



Space of Green Politics in South Asia: Myth or Reality?

¹Altaf Majeed, ²Mussawar Hussain Bukhari, ³Ali Shan Shah, ⁴Mian Muhammad Azhar

¹MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science & International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan, altafgill2027@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, mussawarbukhari@gmail.com

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & IR Government College University Faisalabad, alishanshah@gcuf.edu.pk

⁴ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan, muhhammad.azhar@gcuf.edu.pk

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>History Revised format: May 2019 Available Online: June 2019</p>	<p>Green politics is a political ideology comprises social progress through sustainable development, peace, social justice, and grass-root democracy. Green politics is an evolving trend in world politics emerged in 1970s and revolutionized the political scenarios after the mid-80s with the discovery of ‘Ozone Hole’ in 1984. Currently, green or eco political parties are popular in many advance countries such as Germany, France, UK, Netherland, and Spain etc. Regions which present a bleak picture on eco-politics are backward in environmental sustainability, and same is the case with South Asia. Environment is considered a secondary thing in South Asia; because region is already tackling the primary goals of life such as food, shelter, inflation, health, and education etc. Until achieving these goals; eco-politics will remain an illusion in South Asia despite facing many environmental related challenges. Hence, environmental slogans are not Asian political parties. Yet, there are some conservation and reforestation projects such as a billion-tree project in KPK of Pakistan or KFCC (Kerala forest conservation campaign) etc. South Asia is prone to climate change and global warming; Karachi, Mumbai, and Maldives are in the immediate threat to be drowned till 2050 if the sea level keeps rising due to the melting of glaciers. Hence, the need is to focus on more environmental oriented political programs before it is too latepopular in the region. There is a nominal finding about environment in the manifestoes of South.</p>
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Corresponding author’s email address: muhhammad.azhar@gcuf.edu.pk

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1. Introduction

Green politics is an emerging trend in world politics stressing upon socio-economic progress through sustainable development, peace, social justice, and grass-root democracy. Green politics is an evolving trend in world politics: the culture of sustainability and green politics started taking place in the world particularly in Europe in early 1970s; when a group called ‘German Greens’ propagated a social movement focusing on environmentalism in

Germany (Zubrin, 2012), later revolutionized the political scenarios after the mid-80s with the discovery of ‘Ozone Hole’ in 1984 in Southern hemisphere. Montreal summit (1987) and Kyoto Protocol (1997) were the building blocks towards environmental sustainability and development; which set many targets and standards for environment. Green politics started with the emergence of environmental issues and reached its zenith in 90s to that extent that American presidential elections of 2000 were contested on the slogan of ‘climate change’. Since then ‘environmentalism’ has been an essential part of international agendas and state’s policy making.

The early proponents of green politics such as Gandhi, Uexcull, and Spinoza etc. considered it much more than a mere political ideology; as they also share many other ideas like conservation, peace movements, feminism, and grass-root democracy etc. Conservation of Environment and its non-renewable natural resources were the basic goal of green politics at that time. Gandhi once said; ‘Earth has enough to satisfy human needs but not human greed’. (Michael and Mckinney 2007) Later in late 20th century, some ingredients of liberalism such as feminism were also incorporated in the green politics. Now, according to a British green activist ‘Dirik Wall’ there is four pillars of green politics: (Wall, 2010)

- i. Ecological Wisdom
- ii. Grass-root democracy
- iii. Social Justice
- iv. Non-violence

In 2001, ‘Global Green Movement’ organized by 800 delegates from 72 countries in Canberra, Australia promulgated a ‘Global Green Charter’ envisaging six guiding principles, (GGC 2001) which are:

- i. Ecological Wisdom
- ii. Social Justice
- iii. Participatory Democracy
- iv. Non-Violence
- v. Sustainability
- vi. Respect for Diversity

Since its inception, green politics is vehement supporter of grass-root democracy. They have an opinion that people should be involved in local or grass-root political activities to play a direct role in decision making which is going to influence the people lives and their environment. Besides, Green ideology seeks to eliminate nuclear weapons completely from the world and espouse ‘world Federation’ where the chance of any war would be minimum. Last but not least, social justice is an integral part of green politics; Social justice encompasses the economic justice, consumer justice; need and responsibilities being a member of community. Capitalism leads toward competition and competition leads toward waste of resources; hence, green ideology is a bit inclined towards socialism.

