

TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF DISASTERS IN  
CONTEMPORARY INDIA: A STUDY OF TSUNAMI  
AND SUPER CYCLONE

*Dissertation Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the requirement for the award of  
the Degree of*

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*DEDICATED TO MY*  
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CERTIFICATE

The dissertation entitled "TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF DISASTERS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: A STUDY OF TSUNAMI AND SUPER CYCLONE" submitted in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university and is my original work.

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# **Abbreviations**

<b>ADPC</b>	Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre
<b>APWLD</b>	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
<b>BJD</b>	Biju Janata Dal
<b>BJP</b>	Bharatiya Janata Party
<b>BPL</b>	Below Poverty Line
<b>CARE</b>	The Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere
<b>CBI</b>	Central Bureau of Investigation
<b>CRZ</b>	Coastal Regulation Zone
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>DNN</b>	Dalit Network Netherlands
<b>DRDA</b>	District Rural Development Agency
<b>EOC</b>	Emergency Operation Centre
<b>GOs</b>	Government Orders
<b>GOO</b>	Government of Orissa
<b>GPs</b>	Gram Panchayats
<b>HYVS</b>	High Yielding Variety Seeds
<b>IAY</b>	Indira Awas Yojana
<b>IFRCRC</b>	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>IMD</b>	Indian Meteorological Department



<b>INGOs</b>	International non-Governmental Organisations
<b>ISDR</b>	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
<b>KBK</b>	Kalahandi Balangir Koraput
<b>MBC</b>	Most Backward Caste
<b>NGOs</b>	Non- Governmental Organisations
<b>NIDM</b>	National Institute of Disaster Management
<b>ODMM</b>	Orissa Disaster Mitigation Mission
<b>ORC</b>	Orissa Relief Code
<b>OSDMA</b>	Orissa State Disaster Mitigation Authority
<b>PRIs</b>	Panchayati Raj Institutions
<b>SC</b>	Scheduled Caste
<b>SHGs</b>	Self Help Groups
<b>ST</b>	Scheduled Tribes
<b>UDHR</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<b>UN</b>	United Nation
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>UNDRO</b>	United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

# *CHAPTER - I*

## **INTRODUCTION**

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Disaster - A Global Problem

Disasters are as old as human history and are a universal reality and are perhaps inevitable. Disaster is unlike anything else in human experience. It changes the lives of all that it touches and its effects are felt long after the event. Disasters have a multi-dimensional effect on several sectors - physical, social, economic, political, cultural, technological, etc. Every year, various parts of the country are affected by one or more disasters, causing heavy damage and taking a massive toll of life (both human beings and animals) and property thereby adding the suffering of the people affected by such unexpected calamities. For example-: the recent earthquake in China and the cyclone in Myanmar. And perhaps more important, its forces are largely outside the control of the people whom it most affects.

Over the recent decades there has been an alarming increase in the occurrence of natural disasters and the magnitude of their social, economic and environmental impacts. According to the United Nations, in 2001 alone, natural disasters of medium to high range caused at least 25,000 deaths around the world, more than double the previous year, and economic losses of around US \$ 36 billion. About 211 million people are affected by 'natural' disasters every year. Of the two billion people affected by disasters during the 1990s, 90 per cent live in Asia (International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent [IFRCRC], 2001). The continent of Asia is particularly vulnerable to disaster strikes. Between the years 1991 to 2000 Asia has accounted for 83 per cent of the population affected by disasters globally. While the number of people affected in the rest of the world was around 1.2 lakhs, in Asia the number was 5.5 lakhs. According to the World Disasters Report, two-thirds of the people affected are from countries with low

human development index (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, 2001). However, these countries have made fewer efforts than developed countries to adapt their physical environments to mitigate the impact of natural disasters or to insure themselves against disaster risk (Freeman, Keen and Mani, 2003).

Within Asia, 24 per cent of deaths due to disasters occur in India, on account of its size, population and vulnerability<sup>1</sup>. The disturbing fact is that even in a region like South Asia, where poverty, deprivation, and death due to disasters are a common enough feature of life, India remains the worst-affected country. India supports one-sixth of the world's population on just 2% of its landmass. India is one of the world's major theatres of disasters, both natural and human-made. Floods, droughts, cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes etc pound it end to end every year. Epidemics, communal riots, refugees, conflicts, internal displacement, fires and other disasters like environmental fallouts and tobacco induced casualties compound the country's chronic troubles. Often the difference between them is marginal. According to one estimate<sup>2</sup>, nearly 59% of India's land area is prone to earthquakes of moderate to high hazard,<sup>3</sup> nearly 12% is flood prone, about 8% is cyclone prone, 2% is landslide prone and a long coastline is exposed to tsunamis and storm surges. Drought is regarded as disaster in slow motion, affect as much as 68% of India's land. Among the 35 states and union territories, 27 of them are disaster prone. And if the perceived threats due to other disasters such as chemical and terrorist attacks are added, every square inch of India is vulnerable, calling for immediate attention and sustained effort. So disasters are a shared reality spanning individuals, villages, blocks, districts, states, nations and even regions, and have to be responded to with a multi-pronged approach. According to an estimate by World Bank the direct losses due to disasters are on the order of \$ 30 billion over the past 35 years. In 2005 alone, disasters in India caused direct losses approaching Rs 87,500 Crore. The social and economic

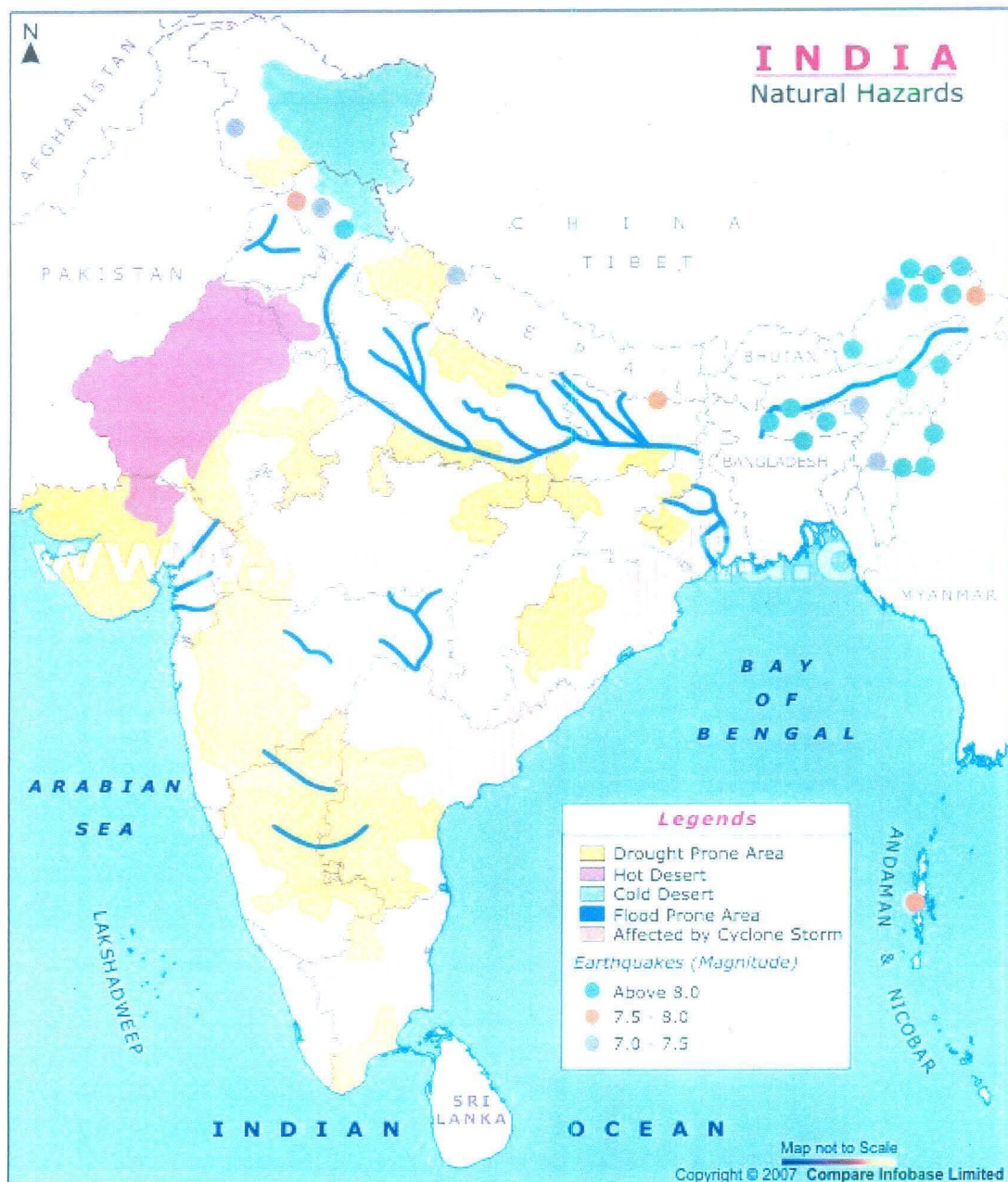
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<sup>1</sup>. From the perspective of hazards and disasters, vulnerability is the conceptual nexus that links the relationship that people have with their environment to social forces and institutions and the cultural values that sustain or contest them. For a detail understanding of 'vulnerability' can see the book, Bankoff, G., G.Frerks and D. Hilhorst (2006), *Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development and People*, (U.K., U.S.A.: Earthscan Publications).

<sup>2</sup>. See, Bhandari, R.K. (2006), "Disaster Management in India: A New Awakening", *Disaster and Development*, Vol.1, No.1, November, pp.1-26.

<sup>3</sup>. Hazard is the necessary condition for the occurrence of a disaster.

Fig. 1



## Natural Hazard Map of India

Source: [www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/natural-hazard.htm](http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/natural-hazard.htm)

progress achieved over decades of initiatives by the people, advance in health, can be significantly degraded by disasters.

Although India has borne the burnt of storms, cyclones, earthquakes in the past but was suddenly shaken up by a natural disaster called the tsunami<sup>4</sup> for the first time in the recent past. The tsunami<sup>5</sup> that occurred in the night of December 26, 2004 killed several thousands of people, displacing many more, and wounding many others whose count will never be known. The devastation caused by this tsunami is unprecedented in the history of all tsunamis. Similarly in India, it is the state of Orissa which is highly prone to all types of disasters. But the Super Cyclone<sup>6</sup> which occurred in 1999 in Orissa was so severe that it affected 12 of the coastal districts of Orissa and affected over 15 million people in Orissa and killed 9,893 people. But before discussing on these two disasters it is necessary to have an understanding of the classification and conceptualization of disasters in general.

## 1.2 Classification of Disasters

Disasters are normally divided into three broad categories on the basis of the main causative factors viz.

1. **Natural disasters**
2. **Human-made or induced disasters**
3. **Technological disasters**

1. The term “**natural disasters**” refers to those disasters that are triggered by natural phenomena. These are natural because they are independent of human will and

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<sup>4</sup> . Until the devastating *tsunami* that occurred in the night of December 26, 2004, not many people knew about the word, *tsunami*.

<sup>5</sup> . A tsunami is a Japanese word (pronounced Tsunah-Mee) meaning ‘harbour wave’. It is often referred as a “tidal wave”, which appears to be a wave train, or series of waves, generated in a large body of water by an impulsive disturbance (caused by an earthquake of submarine landslides) that vertically displaces the water column.

<sup>6</sup> . When a cyclone moves with a wind speed of more than 221 kms/per hour it is referred as a ‘super cyclone’.

motivation. For example- earthquake, volcanic eruption, hurricane, tsunamis, cyclones, tornado, avalanche or flood etc. But today the term natural disaster can be misleading because it implies that the disasters are solely a result of natural hazards- when in fact, human endeavours are a major contributing factor in creating a disaster. For example- if settlements were not located in flood plains, disasters would not result from floods. If housing were built to earthquake and cyclone resistant standards, these hazards would be of scientific interest only and not result in disasters.

2. The term “**human-made disasters**” is of an anthropogenic origin, and has resulted from man’s interaction with the artificial environment he has created. It is caused by human designs and machinations, but not of natural forces. For example- accelerated soil erosion, ethnic conflicts, mass dislocation due to political unrest, civil riots, wars, terrorist violence, epidemics such as water-borne diseases, malaria, plague etc.
3. The third category of disasters i.e. “**technological disasters**” has remained largely unrecognized so far. These are technological because they signify technological failure or breakdowns and defy the description of either natural or human-made disasters. But apart from technological infirmities they too are caused by failure of human factor. For example- train collisions, plane crashes, gas leak (disasters), nuclear explosions etc.

In addition to the classification of disasters mentioned above, disasters also may be classified according to how rapidly they begin and how long they last. And this type of classification is essential, because the general approaches that are used to respond to the disasters in each category are very similar. For example- to support the refugees and displaced persons, feeding programs similar to those that are required for famine victims are used. In this classification system there are two types of disasters:

1. Rapid-onset or cataclysmic disasters - in a rapid-onset disaster, one large-scale event causes most of the damage and destruction. For example- earthquakes, cyclones, floods, tsunamis, landslides, tropical storms etc.
2. Long-term or continuing disasters - in a long-term disaster, the situation remains constant or may even deteriorate as time passes. For example- civil wars, droughts, famines, epidemics, environmental degradation, deforestation, pest infestation and desertification etc.

### **1.3 Conceptual Framework of Disaster**

#### ***1.3.1 Origin of the Term Disaster***

The word 'disaster' is derived from the 16<sup>th</sup> century French word 'Desastre' is a combination of two terms. 'Des' and 'Astre', means bad or evil and 'Astre' means star, thus 'Desastre' signifying a 'Bad Star' or 'Evil Star'. Disaster, therefore, was implying loss or damage occurring due to some unfavourable star. In India some of the local terms which are used for the word disaster are, in Hindi the word disaster is referred as 'Duryog' or 'Aapda', in Bengali it is referred as 'Biparjoy', in Oriya the word disaster is referred as 'Biparjya', in Assam it is referred as 'Durjog', implies mishappening and in Tamil the word disaster is referred as 'Perazheev' means misfortune and in Manipuri the word disaster is referred as 'Tamthiba', and 'Thoudok', which implies a terrible event, it is also referred as 'Awa-aha', and 'Taaba', which implies a great misfortune.

In the 1930<sup>7</sup>s, during the disastrous earthquake in Bihar, Gandhi was said to have described the disaster as god's punishment for the sins committed by the people! But Rabindranath Tagore, who otherwise respected Gandhi, came out in public, admonishing him for his superstitious explanation of the earthquake. Even today there is a tendency among some intellectual circles, to explain Gandhi's observation as his attempt to speak

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<sup>7</sup> . See the article, Banerjee, S. (2005), "Reflections on the Tsunami", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.40, No.2, January 8-14, pp.97-98.



in terms of the popular belief in 'Karma-Phal', which means rewards or punishment for acts done in the past. They interpret Gandhi's public response to the Bihar earthquake – framed in his religious rhetoric – as his way of chastising the upper caste people for the sins that they had committed by oppressing the Dalits.

### ***1.3.2 A Historical Perspective***

In the past, many if not most, of the cultures around the world viewed disasters as acts of God (Drabek, 1991). The problem with this conceptualization was that it ignored the natural processes of an ever-changing environment. Consequently, as the scientific understanding of the earth's physical systems expanded, disasters became synonymous with disaster agents themselves. In other words, disasters were equated with earthquakes, tornadoes, flooding and the like (Cannon, 1994). But this natural hazards perspective downplayed the role of humans in creating or contributing to all types of catastrophic events and was most applicable to sudden-onset "natural" disasters (O'Keefe et al., 1976; Hewitt, 1983). As a result of these weaknesses, the field is moving in many respects towards an alternative explanation that explores the social construction of disasters (Bolin and Standford, 1999; Quarantelli, 1998).

Social scientific disaster researchers realized that catastrophes could neither be understood nor mitigated merely exploring the physical platform of human existence. The first attempt for the study of disasters from a social science perspective was done by Prince, in his investigation of the Munitions ship explosion in the harbor of Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1917 (Prince, 1920). This study helped to provide an insight on the social and economic consequences of disasters and helped to understand how humans respond in times of disasters. Social scientists approach disasters as unpredictable and extreme happenings that dismaying fell upon human communities. From the 1950s to the 1970s interests fell on the behaviour of individuals, and organizations in the warning, impact, and immediate aftermath stages of disasters. In the 1980s, however a new position emerged. Disasters and hazards leading to them were reevaluated and redefined as basic, often chronic elements of environments and, more significantly, as happenings humans

themselves to degree construct (Hewitt, 1983). The formation and formulation of social realms were added into the disaster nexus.

### ***1.3.3 What is a Disaster?***

To have an understanding of the term disaster it is important to differentiate the term disaster from individual, non-extreme or small-scale suffering. For example- hunger is a growing world-wide phenomenon; while it is a major concern, it is often endemic, being addressed with different approaches. Only when hunger becomes widespread and acute, in other words a famine, does the situation qualify as a disaster. This distinction is important because it helps define disasters as a separate set of events and gives a starting point for studying and undertaking their importance, their impact, and the proper responses they require.

To have a conceptual clarity of the term disaster one needs to understand the distinction between the term hazard and disaster as these two terms have been used interchangeably many a times. The distinction between the concept of hazard and that of disaster lies basically in the time perspective. A hazard is “a condition with the potential for harm to the community or environment” (Drabek, 2004, Student Handout 2-1, p.1). For sociologists, the term disasters referred to specific events like the Tsunami (2004) whereas hazards define a class of threats like hurricanes, tsunamis, cyclones, tornadoes, earthquakes, etc.

The term natural hazard has been defined in four ways. It is:

- i) “A naturally occurring or man-made geologic condition or phenomenon that presents a risk or is a potential danger to life or property” (American Geological Institute, 1984);
- ii) “An interaction of people and nature governed by the co-existent state of adjustment of the human use system and the state of nature in the natural events system” (White, 1973);

- iii) “Those elements in the physical environment [which are] harmful to man and caused by forces extraneous to him” (Burton and Kates, 1964);
- iv) “The probability of occurrence within a specified period of time and within a given area of a potentially damaging phenomenon” (UNDRO, 1982).

A hazard is the necessary condition for the occurrence of a disaster. However only when hazards (physical events) intersect with exposed, vulnerable elements at risk will a disaster occur and cause humanitarian, economic, social, political and ecological effects. The character and magnitude of a hazard may be altered by man’s actions; there is little hazard from flood if man does not inhabit or use the flood plain. *Where* man builds and lives with reference to the location of potential extreme geophysical events determines the character and extent of geophysical hazard to man. The extent of the hazard is also a function of *how* man builds. Man can live in some areas of high seismic resistance. For instance- great earthquakes may come, but casualties, economic losses, and social disruption can be minor. This shows that hazard can be reduced even if not completely eliminated.

Most social scientists refer to actual or possible disasters (hazards) in terms of physical impacts of or problems caused by unplanned and socially disruptive events (Fritz, 1961; Barton, 1970; Dunes, 1970). Their most visible features are they do physical and social harm, that they strike suddenly (or at least are ultimately represented as acute), and that something can be done about them either before or after they happen (Perrow, 1984). One of the convenient definitions of “disaster” is that an individual event must cause more than US \$1 million in damage, or the death or injury of more than 100 people (Burton et al., 1978). This definition has some drawbacks, for instance sometimes the small damages can be very costly in highly developed societies, while catastrophic ones may appear cheap in very poor societies with few valuables. In fact, disasters seem to have a disproportionately large impact on very poor and very rich societies; the former (i.e. the poor) present the higher casualty totals and latter (the very rich suffer) the highest property damages. This definition is not complete as it ignores the social aspect. It is not

just enough to define disasters in terms of its 'property spaces' (Kreps, 1984a, 20) i.e. the 'magnitude' and 'scope of impact', as disaster is also a social product.

Turner offers a number of general statements for defining the concept of disaster:

- i) [A disaster] may be taken to be 'a significant departure from normal experience for a particular time and place' (1978: 82);
- ii) 'Unwanted consequences as a result of the collapse of precautions which had hitherto been culturally accepted as adequate' (1978: 84);
- iii) 'From one point of view, disasters may be regarded as unwanted and unanticipated discharges of energy which have harmful consequences' (1979: 54).

In order to have an understanding of natural disasters, Pelanda stress that:

*if one seeks an understanding of what happens at the interface between extreme physical phenomena and social systems, it is necessary to look at the relationship between extreme physical phenomena and social systems, it is necessary to look at the relationship between the context of 'normality' and the processes of disasters (Pelanda, 1981: 1).*

From this one can infer that, one should examine how the processes of disaster operate upon, and disturb, the normality of condition in the community. Hence in order to understand disaster it is necessary to be familiar with the relationship between the disaster event and its impact within the social environment. Further, in order to define the causes and effects of disaster impact upon a social system (or subsystem), the definition must have its roots within that system.

To understand the effect of the disaster on the social system, Barton's (1969) concept of a 'collective stress situation' is useful as it has its roots in the social system. A 'collective stress situation', described in Barton's words, is one which:

*occurs when many members of a social system fail to receive expected conditions of life from the system. These conditions of life include the safety of the physical environment, protection from attack, provision of food, shelter, and income, and guidance and information necessary to carry on normal activities. Collective stress can arise from sources either outside or inside the social system.*

The first socially oriented definition was innovatively advanced by Fritz (1961). In this respect, definitions of a social nature have replaced the very early referents in almost solely in physical terms. The definition of disaster which is one of the most referenced is the one proposed by Fritz:

*an event, concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of a society, undergoes severe danger and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society is prevented (1961: 655).*

From this it is inferred that the social component of defining disaster was oriented towards a systems approach, emphasizing social structure and the effects the agent had upon the system following the impact. But in this definition no emphasis was provided for considering pre-conditions, hence causes of disaster were confined to the agent itself rather than the social system.

There is another definition which moves towards the notion that determining the causes of disaster is essential to understanding the disaster event; and that these causes may be found within the social system itself, rather than being solely an attribute of the disaster agent. This definition suggests that social systems may cause disaster and that vulnerability is an inherent feature of the social system. Kreps' definition of disaster highlights this interpretation, although he does not state that causes and consequences of disaster are exclusively a function of that society. Disasters, according to Kreps, are:

*events, observable in time and space, in which societies or their larger subunits (e.g. communities, regions) incur physical damages and losses and / or disruption of their routine functioning. Both the causes and the consequences of these events are related to the social structures and processes or their subunits (Kreps, 1984b: 312).*

This definition of disaster is very much applicable to my study as it explains that there may be features within the structures and processes of social systems that lead to an increase in the disaster vulnerability, and possibly through an increase in the diversity of potentially disrupting situations and circumstances.

#### **1.4 Objectives:**

1. To understand the available sociological perspectives on disaster;
2. To study the differential impact of the disaster on different categories of population;
3. To analyze how the disaster relief and rehabilitation process is socially structured or influenced;
4. To assess the role and response of the State and see how it is different from the NGOs;
5. To analyze how those who are excluded from the disaster relief, put forth their rights/claims;
6. To examine what changes come about in the social structure, social relationship, society, family and caste in the aftermath of the disaster.

#### **1.5 Methodology**

The problem under study is to know that although hazards are natural but disasters outcomes are not. For this study two case studies have been taken i.e. the 2004 tsunami in India and the 1999 Super Cyclone in Orissa. This study is basically a review of existing literature on the topic. Materials for this study were collected mainly from secondary

sources, but I have also relied on primary sources. The secondary sources on which the research is carried out includes the material that are available in the forms of books, journals, articles, newspaper clippings, magazines like Frontline and India Today and the studies undertaken by different authoritative agencies on disaster. Annual reports of the government and reports of special bodies on disaster management, reduction and preparedness like National Institute for Disaster Management (NIDM), Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), United Nations Disaster Management Team (UNDMT) etc and the conferences, workshops and training programmes on disaster have also provided the basic literature on disaster. In order to have an understanding of the local terms used for the word disaster in different languages I have interviewed people which helped me to gain insight into my research.

## **1.6 Need to Study Orissa Super Cyclone and the Tsunami**

Orissa is one of the states of the Indian Union formed as a linguistic province in 1936. The state is having 482 km long-coastline, drained by three major rivers namely the Mahanadi, the Brahmani, and the Baitarani. In spite of the fact that the state is endowed with vast mineral deposits of chromate, bauxite, iron and coal in respect of about 94.4%, 69.7%, 26.0% and 23.8% respectively of the total deposits of India (GOO, 2000; Dash, 2001). Still Orissa occupies the dubious distinction of being the poorest and the least developed state in India. Situated on the east coast of India, Orissa is a state highly vulnerable to disasters. Even the vast coastal belt of the state has made her prone to the different calamities. Occurrence of floods, famines, drought and cyclones is common on the soil of Orissa. Between 1820 and 2002, the state suffered 68 major floods, 41 cyclones, 55 droughts, and 5 tornadoes. The state suffers from atleast one natural disaster every three years. The socio-economic condition of the people of Orissa is significantly guided by the interplay of various natural forces. Before the people of Orissa and the state managed to recover from one disaster they faced another. In 1999 Orissa faced two successive cyclones in less than two weeks. The second one termed as the Super Cyclone affected 12 coastal districts of Orissa and was one of the worst disasters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

But very few research studies have been undertaken on the 1999 Super Cyclone and there is rarely any study on cyclone in Orissa. Most importantly there is hardly any study on the Super Cyclone in Orissa from a social science perspective. For this reason, this study deals with the Super Cyclone in Orissa from a sociological perspective.

Similarly the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami is the biggest peacetime mass fatalities incident in the recent history. The cataclysmic 2004 tsunami was a world wide disaster, the impact of which will be felt for decades to come. Since the focus of my study is confined to India, so in India, the tsunami affected nearly 2,260 kilometers of the mainland coastline of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Pondicherry, as well as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, with tidal waves up to 10 meters high penetrating up to 3 kilometers inland, taking up at least 10,749 lives (“Special SITREP 35”, para.1) and affecting more than 2.79 million people across 1089 villages. The relief and rehabilitation that followed was perhaps one of the largest in history till date. But there is little research on the tsunami from a social science perspective and more specifically from a sociological perspective.

Here I attempt to study these two disasters from a sociological perspective as disasters are intriguing social phenomena. During a disaster, the social structure cannot be taken for granted and therefore its origins and transformations have to be observed and analyzed quite vividly. I will attempt to analyze that in both the cases how the social systems generate unequal exposure to risk by making some people more prone to disaster than others, thereby creating inequalities in risk and opportunity. This study is essential because of the misperception of disasters as social leveling events, but in fact the risk of exposure to the effects of disasters is not distributed equally but reflects the fault lines (i.e. the inequitable social order) of the society. Even there is less research on the subsequent relief and rehabilitation efforts in the aftermath of the tsunami and the super cyclone from a social perspective so this work will also focus on it.



