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# Snippets of India's Polar Research

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Nikhil Pareek

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## 5 **Abstract**

6 Distant non-<sup>1</sup> Arctic states, non government organisations, international organisations etc.  
7 have evinced interest and staked claim for engagement in the Arctic Council and thus Arctic  
8 has become a geopolitical, geo-economic issue of great importance in the recent times. India  
9 has cited climate change as well as impact and inter-connection between the Arctic climate  
10 and Indian monsoons due to the receding ice cover as a basis of its research, thus legitimising  
11 its role as an Observer and stakeholder. Despite the huge geographical distances between  
12 India and the Poles, it possesses an exceptional alpine region with the Himalayas in its  
13 background having polar characteristics to aid polar scientific research.

14

15 **Index terms—**

## 16 **1 Introduction**

17 With the continuously changing situation at the North Pole, witnessing record highs of the polar ice sheet melts  
18 and the corollary growth in the avenues to exploit the vast untapped hydrocarbon deposits as well as opening  
19 up of shorter shipping routes to commercial and lucrative development, the Arctic region is garnering attention  
20 of the global comity of nations including India, who are vying for a say and place in Arctic affairs.

21 Other than the Arctic Council members and littoral states, distant non-Arctic states, non government  
22 organisations, international organisations etc. have evinced interest and staked claim for engagement and thus  
23 Arctic has become a geopolitical, geo-economic issue of great importance in the recent times. India has cited  
24 climate change as well as impact and inter-connection between the Arctic climate and Indian monsoons due to  
25 the receding ice cover as a basis of its research, thus legitimising its role as an Observer and stakeholder. Despite  
26 the huge geographical distances between India and the Poles, it possesses an exceptional alpine region with the  
27 Himalayas in its background having polar characteristics to aid polar scientific research.

28 This paper tries to comment on India's scientific focus though the author acknowledges the lack of any formal  
29 education in science and has relied solely on National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research's (NCPOR) Annual  
30 reports and other inputs available in public domain. Some data has been analysed from a lay-man's perspective  
31 and the author is blameworthy for any wrongful extrapolation.

## 32 **2 II.**

## 33 **3 Research Focus**

34 Unlike the Arctic-8 countries namely Canada, Denmark, Finland, Russia, the USA, Sweden, Norway and Iceland,  
35 India does not have permanent research station/facilities within or close to the Arctic Circle. The town of  
36 Ny-Ålesund, Norway is being used as the international research base by Norway, France, Germany, Italy, the  
37 Netherlands, the UK, India, China, Japan, and Korea which have established research stations and conduct  
38 research from there. India had commenced its research presence in Arctic since 2007 and established its research  
39 station Himadri in 2008. Among the Asian countries, India lagged behind China, Japan and Korea in commencing  
40 its research at Arctic but on the other hand, it has the advantage of having the Himalayas as the third largest  
41 depository of ice outside of the Poles in its backyard. Considering that India mans its Arctic research station  
42 only between April to September every year and exacerbated by the huge distances and transportation costs  
43 involved, there are huge deficits in the output, depth and quality of Indian polar scientific research.

### 3 RESEARCH FOCUS

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44 India's Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and its executive arm, Earth System Science Organisation (ESSO)  
45 and National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) was constituted to understand and address the  
46 various aspects relating to earth processes for understanding the variability of earth system and for improving  
47 forecast of the weather, climate and hazards. The MoES has acknowledged that the Himalayas store the greatest  
48 concentration of snow apart from the Poles. The Himalaya range encompasses enormous variation in elevation,  
49 precipitation, biodiversity, and patterns of human livelihoods. (Singh., S.P and Thadani., Rajesh, 2015). The  
50 Ministry of Earth Sciences has been reiterating that its research activities are being focused at the Poles and the  
51 Himalayas. Indian research activities of the Cryosphere are concentrated in three major regions: (1) Antarctic  
52 region (2) Arctic region and (3) Himalayan region. (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2011). In order to obtain more  
53 comprehensive understanding of climate change, it is also required to have climate records from Arctic region  
54 and Himalayas in addition to the Antarctica. (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2011). The stated objective of Indian  
55 research also incorporates the study of the biogeochemical aspects of Himalayan ice and compare it with the  
56 polar environment. (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2011).

