Social Support in Disaster Coping and Mitigation in the Case of Recurrent Disaster: A Qualitative Investigation

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Abstract

Disaster studies have generally held a definition of disaster (floods) which is narrow to the extent that it fails to contain in its ambit the specific nature of recurrent floods. Recurrent floods are more devastating and destructive than the sudden disasters according to the data. Social support system is been seen as the major relief mechanism in the post-disaster situation. This paper attempts to show that in the situation of recurrent floods, this idea of social support faces severe challenges because of traditional entanglements. The study was carried out in the one of the important flood-prone district of Uttar Pradesh, Ballia. The study involved the retrospective qualitative analysis of information collected through a qualitative interview schedule. It was found out that the flood-stricken community does not run into a frenzy of coping up. Instead the social divisions continue to govern the relief mechanisms as well due to the lack of uncertainty. This paper provides empirical evidences to establish the need for a 'different sensitive' approach.

Keywords: *Disaster, Flood, Natural Disaster, Social support*

Introduction

Floods are the most frequent natural calamities faced by India (Jain et al., 2007; Gupta et al., 2003) in different magnitudes, year after year (Table 1). The main causes of floods in India are inadequate capacity of river sections to high flows, silting of river beds, and drainage congestion. The frequency of floods in India is more than half of the total number of floods occurring in Asia in each decade (Parasuraman & Unnikrishnan, 2000). Every year millions are rendered homeless due to floods and lakhs of hectares of crops are damaged (Arya, 2007). Twenty-three out of 36 states/union territories in the country are subject to floods and 40.0 million hectares of land, roughly one-eighth of the country's geographical area, is prone to floods (Arya, 2007; Gupta et al., 2003). According to the *Rashtriya Barh Ayog* (National Commission on Flood), the area prone to floods in India is 40.0 million hectares (Ministry of Water

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Resources, 1999). The average area annually affected by floods is 7.52 million hectares out of which the agricultural area is 3.52 million hectares. Roughly 30.0 million people in the country are affected by floods and more than 1500 lives lost each year. Assam, U.P. and Bihar are among the most flood-prone states in the country (Jain et al., 2007). Floods are mainly of two types: Recurrent (seasonal) and Flash floods. Flood occurs when a river or stream breaks out from their natural or artificial bank due to heavy rainfall, melting of snow, dam failure etc. Usually, inundation is temporary and the adjacent land is inundated by overflow from a river, stream, lake, or ocean (Jain et al., 2007). Recurrent floods, unlike the flash floods, are predictable and foreseeable with the seasonal changes happening around the year. India faces floods primarily in the monsoon period which last from June to August. Flash floods are more sudden and episodic and the reasons for such disasters are the unpredicted climatic changes caused by human-induced interventions. Table1 shows that in any form of impendence (killed, affected and economic loss), flood has the major share of all disasters.

Table 1: Top of Natural Disasters in India (June 2005 - June 2013) and the resultant damage

As per number of people killed			As per total number of people affected			As per cost of economic damage in INR		
Disaster	**Date**	**Number**	**Disaster**	**Date**	**Number**	**Disaster**	**Date**	**INR (in millions)**
Flood	12/Jun/2013	6054	**Flood**	24/Jul/2005	20000055	**Flood**	28/July/2006	203.671
Earthquake (seismic activity)	8/Oct/2005	1309	**Flood**	3/Jul/2007	18700000	**Flood**	24/July/2005	200.066
Flood	24/Jul/2005	1200	**Flood**	12/Jul/2007	11100000	**Flood**	28/June/2005	138.184
Flood	3/Jul/2007	1103	**Flood**	11/Jun/2008	7900000	**Flood**	25/Sep/2009	129.172
Flood	11/Jun/2008	1063	**Flood**	22/Sep/2007	7200000	**Flood**	18/Sep/2010	100.934
Flood	July/2009	992	**Flood**	15/Aug/2011	5549080	**Flood**	12/Jun/2013	66.088
Extreme temperature	April/2013	557	**Storm**	25/May/2009	5100000	**Earthquake (seismic activity)**	8/Oct/2005	60.08
Flood	25/Sep/2009	350	**Flood**	28/Jul/2006	4000065	**Flood**	23/Sep/2011	55.874
Flood	28/Jul/2006	329	**Flood**	23/Sep/2011	3443989	**Flood**	5/Jul/2010	26.856
Extreme temperature	28/Jun/2005	311	**Flood**	18/Sep/2010	3267183	**Flood**	5/Sep/2011	25.955

Source: EM-DAT: the OFDA/ CRED International Disaster Database (www.embat.be) accessed on 29 June 2014.

