

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN INDIA AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC: NECESSITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE??

*Nitesh Mahech

**Pankhuri Bhatnagar

ABSTRACT

“In the era of globalization, environmental justice has become a significant issue in the discourses of the environment which call for environmental equity and justice. Every environmental concern is inherently a global concern because of the interconnectedness and interdependency of our ecosystems and all living beings. However, even though these issues transcend state boundaries, some communities suffer more serious consequences than others. Historically, it has been observed that environmental issues leave a deeper impact on marginalized and vulnerable sections of the community. This paper seeks to analyse the concept of environmental justice in India in the context of the Covid-19 global pandemic. The pandemic has increased the gap between the haves and have not’s in the society. It has highlighted the existing inequalities in the system and reinstated the need to ensure that marginalized and vulnerable sections of the community also develop. The paper has been divided into four sections where firstly, the concept of social and environmental justice has been elaborated. Secondly, it elucidates the impact of Covid-19 on environmental justice in India with various instances and the rights affected by those injustices. Thirdly, it provides recommendations for implementing environmental justice in this pandemic and depicts how such implementation can help states to combat the global challenge of the pandemic. The paper concludes with the correlation between environmental justice and sustainable development, depicting how both are necessary for the fulfilment of the other.”

Keywords: Environmental justice, social justice, coronavirus, sustainability, environment, justice, vulnerabilities and responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

While it may seem beyond our wildest beliefs that a tiny microorganism has shaken economies and countries all over the world, it is a known fact that all life on Earth has

evolved from a single-celled organism only. The world is nothing but a single interconnected organism and planet Earth is the skeleton. This is why every environmental concern is inherently a global concern, and all life is interdependent and interconnected. This phenomenon is termed as the “ripple effect” where every interaction we make with the environment causes small changes that ripple out throughout the world and eventually affects all living organisms. The Covid-19 pandemic is the best example of this as one person allegedly coming into contact with a bat in China ultimately affected all persons, governments and industries in all corners of the world.

While environmental issues indeed affect all persons, it has been observed that certain sections of the society who have been discriminated against and marginalized since long, suffer from more serious consequences than the rest. The following sections analyse the concept of Environmental Justice in the Indian context and outline various cases of such injustices. It further seeks to show how implementation of environmental justice can actually combat this global challenge and even lead to achievement of the global developmental agendas and pave the way to a sustainable future.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social Justice is an economic, philosophical and political theory which postulates that the concept of Justice has various other aspects, apart from those commonly embodied in Civil and criminal law, economic distribution and the traditional concepts of morality.¹ Social justice lays more emphasis on maintaining just relations between societal groups rather than justice for individuals. Thus, the concept goes beyond individuality and is closely related to the conflict theory, which involves redressal of past grievances or ongoing conflicts between different groups of the society. It is based on the principle that all persons must have equal access to health, wealth, well-being, rights and opportunities irrespective of their social, economic, political or other circumstances.

The National Association of Social Workers defines it as “the stand that every person deserves equal political, social and economic rights and opportunities. The aim of social

* University School of Law and Legal Studies, GGSIPU

**Amity Law School, New Delhi

¹ Jim Chappelow, SOCIAL JUSTICE INVESTOPEDIA (2020), <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-justice.asp> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

workers is to open the doors of access and opportunity for all, especially those in dire need.”²

While there are many formal definitions of this concept, they all have 3 commonalities:

1. Equal rights
2. Equal opportunities
3. Equal treatment

Thus, keeping these core values in mind, it would not be wrong to state that the concept of Social Justice derives its Constitutional basis from Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution.³ The main purpose of this philosophy is to promote the interests of oppressed communities and redistribute assets or opportunities from the privileged to the underprivileged groups. Advocates of this theory may seek to achieve their objectives through peaceful protests, government programs, relief efforts, charitable donations, boycotts, blacklists or even violent revolution. The most popularly known example of Social Justice is the Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King in the 1950s.⁴ Other examples include Right to Education, Abolition of slavery, right to housing and provision of social security (OASDI program)⁵ in the U.S.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The concept of Environmental Justice emerged in the 1980s in the U.S. Environmental Justice is an intersection of Environmental laws and Social Justice as it applies the principles of the latter in the field of the former. The 3rd principle of the Earth Charter also provides for social justice, implying the interconnection between the two.

Environmental Justice refers to the *fair distribution* of environmental benefits and burdens, *fair treatment and involvement* of all with respect to enforcement of environmental laws, policies and regulations, irrespective of their race, colour, status, wealth or national origin⁶. It

² TSDF, THE SAN DIEGO FOUNDATION THE SAN DIEGO FOUNDATION (2016), <https://www.sdfoundation.org/news-events/sdf-news/what-is-social-justice/>.