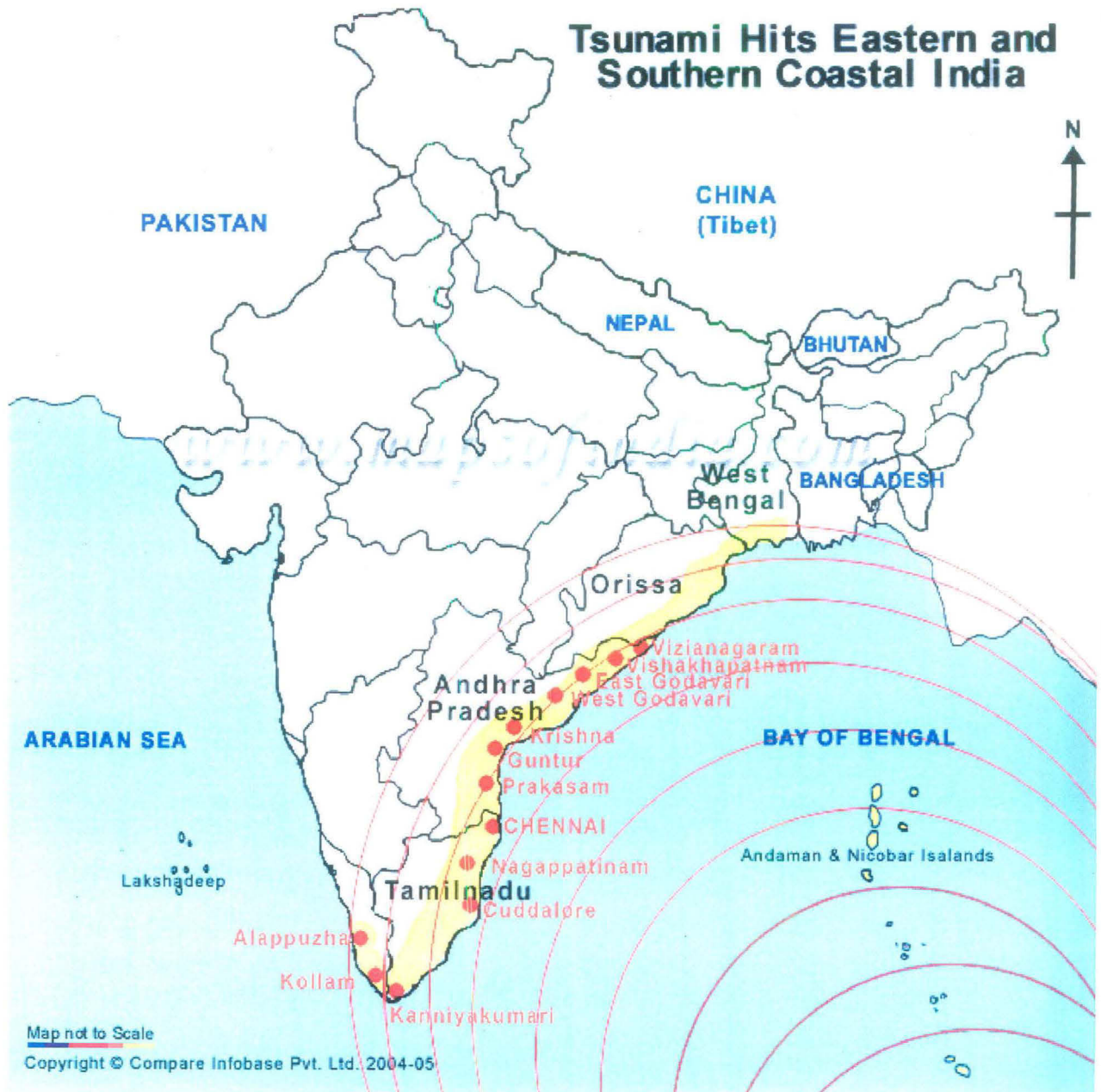
Fig. 2



**Map of Orissa  
Depicting the Affected Areas**

Source: <http://www.un.org.in/dmt/orissa/FAOrpt.htm>

Fig. 3



## Tsunami Affected Areas in India

Source: <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/tsunami-in-India/tsunami-affected-area-india.html>

## 1.7 Nature and Scope of the Work

I have taken two diverse disasters i.e. the 1999 Super Cyclone in Orissa and the 2004 tsunami as “cases” which would help me to derive insights through comparison and contrast. I would attempt to analyze and study the two disasters from a sociological perspective as there has been comparatively less work on it, this would help to infer that social vulnerability to disaster is not uniform whether we take into account the caste, class, gender, age, ethnicity etc. In both the disasters I am going to analyze that although disasters typically construct them to be ‘natural’ in fact they have a social origin.

Natural disasters are hardly natural as they affect different categories of population differently according to their social, political, economical and cultural contexts and it is the vulnerable groups who tend to suffer more at the impact of natural disasters. I will analyze how this differential impact of the disaster is further continued with the exclusion and discrimination of the vulnerable groups in the crucial relief and rehabilitation phase in the form of institutional discrimination and social prejudice. These arrangements in terms of social, political, economic, institutional etc combine to structure (predestine?) their vulnerability. The present work will be an important contribution to the contemporary discourse on disaster studies as it helps to have a better understanding of the social structure (and the changes that arises in the social structure in the post-disaster) and raises questions on the structural deprivation of certain social groups which will in the future lead to a holistic relief and rehabilitation policy that will be more inclusive and make special provisions for the vulnerable groups and those at the very bottom of socio-economic hierarchy. It will significantly add to the existing store of knowledge and future research on the topic.

## 1.8 Organization of the Study

The first chapter, ‘**Introduction**’ focuses on how disaster is a global problem and in Asia it is India which is highly vulnerable to all types of disasters. The conceptual framework of disaster is discussed with the crucial differentiation between hazard and

disaster. The nature and scope of the work is explained which helps to understand the rationale behind taking the 1999 Orissa Super Cyclone and the 2004 tsunami as case studies for my research.

The second chapter, '**Disasters: Sociological Perspectives**' is an attempt to discuss disaster from a sociological perspective. The first section of this chapter deals with the classical approach on disaster and the second section deals with the contemporary approach on disaster.

The third chapter, '**Disasters in India: A Sociological Perspective**' begins by discussing the need for a sociological perspective in disaster. In this chapter I have made an attempt to analyze how the disasters interact with the pre-disaster social conditions and have a differential impact on different categories of population. The first section focuses on the social consequences of the tsunami disaster and the second section focuses on the social consequences of the super cyclone.

The fourth chapter, '**Rehabilitations**' focuses on how the relief and rehabilitation process is socially structured in both the cases i.e. the tsunami and the super cyclone. This chapter also deals with the response of the state and civil society organizations in both the tsunami and the super cyclone. In addition to these I have also discussed the need for a rights-based approach in disaster and have explained how the people who have been discriminated in the disaster put forth their rights in both the case studies i.e. the tsunami and the super cyclone.

The last chapter, '**Conclusion**' provides the summary and describes the findings of the present study and gives some valuable suggestions. This chapter ends by giving a brief account of certain aspects in the area of disaster studies which have not been much explored but which should be researched in the future.

## *CHAPTER - II*

### **DISASTERS : SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

## DISASTERS: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

### 2.1 Classical Perspective

Why study disasters at all? One answer which comes from our commonsensical understanding is; to improve our understanding of these calamitous events in order to minimize what we see as their undesirable consequence. But beyond this practical justification, in what sense are disasters a sociological construct? In other words, what are the primary reasons for studying disasters, and why should such phenomena be of particular interest to sociologists? The answer is that disaster is a social product and this explains the significance of sociologists in studying disasters. As Pelanda points out:

*the disaster -as-a-social -product perspective has the property of breaking down the boundaries within which disasters have been studied and conceptualized until now, but it does not provide per se an alternative definition. It only indicates that the problems a 'sociology of disasters' has to cope with are complex than those traditional 'disaster research' has dealt with (1982, 7).*

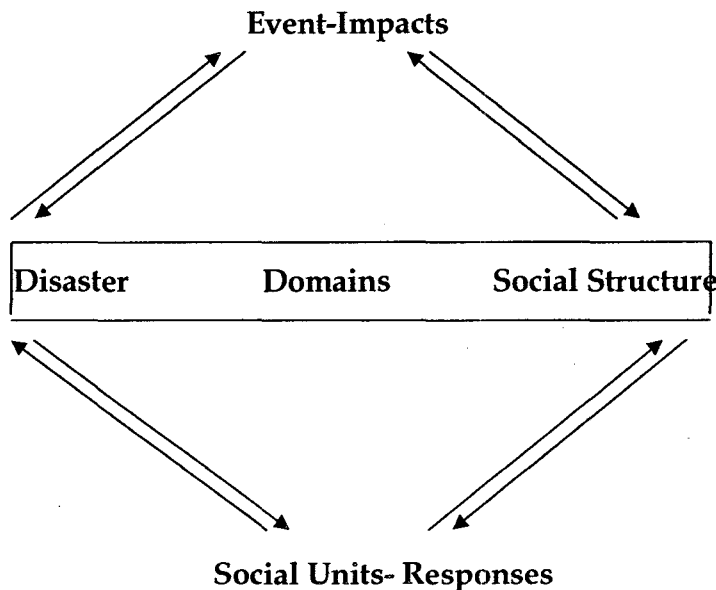
Disasters provide opportunities to examine aspects of social structures and processes that are hidden in everyday affairs (Turner, 1967; Kreps, 1984: 310). The basic subject matter of sociology is social structure, or the forms of human association (Simmel, 1908). Social Structure is a complex network of existing social relations amongst persons of a society in relation to one another. (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952).

How are disaster and social structure related? A revision of Fritz's (1961) earlier definition points to the mutual relationship between disaster and social structure. Thus disasters are:

*events in which societies or their larger subunits (e.g. communities, regions) incur physical damages and losses*

*and disruption of their routine functioning. Both the causes and effects of these events are related to the social structures and processes of societies or their subunits.*

The argument here is that the above definition points to four core properties. Disasters are (1) events that can be observed in time and space. These events have (2) impacts on (3) social units. The social units enact (4) responses that are related to these impacts. It explains that there may be features within the structures and processes of social systems that lead to increases in disaster vulnerability, possibly through an increase in the diversity of potentially disrupting situations and circumstances.



**Fig. 4. Relationship between Disaster and Social Structure**

As expressed graphically on figure1, an important bridging concept in this regard is domain. Domains represent actual or threatened physical and temporal impacts as legitimated spheres of collective action. For example, floods have greater scope of impact than tornadoes, while the latter have less forewarning. The two types of events can be compared in terms of these property spaces of impacts. At the same time, domains such as damage control or warning translate these physical and temporal features as the responses of social units. The enclosed rectangle on figure1 depicts the relationship of

social structure and disaster through domain performance. The continuous arrows reflect the fact that disaster and social structure are at once antecedent and consequent of each other. Pre- and post – impact domains capture the life history of disaster as historical happening. As presented below, responses to disasters reflect alternative forms of association. These forms are enacted by different types of social units. And as defined and observed, social structure is both thing (unit) and process (response).

Sociologically a disaster is defined as a specific type of ‘collective stress situation’ (Barton, 1969: 38). A ‘collective stress situation’ is one which “occurs when many members of a social system fail to receive expected conditions of life from the system”. This explains that social units fail to cope with the normal functioning of the society. This is considered as a change in the system that some social units are not able to function properly. ‘Social System’ is an important concept in sociology. To understand disaster in the context of social system we can refer to Talcott Parsons ‘system analysis’, i.e. disasters may generate change within the social systems, but not supposed to cause systemic change (Parsons, 1951).

Disaster studies provide rich data for addressing basic questions about social organization – its origins, adaptive capacities, and survival and even about role enactment. These questions are considered fundamental by the classic figures of sociology.

The three major classical sociological pioneers- Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber – had an implicit environmental dimension to their work. According to Marx:

*It is not the unity of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but rather the separation between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital. Karl Marx, Grundrisse<sup>8</sup>.*

<sup>8</sup> . See, Foster, J.B. (2000), *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, (Kharagpur: Cornerstone Publications).





The process of labour, which is the basis for the relationships between man and his natural environment, predetermined man's transition to social life, the emergence of society with its specific laws of evolution. According to Marx, labour is primarily "a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature"<sup>9</sup>. Although there is a long history of denouncing Marx for a lack of ecological concern but according to the Italian Geographer Massimo Quaini, "Marx ... denounced the spoliation of nature before a modern bourgeois ecological conscience was born"<sup>10</sup>.

Instead Marx and Engel believed that social conflict between the two principal classes in society, i.e. capitalists and the proletariat (workers), not only alienates ordinary people from their jobs but it also leads to their estrangement from nature itself. This is evident in "Capitalist Agriculture" which puts a quick profit from the land ahead of the welfare of both humans and the soil. And as the industrial revolution proceeded through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rural workers were removed from the land and driven into crowded, polluted cities while the soil itself was drained of its vitality (Parsons, 1977: 19).

According to Marx, "Cultivation – when it progresses spontaneously and is not *consciously controlled*...leaves deserts behind it"<sup>11</sup>. The arbitrary utilization of natural resources and the rapacious exploitation of natural wealth were started in the early period of social history and became particularly pronounced in the capitalist era. Lenin even stressed that capitalist large-scale production and capitalist competition were accompanied by "rapacious use of the productive forces of the soil"<sup>12</sup>.

Marx in his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844" recognized the interdependence of humans and nature, an idea now central to the ecological vision. People, he asserted, were active natural beings who were corporeal and sensuous and

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<sup>9</sup> . See, Marx, K. (1976), *Capital*, Vol.1, (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

<sup>10</sup> . See, Foster, J.B. (2000), *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, (Kharagpur: Cornerstone Publications).

<sup>11</sup> . See, Shirokov, Y. (1975), *Man, Society and Environment*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), pp. 24.

<sup>12</sup> .Ibid., pp.24.

who, like animals and plants, were limited and conditioned by things outside themselves. They were different from these objects and yet dependent on them. “The sun is the object of the plant – an indispensable object to it, confirming its life – just as the plant is the object of the sun, being an expression of the life-awakening power of the sun”<sup>13</sup>. Like today’s ecologists, Marx recognized the essential linkages between the materials that make up the human body and nonhuman nature. “Nature is man’s organic body,”<sup>14</sup> he wrote. Man lives on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange. If, he is not to die. That means physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.

What is essential to the “ecological” vision of Marx and Engels is their study of the history of human interactions with nature. They argue that early societies had a different relationship to nature than do capitalist societies. While pastoral societies wander, taking from nature that which is necessary for life, horticulture societies settle down and appropriate the earth’s resources for their own sustenance. The settled community uses the earth as “a great workshop” for its labour. Human labour, on the one hand, and the earth, with its soil, water, and inorganic life as instrument of labour on the other hand, are both necessary for the reproduction of human life. Under capitalism, the earth is bought and sold as private property. According to Engels, the earth is peddled for profit. “To make the earth an object of huckstering”<sup>15</sup>, he wrote, “the earth which is our one and all, the first condition of our existence – was the last step toward making oneself an object of huckstering”<sup>16</sup>. It is the ultimate in alienation.

The historical development of material production is responsible for the continually growing complexity of interaction between nature and society – from the rudimentary forms connected with hunting, stock-breeding and crop farming in primitive society to the most up to date achievements in science and technology. In particular, in the course

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<sup>13</sup> . See, Merchant, C. (1992), *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, (New York, London: Routledge).

<sup>14</sup> . See, Merchant, C. (1992), *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, (New York, London: Routledge).

<sup>15</sup> . Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> . Ibid.

of social history the use of power resources by man becomes increasingly complex and changes in quality. For example, in addition to electrical power, production has been started of nuclear energy, which has triggered off a veritable chain reaction in the relationships between man and nature. The industrial development begins to change the thermal balance of the Earth, increasingly affecting the moisture turnover and the natural processes associated with it. The scientific and technological revolution holds out to mankind in the coming historical period unprecedented technical opportunities for cardinal changes in nature on a regional and global scale. These changes, however, may be directed toward rational utilization and improvement of the natural environment for the benefit of man or bring disaster to mankind.

In “Capital”, Marx analyzed some of the “ecological” side effects of the capitalist mode of production. He argued that capitalist agriculture, much more than communal farming, wastes and exploits the soil. Capitalist agriculture, Marx observed is progress in “the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility.”

But these mode of transforming nature have unforeseen side effects and this is well noted in Engel’s, “Dialectics of Nature”, he wrote: “in nature nothing takes place in isolation, everything affects every other thing and vice versa, and it is mostly because this all-sided motion and interaction is forgotten that our natural scientists are prevented from clearly seeing the simplest thing”. Marx and Engel’s both made reference to the negative impact of capitalism on natural environment. The shift in thinking i.e. the impact of the natural upon the ‘social’ appears to emanate particularly from Durkheim and Weber.

Durkheim’s idea was that society constituted a social ‘organism’ which constantly had to adapt to the outside social and physical environment. Its equilibrium or steady state could be knocked out of kilter by various disruptive events but, ultimately, it would return to normal just as the human body recovers from a fever. This view point of Durkheim is very much useful to have a sociological understanding of disaster, because

of Durkheim's distinctions of "normal" and "pathological" which is used in analysis of deviance and crime, two seemingly "abnormal" phenomena, provided the means for identifying certain "normal" features of the structure and functioning of the societies. (Durkheim, 1964a: 102-103, 1964b: 47-75). This distinction of Durkheim can be applied to have a sociological understanding of disaster because, we can only be aware of the occurrence of a disaster, which disturbs the normal functioning of the society, if we have in our minds some idea of an alternative and orderly pattern of events which would have existed had the disaster not occurred. So, all disasters are measured in terms of the disruption of an order which was intended or at least anticipated in the future.

Even, the term 'anomie' used by Durkheim to explain the absence of norms or disintegration of norms can be used to analyze the concept of disaster, from a sociological perspective, as a disaster also leads to a deregulation of the normative structure and creates a crisis in the collective order. Durkheim while explaining the problem of suicide dismisses the interpretation of suicide as deriving from the phenomena of imitation, there he uses the concept of the 'fusion of consciousness' i.e. the sentiments experienced mutually by a large number of people. This concept i.e. 'fusion of consciousness', can very well be applied for a sociological understanding of disaster, as when a disaster occurs each one feels the same emotions as the next and the sentiments which stir individuals are mutual sentiments.

Similarly Weber's body of work also seems relevant to sociological studies of disaster. Weber's use of the term 'rationalization' and 'bureaucratization' has implications for having a sociological understanding of disaster. A disaster is a situation where "many members of a social system fail to receive expected conditions of life from the system" (Barton, 1970: 38). But with increased 'rationalization' and 'bureaucratization' as a means we can reduce the effects of disaster and would generate knowledge and produce social, political and economic systems that are adaptive.

Even Weber's use of the notion 'disenchantment' i.e. one need no longer have recourse to magical means, because "one can in principle, master all things by

calculation”, this helps us to understand the idea of ‘disenchantment’, but the idea to master all things has adverse effects on the nature, leads to crisis situations like disasters. At the same time, other elements of Weber’s body of work also seem to be relevant to sociological studies of disaster. His conceptualization of ‘ideal types’ (Weber, 1949: 89-112) provides a way to explain why the term “disaster”, culturally identified with multiple simultaneous deaths (or the threat thereof) perceived to be the result of natural forces, is so resistant to redefinition (such as to encompass the crimes of a serial killer or the crash of a stock market (Dynes, 1999, Stallings, 1998, 2001).

Weber’s theory of social stratification based on class, status and power has implications for providing insights into the sociological understanding of disaster. As it helps to investigate how inequalities in class, status and power affect disaster victimization and recovery. If we analyze how class and disaster are related we find that reestablishing the *status quo* has more to do with the dominance of the property classes than with any “natural” process of social recovery. Similarly, if we try to find out the effects of disaster on a variety of status groups, we find that there are variations in impact and recovery of higher castes and Dalits in the disasters, which can be easily traced back to existing vulnerabilities and capacities. Lastly, if we see how power and disaster are related we find out that disaster require that some agencies and officials take responsibilities, make decisions, and be seen as legitimate. But the exercise of authority which is weak in normal times proves even weaker at a time of disaster. It is even found that organizations may be unable to function well due to conflict between the work role and the family role of officials. This was the sociological explanation of disasters by the classical figures of sociology.

Many of Garfinkel’s field studies of ethnomethods which involves the intentional creation of exceptions in order to learn about the routine (Garfinkel, 1967: 53-65) helps to have a sociological understanding of the disaster.

*Procedurally it is my preference to start with familiar scenes and ask what can be done to make trouble. The operation that one would have to perform in order to....*

*Produce disorganized interaction should tell us something about how the structures of everyday activities are ordinarily and routinely and maintained (Garfinkel, 1967: 37).*

In sociology, it has been the symbolic interactionists who have emphasized that “man lives in a symbolic environment which mediates the relation of the physical environment to him” (Rose, 1962: x), that social interaction is an “interpretive process” (Wilson, 1970), and that the appropriate strategy for sociological investigation requires that “one would have to take the role of the actor and see world from his standpoint” (Blumer, 1966: 542). And the environment of action, which is constituted by the actor, has been nicely caught in W. I. Thomas (1928: 572) concept of “definition of the situation” and in his widely known apothegm, “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”. Within this sociological perspective, then, environmental influence translates into what Ball (1972: 62) has termed “existential causality”, that is, influence through the meanings of situations “as they are phenomenologically experienced by the actors located within them”.

Giddens examination of “critical situations” in which “the accustomed routines of daily life are disrupted” helps us to understand the sociological relevance of disasters.

Although the classical approach is useful for the sociological understanding of disasters and it is the classical analysis of social structure and social change which has provided the starting point for several formidable contemporary theories of the environment. But the classical approach has several limitations which led to the growth of other approaches on disaster. The classical approach has not explained much the relationship between the physical and social environments and about the human-environment interactions. So in the next section I am going to deal with the contemporary perspective on disasters which has taken up these issues.

## 2.2 Contemporary Perspective on Disaster

The sociological understanding of disaster by the classical sociological pioneers has been criticized because environmental factors have been marginal elements in sociological explanation. Although the three major classical sociological pioneers – Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber, had an implicit environmental dimension to their work but this was never at the forefront because their social structural explanations was given importance over physical or environmental ones (Buttel, 1968: 338). Sorokin (1964 [1928]: 192-3) said that any analysis of social phenomena which does not take into consideration geographical factors is incomplete.

William Canton and Riley Dunlap argued that the vast majority of sociologists share a fundamental image of human societies as exempt from the ecological principles and constraints which govern other species. This is evident even in Talcott Parsons, work 'The Social System', for example Talcott Parsons waits until the last few pages of 'The Social System' to admit that his 'theory of action [is] a logically closed system ... only on an analytical level .... The impetus to a process of change', he acknowledges, may perfectly well originate ...in the physical environment' (1951: 489). Even Erving Goffman said that the most primitive organization of human experience always includes a 'natural framework', a 'purely physical' account of the order or disorder of things (1974: 22). Although Goffman recognizes the significance of the physical, however he ignores it in his subsequent analysis.

And Roland Warren descriptively links the formation of communal sentiment to the interrelationships of people to a common territory, suggesting, although not theorizing, the idea that important social activities are typically dependent upon a common geography, or what he calls 'locality reference'(1987: 9).

So, we can say that the classical sociologists could acknowledge the importance of the environment, did not consider it as a sociological problem, it may be because their investigations were limited to what we might call non-extreme environments. A non-

extreme environment is said to exist when nature is embedded in a legitimate way of knowing that renders it innocuous, inoffensive and non-problematic. A non-extreme environment is unlikely to be a cause of great concern; it is, rather, more likely to remain pre-reflective and a source of what Giddens calls 'ontological security' (1991: 35). But today instead of the term non-extreme environment we come across the idea of an extreme environment (Mileti et al, 1975). With the increasing frequency and severity of natural and technological disasters particularly but not exclusively, in the developing world place them in the centre of debates on human-environment relations and issues of development and sustainability.

From this we can say that will the classical sociological approach be enough to explain the surfeit of disasters which we are facing today?

The classical legacy has been problematic for the environmental sociology. It has been observed that the overall thrust of the classical sociological tradition to create bodies of theory and research in which it is implicitly assumed that human groups and societies are essentially insulated or exempt from biophysical processes (Catton and Dunlap, 1978). From an environmental sociological point of view, the classical tradition can be said to be "radically sociological", in that in its quest to liberate social thought and sociology from reductionisms, prejudices, power relations, and magic, the classical theorists, wound up exaggerating the autonomy of social processes from the natural world.

The classical sociologist saw the environment, like religion as a distraction from the necessity of class struggle. And, where the seriousness of environmental destruction was acknowledged, left wing critics were inclined to focus on the class and power relations underlying this crisis rather than on factors relating more directly to the environment itself (Enzenberger, 1979). And, when Marxism came to dominate social theory, this resulted in further exclusion of environmental issues from the discipline of sociology. Now, the question is how to conceive of a sociology in which nature really matters?



The inadequacy of the classical sociology to provide a distinctive understanding of the relationship between society and the environment led to the growth of 'environmental sociology' and the development theories on disaster. As, disasters occur at the interface of society, technology and environment and are fundamentally the outcomes of the interactions of these features.

### *2.2.1 Ecological Approaches*

The ecological approach deals with the interface between human systems and their natural and social environment. The human communities exist in exchange relationship with biosphere (Kai Erikson, 1994). Because when technologies disrupt the relationship between communities and environments, both communities and environment change. Here the question of adaptation becomes important as it helps to understand the human use of the physical environment. As a disaster occurs when a community is not able to adapt to its environment. The sociocultural system is seen as the primary means by which a human population adjusts to its environment. It enables a community to extract from its surrounding food, shelter, water, energy, and other necessities and to confront and reduce to some relative degree the uncertainty and vulnerability experienced in interaction with environmental conditions and forces that threaten the population (Bates and Pelanda, 1994: 149). The adaptational dimension is included in our understanding of disasters because of the fact that human communities and their behaviors are not simply situated in environments. The interface between society and environment is not one "of external contact between separate domains" (Ingold, 1992: 51). Societies are founded and formed in nature themselves, just as nature is culturally constructed and physically altered by society.

Society and environment thus are interpenetrating, mutually constitute of the same world, comprised basically of the possibilities for exchange and action provided by natural, modified, and built environments and of the abilities and capabilities of people and their cultural constructions (Ingold, 1992: 52)

So, disasters do not originate exclusively in societies, but rather emerge from societal environmental relations and the institutionalized forms those relations take. Disasters can result from the interaction of social, natural systems, and material, producing a failure of human culture to protect. Since our understanding of the effects of our actions and about these auto dynamic systems is far from complete, the risk of failure becomes very high (Dombrowsky, 1995 ).

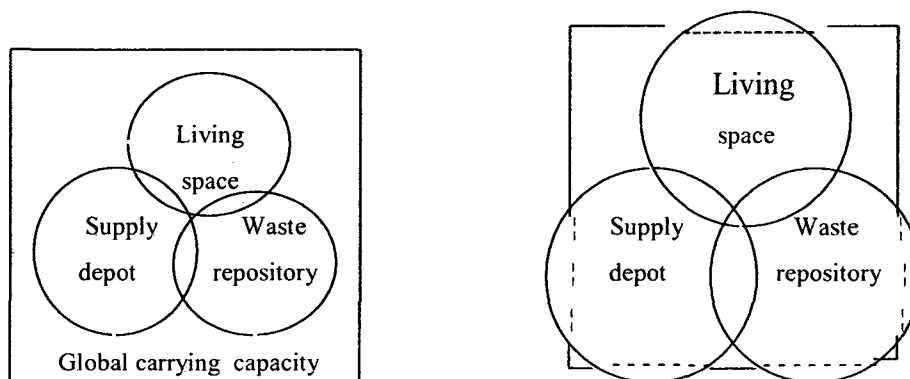
The basic essence of environmental sociology has thus been to recover, and uncover, the “materiality” of social structure and social life, and to do so in ways that yield insights relevant to solving environmental problems. The original contributors to environmental sociology i.e., Dunlap and Catton, as well as Schnaiberg, have also been the most influential contributors at the theoretical core of environmental sociology. The environmental systems helped to illustrate the arguments that are most central to the core of environmental sociology

Dunlap and Catton’s environmental sociology (Catton 1976, 1980; Catton and Dunlap 1978; Dunlap and Catton, 1994) is built around several interrelated notions of environmental problems and the inability of conventional sociology to address these problems stem from worldview (the dominant western worldview in society at large, and the related human exemptionalist paradigm in sociology) that fail to acknowledge the biophysical bases of social structure and social life.

It also analyzed that modern societies are unsustainable because they are living off of what are essentially finite supplies of fossil fuels (What Catton [1976] has called “ghost acreage”) and are using up “ecosystem services” much faster than ecosystems can produce or replenish them; at a global level these processes are being exacerbated by rapid population growth. It says that societies are to a greater or lesser degree faced with the prospect of ecological vulnerability if not “crash”, particularly with the exacerbation of global environmental problems. Duncan’s POET (Population-Organisation-Environment-Technology) model (1961) which was depicted as an ‘ecological complex’ in which: (1) each element is interrelated with the other three and (2) a change in one can

therefore affect each of the other. This POET model helped to provide insight into the complex nature of ecological disruptions, although it failed to give sufficient weight to environmental constraints. For example, in a causal sequence suggested by Dunlap (1993:722-3), an increase in population (P) can create a pressure for technological change(T) as well as increased urbanization (O), leading to the creation of more pollution (E). So, Duncan’s POET model with its use of the human ecological complex at times ‘came close to an embryonic form of environmental sociology’ (Buttel and Humphrey, forthcoming, p.14).

The ecological base of environmental destruction is probably best described in Catton and Dunlap’s own ‘three competing functions of the environment’.



