

Marginalization in Catastrophe:

Rainfall
Landslides and Kerala
Deluge in 2018

CENTRE FOR
SOCIAL
STUDIES AND
CULTURE



Centre for Social Studies and Culture (CSSC)

in Collaboration with

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**Marginalization in Catastrophe:
Rainfall, Landslides and Deluge in Kerala, 2018**

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Rainfall Landslides and Deluge in **Kerala** **2018**

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“There may be some dignified persons walking around, but no human dignity, and human dignity is the central issue of our times.”

Ramsey Clark
Racism and Human Dignity

Acknowledgements

The destruction left by the catastrophic flood in Kerala in 2018 continues to haunt the people of Kerala, particularly the marginalized. Despite many criticisms and differences in approach, everybody is joining hands with the state government for the reconstruction of Kerala. During the initial days of the flood, hundreds of friends, including students and volunteers, joined our team for rescue and relief operations. Later, a two-day assessment meeting was followed at Thiruvalla where the need for an immediate study of the devastating effects of the flood on the Dalit-Adivasi communities was raised and in the meeting the emphasis was laid on submitting certain proposals to the government considering the views of the communities affected so that these communities receive long overdue priority in the *Nava Keralam* project.

Centre for Social Studies and Culture (CSSC) and the Abhayaloka Buddhist Community led a team of researchers to conduct the study in Kottayam, Alapuzha, Pathanamthitta and Idukki districts. The team of researchers was led by the able guidance and vision of Dr. Sanal Mohan, Dr. Meera Velayudhan and Dr. CP Geevan. The team discussed and interviewed more than 300 individuals across various localities in 21 villages of various districts based on a prepared questionnaire and interview schedule. These 'silent' but intense activities have been going on for the past few months and have led to the completion of the report today. The report provides a comprehensive outlook on the Kerala floods and its effect on Dalit-Adivasi communities as well as recommendations that address environmental and social issues in contrast to infrastructure development and welfare measures addressed in several other reports.

The intellectual leadership and practical solutions offered by the senior academics, Sanal Mohan, C P Geevan and Meera Velayudhan individually, and in several brain storming sessions is unparalleled and cannot be adequately acknowledged here in words. Geevan with his experience in environmental sciences and post-disaster management policy and action; Meera Velayudhan with her solid background in Women Studies and disaster management, and Sanal Mohan with his acumen in ethnographic studies, Dalit studies and critical social sciences enriched

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Shibi Peter

Centre for Social Studies and Culture

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Foreword

The report presented here is a product of the dedicated efforts of a group of researchers who took to themselves the task of recording and analyzing the experiences of the 2018 floods. Moving across different genres—statistical data presentation, ethnographic account, analysis of narratives—the report tries to address the problems faced by the most marginalized sections as they faced the flood and overcame it heroically. In addition to this, the report also brings to the fore much required historical sensitivity to the problems faced by the caste-oppressed people in the context of natural disasters such as floods. Conducting research in different geographical locations of Kottayam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta and Idukki districts, the report comes out with valuable information that might help form action plans for the rehabilitation and reconstruction work in these regions as part of the efforts at the creation of new Keralam famously articulated as construction of *Nava Keralam*. Central to the study is a sample of 237 households belonging to SC, ST and Dalit Christian communities spread across Kottayam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta and Idukki districts. Let me quote from the report to show the rationale for the inclusion of the category Dalit Christians in the report.

“Although, the Dalit Christians—Dalits who have adopted Christianity as their religious belief—experience social exclusion equally as the Scheduled Castes, they are not separately enumerated in the Census/official statistics because they are not recognized as Scheduled Castes. This is despite the fact that freedom of religion is a fundamental right in India’s Constitution. The call for justice by Dalit Christians is mostly go unheeded until now. Hence, we have given attention to the Dalit Christian situation during the disaster in this study. The term Dalit Christian is explicitly used according to the context”.

