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Proposal for a research:

Climate change and tribal communities in India

Climate change is a universal threat. Its effects are however bound to be uneven. Poorer countries with lesser economic capabilities will suffer worse fate than developed ones. Even within the poorer parts of the world, the implication of climate change will be skewed. Socio-economic status and regional location will determine a community's resilience towards the vagaries of changing climate.

The fate of the millions of tribal communities in India seems bleak given the above observations. Most of the tribal communities are agriculture based social groups who depend largely on nature for their livelihood. Their culture, traditions and social moorings are rooted in their intersections with nature. Even with the spread of modern development and the corresponding decline in the dependence on nature for day-to-day survival, tribal communities continue to draw their identity from their being closely associated with nature historically.

Climate change stands as an impending threat to these groups who ironically have the least culpability towards the problem. Not only are their livelihoods directly being challenged, their identity as well as cultural legacy stands on loose grounds. Do these communities, ingenious as they are, have the capacity to withstand the threat of climate change? Not unless they have the adequate support of modern technology and knowledge.

These factors throw up some pertinent questions related to justice and equity for the tribal communities. Where do these communities go to for ensuring a just solution to this impending predicament? Is it not the responsibility of the state to factor in the interest of these communities in determining climate policies? To what extent, if at all, does the state take these communities into consideration in framing its climate change policies? Tribal communities in India occupy lands and follow practices that are generally unique from the 'mainstream' populations. As such, there is a requirement for climate policy to be cognisant of their unique lifestyle and circumstances to be effective and just. It is not clear as to how far such sensitivity is practised in policy making. Are the national adaptation and mitigation plans made keeping in mind the duty to safeguard the rights of tribal communities such as forest dwellers of Madhya Pradesh, for instance? This research would critically seek to unravel the uniform approach generally undertaken by the state to deal with the problem of climate change that may harm the interests of certain marginalised groups. It would seek to formulate ways through which the state can provide protection to these vulnerable communities from climate change without altering their lifestyle and ethos. Thus, there is a need to conduct a study that would probe the issue of equity and justice in relation to climate policy making and tribal communities in India.