**Fig.5. Competing functions of the environment: (a) circa 1990; (b) current situation**

**Source: Dunlap 1993**

Schnaiberg environmental sociology (Schnaiberg, 1980; Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994), centers around two key notions; i.e. of a “treadmill of production”, and that this treadmill tends to result in environment degradation (through “withdrawals” [i.e., scarcity of energy and materials] and “additions” [i.e., pollution]). The treadmill of production

holds that modern capitalism and the modern state exhibit a fundamental logic of promoting economic growth and private capital accumulation, and that the self-producing nature of this process causes it to assume the character of a “treadmill”. Schnaiberg argues that the treadmill of production is directly linked to ecological crisis, since this accumulation process requires resource extraction (“withdrawals”) and contributes to pollution (“additions”).

A disaster is made inevitable by the historically produced pattern of vulnerability, evidenced in the location, infrastructure, sociopolitical structure, production patterns, and ideology, that characterizes a society. The pattern of vulnerability will condition the behavior of individuals and organizations throughout the life history of a disaster far more profoundly than will the physical force of the destructive agent. Vulnerability is fundamentally a political ecological concept. Political ecology blends a focus on the relationship that people have with their environment with close attention to the political economic forces characteristic of the society in which they live that shape and condition that relationship.

From the perspective of disasters, vulnerability is the conceptual nexus that links the relationship that people have with their environment to social forces and institutions and the cultural values that sustain or contest them. Thus combining the elements of environment, society and culture in various proportions, the concept of vulnerability provides a theoretical framework that encompasses the multidimensionality of disasters. Vulnerability can become a key concept in translating the multidimensionality into the concrete circumstances of life that account for a disaster (Blaike et al, 1994; Comfort et al, 1999; Cutter, 1996; Hewitt, 1983).

A political ecology approach recognizes that the social institutional arrangements through which human beings access and alter the physical environment in their quest for sustenance and shelter are key elements in the evolutions of disasters. Its analysis focuses on those conditions surrounding the disaster, either threatened or occurred, which shape its evolution. It most particularly emphasizes the structures that shape the developmental

features that make the society vulnerable to both socioeconomically and environmentally generated hazards. So a political ecological approach is capable of encompassing the causation and production of disasters, their development as social and environmental processes and events, their sociocultural construction, and their implication for the overall sociocultural adaptation and evolution of the community (Bates and Pelanda, 1994: 147).

“At the root of the ecological crisis...are the basic values which have built our society” (Swan, 1971: 225). Values such as individualism, materialism, limited government and progress (Caldwell, 1970; Christensen and Norgard, 1976; Harblin, 1977; and Whisenant, 1974). A more sophisticated version of this argument has been developed by extending Kuhn’s (1970) well-known concept of “paradigm” to the sociocultural level, in the concept of the “dominant social paradigm”, used by Pirages (1977: 6) to explain the “common values, beliefs, and shared wisdom about the physical and social environments” which constitute a society’s basic “worldview”. But, environmental problems arise, because nation’s Dominant Social Paradigm was formed during a bygone era of extraordinary abundance, and thus much of it (e.g., commitments to laissez faire, individualism, progress, and growth) is no longer adaptive in an era of ecological limits (Pirages, 1977; Catton, 1980; Drengson, 1980; Ophuls, 1977; Rifkin, 1980; and Robertson, 1978). This idea is even consistent with sociological theories which emphasize that a societal value system may become maladaptive if the conditions facing the society change (Parsons, 1977; Williams, 1979).

Today, the idea of “social mitigation” of environmental hazards has been the subject of sociological study for altering the potential for harm in preimpact and post impact stages in disaster.

### ***2.2.2 Developmental Approaches***

The natural environment is the source of resources for development, but the development process lead to the destruction of significant parts of this natural environment.

Poverty is the major causal explanation of disaster. The poor people are often forced to live in environmentally-fragile or degraded areas and these areas are prone to flooding and pollution, as well as the lack of basic infrastructure such as drinking water. These poor environmental conditions may lead to health problems, which in turn can affect individual's ability to earn a living, so exacerbating their economic and social vulnerability. Moreover, people living in poverty can often not afford to improve their local environment and in many cases may be forced to contribute to environmental degradation through, for e.g., using local forest resources for building materials and fuel (Mc Granahan, 1993).

Disasters today are less as the result of geophysical extremes such as storms, earthquakes, avalanches, droughts etc and more as functions of an ongoing social order, of this order's structure of human environment relations, and of the larger framework of historical and structural processes, such as colonialism and underdevelopment, that have shaped this phenomenon. This perspective is relevant as it analyses the social creation of vulnerability (Oliver-Smith, 1996). For example, Morren asserted that:

- (a) Hazards emerge directly from human activity.**
- (b) The severity of damage is related to the intensity of human environmental intervention.**
- (c) Development, encouraging dependency and specialization in individuals and communities, actually reduces both normal coping capacities and the ability to respond to hazards.**
- (d) Outside disaster aid may convert a short-lived local problem into a long-term one (Morren, 1980, 1983).**

Hewitt, who examined the interface between natural and societal systems, challenged what he termed was the "dominant" view of disaster (Hewitt, 1983). And the prevailing perspective of his day assumed that calamitous events were the result of "extremes in geophysical process" (Hewitt, 1983: 5). But, Hewitt took a technocratic approach and provided an alternative explanation for disaster. Hewitt (1983) asserted that the

predominant view was a myth. Disasters are not necessarily the unpredictable and unexpected outcome of powerful physical systems. Instead, the diverse activities of human beings play a role in calamity. Also, if this technocratic interpretation were true, “persons and institutions [would be] uniformly and unambiguously committed to removing known, manageable risks from everyone’s life” (Hewitt, 1983).

However, “there is a lot of evidence that human groups and institutions are rather less fervent about equity and social justice than that” (Hewitt, 1983). Therefore, disasters should be viewed as a reflection of “the ongoing social order .... And the larger historical circumstances that shape or frustrate these matters” (Hewitt, 1983). Hewitt recognized that social changes would have to take place if disasters were to be prevented. For example- the conditions of work and life in urban, industrial and commercial societies would have to be altered in order that people would have sufficient time and means to avert risk and minimize the possibility of disaster. Hence, Hewitt feared the modernization process and suggested that catastrophes would be reduced through a more equitable socioeconomic order.

The increasing vulnerability to hazard continues relatively unabated today, eagerly because of the undermining of indigenous adaptations, based on long term experience local environments, through direct government policies or political economic forces creating production systems inappropriate to local culture and environmental conditions. Even the large-scale economic interventions such as mining, forests, irrigation, hydroelectric, and industrial enterprises are creating hazardous conditions around the globe. The government economic policies designed to enhance growth are setting in motion processes with dangerous potentially catastrophic ecological consequences. In effect, such processes are creating both vulnerability and the preconditions of a disaster agent (Horowitz M, Salem-Murdock, M. 1987, Lees, S.H, 1980, Morren.G, 1980).

Today, most disasters are closely linked to models and patterns of development as they intersect with the environment. The processes associated with economic growth such as industrialization and urbanization have led to the concentration of populations areas

with vulnerable conditions (Morren, 1983, Torry, 1980). Many people on the social and territorial periphery of the globe economic system are made more vulnerable by unequal economic relationships that do not allow them access to the basic resources of land, food, and shelter (Maskrey, 1989). In earlier disaster research, it was assumed that people lived in dangerous circumstances because they lacked knowledge of disasters. Today, recent research shows that individuals and groups may be fully aware of risks but have *no choice* other than to live in dangerous areas such as flood plains.

This predicament is not due to lack of information or inefficient land-use planning but due to the market forces that do not permit low-income groups access to safe land for residence (Maskrey, 1989).

Mileti recognized the continuing rise in losses associated with hazards; Mileti et al., (1995: 122) assert that “elements of culture ... constrain effective and sustainable adaptation to natural hazards”. Seeing the alarming trend in natural hazard losses, Mileti (1999) declares that culture is to blame. Attitudes, values and behavior are, according to Mileti, producing increased disaster costs. For instance, people often believe that technology (e.g. warning systems and dams) will make them safe and therefore locate their settlements in dangerous areas (Mileti, 1999: 2-3). In addition, people’s development preferences often produce hazardous conditions: the “settlement of hazardous areas has ... destroyed local ecosystems that could have provided protection from natural perils”. So, as a result, of the “choices that are made about where and how human development will proceed actually determine the losses that will be suffered in future disasters” (Mileti, 1999: 27). Thus, Mileti argues that all aspects of cultures relating to development are to blame for the creation of disaster.

With the current changes in the nature and number of disasters, there is urgency for appropriate reconceptualizations and approaches to disasters. Today, the question of how well a society is adapted to its environment should be linked to the question of how well an environment fares around a society. The issue of mutuality is at the forefront. As disasters clearly express the imbalances in the mutuality. The globalization process has



produced problems that are basically nonlinear in causation and discontinuous in both space and time, and, therefore, inherently unpredictable (Holling, 1994: 79-81). Human beings, societies, and local and global environments are influencing each other in unfamiliar ways and in measures that challenges adaptive capacities as well as traditional understanding of structure and organization (Holling, 1994: 79-81). So, as we see environmental problems developing, how do we predict and mitigate the disasters they prefigure? We must see that our definitions and approaches for studying them now must reflect these realities.

## *CHAPTER-III*

# **Disasters in India: A Sociological Perspective**

## Disasters in India: A Sociological Perspective

India is a geographically diverse country with the second largest population in the world. It is also one of the oldest civilizations with rich cultural diversities and varying living styles. The country is developing rapidly with the help of emerging new technologies such as Information and Biotechnology, and in fact we are living through a knowledge explosion accompanied by galloping technological development. Yet, within India and around the world losses and social disruption due to creeping hazards and dramatic disasters appear to be increasing. This makes me question myself how can we as sociologists contribute to the understanding of disasters and would help in reducing its impact and contribute in the policy level. In other words what is the role and potential impact of social science knowledge or sociologists in this less than ideal set of events?

But, the irony is that only recently disasters are considered as social events. Earlier disasters were considered to be the result of “extremes in geophysical processes” (Hewitt, 1983a, p.5). But, a disaster is not merely a physical calamity; it is as much of a social calamity<sup>17</sup>. As any physical disruption that occurs in a situation where no human habitation is involved does not really constitute a disaster, no matter how great is its scale. It gains in meaning as a disaster only when it affects human beings, lives, their relationships, their property and their mental and emotional states.

Moreover, a disaster is a disaster in what it does to the people, their material and social worlds, their bonds and values and gives a severe blow to the normal rhythm of the social life. It connotes a crisis in the lives and world of the people, a crisis of the magnitude that calls for immediate remedial measures to restore order not only in the material but also the social and psychological lives of the people. Thus, disaster is as

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<sup>17</sup> . See the book, Husain, Ahmed. (2006), *Natural Disasters*, (New Delhi: Sumit Enterprises).

much of a disequilibrating social event as it is physical. To illustrate it, a natural disaster like earthquake shakes the social life as much as they shake the physical infrastructure. Similarly, human-made disasters such as ethnic strifes inflict strain on the social harmony. Likewise, technological disasters, like gas leakage results in untold sufferings for the surviving victims and their families. And it is through the work of the sociologists that disasters are studied from a social perspective. In this work I will attempt to analyze and study disasters from a sociological perspective.

In 1959, Kenneth Waltz began his seminal book, '*Man, The State and War*', with the words 'asking who won a given war, someone has said, is like asking who won the San Francisco earthquake'. But there Waltz's assumption was that the latter was an example of a natural occurrence 'whose control or elimination is beyond the wit of man' has been wearing increasingly thin. As today, hazards such as tsunamis, earthquakes, cyclones, flooding, etc are generally regarded as triggers which exacerbate already vulnerable conditions. In fact poor societies which suffer a fragile physical environment, weak economies and inadequate social and institutional structures are disproportionately likely to make a disaster out of a natural hazard. The impact that these event types have on the recipient society is therefore only determined in part by the severity of the hazard itself. And the way that precautionary measures and post hoc mitigation strategies are institutionalized is intrinsically *social*. As such, 'neither disasters themselves nor the conditions that give rise to them are undeniably natural' (Alexander, 1997:289). So, even the most acute of hazards are, in terms of their social impact, *within* the wit of man.

We live in a common myth that everyone is equally affected in a disaster event. There is little understanding of the way disasters interact with pre-disaster social relations and have differential impact on people according to caste, class, race, age, ethnicity, gender, etc. Conventional wisdom sees disasters as natural phenomena that pick their victims at random. Media stories hinging on the notion that disasters "spare no one" perpetuate the myth that socioeconomic and other distinctions make little difference when disaster strikes. But, in reality the effects of disasters-including even the physical damage they produce-are *social* in origin.

The social dimensions of disasters have significant implications for devising appropriate disaster management strategies. The prevailing disaster management policies and programmes are geared mainly to restoration of affected infrastructure and essential services, and providing material and medical relief to the people in disaster affected areas. The restoration of infrastructural services such as water, electricity, etc.; the provision of food, shelter and clothing; and providing medical facilities are parts of the usual rescue services. While all this is necessary and deserves priority, it is not just enough. What is missing in the existing approach is the lack of concern for social impact for disaster. It is needless to add that the surviving victims of disaster need as much of social and emotional relief as material and medical. Therefore, there is a need to *broad-base* the existing approach of disaster management and include within its orbit the social consequences of disasters.

It is actually the sociologists studying disasters who see natural, technological and human-induced disasters as fundamentally social events reflecting human decisions about the organization of social life in the physical environment. Not the physical hazard (e.g. flood) but the socially constructed vulnerability to it (e.g. the impoverished fishermen living near the flood plains) is at the heart of the process of “designing disasters”.

Although hazards are natural, disastrous outcomes are not. It is rather the unequal access to opportunities and unequal exposures to risks of the populations concerned – the consequences of the socioeconomic system – create the disaster. Disasters arise through the propensity of social systems to generate unequal exposure to risk so that some groups or individuals are prone to effects of hazards than others. Disasters therefore cannot be termed “natural” because hazards affect different groups of people differently. So, I would like to question the very idea of a natural disaster, as natural disasters are hardly natural. I am going to do this study keeping in mind my objectives as mentioned earlier by taking two case studies, i.e. the 2004 tsunami in India and the 1999 Super Cyclone in Orissa.

### 3.1 Case Study (a) Tsunami

A Roman scholar Pliny the Elder (c23-79 AD) once said: ‘The only certainty is that nothing is certain’<sup>18</sup>. Several millennia on the Indian Ocean earthquake-triggered killer waves represent uncertainty on an unprecedented scale. So, natural calamities such as earthquakes and typhoons are known to periodically affect the southern Asian coast and the communities and countries affected by the December 26 tsunami are no strangers to local level shocks and uncertainty (a situation where we don’t know what we don’t know). But, the massive earthquake on December 26 in the Indian Ocean triggered off tsunami waves resulting in a colossal loss of lives and affecting millions of people in 11 countries. The total death toll is in excess of 1, 50, 000 with thousands more missing and the devastation caused is unprecedented in contemporary history. But still the disaster was not socially neutral in its impact.

Are the patterns of cleavages reestablished or changed after the tsunami? The tsunami demonstrated that while the hazards themselves do not discriminate between the various cleavages in society (i.e. between rich and poor, men and women, high and low caste etc), but the severity of impacts, and the speed of recovery of various individuals and groups differ vastly. These variations in impact and recovery are easily traced back to existing vulnerabilities and capacities.

Class is a major form of social stratification in India. In the tsunami class differences cut-across the tsunami affected populations in India. It is the poorer classes who bore the heavier burden of the disaster and its recovery than the relatively better-off. For example- in the tsunami the higher death and displacement tolls are recorded among poorer coastal populations without access to safe housing structures. While the relatively well-off among the tsunami-affected were able to procure alternative housing or move in with extended families and friends, but the more impoverished communities had *no choice* but to languish in transitional shelters for extended periods of time. Due to the differential

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<sup>18</sup> . See the article, Mehta, Lyla. (2005), “The Tsunami and Globalised Uncertainty”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.40, No.3, January 15-21, pp.194-195.

impact of the tsunami on the poor, there was a differential timeframe in their recovery. As on issues of livelihood recovery, those most-affected were those already lacking access to property and capital. But the irony is that these same persons were excluded from many economic livelihood programs that also focused on restoring lost economic opportunities without taking to consideration those who had none to begin with. Here one easily relate with Weber's political sociology which focuses on the structured inequalities of class. As due to the structured inequalities of class, reestablishing the status quo for the people affected by the tsunami had more to do with the dominance of the property classes than with any "natural" process of social recovery, as the social recovery was done on the basis of class.

The differential impact of the tsunami disaster can also be understood by a basic structural phenomenon i.e. Caste system which is a form of social stratification unique to India. In the tsunami the different categories of population were affected differently according to their caste. The community most affected by the tsunami in India is the fishing communities and primarily the more impoverished fishing communities living in close proximity to the sea. These fishing families not only bore the burnt of the tsunami's natural impact, but given their existing vulnerability due to poverty (with homes washed away, fishing gear destroyed, no savings or insurance), they also faced greater difficulties in recovering their homes and regaining their livelihoods. However, within these affected populations, certain ethnicities, minorities and caste appear to have been more affected than others. For example - it is the lower castes and tribal groups in India.

In India it is important to note that all those who form a part of the fishing operations do not belong to one caste. An important factor here is that in India even the word 'fishermen' does not mean the same thing it means in other countries. As one would assume that 'fishermen' were those whose occupation was 'fishing', but in India 'fishermen' means the people whose caste makes them 'traditional' fishermen. But the problem is that the Dalits whose occupation is fishing are not counted- neither officially

nor socially – as ‘fishermen’ in India, this means that even when fishing was wiped out as an occupation, Dalit<sup>19</sup> fishermen were not considered to have been affected.

In India it is important to note that all those who form a part of the fishing operations do not belong to one caste. The fishing community can broadly be understood as composing of three main caste categories- Meenavar Community (Most Backward Caste) or as Fernandos in some Catholic villages, Dalits (Scheduled Caste) and Pazhankudi Makkal (Scheduled Tribes), who live in a hierarchical relationship. Though these communities might be living in the same village, these castes subscribe to various economic, social and cultural hierarchies and there is complete geographic segregation between the communities. While the Meenavar community (MBC) is the one which takes the boats out to sea, but the remaining jobs were done by the Dalits (SC) and Pazhankudi (ST) communities and they were equally affected the tsunami disaster. The other occupations which minimally form a part of the economy of the fishing village are occupations such as manual labourers lifting the catch from the sea on to the boat itself, lifting the catch on to the shore and sorting it, truck drivers who transport the fish to different regions for export, places of sale, etc., people selling fish on the shore using big baskets/cycles, those who repair/paint boats etc, those who do the inland fishing, prawn farm labourers, labourers part of the fish packing activities, those involved in construction, basket making etc.

In India, the intersection of geographic proximity and impoverishment resulted in high death tolls among the Dalit communities in the tsunami. The Dalits are considered to be more vulnerable on a number of grounds, namely their existing impoverishment and the continued discrimination they face at the hands of the state and other caste communities. The Dalits suffered proportionately greater losses both directly and indirectly. In terms of direct impact, it is estimated that Dalits lost over 1700 boats in Tamil Nadu. Even the Dalits also suffered significant losses to livestock and agriculture. But, if we see in terms of indirect impacts we find that as most of the Dalits worked as

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<sup>19</sup> . The Dalits are people who fall outside the four-fold caste system consisting of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. The word ‘Dalit’ means broken and oppressed people. It is used to refer to people who are considered ‘untouchables’ owing to their birth.



daily labourers, coolies or domestic workers in the service of fishermen, so their livelihoods were affected by the fishermen's losses. Others worked as small-scale fish retailers and as backwater fishermen. Given that many of these livelihoods are inextricably linked to the coast, a high percentage of Dalits also chose to live in shanties along the seashore. So, when the tsunami struck, these shanties (made out of reeds and mud) were unable to withstand the force of the tsunami and were simply washed away along with their occupants. But, still the government and the NGOs focused only on the fishing communities and neglected other communities as they were the one who were the worst affected.

The caste fishermen (known usually as Meenavars or as Fernandos) were also among the chief landowners of inner coastal agricultural lands, and the Dalits worked as labourers in large on these lands. This shows that apart from the Dalits who earned their livelihoods working with the fishing communities, the Dalits who earned their livelihood from agriculture were also affected. The other large agricultural landowners are the higher caste *Vanniars*, who also relied on the Dalits to till their lands. The salt pans which are prepared and harvested by Dalits are owned mostly by the government, who handed over the control of the salt pans to cooperatives. But the irony is that the Dalits are usually not able to participate in these cooperatives. So from this we can infer that the coastal Dalits in Tamil Nadu are excluded from controlling the means of their production.

This shows how the Dalits were affected differently in the tsunami. Here one can view the discrimination in the tsunami with regard to the caste system as 'pathological' in the way Durkheim had used pathological to analyze abnormal phenomena which would help to explain normal features of the structure and functioning of the society. Caste system can be viewed as pathological in the sense that how caste as a form of social stratification in India discriminates among the people even in a crisis situation like tsunami, for any outsider this would appear as abnormal or pathological.

Another category of population who were severely affected by the tsunami is the agricultural communities, the agricultural operations were carried out in the immediate

hinterland of the fishing area and they were equally important to the very subsistence of the fishing village. The agricultural communities include those owning and cultivating land, share croppers on the land, tenants of the land, landless agricultural labourers, those who take lands on lease, etc. But their loss was completely ignored by the state and the NGOs because of the focus on the worst affected i.e. the fishing communities.

There is another category of population who were affected by the tsunami, they are those who provide the commercial backbone to the village economy of Tamil Nadu which include the petty-shop owners and the service providers like barbers, tailors, cobblers etc. There are also the labourers who work on the industries like salt pans in Vedaranyam. The extent of havoc the tsunami has wrecked has had its impact on this diverse range of people.

There is another category of population who were affected in the coastal area i.e. the Aravani population (that section of population who do not identify themselves either as men or women) but the disaster response has not reached them. For instance, nowhere neither in the official nor in any other reports their death has been recorded.

The people of different ethnic groups were also affected differently by the tsunami disaster. The ethnic groups include the tribals/advivasis or the indigenous people of the community. The tribal communities were affected by the tsunami as they live in geographically segregated enclaves and bear the burnt of the disaster's natural impact. In case of the tsunami, the indigenous tribes of Andaman and Nicobar, the Onges, the Jarawas, the Sentinelese, the Shompen, who lived with a light ecological footprint, but surprisingly they had the lowest casualties even though in the Indian subcontinent they were closest to the epicenter of the earthquake<sup>20</sup>. As the tsunami left less destruction in regions protected by mangroves than barren and exposed beaches. This really makes me question our developmental plans. As the "development" that ignores ecological limits

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<sup>20</sup> . See, Shiva, Vandana. (2005), "Tsunami Teachings in the New Year", *Mainstream*, Vol.XLII, No.6, January 29, pp.9-10 and pp.38.

and the environmental imperative can only lead to unimaginable destruction, like the tsunami.

Although the tribal population had the less casualties, but this does not mean they were not affected by the tsunami. In fact some of these tribal communities settled in the coastal regions of Tamil Nadu, taking up backwater fishing, catamaran fishing near the shore, and working as casual labour on fishing boats etc., as a means of livelihood but the tsunami completely shattered the livelihood of these tribal communities (for example-Irulas). Since these tribal communities are by nature, very reserved communities, so they are very reluctant to even speak about the losses they have incurred in the tsunami to the outsiders, so this puts the tribal communities at a disadvantage and contribute to worsening their recovery process.

In the tsunami in Campbell Bay different ethnic groups i.e. a colony of settlers and migrants alongside native islanders who belong to it reside. Because of a natural disaster i.e., the tsunami the settlers are feeling deprived of a sense of control in a colony governed by the local administration to autonomous Nicobarese. After many years of labour their lives have been torn apart and the settlers are in a fix as to what would happen to their lives next.

These settlers are from different ethnic backgrounds, they are mainly ex-army personnel, a small colony of fishermen, former forest and road-building labourers who stayed back seeking a future and others who had migrated in to the colony created during 1969-1980. The main source of employment at the colony was at creating and tending horticulture of coconut and areca nut, apart from working in government departments. Over the past five decades as the colony grew many settlers had begun to rake in profits of their labour alongside direct and indirect dependence on the government in almost all aspect of their lives. On the other hand the Nicobarese are of the coastal region and the change that came with the emergence of the colony was partly functional and cosmetic. These Nicobarese are mostly depended on the socio-ecological processes along with the dependence on the copra and areca nut economy. But the settlers and immigrants

outnumber the Nicobarese of this region and were intrinsically associated with the growth of the colony through governmental assistance.

Taking into account the diverse dependencies of settlers on the government and the toil that went into creating a colony, the task of recreating the colony has no easy answers; moreover, suitable land for resettlement and livelihood means is not easy to find, given the immense damage due to destruction of landholdings and their inundation (Malik and Murthy, 2005; Thakker and Goyal, 2005; Ramachandran et al., 2005; Krishnamoorthy et al., 2005; Ramanamurthy et al., 2005; Kaul and Menon, 2006). Especially for the settlers and migrants (those who do not actually belong to the region) future livelihood possibilities are enigmatic, as their sense of loss is compounded by the lack of security in a place they couldn't fully call their own.

Even the tsunami disaster had differential impact on the women and men, as this is evident in the greater number of deaths of women. In fact the death toll of women is estimated to be three times more than that of men in India. The reasons behind this outcome are largely attributed to gender based socio-cultural differences which guide behaviour patterns. Women actually had less survival possibilities in the tsunami due to their attire (saree, long skirts, salwar kameez) and long hair which both became impediments to swiftly moving to safety, even due their inability to climb and swim (skills which are socially not encouraged for women to have), and due to the timing of the disaster and where women and men were when the tsunami struck.

Since it was a Sunday morning most women were inside the homes attending to morning household chores. Even many women survivors mention that they were preparing the morning meal for the family and were caught by the wave unaware. On the other hand men were reported to have been mostly outside, and could see the wave and run to safety. It is also widely reported that women were trying to save the children, the elderly and others in need of help during the first wave and were washed away with the second. It is also indicated that their weaker physical strength made hanging on to things to avoid being swept away while also carrying children in their arms made it more

difficult for women. As the burden of keeping the family together and alive rests disproportionately on women's shoulders. This even highlights the disadvantages imposed on women in terms of the restrictive social roles which resulted in high death tolls among women in the tsunami.

Another issue which was the cause of concern in the post-tsunami was the additional burden of increased domestic work, and the incidence of violence against the women had escalated (Rees, Cook, Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2005; Fisher, 2005; Oxfam, 2005; Global Fund for Women, 2005; APWLD, 2006; Ford Foundation, 2006; Solidaritas Perempuan, 2006; INFORM, 2006). In the chaos resulting from a disaster and the disruption caused to social and family protection, vulnerability of all women increases in terms of personal security. For example- there were incidents of rape and sexual abuse in rescue and in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami.

And what is important to note is that the violence which a woman encounters at home, the perpetrator is none other than the husband or close relatives. The consequences of violence against women are seen to affect all aspects of the everyday life of the women, especially her health (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002; UNIFEM, 2003; WHO, 2001; WHO, 2005). This leads to differential timeframe in the recovery of women and one of the reasons for this is the gender inequality and the limited representation of women in disaster responses.

In the aftermath of the disaster, relationships are also affected in the family and it results in the increase in the incidence of violence against women. One of the main reasons for the increase in violence after the tsunami is due to the power imbalance between women and men within the family and in the community at large. After a disaster the pressure even in a non-violent relationship can result in violence, whereas it is likely to increase in an already violent relationship (Wiest, Mocellin and Motsisi, 1994; Enarson and Morrow, 1998; Fordham, 1999; Enarson, 2000; Felten-Biermann, 2005; Mac Donald, 2005). For example- the incidence of violence against women increased

after the tsunami and there were reports of escalation in emotional, physical and sexual violence.

The tsunami disaster was particularly poignant because it took the lives of so many, young children. Out of the affected victims children constitute 40%. As in the secular smorgasbord that is India, the day after Christmas is the start of every child's winter vacation. So many children lost lives as they were playing outside. Even many children who escaped the killer waves were affected badly and were in a deep shock and barely spoke, as many children had become orphans, the problem of where do they go had come? Even those who had not lost their parents their family had become desperate and destitute as their parents had lost their means of livelihood. Children suffer long lasting strain on their consciousness and development delays.

