader in solar energy by facilitating the extensive generation and adoption of solar electricity. It emphasises the implementation of both photovoltaic (PV) and solar thermal technologies, concentrating on diminishing the expenses associated with solar power generation to render it competitive with conventional energy sources.

A primary strategy of the project is the creation of solar parks nationwide, offering essential infrastructure and policy support to entice investors(Chowdhury, n.d.). It also promotes rooftop solar installations for residential,

commercial, and industrial use, with the objective of decentralising energy generation and diminishing reliance on fossil fuels(Purohit & Purohit, 2018). The mission advocates for indigenous manufacturing of solar panels and associated components to stimulate research and development, thereby diminishing dependence on imports and enhancing domestic capability. Financial instruments like as feed-in tariffs, subsidies, and viability gap funding have been utilised to bolster the sector.

The National Solar Mission has markedly advanced the development of renewable energy in India, with solar power now comprising a considerable segment of the nation's energy portfolio. It has also created employment possibilities in solar panel manufacture, installation, and maintenance, so contributing to economic development. Nonetheless, obstacles include land acquisition, substantial initial expenses, and variable energy production because to climatic variables remain. Notwithstanding these obstacles, the mission has established a standard for worldwide renewable energy regulations and strengthened India's dedication to addressing climate change through clean energy initiatives(Chandel et al., 2016).

4. CHALLENGES OF IDEOLOGICAL POLARISATION

Ideological polarisation presents substantial challenges to efficient environmental policymaking in India. Divergent priorities among political actors can lead to fragmented policies, postponed execution, and inconsistent results. Debates about large-scale infrastructure projects often juxtapose developmental objectives with environmental issues, resulting in policy impasses and public opposition.

The ideological biases may also lead to the selective prioritisation of environmental concerns. Market-driven initiatives may prioritise economic growth but frequently underestimate the imperative of climate action. Conversely, progressive programs prioritising social fairness may have difficulties in achieving economic viability and scalability. These issues highlight the necessity for inclusive governance systems that integrate multiple viewpoints and promote consensus-building.

Ideological polarisation severely obstructs effective environmental policymaking in India by fostering differences among stakeholders, frequently based on divergent political, economic, and social ideologies. These ideological divisions are evident in discussions over development against conservation, public versus private sector participation, and centralised versus decentralised governance. Political parties and interest groups often prioritise their goals, leading to fragmented strategies for addressing environmental issues. This polarisation hinders consensus-building, obstructs the execution of sustainable policies, and diverts attention from critical environmental concerns necessitating immediate and collective action.

A key difficulty of ideological polarisation is the conflicting priorities of economic expansion and environmental sustainability. Pro-development factions frequently perceive environmental rules as obstacles to industrialisation, infrastructural initiatives, and foreign investment. Conversely, conservationists and grassroots organisations underscore the enduring ecological repercussions of unregulated growth. This conflict is most evident in projects such as mining, deforestation for infrastructure, or major dams, when economic advantages are assessed against environmental and social consequences. The resultant stalemates cause extended delays in decision-making, obstructing the implementation of policies that reconcile these conflicting objectives.

Polarisation also influences the implementation of environmental laws and regulations. State administrations, influenced by political ideology or local electoral factors, frequently oppose the execution of central government mandates regarding environmental issues. Disputes about forest clearing legislation, pollution management regulations, or land use policies become heated when political parties exploit these concerns to attract their respective voting bases. The disjunction between central and state governments undermines institutional structures and leads to inconsistent implementation of environmental standards, hence diminishing the overall effectiveness of policy efforts.

A further aspect of ideological polarisation is the divergent viewpoints regarding the importance of the private sector and market-oriented solutions in tackling environmental challenges(Roth & Dressler, 2012). Some proponents support privatisation, deregulation, and market-oriented strategies such as carbon trading to address environmental deterioration, while others contend that these methods prioritise profit over social and ecological well-being(Rout et al., 2020). The discourse surrounding public vs private governance in sectors like renewable energy, waste management, and natural resource conservation frequently results in policy stagnation. This split impedes the acceptance of novel solutions and jeopardises the engagement of crucial stakeholders necessary for successful implementation.

At some point ideological polarisation exacerbates public distrust and undermines shared accountability for environmental preservation. When political and ideological narratives prevail in speech, environmental issues are frequently characterised as partisan matters rather than collective social challenges. This diminishes the readiness of citizens, industries, and local governments to engage in sustainable practices, as actions are viewed through a polarised perspective. In a nation such as India, where many populations, ecosystems, and developmental requirements exist, surmounting these ideological divisions is essential. Efficient environmental policymaking necessitates the depoliticisation of ecological matters, the promotion of discussion across ideological divides, and the prioritisation of the shared objective of sustainable development(Felli, 2015).

5. RECONCILING IDEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS

To mitigate the issues of ideological polarisation, India must embrace a cooperative strategy in environmental policymaking. Establishing agreement on collective objectives, such as diminishing greenhouse gas emissions and safeguarding biodiversity, helps foster a unified framework for action.

