

PERSPECTIVE BUILDING FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

India is a country vulnerable to number of natural and human made disasters. Its 58.6% landmass prone to earthquakes; over 40 million hectares (12%) of land is prone to floods and river erosion; of the 7,516 km long coastline close to 5700 km is prone to cyclones and tsunamis; 68 per cent of the cultivable area is vulnerable to drought and hilly areas are at risk from landslides and avalanches. Similarly, vulnerability also exists due to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) disasters. In order to deal with varied nature of disaster the Government of India has adopted policy document and legislation on disaster management in 2005. The government approach to disaster has changed from 'reactive approach' to 'pro-active approach'. In this context, the present paper takes overview of disaster management practice in India. It tried to highlight relevance of perspective building for disaster management and proposing anti-discriminatory perspective for disaster management as potential framework for intervention during the natural as well as human-made disasters. The present paper is divided into three parts; Part one explains the need of perspectives building for disaster management, Part, two discusses about the anti-discriminatory perspective for disaster management, and part three highlights importance of anti-discriminatory approach in the post disaster and its implications for human service as well as social work disciplines.

Keywords: Anti-discriminatory perspective, Disasters, Disaster Management, Social Work

Introduction

Broadly, disaster management defined as “a collective term encompassing all aspects of planning for and responding to disasters, including both pre and post disaster activities. It may refer to the management of both the risks and consequences of disasters”. Thus, the term management for disaster situation has emerged as integrated term that encompasses preparedness and mitigation of pre and post disasters.

However, the important issue is does disaster management comprehensive enough to deal with varied disaster situations and the issues of socio-cultural diversity and marginalization in disaster situations. What should be ideal perspective for disaster management to deal with complex issues of social exclusion and marginalization in the disaster situation? How to make disaster management more comprehensive and non-discriminatory for pre and post disaster? The reporting on various disasters shows that poor and marginalized communities suffer doubly during and after a disaster. There are various issues essential to create socially just communities are not addressed by disaster management after disasters. The issues of class, caste, gender and religious inequities in the post-disaster phase are neither addressed nor resolved and became challenging task before disaster management practice. There are few civil society organizations addressing these issues but largely disaster management practice is silent on the issue of discrimination and marginalization in the post-disaster situations. Similarly, there is no substantive study on the aspect of community re-building and mitigating socio-cultural disparity after disaster in the social science literature.

To address above concerns, the present paper attempts to propose the perspective for disaster management and its potentials to practice inclusive as well as non-discriminatory disaster management practice in India. The literature on disaster management and mitigation emphasizes several important components such as early warning, relief distribution, need assessment, mental health, psycho-social aspect of disaster victims, community practice etc. These approaches of have intrinsic limitations and may generate discriminatory, sectarian and socially exclusive practice during disaster situation. There is need for larger non-discriminatory and socially inclusive framework for disaster planning, management, mitigation and preparedness.

In this context, the present paper tried to highlight relevance of perspective building for disaster management and proposing anti-discriminatory perspective for Disaster management as potential framework for intervention during the natural as well as human-made disasters. The present paper is divided into three parts; Part one explains the need of perspectives building for disaster management, Part, two discusses about the anti-discriminatory perspective for disaster management, and part three highlights importance of anti-discriminatory approach in the post disaster and its implications for human service as well as social work disciplines.

Perspective building for Disaster Management in India

It is essential to develop perspective for disaster management in India. The more rigorous and unbiased efforts put in for perspective building

process, easier would be process of identification of issues, vulnerability, target group and design of intervention during disaster situation. The perspective building is also important to make disaster management socially inclusive in nature and instrumental for community re-building which can achieve values such as social justice and human rights. The process of perspective building includes looking at the current definitions of disasters and building a new definition on the basis of varied nature of disaster and reasons behind the different disasters. The definition of disaster should be flexible and comprehensive enough to add in and cover all the types of natural and human-made/social disasters. It should not discriminate or exclude any disaster due to socio-cultural and political complexity.

The literature on disaster management gives feeling that the concept is meant for development as well as re-building society after disaster but actually in practice it is managing the post-disaster situation by rescue, relief and rehabilitation work. There is more emphasize on 'naturalness' of disasters, rather than preventive aspects. Moreover, the Disaster Management Act and policy document on disaster management is silent about the certain human-made disasters/social disasters such as droughts, displacement, communal riots, caste conflicts/atrocities etc. There seems to be narrow vision and systemic silence with in conceptualization of disaster management itself in order to intentionally stay away from the structural and socio-cultural complex issues of the Indian society. The victims of social disasters wait long for justice and made satisfied by government meager compensation and relief measures. The issues of vulnerability and preparedness do not get sufficient attention, methods and skills to deal with varied vulnerability are neglected and poor and marginalized communities issues are not highlighted in the process. Similarly, the complexity of issues, the difficulty of intervention, the dynamics of political processes, attitudes of the community, and the politics of aid have generated a lot of dilemmas. These issues have to tackle with sensitivity and breaking up into separate process, each requiring individual attention as well as collective recognition. Thus, the narrow vision and weak conceptualization of disaster management becomes fundamental deterrent to address the root cause of societal issues and produces self-limiting emergent intervention in rescue, relief and rehabilitation.

