



Book Review

Climate Justice in India

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Prakash Kashwan (ed.), Climate Justice in India, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2022, pp.264+xx,

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Climate Justice in India is a compilation of eleven insightful chapters (inclusive of the introduction and conclusion) authored by prominent researchers, based on empirical studies in their respective fields, related to climate justice. The book stands out amidst a myriad of writings in this area as it provides multiple perspectives on the issue of climate justice in India and its enormous impact on the marginalised – women, dalits and the poor. As stated by the Editor, the objective of this book is to bring aspects of social, economic and environmental justice as related areas to climate change debates in India (XVIII). The book primarily focuses on the threat that climate crisis majorly poses to the lives and livelihoods of the poor and marginalised groups. The strong contention of the authors is that the reasons for the rise of climate authoritarianism is the huge disparity in socio-economic inequalities and the widespread acceptance of political authoritarianism (XIX). The chapters in this book strongly argue that climate crisis is not merely a rise in

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temperature and its consequences but makes a clarion call for building social, economic and environmental resilience with respect to food, water, energy, transition to renewable energy, urbanisation and effective climate policies at the state and national levels (XIX). The most fascinating aspect of this well researched book is that the authors have used 'historically informed, empirically grounded and conceptually rich social science analysis, while engaging with issues related to climate justice in India' (7). Some of the authors have also used the idea of intersectionality to understand how gender and caste-based inequalities impact access to drinking water and the benefits of agro-ecological farming.

Chapter 1 authored by Prakash Kashwan and titled as *Climate Justice in India* begins with a detailed description of the COVID-19 crisis that India went through and how it impacted the dalits, adivasis, and other marginalised groups, who continue to be oppressed. During this period the Government of India opened coal mining to the private sector with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi declaring that he was 'unshackling coal mining from decades of lockdown' (3). But what needs to be noted here is that the welfare of the whole population of the coal miners who work under extreme conditions has been completely ignored. The author has used this example to demonstrate how Indian leaders respond to crisis and emphasises that 'the climate crisis is occurring in a world of extreme inequalities' (4). India houses the largest population of poor people. The close relation between climate crisis and socio-economic and political inequalities forms the basis of climate injustice. Various studies clearly highlight that the worst impacts of air pollution are being normalised because this would be damaging primarily for the marginalised who are voiceless politically. Thus, the author points out that India is a thriving ground for lot of injustices associated with climate crisis. The inability to stabilise climate system naturally exacerbates the inequalities and injustices associated with this.

The chapter also attempts to understand how colonisation, imperialism and capitalism have worsened the climate crisis, highlighting the causes for deep-seated inequalities and thus arguing that this would require deeper engagement which will have greater implications for environment and climate vulnerabilities. The author quotes a study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) which revealed that household cooking and heating contributed to around 40% of the pollution in Delhi in December 2020 and January 2021. This elucidates that women are the worst impacted because of indoor air pollution, in both rural and urban settings (11). Thus, climate crisis aggravates pre-existing inequalities. Hence, the author strongly argues that climate justice requires theories and insights from multiple disciplines. The author introduces concepts foundational to justice theory – distribution, procedural and recognition. The author also touches upon restitution and reparation – two ideas that are new to climate justice debates. The inability of the international community and the national government to ensure just climate mitigation is a clear indicator of the burden of this crisis on the marginalised.

The protection of resource rights and restitution of lost lands are codified in acts such as the Panchayat Act of 1996 and the Forest Rights Act of 2006. However, there are multiple instances which show how the state has failed to implement these laws because of the privileges enjoyed by the powerful actors in the State. Although dalits and other landless rural workers benefit from the provisions of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), they have never really materialised because of the non-recognition of dalits as agriculturists. The author also holds the corporate control of the economy as a major reason for the vanishing of the welfare state. As the oppressed lack representation they are not heard in the political and policy processes.

Chapter 2 titled *Urban Climate Justice in India*, authored by Eric Chu and Kavya Michael, focusses on how cities are extremely vulnerable to climate change due to rapid growth in population, gross socio-economic inequalities and the lack of proper infrastructure. The authors argue that theories of urban climate justice should take into consideration historically deep-rooted forms of inequalities and various other means by which climate change can increase their adversity. This chapter examines urban climate planning from the 1990s and demonstrates that the design should be a bottom-up approach which would include even urban planning and the need for equity which would be inclusive in terms of development, human rights and socio-economic transformation (27).

