

SOUTH ASIAN CLIMATE TRANSNATIONALISM: BEYOND DIASPORIC HUMANITARIANISM

Corresponding Author: Professor Steve Taylor, Centre for Global Development, Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, UK; Email: Stephen.a.taylor@northumbria.ac.uk

Statements and Declarations

Ethical Considerations

All of the research which informs the paper received ethical approval and clearance via Northumbria University, UK

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

Funding Statement

The research upon which this article is based was funded by Northumbria University, UK

SOUTH ASIAN CLIMATE TRANSNATIONALISM: BEYOND DIASPORIC HUMANITARIANISM

ABSTRACT

South Asia is currently on the front line of the global climate emergency, with the region experiencing increasing, devastating crises resulting from climate change and ‘climate coloniality’ (Sultana, 2022). This paper, drawing upon original qualitative research, explores the relationship between the South Asian diaspora and climate action within South Asia. We introduce and chart the nature and dynamics of contemporary South Asian climate transnationalism and suggest that this significant contemporary phenomenon has been hitherto unrecognised within South Asian migration, diaspora and transnational studies. It is further argued that concepts utilized within existing literature on the diaspora-climate action nexus, such as ‘diaspora humanitarianism’ and ‘intensive transnationalism’, do not adequately capture the nature, significance, diversity, scale and ever-presence of contemporary South Asian transnational diasporic climate action in the face of the unending plethora of crises precipitated by climate change. We also contend that while South Asian religions do play a significant role in motivating some of the ever-present diasporic climate action studied, much of this activity is also guided by environmental rationalities, and articulations of climate coloniality and climate justice, which both cut across and exist independently of South Asian religious beliefs and attachments.

KEYWORDS

South Asia; Diaspora; Transnationalism; Climate Action; Climate Transnationalism; Climate Coloniality

Introduction

The relationship between international migration and global development is a key area of global, national and regional policy making and governance, as well as a focus of academic research, throughout the world, but with particular reference to the global south. The implications of migration, especially the significance of transnational migrant remittances within the global south, are also firmly embedded within the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the current priorities of global policy organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank (see, for example, World Bank Group/KNOMAD, 2024), meaning that transnational diasporas are now clearly seen as crucial development agents within original sending societies. This is particularly the case in South Asia which is famously the largest foreign remittance receiving area of the world, the value of which outstrips international aid to, and regularly exceeds foreign direct investment in, the region.

South Asia is also currently on the front line of the global climate emergency, resulting from what Sultana (2022) refers to as a racialized ‘climate coloniality’ wherein:

historical differences position colonial...countries at greater
(environmental) advantages over post-colonial...countries...the ecologically
unequal exchange between the global south and the global north, ongoing
extractive capitalism, the imperial structures of global trade, and domination in
setting policies and ideologies, - all work to maintain climate coloniality (p. 4).

South Asia has consequently experienced a rapidly increasing number of climate-related disasters in recent years, such as devastating floods in Kerala, India in 2018, across Pakistan in 2022 and within Bangladesh in 2024, leading to a significant loss of life and the destruction of infrastructure and habitat. ‘Colonialism haunts the past, present and future through climate’ (Sultana, 2022, p. 10) and thus constantly increasing temperatures and changing weather patterns are, as we write this, severely impacting the lived experience of hundreds of millions of people across South Asia, threatening and dismantling the sustainability of human and non-human life, agriculture and food production, natural resources and shelter, particularly impacting social groups and communities already disadvantaged through other social, cultural and political dynamics.

This paper, drawing upon original qualitative research conducted during 2023 and 2024, explores the relationship between the South Asian diaspora and climate action within South Asia. We propose that South Asian climate transnationalism is a significant contemporary phenomenon within transnational civil society but has been hitherto largely unrecognised

within South Asian migration, diaspora and transnational studies, as well as within academic studies of contemporary climate action.

From Diaspora Humanitarianism to Climate Transnationalism

There has been some academic work on ‘diaspora humanitarianism’ (Parry, 2023) across South Asia – sporadic, immediate and time-limited transnational responses from diaspora individuals and organizations to a specific crisis/disaster, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (Aldrich, 2011), the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir (Rehman and Kalra, 2006; Rytter, 2010) and a number of disasters in Pakistan between 1972-2023 (Makhlouf and Selmi, 2024). South Asian diasporic humanitarianism is predominantly represented within this existing literature as a set of isolated responses, inspired by ‘family ties and a feeling of moral or religious duty...(and) transnational civic obligation’, to various ‘natural calamities’ (Parry, 2023, pp. 158-71), with little recognition of any environmental/climate-related rationalities, motivations or focus within such transnational diasporic actions.

