THE DIALOGUE BOX
FACTS. OPINIONS. EXPERIENCE

YOUR VOICE
EVERY VOICE COUNTS

Fractured Homelands: Unveiling Climate Injustice and the Resilience of Queer Communities in the Face of Environmental Turmoil

Shefali Bhatia

Introduction

In an interview with Grace Banu, an influential Dalit and trans rights activist and writer from India, Suman Saurav writes how, "one's access to resources is dictated by their social identity and location. Even those resources which have the potential to save one's life". This statement conveys the reality that in times of crisis, it is not the fittest that survives, but rather those who secure the finest means of survival by virtue of their occupation of highest position within the social hierarchy. While disaster may affect everyone indiscriminately, the ability to receive rescue and display resilience in the face of adversities is distributed undemocratically. This unfortunate truth resonates strongly in the context of climate justice in India. The concept of climate justice acknowledges that the climate change impacts unequally and unfairly across the society. It primarily underscores that the burden of climate change falls on the most vulnerable and marginalized communities, despite them contributing the least to its causes. While substantial body of research work acknowledges the relevance of intersectionality when examining the groups most affected by climate change, there remains a notable lack of attention given to the transgender community.

Some scholars have rightly pointed out that the marginalization of queer people is amplified during disasters, as pre-existing inequalities are magnified (Gorman-Murray et al. 238). The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans where the community faced homelessness and extreme poverty is one example. Prior to this catastrophic event, they were already facing distinctive discrimination and a lack of societal acceptance, rendering them more susceptible to catastrophic displacement events (Mark et al. 23). This highlights the urgent need to address the unique challenges faced by queer people, including loss of home, displacement, rebuilding, among others.

This essay examines the issue of transgender people experiencing homelessness during disasters and delves into the various ways it impacts them and facets that are often overlooked in disaster literature. Drawing upon the sociological concept of "loss" and "solastalgia", the essay expands the understanding of 'home' to argue that losing one's home is more than just the physical loss of property. It is, in fact, loss of ontological security and the psychological functions that it provides, including self-identity and agency. While losing one's home in a disaster is devastating to anyone, unsheltered transgender people encounter social stigmatization that deprives them of their dignity, and so, for them it becomes an experience that is tainted by cruel structural discrimination from society. This reality is essentially poignant for transgender people from Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi communities, "who face the double brunt of Brahmanical patriarchy... and transphobia" (Saurav).

Climate Justice and the Transgender Community: Unique Challenges of Climate Change

In the aftermath of disaster, transgender individuals just like other marginalized communities, lose their livelihoods, however, the obstacles they face in accessing food and jobs are more challenging. Furthermore, the detrimental effects of air and water pollution disproportionately impact them, particularly those, who have undergone gender-specific surgeries and hormonal treatments. Climate change emergencies are also intricately linked to psychological distress, for instance, night time heat is linked to poorer sleep, which in turn can deteriorate mental health and hot days are associated with self-harm incidents (Mariwala and Rizwan 1). Not having a safe shelter further intensifies the impact of these crises.
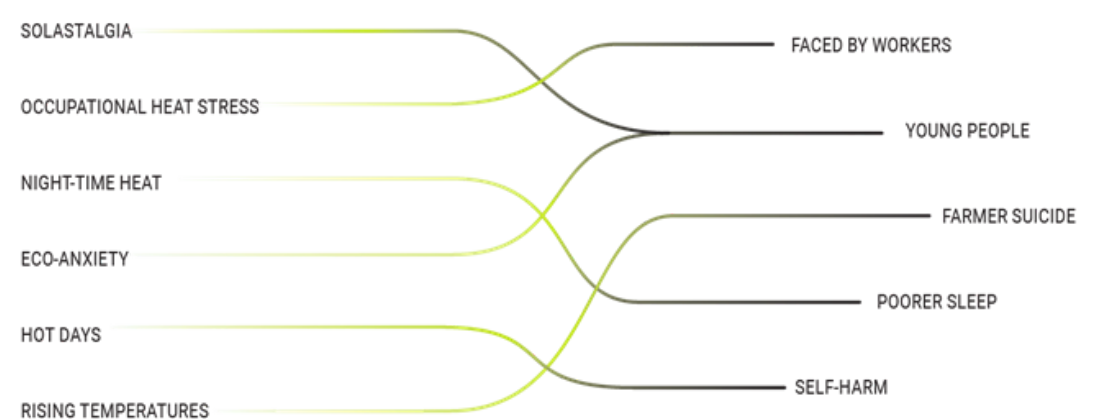
Image Credit: Shutterstock

