India after the Tianjin summit and in the midst of the climate crisis – an overview

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On China's initiative, the Tianjin Summit was held on 31 August and 1 September 2025, within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). India was invited to attend. Sushovan Dhar, a political activist and trade unionist in Kolkata, analyses the summit's proceedings and geopolitical implications in this interview. He also examines the nature of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's regime, the link between the climate, democratic and social crises plaguing the country, and the state of the parliamentary and radical left.

Pierre Rousset -How should we analyse the results of the Tianjin summit?

Sushovan Dhar: Established in 2001 as a security forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was initially led by China with the aim of controlling borders and combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism in Central Asia. Over time, its scope has significantly expanded. Today, the organisation includes India, Pakistan, and Iran, and it collaborates with several observer states. China has transformed the SCO into a platform for asserting its influence across Eurasia. Through this organisation, Beijing promotes the concept of a multipolar world, albeit one in which China occupies a central position. In practice, the SCO enables China to draw Central Asian countries into its economic sphere through trade and infrastructure projects, often associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (the 'New Silk Roads'). The organisation also serves to counterbalance the influence of the U.S. and NATO in the region. Additionally, it acts as a means for China to present itself as a responsible power, a guarantor of stability, in contrast to the so-called 'interventionist' West.

The Tianjin summit marks a pivotal moment within this broader strategy. By hosting the event in Tianjin, Beijing has showcased a level of confidence and leadership that goes beyond mere formal symbolism. The summit has positioned China as a unifying power, successfully bringing together rivals like India and Pakistan alongside partners such as Russia and Iran. Beijing is leveraging these meetings to set an agenda that encompasses a range of topics, including development banks, digital cooperation, climate change

adaptation, and security measures, all crafted to benefit China. Through this approach, it aims to bolster its legitimacy as a leader of the ‘global South’, presenting itself as a dependable alternative to the United States, which is frequently viewed as unilateral and coercive.

The summit advanced several overlapping objectives, providing China with strategic depth in Eurasia and effectively keeping Central Asia and its neighbours outside the influence of NATO- or US-led alliances. Additionally, it facilitates a strategy of division and control; by bringing India and Pakistan together in the same forum, Beijing prevents either nation from aligning too closely with Washington. Simultaneously, the SCO and BRICS contribute to constructing a narrative about the ‘global South’, presenting a new international order where formerly colonised countries possess a greater voice. However, while some on the left celebrate multipolarity as a progressive aspiration, it paradoxically reinforces China’s dominant position in Asia. The massive infrastructure projects, technological investments, and trade corridors serve to expand Chinese capital rather than liberate workers, peasants, or the smaller states in the region.

It is difficult to interpret China’s actions as a genuine substitute for Western imperialism. They reflect the rise of another capitalist power, one that seeks to reorganise global hierarchies to its advantage. Anti-imperialist rhetoric is used strategically, but the underlying logic of exploitation and domination remains intact—the only difference is that China, rather than the West, now sets the rules in certain regions.

Recent SCO summits, particularly the one held in Tianjin, have highlighted the importance of adapting to climate change, disaster response, and green

development, thereby positioning China as a leader in addressing environmental challenges. However, the reality often starkly contrasts with this rhetoric. The projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central and South Asia may exacerbate ecological pressures; the construction of massive dams, coal-fired power plants, and various infrastructure projects is disrupting rivers, forests, and local communities. Furthermore, SCO climate cooperation frequently prioritises the interests of states and corporations—focusing on securing energy, trade, and investment—over the needs of local populations. Consequently, climate rhetoric is employed to legitimise Chinese-led projects, while the burden is disproportionately borne by workers, farmers, and marginalised communities.

