

Caste and Climate Justice Brief

What is Caste Oppression?

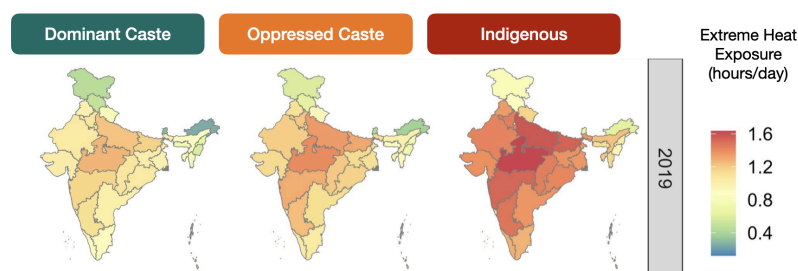
Caste-based discrimination affects over 260 million Dalits worldwide, who endure the hidden apartheid of segregation, exclusion, and discrimination. In South Asia, Dalits face severe structural discrimination leading to social and economic exclusion and limited access to essential services like water and sanitation. They experience physical and social segregation, restricted occupational choices, and widespread caste-based violence. Dalit women, in particular, suffer from historic, institutionalized, and systemic oppression, making them extremely vulnerable in the face of climate change.

The Worse-Hit: Climate Vulnerability amongst the Caste-Oppressed

Dalits are more susceptible to natural and climatic disasters than dominant caste groups due to their marginalized social status. They often reside in vulnerable locations on the periphery of settlements, hold precarious jobs like rubbish disposal and casual farm labor, and lack secure land rights. Dalit women are disproportionately affected, facing higher exposure to natural disasters and lesser access to humanitarian aid. Their dependence on wage labor and dominant upper caste groups exacerbates their vulnerability to extreme weather events. Additionally, acute water shortages due to climate change severely impact Dalit women, who sometimes walk long distances to fetch water, risking physical and sexual violence.

How are Caste Injustice and Climate Injustice connected?

Caste injustice has significantly contributed to the climate crisis we face today. Current efforts to combat climate injustice often overlook the issue of caste, rendering these attempts incomplete and sometimes counterproductive. Just last month, South Asia is facing a deadly heatwave, recording temperatures up till 52.3C. However, the effects of the heatwave were disproportionately, caste-oppressed and Indigenous communities in India were hit worse as seen from data from 2019. **Thermal injustice is climate injustice is caste injustice.**



What's Next: Toward Caste and Climate Justice

A comprehensive and meaningful approach to tackling the climate crisis must fundamentally reimagine climate justice as inclusive of caste justice. We need to:

- Recognize caste as a crucial factor in human-environment interactions.
- Understand the deep histories of caste-based extractions.
- Adopt an anti-caste perspective in mapping climate movements.

By integrating these elements, we can work towards a just and equitable response to the climate crisis, ensuring that the most vulnerable populations, particularly Dalits, are not left behind.