

## Climate Justice in India

*Climate Justice in India* brings together a collective of academics, activists, and artists to paint a collage of action-oriented visions for a climate just India. They offer historically and socially grounded perspectives on justice implications for Indian society, politics, and economics. This unique and agenda-setting volume informs researchers and readers interested in topics of just transition, energy democracy, intersectionality of access to drinking water, agroecology and women's land rights, national and state climate plans, urban policy, caste justice, and environmental and climate social movements in India. It synthesizes the historical, social, economic, and political roots of climate vulnerability in India and articulates a research and policy agenda for collective democratic deliberations and action.

This crossover volume will be of interest to academics, researchers, social activists, policymakers, politicians, and general readers looking for a comprehensive introduction to the unprecedented challenge of building a praxis of justice in a climate-changed world.

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# Climate Justice in India

*Edited by*  
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## Abbreviations

ACCCRN	Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network
AKRSP [I]	Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India)
AMRUT	Atal Mission on Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation
AP	Andhra Pradesh
ASUS	Ambedkar Slum Utthan Sangathan
BCCL	Bharat Coking Coal Limited
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBA	Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan
CBDR	Common But Differentiated Responsibilities
CCL	Central Coalfields Limited
CDKN	Climate and Development Knowledge Network
CIL	Coal India Limited
CMM	Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha
CoP	Conference of Parties
CRDPs	Climate-Resilient Development Pathways
CSE	Centre for Science and Environment
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DGSM	Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal
EIA	Environment Impact Assessment
EIA/SIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessments
ERR	Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction
FLCs	Forest Labour Co-operatives
FRA	Forest Rights Act

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAG	Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group
GHGs	Greenhouse Gases
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GST	Goods and Services Tax
GW	Gigawatt
GWSSB	Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board
HPERC	Himachal Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission
HRtWS	Human Right to Water and Sanitation
HSAA	Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ICJ	India Climate Justice
ICJF	Indian Climate Justice Forum
IMF	International Metalworkers Federation
INDCs	Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JLG	Joint Liability Groups
JMACC	Jharkhand Mines Area Coordination Committee
JMM	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
JNNURM	Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission
JOHAR	Jharkhand Organization for Human Rights
KSSP	Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad
kWh	Kilowatt-hour
LARRA	Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act
LSGIs	Local Self Government Institutions
LVC	La Via Campesina
MAKAAM	Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MKSP	Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana
MMDRA	Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act
MP	Member of Parliament
MP	Madhya Pradesh
MW	Megawatt
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NAPCC	National Action Plan on Climate Change
NBA	Narmada Bachao Andolan
NCDHR	National Commission on Dalit Human Rights
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau

NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NESAPON	North Eastern Society for the Preservation of Nature and Wildlife
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NGT	National Green Tribunal
NHG	Neighbourhood Group
NRLM	National Rural Livelihoods Mission
NTPC	National Thermal Power Corporation
NTUI	New Trade Union Initiative
NVDP	Narmada Valley Development Project
OBC	Other Backward Classes
ODF	Open Defecation Free
PACS	Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies
PESA	Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act
PESA	Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
PMCCC	Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change
PSUs	Public Sector Undertakings
PV	Photovoltaics
RE	Renewable Energy
RECs	Rural Electric Co-operatives
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
RESCO	Renewable Energy Service Company
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
RTI	Right to Information
SAPACC	South Asian People's Action on Climate Crisis
SAPCCs	State Action Plans on Climate Change
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes
SECL	South Eastern Coalfields Limited
SHG	Self-help Group
SIPB	State Investment Promotion Board
SSP	Sardar Sarovar Project
T-Zed	Towards Zero Carbon Development
TERI	The Energy and Resources Institute
TNRLM	Tamil Nadu Rural Livelihoods Mission
TNWC	Tamil Nadu Women's Collective
TUED	Trade Unions for Energy Democracy
UAPA	Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act
UIDSSMT	Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme for Small and Medium Sized Towns

ULBs	Urban Local Bodies
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
UNFCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UP	Uttar Pradesh
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VECs	village energy committees
WASMO	Water and Sanitation Management Organisation
WB	West Bengal
WCD	World Commission on Dams