While there has been some (albeit scant) research on the South Asian diaspora-climate action nexus beyond diaspora humanitarianism, which highlights ongoing diasporic environmental/climate work rather than time-limited responses to unexpected ‘natural’ disasters, this work only identifies the religious motivations and inspiration for such actions by demonstrating the role of major South Asian religions, such as Sikhism (Mooney, 2018; Prill, 2015) and Islam (Hancock, 2020), in generating a range of diasporic, transnational climate work within South Asia and across the globe. It is clear from this existing literature that

environmental, climate and ecological concerns are intrinsic to the predominantly South Asian religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Our research reveals the contemporary significance, varying scales, and ongoing, *ever-present* nature, of South Asian diasporic climate action in the face of multiple, *ceaseless* and increasing disasters and crises resulting from climate change. The diasporic transnational actions reported below are at least partly inspired and motivated by environmental/climate orientated concerns, alongside family connections, moral or religious motivations and attachments to places of origin and/or identity. The climate related events/crises responded to are no longer viewed by those undertaking this work as purely sporadic, unexpected natural disasters, rather they are viewed as constant, unending and as at least partly related to climate change and climate coloniality. This is what we refer to as South Asian climate transnationalism and we argue that it emerges outside of and across, as well as from within, specific South Asian religions. Our discussion of contemporary South Asian climate transnationalism in this paper complements the very recent recognition within global policy arenas (for example, see Adaawen, 2022; European Union Global Disapora Facility (EuDif), 2024; IOM 2024) of the significance and potential of diasporic groups as global south environmental/climate actors.

The concept of ‘transnationalism’ has spawned a vast multi- and trans-disciplinary literature over the past two decades, encompassing a wide variety of, often competing, definitions, theories and substantive/empirical applications. Our concern in this paper is with ‘transnationalism from below’ (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), diaspora/migrant practices relating to a country of origin or identity economically, socially, politically and culturally, transnational relations that are part of South Asian civil society and the development of what has also been referred to as ‘transnational social capital’ (Peck, 2020). However, it is

surprising that diasporic climate action has been omitted from conceptualisations and accounts of South Asian transnationalism from below as well as from analyses of transnationalism and climate action more generally. A recent review by Tedeschi et al. (2023) of current debates and new perspectives on transnationalism set out to answer two main questions: ‘how is transnationalism defined (or not defined) in the most cited and most recent scholarly works about the subject and what are the most promising lines of research concerning transnationalism’ (p. 604). There is no mention of climate or environmental transnationalism, or anything at all relating to such activity, within the entire paper. Similarly, Almeida et al. (2024) undertook a review of contemporary forms of climate action, which they describe as ‘one of the most critical concepts of the twenty-first century’, in order to offer ‘a classification scheme defining different forms of climate action’ (p. 2). Despite focussing particularly upon non-institutional climate actions within civil society, including ‘transnational climate movements’ (p. 6), again there is no reference at all to global diasporic climate action/environmentalism. When we add that within two recently published handbooks, on the South Asian diaspora (Chatterji and Washbrook, 2023) and on Indian transnationalism (Sahoo and Purkayastha, 2019), there is no coverage of South Asian diasporic climate action or environmentalism, then it becomes clear that the focus of this paper, introducing and charting the nature and dynamics of contemporary South Asian climate transnationalism in the context of ongoing global climate coloniality, starts to fill a significant lacuna within existing academic literature and research.

The Research Process

We undertook original, qualitative empirical research on South Asian climate transnationalism between March 2023 and August 2024. Our data was collected from two research projects focussed upon diasporic climate action.

From March to September 2023, we conducted a small scale research project considering diasporic environmental citizenship in South Asia. This involved seven interviews with key stakeholders and experts (academic, governmental and civil society) in South Asia and 10 interviews with representatives of diasporic groups of South Asian heritage based in the UK. These interviews were conducted both on-line and face-to-face and lasted between 45-90 minutes in length. The project culminated in an end of project workshop in which the authors, selected key stakeholders and diaspora representatives met to discuss key findings from the project and consider future research priorities.

