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Intersectionality between Gender and Climate Justice

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Abstract

The paper seeks to understand the intersectionality between climate justice and gender, focusing on how climate change negatively impacts women. The impact is further studied by focusing on the economic sectors (women's contribution being the largest) that are majorly impacted by climate change, amplifying the existing gender inequalities and posing a major threat to their livelihood and existence. Paper also focuses on active participation of women in various environmental movements and why women have been at the forefront in addressing various causes associated with these movements. The paper also seeks to establish a between the concepts of gender and climate justice with that of a theoretical aspect that is 'intersectional feminism'. The writing also stresses on why there is urgency of inclusion of the idea of climate justice within the whole process of decision making. In the end paper concludes with analysing various initiatives and measures that can be adopted by respective stakeholders in addressing various gendered impacts of climate change and ensuring justice for women. Justice ensured for women will be very instrumental in ensuring justice for other vulnerable and marginalised communities within the society, doing away with the unequal burdens of environmental change and establishing a just and fair society to live in.

Key Words: Intersectional Feminism, Gender, Gender Roles, Climate Justice, Climate Equity, Environmental Movement, Environmental Stewardship, Economic Sectors

Introduction:

Climate change is the major existential threat faced by humanity today due to its human induced catastrophic impacts. Human caused climate change has changed the whole relationship humans and other species share with the planet. Major factors responsible for this changed relationship has been depicted in different ways in which climate change exhibits itself, including rising temperature, rising sea level, loss of biodiversity, rise in extreme weather events, change in rainfall patters and more. One major impact of this has been on the existence, wellbeing, and security of humans. Additionally, climate change has changed and altered the relationship that each gender shares with the society. Climate change has led to significant deterioration in the social standing and position of women due to increased discrimination, exploitation, deprivation, further marginalising their already marginalised position. Climate change further exacerbates and perpetuates structural inequalities between men and women posing a major threat to the enjoyment of rights and liberties. It is diminished position of women that demands urgent attention, acknowledgement and assurance of climate justice for them (Setiya, 2023).

Objectives:

- The purpose of the paper is to understand the various gendered impacts of climate change
- Study seeks also focuses on the need for climate justice for women
- Study also recommends various measures and steps that can be taken to do away with impact of climate change on women

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Methodology:

The study completely relies on secondary data collection, analysing data from various sources like newspaper articles, books, websites, research papers, and others.

Idea of Climate Justice:

The idea of climate justice has gained a significant prominence over the past several years and has taken on an increasingly significant role in environmental activism, civil society messaging and at major international negotiations. Idea of climate justice places equity and human rights at the centre of decision-making process on climate change. It focuses on responsibilities of the countries and industries who have gained huge amount of wealth by emitting large amounts of greenhouse gases. Specifically, these are the countries that owe significant amount responsibilities towards the countries and communities that are most vulnerable to climate change. Climate justice is a human-centred approach and a prominent way through with sustainable development and sustainable future can be achieved.

Negative impacts of climate change can be reduced through actively incorporating the concept of climate justice in the whole process policy making, formulations and implementation. Climate justice or environmental justice incorporated the idea of fairness, inclusion and involvement of all people regardless of identities such as race, religion, creed, income and so on, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies that are inclusive and sensitive to the needs and requirements of this segment of population. Idea of 'Climate Equity' is in consonance with the broader idea of climate justice. Need for incorporating the idea of 'equity' within climate actions arises from the fact that environmental change has disproportionate footprints on different sectors of the economy, different communities and different genders.

It has been an acknowledged and proven fact that climate change does not have a proportionate impact on all the sections of the society. Some communities experience disproportionate impact due to inaccessibility of resources, services, socioeconomic disparities, existing vulnerabilities, and systemic environmental

injustice. The population which is already marginalised and vulnerable are the most affected by the climate change due to their overlapping vulnerabilities. Moreover, these are the communities least responsible for climate change. Conversely, those responsible the most for the climate change are the ones who has better capability and ability to protect themselves from the adverse impacts of environmental change. The idea of climate equity thus demands development and implementation of equitable solutions to the climate change impacts, so that the unequal burdens can be addressed and redressed. It is a principle that needs incorporation, focusing on that every person – regardless of religion, gender, ethnicity, income, gender and other identities - should benefit from a clean and healthy environment and have equitable access to the resources, services and opportunities they need to shield themselves from the adverse impacts of environmental change. It is a just and fair distribution of benefits and burdens of climate change a climate action. Some key components of climate equity are fair distribution of climate impacts, equitable climate action i.e. fair sharing of responsibilities and just transition, inclusive policy development through participation and representation, intergenerational equity and addressal of historical injustices (Mwenje, 2025) (Bruce Chew, 2022).