The above data clearly indicates that in accordance with the number of people killed, flood stands outrageously higher than all other major disasters in last ten years. From 2005 to 2013, flood leads in the ten top most natural disasters in affecting people adversely, storm being the second one. Flood is the leading disaster in terms of the economic damage occurred too. The frequency and the impact of flood therefore, we see exceeds all other natural disasters. Thus, it is not very difficult to fathom that floods are the most destructive disaster ruining lives of the people at a massive scale. It is important to note that the recurrent floods are more devastating than flash floods because of the frequency of occurrence and consistent lack of mechanisms to mitigate, control and manage floods. With the beginning of the monsoon, the situation of inadequate water availability changes into a situation of huge water. It comes from the Himalaya- Ganga region in every monsoon, when the flow reaches the plains of Southern Nepal, Northern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal; rivers overflow their banks and inundate the land leading to the large scale disruption of social and economic life (Dixit, 2003). Every year these areas meet with the annihilating tendencies of the floods without gearing up for the destruction to be caused. The uncertainty of rate and intensity further makes the conditions even more deplorable for the people.

When we look at flood (recurrent or Flash) under the arena of term disaster, we find that disaster has been seen as "non-routine events in societies... that involve conjunctions of historical conditions and social definitions of physical harm and social disruption" (Kreps & Drabek, 1996). It is also defined as a basic disruption **of** the social context within which individuals and groups function (Fritz, (1961) cited in Kaniasty & Norris (2004). Another pragmatic definition follows as, "a disaster is the result of vast ecological breakdown in the relation between human and their environment, a serious and sudden event on such a scale that the stricken community needs extraordinary efforts to cope with it often with outside help or international aid" (Nozi, 1997). Susman, Okeefe and Wisner define disaster as "the interface between an extreme physical event and a vulnerable human population" (Perry, 2006). Even a cursory glance will make it clear that the focus of disaster has primarily been on studying it as a 'non-routine', 'disruption' and 'sudden' event. The issue of regular, frequent and recurrent events such as floods in monsoon period is ignored by these analyses. The dominant models of coping with the disaster that have come up in the recent period have been designed on an understanding of disaster which is dominated by sporadic, abrupt and flash events that are unpredictable and uncertain. The seasonal and recurrent floods in agricultural areas for example are merged and therefore undermined within the larger ambit of disaster as episodic events.

Risks Involved in Recurrent Floods

Disasters are not phenomena that occur as isolated, autonomous entities. They exist as the impacts on the consequence for individuals, families and groups of people within a specific social time, geography and particular culture (Buckle, 2005). While economic damages and loss of life are pronounced in urban and coastal areas due to the concentration of infrastructure and people, floods in rural areas are both closely linked to agricultural production and livelihoods of rural populations (Manuamom, 2009). Disasters are events that are life changing for a whole economy, people and area. It is equally true of floods but in case of recurrent floods, it takes a leap ahead. It is not just life changing an event but primarily life designing a concern, for their frequency and regular nature makes it a part and parcel of the lives of the people facing it. Recurrent floods in India are phenomena occurring mainly in agricultural belt. According to Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Agricultural Assessment Report, the monsoon floods caused damage of unprecedented scale to agricultural crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry and destroyed primary infrastructure such as tube wells, water channel, household storage, house, animal sheds, personal seed stock, fertilisers and agricultural machinery (World Food Programme, 2010). Uttar Pradesh (UP) for example is one of the flood-prone regions in India. Located in the Indo-Gangetic plain, Ganga, Yamuna, and other perennial rivers along with their tributaries drain the land year round accounting for high fertility of the soil in this region. Fertile soil accounts for high agricultural fecundity making it one of the leading states in food grain production and other crops. However, 85 percent of the average annual rainfall of 990 mm is received during June to September. This is the time when the river overflows from their beds and causes destruction at a large scale. Using the example of Uttar Pradesh, we can see the enormous loss caused by the frequent floods occurring mainly in this region.