Finally, Tianjin transcends the role of a mere meeting place. As a significant port and industrial centre linking Beijing to the Bohai Sea, it exemplifies how China combines its national economic strength with its global aspirations. By convening its rivals and partners in this city, Beijing showcases its confidence and authority over Eurasian politics and trade networks. The city encapsulates China's narrative on development: featuring modern infrastructure, enhanced connectivity, and a strategic position, it reinforces the country's image as a capable and responsible leader, particularly in contrast to a 'disorderly West'. In this context, Tianjin serves as a tangible symbol of the amalgamation of China's economic, political, and strategic powers.

How can we understand Trump's policy? In principle, India was a major card to play against China, his primary target. The result: the Tianjin summit!

Trump's trade approach exemplifies a new, assertive style of American power.

His administration employed tariffs and sanctions as strategic tools to persuade other countries to align with American interests. When New Delhi contemplated independent decisions, such as acquiring oil or arms from Russia, Washington did not merely express diplomatic opposition but also threatened to impose sanctions and trade restrictions. It levied punitive tariffs of 50% on goods imported from India. These tariffs, among the highest globally, include a 25% penalty on transactions involving Russia.

However, it is crucial to understand that India is not simply a passive victim. The Indian ruling class actively seeks US markets, investments and high-tech weapons to stimulate economic growth and strengthen its position on the international stage. The contradiction arises when India tries to play both sides: taking advantage of American markets while maintaining its long-standing relations with Russia and avoiding open confrontation with China. Trump's aggressive tariffs have exposed the limits of India's so-called 'strategic autonomy'.

Most of Trump's measures—such as tariffs, visa restrictions, and trade threats—were not merely issues of foreign policy; they also functioned as domestic policy tools aimed at reassuring American voters that he was safeguarding jobs and adopting a tough stance towards other nations. Beneath the sensational headlines, these policies often resulted in a redistribution of profits and bargaining power among various sectors, rather than challenging the fundamental principles of capitalism. The spectacle surrounding tariff announcements and stringent visa measures may create the impression that the drama is more significant than the underlying structural reality, where financial and technological flows, as well as military alliances, have persisted without interruption.

Let’s take the example of restrictions on H-1B visas. For ordinary Americans, these measures were presented as protecting domestic jobs. In practice, they were meant to tighten control over highly skilled labour, limit wage growth in the technology sector, and reinforce managerial authority. In doing so, they diverted attention from structural problems such as financialisation, weak social protections and corporate concentration. The Indian IT sector and Chinese manufacturing industry became convenient scapegoats in a discourse aimed at appeasing national concerns.

Trump’s geo-economic strategy also varied depending on the target. China, considered a systemic rival, faced tariffs, export controls and efforts to slow its technological growth. India, on the other hand, was treated as a strategic player in the Indo-Pacific region: courted for defence cooperation (such as the Quad), it was also pressured to open up sectors such as agriculture, pharmaceuticals, e-commerce and medical devices. The removal of India’s Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) and the tightening of visas were ways to encourage markets to open up to US capital without disrupting broader security relations. In other words, the tools were tailored: disciplining China and obtaining concessions from India.

The Tianjin summit took place against the backdrop of this delicate balance. Although the event was presented as anti-American, it mainly served as an opportunity for Modi to stage a series of carefully orchestrated photo ops with Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin. Modi was invited to the Chinese military parade commemorating the 80th anniversary of Japan’s defeat in World War II; he declined the invitation – a strategic decision aimed at avoiding friction with Trump while maintaining dialogue with Beijing and Moscow.

More broadly, what does the Tianjin summit say about China-Russia-India geopolitics?