## Preface and Acknowledgements

My ongoing engagements with international and national debates on climate justice are a result of an intellectual journey over the past two decades that has brought me time and again to the complex intersections of environmental protection and social justice. Market-based solutions became the backbone of ostensible global responses to climate change at the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Bali in December 2007. The sense of excitement among environmental economists then is difficult to describe from where we are today. However, to those of us who had spent time in the field, this euphoria was evidently and grossly misplaced. The journey that market-based solutions would have to take, from Bali to places like Bastar in Chhattisgarh, where they would be eventually implemented, is not paved with the freedom of choice that pro-market advocates like to celebrate.

Markets are designed to facilitate the accumulation of surplus in the hands of those who can channel it higher up in the ‘food chain’. In most cases, the market ecosystem is essentially a centralizing force and does not work for the poor and marginalized. Unfortunately, this argument often falls through the cracks due to the lack of interdisciplinary work that is needed to produce knowledge that may help inform public debates on these complex questions. The market-based solutions institutionalized at the Bali climate conference, especially carbon offsets and carbon emissions trading, have proven to be colossal failures.

Perhaps even more embarrassingly, the advocates of market-based climate solutions lost the battle of ideologies to right-wing reactionary forces. Even in the supposedly knowledge-driven market economies of the Global North, ultra-conservatives have been successful in labelling neoliberal policies, such as offsets and cap-and-trade policies, as

part of ‘the radical Left’s progressive wish list’. This is not surprising to many on the left but this also offers much food for thought for students of policy analysis, who focus rather narrowly on coming up with ‘efficient solutions’. While smart analyses can be helpful, the belief that such analyses are sufficient to drive policy change has proven to be a chimera. This is why it is necessary to cultivate a strong awareness of the extent to which the beneficiaries of the status quo use their political and economic power to thwart sensible debates on the unprecedented environmental and social crises.

This edited volume is meant as an early intervention to bring consideration of social, economic, and environmental justice to the centre of climate change debates in India. Considering the vastness of the subject matter at hand, there seems to be no better way than to convene a group of fresh voices engaging specifically with each of the many aspects of climate justice. Unlike many other edited volumes, this one is not merely a by-product of a conference or a workshop. The contributors were kind enough to respond to my invitation to write a chapter specifically for this volume. Yet, this was not easy, as this collaboration entailed working through more than one draft of the chapter abstract followed by several drafts of each chapter. Such close and enriching collaboration with the contributors helped produce chapter texts that offer fresh insights at the cutting edge of these pressing debates.

Climate justice debates in India in the past have foregrounded struggles against the strangulating hold of the forces of global capitalism, neocolonialism, and neo-imperialism. These are valid concerns – a frontal response to these regressive forces is necessary to realize a better future for the planet and the majority of the population of the world. Yet, the task of addressing the serious threat that the climate crisis poses to the lives and livelihoods of poor and marginalized groups, including the urban poor, cannot wait for victories against those formidable adversaries. Equally important, the beneficiaries of the status quo continue to seek to mould the global climate policy process and national policymaking processes to suit their interests.

This is why it is risky to focus narrowly on climate advocacy driven solely by the goal of reducing average atmospheric temperatures, no matter how radical the target. Such advocacy is premised on two assumptions that are rarely made explicit: in many instances, aggressive climate action is equated with climate justice. If climate crisis affects the poor and the marginalized the most, wouldn’t ‘fixing’ the climate crisis automatically minimize vulnerabilities and produce climate justice? Or so the argument goes. Unfortunately, any such expectations must be tempered. As the chapters in this volume show, in the pursuit of climate justice, the means matter as much as the ends. A second and related unstated assumption is that we must prioritize climate action before we can pursue climate justice. In the words of Jonathan Logan, one of the founders of Extinction Rebellion (XR) America, ‘If we don’t solve climate change, Black lives don’t matter. If we don’t solve climate change now, LGBTQ [people] don’t matter ... I can’t say it hard enough. We don’t have time to argue about social justice.’