Table 2: Losses due to flood in Uttar Pradesh (1973-2008)

Year	No of affected district	Affected Population (in lakh)	Villages affected	Affected total area (lakh ha)	Affected agricul-ture land	Affected house-hold	Life losses		Approxi-mate loss INR crore
							Human	Animal	
1973	40	141.50	30004	35.00	22.23	2.98	163	375	286.84
1974	39	73.90	14948	19.86	12.24	2.03	72	160	173.16
1975	35	92.84	18629	23.65	14.21	2.0	181	892	92.44
1976	36	131.95	32962	33.49	18.49	2.05	240	1434	92.44
1977	31	37.00	7536	12.87	6.42	0.51	157	887	77.04
1978	55	225.87	48889	72.50	38.82	11.92	739	7430	688.24
1979	16	21.05	3913	7.03	5.18	0.23	77	220	67.57
1980	46	303.47	44629	58.57	30.94	19.23	1309	5242	790.67

1981	33	146.27	20706	29.91	16.35	4.91	427	1356	286.38
1982	44	232.91	32459	55.38	33.09	10.18	562	2517	585.65
1983	56	155.34	24713	38.36	24.99	5.16	519	2101	754.03
1984	39	65.75	11500	16.68	0.31	0.83	209	432	26215
1985	55	195.59	27113	40.28	24.19	6.20	804	3806	1216.26
1986	45	59.19	8925	10.34	6.45	0.51	233	725	278.64
1987	9	38.24	5807	5.81	3.16	1.80	163	990	186.14
1988	46	182.04	24721	31.76	17.14	3.71	765	2102	134.68
1989	25	48.62	8281	10.03	6.52	0.78	165	516	-
1990	51	85.34	15524	22.03	10.64	1.32	471	2889	-
1991	29	24.19	3372	8.10	2.10	0.78	214	369	-
1992	20	29.24	4254	5.91	3.34	0.34	140	979	-
1993	34	75.05	11765	15.11	7.91	1.37	314	2088	-
1994	45	39.07	9627	9.86	5.98	0.66	317	4855	-
1995	51	36.91	8874	12.79	7.98	0.88	321	1287	-
1996	44	72.20	8827	11.24	6.78	0.09	313	1232	-
1997	29	10.21	2284	3.49	1.55	0.03	102	144	-
1998	55	121.19	156118	25.23	14.15	3.84	1355	3384	-
1999	11	1.83	2.99	5.39	4.069	0.0049	17	9	-
2000	40	63.86	5882	7.84	4.724	0.0839	453	977	-
2001	21	27.15	3819	4.63	2.89	0.09	201	251	-
2002	14	3.86	770	1.10	0.62	0.0061	33	36	-
2003	54	134.80	17011	23.60	15.03	0.35	964	3201	-
2004	2	14.36	865	2.439	-	-	88	217	-
2005	35	24.511	3652	3.597	3.853	0.7732	203	259	-
2006	12	4.53	678				353	588	-
2007	23	26.53	758	8.49	5.66	0.34	272	170	519.86
2008	32	41.75	6287	4.988	-	6.30	889	1898	-

Source: (Bhad Prativedan Uttar Pradesh , 2008)

Table 2 makes clear the massive frequency of floods in UP for more than two decades with an increasing loss of lives and livelihood with each consecutive year. It must be noted that these floods have been very regular and not at all sudden or shocking in nature yet continue unobstructed. Heavy monsoon takes its toll on the carrying capacity of most of the rivers resulting in floods in several districts specifically in the eastern and central districts. Secondly, outpouring of water from the rivers in Nepal towards India also contributes to flooding in rivers of the eastern UP. The recurrent

and annual floods in the major tributaries result in high seasonal water logging conditions. Due to flooding and subsequent water logging, a large area of productive lands turns into wasteland restricting crop growth in the kharif as well as rabi season (Climate Profile of India, 2010). The flood is also accompanied by reduced availability of food and other commodities which leads to increase in the price of essential commodities and a reduction in the amount that could be purchased by households. Food security was compromised by reduced expenditure on food resulting from additional constraint on household budget and rising food prices. In case of recurrent floods, the risk once caused is ameliorated converting the already worse conditions into a hazard for the next upcoming flood.