57 It is universally acknowledged that the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas exert a great influence on the  
58 regional and global climate due to their unique topography and affect the global atmosphere and fresh water  
59 flow on a massive scale. Moreover, there is Himalaya region in terms of forest cover, rainfall and biodiversity  
60 and a standard template cannot be applied. However, based on a cursory survey of NCPOR's seven Annual  
61 reports from 2012-13 to 2018-19 it appears that India has not devoted commensurate effort towards studying the  
62 Himalayas and its inter-linkages with the Polar environment. Indian research is also found deficient in studying  
63 the oft-quoted tele-connections between the Indian monsoons and Arctic snow recession. As per the Ministry of  
64 External Affairs (MEA) it was stated that the objective of Indian research included the study the hypothesized  
65 tele-connections between the Arctic climate and the Indian monsoon by analyzing the sediment and ice core  
66 records from the Arctic glaciers and the Arctic Ocean. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2013). Though India's  
67 research stations are located at both the poles, there are negligible attempts at co-relation of the data of the  
68 Poles among each other as well as with that of Himalayas.

69 It has been acknowledged by the MoES that there are over 9500 glaciers in the Himalayas, yet only symbolic  
70 study of the Himalayan Cryosphere is being undertaken. The detailed glacier inventory of Indian Himalayas  
71 (GSI, SAC) indicates presence of 9579 glaciers in the Himalaya, some of which form the perennial source of  
72 major rivers. (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2011).

73 As a developing country with agriculture as the mainstay for majority of its population, the climatic impacts of  
74 a warming planet leading to disruption in yields should be the focal point of Indian research. Glacier retreat and  
75 snow cover changes have contributed to localized declines in agricultural yields in some high mountain regions,  
76 including Hindu Kush Himalaya and the tropical Andes . (IPCC, 2019). Against the presence of various glaciers  
77 spread over great distances with varying ecological parameters as well as similar features available in neighbouring  
78 countries in the Himalayan region for study of mountain weather phenomena, environmental, biogeochemical and  
79 ecosystem variabilities, the studies on the same appear not to have been undertaken. Yet, against the huge and  
80 humongous data available, India is assessed to be undertaking mere superficial studies, data for most of which has  
81 been already documented and researched. Instead of carrying out research in novel and unexplored areas, India  
82 appears to be relying on historical data points. The MoES has acknowledged that it is conducting studies by  
83 'Identification of a few type glaciers such as Chota Sigri, Hamta and others for which some previous glaciological  
84 data are available, for detailed glacial assessment and mass balance studies.' (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2011).

85 In the Himalayas, a pilot expedition to the Batal and the Sutri Dhaka glaciers in Himachal Pradesh was  
86 undertaken by a five-member team during August -September 2013, as a prelude to the initiation of a major  
87 long-term program of cryosphere studies in the Himalaya. The team, during its month-long expedition, established  
88 a network of stakes on the glaciers to collect data for mass balance studies. (MoES Annual Report 2013-14).

89 Based on the aforesaid, two issues stand out that firstly India appears to be focussing only on those glaciers  
90 for which preliminary data is already available and secondly the pace of research appears to be tardy. From a  
91 lay-man's viewpoint, expeditions marked by its duration (one month) should not be the parameter, especially  
92 during the inception stages of any project.

93 A systematic long-term scientific investigation of Himalayan glaciers with objective "to understand the response  
94 of Himalayan Cryosphere to the changing climate and its hydrological impacts" has been carried out. Six selected  
95 benchmark glaciers (Sutri Dhaka, Batal, Bara Shigri, Samudra Tapu, Gepang and Kunzam) of Chandra basin,  
96 western Himalaya have been monitored for their changes. (MoES Annual Report 2019-20).

97 Despite commencing research at Arctic in 2007, the MoES has also acknowledged that 'systematic studies if  
98 (of) the cryospheric domain of the Arctic is as yet to be initiated.' (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2011).

99 Figure 1 placed below depicts the number of papers on various subjects based on data contained in the  
100 NCPOR's seven Annual reports from 2012-13 to 2018-19 which shows that Himalayas has been covered mere  
101 5.65% (25/442\*100) which appears to be grossly inadequate. The papers on Himalayas are placed in Table 1. A  
102 connected issue is that there is no data available on overnight stay by the ESSO scientists near Himalayas which  
103 could have given more clarity on the research efforts. In short, the Himalayas which possess many similarities  
104 with the Poles have been little studied and thus less understood. Since the Himalayas are water towers for nearly  
105 one-sixth of the human population including India, the scientific efforts to understand and co-relate with the  
106 climate change should form the bulwark of research efforts. Since NCPOR is the sole and pioneer institution

107 heralding polar as well as ocean research, this duplication can be attributed to one of the following two reasons. It  
108 is assessed that the main reason for such duplication is to enhance the number of publications so as to give volume  
109 and credibility to the research. It is brought out that one paper from Fridtjof Nansens Institutt in 2013 had  
110 commented that 'Looking at India's research activities in terms of publication output the annual numbers have  
111 been modest. (Stensdal, 2013). The other reason for duplication could be to embellish the authors' curriculum  
112 vitae.

