Kalindi Sharma, P. C. Joshi and Anil K. Sinha

GENDER AND GOVERNANCE IN CONTEXT OF POST-EARTHQUAKE GUJARAT

Given the relative inevitability of natural disasters, what remains decisive and critical is our ability to deal with them in order to bounce back better than before. They are not over once the tremors are over or once the water has receded, the real disaster begins then, when people are forced to live through the aftershocks and inundation (Fordham, 1998). When an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale hit the state of Gujarat, it did take the planners and government agencies by utmost surprise (Gujarat Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Policy, 2003). In the last decade's post Gujarat earthquake, the country has witnessed many more natural calamities of varied nature and magnitude.

Disasters remain one of the major natural events in human life, impacts of which are irreversible to a great extent. They have greater significance in developing countries (DeGirolamo & McFarlane, 1996; Quarantelli, 1994) and are more likely to strike them in a severe manner than developed economies (Norris et al., 2005). India has been one of the most vulnerable south-Asian countries in terms of natural disasters. The vulnerability can be attributed to the varied geological and climatic conditions over the complete stretch of its landmass. The loss of lives and property due to disasters still poses a challenge for substantial scientific and material progress that is being made in the country. The 2001 earthquake was a "national wake-up call" for the Government of India (Gupta, 2001). The policy framework of the country became furnished with the National Disaster Management Act in the year 2005 immediately after the Indian Ocean Tsunami while a Gujarat State Disaster Management Act had already been made into a part of state government policy since the year 2003.

Many facets of disaster management and mitigation acquire a gendered connotation, eluding the eyes of many. Immediately after the disaster what prevails is the urgency to provide people with relief, what is overlooked, as

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not being compelling enough is the gender sensitivity. Since the backdrop of this discourse is gender, hence a clear understanding of the concept becomes a necessity. Most of the people fail to reflect upon the underlying social reality of the population, by far marginalizing the gender concerns of the community under the impact of disaster or vulnerable to a disaster. Gender-aware capacity and vulnerability assessment facilitates just disaster practice. Hence the utility of gender analysis in disaster scenario is instrumental to the success of many disaster related practices and policies.

Many have considered the state of Gujarat as one of the most prosperous states and a flourishing business hub in the country; much of it can be ascribed to the textile, handicraft and the diamond trade industries. However, the state has also suffered a series of aftermaths in the last two decades, from a devastating cyclone to drought to earthquake in 2001, tremors of which shook the state for years in a row. This certainly does not sound very encouraging in the wake of few political and religious upheavals, which also added to the agony of the people of Gujarat. Since the epicentre of the earthquake was situated near a village Lodai in Anjar taluka, it was the district of Kachch, which bore the deepest scars of the catastrophe. Almost the whole region suffered heavy losses of life and property (personal and public). Estimated direct and indirect losses due to damage of property and its destruction are known to be US \$5 billion which was a major setback for the developmentalists and planners (Dordi, 2003).

Nine years after the disaster, traces of devastation and damage were hard to find especially after massive reconstruction initiatives taken up by the Government along with several NGOs and self-help groups. Much of the area has recovered completely in terms of physical reconstruction from the tragedy, some which are left are on their road to recovery. However, in these reconstructive endeavours gender has emerged as one of the most complex elements of human existence in the affected areas and in order to gain effectiveness such recovery status studies need a thorough understanding of local hazards, capacities, and vulnerabilities. It qualifies as the most striking feature for study in terms of its impact on women and men and the ways in which they cope with this marked social category during emergencies.

The theoretical journey that follows henceforth is a detailed first hand account of the recovery status study on the implications of earthquake of 2001 with respect to government's disaster relief and recovery policies carried out in Kachch, Gujarat, in the year 2009 as part of a project.

Conceptualising Gender through the lens of disasters

At the outset, one must be cautious of the intricacies of gender studies, which in many cases have been used interchangeably with feminist studies. Gender is often used as a misnomer in the field of gender studies. When and

where "gender" concerns are mentioned the only demonstrable manifesto taken, is that of women. However during data collection, any concerns that came ahead and those that pertained to men were also taken to stride, which would be discussed during the course of discussion. There have been concerns over the academic gap that exists in our researches regarding the men and their victimisation during disasters as well as post-disasters (Fordham and Ketteridge, 1998).