Inter-ministerial task forces, multi-stakeholder consultations, and public engagement campaigns can promote conversation and collaboration among political actors, civil society, and local communities. The National Biodiversity Action Plan exemplifies the efficacy of participatory governance in fulfilling environmental goals. By cultivating trust and reciprocal understanding, these strategies can facilitate the reconciliation of ideological disparities and improve policy efficacy(Onial et al., 2018).

6. MEDIATING IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICTS IN INDIA

Institutions are crucial in resolving ideological disagreements and The National Biodiversity Action Plan facilitating the execution of environmental policy in India. The judiciary, especially the National Green Tribunal (NGT), has become a pivotal entity in resolving environmental conflicts and ensuring regulatory adherence. The NGT has enhanced environmental governance and accountability through significant rulings and aggressive measures(Gill, 2016). Legislative bodies and regulatory agencies, including the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), function as venues for reconciling varied viewpoints and harmonising conflicting interests. Augmenting institutional capacity, fostering openness, and increasing public engagement might further enhance their efficacy in conflict mediation and policy innovation.

7. CONCLUSION

The relationship between political ideology and environmental policymaking in India highlights the intricacy of tackling the country's ecological issues. Although ideological differences may provide obstacles, they simultaneously present opportunity for invention, discourse, and collaboration. By adopting varied viewpoints and promoting inclusive government, India may cultivate more efficient and sustainable resolutions to its environmental challenges. Enhancing institutions, fostering participatory frameworks, and establishing consensus on common objectives will be essential for attaining long-term environmental sustainability.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

Chandel, S. S., Shrivastva, R., Sharma, V., & Ramasamy, P. (2016). Overview of the initiatives in renewable energy sector under the national action plan on climate change in India. Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews,54,866–873. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2015.10.057

Chowdhury, S. A. (n.d.). National Solar Energy Roadmap, 2021—2041.

Felli, R. (2015). Environment, not planning: The neoliberal depoliticisation of environmental policy by means of emissions trading. Environmental Politics, 24(5), 641–660. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2015.1051323

Gill, G. (2016). Environmental Justice in India: The National Green Tribunal. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315686592

Graebner, W. (1976). Coal-mining Safety in the Progressive Period: The Political Economy of Reform. University Press of Kentucky.

Kashwan, P. (2016). What explains the demand for collective forest rights amidst land use conflicts? Journal of Environmental Management, 183, 657–666. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2016.08.031

Kaushal, N., Babu, S., Mishra, A., Ghosh, N., Tare, V., Kumar, R., Sinha, P. K., & Verma, R. U. (2019). Towards a Healthy Ganga—Improving River Flows Through Understanding Trade Offs. Frontiers in Environmental Science, 7. https://doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2019.00083

Kumar, K., & Kerr, J. M. (2012). Democratic Assertions: The Making of India's Recognition of Forest Rights Act. Development and Change, 43(3), 751–771. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01777.x

Kureethadam, J. I. (2015). Salvation from Below. Individuals and Grassroots Movements for Ecological Renewal. Seminare. Poszukiwania Naukowe, 36(4), 67–78.

Larson, A. M. (2010). Forests for People: Community Rights and Forest Tenure Reform. Earthscan.

Onial, M., Jasmine, B., Singh, Y., Pande, A., Ramesh, C., Sivakumar, K., & Mathur, Vinod. B. (2018). Updating India's National Biodiversity Action Plan: The process and way forward. Current Science, 115(3), 422–427.

Pepper, D. (2002). Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203423363

Purohit, I., & Purohit, P. (2018). Performance assessment of grid-interactive solar photovoltaic projects under India's national solar mission. Applied Energy, 222, 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2018.03.135

Quitzow, R. (2015). Assessing policy strategies for the promotion of environmental technologies: A review of India's National Solar Mission. Research Policy, 44(1), 233–243. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2014.09.003

Ramakrishna, K. (1984). The Emergence of Environmental Law in the Developing Countries: A Case Study of India. Ecology Law Quarterly, 12, 907.

Roth, R. J., & Dressler, W. (2012). Market-oriented conservation governance: The particularities of place. Geoforum, 43(3), 363–366. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.01.006

Rout, C., Paul, A., Kumar, R. S., Chakraborty, D., & Goswami, A. (2020). Cooperative sustainable supply chain for deteriorating item and imperfect production under different carbon emission regulations. Journal of Cleaner Production, 272, 122170. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.122170

Schwarz-Herion, O. (2020). The Role of Smart Cities for the Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. In A. Omran & O. Schwarz-Herion (Eds.), Sustaining our Environment for Better Future: Challenges and Opportunities (pp. 209–257). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-7158-5_13

Shome, P., & Mukhopadhyay, H. (1998). Economic Liberalisation of the 1990s: Stabilisation and Structural Aspects and Sustainability of Results. Economic and Political Weekly, 33(29/30), 1925–1934.

Simon, M., & Joshi, H. (2022). Story of the Ganga River: Its Pollution and Rejuvenation. In A. Mukherjee (Ed.), Riverine Systems: Understanding the Hydrological, Hydrosocial and Hydro-heritage Dynamics (pp. 21–55). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87067-6_2

Taskeen, M. S. S. (2022). State Water Control Policies and River Policies Initiatives Launched by Govt. To Save Rivers. Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research, 4 Issue 1, 1.