This paper is also based upon data drawn from a second project, conducted from August 2022 to August 2024, which included a further seven interviews with key stakeholders and experts (academic, governmental and civil society) on climate challenges, and diasporic engagement with these challenges, across Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Within this second project, 15 interviews were also undertaken with key informants from South Asian diasporic organizations across the UK and the Arabian Gulf currently engaged in varied forms of environmental action within South Asia. All of these interviews, again a mixture of face-to-face and on-line meetings, lasted between 45-60 minutes each.

Both research projects involved a search of relevant academic literature and grey materials, as well as an analysis of the South Asian diaspora-climate action policy arena. All of the interviews across both projects were conducted in English and they were all recorded and transcribed (with participant consent). All interviews (face-to-face and on-line) were collectively analysed by the authors of this paper and all of the research which informs the paper received ethical approval and clearance via Northumbria University, UK.

Ever-Present South Asian Climate Transnationalism

South Asian climate transnationalism, in a similar vein to diaspora humanitarianism, operates in the under-recognised ‘third’ (Parry, 2023) space between international institutional and local civil society responses to the climate emergency in South Asia. Parry (2023) outlines how diaspora humanitarianism ‘is distinguished by quick mobilisation and participation based on social networks, emotional motives, informal delivery and accountability procedures...(involving) cash, skills, and financial and human resources transfers’ (p. 161-71). These were also key features of the climate transnationalism undertaken by the South Asian diasporic organizations studied here. For example, when, between June and August 2018, the Indian south-western state of Kerala was hit by devastating floods and landslides, which were at the very least partly a result of climate change (Hunt and Menon, 2020), wherein 500 people lost their lives, 1.4 million were displaced, infrastructure, homes, livestock and sanitation facilities were destroyed and there were economic losses of 3.4 million US dollars across the state, the World Bank (2019) noted a more than 14% increase in overseas remittances to India and attributed this primarily to the financial help sent by the global Malayalee diaspora to their families and the state in order to help Kerala cope with the

aftermath of the floods. One of our key informants (KI), representing a UK based Malayalee diasporic organization, reported how the floods coincided with *Onam*, the biggest harvest festival in the Keralan calendar which is celebrated globally across the Malayalee diaspora. Preparations for the festival celebrations immediately gave way to providing support for the victims of the floods as soon as news of the disaster became known:

It was an overwhelming feeling that every Malayalee around the world was coming together to support and help their fellow Malayalees back home.

We cancelled our age-old tradition of *Onasadhya* (Onam banquet) in 2018, which was celebrated since the 1970s so that the ticket money for the *Sadhya* (banquet) could be instead contributed to tackling the Kerala floods. Many Malayalee restaurant (in London, UK) too contributed a part of their Onam profits to the cause (UK KI 4).

The regional UK Malayalee association referred to in the statement above was able to raise £50,000 from this specific fundraising initiative. As a result, ‘initially, we shipped, or air cargo-ed, food and clothing items. And then the local district collectors, they would send us a list, saying what they want in their area’ (UK KI 4). Further fundraising enabled reconstruction following the floods and capacity building to sustain communities in the face of future flooding:

We built three water plants in Alleppey district (Kerala), which is actually surrounded by water, but they don't have clean water. After that, we decided to build houses for people who lost their house...Everyone played their part... And that is one of the reasons that we were able to rebuild Kerala quite quickly, I would say (UK KI 4).

While climate work was not explicit to the aims of this diasporic Malayalee organization, there was also a clear environmental rationale to this particular transnational diasporic humanitarian response, as well as a recognition that such responses are no longer isolated, sporadic, time-limited reactions to natural calamities, rather they are ever-present, ongoing forms of South Asian climate transnationalism from below in the context of the challenges posed by the global climate emergency and climate coloniality:

These floods are not going to stop...they have not stopped since 2018. There was big focus on that year but there have been floods and landslides and many other environmental problems and issues every year...so our work has never stopped since 2018 and it won't...climate change is a huge problem for Kerala and it is only going to get worse, we are ready to respond to these challenges but it is only going to get more and more difficult (UK KI 15).

The representatives of the Malayalee diasporic organizations interviewed also stressed that their humanitarian and environmental work in the aftermath of the 2018 floods and beyond,

to the present day, is not strictly religiously inspired and that it explicitly crosses religious boundaries within Kerala. Thus, UK KI 4 stated, 'I can categorically say that we did not favour any religious or caste group with our flood relief work... To be mindful of the relief activities being inclusive in all forms we had early on decided to concentrate on communities rather than individuals', while UK KI 3 commented, 'the floods taught the people an important lesson of equality...we were motivated by our pride in Kerala and our care for all humanity...we helped everybody...irrespective of (religious) background'.