The researchers who authored the report have shown the qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions of the social existence of the marginalized sections of the study area. Such a perspective has helped to provide much needed information regarding the pre-flood and post-flood situation. For example, the report refers to many migrant villages of Dalit Christians in the Idukki district where people had settled down since the 1950’s in search of agricultural lands of their own which liberated them from their enslaved status under caste formation in the southern plains of Kerala, which had a very long history. In spite of such migrations, the report shows that most people did not become rich peasants. On the contrary most of them became poor and marginal farmers and over generations, as the study has shown, some of them combined wage work along with farming. In fact, when landslides occurred, these sections of the poor and marginal farmers suffered huge losses as the lands of many were washed away. In the midland plains of the districts that are covered in the study, Dalits, Adivasis and Dalit Christians live in places that are euphemistically referred to as ‘colonies’ which are nothing but ghettos.

The ghettos of the marginalized, a product of the development initiatives of the 1970's, have become a veritable site where inequalities are reproduced in postcolonial Kerala. More importantly, it is a site where the historical forms of spatial inequality are reproduced. The architecture of the houses inhabited by the oppressed castes, nature of the built space, furniture and utensils used, sanitation facilities available to the people of the household, among others, showed the historical continuity of spatial inequality bequeathed to them. It becomes evident in the report that in the context of the severe flood, most of these houses and facilities available were damaged as they were of poor quality. It may be noted that material culture of a society is a substantial indicator of how they have evolved historically. In the examples provided in the report we get deeper insights into the manner in which the marginalized sections of Kerala managed to access the fruits of much hyped modern postcolonial development.

The report also shows aspects of policies and local governance that were out of sync with the real experiences of the people who endured floods and who were looking forward to the support of the state as well as NGO's to survive the crisis. These issues are highlighted here in order to develop necessary infrastructure to face future calamities, if ever they occur. It also refers to inadequacies in health care system as well as the urgent need to provide mental health and psychological support to the flood affected people. The report refers to the lack of sanitary facilities including restrooms available in the camps. We may ask a pertinent question here. How many public buildings in Kerala have restrooms that can be used without compromising the dignity of the individuals who use them? The situation becomes worse if the individual is a woman, a girl, or person with disability. Similarly the report refers to the vulnerabilities of women living in the camps where adequate sanitation facilities were not available. In fact, all these points to the fact that Kerala has to evolve as a gender-friendly society with greater sensitivity to the requirements of citizens of all genders.

Among the questions that the post-flood Kerala has to face, the most significant one is that of citizenship and land ownership. In fact, we are yet to have such a discussion even in the official reports of the Government of Kerala. Another challenging question here is to treat the people affected as citizens who have the right to be treated in a dignified manner. The narratives presented in this report show that there was a huge deficit in Kerala when it comes to the question of the citizenship of the marginalized sections and their desire to be treated with dignity. We need to address here the deficit in the longstanding issues of social citizenship that gets re-articulated in times of crisis as occasioned by the 2018 flood in Kerala. The narratives included in the report from all the districts covered in the study show that social citizenship of the people was violated by the state officials functioning at various levels, political parties and their functionaries. Additionally, the dominant social groups that wield considerable power in normal circumstances were unwilling to dent their position even under conditions of calamity made matters worse in certain contexts. This in fact explains the problems that the poor and caste marginal had to suffer in the relief camps.

These questions are discussed in the report not to fix the responsibility on any particular social groups per se, but to reiterate the need for alerting the people about the consequences of such practices that make the recognition of the humanity of the poor and marginalized section in the context of natural disasters difficult. The existing studies on natural calamities and the way states and communities have tried to cope up with them have shown that pre-existing social divisions influence in a substantial manner the framing of policies addressed to

rehabilitate the affected people. It is in this context that the narratives of the people who have endured floods in 2018 become important. These narratives open windows into the inner recess of social life that are not often available for observation and analysis. Although much limited in scale, as the present study had covered only four districts, it has shown the extent of inequalities and prejudices that prevail in our society that refuse to die even in the face of calamities. It is in this context that the narratives become significant.

