



## Locating Dalits in Disasters: A Review of Literature

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**Abstract:** Disasters do not affect everyone equally. In India, Dalits, who have faced caste-based discrimination for centuries, suffer more during disasters. This literature review looks at how disasters impact Dalit communities and why they are more vulnerable. Many Dalits live in disaster-prone areas because of poverty and social exclusion. When disasters happen, they often struggle to get relief and support due to discrimination.

The social vulnerability framework (Wisner et al., 2004) helps explain why Dalits are at higher risk. Studies (Gaillard et al., 2017; Ray-Bennett, 2018) show that disaster policies often ignore caste-based challenges, leading to unfair distribution of aid. Dalits also have little to no say in disaster planning and decision-making, which makes their situation worse.

This review highlights the need for disaster policies that recognize caste discrimination. A fair and inclusive approach can ensure that Dalits receive equal help and protection before, during, and after disasters. Addressing caste-based inequality in disaster response is necessary to create a more just and resilient society.

**Keywords:** Dalits, Caste, disasters, Social vulnerability, social exclusion

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## Introduction

Disasters like floods, earthquakes, and cyclones impact and affect everyone, but some people suffer more because of their social status and exclusion. In India, Dalits, who have been marginalised for ages, face challenges during disasters. This literature review is an effort to understand how disasters impact Dalit communities and how their issues and problems can be addressed. Dalits often

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live in areas that are more prone to disasters due to socio-economic reasons (Gaillard *et al.*, 2017). When disasters happen, they often get neglected because resources are not shared equally. Additionally, disaster management policies and policy makers sometimes ignore the specific needs of Dalits because our understanding of being a Dalit is also limited, making them more vulnerable (Ray-Bennett, 2018). The social vulnerability framework helps us understand why Dalits are more at risk. According to Wisner *et al.* (2004), vulnerabilities depend on many factors like economic status, state governance, and who can access resources, all of which are affected by the caste system in India. This framework helps us identify the specific challenges Dalits face and suggests ways to make disaster management fairer and more inclusive.

This literature review has tried to bring together possible existing research on how disasters affect Dalits. It seeks to provide a clear understanding of the challenges Dalits face during disasters and tries to highlight the way to create more inclusive and better disaster management programs. The early works on disaster tend to study the role of Geo-tectonics in causing disasters (Bryant, 1991; Alexander, 1993; Tobin & Montz, 1997). Other studies concentrate on the human response to disasters, including psycho-social and physical pain and trauma, as well as the economic and political reasons behind the occurrence of disasters (Dynes *et al.*, 1987; Lindell & Perry, 1992; Oliver-Smith, 1996; Platt *et al.*, 1999). Both sets of literature presuppose that disasters affect the 'normal' social functioning and that recovery involves a journey to return to normal. Disaster is a situation in which it is believed that it will treat everyone as equals, but according to Wisner (2004), disaster is a socio-political and economic event with differential impacts.

When we were entering the 21st century, there was a belief that Indian society would overcome its basic problems, including caste and become a developed society. We are in the third decade of the 21st century. India has emerged as a developed and capable country, and even today, caste violence in its evil traits continues in our society and has even increased. (CJP Report, 2023).

In India, the caste system is linked intricately with environmental issues, similar to how race is linked to environmental issues in the United States (Fothergill *et al.*, 1999; Bolin & Kurtz, 2018; Sharpe & Wolkin, 2022). People from lower castes, often called untouchables, suffer the most from different types of pollution and are deprived of environmental benefits. The paper 'A Dalit Critique of Environmental Justice in India' by M. Bhimraj (2020) is a comparative study on various topics related to ecological justice and compares

the Dalits with black people. In this paper, he focuses on two main types of environmental injustice, viz- unfair access to natural resources and unequal protection from health hazards. He writes that

“The academicians or scholars engaged in the field are either intentionally or unconsciously turning a deaf ear towards this issue” (Bhimraj, 2020: p 99). There is very little research that directly connects caste with environmental issues in India. Unlike in the United States, India lacks large-scale studies that take a look at how caste influences environmental discrimination. We can understand that in India, we are yet to define the official definition of environmental justice. The goal of this literature review is to highlight that these issues are often ignored in discussions about the environment in India. It also points out that there is a need for more detailed studies on these topics (Bhimraj, 2020).

Environmental Justice and Disasters are two different topics, but they connect in how they affect people’s lives. Environmental justice is about making sure all people, especially the poor and marginalised who are unfairly exposed to environmental hazards, can have access to clean air, water, and safe living conditions. Disasters are events like floods or earthquakes that cause major harm. Marginalised communities often suffer more in both cases because they live in riskier areas and have fewer resources to recover. So, both issues show how the most vulnerable people face the greatest risks and hardships.

A paper, ‘Dalits’ Access to Water: Patterns of Deprivation and Discrimination’, by Rakesh Tiwary and Sanjiv J. Phansalkar (2007), looked into the issue related to access to water. According to this paper, access to water has a classical historical pattern where Dalit people were denied access to public water bodies. This was a ‘multi-location study’ which was using a survey method and a questionnaire-based survey method. They used a common questionnaire that had been administered across 10 sites in India. The Gujarat site survey was administered by IWMI Tata Water<sup>1</sup> Policy Program Anand aiming to assess the discrimination and deprivation faced by Dalits regarding water for domestic use across India. Various indicators have been used to show how Dalits are treated unfairly when it comes to water. It also explored specific challenges, like the difficulties faced by Dalit women.