The social, emotional and family relationships between the South Asian diaspora and places of origin/identity which, as we have seen, form the bedrock of transnationalism from below and diaspora humanitarianism, enabling 'timely mobilization (of humanitarian service)...to inaccessible places to which other actors have no access' (Parry, 2023, p. 161), are key features of the climate transnationalism being uncovered here. For example, one of our KIs from a regional UK diasporic Bangladeshi association, comments on the organization's response to recurrent floods in Bangladesh:

The phone rings for a crisis and we are a tight community...people come together and it is a real community effort...but there is now a crisis all the time in Bangladesh, it's not like there is one flood and that is it for a few years, now it is all the time, there is always something we need to help with...in the 2022 floods (our) Bangladeshi Association led an appeal... (association members) then went across to coordinate relief in some of the most affected areas areas because we have the knowledge, we know where the places are,

where to go... the impact that Bangladesh is experiencing isn't because of what Bangladesh is doing...it is problems caused by countries far away from Bangladesh causing the climate change but it's the poorest countries that are carrying the burden and their citizens who are suffering the almost catastrophic impacts with their livelihoods destroyed... in Pakistan, in Afghanistan, India, it is the same and all the communities, relatives, friends, the diaspora all come together to raise funds for their countries. We care about our countries, we are strong communities here and we come together to support the people back in our countries. It's our history, our people we can't sit back - we owe them that (UK KI 10).

So, alongside and embedded within the family connections and ties, religious beliefs and attachments, social and emotional bonds with places of origin and identity and civic obligations which constitute South Asian transnationalism from below, which has all been charted previously, are South Asian transnational diasporic environmental rationalities, motivations and understandings related to the climate emergency in South Asia. As the quote from one of our participants above demonstrates, this environmental rationality includes an understanding and explanation of climate coloniality; the structural, historical and contemporary dynamics of the ecological crisis facing South Asia. The environmental/climate coloniality aspects of South Asian transnationalism from below have been previously unrecognized by the academy.

South Asian climate transnationalism occurs simultaneously across different localities, different temporalities and at different scales, with communities organizing collectively to raise awareness, funds and material resources, as well as giving their time, skills, knowledge and labour, in order to ameliorate the impacts of climate change and climate coloniality, with these actions being at least partly rationalized and motivated by an awareness of the contemporary impacts and historical (colonial) causes of the climate emergency across South Asia. Immediate responses to ceaseless climate crises take the form of the distribution of resources such as food, clean water, clothing, and temporary accommodation in the form of tents and temporary shelter and reuniting families and communities separated during disasters. Reconstruction involves the rebuilding of homes and building capacity to prevent and soften the impact of future climate events. The huge significance, and ever-present nature, of South Asian diasporic transnational responses to permanent climate crises across South Asia was also fully recognised by our Key Informants within South Asia (SA). For example, in relation to Pakistan:

Diaspora...they seem to have more understanding than most of the impact of climate change...they (diaspora) have really come into action during this climate calamity. We (in Pakistan) have seen (climate-induced) earthquakes, floods, unbearable heatwaves, endless things all occurring at the same time... they (the diaspora)...really contribute financially and socially...we may not even

require the likes of the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank...if the potential (of the South Asian diaspora)...can be tapped further (SA KI 2).

Diversity and Scale of South Asian Climate Transnationalism

The scale of the climate transnationalism of some the South Asian diasporic organizations studied is large, and the speed of their response to a range of concurrent and endless climate-related events across the region can be very rapid. The Chief Executive of a UK-based South Asian diasporic environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO) described how this organization has over 10,000 volunteers in the UK and then over 35 contact hubs across South Asia, constituted by many more thousands of volunteers working on a variety of climate action projects. ‘Some (groups in the UK and South Asia) are very active and can have projects four or five times a week, others maybe once a month or once every few months’ (UK KI 6). The use of social media, and particularly *WhatsApp*, enables this vast and flexible network to respond very quickly to particular events. For example, following floods in Himachal Pradesh, Northern India in July 2023, the organization mobilized teams of support from Chandigarh (a city in Punjab, north-western India) to travel to work in a disaster response effort within hours of the floods occurring. ‘Any climate emergency, disaster, major flood...we respond. We send a disaster relief team to help respond and work on it’ (UK KI 6).