India expresses its scepticism about the SCO's role as a vehicle for Chinese interests. Delhi balances its presence within this organisation by participating in Western forums, such as the Quad. It was only in 2017 that India officially joined the SCO, an organisation largely dominated by China and Russia along with Pakistan, partly to avoid isolation in its own neighbourhood. However, for Delhi, there are contradictions and balancing factors. The China-Pakistan axis is problematic for Indian foreign policy. These two countries support programmes that India opposes, particularly in Kashmir and within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. However, Russia, India's traditional partner, counterbalances Chinese dominance. India remains in the SCO not because it fully subscribes to its objectives, but because its departure would leave China with unchallenged influence in Eurasia. For New Delhi, the SCO offers access to Central Asia, a region rich in energy resources where India otherwise has limited reach (due to geography and the Pakistani blockade). India is keen to seize this platform for combating terrorism, using the SCO's rhetoric on this issue to draw attention to Pakistan-based groups. There is also a crucial aspect of regional visibility. By being present in the room, India asserts itself as a Eurasian power, not just a South Asian one.

Russia co-founded the organisation with China in 2001, initially as a security platform to counterbalance NATO and the United States' presence in Central Asia. Today, Russia continues to use the SCO to maintain military partnerships in the region, present itself as a guarantor of security in Eurasia, and prevent Central Asian states from moving too close to the West. Despite its economic weakness, Russia strives to avoid becoming China's junior partner, using the

SCO to maintain its dominant position in Eurasia. Although it has military power, its economic vulnerabilities lead Russia to rely on its energy exports and arms industry to maintain its importance and obtain concessions. Russia relies on the SCO as a diplomatic lifeline, offering it a safe haven from isolation. Amid Western boycotts and exclusions, SCO summits allow President Putin to share the stage with major powers such as China, India, Iran, and the Central Asian states. This allows the Kremlin to project an image of legitimacy and mitigate its total dependence on China.

For Russia, India's presence in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is advantageous, as it prevents the organisation from becoming an entity dominated solely by China. This dynamic allows Russia to play a balancing role between New Delhi and Beijing. For India, Russia serves as a crucial link, facilitating its engagement with the SCO without giving the impression of succumbing to Chinese influence. India benefits from its military ties and historical goodwill with Moscow. However, Russia's growing dependence on China makes this balance precarious; India cannot always count on Moscow to temper Beijing's ambitions. Therefore, this situation requires careful navigation, reflecting India's overall strategy: to avoid placing all its hopes in a single path and to exploit the contradictions between the major powers to strengthen its influence.

The Central Asian republics, namely Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, view Russia as a traditional partner, despite China's superior economic power. They recognise China's economic influence but harbour concerns about potential dependence and excessive interference. Consequently, the Tianjin summit highlights both China's growing ability to shape the agenda and the underlying tensions that hinder complete unity.

The Tianjin summit is therefore unlikely to resolve the serious disputes between India and China, including Kashmir. However, can they be put on hold? And what implications will these developments have for Pakistan and Bangladesh? What about the dynamics in South Asia? What about the impact of the climate crisis and conflicts over water control at a time of historically severe flooding?

No summit, including the one in Tianjin, can magically erase the deep-rooted differences between India and China, particularly the sensitive issue of Kashmir. At best, such a meeting can lay the groundwork for practical and incremental improvements. These include stabilising the Line of Actual Control (LAC) through renewed military and diplomatic channels, reaffirming past disengagement agreements, and implementing concrete confidence-building measures. To achieve real progress, sustainable and verifiable measures would be required: disengagement at remaining friction points, transparent sharing of patrol data, and agreed and time-bound standards for ground and air operations.

It is unlikely that the Kashmir issue will be addressed directly. India considers Kashmir an internal matter, while China maintains close alignment with Pakistan, motivated by strategic interests in Gilgit-Baltistan and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This alignment became particularly evident during tensions between India and Pakistan in May 2025. China provided political support to Pakistan, publicly denouncing India’s actions and calling for restraint while advocating dialogue. Reports also indicated military assistance and coordination, including intelligence sharing and logistical support, which strengthened Pakistan’s negotiating position. These actions highlighted the fact that China’s involvement is not neutral; it actively

supports partners that serve its strategic interests in South Asia, even risking exacerbating regional tensions.