Dalits, known as Scheduled Castes on paper, are a marginalised community in India who have long faced discrimination and social exclusion due to their lower caste status (Tiwary & Phansalkar, 2007). They have been subjected to various types of oppression, which is limited access to resources, education, and employment opportunities because of this social system. There is one more

area where Dalits are particularly vulnerable and face multiple issues, and that is natural disasters. Disasters such as floods, droughts, and cyclones bring multiple challenges for Dalits, this also magnifies their existing inequalities and makes them more prone to victims of marginalisation.

During natural disasters, Dalits often struggle to access even the most basic needs, such as food, clean water, and shelter. This is due to a combination of factors, including their social and economic situations, lack of support from the government and other institutions, and discriminatory practices that continue their exclusion and vulnerability. The discrimination faced by Dalits during natural disasters is rooted in the structural inequalities present in Indian society (Sankaran, Sekerdej & von Hecker, 2017). Despite constitutional provisions for social and economic upliftment, Dalits continue to be denied their basic rights during times of disaster. This discrimination is evident in the time of resource distribution for relief and aid in the aftermath of disasters, where Dalits are often at the bottom of the priority list or maybe not included. They are often the last to receive assistance, and their needs are frequently overlooked or ignored (Tiwary & Phansalkar, 2007)

### **Caste as Social Capital: Implications during Disasters**

Caste as a concept has many layers, which attracted so many scholars not only from India but from the world over. Louis Dumont is one of those well-known French anthropologists who introduced the concept of *Homo hierarchicus* (1966). According to Dumont, the Indian caste society is a perfect example of hierarchy in its original religious sense. Dumont describes it as a system where the parts of a whole are ranked based on their relation to the entire system. Hindu society exemplifies this because, in the caste system, all castes are ranked according to their level of purity in relation to the ultimate pure entity, which is God or the Absolute. By this, he introduced the idea of purity and pollution in the caste system (Diana, 2003).

The idea of caste purity and pollution later played an important role in understanding the marginality and subjugation of Dalits. When we talk about the ideas of purity and pollution, they involve various forms of prohibitions. The most significant prohibitions are related to food, water, and interpersonal relationships with Dalits are placed at the lowest level of these prohibitions. This type of prohibition is also known as social exclusion. Disasters have a direct connection with this social exclusion. Social exclusion exists in many forms, primarily based on caste. For example, Dalits' homes are built far away from the main villages. Even today, we can see Dalit settlements located far

from the city. This kind of exclusion creates a society where not only inequality exists, but essential resources and basic rights, including important issues like health and education, get differentially distributed (Kabir *et al.*, 2018).

So far, in all the papers we have read and understood, we have focused on two words: Dalit and disaster. When we talk about Dalits, our academic space today is filled with discussions about Dalits and their concepts. The history of the Dalit movement has now come into the mainstream. But even today, society's understanding of Dalits is very weak. Not just in villages but even in big cities, there are many Dalit neighbourhoods where people still have to clean waste by hand.

In 1986, Pierre Bourdieu proposed an idea known as Social Capital, where he discussed social capital as the asset of the actual or potential resources linked to a certain reliable network of more likely institutionalised relationships of mutual people and assurance. It discusses the benefits individuals gain from their social networks, such as support, opportunities, and information. These connections can be valuable in various aspects of life, including economic success, social mobility, and cultural development. Bourdieu's concept highlights how social capital, along with economic and cultural capital, contributes to an individual's overall position and power in society.

Anuradha Mukharji, in her paper 'Post-Disaster Housing Recovery: The Promise and Peril of Social Capital' (2014), which is based on her 7 months of extensive fieldwork in the epicentre of the Gujarat earthquake in Bhuj and Bhachu, discusses this issue. She collected the data through in-depth and semi-structured interviews with almost 17 different caste groups in Bhachu and 19 different caste groups from Bhuj. She also included data from some NGOs, Government and local journalists in her sample. In this paper, she discusses that social networks built on shared values, trust, and norms can help communities work together and recover after a disaster. This means having social capital ensures communities act together and recover. It shows that strong internal bonds based on trust didn't always lead to joint efforts for housing recovery. The social capital in each community varied based on their pre-disaster networks and resources. The findings highlight the importance of understanding community contexts and contribute to public policy discussions on post-disaster recovery. This paper could have explored the aspect of the agency and the impact of social capital on different castes, but this aspect was ignored in the paper.

In another paper on Social Capital for disaster risk reduction and management with empirical evidence from Sundarbans of India (2016),

Saswata and Jayant elaborated on the argument that social capital is a vital resource in every community, especially during disasters. This paper was based on qualitative research and field surveys using both primary and secondary sources. Primary qualitative data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focused group discussions (FGDs). Their key informants were Pradhan, Up-pradhan and Block Development Officers, and for FGDs, they also conducted in-depth interviews with different people and groups from the village Satjelia. This study was conducted in July-August 2014, almost five years after Cyclone Aila. However, small-scale disasters like breaching of embankments, sea-surge and resultant flooding had been affecting the islands perennially.