Indian cities are extensively seen to bear the brunt of climate change. However, the 74th Constitution Amendment Act of 1992 vested urban local bodies with the power to bring about sanitation, waste-management, infrastructure and development planning. The Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans also emphasised the need for market friendly reforms in urban infrastructure. Unfortunately, there has never been an overt environmental agenda in urban planning in India. The chapter concludes stating that environmental issues in Indian cities can be dealt with only by taking into consideration the infrastructural deprivation of the poor. Emphasis should be on the distributive, procedural and recognition equity. However, this could be challenging as evidence indicates that local plans are socially exclusive (44). It is extremely important that climate action in Indian cities should not just confine to addressing the inequal distribution of losses triggered by the climate crisis, but further look at how minority voices can be recognised and also focus on how the unequal distribution of human capabilities and developmental rights can be done away with (44).

Rahul Sharma and Parth Bhatia in their chapter titled *How just and Democratic is India's solar energy transition?* state that control

over energy infrastructure is highly political and this often leads to unequal electricity access. The chapter examines to what extent State policies ensure a just energy transition, by analysing energy democracy and energy justice. In India, consumer choices are confined to grievance channels and they have absolutely no voice in decision making and implementation (53). As per the research conducted by Moallemi et.al, majority of the renewable energy (RE) sources are owned by private corporations, due to the push for the same since 2000. As per the federal system in India, energy is listed as a concurrent subject, and the Central government provides assistance in planning and financing projects. States like Kerala have taken into consideration compensating communities whose lands have been acquired for conversion to solar parks. Similarly, the West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir governments too have incorporated social and environmental concerns in their policies regarding renewable energy transitions (67). However, the authors highlight that most states confine themselves only to the financial and technical aspects while implementing RE policies. Based on their survey of state RE plans, the authors indicate that though India is in the process of massively reconfiguring its energy system at a rapid pace, the implementation is abysmally lacking in terms of community ownership and control, thus falling short of energy justice concerns. The authors nudge for an RE framework that would take into consideration aspects of development and climate mitigation as well.

Chapter 4 authored by Vasudha Chhotray, focuses on Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh – two major coal producing states of India, and tries to understand how extractive regimes continue with their unjust practises in coal mining. In India, laws like the Coal Bearing Act 1957, the Mines and Minerals Act 1957, and the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013, and the Central ministries on coal and environment and forests, facilitate mineral resource

governance (77). However, with economic liberalisation in 1991, coal was opened for private sectors in 1993 and states started implementing stringent measures to deal with groups that resist. The author traces the history of coal mining in India, that majorly involves rural people and adivasis. With the shift to open-cast mining which was supported by the World Bank, environmental destruction intensified, as there are no adequate measures in place to control fly ash disposal, stack emissions and waste water treatment, thus inflicting irreparable damage to the environment. Using the examples of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, the author illustrates the impact of extractive regimes as they mine into the livelihoods of the local people. The transition to RE projects in the coal heartlands also throws up enormous problems – land grab and divestment of the local population, being major concerns. As both states transition to RE sources without proper settlements for the dispossessed, the rights of the victims continue to be violated. This chapter details issues from the perspective of the victims during the coal extraction regime and the later transition to the RE phase, and how these factors need to be taken into consideration for a just and democratic transition.

Haimanti Bhattacharya's chapter examines the interconnectedness between economic inequality and carbon emissions in India and its implications for climate justice. The author has relied on state level panel data of India from 1981-2008, to understand the impact of these factors on the economically weaker sections. The research findings indicate that there was a positive relationship between carbon emissions and economic inequality in the post-liberalization period that gained strength in the 2000's, in comparison to the 1990's. The author traces the reasons for this to the opening up of the markets, during the post liberalisation period, which increased the carbon footprint of the economically well off. It is a known fact that globally, rising carbon emissions will impact the poor severely. Thus, growing socio-economic

inequalities supplemented with climate crisis, will wreak havoc on the lives of the economically marginalised. The findings of this research also indicate that policies to reduce economic inequalities will mitigate carbon emissions as well. Thus the author moots for an efficient framework that would address both economic inequalities and carbon emissions for a sustainable environment.

