

ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE IN A WORLD TRANSFORMED BY CLIMATE CHANGE



Mrittika Bardhan

Student
BSc. 2nd Year
Department of Environmental Science
Asutosh College
mrittikabardhan03@gmail.com

The topic of “**environmental racism**” arose since its inception in 1987 by **Benjamin Chavis** who was the then executive director of the United Church of Christ (UCC). From the forefront he had led the commission for racial justice and had published a groundbreaking report called **Toxic Waste and Race in the United States**. It defined the discrimination faced by racial minorities due to environmental pollution. Chavis had called the situation “an insidious form of institutionalized racism. It is, in effect, environmental racism”. Thus, came the term environmental justice or eco-justice which became a social movement and the driving force to address and eradicate the environmental injustice that the poor and marginalized communities of the world suffer from in the form of hazardous waste disposal, extraction of resources and land uses. The starting point of this movement

was the United States, a country that was heavily influenced by the American Civil Rights movement and the movement has become more global ever since, with some of its goals being designed by the United Nations.

With the emergence of green politics, climate change has become one of the major components while discussing environmental justice (“**climate justice**”). The major contributors of climate change are pollution (air and soil) which pose serious threat to our planet by increasing temperatures, rainfall and significant rise in sea level. As a result of this, communities of the fishermen who live adjacent to the sea coast suffer from floods. Other potentially risky effects that are induced in the environment include droughts resulting in food scarcity and exposure to disease causing factors.



Environmental Justice in India: The matter of environmental justice and movements related to it had been present in India since a long time but it did not garner much attention as it was localized to a particular region. But eventually the social justice issues became wider and accepted environmental issues thereby gaining public support. The most popular one was the **Chipko movement** led from the forefront by Sunderlal Bahuguna. Since then, many unmentioned struggles have taken place on certain important issues which did not gain much prominence at that point of time. The tribal groups were demanding their rights and access to land and other natural resources. At the national level an impetus was observed when the **Bhopal Gas Tragedy** took place in 1984. It was a man-made disaster resulting in activism and mobilization around issues related to the environment concerning industrial policies and legislation. With the advent of modern forestry and wildlife preservation laws, the local people have direct control over the natural resources in certain areas. Conflict arose when the developmental activities of state affected the environment and thus a wave of environmental justice movement was created in the country such as the **Silent Valley protest, Appiko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan** etc.

The various steps through which we can

accelerate the applications of environmental justice in today's world are as follows:

- Effective law should be introduced concerning the environment that the government and its people should follow for a clean and healthy environment which is the road to sustainable development.
- A strong legal framework should be adopted to help in equal distribution of resources among all the people irrespective of religion, caste and creed. Through this framework the marginalized and vulnerable classes of society would have the access to justice, have knowledge and also participate in the policy making.
- For maintaining a sustainable and healthy environment for the future generations' "transformation" should be the new solution. It involves a broad spectrum of society for designing and implementing the new policies and decisions.

The challenge is such that we are at crossroads at defining environmental justice as a specific field. With the current scenario environmental justice can be considered both a political as well as analytical term which involves environmental racism and environmental inequality and also environmental policies.



Therefore, it has become a ‘masterframe’ which can be applied to multiple domains. While the literature on eco-justice is closely tied to social, cultural and political aspects, this can pave way for a more

critical and reflective mode for organizing communities and making sure that justice activism remains in the places where people live work and play despite the existing diversity.

“Everyone deserves a clean, healthy, sustainable and liveable environment.”

- Robert D. Bullard(father of environmental justice movement)