113 Though the author is ill-equipped and unqualified to comment on the co-relation/ similarity between the  
114 subjects, yet as per the Table 2 placed below, it is seen that the duplicated papers stand at 6.33%. Some other  
115 instances of similar papers are placed at Table 3, which have been tabulated from a lay-person's perspective and  
116 specialists from the subject can offer elaborate comments.

117 It is recommended that there must be stringent evaluation of the stream of publications from a re-  
118 searcher/subject utilising the same data and same theory and thus avoid duplication. The practice of thorough  
119 review of all scientific literature on the subject, formulation of the idea/objective of the research and designation  
120 of the subject part of the research along with a self-declaration by the researcher are few tools that can cease  
121 such blatant publishing violations. The ethics and methodology of utilising the data obtained from government  
122 sensors/equipment deployed at various locations is a separate study in itself and is being skipped here.

## 123 **4 b) Papers on Health**

124 Another feature on visits by Indian researchers as part of Indian expeditions to the Antarctic and Arctic shows  
125 that the duration of visit of individual scientists remains close to one month, generally. Considering the long  
126 distances involved, need for acclimatisation and other logistics requirements, it is recommended that such short  
127 duration visits could be substituted by longer durations for greater productivity.

128 Though the duration of stay of NCPOR personnel at Antarctica is not given out in Annual Reports 2010-11  
129 yet three papers put in the NCPOR Annual Report 2012-13 with the under-mentioned titles imply that the stay  
130 in Antarctic was for one year. This fact is neither corroborated by the data in the particular year's annual reports  
131 nor the prevailing precedents of Indian expeditions. The particular papers are:- The contention is also shaken by  
132 another paper titled 'Psychological Health in the summer team of an Indian expedition to Antarctica' (Ser No.  
133 18 NCPOR Annual Report 2015-16) and the particulars of duration of Indian Expeditions to Antarctic given in  
134 Table 4, which also affirms that Indian expeditions are launched during the Antarctic summer months and not  
135 once in any NCPOR annual report, year long residence is given out. It seems that these papers may be based on  
136 data falsification and NCPOR must subject its papers to Retraction Watch Database and other similar tools for  
137 credible output. Off late, there has been a flurry of retraction of scientific papers on grounds of plagiarism and  
138 image duplication. 'While 127 papers retracted might be a fraction of the number of papers published each year  
139 from India, it is still a huge number considering how reluctant journal publishers are in retraction' (The Hindu,  
140 2019). The purpose as well as credibility of NCPOR to function as an authentic, reliable repository is shaken by  
141 the aforesaid instances and a corrigendum may well serve to keep its scientific integrity intact.

## 142 **5 c) Attendance of Commission on the limits of Continental 143 shelf (CLCS) Meetings**

144 On perusal of NCPOR Annual reports, it is also seen that India has been deputing scientists to attend the CLCS  
145 meetings rather than sending experts on legal/technical issues, as is the practice by all important countries. A  
146 brief on the United Nations Commission on the limits of Continental shelf is given below. As per the List of  
147 experts for the purposes of article 2 of Annex VIII (Special Arbitration) to the Convention (UN.org, 2020), India  
148 does not have any experts in the following three fields:- issue in its Eastern offshore remains unfinished and  
149 unresolved.

150 Maritime legislation and marine legal order along with global ocean governance is a separate field and requires  
151 constant and updated domain expertise. A corollary to this is found in attuning domestic laws and legislation to  
152 UNCLOS. Another connected feature is participation in the other two exclusive bodies set up under UNCLOS  
153 namely International Seabed Authority, International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Based on information  
154 compiled from NCPOR Annual reports at Table 5 placed below, it is clear that diverse personnel as well as  
155 persons not acquainted with the domain knowledge are being sent for maritime legislation and legal order related  
156 work which may not do justice to the expertise required.

## 157 **6 Conclusion**

158 India can derive parallels between its Antarctic expedition's scientific expertise and legacy as also as the state  
159 having the Third Pole, the Himalayas in its backyard to boast its credentials. India can put forward the Arctic  
160 governance example to build trust and foster intergovernmental cooperation to bring together India, China,  
161 Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and also Myanmar and Bangladesh among nations that are impacted  
162 by the developments in the Himalayan-Third Pole region. It is prudent that India's neighbours be coopted  
163 in a broad strategy so that no only India's position is strengthened but the resources are not monopolized by  
164 certain countries alone. It will pay handsome dividends to assume support of Asian partners and assume a lead