Arpitha Kodiveri and Rishiraj Sen's chapter analyses the flaws in India's climate action plans at the state and national levels, and suggest ways by which these issues can be addressed. The authors quote the research study by Chandra Bhushan et.al to illustrate how laws like The Air Act 1981, Water Act 1974, Environment Protection Act 1986 and Forest Rights Act 2006, fail to contribute to effective climate action (118). The authors examine the loopholes in the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and the State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) and highlight how these fail in climate adaptation measures and issues related to marginalisation and climate injustice, in spite of identifying women and the poor as being vulnerable to climate change. Further, both documents do not focus on issues of inequality like caste and suffers from 'dalit blindness' (130)- problems that are pertinent to discussions on climate justice in India. Thus, both documents lack an intersectional understanding of the effects of climate change on women, Dalits and the poor who constitute the precarious population of our country. India, currently seems to be pursuing development aggressively, without paying heed to the root causes of climate vulnerability, socio-economic inequalities and discriminations based on caste and gender. The chapter calls for a reframing of laws and policies in this regard, for effective climate justice.

Prakash Kashwan's chapter focuses on the climate justice movements in India, (which he classifies into three streams-conventional climate activism in India, various people's movements and the contemporary climate movements,

including the youth movements) their political implications and to what extent these movements can help in reshaping climate justice in India. The author delves deep into the three most prominent environmental movements in India, namely, the Chipko movement, the Silent Valley movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan movement to understand their contribution to environmental causes. The detailed examination reveals that these movements extensively relied on middle class and international supporters, who overlooked the needs of the local communities in their fervent pursuit of environmental concerns (149). The author sees climate deniers, climate action delayers and those who deny the need for social justice with respect to environmental concerns as major obstacles in the path to climate justice movements. Demanding accountability from powerful market and state actors is indeed a primary requirement for effective climate action.

Srilata Sircar, in the subsequent chapter, argues that any engagement with climate justice would be incomplete in the Indian context, if it does not take into consideration caste-based inequalities. The chapter examines the various ways in which caste structures are reinforced in the Indian society, tracing its evolution from the colonial times to the recent covid years and its impact on the migrant workers. The author also touches upon urban infrastructure and issues of sanitation to highlight the plight of Dalits, who constitute a major proportion of sanitation workers. The Swachh Bharath Mission and the Smart Cities Mission are two programmes that completely ignore caste exploitation in the context of sanitation work (173). Through various examples, the author demonstrates how urban life sustains through continued caste-based exploitation. The chapter also exposes the wide gaps that exist between environmental movements and anti-caste politics and makes an urgent appeal to do away with eco-casteism, and to include ideas of Ambedkar in all environmental engagements.

Chapter 9, authored by Vaishnavi Behl and Prakash Kashwan, examines the glaring inequalities in access to water. They highlight how social inequalities and climate change exacerbate water injustice. The chapter analyses the lack of access to safe and clean drinking water and the various social inequalities that contribute to this. The authors use Gujarat and Uttarakhand as examples to understand the intersectional factors that impact access to water and how the immediate victims of this problem are women. Kimberle Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality (gender, class and caste in the Indian context) is used to understand the severity of water injustice and how water insecurity is different for different individuals based on the various social factors that constitute their identity. Climate change is definitely going to impact availability of ground water, especially for those who are marginalised who are often left to take care of themselves. Strong coalitions between state and non-state actors could be instrumental in bringing about social transformations. A diverse society like that of India would require multiple approaches to address embedded inequalities in the social structure so as to address water injustice.

The final chapter authored by Ashlesha Khadse and Kavita Srinivasan, looks at climate change in the context of the entry of more women into farming. The authors highlight how certain climate solutions impact women's rights over land and their livelihoods based on agriculture. Examples from the states of Kerala's Kudumbashree and Tamilnadu Women's Collective (TNWC) are used to illustrate how the women farmers' models in these states are worthy of emulation, as it gives more visibility to women farmers and its benefits to vulnerable women. The model used by these authors for their study is a combination of agrarian justice and climate justice, labelled as 'agrarian climate justice' (208). The authors advocate that issues of agrarian and climate justice need to be addressed by ensuring the rights of women farmers to hold

and control land. The challenges posed due to leasing of lands also need to be done away with by making tenancy laws more formal.

Climate Justice in India is a treasure house of information and data on the various concerns related to environmental issues. The authors have convincingly presented the need to look at this urgent crisis, and how it is closely connected to various social issues like gender, caste, water and other resources like coal, and the challenges to renewable energy transition. The book strongly argues for an inclusive approach in dealing with issues related to climate justice and speaks on behalf of those who have been rendered voiceless – women, Dalits, Adivasis and the economically impoverished. The authors emphasise how climate justice cannot be meted out by isolating it from other social security concerns that plague our society. The need for community engagement and efficient resource mobilisation are also integral to any engagement with climate justice. Laws, policies and implementation need to take into consideration the different sectors of the economy, thus broadening the scope of climate justice. This book stands out from others in this genre as it succeeds in demonstrating that climate justice is social justice as well.