Adoption of the children was a critical issue after tsunami as many children had become orphans and there was a sudden upsurge among the people wanting to adopt the orphan children but there were people who wanted to exploit the orphans, take them away to other places for selling or for other kind of work— especially, though not only, the girls among them. Child headed households had become a reality after the tsunami disaster because both parents have gone and there was a huge drop-out of the children after the tsunami as both parents had gone and the child had to take over the burden of caring for the family. Even those children whose parents were alive, their education was also affected as the school building were damaged and in many cases the parents had no source of income to send their children to schools and this affected the education of the children and the socialization of the children. Another issue of concern was the health of the children as they were not able to receive balanced nutritional diet as their family had lost its source of livelihood, even due to the psychological impact of the tsunami on the children.

Since in the tsunami different categories of population were affected differently naturally their capacity to recover swiftly is limited by the very factors that caused the impact in the first place.

### 3.2 Case Study (b) Super Cyclone

Cyclones are very much a part of life for the people living near the Bay of Bengal. Orissa witnessed a series of major natural disasters in 1999. In the month of October, 1999 the state bore the brunt of two major cyclones within a period of two weeks which affected 14 districts of Orissa. The first cyclone, which surfaced during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October, lasted overnight, affected mostly two districts, i.e., Ganjam and Gajapati was classified as a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm with wind speeds reaching 200 km per hour. On the other hand, the second cyclone, which occurred during October 29-30, was classified as Super Cyclone which swept the entire Orissa coast affecting twelve districts and devastating a 250 km stretch of eastern Orissa's coast. The intensity and impact of Super Cyclone was so severe that the survivors of the worst affected area Ersama said 'it was not a cyclone, but it was a *Kala* (dooms day) and was an *avishaap* (curse of God) for us'<sup>21</sup>. The IMD termed this cyclone as a "Super Cyclone" to underline the unprecedented nature of its fury (Gupta and Sharma, 2000: 11). It was the most devastating, the worst ever cyclone of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its intensity was totally unheard of before.

From my first case study i.e., the 2004 tsunami disaster I could find out that although the hazards are natural, disastrous outcomes are not. So the question which arises, is it also the case of the 1999 Super Cyclone in Orissa. Like the 2004, tsunami in my second case study i.e., the 1999 Super Cyclone in Orissa I will attempt to analyze the social consequences of the disaster on various classes, caste groups, gender, age etc. This issue is of relevance to the contemporary discourse on disaster studies as it raises questions on the structural deprivation of certain social groups which is often ignored or overlooked.

The Super Cyclone has differential impact on different caste groups, economic classes and many other vulnerable communities. In the Super Cyclone the rural

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<sup>21</sup> . See the article, Pareeda, P.K. (2002), "Towards Rebuilding a Post-Disaster Society: A Case Study of Super Cyclone-Affected Coastal Orissa", *Indian Journal of Social Work*, Vol.63, No.2, April, pp. 255.

population was more badly hit than the urban population as 13.7 million rural populations was affected and 1.9 million urban populations were affected<sup>22</sup>.

Although the Super Cyclone affected more the poor but it had also not spared the rich. The cyclone had actually put all the rich and the poor in one boat. In the aftermath of the cyclone what has come out starkly is the helplessness of the middleclass to make ends meet. This is quite visible at Patbalda, which is a Brahmin dominated village, people's faces are sunken and saris tattered, women, girls and children of the village were pleading with the local politicians to arrange the minimum basic necessities for them.

In Jagatsinghpur district which is the ground zero of the Super Cyclone in the villages of Khuranta, Kankana, and Ramtara where the major source of income was cashew plantation and betel vine for the Bengali owners and also for the Dalit and non Dalit poor households. Apart from this it was also employing family members on a regular basis for watering, cleaning, plucking and processing of betel leaves and cashew plants, but was also providing opportunities for wage labour for many of the poor households. The important thing to note is that the betel leaves were even supplied to places both within and outside the state. And on the other hand the cashew plantation is labour intensive in nature. So many landless labourers were employed in its various stages of land development, plantation, de-seeding, processing, etc. But the Super Cyclone washed away all the cashew plantations and betel vines of all these villages resulting in a major loss of the livelihood of these people particularly, the Dalit, non-Dalit, and poor and women workers were the worst sufferers.

It is noted that in the Super Cyclone the deceased mostly consists of the daily wage labourers, fishermen and women.

Fishing is the occupation of a sizeable proportion of people in coastal Orissa. Fishing industry and shrimp business of Orissa is the third largest revenue earner for the state and

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<sup>22</sup> . See, Das, Kumar. (2002), "Social Mobilisation for Rehabilitation: Relief Work in Cyclone-Affected Orissa", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.37, No.48, 30 November – 6 December, pp.4784-4788.



an important source of livelihood. The Super Cyclone in Orissa was a huge setback for many fishermen as well as non-fishermen whose major source of livelihood was capturing fish in the sea, shrimp cultivation and collection of shrimp seedling in the mouth of rivers. The community lost not only their homes but also their equipment. The marine and inland fishing activity has also been completely ruined and perhaps it will take a decade to recover. These fishing activities were not just limited to the urban centres of the state but were also supplied beyond the state boundaries particularly to West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. But unfortunately all the nets and boats of the fishermen were washed away by the Super Cyclone and the high tide. This was a huge loss for all those whose livelihood was dependent on it. As a consequence of this the processing of dry fish which was specifically the domain of women was severely affected.

The economy of Dalit fishermen households was completely weakened due to the loss of income generating assets such as nets and boats in the cyclone. It is not possible to capture fish without nets and boats in the post-Super Cyclone period.

Orissa is primarily an agricultural state even today despite its vast natural resources. For 80 per cent of the affected population in Orissa, agriculture is a primary source of livelihood not only for the landholding groups, but also for the landless households particularly for the non-Dalit poor and Dalit households. In the pre-cyclone period it was providing wage employment for the landless and partially assuring food security to the marginal and the small farmers. But the problem is that these lands which were used by these people have not been declassified and are not registered in the name of the occupants.

It is due to the Super Cyclone that there is inflow of sea tides into the main lands which has salinated the agricultural land in the Ersama block of Jagatsinghpur district. There are even instances of sand casting in Ersama block (It is the ground zero of the Super Cyclone. This worst affected area being called the "ground zero" or "sacred ground" can be related to Durkheim's idea of sacred which is central to the definition of

religion, in his classic text i.e. *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*. The surviving family members whose lost relatives' bodies were never recovered were offered urns containing the "dust" from the site in lieu of remains. And these urns contain validation of the sacred, so it is referred as the "sacred ground" or "ground zero") in the agricultural land. The salination and sand casting of agricultural land in these villages have almost stopped the agricultural production in the post-cyclone period. The irony is that on the one hand the treatment of these land is time taking and on the other hand it is not affordable by the marginal and small farmers, as a result of which many of the landowners have kept their agricultural land unutilized. It may take more than a decade to achieve the status quo.

The Super Cyclone was a severe blow to the livelihood of the traditional artisans like potter, weaver, mat maker, etc as they had lost their occupational assets. The small-scale and household industries, craftsmen, artisans and petty traders lost their implements and raw materials when their houses were swept away. In Dhobei, Ramtara and Marichipur villages, there were artisans who were engaged in making bamboo baskets and weaving of palm leaf mats and pottery works. The Super Cyclone has not only uprooted the bamboo bushes and palm trees, but also has taken away the traditional kilns of the potters. In this way it has damaged the livelihood sources of the artisans by ceasing the income flow and has adversely affected their traditional earnings sources.

The Super Cyclone in Orissa had an impact on the diverse occupations and economic classes. As in the pre-Super Cyclone period, the traditional animal husbandry and horticulture were a source of earning of many families. This was particularly helpful to the vulnerable households belonging to different caste groups. The livestock had multifarious ways of earning that is through selling of milk, curd, ghee of cows and she-buffaloes; selling of goats, hens, cocks and young calves; use of bio-fertilizers in agriculture and the use of bullocks for ploughing were helping a lot to the household economy. So the loss of livestock was a major loss in the reserve capital of the households. More than fifty percent of the livestock population, which was an important source of income in the cyclone-hit districts, was dead. This has also affected the

ploughing of the agricultural land as the ploughing of land by the use of tractor in the post-Super Cyclone period seems to be unaffordable by the small and marginal farmers.

In the pre-Super Cyclone period the affected districts of Orissa had a good number of trees and plants like coconut, banana, mango, lemon, papaya, etc. These were not only supplementing the annual food requirements of the family, but also earning a lot of income for the households. But the Super Cyclone has uprooted all these trees and plants and the income from these sources stopped immediately after the Super Cyclone due to heavy damage to it. It is the state's rural population who are going to feel its pinch. The government has decided to raise commercial plantation like casuarinas and eucalyptus that would give dividends in a decade's time, but the commercial trees can only meet the fuel wood and timber needs of the rural population. But Orissa's rural population also depend on forests for roots, tuber, leaves, fruits, medicines and even leaves for plate making to earn their livelihood.

It is true that the Super Cyclone has not left anybody from its impact irrespective of caste, class and gender. But still it had differential impact on different economic classes, caste groups and gender. As, the nature and severity of impact of natural calamities on the survivors to a large extent depend on the pre-disaster socio-economic characteristics. This is even true in the Super Cyclone of Orissa as it was more disastrous on the Dalit, landless poor or labourers, and other vulnerable groups like the women, aged persons, children, and on those households which lost all adult male members of their families.

In the post-Super Cyclone period it is the Dalit and the landless labourers who had to suffer more as they were not able to get employment and earnings from the livelihood sources they were dependent on i.e., agriculture, horticulture and livestock. As the agricultural land had become saline and sand casted it was unsuitable to produce crops and this has affected not only the landowner, but also the poor Dalits who were cultivating the land on a lease basis, as well as by encroaching the government waste land and river banks.

The Super Cyclone led to the disruption of the social structure (complex network of existing social relations amongst persons of a society in relation to one another, Radcliffe-Brown, 1952) as the Dalits, landless labourers, women who existed in social relations with one another viz. with the landholding groups for their livelihood and the landowners depended on them for their labour was completely disrupted after the Super Cyclone.

As the affected villages in the 1999, Super Cyclone were situated either close to the seacoast or surrounded by the river flowing to Bay of Bengal (Samal, Meher and Panigrahi, 2003) so the 1999 Super Cyclone changed the occupation of most of the affected people from cultivation to fishing in villages near the seacoast and from cultivation to wage labour or to modern non-farm activities.

A disaster occurs when hazards and threats of hazards, natural and human, impact on the vulnerabilities of an area/region and its people. Within these parameters, vulnerable groups face greater suffering. Vulnerabilities are essentially 'a set of prevailing or consequential conditions composed of physical, socio-economic and political factors which increase a communities susceptibility to calamity or which adversely affect its ability to respond to events'<sup>23</sup>. Certain groups of population are more vulnerable to a number of natural and human-induced disasters compared to others.

The Super Cyclone even had a differential impact on the women. During normal times women in a patriarchal male dominated society are considered vulnerable to discrimination and unjust actions because of their insignificant role in the decision making process in public space. During natural calamity or disaster situation their vulnerability is multiplied and sometimes manifests as a crisis situation in need of special attention. Moreover, it is important to note that women are not necessarily a homogeneous group. In fact there may be some gender specific problems common to women as a social category but within the women group also there are substantial

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<sup>23</sup> . See the Book, Parasuraman, S and P.V. Unnikrishnan (eds.), (2000), *India's Disaster Report: Towards A Policy Initiative*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

variations, according to the socio-economic position, marital status, age, physical ability, sources of income etc., and it is quite natural if the impact of a catastrophic disaster like Super Cyclone varies in its intensity and nature of problem for different categories of women.

When a disaster strikes, women are more vulnerable and especially those women who are household heads, handicapped, widow, and old aged. In the Orissa Super Cyclone numerically women were the largest vulnerable group. The Super Cyclone in Orissa affected the rural women more severely than men, because of their greater responsibility for household management. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, women feel helpless for failing in their duty to provide food and water to their family members.

The Super Cyclone had brought large-scale destruction of many house buildings and rural infrastructure and this brought about many inconveniences to women in their day-to-day activities like ablution, bathing, washing, defecation, fetching water and fuel wood, cooking and preparing meals for family members. Even the lack of electricity, coupled with disruption in communication system raised the sense of insecurity among the women in Orissa.

In the aftermath of the Super Cyclone the sources of drinking water<sup>24</sup> had either been damaged or contaminated, and the women had to travel long distance to fetch drinking water. So the work load and drudgery of the women increased significantly for clean water, fuel wood, and cooking food and maintaining proper hygiene and sanitation in the house. Since women as a group is not homogeneous, the plight of the poor women knew no bounds. As the unhealthy environment created by the Super Cyclone coupled with the lack of pure drinking water and scarcity of food materials resulting in malnutrition and undernourishment causing spread of diseases during post-cyclone period. So the money that was meant for their basic necessities like food, clothing and shelter were diverted for treatment of diseases.

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<sup>24</sup> . See the book, Swain, M., et al (2006), *Disaster and Gender: Impact of the Super Cyclone on the Life and Livelihood of Women*, (New Delhi: Serial Publications).

The women from marginal farm households as well as landless agricultural labourers group who engaged themselves with multiple activities like backyard poultry, duckery, small animal rearing, rope making, mat weaving, and part time non-farm jobs, were not only meeting their family consumption, these activities was also earning them some cash income. This was also an important way of countering vulnerability of women, but was completely stopped after the Super Cyclone.

One of the important changes in the family structure that had come after the Super Cyclone is migration of the people both inside and outside the state. As the people had nothing to fall back upon, the bread winners of families have already started moving out in search of jobs, leaving their families behind, which would create additional burdens on the women-folk who have to manage their impoverished families<sup>25</sup>.

Women were the worst sufferers during the Super Cyclone in Orissa. During disasters, an inordinately large number of deaths tend to occur among women and in fact in the 1999 Super Cyclone a majority of over twenty thousand lives consumed by the Super Cyclone were women. Their vulnerability arises from their already precarious social status; limit their access to resources, and to information. Factors such as poor political participation of women, gender insensitivity, discriminatory governance system, skewed economic entitlements of women result in women being the worst sufferers in disaster situation. Some of their vulnerabilities are as follows (Behera, 2002).

- (1). The losses of sources of income such as livestock, kitchen garden usually controlled by women further erode their economic status.
  
- (2). The collapse of physical space (shelters) and subsequent social dislocation further increases women's vulnerability for sexual exploitation.

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<sup>25</sup> . See, Swain, S. (2000), "Women in Orissa: The Pre- and Post-Cyclone Scenario", *Mainstream*, Vol.38, No.12, March 11, pp.29-30.

(3). The responsibility of moving essential items together such as dry food, clothing, infant needs, watching over children (who were all the more curious and anxious to move out of the house and thereby increasing risk substantially), feeding and childcare, etc are some of the jobs the women are engaged in.

(4). Traditional anatomy conspires against women in disaster situations. For example-the traditional clothing such as saree is not the best garment to be in when a person is trying to move faster and get saved and yet this is what most of the women in the state wear.

(5). Once in safe houses, women particularly pregnant women face the problem of congestion and are put to grave risk.

(6). Prolonged confinement creates added problems in terms of non-availability of private space to be able to meet bodily needs. Women who are menstruating find the situation particularly difficult.

In the pre-Super Cyclone period the major source of livelihood for the women were selling milk, horticulture produces and wage labour in agricultural activities. Selling milk at Paradeep, a port town, was a regular source of income that was supplementing and was actually supporting the family living of many Dalit and non-Dalit households. But in the post-Super Cyclone period the women expressed that all the she-buffaloes they possessed were very costly and producing eight to 10 litres of milk per day, but the problem is that these cattle were not insured. So, they could not get any financial aid for the loss of livestock in the post-Super Cyclone period. A major source of livelihood for women after the Super Cyclone was completely stopped. So in the process of aggravating already existing vulnerabilities, disasters create new ones.

The Super Cyclone gave a severe blow to livelihood of the people engaged in the informal sector for nearly six months. A number of Dalits were going to Cuttack for daily

engagement in the informal sector<sup>26</sup>. But in the post Super Cyclone period, due to the damage of the rickshaws, they could not get daily engagements. So the daily commuters who went to Cuttack city, for engagement in the informal sector, were totally stopped for six months.

The income and value of assets of the affected people have substantially decreased after the 1999 Super Cyclone. One of the major consequences of the calamity is unemployment. So the jobseekers from the affected rural areas will migrate to the cities in search for livelihood.

The Super Cyclone even highlighted the different degrees of vulnerability across certain groups and classes. For example-the poor fisher folk living in huts close to the coast suffered far more than those who lived in pucca houses. Even in the district of Jagatsinghpur all the villages which were situated within 5kms from the sea shore were severely affected by the impact of the Super Cyclone.

As the disaster affected different categories of population differently, the children are another vulnerable section. In the Orissa Super Cyclone an estimated 3.3 million children i.e., a quarter of the entire affected population of Orissa were hit by the Super Cyclone. In the wake of the destruction, 1,500 children were left orphaned and many were homeless and were passing through a severe malnutrition phase.

The orphans who were in the age group of 9-14 years<sup>27</sup> were the worst affected; they would feel shy to go to other people's homes for food and at the same, were too young to look after their own needs. Due to the devastation caused by the Super Cyclone thousands of schools were damaged or destroyed, along with 1.6 million homes. In fact the children have lost all their books and the schools have lost their teaching aids. There is a huge chance that these children run the risk of becoming beggars and child labourers. So for the children the world turned upside down due to the Super Cyclone.

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<sup>26</sup> . See, Samal, K.C., et al (2005), *State, NGOs and Disaster Management*, (Jaipur: Rawat Publications).

<sup>27</sup> . See, Juvva, S and Alka Parikh (2002), "From Nowhere to Care: Experiences with Cyclone Rehabilitation Interventions", *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, Vol.63, No.2, April, pp.283-292.



The disaster i.e. 1999, Super Cyclone in Orissa had affected different categories of population differently so naturally there would be differential timeframe in their recovery. Here one can relate with Weber's political sociology which focuses on the structured inequalities of status and can relate it to disaster. As the status of the different caste groups, economic classes, gender, age etc played an important role in the disaster and there were variations in the impact of the disaster on these groups so naturally their status would affect their recovery from the disaster due to their existing vulnerabilities and capacities.

*CHAPTER - IV*

**Rehabilitations**

## Rehabilitations

A disaster causes temporary disturbances to the societal equilibrium. Disaster relief is provided to tide over the situation during the crisis phase which enables the affected people to recover from the immediate impact of the disaster<sup>28</sup>. Rehabilitation means not only rebuilding or repairing houses and roads, but giving utmost importance to the region if it is disaster-prone. Thus, it is more than restoring the basic infrastructure. If disasters are not socially neutral in their impact, it makes me question if the relief and rehabilitation process is also socially structured or influenced.

On the one hand, India can boast of having evolved a social structure which is capable of absorbing many contradictions and conflicts. But on the other hand, there are some basic and fundamental problems which continue to colour social interactions. And, we are committed to a social order based on complete equality, but we live in a society which is among the rigidly hierarchical in the world. And this results in some being subjected to exclusion, discrimination and marginalization. Because as, sociologists instead of looking into the inequalities inherent in the nature of human beings we look into the inequalities in their conditions of existence. For example- the differences in the life chances and life styles among people which result from the different positions they occupy in society- as land owners and labourers or as Brahmins and Harijans.

### 4.1 Case Study (a) Tsunami

The uncertainty and dramatic changes the tsunami disaster created was unfrequented or unprecedented in the history of mankind, although it is difficult to give consolation to those who have lost their lives, loved ones, livelihoods and belongings, but at least by providing relief one can prevent the creation of a 'double tragedy'. The need of the hour

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<sup>28</sup> . See the book, Mishra, G.K. and G.C. Mathur (eds.) (1993), *Natural Disaster Reduction*, (IIPA: Reliance Publishing House).

was that the coordination of relief must be truly on a globalised scale to prevent a 'second tragedy' that could result from improper rehabilitation efforts. In accordance with the need the tsunami had a massive global out pouring of relief. In fact all those who have watched their fellow human beings traumatized by the tsunami will warm to the outpouring of money intended to help them recover and revive their lives<sup>29</sup>. But, the question does the relief reach the people who need it most.

According to Sandhya Venkateswaran of Care India<sup>30</sup>:

*The emergency response to the 2004 tsunami in India demonstrates once more that, while disasters are class and caste neutral, those on the margins feel their impact much more severely. Marginalised people live in precarious conditions that increase their vulnerability to disasters. When viewed in this light, accountability to affected communities needs to go well beyond the provision of relief and rehabilitation, so that they regain their pre-disaster level. Accountability needs to empower them- socially and economically- to build their resilience and protection from future disasters. This is very much applicable in the tsunami disaster as there was discrimination on the basis of caste, class, ethnic, gender, age etc in the process of relief distribution, in the aftermath of the tsunami. There was also discrimination on the basis of livelihood pattern. For example- whenever there is salt water, the fishing communities claim a right to fish. But actually more than 20000 acres of agricultural land has been salienated. This shows that how the agricultural communities have been discriminated and are adversely affected from a long term perspective due to assumption that it is the fishing communities who are only badly affected in the tsunami.*

In the relief process there was undue attention given only to the rehabilitation of fishery-based livelihoods from both the state and civil society. As it was assumed that it is the fishermen communities who were the 'worst affecties' of the tsunami. And the rehabilitation issues of other occupations were neglected. Discrimination on the basis of caste in the aftermath of the tsunami is an unquestionable fact. The discrimination against the Dalits was present at all phases of the recovery process, from the denial of rice, the

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<sup>29</sup> . See the article, Standing, Guy. (2005), "Tsunami Recovery Grants: Looking at Long-Term, Sustainable Plans", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.40, No.6, February 5-11, pp.510-514.

<sup>30</sup> . Sandhya Venkateswaran, Care India, *Accountability lessons from the tsunami response in India*, in Humanitarian Exchange No. 32, December, 2005, Overseas Development Institute, pp. 10, accessed at: <http://www.odihpn.org/documents/humanitarianexchange032.pdf>

refusal to share emergency shelters, the removal of bodies, and the relief materials provided, through the compensation and provision of livelihood assistance and housing. The structural inequalities on the basis of caste can be described as social facts, to the extent that they exist independently of what individuals think or feel about them and in the sense that they cannot be changed according to the will and pleasure of individuals.

The patterns of structured inequality based on religiously sanctioned differentiation (castes primarily), which in normal circumstances produce marked inequalities in resource access; result in times of crisis in a morally justified inequitable distribution (Torry, 1986). In India, the Dalits faced severe difficulties in accessing emergency relief. This is due to their low social status and illiteracy, many Dalits even found it difficult to register their losses and receive due compensation. There was also substantial evidence of continued institutionalized discrimination and social prejudice directed at Dalits in the delivery of emergency relief.

One of the catch-cries of post-tsunami rehabilitation was “building back better”. But the irony was that a discriminately approach was adopted in this ‘building back better’, as it focused intently on the dominant caste-group of the Indian coast-line, and has meant ‘building back worse’ for coastal Dalit communities, as their relative poverty and communal powerlessness has increased.

There were uncoordinated efforts by the State and civil society to supply boats to fish workers; this had led to an increase in the total stock of fishing boats in Tamil Nadu, with possible long-term, negative consequences for fishery in Tamil Nadu which has already been experiencing stagnation due to over- exploitation. Even the caste fishermen have been given on balance far more and far better boats than they had before the tsunami. Their houses have been replaced, regardless of the level of damage to their pre-existing houses, and have been provided with important infrastructure. Since the caste fishermen received a lot of rice and cash in the form of relief, this made them less keen to go back to work, the work on which the Dalits were relying on. By doing all these caste fishermen tried their best to prevent the Dalits from receiving any aid.

Although the caste fishermen also suffered greatly in the tsunami, but the truth is that now their position is much better than what it was before the tsunami. And again one cannot deny that these improvements were necessary, but not at the cost of neglecting the Dalit communities who are generally exploited by the caste fishermen. As this type of biased reconstruction can create a disaster for those who miss out. As Henri Tiphagne of People's Watch Tamil Nadu<sup>31</sup> explained, "As a result of the relief and rehabilitation, Dalits are even more dependent and vulnerable than before".

The tsunami couldn't wash away the hatred for Dalits. In fact in Nagapattinam, the Dalits were thrown out of the relief camps, water supplies, and toilets. The Dalits were even denied food aid on the grounds that there were no deaths among them (Alternative Law Forum, n.d., Problems of Relief Distribution in the immediate aftermath, para.2). This flip side of the relief usually remains out of focus in the coverage of natural disasters. There are many instances where the Dalits were discriminated even during relief distribution after the infamous tsunami. For example- Dalits were often abused as 'thieves' by their neighbours when they sought relief provisions. In another case, a fishing community refused to share water supplied to them by the UNICEF fearing that the Dalits would pollute the water<sup>32</sup>. Even doors were slammed in the face of the Dalit survivors. Here when the government should have 'ensured justice' was actually reinforcing the divide.

In the tsunami in India the displaced Dalits even came face to face with exclusion and discrimination when seeking shelter. It was highlighted by the media that the government officials themselves were segregating relief camps by setting-up Meenavar-exclusive camps and dividing the Muslims, Dalits and other lower castes into camps of their own. Although there were questions raised against the government officials and the answer

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<sup>31</sup> . See the report, Making Things Worse: How 'Caste Blindness' in Indian Post-Tsunami Disaster Recovery has Exacerbated Vulnerability and Exclusion, Report by Timothy Gill, Commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands, pp.7.

<sup>32</sup> . See the South Asian Disaster Report 2005: Tackling the Tides and Tremors, pp.28

was that it was a practical move given the existing mistrust between communities and that “a crisis like this was no time to experiment with caste and religious amity<sup>33</sup> ...”

In a report provided by Annie Namala<sup>34</sup>, on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2005 on behalf of the Fact Finding team, noted: As we watched, trucks of food and clothing came to the village and were getting distributed among the fisher community. The Dalits who ran after the Lorries came back empty handed. There has been further complain that since morning three-four trucks had come to the village and the fisher community did not allow any of them to give relief to the Dalits. Even the Dalits were asked a standard question - how many deaths are there among you? From the Report one can easily make out, can one erect a hierarchy of deaths where death in the fisher family is more costly to the family than a death in the Dalit family or can we grade the dead like we grade the living, along caste lines?

Relief materials were actively diverted from affected Dalits in a number of instances. And in most cases, providers which include the government and NGOs passively bypassed affected Dalits in their rush to reach the caste fishermen. The main reason behind this is the assumption of the ‘hardest hit’ that is the caste fishermen. As the general policy of all providers was to help the caste fishermen first and foremost because the community was, physically speaking, the hardest hit. But, the caste fishermen had much to begin with in the form of assets, savings and, importantly, social capital in terms of strong organizations and caste superiority. And this social capital enabled them to fill, and in many cases greatly surpass, their requirements. It even gave them the relative strength necessary to prevent Dalits from receiving relief support, thus advancing even further their relative strength for the longer term.

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<sup>33</sup> . See the South Asian Disaster Report 2005: Tackling the Tides and Tremors, pp.27.

<sup>34</sup> . See Mohan, N., et al “Exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis in the Time of Tsunami: A Case for an Inclusive Relief and Rehabilitation Policy”, <http://www.altlawforum.org/Resources/Tsunami/Dalits%20Tsunami.doc>.

The Citizens Platform for Tsunami Affected<sup>35</sup>, Tamil Nadu, noted, 'However what is emerging as a pattern across many of the affected coastal regions is the fact that Dalit communities are not being provided relief material. Even when the material (dry rations, clothes, utensils, etc.) are supplied to the affected villages, they are not shared with the Dalit families within the village. In some cases these families do not even have the tokens issued by the Panchayats to access relief material. In other cases, though there might be a token given they are not allowed to stand in the queue to collect relief material, which is their right. Not only does these cause hardships leading to starvation of the affected Dalit families but also creates the basis for avoidable caste based hostilities to be generated. This shows how unequal distribution of relief can affect the relationships between those with resources and those without resources in the post-tsunami period.

One of the important aspect of the relief and rehabilitation process was that the packages for livelihoods was formulated from a "property owner centric" viewpoint which ignored the needs of the people who did not own any property in their names that is the women who has no property in her name, even the fishing and farming communities who do not own boats, nets, lands or shops. Marx in his 'Theory of Class Conflict' considered property as the most distinguishing characteristic of any society and classes are determined on the basis of individual's relation to the means of production. And this holds true even today as in the tsunami the groups who contribute to the coastal economy by providing their labour and skills have all found themselves sidelined and disregarded as they did not own any property.