A general sketch of subjugation of women cannot be drawn in case of Gujarat at this juncture, hence proceeding with a bigoted opinion of making women the most visible and only victim of the disaster would be inconsequential. It may also be noted that discrimination may not always be based on gender, it can be one of the many triggering factors, others being caste, creed, social and financial status, etc. A gender sensitive analysis has found many associated reasons for the subjugation and vulnerability of women, for instance patriarchy, the socio-economic status of women and even the colour of their skin (Fordham, 1998). It has been generally acknowledged that women in developing nations are more vulnerable to disasters and other emergencies, however the same holds true for women in developed nations (Fordham, 1998). Strangely enough it is not always the women who bear the brunt of nature, vulnerability has also been experienced among children, elderly, physically and mentally handicapped. The gender perspective in disaster research has remained at its nascent stage and has been restricted to feminist ideologies which work towards making women visible and not exactly depict the pathos of those already visible (Fordham, 1998).

Disaster research and management initiatives still lag behind in terms of substantial gender sensitive research (Morrow and Enarson, 1996; Fothergill, 1996; Fordham and Ketteridge, forthcoming; Scanlon, 1996; Walker, 1994; Blaikie et al., 1994). Most of the researchers and developmentalists have been known to adopt gender neutral strategies and in most cases the experiences of men have been universally accepted as the only representation of the society (Fordham, 1998). In Indian context, to a great extent power relations between men and women are unequally distributed. Gender also determines the social relations, which further form the basis of various social institutions. They are in turn reflected and reinforced in the social and cultural milieu, in the policy framework, in an individual's identity and so on. When we talk of gender categories and assigned social roles it becomes rather clear that this would most certainly lead to differential treatment of individuals in the society. This may well be negatively propagated as "Gender Discrimination". Article 2, CEDAW states "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction, intentional or unintentional made on the basis of sex is discrimination" (UN, 1981). Such a discrimination which may be reflected in various forms leads to disharmony within social groups and in many cases leads to a breakdown of the social order, etc., and this disharmony is deeply embedded in the social and economic systems of a country. Within the context of development, disasters are a means of bringing to light such disharmony within the society. This includes both vulnerabilities and capacities and social and economic imbalances arising from class, caste, disability and minority status.

Gender as an issue has been treated as a luxury in developmental plans but has been rarely addressed in the case of national level disaster plans. The ideas of gender are generally put on hold during an emergency (Sharma et al., 2009). Planners, at the government level, seem to be interested in addressing the issues of gender only after the disaster has struck and certainly not during the "heat of the moment", for instance when the rescue efforts are on. It becomes a paradox of some sort that women and children are definitely addressed first but only after the disaster has occurred and not at the levels of preparedness (Myers, 1994). During the last decade United Nations Development Programme has been extensively involved in the national level disaster planning and the inclusion of gender concerns in them as a major thrust area. United Nations, in one of its disaster related manuals, has come up with nine major components in its framework based on which disaster prevention/mitigation plans and strategies can be developed. The components are vulnerability assessment, planning, institutional framework, information systems, resource base, warning systems, response mechanisms, public education and training and rehearsals (UNDP/UNDRO, 1992). Myers has successfully depicted gender categorically in her article through these nine components, which she prefers to denote as "pegs" on which gender issues can be hung. According to her, planners should focus upon questions like whether the vulnerability assessment is sex disaggregated, does the national disaster plan take into consideration the plans or opinions suggested by women, does the data represent women at the community level, does the information gathering take into stride the needs of women and their individual coping strategies, if there is a need to strengthen women and children towards disaster mitigation or should they be treated as victims only, if the warning systems reach those who are vulnerable, whether women would be encouraged to be a part of the disaster relief process, if gender dynamics have been considered in times of trauma that the disaster is most likely to bring, if vulnerable populations are also included in the educational and training programmes related with disasters and finally if women and children are also being made a part of the rehearsals that are meant to train people towards disaster preparedness (Myers, 1994).

During a crisis the demands of both the gender's needs to be addressed. Myers is also of the opinion that the inclusion of gender at the level of disaster planning will bridge the gap between disaster relief and rehabilitation and development (Myers, 1994). Aspects of gender transcend all segments and barriers of society and have implications for every action and move towards

sustainable development, where disaster acts as a non-negotiable parameter. Keeping these ideas in mind we shall now proceed to the study that was carried out in the district Kachch of Gujarat, a decade after the earthquake affected the region.