Globally, some progress has been made with regard to inclusion of idea of gender within the wider framework of climate justice but much more needs to be done. Climate justice cannot be achieved without gender justice. Various initiatives have been taken like in the recently concluded climate conference COP29 women has been recognised as an important beneficiary group of climate finance and on recognising women in the informal economy as essential to just transition to low emission economies. There were commitments to gender responsive climate policy and action and integration of gender equality issues into climate action. Women's participation in the overall process of decision making was also acknowledged in the conference.

Gendered Impacts Of Climate Change:

Climate change has been described as 'threat multiplier' as it intensifies resource scarcity and worsens the existing societal, environmental,

and economic factors (UN, 2024). Any disaster, whether man-made or natural impacts women more as compared to men. It is the power relations of any society and intersecting inequalities that determines the relation of women with climate change. The position held by women is that of 'other' when compared to men leading to her invisibility, powerlessness, vulnerability and inaccessibility of basic services and resources. It is this inaccessibility of resources and lack of decision-making powers that leads to more suffering of women both during and after disasters.

Another major impact of climate change induced disasters has been on the health of a women. Extreme weather events, heat, water stress and air pollution affect the women unequally due to inaccessibility to clean water, sanitation facilities, malnutrition, mutilations, child marriages and gender-based violence. Air pollution and rising temperature has been associated with complications during pregnancy, preterm birth, low birth weights and poor maternal health (Berninger, 2024).

Major Sectors Impacted By Climate Change:

There are some sectors of the economy that are very sensitive to climate change and the relation that women share with these sectors is that of being the major participants and contributors to these sectors. Some of these sectors are agriculture, forestry, tourism and so on. Consequences of climate change has been most severe on the agricultural sector negatively impacting the whole food supply chain. Agriculture is most sensitive to weather and climate change as compared to other sectors of the economy. There is massive loss of agricultural productivity and yields due to rise in extreme weather events like floods, heatwaves, wildfires, droughts, torrential rainfalls, unpredictability of dynamics of pests, pathogens and invasive species, reduced soil health and more leading to food shortages, widespread famines and hunger. At the receiving end of this impact is the rural communities, women holding the majority share of it. Communities with the fewest access to the available resources feel the effects first and most devastatingly. Women is the community that make up the majority of the world's poor and are hugely dependent on the local resources for their livelihood. Women and girls are responsible for securing food, water and firewood for their

families. Extreme weather events like floods, droughts make rural women to walk extra miles, spend more times in securing income and resources and work harder for earning their livelihood. Women due to this may also be exposed to increased risk of gender-based violence. According to a study published by UN women and men are 14 times more likely to die than men mostly due to limited access to resources, information, and decision-making power. This ultimately impacts the rights and liberties of women like right to life, reproductive rights (Lindwall, 2022).

- **Agriculture Sector**

Agriculture sector is one of the most sensitive sectors to climate change and women make up nearly half of the agriculture labour force in developing countries. Feminisation of the agriculture sector is one major reason why climate change has a disproportionate impact on the women engaged in it. Globally women constitute about 43 per cent of workforce participation rate, with more than two-thirds of employed women in South Asia engaged in agriculture. Climate change has amplified the pre-existing gender inequalities within the societal set up (Thawaney, 2024).

- **Forestry**

Forestry is another important sector majorly dominated by women. The major challenge that is faced by this sector is that of deforestation. Deforestation is one major factor behind climate change. Issue of deforestation is not just an environmental problem but also a major threat posed to the livelihoods of people who depend on it, women suffering the most. It is the roles and responsibilities attached to each gender that results in the inferior position of women in the society. Women have been traditionally involved in collecting water, firewood, fodder and other forest products. With deforestation the whole task of shouldering household responsibilities becomes difficult further increasing their overburdened responsibilities. Displacements induced due to destruction of forests, natural disasters like floods, wildfires, cyclones, and sea level rise is another impact of climate change. The majority of those displaced by the climate related disasters are women and girls. Displacement further increases gender specific challenges like the risk of gender-

based violence further increasing the vulnerability of women (Sharma, 2022) (Lindwall, 2022).