In 2005, Indian government passed the Disaster Management Act 2005, which provides for the effective management of disasters in the country. The Act provides for setting up of a three tier hierarchical the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister, the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA) under the Chairmanship of the Chief Ministers, and the District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) under the Chairmanship of Collectors/ District Magistrates/Deputy Commissioners. The regions prone to recurrent floods therefore demand a continuous flow of relief and mitigating support structure both in the pre-and post-disaster stage. In such cases, social support becomes an important structure in resilience.

Disaster outcomes are based on pre-existing social structures and the consequences of these structures for both organisational and individual responses (Dynes, 1993; Oliver-Smith, 1996). In the post-disaster scenario, the immediate relief that is procured by the victims is from the social support system which includes family, neighbours and other community members. In the whole event local community has different roles to play in different stages of the disaster cycle: from rescue to relief to rehabilitation to preparedness (Shaw, 2003).

Conceptualisation

In the realm of disaster studies, 'Social Support' is considered as an important substructure for the disaster recovery process. Disaster sufferers tend to rely primarily on their indigenous support networks called social networks for coping and resilience post disaster. Social networks are key social units that respond to disasters (Kreps, 1984). This network is a buffer against hazards and protects an individual from the uncertainty of a disaster. There is also a lot of formalised aid offered by government and relief agencies especially in the affluent regions of the world. The pattern of help receipt post-natural disasters could be better represented as a pyramid with its broad foundation being helped from family, followed by support from other primary

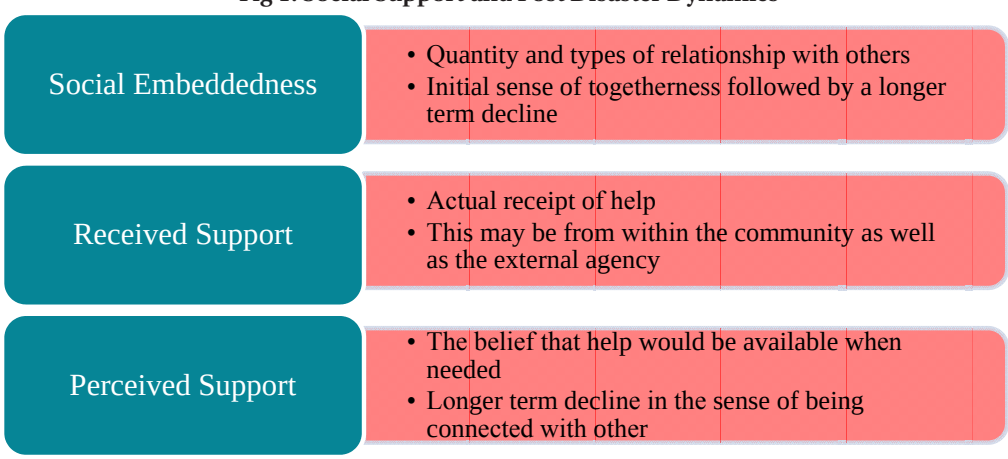
support groups such as friends, neighbours, and local religious congregations, and its narrow top being the aid provided by formal agencies and professional services (Kaniasty & Norris, 2004). Oliver Smith (2000 Catastrophe and Culture) further explains disaster as an opportunity to 'unmask the nature of the social structure, resilience of relationship and other alliances. It also provides a unique view of a society's capabilities for resistance or resilience in the face of disruption'.