Green politics also inspires taking actions on individual level; such as individual decision of ethical consumerism. For instance, buying and consuming things that are eco-friendly, such as using paper bags instead of plastic bags for daily usage due to its recyclability and disposability.

Green ideology is an issue-oriented ideology; emerged with the emergence of environmental issues and proliferated with the proliferation of those issues such as global warming, ozone depletion, glaciers melting, water depreciation, desertification, depletion of non-renewable resources etc. There are many countries including Pakistan which are highly affected with those issues, and usually such countries are the most palatable grounds for the popularity of green politics. But it is the general observation that the countries which are most prone to climate change are least aware and consequently least interested in green politics. The basic needs for the survival of human beings are food, clothes and shelter. It is really difficult for the people to divert their main intentions towards environment other than basic needs for survival. The simple question raised in the mind first is, a person who is surviving by leaps and bounds and is worried from where the food will come tomorrow, can divert his attention to the question of environment.

2. Hypothesis

Economic backwardness, unawareness, and subtle democratic norms are few of the many reason behind the unpopularity of green politics in developing South Asia.

3. Literature Review

Thomas Poguntke evaluated the comparative role of green political parties in Europe. According to him, Green Parties in Europe hold no or limited power; hence, ineffective of implementing their green agendas into reality. Besides, wherever they are in power, they are in coalition government, hence cannot dictate their demands or agendas. Although, green party in the recent polls have shown exceptionally in Finland but they have equally sabotaged badly in Germany. Hence, the picture of green politics is bleak in Europe (Poguntke, 2001).

Christine Dann reviewed the history of global green political parties. First, he described what green politics is. Green Politics consists of four elements; ecological wisdom, non-violence, democracy, and social justice. The origin of Green politics dates back to the time when man started taking interest in his environment and it started taking boom with the discoveries of ecological issues such as ozone depletion, desertification, deforestation, and global warming etc. According to Christine, future belongs to environment and consequently, environmental politics would be more appealing than any issue because of its sensitivities as the survival of human depends on it. (Dann, 1999)

Ahmed discussed the Stockholm conference on resilience which held from 21st August to 23rd August, 2017 in which more than 100 researchers participated. The agenda of the conference was to find the ways for the conservation on coral reefs, stop deforestation, and urbanization with healthier environment. He also discussed the status of Environmental Laws in Pakistan. Pakistan has devised environmental laws but lags behind in their implementation. For instance, Article 11 of PEPA (Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997) prohibits excessive emission of polluted waste of any sort: solid, air, or noise etc. but have little implementation. Article 11 of PEPA (1997) requires IEE (Initial Environmental Examination) and EIA (Environment Impact Assessment) reports for projects more than 50 million worth. These reports are unknown to most contractors in Pakistan. PEPA (1997) also promulgates the zero or minimum noise pollution in the vicinity of educational institutions, but with no application. KPK has taken an initiative to restore the environment in the form of 'Billion 'Tree Tsunami'. Pakistan is in acute needs of taking steps towards environmental restoration and conservation. According to German's watch climate risk index of 2016: Pakistan lost more than 2 billion dollars due to climate change related events. (Ahmed, 2017)

Waqar M. (2014) criticized Pakistan's politicians and political parties for neglecting environmental or climate change issue in their electoral campaigns. Besides, they invested a little to tackle climate change which has affected Pakistan adversely. Human rights commission of Pakistan in her annual report of 2013 said: "Environmental issues cannot be sidelined as secondary matters of public policy" (Ahmed, Pakistan's politicians fail to protect environment, 2014) but in case of Pakistan it is not an issue, not even a secondary one. According to World Bank report, Pakistan loses about 6% of GDP annually due to ecological or environmental degradation. Despite the recent flooding from 2010 onward due to extreme weather conditions, no major political party of Pakistan has focus much on environment in their election campaigns or manifestoes. They added the word environment in their manifestoes just nominally without much regard except Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf Pakistan. PTI in 2013 manifesto stressed on "green economy" based on reforestation, eco-tourism, small scale farming, and effective water management. 'Billion Tree Tsunami' is an offshoot of these visions. Most of the other political parties look at these projects with much suspicion; but the fact is, even if these projects materialized only 10% into reality, it will change the land-scape of KPK from environmental deteriorated to environmental friendly province.