There remains a significant gap between short-term de-escalation and a lasting settlement of disputes over the LAC, not to mention Kashmir. In short, the Tianjin summit should be seen not as a solution to a century-old border dispute, but as a practical stabilisation effort. It reduces the risk of crises, creates space for the gradual normalisation of trade and interpersonal relations, and allows countries and regions to navigate complex geopolitical realities cautiously.

The evolution of India-China relations, particularly through multilateral engagements, has significant repercussions throughout South Asia. For Pakistan, the stakes are particularly high, as China's support is crucial. At the same time, India's engagement with China through multilateral platforms such as the SCO suggests that Delhi is seeking to manage the conflict without allowing it to escalate. This strategy may provide temporary respite, but it is also a source of concern for Pakistan. Furthermore, a deterioration in relations between India and China risks perpetuating a cycle of crisis, hindering any meaningful reconciliation between Delhi and Islamabad.

For Bangladesh, the impact is more subtle but nonetheless significant. Dhaka has close economic and political ties with both India and China. Greater stability in relations between India and China along their northern and northeastern borders could ease regional tensions. This would be beneficial for Bangladesh's cross-border trade and connectivity initiatives, including energy networks, transport corridors and supply chains. Conversely, if interactions between India and China become overly competitive, Bangladesh

may have to take sides or juggle conflicting demands, particularly within regional forums such as BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal security architecture.

Multilateral cooperation, whether in trade, energy or disaster management, would be more viable if India and China effectively managed their tensions. However, China's massive support for Pakistan and the expansion of its Belt and Road Initiative in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and other neighbouring countries could exacerbate the strategic competition. This situation could force countries in the region to continually balance their relations with India and China. As a result, South Asia could find itself caught between these two major powers, where the autonomy of small states is limited and regional diplomacy becomes an exercise in careful navigation rather than an open pursuit of cooperation.

The geopolitical and security implications of tensions between India and China are further complicated by climate change and resource scarcity, particularly in shared river basins across South Asia. The Brahmaputra, Ganges, and other transboundary rivers are vital to India, Bangladesh, parts of Nepal, and Bhutan. China's control over the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra gives it power over downstream flows, which could lead to friction in the event of extreme hydrological events. Recently, South Asia has experienced historically severe flooding, displacing millions of people, disrupting agriculture and exacerbating food and water insecurity.

At a time of intensifying climate crises, unresolved disputes between India and China increase vulnerability. Any confrontation along the LAC or politicisation of regional water flows could hamper timely cross-border coordination for flood management, dam operations and disaster relief.

Admittedly, stable relations could facilitate better regional cooperation on disasters, hydrological data sharing, coordinated reservoir management, and the establishment of joint early warning systems. Nevertheless, current dynamics indicate that water security will remain a sensitive issue, both environmentally and geopolitically, particularly for Bangladesh, whose densely populated delta is extremely sensitive to upstream management and climate shocks.

It is important to note that the consequences of India-China relations are not isolated. Their evolution significantly shapes South Asian geopolitics, influencing Pakistan's strategic calculations, Bangladesh's economic and environmental resilience, and the broader regional balance. However, deep-rooted disputes, China's support for Pakistan, and climate-related tensions indicate that South Asia remains in a precarious position: geopolitical rivalry, historical enmities, and ecological vulnerability converge to create both risks and limited opportunities for collaborative problem-solving.

What is the connection between the BRICS and international security alliances? The term 'Global South' seems rather misleading to me. It encompasses imperialist powers, regional powers, oil-producing states, etc. I prefer to use the term 'dominated countries' to refer to what was once meant by 'South'.

The BRICS, a grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, is often presented as a counterweight to Western-dominated global institutions and as a platform for the 'Global South' to make its voice heard. As I mentioned earlier, the discourse emphasises multipolarity, collective development and challenging American and European domination. Nevertheless, despite these

assertions, BRICS operates largely within the existing global capitalist framework, redistributing influence among dominant states rather than challenging systemic inequalities.