³ INDIAN CONST. art 14, 15 &16.

⁴ HERBERT H HAINES, BLACK RADICALS AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MAINSTREAM, 1954-1970 98–118 (1989).

⁵ Julia Kagan, SOCIAL SECURITY INVESTOPEDIA (2020), <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/socialsecurity.asp> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

⁶ US EPA, OA, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE | US EPA US EPA (2019), <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

further aims to ensure sustainable development, environmental planning for development, cessation of production of all toxins, hazardous and radioactive materials and right to participate equally in decision making.⁷ A large number of rights are derived from this concept such as – Right to a safe and healthy environment, Right to compensation of victims of environmental damage, cleanliness programs for urban centres, right to oppose destructive operations of corporate bodies, providing equal access to water resources etc.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN INDIA

In recent years, India has witnessed a surge in environmental justice movements. The concept is derived from 3 elements of the Indian Constitution:

- 1) Fundamental Rights – A.21 Right to Life, which includes enjoyment of a healthy environment⁸
- 2) Directive Principles – A.48A which provides the State shall protect and improve the environment, forests and wildlife of the country
- 3) Fundamental Duty – A.51A (g) which states that it is the duty of every citizen to have compassion for living creatures and protect and improve the natural environment.⁹

Based on these core values, the Apex Court of India has been spearheading the movement and declared in a case that “issues of environment must and shall receive the highest attention from this court”.¹⁰ A large body of judgements have been passed providing compensation to the poor sections of the community who were disproportionately impacted by industries, such as by the Bhopal Gas tragedy of 1984. The innovation of PILs led to a series of landmark judgments¹¹ upholding the citizens right to clean air¹² and clean water.¹³ Being home to thousands of NGOs, India has many advocates of environmental justice on behalf of the poor

⁷ *Id.* at 6.

⁸ Subhash Kumar v State of Bihar, AIR 1991 SC 420.

⁹ R. Sharma, *Green Courts in India: Strengthening Environmental Governance*, 4 LAW, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL 50 (2008).

¹⁰ Tarun Bharat Sangh, Alwar v Union of India, Supreme Court of India, 1992 Supp (2) SCC 448.

¹¹ M.C. Mehta v Union of India, (1998) 6 SCC 60, (1998) 9 SCC 589, (1999) 6 SCC 9.

¹² Murli S. Deora v Union of India, (2001) 8 SCC 765.

¹³ Narmada Bachao Andolan v Union of India, (2000) 10 SCC 664; Mrs. Susetha v State of T.N. & Ors., (2006) 6 SCC 543.

and vulnerable.¹⁴ The establishment of NGT (National Green Tribunal) and enforcement of various eco-friendly legislations have further increased the citizen's access to environmental justice.¹⁵

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN INDIA

There has always been a gap between law and practice in relation to the protection of our environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the have nots of the society for which following are some instances:

1. The adoption of nationwide lockdown in India initially resulted in noticeably clearer atmosphere and fresher air.¹⁶ However, with the unlock program, the pollution levels have gone up again¹⁷.
2. The low-income communities living in polluted areas since years have been disproportionately affected by the outbreak. Studies have found that there are higher risks of death from Covid-19 in areas with higher air pollution levels.¹⁸ It has also been found that rise of even 1 microgram per cubic meter of fine particulate matter air pollution (PM 2.5) is associated with an 8% increase in the Covid-19 death rate across US countries¹⁹ which implies air pollution helps in spreading of the deadly disease.²⁰

¹⁴ KISHAN KHODAY & USHA NATARAJAN, *Fairness and International Environmental Law from Below: Social Movements and Legal Transformation in India*, 25 LEIDEN JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW 415–441 (2012).

¹⁵ LIN TUN, WANG C & CHEN Y, GREEN BENCHES: WHAT CAN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA LEARN FROM ENVIRONMENT COURTS OF OTHER COUNTRIES? 9–10 (2009), <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/27523/green-benches.pdf> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

¹⁶ Soutik Biswas, *India coronavirus: Can the Covid-19 lockdown spark a clean air movement?*, BBC NEWS, Apr. 20, 2020.

¹⁷ Anuradha Mascarenhas, *During 'unlocking', rain helps keep pollution levels in check in some cities: Study*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, June 18, 2020.

¹⁸ Wu, X., Nethery & R.C., *Air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States: Strengths and Limitations of an Ecological Regression Analysis*, Science Advances (2020).