Social support influences the rumination and the coping behaviour of the individuals. Gonzalez de la Rocha (1991), Lomnitz (1977), Reyes Morales (1994), and Velez-Ibanez (1983) have all described how the poor in Mexico use family and other close relationships to mobilise resources in their struggles to overcome some of the vicissitudes inherent in poverty and political disenfranchisement (Norris et al., 2005). Social support is directly proportional to the strength of the social networks. It depends on individual interaction and kinship network. Further, supportive social networks are often cited as a buffer against stress (Realmuto et al, 1991; Pittman & Lloyd, 1997; Brewin et al, 2000; Karanci & Acarturk 2005). In their study with the survivors of the Yugoslavia war, Rosner et al. (2003) found that being a member of a group was a predictor of growth. The opportunity of membership may provide for sharing trauma history, worldview, and collective coping strategies with each other. Thus, Social support seems to be an important facilitator of growth (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). To summarise, higher the level of community participation, more is the social support and greater is the likelihood of developing successful coping skills (Perry, 1983).

Social support imbibes within itself three major facets of social support: social embeddedness (quantity and types of relationships with others), received support (actual receipt of help), and perceived support (the belief that help would be available if needed) (Kaniasty & Norris, 2004). In short, perceived support refers to helping behaviour that might happen, received support refers to helping behaviour that does happen, and social embeddedness represents the most basic structural component from which these functional components emerge. It is well established by several studies that in the aftermath of a sudden disaster, the community plunges into action regardless of the routine bias and prejudices of societal relationships. There is an upsurge of local help flowing in from the members of the society for sufferers. This stage has been referred to by scholars by several labels such as 'heroic and honeymoon phases', 'democracy of distress', 'altruistic community', 'post-disaster utopia', 'stage of euphoria' (Wolfenstein, 1957; Barton, 1969; Frederick, 1980). However, as rightly argued by Kaniasty and Norris, this stage begins to fade as soon as the communities begin to recover & there is a departure back to the pre-event situations. It is difficult for these elevated levels of solidarity and mutual support to last the full length of

the recovery period (Kaniasty & Norris, 2004). They cite several reasons for the deterioration of this initial mobilisation of support: firstly, disruption of social networks by natural disaster through 'death, injury, and relocation, secondly, 'the need for support among all affected frequently surpasses the availability' which also leads to a decline in perceived support and thirdly, decreased participation in social activities with relatives, friends, neighbours and community organisations. Further, Kaniasty & Norris point out that this immediate heroic support is not as egalitarian and homogeneous as generally assumed to be as factors such as race, age, and economic status affect the distribution of resources in recovery. It is important to remember that post-crisis exchanges of support take place in a context of pre-existing socio-political andcultural structures, and thus they are reflections of complex transactions among characteristics of the individuals, the community, and the stressor (Kaniasty & Norris, 2004). All these combine to cause a reduction in the perceived support as well which, as earlier mentioned, is the expectation of the availability of help among the people fighting the disaster (Fig. 1).

Fig 1: Social Support and Post Disaster Dynamics



Source: Kaniasty & Norris, 2004

On the basis of these assumptions, several scholars have argued that the focus must be shifted from initial immediate support through the social relationships to the 'received support' which is what is actually received by the afflicted people from sources outside and inside the community. The stregthening of the received support will also positively impact the 'perceived' support and therefore improve the mental and psychic conditions of the sufferers. They argue for a community-centric intervention by assuring communtiy participation in evaluating the needs and determining which actions are most suitable'.

In areas prone to recurrent disasters, however, such suggestions are found to be highly limited. It is important to note that as we mentioned earlier the concern of disaster studies has been narrowed down to the situations of flash disasters, similar confinement is faced by the assumptions and arguments stated above. The places afflicted with recurrent floods for example never witness the so-called heroic or honeymoon period because of the lack of unpredictability about the occurrence of a disaster. Recurrent floods hardly 'shock, traumatise or plunge into depression' the victims who have become accustomed to welcoming a disaster owing to their frequent experience with them. The communities in these areas never show signs of coming together and working in a harmonious and homogeneous environment. The traditional prejudices and irrational hostility that governs the social relationships in such areas continue to decide the priority order of the distribution of help. It is scarce to find a change in the pattern of relief procurement where women, children (mostly female) and lower class and caste people continue to be deprived of even the primary help.