BRICS has established initiatives such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and a Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), offering alternative channels for financing infrastructure and development. The argument put forward is that these mechanisms reduce dependence on the IMF and the World Bank. However, in practice, it is capitalist imperatives that dictate lending decisions; projects must be financially viable and generate returns, which often favour the priorities of states and corporations. BRICS continues to emphasise the central role of the IMF in global finance, reflecting a preference for reforming and gaining influence within the existing system rather than creating a truly independent alternative.

BRICS claims to promote multipolarity and South-South cooperation while largely adhering to existing global norms in trade, technology, and finance. Western institutions set the rules on intellectual property, supply chain protocols, and financial regulations. Infrastructure projects, industrial corridors, and energy investments, particularly those led by China, extend their influence while creating patterns of dependency that resemble those of Western globalisation. These projects often benefit states and corporate elites, often at the expense of the working masses.

Politically, the BRICS are heterogeneous and asymmetrical. China dominates economically and sets the agenda, while Russia leverages its military power and energy exports to maintain its global influence. India seeks to engage with both powers while balancing its relations with the United States and

regional frameworks such as the Quad. Brazil and South Africa focus on regional influence and economic engagement but have limited influence on political priorities. Cohesion is based primarily on a shared ambition to find a place in the imperialist hierarchy, rather than on a unified vision of global justice.

BRICS summits often emphasise sustainable development, adaptation to climate change, and green growth. However, these initiatives prioritise capitalist interests at the expense of ecological justice or local communities. Projects like the Belt and Road Initiative, along with large energy investments and infrastructure corridors, can increase environmental stress, disrupt ecosystems, and exacerbate social inequalities. The bloc's climate rhetoric often serves as a tool to legitimise strategic and economic expansion rather than a sincere commitment to sustainability and equity.

It would be fair to conclude that BRICS does not offer a radical alternative to Western-dominated global capitalism. The bloc's insistence on the central role of the IMF, combined with its strategies for infrastructure, trade, and finance, shows that it seeks to redistribute global power among emerging capitalist states. It does not seek to challenge exploitation or structural inequalities. It symbolises the shifting of global power, not the transformation of the global system.

There are obvious differences within the BRICS that any thorough analysis would highlight. The bloc encompasses various models of capitalism: state-led development in China and Russia, neoliberal reforms in India and Brazil, and extractive capital dynamics in South Africa.

The crucial question is whether the BRICS can be harnessed—by labour movements, trade unions, and progressive governments—to transfer power to workers, limit exploitation, and promote genuine sovereignty through democratic social policy rather than simply serve as a front for competing imperialisms and global reconfigurations of capital. At present, the possibilities are extremely limited.

Could you provide an analysis of the Modi regime, the relationship between the RSS, BJP and Modi, the impact of Hindutva politics, and its implications in India (and indeed in the region)?

The Modi regime, in power since 2014, represents a decisive shift to the right in Indian politics, emphasising majoritarian nationalism, centralised executive authority, and a disciplined and ideological state apparatus. Its ideological and organisational pillars are the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a century-old Hindu nationalist organisation deeply rooted in Indian civil society. The Bharatiya Janata Party serves as an electoral front, whereas the fascist RSS provides long-term strategic direction, cadre mobilisation, and ideological coherence, ensuring that the regime's policies align with its vision of a Hindu-centric India.

At the heart of this project is Hindutva, a political philosophy that defines Indian identity primarily in communal terms, promoting Hindu cultural and religious dominance while marginalising minority communities, particularly Muslims and, to a lesser extent, Christians and Dalits. Hindutva is not merely symbolic; it actively shapes legislation, education, cultural policies, and social narratives. The Modi government has systematically used state institutions to implement this worldview, including the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the

National Register of Citizens in Assam, and revisions to school curricula that emphasise Hindu-centric historical narratives. These policies, combined with the mobilisation of disciplined networks of cadres, reveal an authoritarian and fascist approach to governance: dissent is monitored and restricted, civil liberties are limited, and opposition is systematically delegitimised.

