ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: THE NEED FOR EQUITY IN RESOURCES

Greed. Greed. Greed.

Human nature—always placing greed ahead of genuine need, whether the call comes from nature or from other humans. Nothing reflects this better than *Universe 25*, the haunting experiment that mirrors our own behaviour. Though performed on mice, it exposes what happens when material abundance exists without social balance or emotional purpose. It shows a different perspective from what we discuss here, yet it uncovers the same truth: humans may write their own destruction.

"We don't inherit the Earth from our ancestors—we borrow it from our children."

Universe 25, conducted by John B. Calhoun in the late 20th century, created a mouse utopia—unlimited food, shelter, perfect temperature and safety. Four pairs of mice began the experiment. By Day 145, they multiplied to 600+, forming their own city. When survival needs were fully met, the real collapse began. Social groups formed, dominated corners, attacked each other, mothers abandoned their young, males stopped mating, and by the time the population touched 2,200, growth froze. Eventually, the colony died out.

What killed them wasn't scarcity—it was abundance without purpose, connection, or meaning.

The experiment teaches four things:

1. **Loss of purpose in abundance** – Without challenge, even living beings lose their sense of meaning.
2. **Isolation despite proximity** – Crowding does not guarantee connection; loneliness thrives even in cities.
3. **Collapse of norms** – When empathy and shared values erode, society rots from within.
4. **Generational breakdown** – Chaos during upbringing creates generations incapable of functioning.

The parallels to human society are disturbing. Mental health issues rise. Communities weaken. Abundance becomes emptiness.

RESOURCES AND HUMAN GREED

A resource is anything in our environment that can fulfil needs and is technologically, economically, and culturally accessible. Yet humans remain unsatisfied. Our actions lead to:

- Depletion of resources for the greed of a few
- Unequal distribution—dividing society into haves and have-nots
- Overuse—triggering global warming, pollution, ozone depletion, and land degradation

We complain "temperatures are rising," but forget *we* are responsible. Awareness doesn't guarantee action. A film like **"Tikdam"** shows how simple, local efforts can restore old

weather patterns. Imagine if millions of such efforts united—nature would revive faster than we think.

But the reality remains uneven. Globally, countries like the USA and Japan focus on environmental protection, because their basic needs have been fulfilled long ago. Meanwhile, India still struggles with basic necessities.

Within India too, inequality is stark:

- Mineral-rich states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are home to some of the poorest tribal communities
- Arunachal Pradesh has abundant water but lacks infrastructure
- Rajasthan has solar and wind power but no water
- Ladakh lacks natural resources but holds rich cultural heritage

From tribal villages of Odisha to the polluted lanes of Delhi, environmental harm hits the weakest first. As India pushes for economic growth, the question is urgent: **Can governance evolve to protect both nature and the people who depend on it?**

This is the heart of **environmental justice**—the idea that environmental protection is not a privilege for the rich or powerful, but a right for every human.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE ONLY WAY FORWARD

Development cannot destroy the environment, and today's growth must not steal from future generations.

Tribal displacement for mining is one example of injustice. Films like **Narivetta**, inspired by the 2003 Muthanga tribal protests, show this harsh truth. Tribal families demanding land rights were met with violence. Despite laws and constitutional protections, vulnerable communities still suffer the most.

To bridge this gap, India needs strong policies:

1. Universal Protection from Environmental Hazards

- **Environmental Justice Act** – Equity audits in all EIAs
- **Hazard Mapping** – Publicly accessible data on pollution and climate risks
- **Community Monitoring** – Local groups to track air, water, soil quality
- **Legal Empowerment** – Free legal aid for marginalized groups

2. Equitable Access to a Healthy Environment

A. Food Security

- Support agroecology and small farmers
- Promote urban farming
- Universal school meals

As Vandana Shiva said, "Food is not a commodity… it is life itself." Ensuring food justice is a moral duty.

B. Renewable Energy

- Subsidized clean energy for rural and tribal communities
- Solar microgrids and wind cooperatives
- Training youth for green jobs

Energy access = empowerment.

C. Climate Change Adaptation

- Region-specific climate trust funds
- Corporate carbon accountability
- Youth climate councils

Climate change hits the poor first and worst—from Odisha's rising seas to Delhi's heatwaves.

D. Ethical Resource Extraction

- Mandatory community consent
- Restoration funds from companies
- Ban extraction in sacred and biodiverse zones

APPLYING THESE POLICIES IN INDIA

1. Strengthen Article 21 to clearly include environmental justice
2. Expand the power of the National Green Tribunal
3. Mandate equity assessments in all major projects
4. Support tribal and small farmers through subsidies and land rights
5. Promote locally-grown produce in PDS
6. Encourage decentralized renewable energy
7. Map climate vulnerabilities using GIS
8. Make FPIC compulsory in tribal regions

SUCCESSFUL CASES THAT PROVE JUSTICE WORKS

1. **Dehradun Valley Case** – Stopped limestone mining, protecting villagers' right to a wholesome environment.
2. **Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum Case (1996)** – Introduced "polluter pays" principle.
3. **Forest Rights Act (2006)** – Helped Adivasis reclaim ancestral forests.

These cases show the power of unity and the strength of laws when used courageously.

CONCLUSION

Environmental justice is not about trees alone—it is about people.

It is not a luxury—it is a necessity.

A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable.
If India embeds justice into environmental governance, development will finally become a shared right—**not a privilege for the few**.
—Omeshi Gupta, Class 11
Sai Public School