This study reviewed how social capital aids disaster response and recovery worldwide, focusing on the Sundarbans in India. In this area, prone to tropical cyclones and surges, community networks are crucial for survival. The study stated that social capital helps communities survive until outside help arrives and is often the only resource they can rely on. Social capital acts like informal insurance during small-scale disasters and fills gaps in basic infrastructure and disaster management. Properly mobilising social capital can greatly benefit communities in remote, hazardous areas. There are many other studies which support this argument (George, 2008). However, studies could also be quoted that are contrary to this belief.

A paper titled 'The Role of Social Capital in Disaster Resilience in Remote Communities after the 2015 Nepal Earthquake' (Sarita *et al.*, 2021) asserted that little is known about the role of social capital in remote rural communities. This study examined social capital after the 2015 earthquake in three remote Nepali communities. The studies using data from 2018 show that bonding and bridging social capital helped rescue efforts immediately after the earthquake. However, this weakened once external aid arrived. Marginalised groups with low social capital struggled to access relief compared to those with higher social status or political connections. Pre-existing inequalities, weak family bonds, gender issues, and village remoteness further hindered resilience. Disaster programs should focus on women and the elderly to strengthen community resilience (Sarita *et al.*, 2021).

### **Caste-Based Vulnerability: Locating Dalits on the Social Margins**

Take a look at this case study from a news article published in Times of India by Manoj Chaurasia: "Jagdish Sada lost 10 goats, five cows and his 70-year-old mother Bhurdi Devi when tempestuous Kosi flowed through his densely



populated village after breaching its mud embankment at Kusaha in Nepal in 2008. All the utensils kept inside the thatched hut were also carried away by swirling Kosi. As they took shelter near the embankment, she mentioned I survived, but I lost everything” (Chaurasia, 2024).

Dalit people often live in very bad and poor conditions. They tend to live in areas that are more prone to disasters like floods, earthquakes, and cyclones. This is also because they have limited access to good land and resources. Wealthier and upper-caste people live in safer and better-protected areas. For example, in many villages, the Dalits’ homes are located on the outskirts, near riverbanks or low-lying areas that are more likely to be flood-affected. When disasters hit, these areas are the first to be affected because of these informal settlements, which means areas without proper planning and infrastructure and their places are not built to withstand these extreme events. These settlements often lack basic living facilities like clean water, sanitation, and sturdy housing, making them more vulnerable to damage and destruction.

This kind of discrimination comes under spatial discrimination, which has been studied by M.N. Srinivas, Kathleen Gough, and André Béteille, showing the big differences in how people live in the Cauvery Delta region. These differences are based on caste, which is a system in India that groups people into different social levels. In the Cauvery Delta, people from higher castes, who often own the best farmland, live in big, nice houses near the main roads of the village. These houses are spacious and well-built, showing their high social status and wealth. For example, in a village like Thanjavur, Brahmins and Vellalars, who are higher caste people, live in these central areas. On the other hand, people from the Scheduled Castes (SCs), such as Paraiyars or Chakkiliyan, live in small, crowded houses on the edge of the village. These areas are not as nice and often have fewer resources, like clean water and good roads.

Kathleen Gough’s research found that there is a clear separation between where different castes live. Higher castes live in the main part of the village with better facilities, while SCs live in less desirable areas with poorer living conditions. For instance, in Mannargudi, the Kallars, who are a dominant caste, own most of the good farmland and live in the central part of the village. The Chakkiliyars, who are from the SC, live in a separate area with fewer amenities.

M.N. Srinivas introduced the idea of the “dominant caste.” This means the caste that has the power and land in a village. Dominant castes, like the Vanniyars or Kallars in the Cauvery Delta, live in better houses and control most of the resources. SCs, like the Paraiyars, often work as labourers on the land

owned by the dominant castes and live in poorer conditions. (Tharamangalam & Chathukulam, 2018).

André Béteille's studies also show how the layout of a village reflects its social structure. In the central part of the village, where the higher castes live, there are more schools, temples, and markets. These areas are better maintained. SCs, however, live on the outskirts in areas with fewer services and amenities. This setup makes it hard for SCs to improve their living conditions, even if they start earning more money.

The work of Srinivas, Gough, and Béteille helps us understand how these inequalities are built into the very layout of the villages in the Cauvery Delta (Tamil Nadu region) and how they continue over time. This pattern was also observed by Badri Narayan in his field study on 'History Produces Politics: The Nara-Maweshi Movement in Uttar Pradesh', this study was conducted in 2009 in 4 villages of Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh. According to this study, this village was dominated by the upper caste Bhumihar community and has 1,400 Bhumihars, 1,250 Kewat, 400 Chamars, 300 Pasis, 50 Telis, 10 Dhobis, 10 Lohars (blacksmith), five Nais and five Dubey's (Brahmins) where he discussed grass root movement which took place during 1950-1980 in the village changing the narrative and the politics of Uttar Pradesh. The spatial segregation of communities based on caste, as observed by academics, further exacerbates these issues. SCs, living in isolated clusters away from main roads, find themselves at the mercy of more powerful caste groups.