Economically, the regime combines neoliberal reforms with state-led infrastructure projects, often presented as “development for all”, but these initiatives are closely linked to corporate interests, political patronage and centralised control. This combination of majoritarian ideology and capitalist politics illustrates a link between fascism and capitalism, where the state consolidates its power by merging economic and cultural control.

Politically, the Modi regime has reshaped the Indian state by centralising authority, weakening institutional checks and balances, and restricting federal autonomy. Surveillance and selective enforcement of anti-terrorism and anti-sedition laws repress dissenting voices, minority groups, and left-wing activists. The BJP—RSS network supports a nationwide mobilisation network through social, cultural, and religious organisations, thereby reinforcing majoritarian consolidation and electoral dominance. This model mirrors classic fascist patterns: mobilising mass support through cultural and religious nationalism, combined with strong state control and the repression of opposition.

The regional implications are profound. India’s assertive nationalist posture affects its relations with Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Kashmir remains a flashpoint, as Hindutva rhetoric amplifies tensions and influences policies towards minorities and cross-border issues. Relationships with neighbouring

countries are increasingly transactional and security-focused, often eliciting mistrust or resistance. In Nepal and Bhutan, ideological outreach and infrastructure projects aim to extend influence, although nationalist rhetoric can provoke negative reactions. In Bangladesh, Hindu nationalist policies intersect with border management, migration, and minority rights, shaping bilateral relations and people-to-people ties.

Domestically, the regime has intensified religious polarisation and restricted civil rights, academic freedom and media independence. Cultural and religious nationalism permeates education, public symbolism and social policy. The Modi government is consolidating state power by merging neoliberal economic policies, pro-business development and an ideological apparatus with fascist tendencies. Hindutva mobilises cultural loyalty, diverts attention from class inequalities, and legitimises elite-friendly policies while strengthening India's national and regional positions and maintaining global capitalist integration through alignment with the United States, selective engagement with China, and participation in forums such as the BRICS.

In essence, the Modi-RSS-BJP project is more than just a ruling party; it is a long-term ideological mechanism involving the state and civil society that aims to reshape India's social fabric, political culture, and regional role. The combination of fascist-tinged majoritarian nationalism, neoliberal economic policy, and strategic foreign policy has profound implications for South Asia. It is altering traditional alliances, heightening regional insecurities, and limiting the space for progressive, pluralistic, class-based politics.

In this particularly serious situation, what is the state of the Indian social and political left?

The Indian left is currently facing a structural crisis that goes beyond electoral setbacks: it reflects a more general failure to defend the struggles of workers, peasants and marginalised sections of society. The BJP-RSS is consolidating its majoritarian power. In this context, the left is struggling to articulate a convincing alternative that connects the class struggle with the fight against all forms of oppression, including caste and gender discrimination, in order to create a coherent political project.

The traditional left, represented by parties such as the CPI, CPI(M) and, to some extent, CPI(ML) Liberation, has increasingly subordinated radical politics to parliamentary strategy. Electoral imperatives push these parties to compromise, form coalitions, and adopt centrist positions. As a result, their critique of neoliberalism, corporate domination, and social inequalities often becomes technical, reformist, or bureaucratic, rather than reflecting the realities experienced by workers and peasants.

For example, land struggles, workers' rights campaigns and peasant movements often receive symbolic support from the traditional left, but their support rarely translates into sustained mobilisation or systemic challenges.