¹⁹ Xiao Wu MS & Rachel C. Nethery, *Exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States*, DEPARTMENT OF BIostatISTICS, HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH (Sept. 30, 2020), https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/covid-pm/files/pm_and_covid_mortality.pdf.

²⁰ Michael Grinshpun, *COVID-19 Teaches Us Lessons About Air Pollution, Environment Justice, and Climate Change*, ENERGY CENTRAL (Sept. 30, 2020), <https://energycentral.com/c/ec/covid-19-teaches-us-lessons-about-air-pollution-environmental-justice-and-climate>.

3. Migrant workers belonging to the low-income groups did not have access to private vehicles²¹ and public transportation was not available. They were forced to walk to their hometowns due to which many of them died.²²
4. The Covid test kits were initially for Rs. 4000. Later, it was slashed down to Rs. 1600 but is still not affordable for low- and middle-income households.²³
5. The vulnerable sections do not have any access to quality healthcare services and those living in overcrowded slum areas are facing hurdles in maintaining social distancing also.²⁴
6. The distribution of ration which was promised to certain households amid the lockdown did not reach their homes and many of them did not even receive their wages.²⁵
7. Funds were collected in large amounts by PM Cares program to overcome the impact of Covid but there is no clear data of usage of the same. No transparency can be seen in allocation of funds.²⁶
8. Commercialization by private hospitals led to bills of Rs. 50,000 per day for merely providing oxygen which made these hospitals in-accessible to many.
9. The Covid waste generated is hazardous in nature and has to be disposed according to bio medical and specifically issued guidelines, thereby creating another environmental crisis²⁷.

Apart from the above, the release of *draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Bill, 2020*²⁸ amidst the pandemic also weakened the protection of our environment as it has increased the discretionary powers of bureaucracy, gives priority to development over

²¹ Patralekha Chatterjee, *The Pandemic Exposes India's Apathy Toward Migrant Workers*, THE ATLANTIC, Apr. 12, 2020.

²² Id.

²³ The Hindu Net Desk, *Coronavirus India Lockdown Day 170 updates*, THE HINDU, Sept. 11, 2020.

²⁴ Leana S. Wen & Nakisa B. Sadeghi, *Addressing Racial Health Disparities In The COVID-19 Pandemic: Immediate And Long-Term Policy Solutions*, HEALTH AFFAIRS, July 20, 2020.

²⁵ The Hindu Data Team, *Data: 96% migrant workers did not get rations from the government, 90% did not receive wages during lockdown*, THE HINDU, Apr. 27, 2020.

²⁶ Shama Mohmed, *There must be more transparency in use of PM CARES fund created to deal with pandemic*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, June 10, 2020.

²⁷ Jasjeev Gandhiok & Sudha Nambudiri, *Medical waste poses a new crisis*, TIMES OF INDIA, May 22, 2020.

²⁸ To be published in the Gazette of India, MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE, http://environmentclearance.nic.in/writereaddata/Draft_EIA_2020.pdf.

environment, and provides certain other exemptions for expansion of national highways from the compliance of EIA norms²⁹.

The recent case of *Visakhapatnam gas leak disaster* took place in May 2020 took place during the pandemic wherein a vapour cloud spread over a radius of around 3km affecting the nearby villagers due to which 12 people died³⁰ and around 1,000 people became ill after being exposed to the gas³¹. This chemical plant was running without compliance to the EIA norms³². Similarly, in *Assam gas and oil leak 2020*, a natural gas blowout happened in Tinsukia District resulting in leakage of natural gas. It subsequently caught fire and resulted in the death of 2 people, large-scale evacuations, and environmental damage as well³³. The Central Government has already exempted these oil and gas firms from legal requirements for environmental clearances³⁴ and thus resulting in non-compliance of EIA norms³⁵. Numerous other examples can be seen where such norms are not followed resulting in the harmful consequences to the environment as plants do not follow environmental legislations when given exemptions by the government.

RIGHTS AFFECTED BY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The deterioration of human environment could eventually endanger the life of present as well as future generations and thus, the right to life under Article-21 is directly affected, which includes the right to live with dignity, enjoyment of the environment, clean air and water. It further affects Articles 14, 15 and 16 which involve equal rights, treatment and opportunities.

In India, we have the *Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993*.³⁶ Article 51(c) of the Constitution ensures compliance with International Covenants like the *ICCPR*, *ICESCR* and

²⁹ Urmi Goswami, *The new draft Environment Impact Assessment Bill is rubbing environmentalists the wrong way*, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, Aug. 15, 2020.