## 6 CONCLUSION

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165 position in sustained deliberations to obtain a lucrative and mutually beneficial arrangement. Among the Asian  
166 nations, India and China have been enriched by the observer status in the AC and can bring forth the insight and  
167 experience for the region's benefit. However, the dimension of the India was yet to enter into agreements with the  
168 Eastern offshore neighbours and thus the issue remains suspended. In conformity with the decision taken at its  
169 twenty-sixth session (CLCS/68, paras35-36), and in the absence of communications conveying developments in  
170 this regard, the Commission instructed the subcommission to examine the information submitted in respect of the  
171 western offshore region of India in the Arabian Sea and not to consider the part of the submission relating to the  
172 eastern offshore region of India, comprising the eastern offshore region of mainland India in the Bay of Bengal and  
173 the western offshore region of the Andaman Islands. (<https://un docs.org/en/clcs/50/2>). Thus India's maritime  
174 limitation From the view of a non-science prism, the scientific progress and research by India appears to be  
175 sufficient in quantity but lacking in quality. In any case, India has been notorious for falling to the tactics of  
176 predatory journals with a view to have a sufficiently large quantity of publications with scant focus on the quality  
177 of the output. According to 2015 estimates, more than 8,000 predatory journals churn out more than 400,000  
178 items a year, and India –which has also seen a spurt in high-quality scientific publications –contributes more than  
179 one-third of the articles in predatory publications. ??Patwardhan, Bhushan. 2019). India's academic institutions  
180 of national importance are found to be ranked poorly on ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities) as  
181 well as SCImago Institutions Ranking World Reports. The governmental research organisations have also fared  
182 similarly, though the participation in international conferences, seminars and meetings is coloured with diplomatic  
183 and multilateral foreign policy hues rather than recognition of its scientific accomplishments.

184 There appear to be a severe disconnect between the professed scientific goals of Indian polar scientists and there  
185 is insufficient focus on academic culture for excellence in selected fields. The situation is adversely compounded  
186 by plethora of international conferences, meetings and events, most of which are organised in popular destinations  
187 taking away both time and resources. Scientific (mis)conduct is examined as a historical phenomenon borne of  
188 the interaction between individuals' aspirations and the systems that impose, measure, and reward scientific  
189 output in particular ways. (Shahare, 2020). It is assessed that the overwhelming influence of social milieu and  
190 bureaucratic practices on India's bodies like NCPOR is also not conducive to scientific excellence. The enhanced  
191 role of institutional practices, social structures, performance audits and inspections, and political direction can  
improve the situation to a considerable extent. <sup>1</sup>

### 1

on Himalayas in NCPOR Annual  
Reports (2012-13 to 2018-19)  
a) Duplication  
A worrying issue noticed by perusing the  
NCPOR's

[Note: 56( )]

Figure 1: Table 1 :

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Figure 2: Table 2 :

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Figure 3: Table 3 :

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<sup>1</sup>Year 2021 F © 2021 Global Journals Snippets of India's Polar Research

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**4**

Figure 4: Table 4 :

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Figure 5: Table 5 :

Snippets of India's Polar Research

Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (as at 28 January 2016) ([https://www.un.org/Depts/los/settlement\\_of\\_disputes/experts\\_special\\_arb.htm](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/settlement_of_disputes/experts_special_arb.htm))

iii. List of experts in the field of navigation, including pollution from vessels and by dumping, maintained by the International Maritime Organization (as at 8 April 2019) ([https://www.un.org/Depts/los/settlement\\_of\\_disputes/experts\\_special\\_arb.htm](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/settlement_of_disputes/experts_special_arb.htm))

Also, none of the six experts named by India in the field of protection and preservation of the marine environment maintained by the United Nations Environment Programme (communicated on 8

November 2002) is from NCPOR. (<https://www.un.org/>)

Year Depts/los/settlement\_of\_disputes/experts\_special\_arb.htm) The origin of 2021 the term Continental Shelf is exclusively based on its geomorphologic concept.

The

58 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is one of the most important

Voluminous accomplishments in the development of international law in the twentieth century. Despite the fact that there is a (L & T) Legal and Treaty division at MEA, (<https://www.mea.gov.in/divisions.htm>) it is seen that instead of sending domain experts, India has been sending diverse personnel including NCPOR scientists for CLCS meetings, in which the sovereign's claims on maritime boundaries are at stake. The presentation of the submission to the Commission was made on 16 August 2010 by Shailesh Nayak, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, head of delegation, Anil Kumar Chaubey, Scientist, National Institute of Oceanography, and Narinder Singh, Joint Secretary and Legal Adviser, Ministry of External Affairs. The delegation of India also included Manjeev Singh Puri, Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, and a number of advisers. (<https://un docs.org/en/clcs/68>).

It is vital to point out that notes verbales had been submitted to the UN

of CLCS by Myanmar on 04 August 2009, Bangladesh on 29 October 2009 and

Oman on 19 May 2010 regarding delimitation of maritime boundaries with

India. However, till September 2019

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Figure 6:

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