

***An Interview with Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the International
Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)***

by Ugo Bardi, Nov 13 2010

1. *Dr. Pachauri, first of all, thanks a lot for agreeing to this interview. Then, could you tell us something about you? Your curriculum bristles with degrees, honors, awards, chairmanships, professorships and all the rest; but I think the public does not have such a clear idea of who you are, at least in Western countries. What is your cultural background, where did you grow up, and how did you ended up being the chairman of the IPCC? How did the fact of having been born in India affect your career? And what is TERI doing?*

I am not sure whether I can say very much about myself. I started my career as an engineer and during the course of my Masters degree programme in industrial engineering I took economics as a minor field, and found it so stimulating that I decided to switch my academic interests and ended up becoming an energy economist. I was one of the few people who was involved in establishing the International Association for Energy Economics (IAEE), a worldwide professional body of which I also became President subsequently in 1988. In the course of my academic work I became acutely conscious of the environmental impacts of the entire energy cycle. This took me into a study of the science underlying climate change. The effect of whatever I studied was that I became convinced of the seriousness of climate change as one of the most important challenges facing the energy economics profession. During the annual presidential lecture to the IAEE in 1988 I highlighted the importance of dealing with climate change as an integral part of future energy policy (much to the chagrin of some of my very conservative colleagues in the membership of the IAEE). The production and use of energy is at the core of what has caused human induced climate change. I became involved as a Lead Author in the 2nd Assessment Report of the IPCC, and was elected as Vice-Chairman in 1997 for the Third Assessment Report cycle. I then decided to run for the Chair of the IPCC in 2002, and was fortunate to be elected to that position by a very convincing margin.

Being born in India has made me acutely conscious of the problems of poverty and – now in the light of what I have learnt in the field of climate change – the vulnerability of the poor to the impacts of climate change. However I do regard climate change as a global problem, solutions for which must involve all sections of society from corners of the globe. TERI is a not-for-profit institution working on research in a diverse field of activities, the common objective of which is to create solutions for attaining a sustainable pattern of development. The Institute has grown steadily since it launched its programme of research activities in 1982, and now has close to 1 000 people working for the institute, largely in India but with a notable presence in other parts of the

world as well. We also established in 1988 an institution of higher learning, the TERI University which runs Ph.D and Masters programmes in a number of subjects, with authority to grant these degrees as a deemed university approved by India's University Grants Commission.

2. *As chairman of the IPCC, you have been subjected – as it could have been expected – to all sorts of attacks, the most recent one being the series of personal attacks directed against you by Richard North and Christopher Booker on the Telegraph. It is good that you succeeded in having truth re-established and in obtaining an apology letter from the Telegraph. Unfortunately, lies stay alive as legends for a long time in the minds of people. Could you tell us your view on these events? Did the Telegraph get away with just a few lines of reluctant apology or – hopefully – there is more that they will have to do to repay the damage they have done?*

I never expected I would be subjected to attacks particularly with people employing the lowest levels of falsehoods. I find it curious that these attacks have come as an avalanche almost as though they were coordinated and launched a full two years after the IPCC received the Nobel Peace Prize along with former Vice-President of the US, Al Gore. I tried very patiently to see that the Sunday Telegraph would retract the scurrilous article that started the spate of repetitive publications and reports that followed. However they were deaf to decent and justified communications from me to do so, and finally I had no choice but to engage a competent legal firm in London to pursue the possibility of instituting legal proceedings in the UK with defamation charges. After a persistent exchange that my lawyers had with this newspaper they published an apology and paid legal fees directly to the firm I had engaged to the tune of about £ 53,000. I suppose I could have pursued my legal case to a logical conclusion and insisted on payment of damages, which I would have donated to a charity, as I do with any funds I receive other than my salary from TERI. However I feel I have better uses of my time than to get involved in a legal campaign, particularly since the newspaper had to retract their damaging article against me and publish an apology, and cough up legal expenses of around £ 53,000.