- **Tourism Sector**

Another sector most vulnerable to climate change is the tourism sector. According to UN report women make up 54 per cent of the tourism workforce. Though women roles are more concentrated in low skill and low paid areas, they are the major contributors to the sector. Climate change induced disasters like cloudburst, floods, wildfires, landslides, and heatwaves have led to huge degradation of the ecology and biodiversity of the tourist destinations. Industry of tourism is the major source of livelihood for the communities inhabiting these regions and any kind of negative environmental impact, whether natural or human induced impacts their source of survival. Moreover, rise in frequency, intensity and duration of natural disasters due to climate change, has led to risking the lives and rights of people residing in these destinations, women being the most impacted

Environmental Movements In India

Environmental movements in India like Chipko movement, Bishnoi movement, Appiko movement, Silent Valley movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan and so on, have seen an active and forefront participation of women. Livelihood sustenance and the household responsibilities are the two major reasons that have made women to be a vanguard in these movements. The societal norms, responsibilities and expectations associated with the roles of women are heavily dependent on the natural resources and hence are more susceptible to effects of climate change. If not addressed timely and actively, can lead to vicious cycle of increasing poverty among women (Justin Winters, 2024)

Intersectional Feminism And Climate Change

When climate change is viewed through the lens of intersectional feminism, it brings to the fore the way in which various forms of inequalities often operate together and exacerbate each other. It is the overlapping identities of women that increases their vulnerability. Various identities of women intersect with each other creating more exploitative and discriminatory situation for women. Women who belonging to an ethnic majority may not face additional challenges faced

by women who belongs to an ethnic majority. Thus, climate actions need to be more sensitive and responsive to the additional burdens and challenges faced by the communities who face the burden of overlapping identities (Bulut, 2024).

Results and Discussions:

The analysis of the data on the intersectionality between gender and climate change illustrates that climate change has a major impact on women. Climate change further exemplifies the pre-existing vulnerable position of women in the society. Though various initiatives have been taken to incorporate gender within the broader framework of climate justice, both at domestic and international level but much more needs to be done to address the gender specific challenges of climate change.

Conclusion:

Various measures and initiatives can be taken by the concerned authorities and stakeholders that can reduce the impact of climate change on women like -

1) Increasing The Representativeness Of Women

Women comprise fifty percent of global population but the representativeness of women or the power position held by women in the decision-making bodies are meagre both globally and in India. According to the UN, women globally only held 11 per cent of ministerial positions responsible for energy, natural resource fuel and mining as of 2023 and the percentage further falls for women in minorities. Increased representation and participation of women in the decision-making bodies would automatically result in formulation and implementation of policies that are more inclusive and sensitive catering to specific needs and requirements of women. Moreover, various studies have shown that having gender diversity in decision making bodies is more likely to result in environmental legislations and actions. Gender minorities on the other hand have more awareness and ability to deal with disasters related to climate change due to their adaptable and local skills, interpersonal skills and knowledge. Women are usually first responders in community responses to natural disasters, leaders in disaster risk reduction, and active contributors to post recovery. Thus,

gender mainstreaming and inclusion of women in building climate resilience in communities is key for climate decisions and policies to be more effective and efficient and strengthening the adaptation and mitigations efforts (Bulut, 2024).

2) Skills And Capacity Building

Building capacities of women by imparting required skills and training can also go a long way in addressing the challenges associated with climate change. There should be increased gender considerations in climate actions in context of delivering the National Determined Contributions by each state.

3) Data Availability

Moreover, availability of reliable gender-disaggregated information and data will enable the policymakers and the concerned authorities in analysing the disproportionate impact of climate change on both the genders leading to better implementation of decisions and policies.

4) Environmental Stewardship

It is the community of women that can do the most justice to the idea 'environment stewardship'. Women are important agents that can address the problem of climate change and its impacts. It has been proven reality that initiatives and movements spearheaded by women have been most responsive and successful. It has been realised that investing in skills and development of women pays off not just in producing global environmental benefits and sustainable development but also improving wellbeing and sustainable practices of the communities they live in (Geraldine, 2009). Women are also responsible for the half of the world's production, major contribution being in the industry of food production. It is the food industry that is one of the most impacted by climate change. Inclusion and involvement of women in the sectors leadership positions can enable in countering the malaise of poverty, food shortages and famines. In developing countries, they make up to 80 per cent of the food. As an important contributor to the food production system, women have also learnt to cope up with and adapt to climate change.

These measures will go a long way in addressing the challenges faced by women due to climate change and ensure justice to the whole community of women. Climate justice ensured for

women will not only address the concerns of women but will have various spillover effects like reduce the impact of climate change on biodiversity, environment and remaining lives on earth.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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