In the relief distribution process the agricultural labourers have been subsumed in the large discourse on agricultural land, with typically only landowners being considered as tsunami affected. The livelihood issue of the agricultural labourers still was in question. The compensation for crop damage was inadequate, and the efficacy of the desalination packages provided by the government still under question. The affected lands continue to

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<sup>35</sup> . See, Mohan, N., et al "Exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis in the Time of Tsunami: A Case for an Inclusive Relief and Rehabilitation Policy", <http://www.altlawforum.org/Resources/Tsunami/Dalit%20Tsunami.doc>.



remain mostly uncultivable. In some areas relief packages did reach labourers, but still nothing has been done for them in terms of livelihood rehabilitation.

In a situation like a tsunami it is not sensible to conceive the crisis only in terms of selective vulnerable groups. But the relief process focuses only on certain section of populations. This has led to a situation in which the people engaged in petty trades, service provision, allied services such as fish curing, vending etc., and working in salt pan lands are ignored. Although relief packages were announced for these groups, but the issue of their livelihood rehabilitation was completely ignored. As everybody lived in a common misperception that these dependent livelihood would pick up as the fishing economy revived. Another point which is important to note is that since these groups belonged to the unorganized sector it was difficult for them to get compensation for the losses incurred as they did not have evidence or proof.

The relief process is socially structured on the basis of religion. As in the first few days after the tsunami, no relief reached Veerapagupathy, a Hindu village in the predominantly Christian coastline of Kanyakumari, for the simple reason that the district administration depended on the Church<sup>36</sup> for the information about the affected settlements. The village did not figure in Church records as the Church maintained detailed records only of the Christian settlements. This clearly shows how religion plays an important role in India although India boasts of being a secular nation. Since the administration did not have any accurate geo-demographic data, it relied on the Church for records, thereby creating a situation in which there are bound to be exclusions<sup>37</sup>.

The process of relief and rehabilitation in the post-tsunami has seen the exclusion of several groups because of a complex matrix of reasons relating to factors as diverse as vulnerabilities and active discrimination, as well as systemic deficiencies. In the relief distribution process the specific needs of vulnerable groups such as women, children, the

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<sup>36</sup> . The Catholic Church is a very well established institution in this area, and played a crucial role in coordinating relief and rehabilitation.

<sup>37</sup> . See the article by Srinivasan, K and Vijay K. Nagaraj (2006), "The State and Civil Society in Disaster Response: Post-Tsunami Experiences in Tamil Nadu", *Disaster and Development*, Vol.1, No.1, November, pp.77-99.

disabled, and the aged were not considered in the relief phase. For example- the older people found it difficult to collect relief packages in camps as they were pushed around.

According to a study conducted by the HelpAge International during the relief phase reveals that a main reason underlying the invisibility of older people is the absence of data disaggregated by age (HelpAge International, 2005). With regard to the elderly, the government's old age pension scheme that was extended with immediate effect to all eligible tsunami affected people who were already covered is severely lacking. Under this only people above the age of 60 who do not have a son above the age of 18 years are eligible for pension. The scheme completely ignores the fact that many elderly, destitute people are estranged from their families and sons, and so are as helpless and vulnerable as those without sons. Further, the fact that the policy mentions sons rather than daughters is contrary to the principle of gender justice that should be the cornerstone of an equitable rehabilitation process.

The relief distribution even did not take care of the special needs of the children. For instance, the relief packages distributed did not contain even children's clothing, baby food etc. Even the relief distribution process did not give any attention to the special requirements of the disabled. As, the disabled receive no mention in the rehabilitation policy, other than directions issued for ordering the distribution of aid devices.

The tribal communities faced serious exclusion in the process of relief distribution in the tsunami. In Tamil Nadu, there is a tribal community called *Irulas*, a semi-nomadic adivasi community, the Irulas as a group were, and continue to be overlooked in the relief and rehabilitation processes. The Irulas were traditionally hunters-gatherers, who moved out of the forests after the passing of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. Most of their families are settled in the coastal region of Tamil Nadu, taking up backwater fishing, catamaran fishing near the shore, and working as casual labour on fishing boats etc., as a means of livelihood.

Since the relief and rehabilitation process was based on 'property-owner centric' and the Irulas have been long been invisible given their nomadic habits, and were scattered, sparsely populated settlements. They rarely possessed proofs of identify such as ration cards<sup>38</sup>, voter's identification cards, community certificates<sup>39</sup> etc. What is important to note that these Irulas households do not even feature in the Census as the Irula settlements are usually located far from the main roads, and people are usually not available at home during the day? So after the tsunami the Irulas whose houses were affected had nothing to show as they lived in huts that were completely washed away, leaving no signs of the destruction that had been wreaked. As the relief process demanded evidence but they were not able to give any evidence so they were debarred from the relief process.

One of the major social effects of the disaster is its impact on the family, social relationships which eventually affects the society. In the aftermath of the tsunami relief money was usually paid on a pro-rata basis, i.e. the number of family members died, the level of injury, etc., so naturally different people get different amounts. With the increase in generosity, this difference has become quite differentiating. But earlier these island societies i.e. the Nicobar Islands were near egalitarian, as the nature did not discriminate much. However, the post-tsunami household level inequalities have become sharper. As more money means more expensive consumption, because of which the society is witnessing heightened intra-social tensions, which can break the traditional social harmony. Further, this increased asset possessiveness is having an adverse impact on the strength of the joint family system and consequently on the traditional social safety net that absorbed all tsunami widows and orphans without much external support<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> . An official document issued by the Government that entitles holders to subsidized food from the Public Distribution System.

<sup>39</sup> . A certificate issued by a competent government authority that validates the caste/community identity of an individual. This entitles members of many marginalized groups to benefits of affirmative action.

<sup>40</sup> . See the book, Gandhi, P. Jegadish. (ed.) (2007), *Disaster Mitigation and Management: Post-Tsunami Perspectives*, (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications).

The relief was structured on the basis of gender. In all societies, men and women experience different vulnerabilities and have different capacities as a result of their gender roles<sup>41</sup>.

*....the failure to identify gendered roles and to plan programmes with them consciously in mind has resulted in the inequitable delivery of disaster relief, and inadequate attention to the potential long-term outcomes of short-term interventions. The tool of gender analysis is a powerful one for accurately diagnosing opportunities and constraints in any programme, and identifying more effective strategies for delivering emergency assistance so that it supports long-term development for women and men, girls and boys (Anderson, 1994, p.8).*

The relief operations were totally gender-insensitive in the tsunami. There was no women employee deputed in the affected areas and male officials were sent to look after the women. Women were made to suffer humiliation and harassment by the insensitive relief and recovery teams (e.g. the distribution of sanitary items, were given by men who gave bad gestures while giving them and took this as an opportunity to tease and harass women through public distribution), and were denied direct access to relief packages, appropriate health care, and opportunities to contribute to relief and recovery planning and management. As a result of which five kerosene stoves were provided for one family, the women received only sarees and no undergarments or churidars.

The officials in relief distribution process were not assessing the needs of the victims and there was no need assessment of the women. When the identification of beneficiaries was done for the implementation of rehabilitation packages, it was not egalitarian in nature. In fact the women-headed households were completely left out in the rehabilitation processes. In other cases all the relief money went to the men who spent it on liquor, as women were not considered the heads of the families. One of the main reasons for this was that women do not have a place in the traditional panchayats. This led to the total marginalization of women in the relief operations.

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<sup>41</sup> . See the Book, Stoltman, J.P., J. Lidstone and L.M. DeChano (ed.) (2004), *International Perspectives on Natural Disasters: Occurrence, Mitigation, and Consequences*, (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers), pp.429.

In Nagapattinam (worst affected district in Tamil Nadu) of India there are nearly three lakh women who live by selling fish, dried fish or working as small commission agents. So on the day of the tsunami, there were many women on the sea shore who lost their money while on the way to purchase fish, while they were vending their catch, or while engaged in commission agent work. Many of these women lost their fish drying shed but the problem is these women and their livelihood were neglected by the government. On the other hand, the men commission agents and ice plant owners got compensation from the government.

The inequality between women and men is often perpetuated by the disaster response agencies. Despite the fact the women play a central roles in families, communities and economies, women are relatively invisible when it comes to the disaster relief operations. This is mainly due to their lower position in society the considerable efforts of women before, during and after a natural disaster are masked by the “female victim / male rescuer” paradigm (Enarson and Morrow, 1998; Fordham, 1999; Enarson, 2000; Felten-Biermann, 2005).

Women’s work has not been recognized by rehabilitation programs (Oxfam, 2005, p.7). Livelihood restoration measures have focused on replacement of assets, thus excluding women who rarely possess assets in their names. Often the disbursement of relief and rehabilitation packages is controlled by fish workers traditional panchayats that are dominated by men, leading to further exclusion of women (Manecksha, 2005, para.14). Even when women do get compensation and relief packages, other family members typically take over the resources that come in (Ibid, para.8).

In a situation like tsunami when people are robbed of their identity or nations are robbed of their land, families of their loved ones and towns of their identity, the discrimination on the basis of their caste, class, gender etc was very much present in the relief operations.

## 4.2 Case Study (b) Super Cyclone

In case of the tsunami the rehabilitation process was socially structured, so this makes me question is it also the case of the 1999, Super Cyclone in Orissa.

The widespread devastation caused by the Super Cyclone not only shocked the people of Orissa but also disturbed the world community and brought their overwhelming sympathy for the people of Orissa, that in turn, resulted in continuous flow of relief assistance to Orissa from different parts of India and the world. Although relief was coming in from every part of the world but initially the problem was 'access' as the roads were not cleared and the initial relief efforts was hampered by poor coordination as well as driving rain. Such was the fury of nature that two district head quarters in the worst affected areas i.e. Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara could not reached for four days. About 400 villages were not accessible even after four weeks after the cyclone. So distribution became a logistical nightmare.

Even, after five days of the Super Cyclone nothing in the way of relief had come to thousands. The scene of devastation and cries of victims of the Super Cyclone is not easily believable. People without access to food and water cannot survive for long. Although the central government begun a massive relief operation by moving about 4,000 tonnes of food and medicine everyday by air, road and ship, but it was merely a drop in the ocean. But the question is in a society where gender, caste, religious, regional, class differentials are extremely pronounced, and differences, entitlements, and obligations along the same differentials are clearly defined and observed, so does the relief and rehabilitation process in the aftermath of the Super Cyclone followed this and create a human-made disaster with a more greater intensity than the natural disaster i.e., the Super Cyclone.

In case of the 1999 Orissa Super Cyclone there were actually no clear-cut relief and rehabilitation policies. So the aid agencies, the government or the NGOs were left to decide what kind of houses they would build, what kind of relief kits should be

distributed, and even which villages should be rehabilitated first. This created confusion, chaos, unreasonable expectations, fear, and wide disparities in the relief coverage of different communities.

The relief distribution process in the Super Cyclone was structured in a fine knit of caste prejudice and population size. It is surprising to note even in a crisis situation like the Super Cyclone where the state seems to have slipped into a stone-age apocalypse the differences on the basis of caste and population seems to work. But relief materials were pouring everyday from different parts and different sources of the country and abroad. Population size was an important factor for relief distribution after the Super Cyclone in Orissa. For example- in Birudipantal in Puri district's Astaranga block relief hardly reaches because the size of the population is very small. It is roughly 80 kms from Bhubaneswar. It is the last of the villages on the estuary of the Devi River which drains into the Bay of Bengal, the smallest in the cluster under the Nagar village panchayat. Although relief operations were going on but it was reaching the larger villages which are invariably outnumbered.

Another important reason why very little relief reaches here is due to the fact that in Birudipantal no one except the poorest Harijans stay here. Even the Development Officer, of Astaranga Block said: Supplies are available in the market, relief isn't required<sup>42</sup>. But the Birudipantal villagers can only widow shop. If there is a food chain in Orissa, Birudipantal is the last link.

In the aftermath of the Super Cyclone the social position and importance of different caste groups in society determined the entitlements and actual access to relief. For example- a Harijan youth named, Pramod kandi from the Birudipantal said: "educated higher caste people from other villages were able to garner some aid from NGOs; we just don't know how to go about it"<sup>43</sup>. The only time that there was any close contact with the relatively affluent general caste population in the area was during the cyclone. Anyone

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<sup>42</sup> . See, Suri, S. (2000), *Orissa Disaster: Agony of the Living*, (New Delhi: Authors Press), pp.19.

<sup>43</sup> . Ibid., pp.18.

with a pucca structure took in whoever came. But once the storm ended, the things changed. Even the NGOs did not make any effort to reach these people. As NGOs are institutions that are open to all categories of citizens irrespective of their caste, creed or gender and whose internal arrangements are not determined by religious laws, are categorized as civil society (Beteille, 1996). But this indeed is questionable.

As the relief distribution in the post-Super Cyclone period was provided on the basis of the size of the village. It was difficult for the people of Birudipantal to fetch relief as it had a very small population with just 20 huts and the government was providing 500gm of rice per head per day which was shrinking inexplicably. Most of the relief in the form of rice usually went to the nearby village Balipantal. The inequality and discrimination (discrimination is the denial of equal enjoyment of rights on the basis of sex, race, religion, political belief, caste, social class, disability, age, sexual orientation or a combination of these or other attributes) in the relief operations had created suspicion and bad blood between the two villages. It was repeated down the road as each village accuses the one nearer the block headquarter of cornering most of the 'loot'.

In the aftermath of the Super Cyclone there was unequal distribution of relief so this makes me question how the relationship between those with resources and those without resources is? In the post-Super Cyclone period a NGO called Mamta Gruhas, with the concept of setting up a house for the orphaned children, widows and the destitute was set up and the scheme was formulated from the suggestions of the UNICEF<sup>44</sup>, which supported the Government of Orissa in undertaking the relief and rehabilitation task.

While setting up the Mamta Gruhas, the volunteers ensured that even the most mundane and everyday things needed by the inmates (like the comb and toothpaste) were provided to them. The government of Orissa even supported the Gruhas, so a reasonable proportion of the aid received by the government was diverted to the Gruhas. As a result the Gruhas often received more luxurious things than those which were available to the

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<sup>44</sup> . See, Juvva, S and Alka Parikh (2002), "From Nowhere to Care: Experiences with Cyclone Rehabilitation Interventions", *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, Vol.63, No.2, April, pp.283-292.



villagers. And this created a sense of hostility in some villages. Due to the unequal relief distribution in the post-Super Cyclone period there was an atmosphere of constant conflict in the villages. Conflict is an important sociological concept. It is said whatever might be the type of social structure, conflicts are bound to occur as there are always some rival claims to scarce resources, prestige or power relations, in which aim of individuals and groups is to “neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals” (Coser, 1956:8). This is very much applicable to the conflict in the Orissa Super Cyclone.

The relationships among the family members were also not conducive in the aftermath of the Super Cyclone. For example- at Balidiha village, two brothers were fighting desperately even while building their houses, over which of them owns the three utensils that were found among the debris of their homes.

There is a saying that in a disaster, “everybody is for himself and away from the fellows” and this was true of the Orissa Super Cyclone. In Alasahi village some NGO was bringing relief and there was a buzz around the village centred on how to claim the paltry 16 loaves of bread, three packets of biscuits and some kerosene oil, earmarked for each of the five villages in that area. Some of the 2000 odd villagers of Alasahi had apparently looted the consignment. And the people who could not grab the relief went home empty handed. This shows how individualistic the people had become after the calamity.

Disasters demand immediate relief and generate the need to return the affected area to ‘normality’ and the ‘tyranny of the urgent’ (BRIDGE, 1996) can oust or demote gender, thereby overturning long-term development programmes. The relief distribution process in the post-Super Cyclone period was socially structured on the basis of gender. In the relief team in the post-Super Cyclone period there were a few women, as a result of which the gender-specific problems were not taken care of, especially the problems of pregnant women, lactating women and old aged women were ignored by the relief team. But it is at this time that they need special care in nutrition and nursing.

The female members of women-headed households complained that their specific problems relating to health and clothing were not taken into account. In fact they had also expressed various difficulties faced by them in dealing with officials for relief and compensation.

There was little evidence that in the post-Super Cyclone period the principle of 'women and children first' was at work in the relief and rehabilitation efforts that followed the Super Cyclone. Women were not specifically a target group for relief assistance after the 1999 cyclone, except certain women and children were considered especially vulnerable. Thousands of marginalized women and adolescent girls found themselves widowed, orphaned, homeless and alone after the Super Cyclone. These women proved to be completely ill-equipped to participate in the rush to secure relief supplies, and prove the ownership of land and property and claim compensation.

The rescue and rehabilitation activities undertaken by both the state government and the NGOs were observed to lack a gender perspective and in fact their interventions were more or less gender-blind. Although women were numerically the largest vulnerable group that needed special attention, but their needs and concerns were not properly understood. The problems of the cyclone-affected women in Orissa were further increased by the absence of any access to resources like loan, credit, market etc. Although the government and the NGOs had been promoting the concepts of Self Help Groups (SHG), but the problem is that very few of these SHGs actually existed in the affected villages of Orissa. The most noticeable relief targeted to women regarded as vulnerable was distributed through the Mamta Gruha shelters (the Mamta Gruhas are an NGO which was started after discussion with the Assistant Relief Commissioner, Government of Orissa, UNICEF, and ODMM to rehabilitate destitute women and orphans).

In an emergency situation like the Super Cyclone, it was actually a challenge for the relief workers to ensure that the children who had managed to survive the cyclone did not fall prey to hunger, cold, disease and epidemics. Mere survival was the first step taken by

the relief workers in aftermath of the Super Cyclone. When the relief and rehabilitation work was carried out, in the first overwhelming days of the disaster, little thought was given to the children as a group with particular needs. Despite the fact that a large number of children were affected but no special interventions were made, not even the provision of baby food.

There are many instances where the relief supplied by the Orissa Disaster Mitigation Mission (ODMM) was insufficient for the children in terms of food. The children particularly under the age of one were not being nourished. Even the provision of emergency clothing for the children was not adequate. According to a report provided by Save the Children, although large amounts of clothing were arrived as relief, but it was always not appropriate. In another instance the UNICEF supplied family kits, including a set of girls clothing and two additional sets of clothing, one small and one large. This shows the insensitive attitude of the relief givers towards the children.

Although relief was pouring in from different parts of the world and was piling up in Ersama's 39 year old panchayat samiti building but relief was not moving. Even when the relief started moving it was distributed in an uneven manner and did not reach the remote villages which were badly hit. For example- in the marooned village of Kharanasi not a single doctor had reached even after fifteen days of the cyclone.

During the relief distribution process there many instances where the relief meant for the cyclone affected people were looted, in fact were vanishing without any trace stored in a warehouse near Bhubaneswar, bought by CARE international, an NGO. Although the NGO lodged a complaint with the police but the state government, was unwilling to enter into further controversy so it handed the case to the CBI. These incidents intimidated the social workers and other civil society organisations from reaching out to the victims in the interior regions.

In the post-Super Cyclone the relief materials that is the polythene sheets that were meant for the cyclone victims was actually benefiting some others. In fact the Special

Relief Commissioner during the 1999 Super Cyclone D.N. Padhi was bungling the purchase of polythene sheets was stalled by Chief Minister Giridhar Gamango for political reasons. In Jagatsinghpur district one could see sheets being sold in the open market. And the seller was unfazed even as one of the photographers clicked his wares. "If I do not sell them, how will I eat? He said. "Why don't you question the people who sold it to me?"<sup>45</sup> This makes me question if the people who are in charge of the relief distribution if they themselves get involved in corruption, how much relief will reach the victims will always remain a mystery.

The International donors, NGOs, private volunteers, corporate assistance and aid from other states flooded Orissa. But the key question was whether the agencies involved in the relief and rehabilitation process would be able to turn things around. As there were many instances of relief being looted and stolen by the agencies involved in relief and rehabilitation process. For example- in Punichi village, the gram sevak and the panchayat secretary were arrested for stealing two quintals of relief rice to sell it in the open market. In another instance the Block Development Officer of Khandapada was caught while diverting relief material to his in-laws house.

Even cyclone politics had been injected into the relief and rehabilitation phase. The relief distribution to the needy was not the only or major concern of the state government as their main concern was the assembly elections in March. The Congress-led state government in the 1999 Super Cyclone was in a fix as it had not only to handle the crisis but also see how it has to be voted back to power. Although the state urged the Centre to declare the 1999 Super Cyclone as a "national calamity", but at the same time demanded exclusive rights to supervise the operation, so that the tragedy doesn't lead to an electoral debacle.

Congress factional disputes have also affected relief measures. As the rival leaders were rejoicing at Gamango's bumbling efforts at crisis management, and were doing little to help. In the post-Super Cyclone phase the then Chief Minister of Orissa, Giridhar

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<sup>45</sup> . See, Suri, S. (2000), *Orissa Disaster: Agony of the Living*, (New Delhi: Authors Press), pp.127.

Gamango was criticized for not handling the crisis situation properly at a time when the dissidence within the ruling Congress Party was at its peak. It was even said by a Congress rival that the inept handling of the calamity by Giridhar Gamango had more to do with his being a tribal. Some of the upper caste politicians and bureaucrats from the coastal belt combined together to oust the tribal from the southern hilly area (KBK region) from the chair of Chief Minister. It has been pointed out in a study (Mohapatra, 2000) that the defeat of the Congress in the assembly elections immediately after the cyclone was a penalty for its awful handling of the cyclone. And in his place Hemanada Biswal a tribal from western part of Orissa, was sworn in as the Chief Minister. But, after the election to the state assembly, in the first week of April, Naveen Patanaik of BJD-BJP coalition took over as Chief Minister after defeating the Congress Party. So, there were three Chief Ministers within a six month period just after the Super Cyclone. This shows how various political combinations are trying to extract mileage out of the agony.

It is important to note in the relief and rehabilitation phase of the 1999, Super Cyclone that an undercurrent of politics has vitiated the vital rescue and relief operations. Although relief and rehabilitation work was undertaken by the government and non-government organizations with encompassed sympathy and support from all over the world including several state governments. But still there are certain areas where the relief package has not reached and rehabilitation work has not started, because a general phenomenon had developed among the people that there is enough money available for the reconstruction activities. Although money was there but due to vested interests and unholy nexus between politician, bureaucrats and contractors, relief and rehabilitation work did not reach the needy and the vulnerable groups, indeed the relief and rehabilitation played a major role during the Super Cyclone for creating vote bank and for the earning for petty politicians.

This shows how vulnerabilities are inextricably linked to certain processes of marginalization that protect the interests of particular groups and areas at the cost of others. There by creating 'marginalization syndrome' for the discriminated and disadvantaged groups. Even a social crisis situation like this has been unsuccessful in

distributing social opportunity equally to everybody without any discrimination. In fact deprivation continues to besiege a large number of affected populations of the tsunami and the Super Cyclone.

### **4.3 The State and Civil Society in Disaster Response.**

It is essential to know the interventions made by State and non-state agencies in the relief and rehabilitation phases to identify factors influencing the positive and negative outcomes of the tsunami response. It is actually the responsibility of the State government to cope with the natural disasters. It is important to mention that as a phenomenon, the tsunami was one that was beyond the pale of experience of the state apparatus. The tsunami was both in nature and scale; an unprecedented, apocalyptic event. Sudden and swift, the tsunami tested even the most efficient disaster management system in the world. But the question is, were the state agencies able to do justice to all sections of the populations according to the needs of the population or did their efforts reach everyone equally on a need basis.

### **4.4 Response of the State – Case Study (a) Tsunami**

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster some family functions, at least are assumed by formalized organizations. A disaster causes loss of some family and kin group functions to more formalized organizations in the community (Bates, et al., 1963). For example in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami disaster the priority was food, shelter, latrines and medicine which was provided by the state and the NGOs which are the formalized organizations.

The tsunami cut off large parts of the coast from the rest of state, and also destroyed the communications infrastructure. For the first two days after the event, there appeared to be no order in the rescue efforts. I would like to question whether the phrase “natural disaster” camouflages an institutional sluggishness in India. Although, there was an initial paralysis due to the nature and sheer intensity of the disaster compounded by the

breakdown of communications channels. But soon after that the state and District level administrations<sup>46</sup> swung into action by noon 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2004, with the first government orders (GOs) on relief and rehabilitation packages being issued on the 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2005. The state works on the basis of the existing structural mechanisms. The government organization and the state go with a fixed belief system, human capabilities, and capacities. They have a different frame in mind and the tsunami survivors have a different human capacity and social situations.

In the initial phase it was the state's decision to bring in the Armed Forces for search and rescue operations, and then moved on to organize relief camps and announcing ex-gratia payments. It has been pointed out by many that the response from the government of India to the massive destruction due to the tsunami was initially hesitant and inadequate. It is the larger civil society institutions who took up rescue and relief efforts. The response of the government was largely in the *gratis* mode.

But did the government address the needs of different sections of population as different categories of population were affected differently in the tsunami and there was acute discrimination in the relief operations. Although the Prime Minister of India promised that the reconstruction would aim to seriously improve the lot of those affected compared to their priori developmental position:

*The government is committed to providing a safer and a higher quality life to its people. It will be the endeavour of the government that on completion of the rehabilitation and reconstruction package, the scars of the tsunami disaster are replaced by better means of livelihood with modern day civic amenities<sup>47</sup>.*

In the definition of the 'affecties' or the affected population of the government did it include all sections of population. As there were many instances of discrimination in the relief and rehabilitation phase on the basis caste by the government. In the initial phase of

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<sup>46</sup> . The District Administration is headed by the District Collector and Magistrate, a senior officer of the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) cadre.

<sup>47</sup> . Rt. Hon. Manmohan Singh, Government of India, *TSUNAMI – A Report to the Nation*, June 3, 2005, pp.8.

the relief distribution the government orally transmitted a policy to distribute relief materials only to the caste fishermen, and to exclude Dalits from relief unless there were surplus supplies after the needs of caste fishermen had been fulfilled. This contrasts greatly with the ethical approach of giving relief to those most affected first. Relief should be given on the basis of 'need' but it is because of the government and its directions that even the NGOs gave the relief on the basis of caste. It is a fact that those who form the fishermen caste suffered on average the greatest losses; it is completely casteist to decide that all those from the fishermen caste were a superior quality of victim to Dalits.

In the relief phase, the relief camps controlled by the government were completely inadequate for the amount of time it took to find land for permanent accommodation. There the Dalits were segregated from the caste fishermen, by setting-up Meenavar-exclusive camps and the Dalits and other lower castes were divided into camps of their own. It was even found out the camps where Dalits stayed were given the less priority than others. In fact the Dalits in the 'Pandagasalai' temporary shelter in Nagapattinam were placed alongside the open sewerage/wastewater drain.

The life of Dalits in Kannigi Nagar after the tsunami is at stake. Their shelter at Kannigi Nagar has burnt down and they waited for 3-4 months for the government to build their temporary shelter, finally the government built the shelters in an area which was flood-prone. And in December, 2005 there was a flood which washed away their temporary shelters and although they have taken all steps necessary to persuade the government to do something for them, but the government has not responded to them. These Dalit victims strongly feel that if they would have been Meenavar instead of Dalit, the government would have helped them properly. This is one glaring example where the government has not addressed the issue of the Dalits.

There are many instances of discrimination against the lower caste communities especially Dalits in the relief phase and the government turned a blind eye towards it. For example- In Raja Nagar, Chengalpat, the caste fishermen went to the extent of beating up



lorry drivers that took supplies to the Dalit colony. The Dalit community reported that – the Meenavars received a lot of food, more than they could use. Rather than give any to us, they stored it in a pit. In such a situation when the government should have taken steps to combat the discrimination done in a crisis situation like the tsunami. On the contrary the government official's reaction to this injustice in Raja Nagar was to ensure that the Dalit community received nothing. In fact the collector told the Dalit communities that their village does not actually exist. The Tsunami Coordinator said, "I have many headaches, why are you giving me another one?" The Tahasildar (government official) said, "Who has died in your village that I should give you relief? Let another tsunami come and then I will see if I can help you". And the Revenue inspector promised the Dalits, "wherever you make your complaint, it has to come through me; I will see to it that you get nothing"<sup>48</sup>.