3. *The recent anti-science campaign tells us that we must have done some serious mistakes in the way science is presented if it is so easy to sway the public with lies and fancy stories. As chairman of the IPCC you have a strong responsibility in doing something to change the way science – and in particular climate science – is presented to the public. What do you think should be done in terms of priorities? Have you devised plans in this sense?*

It is true that scientists are not always the best communicators, and in the case of climate science this becomes a serious deficiency, because we are dealing with an area of direct interest to society at large. If we do not communicate the science of climate change to the public others, who are misinformed or have a vested interest, would fill up the vacuum. In the IPCC in particular we have

created very little capacity for dealing with this challenge, and certainly this has been at the cost of poor dissemination of the scientifically valid assessment of climate change, with the result that the IPCC and the scientific community have been at the receiving end from those who aim to question even those established findings that the IPCC has brought out on the basis of established observations and sound evidence. We hope that with the review carried out by the Inter Academy Council, and their identifying communications as an important part of IPCC activities, the governments who are the ultimate decision makers in the Panel will support the creation of adequate capacity within the IPCC structure.

4. *When we define “Anthropogenic Climate Change”, we mean that people are in large part responsible for the change. There seems to follow as a logical inference that less people would mean less climate change and hence less damage to the planet. That brings us to the controversial theme of “population control”, a term that was fashionable in the 1970 but that, today, seems to have faded from the political consciousness, at least in Western Countries. What is your opinion on the population issue? Especially from the viewpoint of your country, India, which many people define as “overpopulated,” how does the situation look?*

Population is certainly a determinant of economic activities that conventionally result in emissions of greenhouse gases, which are responsible for human induced climate change. But we cannot ignore the crucial role of consumption patterns which determine current emissions and have been responsible for cumulative emissions historically. For instance, energy consumption per capita in some poor countries is 100th of levels that are common in some of the most prosperous regions of the world. Given the fact that population control is a term that goes counter to the very concept of human rights, freedom of choice and liberty we cannot in democratic societies do more than create conditions by which individuals take fertility decisions that would voluntarily lead to lower rates of population growth. What is far more important and can be achieved in much shorter periods of time is an improvement in the efficiency of energy use and a reduction in per capita emissions. India's population is certainly large and still growing at a rapid rate, but its population density is still lower than several countries which are regarded as advanced and developed. Of course a country like India has to focus much more effectively on education of the girl child and ensure access to proper health care and social services. This would enhance human welfare apart from consequently leading to lower fertility levels.

5. *Climate change is just one of the many challenges that humankind is facing today: in addition to it there other forms of pollution, soil erosion, depletion of mineral resources, including crude oil and others. One problem that I see often is that people tend to see a single problem as the only one of any importance and disregard all the others. That is typical of the petty squabbles between "peak oilers" and "climate concerned", each one saying that one problem is more important than the other. You are in the privileged position of being at the*

head of the IPCC, but not being a specialist in climate science you may have a larger view than most of us. What do you think about the priorities we face? Which are the gravest problems and where should allocate our resources?

Essentially, what we should be focusing on globally is the attainment of a sustainable pattern of growth and development. In keeping with the definition of sustainable development put forward by the Brundtland Commission, such a pattern of development should meet the needs of the current generation without compromising on the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Climate change is therefore only part of a much larger problem, which involves the rapid depletion and degradation of the earth's natural resources and its fragile ecosystems. I believe we have to adopt policies and allocate resources for reviving and restoring the health of a range of global commons. We also have to keep human welfare at the centre of our efforts spreading across regions and across generations. I believe our gravest problem is the shift away from living in harmony with nature, and this can be corrected not only through innovation and new technologies but also through changes in lifestyles and behavioral patterns.

6. *In the recent outburst of discussion about climate change, I think we all have learned that a good story can catch people's attention much more than lifeless facts. So, could you tell us something about your recent novel?*

My novel "Return to Almora" is essentially a journey into understanding the essence of the human spirit and what constitutes the soul of a human being. The message that I have tried to craft through this book is to emphasize the fact that reaching a high level of spirituality and sublimation of human behavior does not require living in a monastery or renouncing the world. Spiritual development can be achieved by the most ordinary of human beings. The book is a total of over 400 printed pages, but I am amused that the same detractors who have attacked me through lies about my financial dealings and professional activities have not even spared my humble efforts as a novelist by pulling passages out of context and trying to tar my work which I believe most readers have found to be a source of some inspiration on human thinking and behaviour.