South Asian climate transnationalism is clearly now both highly significant and impactful. It no longer consists of sporadic, isolated and infrequent disaster responses, with defined start and end points or what has also previously been referred to as ‘intensive transnationalism’ (Rytter, 2010; Esnart and Sapat, 2016), a period of immediate crisis when ‘normal life’ is suspended and a transnational community comes together to collectively respond. South Asian diasporic climate action is now ever-present, continually emergent, an integral part of ‘normal life’. In fact, our key informants in both South Asia and the UK were keen to look beyond specific climate-induced disasters and events and emphasize the mundane, daily, intensifying challenges posed by climate change across South Asia, as well as the actual and potential role of the diaspora in helping populations to respond and adapt to these challenges. Thus, the representative of the large UK South Asian diasporic NGO referred to above (UK KI 6) describes only one of their projects aimed at tackling the long-term impacts of the climate emergency within the Sundarbans, located within both India and Bangladesh:

We were doing disaster relief work across the Sundarbans. We noticed that every year, these massive cyclones are ripping through all the villages and everybody is having to live waist-high in water, all the schools are closed, all the jobs are finished, and everything. Then we actually said ‘this is not a disaster-relief issue, this is a climate change issue. This place is getting flooded because there’s no more forest here, the forest is all gone. The villages are exposed to that climate impact’. We need to raise awareness of places like this so we can replant the forests. The carbon sequestration

of mangroves is greater than any other plant species in the region, so it does a tremendous job of storing carbon. The mangroves then bring back all these various fish and fauna to the region, which live in that space and that area, so it can increase so much biodiversity. We are working with local women and local villages and local village panchayats, who then earn money to redevelop their own region. You know, like women who are working for the first time, they're getting jobs and they're planting. They can also sell the plants and generate income for their families and so on. We're trying to make it a win, win, win, win, kind of initiative. Our goal is to plant two million trees by 2026. We've planted 150,000 so far. It's a wonderful project...we hope it can be an example of civil society and a (diasporic transnational) charity organization working together to re-establish a forest.

This particular diasporic NGO was founded upon, and originally inspired by, the religious principles and ethos of Hinduism. However, the work of the organization is also now clearly guided by an articulated environmental rationality that both operates alongside Hindu beliefs and extends beyond them. The climate transnationalism of the organization certainly extends beyond Hindu and Indian populations, 'our work and our people are across all countries of South Asia...we are fighting the consequences of climate change and difficulty and poverty and inequality wherever we find it...we are a Hindu-based organization working in Pakistan, it was unheard of until now' (UK KI 6). Two of the other UK South Asian diasporic

organizations studied, one originating from Sikhism and the other from Islam, have also initiated mass tree planting and reforestation projects, again explained and justified via environmentalist as well as religious principles and extending to populations beyond their specific religious base. For example, the reforestation programme, comprised by the planting of 303 micro-forests, of the Sikh-based diasporic organization began in the Sikh majority state of Punjab, north-west India but now extends across the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir.

Two further UK-based diasporic organizations within this research project were explicitly and broadly South Asian *inter-faith* organizations and they are engaged in a wide range of projects to mitigate the impacts of climate change across South Asia, such as working with farmers in northern India to develop more sustainable agricultural practices to combat soil erosion, a decreasing water table, biodiversity loss and crop failure (and the life-threatening anxieties which accompany this) resulting from climate change, and '(ecological) consciousness raising and political education and peer support for people who want to undertake a climate justice campaign. So, we run webinars on different aspects of climate justice...trying to educate people...and encourage people to get involved in things' (UK KI 14). Contemporary South Asian climate transnationalism not only crosses South Asian religious boundaries but is also clearly and additionally motivated by secular, environmentalist principles and rationalities, as well as religious beliefs and principles, within transnational civil society. In fact, it was argued by the representatives of the inter-faith diasporic organizations who participated in this project that climate concerns were unique in bringing together South Asian communities who have often been divided – historically, politically, geographically and socially, as well as along religious lines:

It's really interesting how in the UK you'll have communities of Sikhs and communities of Muslims and communities of Hindus and Christians and they will be working together on climate and biodiversity...(there) obviously is a direct link there between the climate...how climate is cashing out in global south and how people want to feel a connection to their loved ones they have in the lands of their heritage and how climate is a threat to their loved ones and to the lands of their heritage as well (UK KI 14).