SOLASTALGIA	FACED BY WORKERS
OCCUPATIONAL HEAT STRESS	YOUNG PEOPLE
NIGHT-TIME HEAT	FARMER SUICIDE
ECO-ANXIETY	POORER SLEEP
HOT DAYS	SELF-HARM
RISING TEMPERATURES	

Fig. 1. Raj Mariwala and Saniya Rizwan, Climate Change and Mental Health

Although the progressive circles claim to recognize the institutional injustice faced by the transgender community and its historical abandonment by society, a particular degrading reality remains: their absence in statistical data. Considering the pivotal role that statistics play in informing policies and initiatives at structural level, absence of their representation sheds light on the irresponsible attitude of patriarchal and caste-ridden society.

Banu, in the above-mentioned interview notes that the 2011 census in India documented a population of over 4,90,000 transgender individuals, however, this is only the recorded number. Transgender activists assert that the actual number is six to seven times higher. It is noteworthy that the census was conducted ten years back and it's been seven years since Supreme Court of India legally recognized and upheld the fundamental rights of transgender individuals (Saurav). To make this situation worse, as per a report by Dalberg, a consulting firm, around 102 million people in India, including 30 percent of the homeless population and more than a quarter of its third gender citizens do not have Aadhar (Chandran). The lack of Aadhar disproportionately impacts the most marginalized peoples who are also most likely to experience errors in their Aadhar documentation. These errors can lead to denial of welfare services and exclusion from important support systems.

Both policy and cultural norms have perpetuated exclusionary practices against transgender community. Taking the case of the Green New Deal, despite its commitment towards social reforms to liberate vulnerable communities, it explicitly failed to include transgender people as a community that is affected by climate change. Thus, even within a policy framework considered as progressive and inclusive, there exists climate injustice towards the queer community (Mark et al. 23). According to Bhardwaj, the international framework for disaster management as well explicitly denies the concerns of transgender individuals. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 claims inclusivity in prevention of disaster, reduction, and rehabilitation, however, it itself is limited by binary gender assumptions and thus, remains exclusionary in nature (1).

Image Credit: Shutterstock

Unveiling the Mosaic of Home: Trans People Resilience and Disruption in the Face of Disaster

For many transgender individuals, searching for a secure home is deplorable experience due to discriminatory housing policies. Voluntarily or involuntarily many trans people leave their birth homes and stay in public parks, or in makeshift places provided by queer friends or queer organizations until they find a more permanent and stable shelter (Moudgil 3).

Andrew Gorman-Murray and colleagues explain how the concept of 'house' and 'home' intersect with social relations and emotions and at the same time, with the idea of private and public. According to them, the privacy and agency of home can be influenced by dominant norms, surveillance mechanisms and government agendas and thus, homes of queer people are not inherently private but are instead subject to external sanctions, with constant monitoring (243). In spite of everything, queer people invest in constructing a sense of home that provides them a protected space for self-affirmation and identity support. In this way, home is a site of resistance for the entire queer community against heteronormative social norms where despite societal approval, what blooms is deference, an affirmation of queer identity and desire, and beautiful relationships and communities. By making home, therefore, queer community provide themselves and their families, protection against the adverse effects of discrimination and harassment and by managing such external encroachments, homes of queer populations produce means of resilience (Gorman-Murray et al. 251).

When disaster strikes, the intensity of emotional and structural distress faced by them becomes all more profound. Queer communities find themselves struggling with a magnified external pressure as disaster management policies – with the need to distribute scarce resources – often overlook marginalized populations and disregard the needs of "non-normative" queer households They frame policies that favour heterosexual nuclear families and neighbourhoods. Multiple forms of exclusion and mistreatment that Aravanis, a transgender community of India, faced following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami is an example of this. Not only were they excluded from crucial rehabilitation programs but were also denied entry to shelters and were discredited in death records.