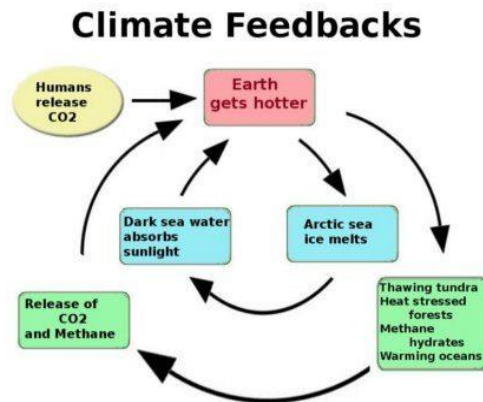
4. Green Politics and the Contemporary World

South Asia is the region with enormous environmental issues ranging; from Mangroves loss, water scarcity, deforestation, and desertification to rapidly melting of glaciers resulting into floods every year, rise of sea level rise, and changes in climate patterns. According to Global Risk Index 2017, Pakistan and India are included in 'Bottom 10' (Bottom 10 is the 10 countries most affected by climate change). Pakistan ranked 7th most prone to climate changes (Kreft, 2017). Major Environmental issues in South Asia are: Climate change is the result of Green House effect, and greenhouse effect complements by climate change. Once this chain starts, it keeps on running with positive energy through climate feed-back mechanism.

Siachan are the 2nd largest glaciers in the world lies in South Asia at the northern borders of Pakistan and India; it is also the source of almost all the rivers in both countries, some of them such as Indus, Gangas, and Brahmaputra etc. are few of biggest in the world. Climate change results in melting of glaciers very fast and exposing new surfaces to absorb more energy, which in turn result in more melting of glaciers. The ultimate consequence is the

floods, partially due to water mismanagement, as witnessed in recent years in Pakistan from 2010 onward. Beside, melting of glaciers also results in depleting of fresh water sources. South Asia hosts the one fifth population of the world with depleting water resources, making it a water stressed region. Scarcity of fresh water is the major issue of Pakistan and India and climate change is the main reason behind it. As for as Pakistan is concerned, scarcity of clean drinking water in major issue. For the irrigation of agricultural territory in Punjab and Sindh, the fresh water is supplied by the only one river of Indus, the major river in Pakistan, while the other areas in the country remained deprived of fresh water. The shortage in the supply of fresh water has been posed severe threats for the economic survival of Pakistan and for people living in Pakistan.

Figure 1



Source: (Heyne, 2015)

The situation has further become worsened because of polluted water in the Pakistan. The main causes of polluted water include excessive use of fertilizers, disposing the wastage of industry into rivers and lakes, the sewage from urban areas remains untreated and finally dumped into the ocean and the use of contaminated pipelines for the transportation of water. The main cause of spread of diseases in Pakistan is usage of filthy water because the fresh drinking water is contaminated. As a result, the main cause of reported diseases and health issues in Pakistan are resulted by polluted water, directly or indirectly (Sabir, 2012). 45% of infant deaths are due to diarrhea and 60% to overall waterborne diseases (PCRWR, 2015).

India retains 24% forest cover of her total land which is close to international standard, 25% of total land. But circumstances are worse in case of Pakistan as she retained between 2 and 5 percent only of its original forest cover leads to erosion and hits the soil's ability to retain water, further compounding the problems of water scarcity and flooding (Gopinathan, 2014). Deforestation occurs due to the weak energy infrastructure. Most of the forest cutting, apart from commercial purpose, occurs for household need; for cooking and heating. Despite alarming situation of forest cover, Pakistan has no solid policy to tackle the situation. There are various bio-diversity and ecological issues related to forestry. Government of Pakistan announced her policy against forest cutting in 1992 which proved to be ineffective due to various economic and political issues. The need of the hour is to initiate the programs regarding reforestation and sustainable harvesting which could fulfill the energy needs of local people while conserving the forests for future generation as well. "Carbon Financing" may be the best strategy in this regard. It is an innovative idea where trees are given the value as they absorb carbon dioxide from the environment. Developed countries give the finances in this regard as environment is considered a global entity. The role of government is to ensure the finances come in and trees are considered an environmental commodity, not just a wood for fuel (Hussain, 2012).