In such a scenario, the arguments about working hand in hand with a communtiy to design and execute a policy are restricted. The very understanding of a community that is envisaged on paper is very different from what occurs in the field reality. A community in the post-disaster situation (read sudden disasters) is generally imagined as a grief stricken, traumatised and in the 'state of nature' where a new utopian community of people can be constructed that would work for the mutual benefit of all.

Methodology

Field area

The study was conducted in one of the important flood prone districts of Uttar Pradesh (UP) Ballia. The selection of the district was purposive. Bairiya tehsil (Ballia) is the most affected flood region in UP and the district is frequently fraught with heavy flood conditions in rainy season. Based on the objectives of the study, one of the villages named *Shival* (Bairiya tehsil) was chosen as the area of study.

Flood is a recurrent phenomenon in the village *Shival,* crippling the livelihood options and destroying the resource base. The annual nature of flood leaves little time for coping and resilience as no sooner the former wounds begin to heal, a new scar arises. There is a complete lack of external aid post disaster due to administrative apathy and people have to rely on their informal networks for assistance and recovery.

Research design and instrument

The study involved the retrospective qualitative analysis of information collected through a qualitative interview schedule. The data were collected during the month of October 2011 and January 2012 as a part of fieldwork for my M Phil dissertation. The sampling was purposive and convenient. Interview schedule and observation were the major tools of data collection. A brief purpose of the study was described to all the respondents and an informal consent was obtained from them for the purpose. Social workers mediated this distrust and facilitated rapport building. Part of the data was also collected using anthropological tenet of 'key informants'. The sample size was that of 20 households apart of the key informants for the purpose of this study. Key informants for this study were the Gram Pradhan, Lekhpal (Revenue Officer at the Village level), Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), personnel and counsellors and other stakeholders who provided major insights on the phenomenon of flood in the village. The subjects had the privilege to withdraw from the interview process at any moment in case of discomfort. Confidentiality and anonymity were also ensured. Interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding basic demography, flood exposure, coping mechanism and aid/assistance available. Interviews typically lasted for 40-50 minutes.

The qualitative data collected from the field were transcribed, i.e. they were typed (from interviews, and observational notes) into word processing documents. The researcher then carefully read the transcribed data, line by line, and divided the data into meaningful analytical units (that is segmenting the data). When meaningful segments were located, they were coded. The coding was done by marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names. During coding, the researcher kept a master list (list of all the codes that were developed and used in the study). After coding, the data were thematically analysed according to the objectives of the study.

Caste and economic network and social support

In *Shival,* the nature of social support is more caste-based and the caste affiliation is an important predictor of social support and assistance post disaster. The caste acts as a major interest group and mobilises support and assistance post disaster. The members of the same caste are pre-eminently closer and exercise stronger network ties. The social cohesion is stronger within a caste group which often acts as a buffer during crisis for the people belonging to the caste community.

The village *Shival* is a multicaste village inhabited by numerous caste groups such as Yadavs, Thakur, Gond, Dvishad, Nai and Kurmi. The Yadavs are the 'dominant group'

due to their numerical strength and have been holding the reigns of leadership since decades. They are economically established and have been dominating the local population leading to the conflict between the Yadavs and the Thakurs who are the potential aspirants for political supremacy but have been unsuccessful due to the numerical majority of the formers. The Yadavs and Thakurs control the major resource base of the village possessing major land holdings in the village. Being economically affluent they employ other lower castes as the manual labourers on their fields for the cultivation thus providing livelihood to the landless and marginal farmers in the village. This perpetuates the traditional jajmani system where the landowning castes provided food grains to the service and labour classes. Notably the Yadav and the Thakur preferably lend their land to the Gond and the Dvishad respectively. This network is very useful during normal as well as crisis, as the destitute bank upon them for their livelihood and survival.