Furthermore, when it comes to crisis followed by a climate disaster, while the material aspects of damage are reported, its immaterial aspects are often overlooked. As Brown argues that alongside physical damages individuals also struggle with the changes in the relationship between themselves and their environment (1). It is therefore important to take into account the symbolic implications of climate disaster and destruction, essentially in the case of queer people as they deeply relate to the idea of place as meaningful landscapes arising from social processes.

In the context of place of home of transgender people specifically, it comprises of both – material and immaterial aspects, including history, relationships and cultural traditions. The link between a transgender person and their landscape does not exist in isolation; their perception of self is influenced by those they share the place with and those they set themselves apart from.

Loss of place in a disaster can therefore translate into loss of identity, social networks, and emotional attachments. The concept of "solastalgia" holds particular importance to examine this. Introduced by Glenn Albrecht and colleagues in 2007, solastalgia is the emotional distress experienced when people are unable to find solace in their "negatively perceived" environment or witness its loss. Some aspects of place are indeed personal but studying it within and across communities can highlight socio-ecological dynamics (Brown 3). For transgender people, home is beyond mere physicality and encompasses a sense of ontological security. Truly remarkable here is the expansive nature of their homes that stretches across different scales and that embraces different sites, from the intimate streets and neighbourhoods to the vibrant public spaces, cities, and even nations (Gorman-Maurer et al. 244). Thus, the sense of meaningful home here incorporates the intricate web of neighbouring connections, shared financial arrangements, and warm embrace of family and friendships. It is within this multidimensional meaning of home that they weave threads of identity, resilience, and a shared longing for a place that they can call their own.

The location of community organisations dedicated to transgender people is an essential reflection of both vulnerability and resilience in various disaster situations. Manthithoppu Transgenders Milk Corporation Society in Sandeep Nagar, Tamil Nadu is an excellent example here. Banu highlights that over 85 trans people are there in this community who initially lacked access to even basic resources, including identification documents. However, with the help of the District Collector, they were able to get proper documentation that brought positive changes. With the establishment of the corporative society, over 85 trans people have become successful entrepreneurs, owning their own lands and cattle. They now earn a livelihood by selling cow milk and are living a life of dignity. Some have even pursued government job opportunities, with many supporting each other. Banu says that it is a welcoming community where those who left their homes will always find a place to belong (Saurav).

It is recognized in media and NGO reports that spaces built by queer communities provide a profound sense of home and belonging. But these spaces are equally vulnerable to the impact of disasters. When we consider the sociology of loss, as Rebecca Elliott underscores, we come to understand clearly that the consequences of climate change encompass both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

While quantitative loss may entail less money at both household and national level, loss of biodiversity etc.; qualitative loss would be disappearance of entire ways of life, landscapes, and cultures (305). While it may be easier to quantify and measure quantitative losses, addressing qualitative loss require a more nuanced approach to disaster management. It is important to note that the most marginalised bear the biggest brunt of these qualitative losses. Thus, it becomes crucial to develop strategies to document qualitative loss, as once these aspects are lost, they can never be fully recovered or compensated.

When we consider the qualitative loss of vital spaces made by queer communities, we can understand the disproportionate amount of psychological and structural injustice they go through. During and subsequent to disasters, the loss of these spaces has the potential to heighten their vulnerability. However, such spaces can also serve as examples of resilience. They become places where the community comes together and provide support and shelter and safety to those who have been displaced from their homes (Gorman-Murray et al. 254). A notable instance of this was demonstrated by Living Smile Vidya, a transgender woman who opened her home for her people in the aftermath of Chennai floods in 2015. Her intension was to create a safe space and comfortable environment specifically for trans persons (Das 1). In a similar vein, Dr Aijaz highlighted the support within the transgender community of Kashmir. He says that they are a close-knit group that provides emotional and psychological help to each other. However, during times of disasters, they often have to rely on external support which presents challenges (Mattoo and Shabir 6).

The interconnectedness between loss and society is evident from these examples. Sociology of loss, therefore, provides an important theoretical framework for understanding the intricate levels of devastation caused by climate change. It allows the uncovering of not only tangible and visible losses but the intangible and less apparent impacts of climate injustice as well.