According to the article-7, Universal declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 'all are equal before law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law' and it is the government whose responsibility is to see that its citizens are not discriminated on the basis of caste, class, gender etc. These instances show that it is actually the government who perpetuated the discrimination. These actions show how the government has used the tsunami relief process to solidify and advance a dominant caste position, at the expense of the affected Dalit communities. One of the main reasons for this is due to the absence of proper accountability and justice procedures, so siding with the dominant caste becomes the easiest alternative or option for the government officials.

According to a report in 'Frontline' on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2005 provided that Dalit agricultural and fish workers were denied relief assistance in the northern half of the Tamil Nadu coast:

*Even the basic relief has not reached a large number of agricultural workers," said K. Balakrishnan...Dalits constitute the majority of the affected agricultural workers...In addition, Dalits who do odd jobs for*

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<sup>48</sup> . See the report, Making Things Worse: How 'Caste Blindness' in Indian Post-Tsunami Disaster Recovery has Exacerbated Vulnerability and Exclusion, Report by Timothy Gill, Commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands, pp.37-38.

*fisher folk but do not own property have also been affected badly. But their sufferings are lost sight of, mostly because of the deep-rooted caste prejudices of the dominant fishermen community, according to I. Elangovan, a Vellore-based English professor, who is the president of the Dr.Ambedkar Centre in Chennai. At several places their names had not been included in the list of the tsunami victims needing relief materials. In many places, Elangovan said, relief teams were prevented from visiting Dalit villages by sections of the fishing community. He said that the saddest part was that even medical assistance could not reach the affected Dalits in a few places because of the hostility shown by the principal community. If the government had arranged proper enumeration, distribution of relief materials could have been ensured<sup>49</sup>.*

This shows how the government has not given any attention towards the lower castes and other vulnerable groups. Although the relief poured in a huge way and the relief and rehabilitation work was going on smoothly and the state could have laid claim to the first success story in disaster management. But with certain segments of population excluded from the relief process can the state achieve success in disaster management.

In a report by People's Watch Tamil Nadu entitled "The Hit and the Affected"<sup>50</sup> enumerates 346 non fishing hamlets (almost two-thirds of these Dalits) which had been affected by the tsunami but were denied government and NGO rehabilitation. Of the houses damaged amongst these affected are non-ocean fishing hamlets, 22% were not registered as damaged. And the important thing is that the government administration did not even have information about the existence of many of these communities even after 6 months after the tsunami. This clearly shows the lack of will of the government to reach the affected non-caste fishermen.

In the post-tsunami relief camps one could observe multiple forms of caste – based discrimination in the form of violence and abuse faced by Dalits. From this one can say caste determines one's security in the aftermath of the catastrophe. But the government

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<sup>49</sup> . Viswanathan, S., *A Neglected Lot*, Frontline, Volume 22, Issue 9, 23 April – 6 May 2005.

<sup>50</sup> . See the report, Making Things Worse: How 'Caste Blindness' in Indian Post-Tsunami Disaster Recovery has Exacerbated Vulnerability and Exclusion, Report by Timothy Gill, Commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands, pp.47.

could have stopped this blatant caste bias in the delivery of relief materials. For example- according to a report provided by Rohini Ghadiok, a Delhi-based civil activist said that:

*The state machinery perpetuates caste discrimination. A day after the tsunami, when survivors started coming in, lower level functionaries were instructed by higher officials to identify people on the basis of caste and religion. A list was made. Since the Meenavar community dominated a particular area, government officials were told to provide Meenavar survivors with the relief material<sup>51</sup>.*

This shows how the state is shifting their responsibility and also negating their social responsibility.

Within the same caste in the relief and rehabilitation phase there was even differential treatment by the government towards a small group of Dalit men and women who collect Azhi (a type of shell). These people remain neck deep standing in the water with the support of the catamarans to pick up Azhis, so many died in the tsunami. Although they were given ex gratia payments by the government but they were totally deprived of the relief and rehabilitation entitlements.

The government adopted a 'property-owner centric' approach while dealing with the relief and rehabilitation process. In fact the relief was given to those who had registered as tsunami affected, and the people who had left their homes after the tsunami and returned after some days found it difficult to register themselves. The government moved with the assumption that the 'fishermen community' was the hardest hit. But the reality is that this 'fishermen community' is not the community of people who do fishing, they are rather a caste group. The Dalits who do fishing are not counted as part of the 'fishing community'. Thus, in the post-tsunami caste was the basis for determining categories of victims, with the caste fishermen considered the primary victims, and the Dalits as the secondary victims? So the aids reached only the fish worker communities, and the several other communities like the agriculturists, petty shop owners, Dalits, women, people

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<sup>51</sup> . Ghadiok, Rohini, *His Relief, Her Relief*, Indian Express, February 8, 2005, accessed at: [http://www.indianexpress.com/full\\_story.php?content\\_id=64243](http://www.indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=64243).

working in the informal sector, etc who had lost their means of livelihood, but not the property and life, were completely overlooked. Even there are reports that in many villages, even if aid is distributed equally to all, it was usually collected back later, and were given to those who lost assets like boats and catamarans (Sampath, n.d., Towards Equality, para.2). It is actually the duty of the government to see that nobody is excluded and to go beyond the mere physical.

In case of the farming community that owns the agricultural lands that were inundated by seawaters, surveys were carried out by the revenue departments of various districts to assess the extent of inundation and the degree of salination. It is only after this that the governments issued government orders (GOs) to provide relief to farmers who have lost standing crops. Merely providing one time relief would not solve the problems of the farmers, one need to even address the livelihood issues of these farmers keeping in mind the long-term problem.

In the post-tsunami relief and rehabilitation operation undertaken by the government and partner agencies it was found that due to the improper survey of the affected area and the lack of understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the disaster affected population there were cases of exclusion. For instance- the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh was one of the worst affected districts in the tsunami. Although many agencies came to this district and extended their help to the fisher folk communities in many ways, but overlooked many vulnerable communities such as the Oruganti reddy's (they are a small vegetable farming community based in Pakala of S.Konda mandal in the district).

Although they are from a forward community, they are head-loaded daily vegetable vendors and these farmers cultivate different leafy and other vegetables throughout the year and sell it on a daily basis for their livelihood. The important thing to note is that even though these farmers live in coastal villages and near by backwater channel, still no agencies had come to rehabilitate their salt affected agricultural fields and restoration of farm ponds, which the community depends for irrigation sources. So these small farmers could not restore their land due to financial constraint, because of which these social

groups lost ten months of own livelihood employment in the post-tsunami. But fortunately a local based agency named SARDS identified the gaps in the rehabilitation and approached CARE and ultimately succeeded in restoration of livelihoods of these small farmers.

For the government, coastal communities meant only the fisher folk. The state was not concentrating on Dalits, Adivasis, and other backward communities. So the narrow understanding of the government / state is problematic for other communities. They were not able to get any relief materials and they were not able to get any assistance to rebuild or reconstruct their livelihood. It is the responsibility of the government to see that the rehabilitation mean that one restores to the previous level all those who have lost resources but the state left those who were socially and economically disadvantaged where they were, i.e. at the bottom of the hierarchy?

As, if this was not enough in the name of reconstruction and rehabilitation after the tsunami the state is making efforts to push these coastal communities from the shore which is their ancestral homestead by using the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)<sup>52</sup> notification and is trying to give the coastal areas to the business houses and also for tourism purposes. The coastal communities have been traditionally using these coastal areas for centuries and their livelihood is totally dependent upon this natural resource and if they are displaced from their traditional habitat, it will lead to the negation of their customary rights.

In the aftermath of the tsunami the government did not pay any attention to the problems of widowers. It is the gender based social expectations which isolate men in the aftermath of the disaster, leaving them to deal with their own losses and grief. It is usually expected that men to be strong and will be able to face the crisis in a 'manly' manner. So no specific interventions were made by the government for the widowers, in fact they were left with the responsibility of raising young families.

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<sup>52</sup> . The CRZ notification did not permit any new construction within 200 meters of the high tide line but due to the strong opposition from the civil society, a new Government Order was issued which made relocation optional for people residing within 500 meters of the high tide line.

In India the post-tsunami intervention by the state was carried out on the basis of a series of government orders. It is surprising to note that the state which has the responsibility to protect and provide what is necessary for each and every citizen to enjoy their rights, in Kerala for example issued government orders with regard to tsunami but did not contain any specific provision with regard to women and Dalits. For instance, there is no rehabilitation policy to provide for women widowed by the tsunami. Although the Dalits were also involved in fishing and its allied activities, there is no provision for their rehabilitation.

The post-tsunami relief operations in the Little Nicobar Islands<sup>53</sup> showed the gross ignorance of the government agencies in the affairs of the islands, as the names of people and places were being misspelled during incomprehensible phonetic exchanges and semantics between some Nicobarese and the compilers. This created a problem when bank accounts were opened to deposit monetary relief under various schemes for the affected. The spellings and names varied between those that were recorded as 'official names' and those which people were commonly known by. Later when lists were verified, ex gratia payments under various schemes began. This confusion and indecision in disbursement resulted in the process continuing for many months for a few unlucky people.

Another problem aroused when the compensatory money for crop damage arrived via the Department of Agriculture. The problem was that in all the years of its existence, the Department of Agriculture and the Revenue Department had never felt the need to visit the tribal areas to document and record the ownership patterns of plantations. Actually such a need had never existed as the Nicobarese of this region had never depended on governmental departments to any great extent. There weren't substantive records of existing villages and their location despite over half a century of governance in the region. So with the arrival of cash, its disbursement became a major problem as land records were non-existent, and cropped area had never been enumerated. It became a

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<sup>53</sup>. See, Chandi, Manish. (2007), "Rehabilitation and Change in the Aftermath of a Tsunami: A Return to Little Nicobar Island", *Disaster and Development*, Vol.1, No.2, May, pp. 91-110.

problem to arrive at a consensus towards ex gratia payment for loss of land due to the tsunami. Initially the officer in charge decided to estimate the loss by calculating the probable number of coconuts sold on average by each family by interviewing them. But this was not acceptable as each family consisted of more than a nuclear family, sometimes spread in more than a village; there are individual and joint families.

Another important point to note is that share cropping based on affinal need and ancestral links was a method the Nicobarese practice to harvest plantation crops and earn income from time to time with no regularity. After much discussion it was decided to share the cash for the loss of land as it affected everyone and was used by everyone within ancestral and granted ownership. These lists included the crop cultivated, all heads of families or even matrilineal owners and other beneficiaries. Thus each family in a village got an equal amount and put to rest the otherwise imminent possibility of inequitable distribution of money if it was only given to the owners and not to all users who experienced the same loss. But this brought into notice the incomplete governmental records on the islanders and their inability to understand the tribal communities with sensitivity, while not accounting for the socio-ecological resilience of these islanders within the framework toward recovery and rehabilitation.

In the post tsunami due to the relief and rehabilitation interventions launched by State and Non- State agencies all the surviving residents of Little Nicobar, Pulomilo, Kondul and Great Nicobar islands (including the indigenous and settlers) except the Shompen<sup>54</sup> tribe of Great Nicobar, were brought to the Campbell Bay area, the administrative headquarters of the southern Nicobars. These people were segregated (according to villages) in different relief camps as settlers and indigenous tribal populations.

In the relief camps the displaced people's lives revolved around just receiving food, water and clothing. Especially the Nicobarese yearned to get back because of boredom and discomfiture in alien surroundings without any privacy, even they realized that there

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<sup>54</sup> . The Shompen are a foraging tribe resident in the interior of Great Nicobar Island. They are indigenous to this island and they were largely unaffected, except for a few who were present in Nicobari villages of Great Nicobar along the west coast when the tsunami struck.

would be no necessity for such expenditure and ambiguity in their lives if they returned to where they belonged and could control their rehabilitation. But the wait was endless – extending for a whole year and more. As the precedence was given to rehabilitation prerogatives as envisaged by the Andaman administration with instructions from New Delhi which were well intentioned but was highly ineffective in bringing a participatory approach and making full use of available resources. This made the Nicobarese yearning to return and begin resettling but there was no encouragement to do so. As nobody wanted to take responsibility for what they envisioned as a dangerous task across a cruel sea and dark forests. This unfortunately delayed the process to recovery and threatened to bring on a dominant system of governance in place of their former self reliance.

One of the major transformations the tsunami brought about among the Nicobarese is that these Nicobarese were exposed to the local administration machinery in the rehabilitation effort and also to the world outside of their hamlets; as the life of these Nicobarese were ensconced within their island world for many years and it is the first time in all their experience and history, that they are opened out. This would not have occurred, if there would not have been a tsunami.

But whenever the government took a proactive relief and rehabilitation approach, the responses to the affected people's needs were taken care of comparatively well. For example- one of the directives given by the Tamil Nadu Government's Order actually showed some clear intention of the government. With the resolution of the concerned village panchayat accepting partnership with the concerned private sector partner and the components of the assistance, the participating agency may prepare a single project report giving in detail the rehabilitation package, cost estimates etc. A committee at the district level comprising of the District Collector as the Chairman, the Project Officer, DRDA and the Executive Engineer of the Public Works Department (buildings) will approve the project. The District Committee may also nominate a third party agency for quality audit. A model memorandum of understanding, type design of the houses, and eligibility guidelines for the agencies will be finalized separately by the Special Commissioner and Commissioner for Revenue Administration immediately. The participating agency will



enter into an MOU with the Collector of the district before commencing the project<sup>55</sup>. But the problem was this not the case in every sector of rehabilitation.

#### **4.5 Response of the State - Case Study (b) Super Cyclone**

The responsibility of managing natural disasters in our country rests with the respective state governments. State governments are autonomous in organizing rescue and relief operations. The state government should repair or replace damaged infrastructure and regenerate viable economic activities. The most vulnerable and under-privileged groups should be given special attention. The Central government only supplements the efforts of the state government in dealing with the disaster by providing financial support and the armed forces. Although there is a Central Relief Commissioner, the states also have their own Relief Commissioners in organizing relief operations. The Relief Commissioner's work here is to establish an Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) immediately to handle the crisis. The EOC comprises of the state and the district administration machinery for local population with an eye on the immediate crisis. Significantly, this group should develop strong linkages with the community or local population and start organized action at the time of pre-disaster, disaster and post-disaster situations.

However, in practice, it is not easy to control a catastrophe as far as the organization arrangements are concerned. In fact "a natural calamity can be heightened by a man-made one"<sup>56</sup>, if there is a bloated bureaucracy like the one in India. The state today is longer regarded as an entity that people look for help in a time of crisis, but is seen as an obstacle. It exists basically to feed itself. The response and reaction of the state to the Orissa Super Cyclone is a proof of that. So how does the state which is supposed to be the custodian of the people in the time of crisis operate at collective risk?

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<sup>55</sup> . See, Louis, Prakash. (2005), "Displacement and Rehabilitation in Post-Tsunami South Asia", *Social Action*, Vol.55, July – September, pp.318-329.

<sup>56</sup> . See, "Orissa's Collapse: Chief Minister Gamang should Go", *India Today*, 22<sup>nd</sup> November. 1999.

A disaster is a 'collective stress situation' (Barton, 1969:38) where many members of a social system fail to receive expected conditions of life from the system'. In the 1999 Orissa Super Cyclone the local government did made an attempt to quickly respond to the situation, but most of the government employees were themselves gravely affected by the disaster. So nobody reported to work for the first three days. Although the Collector tried to commence relief efforts with the help of whoever was available, but again, it was difficult to find people. So it took the government three days to gather enough number of people and equipment to get started. But, by then, the Centre, other states and the armed forces had also provided support.

The incumbent state government's response to the unprecedented crisis was awfully inadequate. In a study it has been pointed out that (Mohapatra, 2000), in Orissa due to the absence of major caste/class cleavages, the disaffection is directed against the state and its agencies. According to a survey, only 5 percent of the respondents considered Orissa government's relief work as satisfactory ('An Unequal Alliance in Orissa', Oliver Health, Frontline, April 14, 2000). Initially the state made a sluggish response to the disaster.

Here one can apply Weber's theory of social stratification and see how power has implications for providing insights into the sociological understanding of disaster i.e. the Super Cyclone. Power and disaster are related because a disaster requires that some agencies and officials take responsibilities, make decisions, and be seen as legitimate. But the exercise of authority which is weaker in normal times proves even weaker during a crisis. It is even found that organizations may be unable to function due to the conflict between family role and work role. For example- in the Orissa Super Cyclone although the state took the responsibility of providing relief to the affected population but there was no cohesiveness among the political parties and the state bureaucracy who was never known for its efficiency simply crumbled. In fact the state's top bosses had set a poor example for the rest. When the storm broke, the collector of Bhadrak one of the districts affected by the Super Cyclone, dashed off to protect his own family in a neighbouring town leaving no one in charge to take vital decisions to provide relief.

For Orissa's weeping millions there may not be life after the disaster. The people of Orissa have been battered and benumbed by the cyclone; they have been orphaned and forsaken as well by the bungling, torpid state government that has abdicated its responsibility. Even after a fortnight of the Super Cyclone there was collapse of the administrative machinery, as the devastated people starve and fall sick, there is actually nobody to dole out the tonnes of relief material. For example- while the people of the affected districts of the Super Cyclone continued to starve trucks loaded with food bags queue for miles in the Kalinga Stadium (epicenter of relief distribution) in Bhubaneswar, the state's capital, and in other district headquarters unsure of where to go. The official machinery at the relief nerve centre i.e. the Kalinga Stadium could not just handle the enormous relief pouring in all parts of the world. So the NGOs could not coordinate with the officials at the stadium, so they gave supplies to areas that were not on the priority list. There are many other instances which show also the callousness of the state.

On the one hand at Astaranga in Puri, the relief trucks were choking the road outside the block development officer's office. On the other hand down the same road there is a group of hungry villagers from Somnathpur scavenging for food. But still the Chief Minister of Orissa during the 1999, Super Cyclone claimed, "We are sparing no effort to reach out to the distressed"<sup>57</sup>. It was even announced by the then Chief Minister that there was sufficient food grain and the relief was provided to all the affected districts. But when the then opposition Minister, Naveen Patanaik went on a tour to Kendrapara, one of the affected districts of the Super Cyclone complained that out of a total requirement of 30,000 tonnes of food grain, the district had received only 2,000 tonnes. In the post-Super Cyclone period the state government took nearly three days for relief to trickle into Bhubaneswar to Cuttack, let alone the coastal districts which bore the burnt. These cyclone stricken people who had been relentlessly chased by the rushing unforgiving water, had been without food and drinking water for these days. So when the first relief truck arrived, they would, the assumption went, break into tears of gratitude. That is what had happened on past occasions, but this time the script has gone berserk. The people

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<sup>57</sup> . See, Suri, S. (2000), *Orissa Disaster: Agony of the Living*, (New Delhi: Authors Press), pp.3.

marooned for days on end, waiting for victuals and other forms of assistance, chose to behave in an altogether unexpected manner. And actually the people pounced upon the food while the forces of law and order were kept at bay. Premonitions of violence filled the air, to be followed by actual violence. The starving people had obviously reached the end of their tether. People commandeered the food, and shoved aside the government and as a consequence of it chaos took over, according to the official accounts. But the starving people had another version to tell; the food belonged to them and they took charge of it.

Here one can relate with Durkheim's concept of 'anomie' i.e. the absence of norms or disintegration of norms, to have a sociological understanding of the disaster. In case of the 1999, Super Cyclone in Orissa due to the sheer intensity of the disaster it caused massive death, destruction and damage in terms of economic, social, cultural, political etc and there was lack of preparedness to face the disaster and the initial delay and dismal response of the state government in reaching the affected people had led to the deregulation of the normative structure and as neither the state government nor the people were prepared to face a calamity of such magnitude which ultimately created a crisis in the collective order.

Taking into account the exceptional nature of the cyclone, and the fact that the state government was not prepared, it asked for assistance from the central government, defence and paramilitary forces. And, in response to the appeal help on an unprecedented scale poured in from all over India and the world. But here again the state was caught totally off-guard. There was no system in place to manage the receipt, storage and distribution of relief material. The Kalinga Stadium in the state capital, Bhubaneswar, was turned into a storage area, which later on went on to become the symbol of administrative failure. Although mountains of relief were dumped into the stadium, but the aid did not reach the needy and the vulnerable in far-flung areas for weeks. In fact the heaps of relief were rotting in the Kalinga Stadium. And the relief teams that came in to assist the state were stranded in the absence of any information from the administration. The chaos, coupled with occasional reports of corruption in the relief process, raised

serious doubts about the state's capacity to manage relief effectively. So in wake of the consequent discontent, there has been growing realization that some 'natural disaster' may indeed be precipitated by human activities.

A study on disaster management and response of welfare agencies (Panigrahi, 2003), shows that the crisis in the state leadership delayed the delivery mechanism adopted for the distribution of basic relief materials in the cyclone affected areas but also expressed the political unwillingness and bureaucratic callousness to mitigate the effects of 1999 Super Cyclone effectively in time. But still it is the state agencies who first reached to the cyclone affected people to provide relief in the form of airdropping of food materials and then distributing relief in the block and panchayat offices<sup>58</sup>. But when the roads were cleared, major relief operations was started by the government on an average gap of eight days after the 1999 Super Cyclone. The relief materials were primarily distributed on the basis of the number of household members. The Panchayati Raj institutions were also involved in the government relief distribution.

But still the government did not distribute the relief equally as around one-fourth of the total relief distributed by the government went to Jagatsinghpur district which was severely damaged. In Jagatsinghpur district, the attention of the government was mostly on the ravaged Ersama block which is the ground zero of the Super Cyclone thereby neglecting the other cyclone affected blocks. At Nandan, a devastated village in Jagatsinghpur, villages are just about surviving on boiled tamarind leaves. And the nearest they have come to getting relief in the first ten days of the Super Cyclone was when a truck carrying rice meant for the village overturned in a ditch half a kilometer away. Because of the importance given to the worst affected area the other pockets which are not much affected suffer. Relief which is a right of everybody should not be the privilege of few and if the government whose responsibility is to look into the interests and the problems of all the affected population sets this example, what the other organizations would learn from this.

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<sup>58</sup> . See, Samal, K.C. (2005), "The 1999 Super Cyclone in Orissa: Coping Strategies of Women in Ersama Block", *Social Action*, Vol.55, No.1, pp.72-97.

There were even instances where the relief providers gave relief in easily accessible areas rather than move to far flung areas which led unequal distribution and exclusion. For example- the roadside villages like Garia and Saraba Patta received more frequent relief in comparison to the interior villages such as Sankha and Dahibara. According to a study ('The 1999 Super Cyclone: The Coping Strategies of Women in Ersama Block' Samal, 2005) around 15 per cent of the sample households had complained that they had received relief late in comparison to other villages. The duration of relief distribution by the government was for 20 to 30 days which was less compared to the NGOs.

There are many instances when the affected people of the Super Cyclone experienced indignity in the relief distribution due to the insensitivity of the state government officials towards the poor villages of that area. For example- in a town 30 kms from Talcher, a town which is known for its thermal power station, there the relief materials distributed to the people were mostly used clothes and even most of them were torn.

There were even instances when the government officials demanded bribes while assessing the damage to house and property and for issuing death certificate to the next of kin of deceased, for payment of ex-gratia. Moreover, the next of the deceased who were injured and affected during the cyclone but died later on, did not get any ex-gratia payment. These are some issues which the government did not pay attention. When the relief distribution process turns into business, the incentive to relief in a development mode (for the affected population) hardly remains in the interest of the dominant stakeholders.

The relief activity of the state was not programmed to address the issue of vulnerability. The government did not pay any special attention to the needs of the women as a vulnerable group as there were many women especially those who had lost their male members and faced various difficulties in dealing with officials for relief and compensation.

In the post-Super Cyclone period different rehabilitation works were carried out to restore and revive the community and the individually owned livelihood assets and to build new livelihood opportunities of the cyclone affected people. As the livelihood of the fishermen were at stake after the cyclone so the state government was providing supports in the form of supply of nets and boats to fishermen. But there were complains that low quality materials were used in boats and since the fishing nets were purchased from outside, their cost was too high, and so they could not fulfill the local requirements properly. Under this programme only a small fraction of landless Dalit families who had been earning their livelihood through fishing for decades benefited. But a majority of the fishermen were out of the beneficiary network as the government did not recognize “fisherman by occupation”. Even the fisherwomen-headed households did not get much benefit from this programme. As compensation was not given for the loss of capital in dry fishing which was an important activity of many fisherwomen.

Due to the Super Cyclone there was significant decline in the livestock population, even the plants/orchards and trees have also affected the livelihood of the households who were depending on these resources for their additional income. But neither the government nor the NGOs have given any compensation for the loss of livestock or plants/trees/orchards.

The government and the NGOs did not make any effort for long-term asset creation or for employment generation, in fact the support given by the government and the NGOs in the majority of the cases did not incorporate aspects of sustainability. The government and the NGOs also did not make any effort for individual assets building programmes. According to a study (‘The 1999 Super Cyclone: The Coping Strategies of Women in Ersama Block’ Samal, 2005) the loans, tools and other equipment that were supposed to be given to the weavers and the other artisan communities by the Government and the NGOs was found that not a single case has benefited from this programme.

In the Super Cyclone the agricultural sector was very badly hit and as the people of the coastal Orissa mainly depend on agriculture, the impact was felt more in terms of

agricultural losses. The Super Cyclone had destroyed all standing crops; rice is the main crop and the major commercial crops i.e. cotton, jute, and sugarcane are kharif crops. The coastal Orissa occupies a premier position in producing coconut oil. Thousands of families are dependent on this tree crop for their livelihood. Horticulture, which includes vegetables and fruit cultivation, is also an important sector for this people. But the killer cyclone closed every hope of the people to survive. Eighty per cent of the survivors had no money to invest for the resumption of agricultural operations. These people had huge expectations from the government to help them in terms of cash, fertilizers, and high yielding variety seeds (HYVS). However, the government could not fulfill the expectations for all survivors as only 20 per cent of people were given the above facilities but others were not, as a result of which, they borrowed money from money lenders and landlords at a high rates of interest. Thus, 68 per cent of the survivors<sup>59</sup>, dependent on agriculture, are now in a financial trap.

In the post-Super Cyclone period the state government promised to deliver number of rehabilitation supports to the cyclone affected people or households. But the restoration of agriculture and other allied activities was not done properly and in time by the government. In fact works like the land reclamation, soil conservation and leveling, desalination, sinking of shallow and deep tube wells for irrigation was completely ignored.

In the post-Super Cyclone period over half-a-dozen state governments had adopted the various affected districts and had undertaken rehabilitation and reconstruction in the cyclone affected areas. However these states had to depend on the Orissa administration to provide reports of damage and work out the details of assistance. But the state government made little effort to assess the needs of the survivors. This typical attitude and approach of the government would not help in the rehabilitation programme but would accentuate the problems of lopsided planning.

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<sup>59</sup> . See, Pareeda, P.K. (2002), "Towards Rebuilding a Post-Disaster Society: A Case Study of Super Cyclone-Affected Coastal Orissa" *Indian Journal of Social Work*, Vol.63, No.2, April, pp. 243-262.



In spite of this, according to a study (Choudhury, Rao, Jena and Chakravarty, 2001) the post-event response to 1999 Super Cyclone by the Government of Orissa has not been dismal. The Super Cyclone event was de facto treated as “calamity of rare severity” almost immediately. Although there was initial setbacks like the total failure of communication followed by a nearly-exhausted status of relief funds and continued absence of government employees for over a week in the cyclone-affected coastal region, but the relief operations swung into action. And the initiatives of the Orissa government were equally remarkable in distribution of immediate relief. It is the state government who has the major share in financing the rehabilitation support programmes of the cyclone affected people. The major livelihood supports provided to the affected people in the Super Cyclone was by the government, the role of the NGOs is very negligible.

#### **4.6 Response of Civil Society – Case Study (a) Tsunami**

The aftermath of the tsunami witnessed tremendous emotional and financial support from the NGO's as a tribute to the collective sense of humanity and human solidarity. Here Durkheimian emphasis on social solidarity is relevant because although there is social differentiation within the society but still it is '*the structure of the collectivity that imposes on each man his peculiar responsibility*' and in this case it resulted in the overwhelming response of the NGOs to the collective social crisis i.e. the tsunami.