Education and employment are two key areas where Dalits face discrimination. Many Dalit people do not get the chance to attend good schools. Even if they go to school, they often face discrimination not just by students but also by teachers and administration, which creates a huge knowledge gap between them and others. This lack of education limits their job opportunities as adults, forcing many to take up low-paying, unstable jobs (Report by National Dalit Watch, 2020). When disasters occur, people who have better education and jobs are usually more prepared, and they can recover faster than people who are living on the margin. They might also have savings or access to loans. Dalits, on the other hand, often do not have these kinds of safety. Their jobs, which are usually in the informal sector, do not provide social security like health insurance or job security. This makes it much harder for them to start their life back after a disaster. Most of the time, they have to start from scratch (Jha *et al.*, 2008).

The study 'Resource Accessibility and Vulnerability in Andhra Pradesh: Caste and Non-Caste Influences' by Boshier *et al.* (2010) examines how access



to resources affects vulnerability to disasters like cyclones and everyday crises in coastal Andhra Pradesh. Using a resource accessibility vulnerability index (RAVI) based on their fieldwork with over 300 respondents, they found that caste is the most significant factor in determining resource access and vulnerability. Lower castes face limited access to assets, public facilities, and opportunities for improvement. Caste influences access to assets, public facilities, political connections, and social networks. Lower castes use informal social networks, such as women's participation in community-based organisations and NGOs, to enhance resilience. The level of education achieved, which impacts access to resources, is significantly influenced by caste, with higher castes having higher education levels. The study found no significant link between age and vulnerability based on the resource accessibility index. Respondents aged 50 and above were less likely to seek government or aid agency assistance during crises, regardless of caste or socio-economic status. The study concluded that despite government efforts, caste remains a dominant factor affecting vulnerability to hazards in coastal Andhra Pradesh (Bosher *et al.*, 2010).

### **Caste-based Discrimination in Relief and Rehabilitation in a Post-Disaster Context**

In times of disasters like floods, earthquakes, and cyclones, marginalised people, including Dalit women, face more significant challenges and risks than others. According to a news report, 'Why Disaster Rehab Must Focus on Landless Dalit Farmers' (2018), "When disasters like floods or storms happen, poor and vulnerable people are hurt the most. They often don't make enough money to recover quickly. A UN report on climate change and poverty warns that climate change could make this even worse, leading to a situation called "climate apartheid." This means the gap between rich and poor could get bigger. By 2030, between 2 million and 50 million Indians could fall into poverty because of climate change. They will struggle more because their income grows slowly, and they have fewer resources to rebuild their lives after disasters" (Jain, 2018).

After a disaster, the government and other organisations usually provide relief and help people rebuild their lives. This includes distributing food, water, and clothes and providing temporary shelters. However, Dalits often face discrimination during these relief efforts. They might receive less help or be left out altogether. This happens because of longstanding prejudices and social discrimination. In many cases, the relief materials and shelters are disproportionately allocated to higher caste groups. This means that

the upper-caste communities receive more resources and better assistance compared to Dalit communities. For example, if a truck arrives with food supplies, the distribution might favour the higher caste areas, leaving Dalit neighbourhoods with little or nothing. Sometimes, these areas are hard to reach due to less connectivity. This unfair treatment makes it even harder for Dalits to recover from the disaster. This unequal distribution of help reinforces the existing socio-economic disparities. Socio-economic disparities refer to the differences in wealth, education, and living standards among different groups. Because Dalits already face many challenges like poverty, limited access to education, and poor living conditions, not receiving adequate disaster relief makes their situation even worse. They remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and marginalisation, which means they continue to be pushed to the edges of society and have fewer opportunities to improve their lives (Equality in Aid Report, 2013).

When these communities do not get enough help during disasters, they struggle to recover. Losing their homes and livelihoods means they have to start from scratch, often with little to no support. This struggle can lead to long-term poverty, as it becomes difficult for them to earn enough money, send their children to school, or access good healthcare. This ongoing hardship keeps Dalits marginalised, meaning they remain excluded from many aspects of society (Equality in Aid Report, 2013).

When a disaster occurs, everyone in the affected area suffers, but its impact is often much worse for Dalits. They are more likely to lose their homes and belongings because their houses are not strong enough to face the aftermath of a disaster. After the disaster, they may not get the help they need. Relief efforts sometimes do not reach Dalit communities as quickly or as thoroughly as they do reach upper-caste areas. For instance, according to the report 'India's Dalits refused access to tsunami relief' (2005), in the 2004 tsunami, many Dalit communities in India did not receive aid as quickly as others. This delay in receiving help made it much harder for them to recover. A similar thing happened during the 2015 Chennai floods (Minority Rights Group, 2005). Dalit people were among the last to get relief supplies, and many people not only suffered but felt emotional distress because of this delay.