The narratives presented in the report, when closely analyzed, would provide insights into the everyday life of the ordinary people and how they make sense of the situations they encounter and experiences they recount. For example, across the four districts where the fieldwork was conducted for this report, the people showed, as would be expected, a remarkable understanding of their subordinated position. Yet they had the tenor to analyze it. As the informants of the study were from the oppressed castes, they could connect their subordination to the forms of caste domination that evolved historically. Their narratives provide examples of critical knowledge contained in their collective social life. Alongside this, people also stated their understanding of floods especially in the case of people from Kuttanad region. However, their preparedness based on their past experiences could not be of much help as the magnitude of the phenomenon went beyond all their imagination and experience. Therefore, today perhaps they have a critical idea about their own previous understanding of the floods.

Their narratives also prove their spirit of resilience amidst extreme difficulties. When people suggest remedies for many of the problems they encountered it actually shows their faith in the democratic structures of governance in spite of the criticisms they offer to the manner in which the warning system operated or relief material distributed or the inadequacies in the running of the relief camps. In spite of all these, the narratives of the people from the remote flood affected areas show that the lack of communication and information regarding the magnitude of the flood prevented them from moving to the relief camps, which were sometimes very far, especially in many instances in the Kuttanad region.

This report may be considered for the analysis and evaluation by the Government and the policy makers and serve to inform concerned citizens. The aim of collecting and analyzing the data for this report is the desire to focus on the experiences of the marginalized sections of the flood affected people which may be lost unless documented. This is more so in the case of communities such as Dalit Christians that are not mandated by compulsions of Governmentality as in the case of SC's and ST's. It is in this context that the present report becomes a social document in addition to the reporting that it envisages.

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An aerial view shows partially submerged road at a flooded area in Kerala during August floods last year | Reuters

Chapter - 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

In August 2018, Kerala experienced the catastrophe of a lifetime in the form of extreme rainfall and consequent landslips and landslides in the highlands and unprecedented floods in most other parts of the state. The state received 759 mm rainfall between 1st and 19th August, which was 164% more than the average of 288 mm. The state received 42% more rainfall than normal since the onset of the Monsoon in June. By mid-August, the total rainfall reached 2,346 mm compared to the normal of 1,650 mm. The highest rainfall was in Idukki district, which received 92% more rains. This was followed by Palakkad, receiving 72% more rains. The torrential rainfall was in many ways more devastating than the historic high rainfall witnessed in 1924, which was considered as the heaviest known rainfall in Kerala's recorded history.

A house affected by disaster at Muniyara, Idukki | CSSC



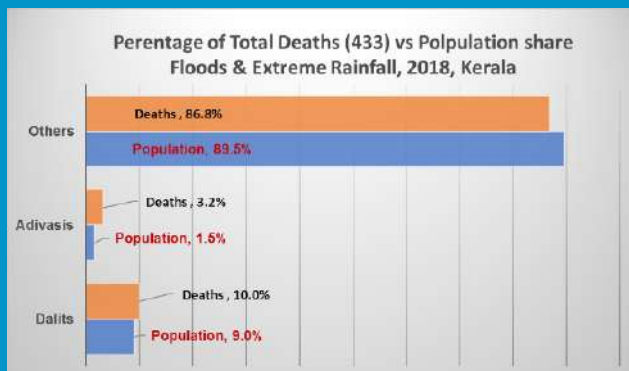


Figure 1.1: Death toll in the flood and extreme rainfall - Share of deaths compared to population share by community

The devastating floods and landslides caused by the extreme rainfall took 433 lives, affected 5.4 million people and displaced 1.4 million people. According to published information, 1,259 of the 1,664 villages in the state, spread across 14 districts were affected in one way or other in the disaster. As per available data, of the 433 killed, 44 (10%) are Scheduled Castes and 14 (3.2%) are Adivasis (Fig.1.1). The seven worst hit districts were Alappuzha, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, and Wayanad. The entire district of Wayanad was declared as disaster affected. Incidentally, Adivasi communities form 1.45% of the state's population with 63% in the districts of Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, and Kasaragod. In comparison, the Scheduled Castes that constitute 9% of the state's population are spread across the state with highest in Palakkad district (14.4%), followed by Thiruvananthapuram, Malappuram, Kollam, and Thrissur.