Thus, South Asian climate transnationalism is mobilizing highly differentiated, and often divided communities, around a common goal of fighting climate coloniality. Our UK Key Informants further suggested that the very experience of being 'diasporic' was also a powerful motivator for, and an aspect of, climate transnationalism. Having a connection to people and places beyond one nation, particularly if that attachment is to places being severely impacted by climate change, can shape climate action, 'there's that sense (for the South Asian diaspora) of being part of a wider global community that binds you all' and if 'you're people and places are in a climate frontline country then that kind of helps people transcend their idea of distance' (UK KI 4). If one has a direct connection to people and places that are undergoing highly damaging transformations as a result of climate change and climate coloniality, the threats of the latter are not some distant threat or future concern, the consequences are very real, in the present and often demand immediate and collective responses which cross national borders.

Our KIs across South Asia unanimously identified the most significant impacts of the climate crisis to be upon ‘people’s livelihoods...on a micro level’ (SA KS 4). For example, across Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, excessive heat and year on year temperature rises are destroying and changing agricultural land, produce, livestock and practices whilst also leading to more frequent energy and power cuts and human migration away from now uninhabitable places. In major cities (such as Karachi and Delhi), outside life is increasingly impossible for human beings for at least 6-8 weeks each year. Regular flooding across the continent, alongside sea level rises and saline intrusion in coastal areas, is also destroying livelihoods based upon agriculture and fishing. The representatives of the South Asian diasporic organizations studied here recognise that the effects of, and their responses to, the climate crisis are embedded within and intertwined with the other struggles of everyday life - food security, shelter, health, increasing costs of living. The need to understand the climate crisis in the context of multiple everyday vulnerabilities experienced by communities in the global south is integral to diasporic engagement and the responses from the diasporic organizations articulate the embedded nature of the climate crisis in the everyday lives of communities in South Asia. Thus, all of the diasporic organizations within the research project are engaged in continual, ongoing education projects, across the UK and South Asia, focussing upon the threats of the climate emergency and efforts to guard against them. A UK South Asian diasporic Islamic organization educates and trains disadvantaged young people in the UK to raise funds for, plan and execute climate adaption projects in rural parts of Pakistan, and UK KI 13 explains:

My main passion is justice...ensuring people's voices are heard and listened to ...we use the mosque as a platform (to engage in climate work)...we have worked in the Hunza Valley in Pakistan...they have more glaciers (there) than anywhere else in the world outside of the polar regions. They have over 7,500 glaciers and they are melting. These floods (in 2022)...was a lot to do with the heatwave which melted some of the glaciers. That region...provides water for the entire Pakistan so it impacts everyone...we work with the communities there to make them a bit more resilient...we have youth development...we're based right in the heart of one of the most socially deprived areas (of the UK)...we help these youngsters who are from these areas fundraise. Then they'll travel (to the Hunza Valley)...and they'll project manage some work...it's not about poverty tourism...they have to make tough decisions...they have to physically fundraise for it...they see life outside of their own bubble...they see the actual effects of climate change in the global south.

Again, we see here how climate transnationalism (from below) is connected to South Asian religious principles/institutions but also involves an articulation of environmentalist and climate justice arguments. A further UK Key Informant (UK KI 9) explains that, 'we do plantation, we work on food systems, we work on renewable energy, we work on agriculture, we work on regenerative methodologies to rehabilitate villages that have faced migration as a result of climate change...it is *constant, daily, yearly*' (our emphasis). UK KI 6 describes how the large diasporic NGO discussed earlier undertakes:

humanitarian campaigns, environmental campaigns, social efforts...we have

environmental projects around the world which include tree plantations and advocacy efforts, education projects...we build computer labs, develop toilets and sports projects...there are around 17 projects all happening at the same time

This continual, wide ranging, ever-present transnationalism from below in the face of multiple, concurrent and ceaseless crises and threats from climate change across South Asia, and the articulation of these threats as propelled by historical and contemporary climate coloniality, is precisely what we mean by contemporary climate transnationalism.

Conclusions

The ravages of the global climate emergency are unevenly and inequitably spread geographically, as a result of colonial and racialized histories and presents of exploitation, extractivism, dispossession and unequal resource use (Sultana, 2022), with increasingly frequent climate-induced disasters and crises and the climate-related destruction of human and non-human life, infrastructure, agriculture, water supply and livelihoods concentrated within the global south. South Asia is currently on the front line of this climate emergency. In this paper, we have introduced and charted the nature, and some of the differing scales and types of, South Asian climate transnationalism as a response to the unending plethora of crises precipitated by climate change across the region. We argue that concepts utilized within existing academic literature and research on the diaspora-climate action nexus, such as diaspora humanitarianism and intensive transnationalism, do not adequately capture the

nature, significance, diversity, scale and ever-presence of contemporary South Asian transnational diasporic climate action, or climate transnationalism.