Despite the radical left's commitment to mass mobilisation, its reach is very limited. Its organisational capacity is weak, leading to the fragmentation of the movement into several minor factions with localised agendas. Although it shows courage in direct action and anti-corporate struggles, the radical left cannot provide a national counterweight to the ideological and infrastructural machine of the BJP-RSS. Moreover, isolation and a massive police presence during radical mobilisations often hamper their ability to maintain visibility and expand their influence. Given their numerical weakness, their

geographical concentration in a few locations, and state repression, these groups encounter it difficult to link local struggles to national discourses, even when these struggles could challenge and highlight the systemic inequalities that Hindutva obscures.

A critical weakness of the left is its inability to weave together class, caste, gender and community concerns into a coherent political project for social transformation. Historically, the left has grown, thanks to a highly unionised workforce, peasant networks, and student movements. Today, many of these structures have declined due to industrial restructuring, the informalisation of labour, and the emigration of skilled workers. While the parliamentary left has been slow to consolidate its influence, radical left-wing factions remain confined to specific regions or sectors. This organisational erosion leaves the field open to the BJP-RSS, which combines ideology, state patronage, and the original networks to build a disciplined mass base.

As a result, popular struggles are either co-opted, marginalised or fragmented. Movements for workers' rights, agricultural protests, environmental justice and minority protection often lack coherent national support. Meanwhile, the BJP-RSS consolidates its power by mobilising religion and culture to mask economic exploitation, reinforce inequalities and repress dissent. The weakness of the left allows the state, corporations and ideological networks to operate unchallenged in national and regional contexts.

Alongside the weaknesses of parliamentary parties and the radical left, social movements and identity activism – around caste, gender, communitarianism, ethnicity or regional autonomy – have also struggled to mount a coherent

resistance to the BJP-RSS. While these movements have played a vital role in raising awareness, they often operate in isolation, fragmented by thematic agendas and unintegrated into broader class or economic struggles.

Many identity movements in India emphasise symbolic representation, cultural recognition or rights-based demands, but they often fail to systematically challenge the structural and material foundations of inequality. For example, campaigns against caste discrimination or for women's rights may lead to legal reforms or social awareness. However, they rarely challenge capitalist exploitation, neoliberal policies, or the elite's appropriation of state resources. In practice, these campaigns may inadvertently leave the field open for the BJP-RSS to appropriate identity discourses, presenting majoritarian politics as protective of cultural heritage while marginalising dissenters.

Furthermore, the dominant discourse of some movements treats identity struggles as independent of class and economic issues, which fragments the political field. This theoretical compartmentalization—which separates social justice from economic justice—limits the ability of movements to create broad coalitions capable of countering a disciplined ideological network, such as Hindutva. On the ground, identity movements remain mostly local, episodic or tied to specific events, they lack sustained national coordination. Campaigns may flare up around a specific incident, law or policy but fade away as soon as immediate attention wanes. Many movements also rely heavily on media visibility and performative activism, which, while effective in raising public awareness, does not necessarily translate into lasting structural change or mass mobilisation.

Furthermore, political parties or NGOs co-opt certain movements, which can dilute their independence and politicise them. These cases transform grassroots activism into a tool for electoral politics or agendas dictated by donors, thereby reducing its potential for transformation. This gap is particularly evident in areas such as labour rights, environmental justice and rural agrarian struggles, where social movements have struggled to align identity-based demands with material and systemic alternatives.

In its current form, the Indian left is fragmented, reactive, and largely ineffective in challenging the consolidation of Hindu power or responding to the urgent material needs of the population. Parliamentary calculations often constrain the traditional left, reducing class struggle and anti-neoliberal politics to technocratic or reformist interventions. The radical left, although engaged in popular struggles, remains small, isolated and rigid in its programme, with many of its members still adhering to Stalinist or Maoist frameworks that offer no concrete strategy for overcoming capitalism.

At the same time, social and identity movements, while essential for raising public awareness, often remain isolated around symbolic victories or specific issues, failing to connect their struggles with the broader material and economic realities that shape the lives of workers, peasants, and marginalised communities. This disconnect limits their potential for transformation and allows the BJP-RSS to consolidate a disciplined, ideological and populist power base, reshaping India’s political and social landscape in a way that marginalises egalitarian and class-based politics.