³⁰ Sumit Bhattacharjee, *Visakhapatnam Gas Leak: How negligence and violations led to a deadly disaster*, THE HINDU, June 06, 2020.

³¹ Id.

³² Gazette, *supra* note 28.

³³ Tora Agarwala, *Assam gas leak: why it's tough to plug, and what threat it poses to the area*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, June 08, 2020.

³⁴ Jacob Koshy, *Centre waives green clearance for onshore and offshore oil and gas exploration*, THE HINDU, Jan. 08, 2020.

³⁵ Id.

³⁶ The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, available at: <http://newapps.nic.in/acts/TheProtectionofHumanRightsAct1993.pdf>.

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR.)*³⁷ These documents have highlighted rights such as highest attainable standard of health, food security, adequate sanitation, access to safe drinking water, healthy working conditions etc. The Stockholm and Rio declarations have further enunciated that a decent physical environment is a pre-requisite for living a life of dignity and worth. Human rights are essentially intertwined with the environment as they cannot be enjoyed in absence of a safe, healthy, and clean environment.³⁸ Therefore, sustainable environmental governance cannot exist without the establishment of and respect for human rights³⁹.

ALLEVIATING THE PANDEMIC BY BRINGING ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The mode of transmission of the novel coronavirus is by contact, respiratory droplets and infected surfaces. Thus, to eradicate or at the very least, slow down the spread of the disease, it is necessary to ensure that the least number of people are affected. This is because each individual carries the potential to spread the virus to 100 others. Covid-19 is a disease where neglecting the minorities or underprivileged of the country will not help in saving the rich and influential, and the virus will reach the homes of the influential through workers, staff, delivery agents etc. Thus, even capitalist states must pay heed to the needs of the underprivileged, or their entire populations will be at risk.

Decades of social injustices have placed low-income and minority communities at greater health risk and economic disadvantage – who now face the further burden of Covid-19 and its economic consequences. The current health crisis has hit the poor the hardest and exposed the gross inequalities in access to food, shelter, and health care and exacerbated existing human rights issues.⁴⁰ The following section lays down some suggestions to implement environmental justice with special regard to the ongoing pandemic.

³⁷ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf.

³⁸ INDIAN CONSTI. art 14, 15, 16 & 21.

³⁹ Justice Swatanter Kumar (Retd.), *Environmental Rule of Law: First Global Report*, UN ENVIRONMENT, (Sept. 30, 2020, 10:04 AM), https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27279/Environmental_rule_of_law.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

⁴⁰ Sheila Coronel, PHILIPPINES: COVID-19 WILL DEVASTATE THE POOR WWW.LOWYINSTITUTE.ORG (2020), <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/philippines-covid-19-will-devastate-poor> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPLEMENT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE DURING COVID-19

In the times of COVID-19, there are certain recommendations in order to implement environmental justice effectively and are as follows:

1. Using the pandemic as an excuse, a number of states have announced that “they are lowering their environmental standards, suspending environmental monitoring requirements, reducing environmental enforcement, and restricting public participation.”⁴¹ This has notably been the case in the USA.⁴² Checks must be established on the same.
2. The cost of Covid test kits must be slashed down for economically weaker sections.
3. Public participation in decision making is one of the core principles of environmental justice. Since live hearings have been postponed, comments from the public on environmental matters must be invited online.
4. It is a new era where a phone is as essential, as is clean air and water. Efforts must be made to spread tech awareness, build infrastructure and make the citizens tech savvy.
5. The ICT tools must be made available, accessible and affordable. For remote or rural areas, ICT tools must be available in regional languages and in accessible formats for disabled persons.
6. Alternatives to internet may be established for those with limited access, such as holding telephonic conferences
7. Covid waste, whether generated at home or in hospitals, must be properly disposed of according to the state’s guidelines. There should not be open dumping of these hazardous and infectious wastes near homes of underprivileged communities.⁴³

⁴¹ Admin, OHCHR | COVID-19: “NOT AN EXCUSE” TO ROLL BACK ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND ENFORCEMENT, UN RIGHTS EXPERT SAYS WWW.OHCHR.ORG, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25794&LangID=E>.

⁴² Ann Carlson et al., TRUMP ADMINISTRATION WEAKENS AUTO EMISSIONS STANDARDS NPR.ORG (2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/31/824431240/trump-administration-weakens-auto-emissions-rolling-back-key-climate-policy>.