Elucidating the nexus between the social support and caste system, one of the informants, Harihar Nath Yadav described: *"The notion of social support has almost sublimed in the village. These days people have gotten quite self-interested and nobody wants to help others. Further, monetary help is available only to the near and dear ones. People are divided in the name of caste and creed. And nobody wants to help members from the other community. The members of the caste group are particularly averse to helping the other castes and thus little help available is, particularly mobilized by caste ties".*

In *Shival*, village structure is marked by informal networks and based on the interdependence of labour reflecting the jati (caste) system. The rural economy is invariably based on the division of labour. The economy is another potent construct ruling the social village. Rich people utilize this situation to give a high interest loan to poor. Another informant Shiv Gond replied: *"Society has drastically changed over these years. The only help available is from the community members but, it's more of an informal kind such as providing food, childcare help and manual. Monetary help is a distant phenomenon. Now the sense of social responsibility has almost vanished. The social support is also biased by caste and creed. The rich and affluent lend only to those who have sufficient resource to mortgage in case of non-payment of loans.The poor and the marginalised have no recourse but to die in poverty and misery".*

He emphasised that rich people have become too selfish to help the poor and the needy. They look down upon flood as an opportunity and try to harness maximum revenues on the loans. Profit maximisation is their utmost priority. Further, villagers are divided on communal lines and communal solidarity is very divisive. People

preferentially extend aid and support to their community members. Since most of his community members (Gond) are poor and marginalised they have little to offer in case of crisis. Thus, social support is more dependent on the personal networks within and outside the community.

In the words of Ram Pujan: *"The floods have an unequal impact on the poor victims. The poor and impoverished are particularly vulnerable due to their poor fiscal strength and coping capabilities. The poor are the worst sufferers due to floods. No sooner, the Ghagghra raises we the poor, the hapless are left to the vagaries of nature. The floods divest us with our resources as well as the employment opportunities".*

He further added that almost all the householders have registered a decline in their fiscal state due to recurrent floods. Often a buffer period is too short for the proper recovery of the losses incurred before the next flood. In such case, social support or the help from the community members becomes out of the question. Little help is available from the kin and acquaintances often in the form of food grains or mutual help and assistance post flood. Sometimes people have been found to take minor loans from the relatives or neighbours but that is not sufficient.

Political Network and social support

Yadavs and the Thakurs have hold over major village resources and have a major say in the local politics. Both groups try to grab the local leadership which is a major bone of contention between them. However due to numerical majority, the Yadavs usually secure political reign in the village. This has led to the creation of two factions in the village. Both castes try to outdo each other in local elections. The Gonds and the Dvishad act as a vote bank for the Yadavs and the Thakurs respectively. This reciprocity is also viable during crisis when each subordinate population banks on their superiors for help and support. Hence, it could be easily deduced that local leadership, economy and caste affiliation are an important interface to social support.

In the words of Ramdev Thakur, a barber by profession: *"The concept of 'social support' is nonexistent in the village. The Yadavs and the Thakurs are the dominant and affluent groups and control major resources. They maintain their monopoly over these resources and extend help only within their networks. The poor and the needy are only remembered during the elections when each tries to establish their predominance and supremacy to secure votes. The rivalry between the duos never leaves any scope for the growth and development. They are more concerned with securing power and position with the support of the poor and the needy".*

Gender and Social Support

Women are the community's first line of defence since traditional social norms compel them to be homebound, in the care of children (Tan, 2008). With the disruption of established male-dominated social control mechanisms, women and their children are the first to be neglected and/or abused. Women encounter strong institutional barriers to organisational efforts. Women are less likely to organise, either out of seclusion, lack of education, or outright threat. Bolin and Stanford (1999) suggested that women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of disaster because of their care giving roles and relative lack of power and status (Norris et al., 2005). Hoffman (1999) argued that women tend to lose conflict over scarce resources. These factors may have also contributed to women's lower levels of perceived social support (Morrow, 1999).

Kalavati described: *"A babua humni ke, ke dehi…..ab hamar admi rahat ta kauno baat rahit… U rahen to sab udhari det rahen par hum mehraru ke koi na dela"*. (meaning: who is going to help us. When my husband was alive, things were different. When he was there, people would easily lend money but now nobody lends to a single woman.)