In a case study done by Mahima Jain (2019) in Orissa over cyclone Fani 2019, she narrated the story of Thangadurai, a member of the Nagapattinam collectorate board for SC/ST monitoring, sharing his experience during a disaster, "On the first day, our main concern was to save our lives, so no one was thinking about caste," he said. "But once we were safe, caste issues quickly surfaced."

She mentioned that in Thangadurai's village, most people work as agricultural labourers or sharecroppers. He described how relief materials were brought in through the main roads, but those living in interior areas, like his village, had trouble accessing them, "To reach our village, you have to pass through many upper caste villages. While relief might be distributed without considering caste, the local situation is very different." Thangadurai recalled how the vans carrying relief supplies needed protection and escorts because powerful communities along the route would stop the vehicles and take the materials. This created a significant barrier for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) living in remote areas, preventing them from getting the help they needed.

The relief distribution process exposed the deep-rooted caste divisions in the society. While the intention might be to distribute aid fairly, the reality on the ground is that powerful upper caste communities can manipulate the situation to their advantage. This results in the most vulnerable, like the SCs, receiving little to no assistance. While narrating the Thangadurai's experience, she also reminds us of the persistent caste-based inequalities that exist in India. Despite legal and social efforts to bridge this gap, caste continues to play a significant role in determining access to resources and opportunities. The disaster relief situation in Thangadurai's village is just one example of how these inequalities manifest in everyday life.

Moreover, the economic disparity between the castes is evident in the type of work they do. SCs are often employed as wage labourers in roles that offer little stability and security. This economic vulnerability compounds their difficulties, especially during emergencies when they have no savings or resources to fall back on. The need for a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities is clear. Efforts must be taken to ensure that relief aid reaches all communities, especially those that are most harmed and hammered by these disasters.

Thangadurai's story sheds light on the broader issue of caste discrimination in India. It calls for a renewed focus on social justice and equality, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their caste, has access to basic needs and opportunities. The disaster relief scenario serves as a wake-up call to address these deep-seated issues and work towards a more inclusive society. Thangadurai's account of the disaster relief efforts in his village underscores the persistent caste-based inequalities in India. His experiences and observations reveal how, despite the intentions of providing equitable aid, systemic issues often prevent fair distribution (Jain, 2019).

We have limited resources to understand Dalit perspectives in disaster situations, but some studies are crucial, and their methods are valuable. The paper “Caste and Disaster” by S. Mohammed (2019) made an analytical comparison of how disasters affect different castes. Mohammed used secondary data to compare the impact of disasters on caste in Orissa, Kerala, and Bihar. Caste inequality affects disaster recovery in India. It argues that the existing caste system makes lower castes more vulnerable during and after disasters. Because damage and loss assessments for disaster compensation often depend on asset ownership, lower caste communities, who traditionally have fewer assets, are at a disadvantage. This lack of assets also leads to their exclusion from formal disaster rehabilitation programs, making them even more vulnerable. Social norms and power dynamics, rooted in caste, influence access to resources and aid after disasters, adding to their difficulties. As a result, the combination of asset scarcity and social exclusion creates a cycle of vulnerability for lower caste communities, making them more susceptible to the long-term impacts of disasters. (Mohammed, 2019).

### **Challenges to Livelihood Recovery for Dalit Communities in Disaster Context**

As per the 2007 Arjun Sengupta Committee Report, 88% of Scheduled Castes (SCs) are poor and face many kinds of hardships. They are often stuck at the bottom of India’s farming economy and struggle to meet basic living standards. The report also notes that almost 63% of SCs work as wage labourers, which is higher than any other social group. This makes them the most economically vulnerable, as they depend on daily wages and find it hard to improve their living conditions. One big problem is that many Dalits do not have access to credit, which is money they can borrow to rebuild their homes or businesses after a disaster. Without credit, it’s very hard to recover and start over. Another issue is landlessness. Many Dalit families do not own any land, which means they cannot grow their food or have a stable place to live. This makes them even more vulnerable when disasters strike (Jain, 2019). In rural areas, many Dalits are farmers who lose their crops and animals during disasters. This can leave them with nothing to eat and no way to make a living. Losing crops and livestock can push these farmers even deeper into poverty. In cities, many Dalits work as daily wage labourers. This means they get paid each day for the work they do, but they do not have a steady job. When disasters destroy buildings and workplaces, these labourers lose their jobs and have no income. This prolonged unemployment

makes it very hard for them to support their families and recover from the disaster (Jain, 2019).

These challenges show how important it is to address the structural barriers that Dalit communities face. These barriers include limited access to resources like credit and land, as well as dependency on informal, unstable jobs. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial for helping Dalits recover and build better lives after disasters. To help Dalit communities become more resilient, we need to take a multifaceted approach. This means addressing both their immediate needs after a disaster and the long-term structural inequalities they face.

In her article “Why disaster rehab in India must focus on landless Dalit farmers”, Mahima Jain (2019) underlined a very important issue of inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR) and preparedness. DRR involves planning and preparing for disasters to reduce their impact. Inclusive DRR means making sure that everyone, including Dalit communities, is included in these plans. One way to do this is by engaging Dalit communities in decision-making processes. This can be done by ensuring their representation in disaster management committees. When Dalits have a say in these committees, the responses to disasters can be more equitable and fairer (Chandrasekhar *et al.*, 2014).