We also contend here that while South Asian religions continue to play a significant role in motivating and inspiring some of the ever-present diasporic climate action studied in this paper, as environmental and climate concerns are intrinsic to many of these religious beliefs, much of this activity is also guided by environmental rationalities and arguments, and articulations of climate coloniality and notions of climate justice, which both cut across and exist independently of South Asian religious beliefs and attachments. In fact, we have also suggested that climate concerns, campaigns for climate justice and understandings of climate coloniality have the potential to mobilise religious communities that have been highly differentiated – historically, politically, geographically and socially – in working together, across faiths, towards a common goal. These secular, environmental motivations also combine with family ties, social and cultural networks, enduring attachments to places of origin and/or identity and transnational civic obligations in producing contemporary South Asian climate transnationalism.

It is remarkable that South Asian climate transnationalism has been previously unrecognized within the voluminous existing academic literature on South Asian diasporas and transnationalism. The very phenomenon of climate change and responses to it, perhaps more clearly than anything else, fundamentally challenges methodological nationalism, the critique of which spawned the very concept of transnationalism and over two decades of theoretical debate and empirical study within transnational studies. Furthermore, many of the South

Asian diasporic participants in our study suggest that climate concerns and a critique of climate coloniality are part of the very essence of being South Asian diasporic or transnational today, as the devastating consequences of climate change are now so real and constant within the lived experience of the people and places that the diaspora are connected to. Some of the diasporic organizations within our study have a long history of transnational climate action and this paper has revealed some of the diversity, varying scales and constant presence of contemporary South Asian climate transnationalism from below. However, our account here is only a preliminary attempt to fill a yawning gap within South Asian diaspora, migration and transnational studies and it is certainly not without its limitations. We have predominantly relied upon the discourses of South Asian diasporic organizations, and particularly leading representatives of those organizations, to reveal the nature, dynamics and impact of the climate transnationalism under scrutiny. Some of us have vehemently argued previously (for example, see Taylor et al., 2007; Taylor 2014) against global northern bias within studies of transnationalism and for the need to consider the multi-dimensional impact of transnationalism from below across the widest possible transnational space. This becomes even more vital when we recognize that South Asian climate transnationalism operates within a post-colonial (or ongoing colonial) context wherein global north environmentalism has often served to reproduce and accentuate, rather than challenge, colonial domination and exploitation, extractivism, dispossession and climate-induced crises and disasters across the global south (Nagel and Staeheli, 2016; Sultana 2022). The representatives of the UK South Asian diasporic organizations who participated in our project, operating in the space between institutional (global, national and regional) and civil society responses to climate change, all saw themselves as subverting colonial and racialized power relations and countering forms of (racialized) exclusion from institutional climate governance and action, an exclusion (and responses to it) which has also recently been noted in relation to UK institutional

environmental action and governance (MacGregor et al., 2024; Tobin et al., 2023). Thus, UK
KI 6 commented:

I was at COP 26 (United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow)...17.8
per cent of the world's population are Indian...I looked around COP 26, only
less than one per cent, 0.5 per cent, were Indian-based thought, values,
representation, people...I met with...a leading activist on climate response for
Africa...we really discussed how...people across Africa and in India don't even
really feel that they're at the table...(South Asia) is not under-represented, it's
not represented...Some of the poorest people in the world, who haven't caused the
carbon in the atmosphere and a lot of the effects of climate change are being
severely punished for it and not being represented in the solutions for that as well...
our mission is to solve that through work, not only from speaking about it, but...
being representative, trying to get a seat at the table.

Furthermore, our South Asian Key Informants, experts on key climate challenges across the
region, unanimously argued that institutions involved in climate disaster response and climate
adaption and governance across Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan needed to engage far
more strategically and fully with South Asian diasporic organizations involved in a wide
variety of climate action. Nevertheless, there is clearly much more work to be done in order
to evaluate the actual impact of the climate transnationalism discussed in this paper upon the
lived experience of those living on the front line of the climate emergency across South Asia.
We do hope that this paper might inspire such future research.

REFERENCES

Adaawen, S. (2022, April). *Human Capital and Mobility at the Service of the Green Economy*. International Centre for Migration Policy Development. https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/58474/file/MIEUX_GreenEconomyHumanMobility_EN.pdf

Aldrich, D. (2011). The Externalities of Strong Social Capital: Post-Tsunami Recovery in Southeast India. *Journal of Civil Society*, 7 (1), 81-99.