According to Chandrapati Devi: *Afsran ke saamne human jana ka bolit. Mardan ki bheed mein mahraarun ke ke boleai deyi.* (meaning: what do we speak in front of officers? How do we speak in a group of men?)

The specific demands of women remain unheard in the evaluation process where the community leaders are the male heads of the family. The particular nature of the requirements of women in post-disaster situation is subsumed under the larger societal needs which are mainly patriarchal understanding of the issue. It is a failure of the community and the agencies dealing into disaster situations that fall short of giving recognition to vulnerable sections of the community.

Results and Analysis

From the above evidence, we can see it clearly that there is an unequally distributed social support system which is hindered by the differences existing in such areas in the form of caste, class and gender. Earlier we had established that the disaster studies are replete with arguments of a strong base of social support that runs into action in the event of post-disaster. The immediate social mobilisation that occurs in such areas acts as the primary source of distributing relief and resources. However, the evidences from the fields depict it on the contrary in the recurrent flood situation. In these areas, the socio-political nexus of caste, class and gender continue to decide

the help distribution in the aftermath of a disaster. Since in areas prone to recurrent floods, the residents are not incognizant of the state of affairs that might arise after the flood, they are never led into frenzy and work in a predictable manner.

In such stances, arguments about strengthening the 'received support' also lies bare because of consistent presence of the social bias in formulation and execution of a relief programme. In the lack of a former 'social embeddedness', the 'receive support' fails to go beyond the existing dominant structure and ends up replicating the latter. As we could see from the statements from female interviewees, there exists a complete disappearance of women from the policy making process to an astonishing degree. One of the interviewees mentioned about the issues of sanitation and child care that specifically bother them every time a disaster hits. Such problems hardly are voiced to the authorities who visit the disaster hit areas to evaluate the situations. The caste nexus that is dominated by the upper castes prohibits the lower caste and class people to raise their concerns related to the issue of inaccessibility and affordability of resource bank. This major failure deprives a large chunk of the population from participation.

Thus this paper suggests a 'difference-sensitive approach' to dealing with disaster especially in case of recurrent disaster. While the role of received support is undeniably important, we must keep in mind the specific nature of the afflicted area. To strengthen social justice in disaster hit societies the affordability, accessibility and availability of the relief and resources without any obstacle must be ensured among all members. In heterogeneous society in case of recurrent floods, the attempt must be made to recognise the polarities sustaining in the society. A difference blind approach along with a fancy imagination of homogeneous society comes rolling down when implemented in the field. The shift from the focus on strengthening social embeddedness in a disaster hit area to consolidating the 'received support' fails to recognise in the process that the pre-event hostilities continue in the received support also. In case of recurrent floods such polarities are more intense because they do not witness the initial frenzy of support also that occurs in the aftermath of the flood. These are the specific characteristics of a site that is prone to recurrent disaster and stratified into segments of people on the basis of caste, class and gender.

Conclusion

The social support in the community is not homozygous. The whole process is marred by the eschewed patterns of representation of different social groups in the local decision making bodies. In this situation marginal and the vulnerable sections like the lower castes, children, women, elderly, and invalids are almost often

excluded from access to these. Caste, class and gender played an important role in increasing the susceptibility and coping and resilience post disaster in the study. The field experience provided explicit insights into the village structure and posed clear picture about the interplay of social elements and natural hazard.

The curious interplay of caste, gender, and economic nexus shapes all social relations including the distribution of the resources in the community. Though all disaster plans envisages the principles of equality giving little attention to the idea (practice) of equity. The programmes foresee all the victims as essentially equal and having similar access to relief. In this scenario, when the disaster management officials strategise preparedness and mitigation, their policies are bound to be shaped largely by the interests of the upper castes (or dominant castes). Clearly, participation by all sections of the society, which is the key to effective disaster management, suffers heavily in this situation. Further, the exclusive and limited nature of disaster studies to only flash or sudden events has also contributed to the throttling and suppression of successful policy execution. There is an ardent need of devising models and methods in disaster areas that are cognizant of the particularities of areas prone to recurrent disasters. Thus we need an approach that is considerate of the differences and nexus of the society for a successful mitigation, prevention and relief programme.

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