Evolving Horizons: Nurturing Equity and Resilience in Climate Action

There is an urgent need for "just" climate action, which requires systemic transformative change. This transformative change aims to disrupt unequal power relations and prioritise socially just pathways. To achieve this, it is crucial for researchers and policymakers to move beyond portraying local communities solely as "victims" or "beneficiaries" and instead invest in enhancing their social and material capabilities (Srivastava et al. 103). Horizontal reservation that reserves a percentage of seats in education and employment for transgender individuals across various social categories is one approach that would empower communities to determine their own futures in the face of climate change.

Srivastava and colleagues contend a "place-based, bottom-up perspective" that values the viewpoints and experiences of marginalized populations as they are essentially needed to address climate change (104). Despite being disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, queer populations are often excluded from decision-making processes due to various forms of injustices. By recognizing and addressing these injustices, we can foster inclusive and equitable climate action that promotes the well-being and agency of all individuals and communities

Works Cited

Bhardwaj, Vani. "Queering Disasters in Light of the Climate Crisis." *Gender in Geopolitics Institute*, Feb. 2023. igg.geo.org/?p=10929&lang=en.

Brown, Adrienne S. "'Homesick for Something That's Never Going to Be Again': An Exploratory Study of the Sociological Implications of Solastalgia," *Society & Natural Resources*, vol. 36, no. 4, Taylor and Francis, Jan. 2023, pp. 349–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2023.2165205.

Chandran, Rina. "Ten Years on, India's Biometric ID Excludes Homeless, Transgender People." *The Jakarta Post*, 2018, www.thejakartapost.com/life/2019/11/27/ten-years-on-indias-biometric-id-excludes-homeless-transgender-people.html.

Das, Monalisa. "The News Minute | Tamil Nadu." *The News Minute*, 4 Dec. 2015, www.thenewsminute.com/article/transgender-woman-opens-home-chennai-flood-affected-36561.

Elliott, Rebecca. "The Sociology of Climate Change as a Sociology of Loss." *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 59, no. 3, Dec. 2018, pp. 301–37, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003975618000152.

Gorman-Murray, Andrew, et al. "Queer Domicide." *Home Cultures*, vol. 11, no. 2, Taylor and Francis, July 2014, pp. 237–61. https://doi.org/10.2752/175174214x13891916944751.

Mariwala, Raj, and Saniya Rizwan. "Building Solidarities: Climate Justice and Mental Health." *The Mariwala Health Initiative Journal*, no. 5, 2022, www.reframe2022.mhi.org.in/revisions/indigenous-climate-justicebuilding-solidarities-climate-justice-and-mental-health.

Moudgil, Manu. "No Place Like Home." *Queerbeat*, 2021, www.queerbeat.org/stories/no-place-like-home.

Saurav, Suman, and Grace Banu. "COVID-19 and the Trans Community in India: A Conversation with Grace Banu." *Resurj Blog: Reflections by Younger South Feminists*, 2021, www.resurj.org/reflection/covid-19-the-trans-community-in-india-grace-banu.

Mattoo, Fahim and Sadaf Shabir. "Trans People Battle Discrimination to Rise Above Natural Disasters." *India Times*, 25 May 2023, www.indiatimes.com/explainers/news/trans-people-battle-discrimination-to-rise-above-natural-disasters-603712.html.

Srivastava, Shilpi, et al. "Climate Justice for Whom? Understanding the Vernaculars of Climate Action and Justice in Marginal Environments of India." *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 53, no. 4, 7 Dec. 2022, pp. 101-23. https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2022.141.

About the Author

Shefali Bhatia is a graduate with Masters degree in Sociology from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Her research interests entail history, urban sociology, gender and sexuality, migration, media studies, and sociolinguistics among others.

Exploring The Corridors of Eco-Taxation in India

Pratik Nayak

Introduction

Throughout the past century, sustainable development and environmental protection have increasingly become the focal point on the policy agendas of both developed and developing nations. While governments have traditionally focused on strengthening legislation to address environmental degradation, recent debates have centered on the potential role of fiscal policy instruments, such as taxes and subsidies, in mitigating environmental issues.

Green tax, also known as environmental taxation or pollution tax, is a type of levy imposed on goods and activities that contribute to environmental pollution. The primary goal of these taxes is to internalize externalities, meaning to account for the social and environmental costs associated with these goods and activities. These taxes are often referred to as Pigouvian taxes, named after Arthur Cecil Pigou, an economist who advocated for government intervention through taxes to address negative externalities in pricing (Folloni and Zelinski).