Every country in South Asia including Pakistan needs to develop a strategy and attract investment to come to Pakistan on climate change issue. This initiative can be taken at the SAARC stage. The industries should also be involved; if one actually invests in projects and get carbon credit that is going to be credited on commodity exchange. It is the first environmental commodity of the world and the predictions of the World Bank are that this market is going to be somewhere in the range of 5 to 10 billion dollars a year on exchange on this carbon emission. Not surprisingly, climate change is compounding these stresses and causing new problems of its own. Pakistan ranks among the worst-hit nations by climate change due to water scarcity and floods. The country relies on the Indus River for irrigation, which is fed by glaciers in Tibet and the Himalayas. However, the melting of glaciers due to global warming, despite leading to short-term higher flows, will eventually lead to reduced flows outside of the monsoon season, compounding the water stress.

India is the biggest state in South Asia as more than 1.3 billion people dwell there. There are more than 1300 working political organizations in India but not even one is green party. (Nautiyal, 2012) Apart from socio-economic crisis, India is saturated with environmental issues; ranging from water shortage to population explosion, noise pollution, air pollution, deforestation, desertification, sea level rise, and solid waste etc. According to 'World Economic Forum' report 2018: Six out of ten world's most polluted cities of the world belong to India including Gwalior, Allahabad, Raipur, Dehli, Ludhiana, and Khanna. (WEF, 2018) For such a crisis ridden country, it is unfounded to have no green party. There are working green or environmental groups in India such as Sadhana forests, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Save silent valley, Meri Dilli Meri Yamuna, Clean Dilli, Green Dilli etc. (Untouched, 2014) The only problem is that these green groups have no political backing. People of India considered these environmental organizations as activists without any political agenda. This is where the green activists in South Asia lag behind developed world as they don't organize them politically. The need of time for Green activists is to compose and regulate their energies for political organization. In this way, they can put pressure on national parties for regulating environmental policies at the very least.

Maldives is a tourist hub of South Asia. It is a smallest country of the region located in Indian Ocean encompassing about 1200 islands. The average ground level of this country is 4 feet above the sea level, which makes it the World's lowest country. (Musili, 2017) Maldives is one of the most endangered countries in the world due to the rising sea level. According to the Maldivian Government reports, if carbon emission remained in current pace and sea level kept rising, Maldives will be under water by 2020. Government of Maldives is even planning to purchase land in India, Sri Lanka or Australia to relocate their population in case of such emergency. (Musili, 2017) Other environmental issues in this country are decreasing fresh water supply, lowering of water table, deforestation, and rapid increase in population which is putting pressure on other natural resources. (Karthikheyana, 2012) Besides, Maldives is prone to frequent Tsunamis which affect the countries' economic and social stature enormously. Hence, there is dire need of propagating green politics in this country but the suit is not being followed.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are other notable countries of South Asian region. Both are small geographically but enormous in population. Both are facing almost similar environmental related problems ranging from deforestation, ground water contamination, air pollution, floods, sea water contamination, and urbanization etc. (Molla, 2016) Social discrimination is widespread in both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka on politico ethnic grounds. Politics is being done on hatred in these states rather than political agendas. There is no party in Sri Lanka or Bangladesh which keeps environment a primary agenda of their politics despite of the fact that both countries lose billions of dollars in flooding and other environmental related issues every year. Rapid Urbanization is another prevailing issue which is a breeding ground for other environmental crisis such as Air Pollution, water contamination, noise pollution, and lowering of water table ect. Dhaka, and Colombo are among the biggest cities of this region with no proper management. (Alam, 2010)

Other environment related issues in South Asia are, Mangroves exploitation near Karachi, desertification due to water scarcity, uncontrolled urbanization, running of old automobiles which are economical but a source of high air pollution etc. So, from the above explanation, it is clearly understood that South Asia is saturated with environmental issues; still there is no clear eco-politics or environmental agendas in the manifestoes of political parties. The disapproval of eco-politics in South Asia is inherent in socio-economic issues of this region. People of South Asia are so deprived of even the primary needs of life that environment is considered a luxury here. Real issues of this region are food, shelter, clothes, education, and health; environment is always secondary to these primary needs of life. Hence, the game of politics in South Asia is played on these primary yardsticks rather than environment. That is the primary reason for the un-popularity of eco-politics in South Asia; as the political leaders are aware of the fact that economic settings define social behavior, which in turn encompass each and every aspect of life. According to Karl Marx:

Our society is like a tree and stem of that tree is economic structure and big branches that originate from these stem are our laws and legislations, which are necessary to govern the society. And small branches, bushes, and leaves are our living styles, religion, social philosophies, norms, and customs etc. Hence, whatever we do with in a society, all depends upon our economic structure just like the whole tree depends upon the stem for its survival.
(Karl Marx: Das Capital, 1867)

Western societies have overcome their primary glitches long ago; hence environment, women rights, gay rights etc. have become their main stream issues. Most of the European countries particularly Germany, Netherland, Luxemburg, Austria, France, Spain, and Italy have Green Political Parties with large Legislature shares. But in case of Pakistan, economic conditions are so fragile and primary issues are so prevalent that no one, masses or political class, care about secondary issues; hence in spite of environmental challenges in Pakistan, there is a little which is being done and propagated.

Education is the motor of every social engine; it keeps the society moving fast towards the positive and more progressive direction. Awareness is the essence of educations and goals of education can only be fulfilled with strong economy. It is a matter of education that we choose facilities around keeping in mind our environment like bicycle or vehicle. But in the mindset in the countries like Pakistan won't allow us to use bicycle because it is considered as transportation means for the poor and source of humiliation while it is environment friendly. It is all about materialistic mindset, the world top economies use bicycles more than any developing country like Pakistan. For instance, in Netherland out of 15 million population 14.59 use bicycles, about 99% of the population use bicycle and it is one of the world top economies. Secondly, 80% of population in Denmark use bicycle daily. Out of 5.5 million people 4.46 use bicycle. (T10H, 2011) These countries are top in the world economy index but people are aware and concerned with the issues related to safe environment and economy.

So, the economy and education of Pakistan is lagged as compared to other economies and have very poor environmental awareness. The serious issues of lack in education and economic awareness lead to the very miserable conditions of politics related to ecology in Pakistan. Only the educated societies have worth to understand the links between human beings and environment and to act accordingly for the protection of our eco-system.

5. Conclusion

Political leaders play a major role in setting the course for their nations. Unfortunately, political leadership of South Asia is so oblivious that they consider environment a redundant object enforced on poor nations like Pakistan by Western authorities. Politics is done on the basis of giving jobs, raising wages and salaries, tax cut, prioritizing education and health sectors and so on. No political leader has given a due attention to the environment in spite of having environmental laws. For instance, Pakistan in the signatory of Kyoto Protocol 1997 hence created Environmental Protection Agencies in each province and center with no effective functions. Laws and Policies are there, the real issue is enforcement; which people take very lightly. Enforcement is guaranteed only through using authority; and using authority to implement environmental laws is not in the best political interest of our political leadership. Hence, it is also a big reason for miserable condition of environmental politics in Pakistan because the politics on environment can only be done when there are concerns with environment and in matter of Pakistan the case is just opposite.

The awareness is needed for our society to make them aware of their surroundings and this is only possible with education. To make contribution to our environment, it is necessary to strengthen the quality of our education and education. The real misery is that the literacy rate of Pakistan is only 58% and we are ranked at 113th number out of 120th countries according to global literacy report. (Khwaja, 2018) There were the best chances to propagate eco-politics in Pakistan after earth-quake of 2005, floods from 2010-13, and most importantly after facing the water scarcity in various regions of Pakistan. Millions on people were affected with these ecological challenges; and if propagated effectively eco-politics could have become a main stream political agenda in Pakistan with large backing of masses particularly those who were affected by it. Besides, major cities of India like Mumbai, Kolkata, Surat, and Chennai are among the top 20 most prone cities to be drawn due to the rise of sea level (Ghose, 2013); and sea level is rising due to rapid melting of glaciers which is a direct impact of global warming. But lack of political will abrogated all those cashing instances and the region still stays far from ecological related politics in spite of abundant ecological challenges.

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