

THE CLIMATE WITHOUT, THE HUNGER WITHIN

The climate crisis reflects not just emissions, but the ego driving humanity's destructive behaviors.



ACHARYA PRASHANT

For more than three decades now, the evidence on climate change has been accumulating with a consistency that science rarely achieves. Each year's measurements confirm and extend the last. The warming is real, it is accelerating, and its costs are being paid unevenly, falling heaviest on those who contributed least to producing it. This much is established beyond reasonable argument.

And yet something in us does not quite respond to it as established fact. The Centre for Science and Environment's State of India's Environment 2026 report offers the latest occasion to notice this. In 2025, extreme weather events struck on ninety-nine percent of all days between January and November, killing 4,419 people and destroying 17.41 million hectares of cropland; four years ago, the crop damage figure stood at just over 2 million hectares. Thirty states and union territories experienced extreme weather for eight consecutive months. The report additionally warns that seven of the nine planetary boundaries that define a safe operating space for life on earth have now been breached, among them climate change, freshwater depletion, and ocean acidification, whose acidity has increased by thirty to forty percent since the in-

dustrial era. The Germanwatch Climate Risk Index 2026 ranks India ninth among the most climate-affected countries across the last three decades. These are not projections. They are last year's account, and the year before that, and the year before that, each worse than the one preceding it.

And that absence of response is where the inquiry must begin.

THE ENGINE WE WILL NOT LOOK AT

The standard diagnosis runs as follows: irresponsible media, short-sighted politicians, corporations with a stake in inaction, and a public that is somehow their passive victim. This diagnosis is enormously comfortable, because it locates the problem everywhere except inside the person making it. Watch how quickly it comes, and notice what it does for the one who deploys it: it produces the sensation of moral clarity at no cost whatsoever. You have identified the villains; you have remained among the innocent.

The less comfortable diagnosis is this: the media shows what you demand, at the resolution your attention sustains. The politician campaigns on what wins votes; you supply the votes. The platform amplifies what earns engagement; you supply the engagement. These are not independent systems operating above and beyond you. They are mirrors, returning to you, at industrial scale, the shape of your own preferences. The indifference to the climate crisis is not being manufactured and delivered to a reluctant public. It is being produced by that public and



then reflected back to it in a hundred formats.

In the weeks since the CSE report was published, no parliamentary session has taken it up as urgent business, no prime-time programme has devoted a full hour to its findings, and the news cycle has moved on with the indifferent efficiency it always displays when the story does not flatter, frighten, or entertain. The 4,419 dead have been noted and filed.

Now ask the deeper question: what produces the indifference itself? Here the answer is precise, and it has a name. The ego, the acting centre that organises all experience around the felt sense of "I am this, and this must be protected and expanded," is not merely indifferent to the climate crisis. It is the climate crisis. The carbon dioxide molecule and the ego are not separate phenomena; one is the exhaust of the other.

The objection will come: surely self-interest, if nothing else, would eventually compel a response. The data affects bodies, harvests, livelihoods; these are not

abstract costs. But the ego's relationship with the body it inhabits is not one of loyalty. The man who straps explosives to himself does not do so despite his ego; he does it because of it. The ego, in its most concentrated expression, will destroy the very body it uses as its vehicle rather than surrender the identity it has built around that body. Climate change will claim harvests, displace families, and raise temperatures that the body must endure. The ego registers all of this and continues regardless, because the ego is not protecting the body. It is protecting the story it has constructed around the body.

Consider what actually drives the numbers. The sense of incompleteness that propels a young professional to book a flight to a destination he has already mentally photographed, to build a house with rooms that will rarely be used; this is not a rational economic decision. It is the ego's oldest and most relentless reflex: I am insufficient as I am; adding, acquiring, displaying will resolve the in-

sufficiency. That resolution never arrives, because the insufficiency is not material. It is structural. The ego cannot be filled because it is not a vessel; it is a motion. And that motion, sustained across a billion households, is what the climate data records.