Methodological Exploration

Anthropology of disasters has specific contribution to make in the study of gender especially those women who are confined to their homes or to their commitments of marital and family life and have not been addressed in the past. An attempt was made to gain deep insight into the lives of these women, and to also highlight the kind of struggles they undergo in their seemingly 'simple' life. The point of departure in this kind of study is generally indepth observation and interview of the respondents and then analyzing them with a vividtheoretical understanding of these phenomena. The study was carried out with the following objectives -

- Getting an overview of the losses caused by the disaster in terms of personal or familial losses.
- Understanding the victims' immediate individual/ group coping strategies with special focus on understanding the gender behaviour in disaster situation.
- One of the major objectives of the study was to focus on the Government policies specially related to Gujarat disaster, their impact on the public more so on the gendered arrangement of the society.
- Finally reflecting upon the changes that have arrived in the social set up of the area over the years after the disasters understanding the dimensions of change and their triggering factors.

The fieldwork in Gujarat started was conducted in the month of June in year 2009 and the areas that were studied during this period were Bhuj and Anjar in Kachch district. The Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority, Gandhinagar, Kachch district magistrate office, disaster cell and the panchayat bhawan of Bhuj and Anjar, provided government related data. This apart, a good deal of printed material in the form of brochures, flyers, pamphlets and annual reviews was also collected from the non-government agencies which have been active in the area after or even before the earthquake. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Case studies were collected from earthquake victims of Bhuj and Anjar, an interview guide was prepared which was utilised for the purpose of gathering context based information. A substantial amount of information was also gained through informal conversation with people of the area who did not qualify for case study as victims or remotely affected during the earthquake (Khattri & Joshi,

2011; Joshi, 2003). Based on the responses of the victims and the secondary data that were collected, an assessment was made in terms of their recovery status and any policy level intervention by the government in the process was also evaluated.

Encountering the disaster

Kachch has a long history of seismic activities ranging from the early 18th century. The earthquake of June 16, 1819 was considered the most devastating of all the earthquakes (Louis, 2001). The people of Kachch especially those living in rural areas have adapted to the vagaries of nature, the recurrent droughts and erratic rainfalls (Mehta, 1998). There have been cycles of drought and cyclones for the past many years before the 2001 earthquake and most affected are those living in rural areas but in case of earthquake it was the urban population that was severely hit. Most of the villagers are claimed to have developed coping mechanisms over the years, which the urban lack (Mehta, 2001). The social conditions after the quake were much more stable in rural areas than urban (Maheshwari, 2002). Immediately after the disaster, response from the government was slow as claimed by many due to lack of a proper disaster mitigation policy (Sharma, 2002). It is claimed by many that this earthquake brought forth the frailty and fragility of the socio-political system (Louis, 2001). Any information on the age and the gender distribution of the deceased was a task rather unattainable since the nature of deaths in natural disasters is of different pattern (Lahiri et al., 2001). Few areas of Anjar are still infamous among many for some serious patches of temporary shelter in and around the district. Bhuj on the other hand has only two temporary shelters, where it was almost impossible to trace an "actual earthquake victim" as the "real" victims have moved to their permanent houses and the tenants of those victims have occupied these temporary shelters. Only four families could be traced in Bhuj Deendayal Awas living since the shelters were made available, in hope of acquiring some land for permanent stay. In the past government has been forced to face the moral hazards of affected people, which arise out their hunger for extra land and money. There have been cases where economically better off people were able to gain more land than those who were in desperate need. Similar was the scenario during retrofitting of the households. Government household assistance packages failed miserably as they were unable to address the needs of the less capable victims (Rawal & Nair, 2001). There exists a gendered dimension to disasters, as was seen even when the disaster struck the region of Kachch. The earthquake struck at 8:46 am on the Indian Republic Day when most of the women were within their homes completing their daily household chores hence the casualties among women were greater than that of men, who were out in the open (Lahiri et al., 2001). However Bachau district of Kachch accounted for the maximum number of orphans and widows (Lahiri et al., 2001).