1.2 Social Inclusion in Disaster Management

The global agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, underscores the importance of inclusive approach during disaster management. The Framework states as one of its guiding principles:

“Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and

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women and youth leadership should be promoted. In this context, special attention should be paid to the improvement of organized voluntary work of citizens.”

The Disaster Management Act, 2005 that marks a departure from India's colonial legacies in disaster management prohibits all forms of discrimination—be it based on sex, caste, community, descent or religion—in any activities related to disaster risk reduction, disaster relief or in humanitarian assistance to the affected people (*Chapter 11, Para 61*). The preamble of India's *National Policy of Disaster Management, 2009* points out that India's economically weaker and socially marginalized sections; Women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities tend to suffer more during disasters. Experiences of disasters across the world prove that a community's vulnerability to hazards and disaster coping capacity depend on the social, cultural, economic and political conditions. Historically imposed social exclusions and deprivations aggravate these and weaken their engagement as citizens of the state and alienate them from the decision-making process.

People's vulnerability to disasters and coping capacity depend on their social, cultural, economic, and political environment. All kinds of marginalization tend to get magnified during disasters. It is particularly true for Dalits and Adivasis in India due to the historically existing practices of untouchability and notions of pollution and purity. The diverse forms of discrimination encountered during disasters include the habitual neglect by authorities of the marginalized; failing to properly account for losses suffered by them; insistence on unjust and cumbersome procedures when it comes

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A tribal family in Wayanad in front of their destroyed house | www.outlookindia.com

to providing compensation; persisting with social exclusion practices, and according low priority to reach out to Dalit/ Adivasi hamlets. Even information, early warnings and government relief and rehabilitation programs remain inaccessible or fall outside the purview of the Dalit community. Moreover, very often, assertive rights by the marginalized are resisted with physical violence by the state and its authorities.

Marginalized communities lacking the capacity to cope with disasters have often been the worst hit by the extreme rain, floods, and landslides. Their losses must be viewed in the context of their position in development programs, and historically imposed disadvantages. Losses of the marginalized cannot be compared with the losses of others who do not have such a historical background and have far more resources and capabilities to re-emerge from challenges. The marginalized sections have been living with many disadvantages with respect to livelihoods, dwelling place, infrastructure and basic amenities prior to the disaster. For example, collapse of houses occurred

widely among Dalits and Adivasis because their houses were not properly constructed or very old that required immediate replacement by a new one. The same has occurred in the case of toilets. Even the most decrepit dwellings that were lost or damaged have been the result of a lifetime's efforts in most cases. Even the most modest dwelling has been gradually built with considerable effort. Loss of livelihood and working days made the post-disaster life literally helpless for an ordinary household of the Dalit and Adivasi communities.

1.3 Dominant Narratives and the Drowned Voices of the Marginalized

Discussions and discourses on the difficulties and challenges of the marginalized often tend to be usurped by the prevailing dominant narratives, overwhelming or deprecating the voices of the marginalized. Despite expectations to the contrary, Kerala is not an exception to this rule with the dominant narratives gaining widespread acceptance. Besides, the dominant caste groups, elites and the powerful are producing narratives on the lives, perceptions and

Locational or geographic marginalization is as much a facet of marginalization as the social and economic with the most marginalized living in highly hazard-prone remote locations and working in the riskiest conditions. The dominant perception naturally leads to the curious question: when does a flood become really a flood? Unsurprisingly, it was the Dalits from Kuttanadu, the low land paddy fields of Kerala, who posed this question. For them floods are part of their lives and a companion in life, death and destruction!

political views of the marginalized and socially excluded sections, especially on Dalits and Adivasis. These dominant narratives are often underpinned by dubious evidence attributed to those from the marginalized but rarely reflect their lived experiences, perceptions, views and situations. Thus, the dominant narratives on the marginalized sections become “*ostensibly radical*”, as termed by Prof. TM Yesudasan, giving hardly any room for questioning. While natural hazards do not discriminate, people do. Disasters often unravel or magnify underlying social inequalities as it did during the flood and landslides. Yet, other than some “*ostensibly radical*” stories, the dominant discourse remained engrossed with the themes that had no place for those doubly affected by disaster and social exclusion.