⁴³ CPCB issues fresh guidelines on disposal of COVID-19 waste, NEWSONAIR.COM (2020), <http://newsonair.com/Main-News-Details.aspx?id=395552> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

8. Reusable face masks, gloves and other amenities must be provided to those who cannot afford it.
9. Food security to be ensured for all, including older or disabled persons who cannot visit the markets. NGOs or state agents must provide ration to such groups.
10. Special provisions must be made to ensure the safety of essential workers who are paying the price of being “essential” and those who could not afford to stay home.
11. Overcrowding leads to spreading of infections. To prevent the spread of the pandemic, cities need affordable, adequate, secure and accessible housing.
12. In view of the current health and economic crisis, states should declare a moratorium and/or a relief on rents, mortgages, and evictions for vulnerable groups.
13. Housing should be greatly de-commodified, as in Vienna, where it is considered a basic human right.⁴⁴
14. A minimal guaranteed income should also be put in place, as in Spain or The Netherlands.⁴⁵
15. Public transport systems act as transmission hotspots but low-income workers do not have the luxury of owning private vehicles. Other affordable and low-risk transportation solutions need to be put in place for them.
16. Daily wage earners who suddenly find themselves without work must be helped in shifting to other sources of income, or provided temporary jobs by the government or given a minimum amount for sustenance of their families during the pandemic.
17. Helpful legislations and government schemes must not be put on hold or struck down at such a crucial time. Recently, Trump has moved for the abolition of the Affordable Care Act in the US which provided numerous health benefits and tax credits to low income families.⁴⁶
18. There must be transparency and accountability regarding funds being collected by states in the name of the pandemic, and in their distribution to the public.

⁴⁴ Johny Bal, “HOUSING AS A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT”: THE VIENNA MODEL OF SOCIAL HOUSING NEWSTATSMAN.COM (2019), <https://www.newstatesman.com/spotlight/housing/2019/09/housing-basic-human-right-vienna-model-social-housing> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

⁴⁵ Elena Sanchez Nicolas, SPAIN TAKES “GIANT STEP” ON GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME EUOBSERVER (2019), <https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/148517> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

⁴⁶ Obamacare: Has Trump managed to kill off Affordable Care Act?, BBC NEWS, March 29, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-24370967>.

19. Issues of alleged discriminatory and arbitrary distribution of the public aid through some local heads of communities have also come to light and several families are claimed to have been excluded.
20. Health and sanitation training must be provided to concerned communities
21. Separate beds, ban on recreational activities, group events and other restrictions must be enforced in old age centres, orphanages and similar homes.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RELATION

Earth Overshoot Day, is a concept evolved by the Global Footprint Network. It refers to the date on which the people on Earth have already consumed the renewable resources for that year. Every year, this date falls earlier and earlier indicating the speed at which resources are depleting! Since the past 2 years, it fell in July however, due to the spread of novel coronavirus in 2020, lesser resources were used and the date shifted to 22nd August.⁴⁷ While this is a positive incident, mankind has still managed to extinguish 1-year worth of resources in less than 9 months during a pandemic! Now, more than ever, there is a need to conserve natural resources and save some for our future generations, i.e. sustainable development.

In September 2015, the United Nations introduced a set of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) which replaced the millennium goals and have to be achieved by 2030.⁴⁸ It is a fact that the consequences of climate change will not be borne equally or fairly by all. There has always been a divide between the rich and the poor, the men and women, old and young, the influential and the marginalized sections.⁴⁹ Implementation of Environmental Justice shall help us in extinguishing these inequalities and in meeting many of the SDG global

⁴⁷ Earth Overshoot Day - Global Footprint Network, FOOTPRINTNETWORK.ORG (2016), <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/earth-overshoot-day/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20Earth%20Overshoot%20Day> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

⁴⁸ Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP, [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20\(SDGs](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20(SDGs) (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

⁴⁹ Martin, CLIMATE JUSTICE - UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2019), <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/climate-justice/> (last visited Sep 30, 2020).

development agendas. It will also aid in realizing past mistakes and avoiding potential ecological conflicts in the future. Thus, environmental justice is a necessary step towards achieving global sustainability and vice versa, as better sustainability choices also help in enforcing Environmental Justice goals more effectively.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is apparent that the marginalized and vulnerable groups of the society have received the shorter end of the stick when it comes to equal rights and opportunities. But the pandemic has taught us a valuable lesson that ignoring the needs of the vulnerable will ultimately affect all others in the society, in one way or another. As Martin Luther King famously quoted, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”. India has witnessed this principle in motion. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

Injustice in any form, even if environmental injustice, is nevertheless injustice. Thus, there is an immediate need for sustained intervention to protect people’s health and economic well-being, with a special focus on the most vulnerable in this outbreak. The need of the hour is to reduce societal inequalities, protect the interests of the vulnerable and move towards building a well-balanced and sustainable future for all.