

# 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.

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