Almeida, P, Gonzalez Marquez, L.R. and Fonsah, E. (2024). Forms of Climate Action. *Sociology Compass*, 18 (2), 1-15.

Chatterji, J. and Washbrook, D. (Eds.) (2013). *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*. London and New York: Routledge.

Esnard, A.N. and Sapat, A. (2016). Transnationality and Diaspora Advocacy: Lessons from Disaster. *Journal of Civil Society*, 12 (1), 1-16.

European Union Diaspora Facility (EuDif). (2024, September). *Climate Action and Environmental Sustainability*. EuDif. <https://diasporaforddevelopment.eu/climate-action-and-environmental-sustainability>

International Organisation for Migration (IOM). (2024, September). *Diaspora for Climate Action*. IOM. <https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/diaspora-climate-action>

Hancock, R. (2020). Environmental Conversions and Muslim Activists. *Social Movement Studies*, 19 (3), 287-302.

Hunt, K. M. R. and Menon, A. (2020). The 2018 Kerala Floods: A Climate Change Perspective. *Climate Dynamics*, 54, 2433-2446.

MacGregor, S., Ali, N., Katz-Gerro, T., Walker, C. and Ahmad, Z. (2024). Holding up a Mirror: Researching Symmetrically to Explore Exclusion, Othering and Whiteness in Local Environmental Governance. *Local Environment*, 29 (5), 617-630.

Makhlouf, F. and Selmi, R. (2024). From Aspirations for Climate Action to the Reality of Climate Disasters: Can Remittances Play a Key Role in Disaster Response ?. *The World Economy*, 47 (11), 3487-3510.

Mooney, N. (2018). Sikh Millennials Engaging the Earth: Sikhi, Environmental Activism, and Eco-Enchantment. *Sikh Formations*, 14 (3-4), 315-338.

Nagel, C. and Staeheli, L. (2016). Nature, Environmentalism and the Politics of Citizenship in Post-Civil War Lebanon. *Cultural Geography*, 23 (2), 247-263.

Parry, S. A. (2023). Diaspora in Humanitarian Action: Analysing the Indian Diaspora's Humanitarian Potential and Efforts for 'Mother India'. *India Quarterly*, 79 (2), 157-174.

Peck, S. (2020). Transnational Social Capital: The Socio-Spatialities of Civil Society. *Global Networks*, 20 (1), 126-149.

Prill, S. (2015). Sikhi and Sustainability: Sikh Approaches to Environmental Advocacy. *Sikh Formations*, 11 (1-2), 223-242

Rehman, S. and Kalra, V.S. (2006). Transnationalism from Below: Initial Responses by British Kashmiris to the South Asian Earthquake of 2005. *Contemporary South Asia*, 15 (3), 309-323.

Rytter, M. (2010). Events and Effects: Intensive Transnationalism amongst Pakistanis in Denmark. *Social Analysis*, 54 (3), 90-106.

Sahoo, A. and Purkayastha, B. (Eds.) (2019). *Routledge Handbook of Indian Transnationalism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Smith, M.P. and Guarnizo, L.E. (Eds.) (1998). *Transnationalism from Below*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Sultana, F. (2022). The Unbearable Heaviness of Climate Coloniality. *Political Geography*, 99, 102638.

Taylor, S. (2014). The Diasporic Pursuit of Home and Identity: Dynamic Punjabi Transnationalism. *The Sociological Review*, 62 (2), 276-294.

Taylor, S., Singh, M. and Booth, D. (2007). Migration, Development and Inequality: Eastern Punjabi Transnationalism. *Global Networks*, 7 (3), 328-347.

Tedeschi, M., Vorobera, E. and Jauhiainen, J.S. (2022). Transnationalism: Current Debates and New Perspectives. *GeoJournal*, 87, 603-619.

Tobin, P., Ali, N., MacGregor, S. and Ahmad, Z. (2023). ‘The Religions are Engaging: Tick, Well Done’: The Invisibilization and Instrumentalization of Muslim Climate Intermediaries. *Policy Studies*, 44 (5), 627-645.

World Bank. (2019). Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook. *Migration and Development Brief 31: April 2019*. Washington DC, World Bank

World Bank Group/KNOMAD. (2024). *Migration and Development Brief 40: June 2024*.
World Bank-KNOMAD.