It is in this context the perspective building becomes pertinent to envision comprehensive disaster management theory and practice. The comprehensive and suitable conceptualization helps in three ways. First, it helps to provide framework to understand origin and naturalness of disaster and provides help to identify the issues to prevent the disaster at the first stage. This is a process that helps to identifies reasons of disaster and make conscious individuals to handle those reasons of disaster to prevent present

and future disasters. Second, it develops critical understanding about the ground reality and provides insights to access the actual need and vulnerability of disaster. Third, consequently it will help to design social intervention and methods to deal with unaddressed disasters, issues and vulnerability at micro, mezzo and macro level. These aspects are already mentioned in the critical social work theories and especially in the anti-discriminatory social work perspective. The anti-discriminatory perspective is one of the suitable perspectives for disaster management and rebuilding society after disasters. The following section will briefly discussed about the anti-discriminatory perspective.

Anti-Discriminatory Perspective for Disaster Management

Social work intervention during disaster situation is the reflection of mission of social work profession. Social work interventions in disasters have dealt with different target groups such as individuals, families, organizations and communities for the areas such as psycho-social aspects, traumatic stress, relief and resources for victims and support and coordination of disaster relief initiatives. The review of the literature shows that social work profession is involved in disaster management and mitigation work but its emphasis is more on mental health and psychosocial interventions in post-disasters rather than community rebuilding and minimizing socio-cultural disparity in post-disaster recovery. The contemporary social work approach towards disaster situations/management is spontaneous, need-based, and service-based. It is not only limits social work towards service delivery but also deviating itself from larger mission of social work i.e. social change, social justice and Human rights. Thus, the above description shows lack of suitable perspective and approach of social work education towards disaster situation in India.

The International Federation of Social Workers' define the key purpose of social work as the promotion of social change and the liberation and empowerment of people. The social work theories are broadly divided into three categories: reflective-therapeutic, social order and social change. The social change theories must underpin our practice, if we are to achieve these key purposes of social work. The English-speaking countries that introduced radical social work 30 years ago, namely Great Britain, Canada, Australia, significantly influenced the international definition of social work and remain at the forefront of the development of the social change and empowerment theories in social work. Contrary, Indian social work education and practice highly involved in assisting state welfare and development programme and activities and rarely talk about social change and empowerment. Thus, the element of discrimination also persists in social

work education in India and need the orientation of anti-discrimination for inclusive intervention and practice.

The anti-discriminatory social work perspective is part of broader critical social work perspective. The perspective propagated by British authors, Thompson and Dominelli who affirm that the discrimination and oppression can be expressed through sexism, ageism, disablism, racism, as well as based on sexual orientation, religion, language, ethnicity, region and mental illness and impairment. Thompson uses a concentric model to identify three levels in which all types of discrimination and oppression take place—the social/structural; the cultural; and the personal/psychological. Thompson proposition has potential to analyse and understand the issues of socio-cultural diversity and discrimination and develop model to minimize the diversity and discrimination in the society. In the context of disaster management, the anti-discriminatory perspective could be applies as holistic perspective that is un-bias, inclusive, non-discriminative, which understand social reality of disaster within a particular context and then design intervention to deal with the emerging issues with the aim to re-build society on the basis of social justice and equality.

In nutshell anti-discriminatory perspective in the context of disaster management means the socially inclusive process that identifies the disasters in the socio-political context and doesn't treat disasters as isolated events of loss and pain. Further, it develops strategies and intervention not only to cover loss and pain by relief and rehabilitation but re-build community for larger integration and social change. In addition, it has potential to transform the hegemonic structures and policies that perpetuate inequities and injustice.

Anti-Discriminatory Disaster Management Practice

This anti-discriminatory perspective has direct relevance to the concept of disaster management. To what extent human service professions/social work education and practice advocate this perspective to make disaster management more socially inclusive process will decide the faith of the perspective. As mentioned the human service professions/social work education and most social workers are not adhere to anti-discriminatory disaster management practice although the perspective and practice advocated by few NGOs in India and abroad.

There are various ways to mainstream anti-discriminatory disaster management in the academic institutions as well as practicing disciplines. First, all academic institutions should adopt a policy to have disaster management concept in its course curriculum and develop an initiative to involve in pre and post disaster situations. Second, the course curriculum on disaster management designed in such way that the flexibility and critical understanding about disasters and disaster management reflected in the

syllabus. Third, the issues of vulnerability and marginalization of poor and oppressed during disasters should be given primacy for evolving approaches, strategies and interventions during disaster situation. Fourth, during disaster efforts heavily focused on rescue, relief, trauma and mental health of disaster victims, co-ordination of support system but need also to give attention on different excluded groups and their needs, policy advocacy and the socially inclusive intervention methods and skills to re-build relations of disaster victims.

Conclusion

The disaster management practice is complex in nature with multiple debates. It is largely accepted that disaster management practice should do relief work, coordinate the disaster relief support system, and access resources to vulnerable sections. These services and activities are essential but do not necessarily address socio-political context of disasters and do not address issues of social change. Moreover superficially understanding the naturalness of disaster in terms of loss and pain and providing healing and mental support does not seem commensurate with the facilitation of social and economic justice. There is need that disasters looked into socio-cultural-political context and disaster management should be made as socially inclusive process. Thus it is essential to make disaster management as comprehensive and socially inclusive process to do justice with the disaster victims. More meticulous observance of anti-discriminatory approach in disaster management and mitigation helps to rebuild equal and just society after a disaster.

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