In her article, Mahima Jain (2019) highlighted the importance of taking some crucial steps, like education and skill development programs, for the betterment of Dalit youth. Education can empower young Dalits, giving them the knowledge and skills they need to take part in disaster preparedness and response efforts. Skill development programs can also provide them with better job opportunities, reducing their dependency on unstable, informal employment. These small but effective steps can help build the resilience of Dalit people in the long run. By addressing both immediate needs after a disaster and the underlying structural issues, we can help Dalits recover much faster, and it will help them build stronger, more secure lives. Rebuilding their livelihoods post-disaster is particularly challenging for Dalit communities due to factors like limited access to money, landlessness, and dependency on the informal sector. To make their life normal or resilient, we need to focus on inclusive disaster risk reduction programs, including Dalit communities in decision-making. These efforts will help create a more equitable and resilient future for Dalit communities, enabling them to better withstand and recover from disasters (Deshpande, 2022).

One of the remarkable studies by Ray-Bennett (2009) examined how caste, class, and gender affect the ways women survive repeated disasters. It focused

on 12 women-headed households from different caste groups in Orissa, India, which often faces cyclones, floods, and droughts. She used a mix of methods, including watching people, talking to them in detail, and looking at documents, taking in-depth interviews. Her study mainly showed that caste, class, and gender together shape the idea of women dealing with disasters and that social structure can change during crises. Women demonstrate both individual and group strength to meet their needs during disasters. The study highlighted the need to consider caste, class, and gender in disaster research and assistance. She also argued that when disasters strike, everyone faces danger. However, Dalit women are more likely to suffer severe consequences. In her studies, Ray (2018) showed that women experience higher rates of loss of life, livelihoods, and property. This means that more Dalit women die or lose their jobs and homes compared to people from the upper caste and even Dalit men.

### Exploring Caste and Disaster in South Asian Context

Caste structure also exists in South Asian countries like Nepal. There is a study that looked at the tough economic situation of Dalit families in Gandaki Rural Municipality, Gorkha District, Nepal, especially after the big earthquake in 2015. Dalits are among the most disadvantaged people in Nepal and are hit the hardest during disasters. Despite laws against discrimination, Dalit families still face significant economic hardships, with nearly 42% living below the national poverty line compared to 21.6% of the general population (Atreya *et al.*, 2023).

Nepali Dalit families mainly depend on daily wages, selling livestock, social security benefits, and selling vegetables for their income. However, the biggest parts of their income come from money sent by family members working elsewhere (remittances) and seasonal jobs (Atreya *et al.*, 2023).

The 2015 earthquake in Nepal made things worse for Dalit families as they were often left out of relief efforts. The earthquake killed 8,790 people, injured 22,300, and caused over (INR) 584 billion in damages in Nepal. These immediate losses could turn into long-term problems, making it even harder for Dalit families to escape poverty.

Another study done by Shubhda Arora (2021) where she used stories from the Nepal earthquake of 2015 to understand what Nepali women went through during relief and rehabilitation and looked at how different factors like caste and class make some women more vulnerable than others. The study focused on the voices of marginalised women after the disaster. In this paper, she highlighted experiences like the issues of alcoholism, drug abuse, illegal



trafficking, prostitution, self-harm, and suicide. These problems are especially bad for Dalit women, who also face multiple types of violence. They don't get equal access to aid, dignity kits, and safe spaces, among other things. This kind of discrimination makes Dalit women from poor backgrounds even more vulnerable after disasters. In Nepal, the relief and rehabilitation processes didn't understand or address these intersectional vulnerabilities properly. In some ways, they even made things worse.

Another study done by Palliyaguruge (2017) on the idea of cultural violence examined that deep-rooted division is so strong that even in times of disaster, such as the earthquake in November 2015, Dalits and Non-Dalits were prevented from helping each other. This study looked at how this social division affected disaster management during the earthquake. This paper explored how the disaster response can impact this culturally divided society by using Galtung's (1996) theory of cultural violence to build a theoretical framework for understanding the post-earthquake scenario in 2015.

Moving on to another neighbouring country, Bangladesh, an article worth mentioning written by Matiur Rahman (2022) looked into the COVID-19 pandemic. The article contended that the pandemic had worsened existing inequalities in society, especially caste based. This article studied the impact and survival strategies of Dalit groups in northern Bangladesh during the pandemic, focusing on the Rabidas and Patni communities. For this study, he used a mixed-method approach. Quantitative analysis was based on 80 respondents to a semi-structured questionnaire distributed equally between Rabidas and Patni Dalit groups in northern Bangladesh. The qualitative method included eight focus groups, four key informant interviews, 10 life experience case studies, and two in-depth interviews. Survey responses were analysed using SPSS software, and a content analysis framework was used for qualitative data. The Rabidas community repairs shoes, and the Patni community makes bamboo products. Both live hand-to-mouth, earning 100–500 BDT (Bangladeshi Taka) per day. During the lockdown, their earnings dropped to less than 50 BDT per day. Many families struggled to meet basic needs, with weekly expenses limited to 151–200 BDT. They received little to no government aid and only some help from civil society during the first lockdown. Prices of necessities increased, leading to shortages and difficulties in affording medical treatments. Most families reduced their food intake, eliminated extra expenses, and borrowed money. However, borrowing was difficult as everyone was struggling. According to a 2018 report by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights titled 'Sustainable and Resilient Communities: A Profile in Dalit

Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia', these disparities and discrimination are more common during disasters.