There are certain areas where the government alone cannot do so there arouses the need of the NGO's. It is unfair to attribute the devastation and death of thousands of people from different sections of the population solely to the natural calamity. The response and interventions of the state and the NGOs can help to mitigate the impact of the disaster. The non-governmental agencies can play very crucial roles in mitigating the intensity of post-disaster effects. In the wake of the tsunami, the civil society, in India and abroad, raised to the occasion, with communities, individuals, and bilateral donor agencies, international, national and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with membership bases in the affected communities, mobilized to respond to the needs of the tsunami-affected areas.

It is true that there was overwhelming response of the NGOs to the tsunami disaster but the disaster was not socially neutral in its impact, in fact there was systematic discrimination and different categories of population were affected differently in the tsunami disaster so the question is were the NGOs sensitive to this issue and helped to counter this inherent discrimination, or effectively reinforced it, by giving only to those with the loudest voice and the strongest influence, at the expense of the most vulnerable and least organized or did it understand that the disaster affected different sections of the population differently. This is what I will attempt to analyze in my work. This is really vital to know as the people who are in charge of relief and rehabilitation if they themselves discriminate between different categories of population on the basis of caste, class, gender etc it will help in furthering the divide among the different categories of population and in the future policies can be implemented keeping in mind these issues.

How the role of the state is different from the NGOs we come to know when we analyze the relief distribution process because when it comes to relief, one thing we should know is to provide relief with dignity and one cannot expect the government officials to do that and it is here the NGOs have an advantage, but the question is did the NGOs took advantage of their position or their relief distribution was socially structured like the state?

The NGOs played an important role in influencing state policy in the tsunami disaster and helped to shape it in a manner that addresses the people's real needs. For example- it was the NGOs that were actually instrumental in bringing to the government's attention that the coastal communities comprised not only of fish workers, but also a range of other groups involved in diverse occupations, which had been equally affected in various ways by the tsunami.

As the disaster affected different categories population differently, naturally they would have different needs. But this was hardly understood by the state in the relief distribution process, as the special needs of different categories of population were not taken care off. In fact one of the important contributions of the civil society organizations

has been their ability to fill the crucial gaps at the time of relief and rescue. For example – while the government could mobilize large quantities of food grains, it was actually the civil society organizations that could understand the specific needs of different categories of population and could mobilize essentials such as children’s clothing, sanitary pads and baby food. The NGOs also played a crucial role in bringing to the government’s attention the negative implications of the state policies as because of the state policies the older men were marrying minor orphaned girls for the special deposits made in their name by the government as part of tsunami rehabilitation.

In the tsunami disaster it is the civil society organizations who have been proactive in highlighting the specific and precise needs of the communities through intervention, research and documentation, by bringing to light the instances of exclusion of certain categories of population in the disaster, and in advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups such as Dalits, non-fish workers and the aged.

Although it was recognized that it is the fishery based livelihoods or fishing communities who were worst affected by the tsunami and required relief and rehabilitation assistance but there were also a large percentage of people on the coast who were dependent on other livelihoods particularly agriculture and informal occupations who were equally affected by the triggers of the tsunami but were completely ignored. As it has already been mentioned earlier that the state gave undue attention to the fishery-based livelihoods but the NGOs have also continued to give maximum attention to the fishery-based livelihoods.

Both the state and the NGOs adopted the policy of replacement of assets, i.e., provision of boats and fishing equipment for the rehabilitation of fishery-based livelihoods. It is actually the uncoordinated efforts of the state and the civil society to supply boats to fish workers that have led to an increase in the total stock of fishing boats in Tamil Nadu, which had long-term, negative consequences for fishery in Tamil Nadu which had already been experiencing stagnation due to over-exploitation.

And what is important to note is that it is not due to the state but this over supply was driven by the desire of the civil society organizations to foster equity by giving boats to those who were earlier labourers, and this has led to a shortage of fishing boat crew, with the result that young boys are pulled out of school to work on the boats. In an effort to increase the number of fishing boats, the organizations seem to compromise on the quality as there are issues relating to the lack of suitability of boats to local preferences and sea conditions. Even the fisheries rehabilitation policy has neglected the deeper issues associated with depleting fishery resources, sea safety<sup>60</sup> and disaster preparedness (For example - by means of insurance cover).

A study commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands (DNN)<sup>61</sup> found reports of blatant discrimination by the NGOs. What is important to note was that the discrimination was reported to be denying Dalit victims even a minimum level of assistance despite their obvious need, and what is worse is that denying them dignity even where the means available to offer this to them.

The NGOs whether it was Church-based and non-Church based, local and international non- governmental organisations (INGOs) had delivered emergency relief directly to the dominant caste group who were taking shelter at Churches, marriage halls, schools and temples. The NGOs did not make any attempt to ensure that the 'outcaste' people, who had either been denied this shelter completely or were kept in a far corner, received emergency assistance. If the NGOs would have troubled to make a standing analysis of caste based discrimination they would have proactively ensured that Dalits received assistance. But the truth is that even those NGOs who had a long history of good work in India did not take such an approach. As a result of which Dalits were denied access to toilets, water, food and shelter in the emergency phase.

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<sup>60</sup> . That is the search and rescue operations for stranded fish workers.

<sup>61</sup> . see the report, Making Things Worse: How 'Caste Blindness' in Indian Post-Tsunami Disaster Recovery has Exacerbated Vulnerability and Exclusion, Report by Timothy Gill, Commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands, pp.16-17.

In the post-tsunami the NGOs instead of looking at victims on a case-by-case basis approached each family on a caste-by-caste basis. Because of which it led to a situation where many individual caste fishermen who were far less affected (and many more who were far better able to cope with the impact) than the individual neighbouring Dalits, yet, they were termed as the primary victims of the tsunami and the Dalits were given the secondary victim status because of their caste. It is even worse to note that it is the local dominant caste that is given all attention and assistance. From this one can say that any NGO that claims to be 'caste blind' but took a policy where the caste fishermen were considered the primary victims is actually contradicting itself, and is ethically bound to develop a policy to prevent repetition in the remainder of the post-tsunami work.

The NGOs have their own capacity and resources and they have their own cultural beliefs and values, and they have their own social relationships, their own economic beliefs, they all come with the same belief system. They have a different frame in mind and the tsunami survivors have a different capacity and social situations. This is important to note as all the NGOs whether it is national or international go with a fixed belief system, human capabilities, and capacities. And think that it should be matching. The NGOs failed to look deeply at the situation when they first arrived in the post-tsunami relief phase; they actually commenced their work with the preconceived notion that the fishermen communities they approached were the only ones affected. But, this was far from reality. It is the caste fishermen who prepared the beneficiary lists, for the relief distribution process and of course the Dalits did not appear on those lists. And the NGOs used these lists for their own beneficiary lists. The fact that the NGOs did not take into account this fact although there have been many reports in the media on the discrimination of different caste groups in the relief process shows that the recovery process of the NGOs is simply unethical.

Expanding the range of livelihood possibilities is generally a desirable objective of rehabilitation, but the NGOs took a blinkered, communitarian way, without taking into account the economic links with other communities, which had a negative impact on other caste groups. This was seen in the supply of 'iceboxes' and fish storage units by

NGOs to women and men of the caste fishermen community. It is the women of the caste fishermen community who control the fish auctions after the catch is brought in by their husbands and family members. And after the auction is over, some unwanted fish which are left over are taken over by the poor Dalit women who use this as a source for their livelihood by selling it on the street or on the beach. It is due to unequal rehabilitation process by the NGOs that this unwanted fish are no more available to the women in the Dalit community as now the excess fish is stored in the fish storage units and 'ice boxes' provided by the NGOs and has led to the exclusion of women in Dalit communities who were hitherto engaged in fish vending activities. The provision of rehabilitation for a dominant caste in a community or for some should not imply the economic exclusion of an impoverished and reliant community; but this is exactly what has happened.

In the post-tsunami period the livelihood recovery programmes were focused mainly in large scale infrastructure such as damaged harbours, road networks, large multi-day boats, trucks, and fishing gear for large scale fishing. But the assistance to the poorer groups in the fishing sector is minimal, and within that women's activities in particular are largely invisible, especially the women-headed families in fish worker communities. As the women do not have a place in the traditional panchayats, so they were left out during rehabilitation process. But it is important to note here that there were some interventions by the NGOs who came forward to help these groups.

There was also discrimination against non-Catholics, disabled people, Muslims in the aftermath of the tsunami.

In the tsunami a semi-nomadic tribal community named Irulas was affected but was excluded in the disaster response by the state. The Irulas as a group were overlooked in the relief and rehabilitation process because of the superimposition of the concept of 'property rights' on the pre-modern communities struck by the disaster. It is mainly because of the fact as a community; the Irulas have long been invisible given their nomadic habits, and scattered, sparsely populated settlements. As the settlements of the

Irulas were dispersed, so identification of the affected and distribution of relief became a daunting task.

As the government and the civil society organizations adopted mainly a property-centric relief and rehabilitation policy so a variety of evidence was required to get compensation – house on patta land, recognition of the village by a panchayats the Irulas live in dispersed, isolated clusters, unrecognized by the panchayats and even the government identification cards was not available with them. The Irulas are also, by nature, a reserved community, and are reluctant to even speak about the losses they have suffered in the tsunami to outsiders. Also, being a tribal community they did not have a strong public presence. It has also been noticed that even the civil society organizations are not eager to support Irula rehabilitation as there is hardly a handful working with them possibly because their settlements are scattered and sparsely populated. On the other hand it is easier to get numbers (in terms of families and people), identify beneficiaries, distribute relief and rehabilitation packages, and raise resources in the densely packed fish worker settlements.

In the tsunami it was felt that the order of priorities for support should be the worst affected area. The Andaman and Nicobar islands which suffered one of the worst of the devastation of tsunami took a long period of time to engage in rescue, relief and evacuation operations mainly due to their geographical location and even due to ‘security reasons’. Out of the 579 islands about 28 were inhabited. Since these islands are in the middle of the ocean, they suffered the most from the tsunami. Over 70,000 people are displaced in these ravaged islands. Moreover, since most of the tribal people are in deep forest they had no way of getting food and were forced to starve.

Due to the nature of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, there were not many NGOs who could undertake the relief and rehabilitation work. The lack of planning and delay in coordination between the government and NGOs has hampered the relief efforts. The government-NGO coordination committee was set up 30 days after the tragedy and met on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2005 for the first time. Taking relief from the mainland continues to be a

difficult process and moving to remote islands is virtually impossible. As the tribals of these islands enjoyed certain independence and even demanded to be left to themselves, naturally it becomes difficult in crisis situations to enter or to 'encroach' their areas. So in the beginning only the administration and some small local groups were working. But keeping in view the severity of the impact this was grossly inadequate. Now the government has agreed to give permission to some more NGOs and INGOs to contribute in the post tsunami rehabilitation.

By analyzing the role of the state and the NGOs in the tsunami relief and rehabilitation process one can say that both the government and the NGOs have adopted a property-centric relief and rehabilitation policies, with the result that livelihood rehabilitation packages predominantly reach only the people who possess assets such as boats, land, shops etc. Although there are several groups that contribute to the coastal economy by providing their labour and skills have all found them sidelined and disregarded. What is important to note is that in the post disaster situation it is the pre-existing social conditions which is given more significance and also played a crucial role in shaping perceptions about 'entitlements' and 'deprivation'.

#### **4.7 Response of Civil Society - Case Study (b) Super Cyclone**

Handling of the disasters in an organized manner by the international system like the UN system or by the Government effort is comparatively a new concept<sup>62</sup>. Since time immemorial disasters were handled by the Non-governmental agencies. Non-governmental efforts were common during yesteryears because most of the governments were autocratic and the bulk of the Third World and tropics were under the colonial rule. Even today when there is an organized effort like Governmental efforts or UN system, such efforts also operate through the NGOs. That is because, effort becomes easy, and there is availability of larger network and the people's participation is ensured. It is also the case in Orissa during the 1999 Super Cyclone.

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<sup>62</sup> . See, Ghosh, G.K. (2006), *Disaster Management*, (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation).



Although it is the government who first came to provide relief to the cyclone affected people but the NGOs also made a timely response to the 1999 Super Cyclone who later came to distribute relief on an average of 13 days after the cyclone. In fact the average duration of relief provided by the NGOs was comparatively higher than that the government (Samal, Meher and Panigrahi, 2003).

In Orissa the NGOs have played a small role in disaster response. The little attention paid to NGOs in the Orissa Relief Code could be seen as both cause and effect of the limited role hitherto played by NGOs in the disaster response process. But the 1999 Super Cyclone radically changed the scenario when NGOs responded to the disaster by engaging themselves in emergency responses as well as in rehabilitation.

In Orissa while the state followed a universalistic approach in supporting victims, it was the NGOs who adopted a community-orientated approach and catered to the needs of the vulnerable groups who would have otherwise find it hard to cope with the impact of the disaster. As it was the NGOs who focused on sector-specific issues such as livelihood, community organization, community asset creation, women group formation, etc thereby accelerating the social and economic recovery after the disaster.

In Orissa the major operation was started by the government, but aid also came pouring in from the NGOs, corporate houses, individuals, trade unions, etc and the average duration of relief distribution and range of relief items by these organizations particularly the NGOs were found to be more. For an average of 145 days, these organizations distributed relief in these affected villages.

In the aftermath of the Super Cyclone there was recognition of the sincere role of the NGOs in the relief and rehabilitation phase. As the state was simply not prepared for such a massive disaster, so after the cyclone the NGOs active in Orissa carried out the relief operations and supplemented government efforts in dealing with the unprecedented disaster. In the post-Super Cyclone period about 40 local and international NGOs had set up an emergency response network called Orissa Disaster Mitigation Mission (ODMM)

to coordinate relief and restoration work. Another NGO network was formed earlier called Orissa Development Action Forum which also played an active part in emergency response.

In the villages free community kitchens were organized by the NGOs and the community kitchens were organized on the basis of caste groups. Although caste discrimination was there in Orissa Super Cyclone and these activities like separate kitchens on the basis of caste increased it, but caste discrimination was more of an exception rather than a rule. The government provided temporary shelter building materials to all affected families. Some NGOs also distributed temporary shelter materials among people soon after the cyclone. What is noteworthy of the NGOs is that some NGOs ran Legal Aid Centres to sensitize the affected people about their rights to compensation offered by the Government.

The affected of the Super Cyclone could actually cope with the post-cyclone period with the support of the relief and rehabilitation carried out by the different organizations which include the NGOs. The NGOs also played a significant role in mobilizing volunteers for relief work. The ODMM has set up a Volunteers Hub at the state capital and ran a volunteers base camp at Ersama, which is the worst affected area of the Super Cyclone to facilitate volunteers for participation in relief activities. Although the smaller NGOs withdrew from the affected area after the relief phase, but the bigger and sincere NGOs continued their rehabilitation efforts in the cyclone affected areas beyond the immediate phase.

Disasters can be instrumental in breaking down the social barriers and changing the social structures. For example- it was observed in the 1999, Super Cyclone in Orissa in a number of communities that before the Super Cyclone, women would rarely interact on social issues within the community, let alone interact with outsiders. But, when many of the relief packages from the governments as well as the NGOs were targeted at, or through women, this gave the women a new sense of confidence and forced them to take

an active role in discussions and social issues. It also helped to boost the self-esteem and status within their families and society.

Although the government paid little attention to the particular needs of the children, the NGOs reported that for five days after the cyclone, no special attention was focused on the needs of the children. There was very little information on where the children were, where they were going or being taken. It was the NGOs who gave special attention to the children as efforts were made to ensure that the community based rehabilitation of orphan children at Mamta Gruhas (transit houses). Many NGOs set up community day care centres for orphan children where widows and single women worked as matrons. Even some NGOs made initiatives to send the children affected by the Super Cyclone back to their classroom by setting up temporary sheds and providing textbooks to students.

What is unique of the developmental NGOs in Orissa is that they lay emphasis on community based initiatives. In Orissa the NGOs formed village development committees to coordinate restoration and rehabilitation initiatives at the community level. In fact functional groups comprising women, farmers, water users, and youth were also formed to carry out specific tasks. These efforts helped to strengthen a rights-based approach to rehabilitation, and diverted people's attention away from relief aid, which helped in accelerating reconstruction activities.

The NGOs also played a very crucial role in restoring livelihoods of worst affected farming families by extending support to farmers groups in the form of seeds, implements, tillage, irrigation facilities, and training. Some NGOs including CARE took special measures to restore non-farm livelihoods, which focused on fishermen, handloom weavers, artisans, etc. several other NGOs facilitated income-generating activities by artisans, craftsmen, and the poor. Even promoting micro-credit activities among women groups and facilitating their participation in income generating activities formed a part of the rehabilitation efforts of some NGOs.

There was large-scale devastation of trees and plants in the Super Cyclone, so massive plantation activities were carried out by NGOs. The severe impact of the cyclone was attributed to the destruction of buffer forests between land and sea in coastal areas over last few years. The cyclone had felled an estimated 90 million trees, thereby wiping off the green cover of Orissa. The NGOs received support from the government and other resources providers in carrying out community, avenue, and backyard plantations in affected areas. One of the important contributions of NGOs in Orissa was in providing the poor families with dwelling units.

But still the major shelter reconstruction programme is being implemented by the state government, which would benefit 600,000 cyclone-affected families. The NGOs have supplemented their rehabilitation efforts with disaster preparedness initiatives.

Although the NGOs actively responded to the 1999 Super Cyclone but there was no coordination and transparency among the NGOs and, between NGOs and the government during relief operations and rehabilitation work. There were instances of predominance of disorganized touch-and-go relief by a lot of non-governmental organizations which was leading to the inevitable wastage and confusion. For example- an 85 year old man gets a pair of faded jeans as relief from a speeding truck and loaves of bread are thrown around and into ditches by overzealous young men and women on a hurry-up relief mission.

It has been observed that one missionary donor has constructed 312 houses with good quality for one village of Jagatsinghpur district, while there were only 218 houses prior to the cyclone. So there was social discontent in other adjacent villages. The problem lied in the fact that NGOs preferred to reach and operate in those villages where Tata Sumo and media people can reach. So the severely affected villages remained neglected.

In Mahakalapada block of Kendrapada district, the NGOs who came first to their village and distributed food were CASA, World Vision and OXFAM. They also received help from Red Cross Society and Ramakrishna Mission. But the problem is that the political leaders interfered in the activities of the NGOs, as a result of which the relief

items were not properly distributed among the affected people. It is even found that among the NGOs, CASA and Gram Vikas made false assurance that they would do such and such things in the village.

Although the Government and NGO collaboration was a new learning in the post-Super Cyclone period, but there were many problems experienced in ensuring Government and NGO collaboration during relief operations. Firstly, the government had no previous experience of working with so many NGOs in a disaster situation as NGOs never before took part in disaster response on such a large scale. Secondly, the absence of a clear framework for information sharing and coordination of NGO activities made it difficult for the government to identify who deserved facilitative support and who not. For example- the bigger NGOs stole media attention because of superior documentation skills, but the smaller NGOs received neither media attention nor funds. So some non-existent NGOs took advantage of this confusion and managed funds from donors keen to contribute. Thirdly major frustration among the NGOs was due to the absence of any institutional mechanism for regular consultation between the government and NGOs. So to address such concerns, the government had set up an NGO Coordination Cell and placed a Secretary in charge to guide NGOs, researchers, and volunteers coming from outside the state, and facilitate interface between NGOs and government departments. This process actually proved invaluable, and prepared ground for institutionalized government and NGO coordination for disaster preparedness and response through Orissa State Disaster Mitigation Authority (OSDMA). Disasters create a need for new social organizations (Kutak, 1938).

#### **4.8 The Need for a Right-Based Approach in Disaster**

Although disasters have frequented India from time immemorial, but it is actually in the recent past, that few of the devastating disasters have struck various parts of the country leaving behind a trail of unimaginable death, destruction and sufferings. The state and the civil society organizations have taken numerous initiatives towards relief and rehabilitation to address such issues. But what has been learnt from the experiences of

previous disasters is that they are mostly charity-based or compensatory in nature without any long-term benefit. In fact less attention has been devoted to human rights protection, in spite of the fact that a whole gamut of human rights standards comprising of treaties, guidelines and principles are embodied in various international documents.

What is a right? A 'right' is "a justifiable claim, on legal or moral grounds, to have or obtain something, or to act in a certain way" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989). Unlike claims made on moral grounds, rights are recognized by law are seen to be identifiable on objective basis<sup>63</sup>.

The question of rights is very important in disasters as disasters are not socially neutral. In fact there is discrimination by the state and the NGO's on the basis of caste, religion, class, gender, and age etc in the relief and rehabilitation phase. But the question is does the people who are discriminated in the disaster relief aware of the fact that getting humanitarian relief is a human right for all those affected individuals. Even the right to get assistance from the state and the other institutions be it NGO's or any civil society organizations without any discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, gender, class, etc. Rights appear to be an essential device for providing protection to the individual against oppression by the state or any other institutions.

This rights based approach to disaster adds a completely new dimension to the existing studies on disaster. It is very relevant because the one who is deprived has lost something at a point of disaster, the last thing that he had before, it was not his willful way of getting himself deprived or whatever, but he was in a circumstance of that kind where he once owned, he was possessional, occupational, ownership, that is what he losses and he has every right to claim it and it is right. He/she need not feel ashamed and no one needs to think that they are giving for free. It is what he had before, he has every right to have it again and the system should adjust to it. It is the duty of the government

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<sup>63</sup> . See the article, Handmer, John. (2004), "Does a Rights Based Approach Make a Difference? The Role of Public Law in Vulnerability Reduction", *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, Vol.22, No.3, pp.43-59.

and every committed non-governmental agency who involve in this process of relief and reconstruction.

#### **4.9 The Issue of Rights: Claims of Excluded People in the Post-Tsunami**

In the post-tsunami period although relief and rehabilitation measures was carried out in full swing but it did not benefit the affected communities to the fullest, in fact there was discrimination among different categories of population. Disasters do not differentiate between men and women, lower caste and higher caste, rich and poor, etc but the consequences of disasters create different levels of victimization. For example – there are number of instances of victimization of women in the aftermath of the tsunami.

According to a report provided by CATAW and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development<sup>64</sup> informs that there were cases of rape and sexual abuse, against women in rescue and in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami. This is a sheer case of violation of human rights of women. And there are numerous cases in the relief operations where women have been neglected.

The women experienced the violence as not only as physical, sexual and emotional but also structural violence i.e., the denial of women's rights in disaster relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. It was known from the women's responses that both the state and the NGO's tend to regard the women as passive beneficiaries rather than as equal citizens with equal rights to assistance and capacities to participate. But do the women know of their rights, the mechanisms and codes of conduct and standards which exist and which should uphold and protect women's rights as they are both ineffectual and ignored and if they know how they put forth their rights. Here one is concerned with knowing the ground for the rights-claims of people affected in the disaster that were

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<sup>64</sup> . See the South Asian Disaster Report 2005: Tackling the Tides and Tremors, pp.34.

discriminated in the post-disaster situation, and there is a *priori* no special moral merit attached to one sort of claim over another.

As the voices of those who are discriminated can help to influence the formulation of the policies and practices that affect their life and livelihood.

A common experience of the women survivors of the tsunami is the denial of their right to information. According to a 'People's Report' provided by India, the Maldives, Puntland (Somalia), Sri Lanka and Thailand<sup>65</sup>, said that women were not clearly informed about their entitlements regarding relief and rehabilitation packages, particularly the Dalit, tribal or minority women. The practice of men being registered as heads of households led to the exclusion of women's access to entitlements, specifically in case of the single, widowed, women with disabilities and older women. These women who sustained the structural discrimination in the aftermath of the tsunami claimed that the states must be transparent and effective in providing women easy access to information regarding their entitlements and rights. Another important claim is that women must be equally recognized as heads of households irrespective of their marital, caste, ethnic, class, age or religious status.

In the post-tsunami period compensation for livelihood focused mainly on men's livelihoods and the subsequent discrimination in resource allocation perpetuated the inequities between women and men. The revival of livelihoods in the agricultural sector where the women workers were in majority was completely neglected. The relocation of the fisher families by the state away from the coast also disrupted the women who had sea-based livelihoods. If there were no male in the family of a women headed household they were excluded from the list for the allocation of boats, trawlers and nets. The women's claimed that their economic rights must be recognized and they should be accepted as income earners. Affirmative action must be taken to promote the livelihoods

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<sup>65</sup> . See the report, "Violence against Women in the Post-Tsunami Context", People's Report: India, Maldives, Puntland (Somalia), Sri Lanka and Thailand.



of excluded and marginalized women such as single women, widows and women with disabilities.

In the tsunami the traditional feudal leadership and religious institutions exercised power and control over women and marginalized the women in the relief and rehabilitation process. Among them the socially excluded groups suffered due to the caste hierarchy, with the Dalits and the tribal women being the worst affected. Here the women claimed that they must be consulted and involved in policy formulation and programme design for relief operations, camp management, damage and needs assessments, allocation of houses and land, and the rebuilding of livelihoods.

The claim of rights for particular – generally historically disadvantaged groups like the women arises out of the factual claim that the members of these groups have special requirements, which the uniform and universal conditions of citizenship in the nation-state are incapable of answering. Not infrequently, these accounts proceed analogously, by extending the same logic that applies to claims for individual rights to communities or groups.

There were instances of caste-based discrimination while distributing aid as well as implementing rehabilitation programmes in the aftermath of the disaster. It was found that discrimination against Dalits and other marginalized people in the post-tsunami period was writ large. In the post-tsunami there were instances when the Dalits were brought in from various areas and were forced to do work of removing dead bodies. This shows how the treatment of this community was disgraceful. The tsunami further exposed the deep-rooted historical divisions in society and rendered the marginalized people more vulnerable. This is a case of violation of human rights and the Constitutional rights. But the question is are the Dalits aware of their rights and if they are aware how do they claim their rights.

During the process of relief distribution in the post-tsunami period, in one case where an NGO gave materials to an elderly Dalit woman who was directly hit by the tsunami,

she explained how the persistence of dominant caste prevented any Dalit from receiving any aid.

*I went to the place where an NGO was giving out kitchen utensils and other relief supplies. As I had been swept away by the tsunami when it reached the backwaters and had lost everything in my house. I felt it was my right to receive those things too. However, after I received it, the Meenavars took it from me. The NGO people saw this, and replaced what was taken from me, but as soon as they were out of sight, the Meenavars came and took it from me again<sup>66</sup>.*

This instance shows even if the Dalits considered that it is their rights to get relief still the caste fishermen community due to their relative numerical, physical and social strength prevented the Dalits from receiving materials, or at least ensured that the Dalits got the last choice. This even shows that the people who are in charge of relief and rehabilitation did not pay any importance that the relief which is a right of every affected people did not reach the Dalits who were also equally affected in the tsunami.

According to report provided by the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, describing the discrimination against the Dalits said:

*After the tsunami, Dalits were kept in separate relief camps and provisions were not shared with them. In Tranquebar, Nagapattinam and other places, Dalits were even beaten for trying to share the provision. Aid was diverted from Dalit areas - even the aid meant for children. Authorities were also afraid of the fishermen and did not make an effort to ensure aid reached Dalits. The government officials who refused to help Dalits used the excuse: "we don't have a government order to help Dalits". The post-tsunami discrimination was absolute<sup>67</sup>.*

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<sup>66</sup> . see the report, Making Things Worse: How 'Caste Blindness' in Indian Post-Tsunami Disaster Recovery has Exacerbated Vulnerability and Exclusion, Report by Timothy Gill, Commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands, pp.31.

<sup>67</sup> . see the report, Making Things Worse: How 'Caste Blindness' in Indian Post-Tsunami Disaster Recovery has Exacerbated Vulnerability and Exclusion, Report by Timothy Gill, Commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands, pp.32-33.

This shows that although the Indian parliament has passed the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 to specifically ban such acts of discrimination against the Dalits. The very existence of this Act of civil rights for Dalits had meant very little, as they are still subject to the most disgusting, dehumanizing crimes whenever they try to implement these rights. According to a report published by the National Human Rights Commission of India<sup>68</sup> in 2004 concluding that the implementation of the Act is abysmal. From this one can conclude that the systemic non-implementation of laws designed to protect and promote Dalit rights has meant that the vast majority of Dalits are subject to extreme forms of violence, social exclusion, labour exploitation, impoverishment, untouchability and repression even in a crisis situation like the tsunami.