Make no mistake, the arguments that the likes of Logan are making are based on an ideology of authoritarian environmentalism. It seeks to use the climate crisis as a totalizing cause to marginalize considerations of a just world. These developments should alert advocates of environmental and climate justice in India. We already have the ingredients necessary for an authoritarian and Malthusian movement on climate action. It is not a coincidence at all that in his novel, *The Ministry for the Future*, Kim Stanley Robinson chose to use India as the site for a hypothetical unilateral deployment of planetary-scale solar geoengineering operations. Deeply entrenched socioeconomic inequalities and a disturbingly widespread acceptance of political authoritarianism are essential ingredients for the rise of climate authoritarianism. Yet, this is not merely a war of wits. Any visions of an alternative world must also outline concrete pathways to translate those visions into reality. In this spirit, this volume seeks to mainstream climate justice within nascent discussions on climate policy and programme development in the Indian context.

Each chapter engages with specific here-and-now issues that sit at the intersection of the climate crisis and socioeconomic crises, of which we have plenty. However, none of the contributors relies on simplistic technocratic solutions that are often presented as silver bullets. Each chapter points to more difficult but enduring tasks of building social, economic, and environmental resilience in sectors as diverse as food, water, energy, including coal and the transition to renewable energy, urbanization, and climate policy development at both the national and state levels. None of the contributors expects to see any major changes to occur without powerful grassroots mobilizations coupled with supportive political and policy advocacy. The history of environmental social movements in India offers deep lessons about building more inclusive climate social movements. While each chapter offers a deep-dive into a specific topic, a comparative reading of the chapters offers cross-cutting insights that will help build bridges across sectors.

In curating this volume, I have drawn inspiration from many conversations that helped animate some of the key arguments that appear in this volume. This included a fortuitously timed invitation in April 2020 to address a webinar as part of the aptly named *Solidarity Series: Conversations During Lockdown and Beyond* organized by the Centre for Financial Accountability, New Delhi. A second virtual talk delivered in February 2021 as part of a series on *Anti-Caste Politics and Environmental Justice* co-organized by Seshadripuram Evening Degree College, Bangalore, and Anti-racist Research and Policy Center (ARPC), American University, created a productive space for some deeper thinking on questions of caste-based oppressions and its implications for climate justice. Two grants from the University of Connecticut were vitally important to this process. A Research Excellence Program grant from the Office of Vice President for Research supported travels to India in the summer and winter of 2019. A Human Rights Faculty Seed Grant for my research on *Economic and Social Rights in a Climate-Changed World* allowed me the space in Spring 2021 to conduct the last round of work on the editing and writing for this volume.

The reflections, arguments, and insights that appear in the volume are a result of engagements with many activists, researchers, and scholars. Rahul Banerjee and Soumya Dutta generously shared their rich understanding of the histories of different strands of environmental and climate movements in India. Several conversations with Nagraj Adve, Rajeswari Raina, and others involved in the Teachers Against Climate Crisis group motivated me to expand the circle of engagement for this volume. Navroz Dubash at the Center for Policy Research (CPR) and colleagues at India Climate Collaborative offered valuable support for the widest possible dissemination of the book.

I am grateful to each of the contributors who worked patiently and diligently on this long and sometimes arduous journey and to the artists, poets, and translators for their creative contributions. The photograph on the book cover showing fishing boats parked in a clock-shape in the village of Champu Khangpok, Langolsabi, Loktak Lake, is by photographer Deepak Shijagurumayum. The photograph also represents the spirit of Naamee Lup, which is a banner representing the collaborative work of the NGO Indigenous Perspectives, Fisherfolk Unions, ESG Bangalore, and other civil society organizations. We are thankful to Ram Wangkheirakpam, the Convenor of Indigenous Perspectives, Manipur, for his kind support. Special word of thanks for Eric Chu who provided valuable inputs on numerous occasions. This volume has benefited from the diligent copy-editing work of Chitralkha Manohar and her team at The Clean Copy and a very supportive steering of the editorial process by Anwasha Rana and Qudsiya Ahmed at Cambridge University Press.

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Storrs, CT  
April 5, 2022

**Prakash Kashwan**