## **Reviewing the Literature from a Theoretical Lens**

In all the papers that were used for writing this review of literature, some perspectives and theories guide research on the impacts of disasters on Dalit communities. This section is an attempt to understand various threads that bind research in this area.

### ***Vulnerability perspective***

The first one is the vulnerability perspective, which is based on the premise that any kind of disaster affects the Dalits more because they are already marginalised. The paper on the Kosi Flood of 2008 by M.K. Jha, an article by Mahima Jain (2019), and a report by National Dalit Watch (2020) which stated that 79% of SCs and 61% of OBCs accessed shelter homes during the Bihar Flood of 2019 because Dalits often face greater risks during disasters due to their social and economic status- are based on this perspective. The vulnerability perspective in disaster studies looks at how certain groups, like Dalits, are more exposed to harm. Dalits usually live in marginalised areas with poor infrastructure, making them more prone to damage from floods, earthquakes, or other natural disasters.

Another aspect related to this vulnerability is inequality during disasters. Whether it is disaster management resources or post-disaster rehabilitation, Dalits always face spatial discrimination. This has been explained in detail in this paper before, but there is one point that these papers do not discuss: that even within the Dalit community, there are many different groups. For example, Chamar settlements are different from Pasi settlements, especially in places like Uttar Pradesh. Thus, discrimination of different types can often be seen within Dalit groups as well. Such nuances have been missed by research conducted on Dalits during disasters using the vulnerability lens.

### ***Community-Based Disaster Management***

Community-Based Disaster Management (CBDM) is a way of handling disasters where local people take the lead in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies. Instead of relying only on government agencies, this approach involves the community directly, using their knowledge and resources to make plans that suit their specific needs. CBDM is very important because it includes everyone in the community, especially marginalised

groups like Dalits, women, and the elderly. When these groups are involved, the disaster plans are fairer and more effective. This way, everyone gets the help they need, and the community becomes stronger and more united.

In simple terms, Community-Based Disaster Management is about giving the power to the people in the community to take care of themselves during disasters. It makes sure everyone is included, uses local wisdom, and builds a stronger, more resilient community.

In this perspective, many different aspects can be considered. The first is that whenever there is talk of disaster risk reduction, Dalits should be included and allowed representation. The second aspect is that since this whole matter reflects the structure of a larger society, it is necessary to ensure that whenever a disaster strikes, the administration becomes as sensitive as possible towards the Dalit community. Additionally, there should be equal participation in the distribution of aid materials, which is discussed in the article by Mahima Jain (2018).

Amidst this, there should be criticism regarding the fact that in the context of Dalits, the papers we are discussing do not address the awareness of the Dalit representative towards their society. This may be difficult during a disaster, but in the case of floods, which occur frequently every year, the coordination of the government machinery must be done well in advance. For this, it is even more necessary for the Dalit representatives to raise awareness and speak about their rights (The Wire, 2019).

### ***Intersectionality of Oppression***

Dalits face severe challenges during disasters due to economic, social, and environmental factors. Economically, Dalits often have low incomes and unstable jobs, making recovery difficult after disasters. They might lose their homes, livestock, or other means of livelihood and have little savings or assets to fall back on. From a sociological perspective, caste discrimination further worsens their situation. Social structures and prejudices mean Dalits often receive less aid and support during disaster relief efforts.

Environmental justice is crucial as Dalits typically live in areas more prone to environmental hazards like floods and droughts. These regions are often neglected in terms of infrastructure and disaster preparedness. During disasters, the lack of proper drainage, poor housing conditions, and limited access to clean water and healthcare make it harder for Dalits to cope and recover. The paper by M. Bhimraj (2020) looks into it and addresses the issues related to health, access to clean drinking water, and manual scavenging, which can be prevalent

even in times of disasters and health hazards. We are still so far away from the idea of environmental justice, and for that, we need to understand the harsh reality of this cycle of intersectional operation, or we can say on a theoretical level this is cultural violence and oppression (Galtung, 1990).

### ***Human Rights and Dalit Perspective***

*The Future We Want* is a declaration made in Rio 2012 which emphasised the idea of human justice and sustainable development. But after examining all the above papers, we can conclude that the idea of basic needs and necessity is still a goal for so many people in our country because they are born in a certain caste group, which is not only dehumanising but also takes away their right to speak and express. They are not only denied their basic right to live a life with human dignity but also face discrimination because of environmental and climatic hazards. Tiwary & Phansalkar (2007) and Sankaran, Sekerdej & von Hecker (2017) examine this phenomenon and assert Dalit people's basic human dignity.