Post-earthquake recovery

Post disaster, during the phase of recovery there were evident changes in the social roles of both the genders, however these changes in some families did not address inequalities of gender but in some, women were found to be vulnerable in the hands of family, especially if she was widowed or separated from her husband. A number of families in the Kachch were dependent upon cottage industries for their livelihood, post-earthquake, death of an adult, particularly a male earning member put added burden on the families and their widows (Lahiri et al., 2001). Very often their maternal or husband's families disowned such women as they were considered an additional liability. In the absence of a bread-earning member, the financial burden of sustaining the dependant members (children, elderly, invalid) fell upon women; hence they were either forced to surrender to penury or to find means of income. Some were reported to have forced themselves into flesh trade when they were not left with earning members in the family (Priya, 2004). They often resorted to daily wage labour, which did not provide much but ensured a steady flow of cash. In the present times the number of such earthquake victim women, living in temporary shelters and working as wage labourers is very low. After a span of few years they were able to claim widow pension from the government and could also gain better means of earning, as the amount provided for pension did not fulfil even the basic needs of the families. However quite a number of families also supported widow remarriage in case the women were young (in her 20s or 30s) and had small children or were childless. Bereaved mothers in some areas have not been able to overcome the grief of losing their children, the trauma of such women was found to be largely psychological, however the fact that few had means to distract themselves puts a question on their social role as a wife, as a homemaker and as a mother of the surviving children (Desai et al., 2002). Many of them faced depression just after disaster but the same holds true for men as well (Desai et al., 2002). Loss of children is met with extreme grief by parents irrespective of gender; they are forced to live their life for themselves and the rest of the surviving members that means blocking out the tragedy from their memory. Couples who lost all their children were agonized till date to such an extent that they cursed themselves for being alive. Whether men and women differ in social functioning post-disaster is still being researched, but there have been definitive gender differences in psychological outcomes of the disasters (Joshi and Mir, 2002). Women have been known to fare rather poorly than men (Norris et al., 2002).

About 1,67,000 people suffered serious injury during the quake, most of which were caused by collapse of buildings. Thousands of them faced the grave threat of spinal injury, which led to paraplegia in some cases. The healthcare facilities were completely disrupted hence immediate care could not be provided, which claimed lives of many. Gender based discrimination among paraplegics was one of most despicable reality faced by health care

providers, social workers and the paraplegic women themselves (Minakshi and Joshi, 2012). Since paraplegia in most cases is known to cause impotence, sexual inadequacy, immobility, urinary and faecal incontinence, many married women were abandoned by their husbands for the above stated reasons, on the contrary men who became paraplegics were tended and cared for, by their counterparts and family. Such incidents caused even more deaths among women for they were incapable of coping with their physical handicap as well as the psychological trauma due to loss of familial support, acceptance and assistance (Joshi and Mir, 2002). Hospitals, government and other agencies took numerous steps towards their rehabilitation and mainstreaming. There were many patients who recovered to a large extent, but most among them were males, supported by their families. The percentage of women who were treated and who recovered was below that of men.

On the brighter side many people in Gujarat believe that the growth has accelerated post disaster and the condition of people has definitely improved in many ways. Women play an instrumental role in risk management in the present time, apart from contributing to the daily needs of the family in times of emergency. The social role of women as nurturer and care-giver is extended in times of disasters when they also provide to families by maintaining the continuity of livelihoods (Minakshi and Joshi, 2012). In Gujarat the role women played in post-quake reconstruction was quite eminent. Women were found to be engaged in rubble clearing, in masonry for reconstruction, as well as in community capacity building. They were taking part in community meetings about the quake, and were meeting other villagers to address the drought issues, which were also affecting the earthquake hit areas in Gujarat (Ariyabandu, 2003). Over time, they gained confidence and skills to begin working as community development intermediaries by initiating local level development projects and for standing up for women's needs and voices (Gokhale, 2008). The Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority came up with policies and programmes that were introduced during the relief dissemination and were implemented later as well. One such step taken by the government was giving land ownership to both husband and wife and not just to the male head of the family, other being the revival of widow pension schemes especially during the earthquake relief work as it became rather convenient to maintain a count of people during post earthquake as a fresh census was carried out to ascertain those affected. Even during relief distribution equitable resource allocation was done in terms of gender, age and community. Mason training programmes were also taken up, training was imparted to anyone and everyone interested in it irrespective of gender.