There is discrimination against both the Dalits and the tribals with regard to their fishing rights, as the Dalits and Adivasis are not allowed to fish in the sea. There is always conflict in the Pulicat area in preventing the Dalits into the sea. The caste fishermen community claims a customary right to control sea fishing and the Dalits and the Adivasis are forced to go backwaters. Most of the coastal Dalits are actually afraid of the caste fishermen to make a claim of their rights as the caste fishermen have numerical, financial, class and caste superiority over the Dalits and the tribals who are by nature reserved and are reluctant to even speak about their losses they have suffered by the tsunami to the outsiders, so the question of claiming their rights is far away. Even the government has made no specific intervention to empower the inland fish folk.

Although the constitution guarantees equality of opportunity and civil rights, still millions of children face widespread deprivation and discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, ethnicity and religion and this was visible even in the tsunami. The providers of relief and rehabilitation took a caste-based rather than a needs-based approach even while regarding the child victims of the tsunami. In Dyyalikupam elementary school a Dalit school girl from Raja Nagar explained her experience:

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<sup>68</sup> . See the report, Making Things Worse: How 'Caste Blindness' in Indian Post-Tsunami Disaster Recovery has Exacerbated Vulnerability and Exclusion, Report by Timothy Gill, Commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands, pp.19.

*At my school, they were handing out shoes, books and other things for the tsunami victims. As our village was hard hit, and my parents had lost their work, I too accepted the things. But the Meenavar children got their parents to make the teachers take them back off us. I had to give back everything. The teachers made me kneel in front of the school to humiliate me, as a punishment<sup>69</sup>.*

Here I would like to quote Chandhoke who, following Gewirth (1982), on how best can the rights of groups be grounded, said that the ground to these rights are in the human capacity for agency. Extending the argument of agency for individuals to groups, she argues that “access to the means of subsistence is a right, not because it is the end of human purpose, but because it is a necessary prerequisite for acting for any purpose at all” (Chandhoke, 1994:2699). This is very much applicable to the discrimination against Dalits in the post-tsunami period as not only as individuals but the discrimination was very much extended to the entire Dalit community. Thus if the discriminated Dalits victims of the tsunami, notion of agency is linked to their right to relief, then this access to relief must be secured.

The post-tsunami relief and rehabilitation programme raised several issues in Campbell Bay as different ethnic groups like the colony of settlers, migrants and the native islanders who belong to it reside. In the aftermath of the tsunami the assertiveness of settlers on feeling deserted came to fore. Even some of the settlers took to the street voicing their demands through processions and even gheraoing an already harried and overworked Assistant Commissioner. Resettlement in their states of origin (Anon, 2006a) was a demand that seemed to calm the sense of loss by locating themselves far away from the potential source of uncertainty perceived of Great Nicobar. On the other hand the Nicobarese demanded that the rehabilitation programmes should make efforts for getting them back to their abodes and recreating plantations and housing that were lost.

After the tsunami there is negation of the customary rights of the coastal communities by the government as they have been eliminated from their ancestral homestead on the

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<sup>69</sup> . See the report, Making Things Worse: How Caste Blindness in Post-Tsunami Disaster Recovery has Exacerbated Vulnerability and Exclusion, Report by Timothy Gill, Commissioned by Dalit Network Netherlands, pp.38.

pretext of safety, they are removed from the coastal areas. But this has jeopardized the livelihood of those who rely on the sea for fishing. The state has given the coastal areas to business houses and also for tourism purposes. In the Constitution, we have caste wise, scheduled caste and scheduled tribes who have benefits that are proactively or affirmatively ensured by the Constitution. But the coastal communities do not get the status of tribal Adivasi (depend mostly on nature only). The people from the coastal communities claim that they do not depend upon the state or any other communities; they depend upon only the nature with which they sustain their life without any dependency. But this kind of independence has been at stay because of the efforts by the state after the tsunami. It is significant to invoke the notion of right to equal respect for all persons, including respect for diverse cultures and ways of life (Dworkin, 1977; Kymlicka, 1989).

#### **4.10 The Issue of Rights: Claims of Excluded People in the Post-Super Cyclone**

In India it is difficult to address social equity issues, in normal times and even in a crisis situation like the 1999, Super Cyclone in Orissa, it is the privileged and the better equipped who are able to access the benefits. The survival of the fittest- Darwinian Theory continues despite the efforts. In case of the Super Cyclone there was inequality and discrimination among different categories of population during the relief and rehabilitation measures. So here even the sensitive issue of rights of the discriminated people in the disaster comes into question.

During the 1999, Super Cyclone the government relief work was started as per Orissa Relief Code. The ORC concerns itself with post-disaster relief modalities. If one makes an analysis of the Orissa Relief Code (ORC) one can find that there are in essence two obstacles to the Dalit and Adivasi communities for being an integral part of the relief and rehabilitation process.

- 1). they do not own property and hence are unable to make a legal claim**

**2). the political economy context of caste based discrimination ensures that access remains limited.**

This created the inability of these affected communities to claim for the assistance and has led to their exclusion from the relief and rehabilitation process.

In Orissa due the absence of any strong women's movement there was no voice strong enough to plead for the women. There was hardly any programmes of rehabilitation geared towards to the needs of the women. In fact there was no definite proposal aimed at assisting the cyclone affected women. The specific needs of the women as a vulnerable group were not considered particularly by the government and even the NGOs. So some of the female members of women- headed households claimed that their special problems relating to health and clothing should be taken into account. As in the relief distribution team there was hardly any female member so women demanded there should be more female members during relief operations to take care of gender specific problems.

Disasters not only bring death and destruction but also cases of human rights violation. The super cyclone had differential impact on different economic classes and there was widespread discrimination among different categories of population in the relief operations. Once the people have been affected by a disaster, they often encounter further challenges to the full realization of rights. The poor people had to jostle to get some work under relief operations. So the poor rural households demanded that relief is their moral right In fact the affected people of the Orissa Super Cyclone exerted direct public pressure for relief and even for inclusion of their name in the BPL (below poverty line) list as it was the basis for allotting cash relief under the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY).

The children who were affected in the Orissa Super Cyclone did not have any information regarding their rights in a disaster. So a strategic planning in rehabilitation and development, organized by the Orissa state government and the UN on 11 December

1999 recommended the creation of transit homes for children, facilities for learning, improved food supplies and the identification of extended families for children.

The issue of rights is very critical in a disaster situation as it has been observed that only the interests of the dominant groups in society are served even in a crisis situation. Inadequate response and lack of consideration for the human rights of the victims will create a human-induced tragedy that exacerbates the plight of those already suffering the effects of the disaster brought on by natural causes. Therefore individual states, civil society organizations, international agencies including the UN and its programmes, private sector, must redouble their efforts towards realization of rights worldwide, including rights to disaster-preparedness and disaster-response.

## *CHAPTER - V*

# **Conclusion**



## Conclusion

Disasters are measured by people against their intentions that order should develop and extend into the future. India is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world having a traditional history of natural disasters. It has been hit by at least two major disasters every year on an average. One fourth of the disaster-related deaths occur in India. The country also has the second-highest figure for disaster-affected people in the world, a reflection of the high levels of vulnerability in the region.

Natural events may be inevitable or even uncontrollable, but their social and economic impacts are neither inevitable nor 'natural'. A disaster might be 'triggered' by a natural event, but it is a product of history, and of social, political and economic systems, because of the way they structure the lives of different people (Hewitt, 1997; Wisner et al., 2004). This is what I could also find out from the study of the two major disasters i.e. the 2004 tsunami and the 1999 Super Cyclone, as although it was triggered by a natural event but the extent to which a population is affected by a calamity does not purely lie in the physical components of vulnerability, but is contextual also to the prevailing social and economic conditions (as disasters unfold in varying socio-economic and cultural contexts) and it's consequential effect on human beings within a given society, which resulted in the differential impact of the disasters on different categories of population. It is very a crucial issue because it draws our attention to the factors that render certain sections of population susceptible and helps to locate disasters in specific, and broader, socio-political contexts.

From my study I could find out that in case of the tsunami there was differential impact on the basis of class, caste, gender, age, ethnicity etc., apart from this there was another category of population i.e. the Aravani (who do not consider themselves to be either men or women) were equally affected by the tsunami but still the disaster response

did not reach them. This shows how the differential impact of the tsunami disaster moves beyond even the category of gender.

The tsunami raised many questions for the ethnic population residing in Campbell Bay, especially for the settlers and migrants in the post tsunami as it created a feeling of deprivation among them and their livelihood issue was at stake as their sense of loss was compounded by the lack of security in a place they couldn't call their own. In the tsunami the assumed status of men as heads of the households further marginalized the women and clearly discriminated against single women, widows, women with disabilities, older women and women who were the co-heads of households. The tsunami had a major impact on the social relationships within the family which had an impact on the women as it resulted in the increase of violence against women. One of the major outcomes of the tsunami was that child-headed households had become a reality.

Although people were affected differently according to class, caste, gender, age, ethnicity etc but caste played an important factor in the differential impact of the tsunami disaster as both the dominant stake holders i.e. the state and the NGOs moved with certain wrong assumptions. Although it was the fishing communities who were worst affected by the tsunami but there were other communities who were equally affected in the tsunami like the agricultural communities, petty shop owners, barbers, tailors and cobblers and they were also labourers who worked in the industries of salt pans who formed the commercial backbone of the village industries.

Another important thing to note was the flawed conceptualization of the term 'coastal community' and the 'fishermen' how it is different in India. But is looked as a homogenous group (fish workers), rather than a vibrant system of inherently different groups, held together by geo-economical links. So the Dalits, Adivasis, and other backward communities who had taken fishing as an occupation were not counted as being affected by the disaster as in India 'fishermen' means whose caste makes them traditional fishermen.

The Super Cyclone in Orissa even affected different categories of population differently. The disaster had a major impact on the rural population than the urban population. It had an impact on different economic classes including a diverse range of occupations and had a major impact on the livelihoods of the landless labourers, Dalits, non-Dalit poor and women workers, fishermen, farmers particularly the small and marginal farmers. The Super Cyclone had completely stopped the traditional livelihoods as there would not be any demand for the works of the traditional artisans like the potter, weaver, and mat maker, the small scale household industries, craftsmen, petty traders as the Super Cyclone washed away their raw materials and implements. The disaster had led to a change of occupation of the affected population.

In both the tsunami and the Super Cyclone there was higher death toll among the women and it had affected more the rural women than men because of their greater responsibility for household management. One of the important finding of the study is that women are not always a homogeneous group. As there are certain gender specific problems common to women as a social category but within the women group there are also substantial variations, according to the socio-economic position, marital status, age, physical ability, sources of income etc., so the Super Cyclone had a differential impact on these different categories of women. One of the crucial changes the disaster i.e. the Super Cyclone brought about is its impact on the family structure as there was increase in migration of the affected people both inside and outside the state. As the male members of the family migrated so this created an extra pressure on the women-folk as they had to take the entire responsibility of managing the family.

From both the case studies it is clear that it is the vulnerable groups like the poor, lower castes, women, tribals, children, disabled persons and old age etc people who suffered more in the disaster and one of main reasons for it is the pre-disaster vulnerabilities already embedded in a given social context. According to Cannon (1994): “there are no really generalized opportunities and risks in nature, but instead there are sets of unequal access to opportunities and unequal exposure to risks which are a consequence of the socio-economic (and increasingly, political) system...It is more

important to discern how human systems themselves place people in relation to each other and to the environment than it is to interpret natural systems”, (cited in Morrow, 1999:2). From this it can be inferred that vulnerability is linked to complex sets of interacting conditions, some related to geography and location (for example, where do the poor reside in flood-prone villages) others with the nature of dwelling (kuccha or pucca houses) and access to physical infrastructure (potable water supply systems), and some with everyday patterns of social interaction and organization (social networks, community institutions) etc. So, the contextualization of disasters within everyday vulnerabilities recognizes the role of interlocking systems of vulnerability in both physical and social that is, the construction of overlapping ‘geographies of vulnerability’ (Fordham, 1999:19).

It is important to note that those most adversely affected viz. the vulnerable groups, should be kept as the focus of any relief and rehabilitation efforts. In the 2004, tsunami and the 1999, Super Cyclone although there was a massive outpouring of relief but the relief and rehabilitation process was socially structured. In case of the tsunami the relief distribution was socially structured on the basis of caste, class, age, gender, religion, ethnicity, livelihood pattern etc. In the relief distribution both the state and the civil society organizations focused on the fishing communities as they were worst affected by the tsunami and the specific requirements of the vulnerable groups like women, children old age people, disabled were ignored. The relief operations in the tsunami was carried from a ‘property-owner centric’ view point which led to the exclusion of many vulnerable groups like women, Dalits, old age people, tribals etc.

Even those people who were engaged in the unorganized sector suffered as they could not get compensation for the losses they incurred in the tsunami as they did not have any proof. What was interesting to find in the relief distribution process was that many people didn’t get relief because their names or their detail records were not registered. This shows there was a skewed understanding of the term ‘affected’ that is based on the premise that only settlement that were damaged by water, and that only people who had lost lives and property were ‘affected’. Everybody has been made vulnerable, and even

those not directly affected by property loss or family loss have suffered a huge drop in his or her life chances and life styles. This visibility-influenced definition has in turn directed the manner in which compensation, relief and rehabilitation processes were and continue to be designed and implemented as there is a stress on provision of evidence that one has lost assets.

Even in a crisis situation like the tsunami the relief distribution process focused only on selective vulnerable groups. This led to a situation where the people engaged in petty traders, service provision, allied services such as fish curing, vending etc., and working in salt pans were completely ignored. Although they did receive relief packages but the crucial issue of their rehabilitation was totally neglected by both the state and the NGOs and they believed that these dependent livelihoods would pick up as the fishing economy revived so all the relief and rehabilitation work was focused on restoring the fishing economy.

The unequal distribution of relief money in the aftermath of the tsunami had also affected the relationship within the family. The relief money was provided on a pro-rata basis, i.e. the number of family members died, the level of injury, etc. But with the outpouring of relief it had increased the difference among household level. This had an impact on the strength of the joint family system and consequently on the traditional social safety net that absorbed the tsunami widows and orphans without much external support. The post-disaster tsunami *social discrimination* in the relief operations has actually created a *new class* in the society.

In case of the Super Cyclone the relief and rehabilitation process was also socially structured. In the Orissa Super Cyclone there were actually no clear cut relief and rehabilitation policies so this had led to chaos, confusion, unreasonable expectations, fear, and wide disparities in the relief coverage of different communities. In the Super Cyclone the relief distribution process was structured on the basis of caste, population size, size of the village, social position, gender, age as it determined the entitlements and

actual access to relief. This affected the relationship between those with resources and those without resources as there was an atmosphere of constant conflict in the villages.

The relief distribution process in the Orissa Super Cyclone did not follow the principle of 'women and children first' so the special requirements of women and children were not taken into consideration. In the Orissa Super Cyclone there was uneven distribution of relief materials as there was focus on the worst affected and the least affected were neglected and there were instances when the relief materials did not reach the remote villages only reaching those places which were on the road side. There were even instances of looting and corruption in the distribution of relief materials by the agencies involved in relief and rehabilitation themselves. For example- the polythene sheets distribution scam in the Super Cyclone.

Another important issue in the relief and rehabilitation phase in the Super Cyclone was that cyclone politics had vitiated the vital relief and rehabilitation process and played an important role in creating vote bank which was not the case of the 2004, tsunami. In case of the tsunami although political representatives did accompany the relief teams, but there seem to have been clear guidelines issued from the top i.e. the state government that led to minimal political interference in the relief process. But in case of the Super Cyclone it led to a situation where the relief did not reach the needy and the vulnerable groups although relief was pouring from different parts of the world. In case of the tsunami caste played a major factor in structuring the relief distribution process and in the Super Cyclone although caste discrimination was there but not the way it was embedded in the tsunami, in fact in Orissa the politics played an important role in affecting the relief distribution process.

So the inequalities in risk (and opportunity) are largely a function of the principal systems of power operating in all societies, such as caste, class, gender, ethnicity, age etc., and accordingly vulnerability is produced by a combination of the major inequality factors- caste, class, gender, age, ethnicity etc- in both the case studies. In other words,

the less power and control over resources an individual or group has, the greater the exposure to the dangers inherent in a natural hazard.

In case of the tsunami the state and the NGOs went with a fixed belief system, human capabilities and capacities which were different from the ground reality. In case of the tsunami despite an initial paralysis by the state, due to the nature and sheer scale of the disaster, compounded by the breakdown of communication channels, the state and district level administrations swung in to action by the noon of 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004, with the first government orders (GOs). The *responsibility* to cope with the disaster either it is natural or human-induced is essentially that of the *State Government*.

The government did not address the specific needs of different categories of population. The relief given by the government was mostly in a *gratis mode* and it was structured on the basis of caste, (within the same caste also there was discrimination) class, gender, ethnicity, age etc and adopted a 'property-owner centric' approach in the relief and rehabilitation. The government moved with the assumption that is the fishermen community who were the 'hardest hit' so focused on it and completely neglected the livelihood issues of agriculturists, petty shop owners, women, Dalit, people working in the informal sector etc were also ignored as they did not own property. There were even cases of exclusion by the government and the partner agencies due to the improper survey of the affected area and the lack of understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the disaster affected population, for example – the exclusion of a vulnerable community i.e. Oruganti reddy's'. Due to the gross ignorance of the government and incomplete government records on the islanders of Nicobar and their inability to understand the tribal communities with sensitivity, has delayed the process of recovery of these tribal communities and threatened to bring on a dominant system of governance in place of their former self reliance.

But the tsunami brought about a major change in the life of the Nicobarese as these people for the first time in their experience and history moved outside their hamlets and was exposed to the local administration in the rehabilitation phase. The state even

negated the customary rights of the coastal communities and is making efforts to push the coastal communities from the shore as the coastal areas are given to business houses and also for tourism purposes.

The civil society organizations rose to occasion and gave tremendous emotional and financial support. The NGOs unlike the state could address the specific needs of the different sections of population with regard to gender, age etc and brought to notice of the government that the coastal communities not only comprise fish workers, but also a range of other diverse occupations, who were equally affected in various ways by the tsunami and even highlighted certain negative implications of the state policies. The NGOs were helpful in highlighting the instances of exclusions of certain sections of population like the Dalits, aged, non-fish workers.

But still there are instances of discrimination by the NGOs on the basis of caste, (as in the post-tsunami the NGOs did not look at victims on a case-by-case basis but on a caste-by-caste basis) gender, ethnicity, age etc. The state considered the caste fishermen as primary victims of the tsunami the NGOs even followed it blindly. There are even instances where due to the geographical location of the place and security reasons i.e. the Andaman and Nicobar Islands it took a long period of time for the NGOs to engage in relief and rehabilitation operations and also the lack of planning and coordination between the government and NGOs delayed the relief efforts. But now the government has given permission to some NGOs and INGOs to contribute in the post tsunami rehabilitation of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

In the 1999 Super Cyclone in Orissa if the death of thousands was tragic, then the lethargy and chaos of the government, both state and at the centre, whose agencies seem incapable of coordinating their efforts was unforgivable. Instead of recognizing the urgency of the situation and providing swift relief, they seemed resigned to the inevitable and then run helter-skelter when the predictable happens. It is actually the crisis in the state leadership which acted as an impediment in the relief distribution process.



But still it is the state government who first reached the cyclone affected population to provide them relief in the form of airdropping of food materials and then distributing relief in the block and panchayat offices. The state could not just handle the enormous relief coming in different parts of the world and so there was no coordination among the NGOs so sometimes the relief went to areas which were not in the priority list. The state distributed the relief in an uneven manner by giving importance to worst affected and neglected the not much affected area. The state even gave relief to those areas which were easily accessible which led to the exclusion of those areas which were far flung.

The state government did not address the specific requirements of different vulnerable groups on the basis of caste, class, gender, age. The government and the NGOs did not make any effort for the long-term asset creation or employment generation nor did make any effort for individual assets building of the affected population. For the government of Orissa the relief distribution process had actually turned into a business as there were instances when the government officials demanded bribes for issuing death certificates to the next of kin of deceased for payment of ex-gratia payment. But still it is the state government who has the major share in financing the rehabilitation support programmes of the cyclone affected people.

Although it was the state agencies who first reached the cyclone affected victims to provide relief but the NGOs also made a timely response to the Super Cyclone who later came to distribute relief on an average of 13 days after the cyclone and the duration of relief provided by the NGOs was higher than that the government. The role of the NGOs is particularly important in the Orissa Super Cyclone, as unlike the state the NGOs adopted a community oriented approach by catering to the needs of the vulnerable groups and focused on sector- specific issues.

What is important of the role of the NGOs is that it sensitized the affected people of their right to compensation offered by the government. What is unique of the developmental NGOs in Orissa is that they laid emphasis on community based initiatives and made efforts to restore livelihoods of worst affected families including the farmers,

women, fishermen, artisans, handloom weavers, craftsmen and the poor etc. But still there are also instances where there was no coordination and transparency among the NGOs and between the NGOs and the government during the relief and rehabilitation work. There were instances of predominance of disorganized touch-and-go relief by a lot of non-governmental organizations which was leading to inevitable wastage and confusion. It is very important to know the interventions made by the state and the civil society organisations in the post-disaster situation. Because disasters can provide an opportunity for transforming unequal power relations and structures if those who are engaged in relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts are aware of the underlying socio-economic and cultural factors that determine access to resources, opportunities and voice (decision-making).

From the relief and rehabilitation phase we can say that different categories of population (on the basis of caste, class, age, gender, ethnicity etc) were discriminated by the state, civil society organizations, dominant caste groups etc in both the case studies. So the issue of rights of these excluded people becomes very crucial.

In case of the tsunami the excluded women had made certain claims to the state and there were Dalits who claimed that it is their right to get relief but were prevented by the dominant caste from getting any relief. There was discrimination against tribals and Dalits with regard to their fishing rights as they were not allowed to fish. But the coastal Dalits were afraid of the caste fishermen to make a claim of their rights as the caste fishermen have numerical, financial, class and caste superiority over the Dalits and the tribal's question of claiming rights was far away as they were even reluctant to speak about their losses they have incurred in the tsunami.

The post tsunami relief and rehabilitation operations in Campbell Bay created a feeling of being deprived of a sense of control among the settlers in a colony governed by the local administration to autonomous Nicobarese. So the settlers demanded resettlement in the states of their origin. And the Nicobarese demanded that the rehabilitation programmes should make efforts for getting them back to their abodes and recreating

plantations and housing that were lost. There was negation of customary rights of the coastal communities by the government in the aftermath of the tsunami. The government did not take into account the interconnectedness between their life and livelihood. So the people from the coastal communities claimed that they do not depend upon the state or on any communities; they depend upon only the nature with which they sustain their life without any dependency so this should not be debarred from them.

In case of the Orissa Super Cyclone the Dalits and Adivasis were unable to claim as there was no provision for them to be a part of the relief and rehabilitation process. And due to the absence of any strong women's movement in Orissa the women although were discriminated but were unable to lay their claims. Although the poor considered it their right to claim but encountered problems in laying claims and the children affected in the super cyclone had no idea of the whole gamut of rights for them in the disaster.

Disasters help to expose and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. As it is the poor people, religious and caste minorities, women and children, the disabled, and old etc who are more susceptible to the impacts of disasters by virtue of occupying vulnerable physical, socio-economic and cultural environments. And these pre-existing vulnerabilities are compounded by insensitive and discriminative relief and rehabilitation efforts, which further leads to reinforcing oppressive systems and structures and results in deeper levels of vulnerability. This is true in both of my case studies.

So from this study we can infer that disasters do not discriminate, but the existing socio-cultural, economic, institutional and political structures and systems make the impact of the disasters more severe on vulnerable groups and individuals. Even the relief and rehabilitation systems and institutional structures discriminate against the more vulnerable and on the already disaster affected people by both design and by ignorance. This study also reveals that the social structure is an important and enduring force even in the midst of physical and social disruption.

If we could learn to transform the spontaneous compassion (shown in the form massive relief and rehabilitation in both the case studies i.e. the tsunami and the Super Cyclone) into long term solidarity and learn to respect forces of nature and peoples' livelihood needs, reconstruction could lead to a more livable future. From the study it is found out that there were few providers who could make a special effort to listen to, work with and reach out to the vulnerable groups, so this shows that the opposite is indeed possible. Since it is possible to take an approach that enables the marginalized and vulnerable groups to be reached on par with others, it is therefore the moral obligation of all providers of disaster relief in disaster affected areas to design and adopt a standing policy to ensure this happens whenever a disaster occurs.

It is not just enough in the post-disaster situation to focus on *regaining* the lost socio-economic opportunities but also to take the reconstruction phase as an opportunity to better the socio-economic opportunities of the vulnerable and marginalized, and to close the existing gaps between various groups in the affected areas.

## 5.1 Suggestions

(i). Special groups such as lower caste people, women, children, old age people, disabled persons, different ethnic groups etc are more vulnerable during a disaster and hence they require special attention, so the capacities of these groups should be strengthened to respond to disasters.

(ii). Assess the vulnerability of the affected community on the basis of caste, class, age, religion, gender, ethnicity etc and take measures to avoid exclusion and discriminatory practices.

(iii). In a disaster it is important to have a vibrant interface and partnership between the state and civil society organisations to ensure that people's concerns are addressed by both policy and practice, as well as to minimize corruption.

(iv). Any relief and rehabilitation policy framed by the State will have to be based on respecting the Constitutional framework. This means that the policy will have to be solicitude to the weaker sections of Indian society including the SC and ST.

(v). In the context of a disaster, when a situation of ‘undeserved want’ arises it is the State’s obligation to provide public assistance and secure the basic rights guaranteed under the Constitution. However what is often not taken on board as a matter of state administrative practice is that the very provision of relief and the beginning of rehabilitation programmes which are aimed at securing the right to livelihood, the right to work, the right to life, the right to health, the right to education, must take into account the Constitutional injunction embodied in Article 14<sup>70</sup>, Article 15<sup>71</sup> and provide it to the affected communities.

## 5.2 A Discussion of Potentials in Disaster Research

While doing the study I could find out that there are certain aspects in the area of disaster studies which have not been much explored. In fact there are some unresolved or unanswered questions in the existing literature, some of which I am pointing out, which should be researched in the future.

There has been relative scarcity of studies on disaster that analyzes how the caste, class, gender, religion, age, ethnicity have multifarious implications on disaster impact and disaster response. I am explaining this by taking an example i.e. gender. There has been comparatively little research on the gender aspects of disaster and how understanding the way gender is socially constructed can help to play an important role in disaster management. Gender relations as well as disasters are socially constructed under different geographic, cultural, political-economic and social conditions and have complex social consequences for women and men. An important issue which can be explored is the link between disaster as a long term context and the declining sex ratio. The

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<sup>70</sup> . The article 14 deals with the right to equality.

<sup>71</sup> . The article 15 (1) and article 15 (4) deals with the right to non discrimination on grounds of caste as well as the right to affirmative action.

environmental and livelihood stress coupled with already strong social norms about male child preference have an adverse impact on the girl child.

Another area which is under researched is how the relief and rehabilitation process in the post-disaster situation is socially structured and how it is even structured institutionally by the State and NGOs should also be looked into. A disaster stresses the need for rethinking the role of the state vis-à-vis civil society and community in the context of relief and rehabilitation operations in the times of disasters which should be analyzed.

It has been increasingly realized the need to study the role of indigenous knowledge in disaster management as it would help to understand the local situation (and in particular the needs of the vulnerable groups) and would help in reaching the most vulnerable communities, which would help to carry the relief and rehabilitation in an effective way. One needs also to look into the social transformations that come about in the social structure in the post-disaster situation.

Natural disasters occur in all countries of the world. But the frequency and intensity of all disasters in the third world countries is very high. The gravity of the problem associated with each type of disaster and with each region significantly differs. Actually the coping capacity to natural calamities of the advanced regions is better than that of the backward regions. So there is a need to study the coping capacities and strategies as there has been scarce studies on the coping capacities of the affected region and strategies adopted by the affected people before, during and after the disaster as it would help to take necessary measures in future disaster management plans.

One needs also to study the psychological impact of the disaster on the affected population and their efforts to reconstruct their past social space. In a disaster less attention has been paid to the question of human rights protection, the issue of right to relief and rehabilitation rather than on actual relief efforts so this is an area which should also be looked into.

I have identified certain existing gaps in the knowledge, in the field of disaster studies which should be studied, understood, analyzed and researched in the future.

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