The same logic, followed far enough, arrives at an image the CSE report captures with particular starkness. From January to June 2025, at least forty-three people were killed near tiger reserves across India, as tigers moved increasingly into human-occupied spaces; sixty million people now live within tiger landscapes across twenty states. What is being described here is not a wildlife management problem. It is the ego's cartography. The forest that once constituted the tiger's world has been consumed, incrementally and without ceremony, by the same restlessness that consumes everything the ego touches. The tiger does not encroach on human settlement; the settlement encroaches on the tiger, and then is startled to find the tiger there. The

incompleteness that builds one more city boundary into the forest's edge is the same incompleteness that raises the atmospheric carbon count. It is one motion, wearing different faces.

WHERE THE EGO GOES TO WAR

The logic sharpens when you follow it to its most concentrated expression. The global military-industrial complex, across its routine operations separated entirely from active conflict, accounts for an estimated five and a half percent of the world's annual carbon dioxide emissions; if the world's militaries were a single country, their combined footprint would rank fourth globally, above Russia. The F-35 fighter jet consumes nearly six thousand litres of fuel per flight hour; for every hundred nautical miles flown, it emits as much carbon dioxide as an average petrol car produces in an entire year. This is the peacetime cost.

Now add the wars. A recent peer-reviewed study published by researchers at Lancaster University and Queen Mary University of London has documented that the Israel-Gaza conflict generated approximately 33.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent across its active military operations, pre-war infrastructure, and projected reconstruction costs; a figure equivalent to the total annual emissions of Jordan, or the annual output of 7.6 million petrol cars. The first two months of bombing alone emitted more carbon than the annual footprint of twenty of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations.

What produces these wars? Not resources in the

abstract; resources do not fight. What produces them is the ego operating at its most collective and most grandiose: national identity that cannot tolerate a rival's existence, religious certainty that cannot survive proximity to doubt, civilisational pride that converts every negotiation into a test of dominance. The theological ego, the territorial ego, the ego that believes its god has issued it a geography and a mandate: each carries its carbon cost. It is expressed in jet fuel, in ordnance, in the concrete required to rebuild what the ordnance destroys.

THE DIRECTION OF THE INQUIRY

There is one dimension of the present situation that honest speaking requires naming plainly, because the language of climate policy almost never does. What has already occurred is not reversible. The warming registered thus far is not waiting for a policy decision to set it in reverse. The glaciers retreating from Himalayan peaks will not return within any time-frame that has meaning for the people now living below them. Seven of the nine planetary boundaries have been crossed; the ocean that absorbs our carbon is itself now more acid than at any point in the industrial era. The carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere will not fall because a conference was convened in Belém or a pledge was signed in Paris; it will fall, if it falls, because the behaviour that produces it changes, and that behaviour will only change when the internal condition that drives it is seen for what it is.

This is not a counsel of

despair, but it is also not a counsel of hope; hope is precisely what the ego reaches for when it wants to acknowledge a problem without changing anything. What it is, rather, is the beginning of the only inquiry worth undertaking: not what must the government do, not what must the media cover, not what must the corporation sacrifice, though all of those questions have genuine answers; but what is this in me that keeps looking elsewhere, that receives news of 4,419 deaths, of harvests destroyed across 17.41 million hectares, of thirty states battered by extreme weather for eight consecutive months, and finds, within the same news cycle, that its attention has already moved on to something that flatters it more, frightens it less, or simply requires nothing of it at all?

That question, asked honestly and without the ego's habitual conversion of discomfort into either self-punishment or righteous despair, is the only place the climate crisis can begin to be understood for what it is. Not because individual introspection replaces systemic action; it does not. But because without it, every systemic intervention meets the same ego it was meant to redirect, now wearing the costume of environmentalism, accumulating its green credentials, and continuing, in every domain it has not examined, precisely as before.

The earth does not register your intentions. It registers what you burn.

Acharya Prashant is a teacher and author whose work centres on self-inquiry and its application to contemporary life.