There are a number of nomadic, semi-nomadic artisan communities dwelling in the area. The traditional handicraft chiefly contributed by women has made Kachch an ever-growing economic hub. Groups of women in Kachch were found visiting the main markets in Bhuj and Anjar from their respective

villages. The visits are made not only for buying basic goods of daily use but for selling handcrafted goods and buying raw material. With the disaster came an era of revolution for these artisans! During the recovery phase, many NGOs that came to Kachch for relief and rehabilitation, noticed the wealth of creativity in the region, much of it was scattered and in dilapidated condition with ruined workshops post earthquake. A number of these NGOs like Kachch Navnirman Abhiyaan, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, Hunnarshala and Kala Raksha established their handicraft units in the nearby areas, which led to radical changes in the status of women in the society. The NGOs started with setting up vocational training units, which taught women in the area the commercial usage of their art, now craft was not merely their understanding and expression of life but it became a profit-earning initiative. This started a literacy drive; women required basic language and calculation skills in order to deal with the customers on a day-to-day basis and also be able to learn the marketing and promotional skills. Groups of women were given raw material after the completion of their training, to which they applied their skill and training. The profit of the sale was distributed among them, which led to enhanced financial independence of women, in turn leading to their empowerment in some way or the other. NGO and government agencies worked hard towards establishing Public Private Partnership Programmes for the upliftment of communities by tapping the strength of the women within the affected population.

Reflecting upon the impact and recovery

The phase that prevails after the disaster is the one that can be readily moulded into a progressive one or one that would witness repeated disasters in the form of failure in recovery efforts. The GSDM Policy of 2003 talks enormously about restoring the normalcy and mitigating long term consequences of the disaster, about focusing on social and economic consequences of the disaster which a society is bound to entail. What it fails to address is the evident complacence on the part of people as well as administration towards earthquake and natural disasters, which are not so frequent in nature (Dordi, 2003). Post-disaster, the aim should not remain narrowly confined to damage assessment, need based relocation and relief; rather it should motivate and work towards strengthening communities in general and vulnerable population in particular (Joshi, 2009). The process of restoration remains incomplete if the rehabilitation and recovery efforts are not brought in sync with the developmental initiatives. Community level participation in the process of recovery, as exemplified by the government post 2001 earthquake, should be encouraged in case of developmental endeavours as well. There is a need to bring together the citizens who have faced the wrath of the nature, the engineering society, the government organisations and the regulators aware of the type and the level of risk and about the measures that would lead maximum benefits with minimum costs

(Dordi, 2003). It is close to impossible to implement strategies for earthquake risk reduction without a society's understanding of the type and level or risk they are exposed (Joshi and Mir, 2006). In order to aid effective disaster management, one needs to keep the communities together if they were together before the disaster as it has been suggested many a times that community support has reduced post-disaster stress among many victims of the disaster (Quarantelli, 1997; Joshi, 2009). Communities need to be seen in a different light altogether, not just as victims but as an impetus capable enough of bringing about a positive change in disaster management endeavours (Ariyabandu, 2003; Joshi, 2009; Joshi *et al.*, 2010). Many social scientists strongly advocate the inclusion of "culture sensitive" concepts indisaster research (Stacy, 1988; Joshi *et al.*, 2010).

Of all the objectives explained in the GSDM Policy, one of the key objectives is "to address gender issues in disaster management with special thrust on empowerment of women towards long term disaster mitigation" (GSDM Policy, 2003). One might wish to question the way in which "women empowerment" is understood by the policy makers, a population which is unfortunately male dominated. A social researcher may associate a range of meanings with the phrase "women empowerment", to the extent that a wage earning woman may still be considered subjugated if her financial independence is not her personal choice but an imposition. One can definitely sense a void between researchers, academicians and few well-known professionals (Dordi, 2003). Though not always do women play the role of being a silent victim, however when they do become assertive enough to campaign for their needs and rights, they are regarded as trouble-makers and complainers, instead of being encouraged (Fordham, 1998). It is only when there is a lack of equal right between men and women that the situation becomes vulnerable (Bremer, 2003). Much of this assertiveness among women is acquired owing to the circumstances they have been forced into and their innate desire to bring about a change in their condition. This would have been unthinkable before a disaster in the given social set-up. A combination of resistance and empowerment of such nature indicates a latent resource among the vulnerable population, which can be usefully deployed to extend and improve the disaster management efforts (Home Office, 1994). Fordham also highlights the lack of power among women policy makers who are anyway few in number in this bureaucratic set-up (Fordham, 2008). Disaster management is a largely male dominated arena where supreme importance is associated with the span immediately following the disaster which primarily involves relief, relocation, needs assessment and damage assessment. One needs to keep a check on such short-sighted approach adopted by the planners and policy makers which accords resistance to the whole process of disaster management making it incapable of addressing the demands of the gendered arrangement within the affected communitythereby impeding its progress.

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