### ***Governmentality and Dalit in Disasters***

Governmentality, a concept developed by Michel Foucault (1984), refers to the art of governing beyond traditional political structures. It includes a range of control techniques, practices, and rationalities used by governments to manage populations and resources. In disaster management, governmentality can be seen in policies, risk assessments, disaster preparedness programs, and recovery strategies.

In the Indian context, Dalits are historically marginalised communities that face systemic discrimination and social exclusion. One way governmentality affects Dalits in disasters is through policy and exclusion. While disaster management policies should ideally be inclusive, they often overlook the specific needs of Dalits, leading to inadequate support during crises. For example, risk and vulnerability assessments, which are part of policy formation, often fail to consider the unique vulnerabilities of Dalit communities. As a result, aid and resources are not effectively or equally distributed. Control and surveillance increase during disasters as part of governmentality. This heightened control can disproportionately affect Dalits, who may already be underrepresented and over-scrutinised in normal times. During relief and rehabilitation efforts, the management of these processes reflects governmentality. Dalits frequently face discrimination in accessing relief services, which shows how governing techniques can fail to ensure social equity.

Examples from real-life disasters illustrate these points. After the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, Dalits were often the last to receive aid, showing how inclusive governance failed in disaster contexts (Minority Rights Group Report, 2005). Similarly, during the 2015 Nepal Earthquake, Dalit communities faced significant challenges in accessing relief due to social hierarchies and discrimination (Arora, 2022). This situation shows how disaster governance practices can perpetuate social exclusion. Recurring floods in Bihar, India, also highlight this issue, as Dalits have been reported to receive less relief compared to higher caste groups, reflecting systemic biases in disaster governance.

One type of governmentality is that in disaster studies, even today, when we study the Dalit community, we find that problems faced by Dalits during disasters are not narrated clearly and correctly by people from different communities, including Dalits themselves. In many places, this entire issue is ignored. There are several factors contributing to this situation- the fear of the dominant community, marginalisation of the Dalit community, lack of organic intellectuals from the Dalit community and hegemony and domination of the upper caste. In his paper, Mahalingam *et al.* (2019) discussed this very important aspect when they did a qualitative study and examined the role of caste, class, and Dalit janitorial labour in the aftermath of floods in Chennai, India, in 2015. For this study, they worked with 15 Dalit workers and interviewed them in multiple settings. They also collected their data from YouTube and newspapers and talked with local activists and journalists. In this study, they shed light on how people are treated at the time of crisis. Dalit janitors are mistreated while performing janitorial work to clean the city after the disaster. This study focuses on two main ideas: (a) caste-based social relations perpetuate inequalities by devaluing our labour as 'dirty work', and (b) Dalit people's experiences, labour, and sufferings, including occupational hazards, become invisible and ungrievable, compelling us to provide a counter-narrative to preserve the memory of our trauma and dignity in case of injuries.

This study by Guru (2004) suggests that the way janitorial labour is labelled as 'dirty work', people associated with it have to go through humiliation, social exclusion and a lack of recognition for their efforts and accomplishments. Specifically, in this paper, they examined the various ways in which caste, dirty work, and dignity intersect in our narrative accounts. Additionally, they also explored memory and how the processes of remembering and forgetting impact Dalit people's dignity.

A critical analysis of these issues reveals that governmentality in disaster management often does not address structural inequalities. Policies and

practices need to be assessed and reformed to ensure they do not continue marginalising Dalits. There is a need for more inclusive governance practices that actively involve Dalit communities in decision-making processes related to disaster management. Enhancing the participation of Dalits in disaster preparedness and response plans can lead to more equitable outcomes.

## Research Gaps

So far, we have tried to include and discuss various issues related to Dalits in a disaster context. These papers did their work well and gave fruitful perspectives towards Dalits in disasters. Several more papers examine Dalit vulnerabilities in disasters. Mostly, these studies, papers, and articles focus on the southern Indian region, particularly Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and parts of Karnataka. These articles examine issues such as health, access to and availability of clean drinking water, migration, and representation in disaster risk reduction efforts. In the context of the states of Bihar, Orissa, and Bengal, we could find news articles, and there is a dearth of academic studies. However, when it comes to the state of Uttar Pradesh, studies have been done focusing on the issue of caste in the context of recurrent flooding, but Dalit issues specifically have not been explored (Akerkar, 2022). There is a lack of media coverage exploring these important social and environmental challenges faced by the people of Uttar Pradesh.

When it comes to the sub-field of social anthropology, there is a complete lack of such studies in disaster contexts. Anthropological works on caste have been based on understanding the village hierarchy and functional and interactional understanding of caste groups. Since land as a commodity is affected by floods, issues of caste in a disaster context revolve around the narratives of landed caste groups, their struggles and rehabilitation, overlooking the issues and challenges faced by the marginal and most vulnerable Dalit communities. Moreover, disaster studies tend to focus on disasters that lead to mass-scale destruction of property and life, like earthquakes, cyclones, tsunamis, forest fires, etc., and thus, studies of disasters that are labelled as slow onsets, like seasonal floods, are neglected. Ethnographic and qualitative research is needed to understand the process of marginalisation and the narratives of the marginal groups in disaster contexts.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.



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## Note

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