The solution lies in the creation of a new, truly radical left, capable of linking material struggles to struggles against identity-based oppressions. It must be

capable of building sustainable, interregional and intersectional networks and of campaigning beyond electoral cycles or demonstrations on specific issues. It must seek to translate local mobilisations into coherent, systemic alternatives capable of challenging both neoliberal exploitation and the authoritarian, majoritarian project of Hindutva.

This is not a fanciful idea. On a global scale, capitalism is failing to resolve existential crises: extreme inequality, environmental collapse and the persistent threat of conflict and war. On a local scale, India has a rich but fragmented base of progressive groups and activists disillusioned with old left-wing traditions but committed to radical change. This environment provides fertile ground for building a new left, capable of unifying struggles, organising strategically and emerging as a credible force capable of reshaping India's political and social trajectory.

In short, creating a new left is not only desirable; it is essential. Without it, progressive politics will remain reactive and marginalised. With it, a disciplined and transformative force can challenge authoritarian majoritarianism, defend democratic and social rights, and offer viable alternatives based on justice, equality, and genuine democracy.

The climate crisis is hitting India severely….. Which political forces are taking this into account when defining their orientations (beyond ad hoc responses to disasters), their urgencies, their priorities, and their unitary policies?

India is facing an unprecedented convergence of environmental, social and economic crises. Extreme heat waves, violent floods, unpredictable monsoons

and the depletion of rivers and groundwater are no longer isolated events: they are becoming structural realities that threaten the livelihoods of millions of people, particularly farmers, informal workers and the urban poor. The floods of 2025 and other extreme events of historic proportions highlight how climate change interacts with pre-existing social inequalities, amplifying the vulnerability of those with fewer resources.

These crises are not neutral. They are deeply linked to the capitalist mode of production: industrial expansion, extractive energy projects, large-scale monoculture agriculture, deforestation and unregulated urban development all intensify ecological stress while enriching entrepreneurial elites. Moreover, global dynamics—India's energy imports, transnational supply chains, and exposure to climate-induced migration—reinforce the structural constraints that shape environmental outcomes. Climate devastation in India is therefore as much a class issue as it is an ecological one.

Nevertheless, in the absence of decisive intervention by the left, environmental discourse remains fragmented, symbolic and largely petty bourgeois. Middle-class activism is often limited to lifestyle changes, tree-planting campaigns or protests against urban air pollution, which are important in themselves but inadequate in terms of scale and vision. Without a systemic approach focused on social classes, this activism fails to challenge the economic and political structures that are at the root of ecological destruction.

The traditional Indian left has largely failed to make climate change a central political issue. It is urgent that the left integrate ecological struggles into demands for social justice: linking energy policy to workers' rights, water

management to farmers' livelihoods, and urban planning to the needs of marginalised people. Only through an intersectional and class-conscious environmental policy can climate activism move beyond symbolic gestures and become a transformative force capable of responding to both social and ecological crises.

This is not only a matter of moral responsibility but also a strategic political necessity. The left can mobilise around climate issues to unite diverse groups: workers affected by industrial pollution, farmers facing water shortages, and the urban poor affected by extreme weather conditions. In doing so, the left can present a radical alternative to neoliberalism and Hindu nationalism, presenting ecological sustainability as inseparable from economic equality, democratic participation, and collective well-being.

The climate crisis is both a civilisational challenge and a political opportunity. If the Indian left fails to turn it into a systemic struggle, environmentalism will remain fragmented and depoliticised, leaving the field open to corporate greenwashing or technocratic interventions that do not address the root causes. A radical, left-wing approach, however, could transform climate action into a central pillar of a democratic, socialist, and socially just political program for India.

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About the Author

Sushovan Dhar

Author

Editorial Board Member of Alternative Viewpoint

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