Soon after the disaster, the dominant discourse around re-imagining and re-building Kerala quickly moved away from the search for equitable and ecologically balanced paths to the pre-disaster human-centered perspectives. The consensus forged by the dominant communities, the religious establishments and mainstream political leadership not only failed to give any hope, it was also alarming. Bishop Geevarghese Mor Coorilose, a strong promoter of eco-theology, stated in a consultation organized to discuss the flood and recovery that it would be inaccurate to call the disaster as not manmade in a generalized manner, instead certain sections—the rich and powerful— ought to be considered primarily responsible for the disaster. The state government is absolving itself of any shortcomings, flaws in managing the large network of dams or weaknesses in disaster management by singling out the torrential rain for the unprecedented crisis.

The spontaneous unity that emerged across various sections in response to the disaster has been exaggerated to be one of the state coalescing into one body and mind. Some have gone as far as to insist that the flood waters carried away with them caste, the highly divisive element in Kerala society! These narratives diverted attention from the questions raised about the failings of the state, the institutional and technical flaws in the management of the dams, and the state’s own likely role in aggravating the disaster. The dominant narratives drowned out the voices and overlooked the experiences of the marginalized social groups who always faced the brunt of structural discrimination and suffering from historically imposed vulnerabilities.

It is well known that the first and worst victims of a disaster are the marginalized communities. They are also the last one to survive. However, the mainstream perception of the marginalized as people well experienced in coping with natural calamities, being repeatedly subjected to such situations, is misleading. It is generally ‘appreciated’ that the marginalized are somehow well-adapted to the disaster situations. Locational or geographic marginalization is as much a facet of marginalization as the social and economic with the most marginalized living in highly hazard-prone remote locations and working in the riskiest conditions. The dominant perception naturally leads to the curious question: when does a flood become really a flood? Unsurprisingly, it was the Dalits from Kuttanadu, the lowland paddy fields of Kerala, who posed this question. For them floods are part of their lives and a companion in life, death and destruction!

Every year the lowlands in Kuttanadu get inundated and the Dalits living in the remote and lowest parts are forced to live in relief camps for months. The transformations brought about by development have not altered this distressing situation that takes a heavy toll on every aspect of their life—from the health status of women and children to the minimum levels of quality of life that the community can enjoy. Though thousands of Dalits and other backward caste groups become victims of these annual flooding, the situation has ceased to be recognized as a disaster in the dominant mindset of Kerala society. The changing governments have not attempted to find a permanent mechanism to deal with the harrowing conditions under recurring floods in the Kuttanadu region.

Sadly, the deliberations on the floods and landslides in Kerala of 2018 in general have not been substantially different from that of the dominant narratives in other domains. Projecting the disaster affected to be homogenous and undifferentiated makes it hard to recognise and address the existing disparities and inequities within the affected communities. Kerala's dominant narratives on flood of 2018 and the response to it have also been indifferent to the pre-existing inequities and unequal coping capabilities of the vulnerable sections. At best, some of the official narratives have al-

luded to some basic data on Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) without explicitly recognising of the linkages between the historical, social exclusions and the increased vulnerabilities as well as the relatively weak capacities of the marginalized to recover.

Absent in the dominant narratives and the disaster management plans are explicit attempts at pertinent and specific hazard risk, vulnerability and capacity analysis for different marginalised sections. While within the dominant narratives, there have been several critiques of the unpreparedness of the state machinery and the ill-equipped condition of the state machinery in almost all aspects of disaster management: from early warning system to prevention to effective recovery. But, there has hardly been any attempt to understand and recognise the disproportionate impact of the disaster on the disadvantaged and marginalized sections due to pre-existing inequities in multiple domains.

1.4 Motivation and Scope of the Study

There are many reports on flood experience from the margins of Kerala society, describing manifestations of the caste hatred and practices of discrimination occurring in the context of disaster, the failure of authorities to treat them

People wade through flooded water in Kuttanad | EPA-EFE



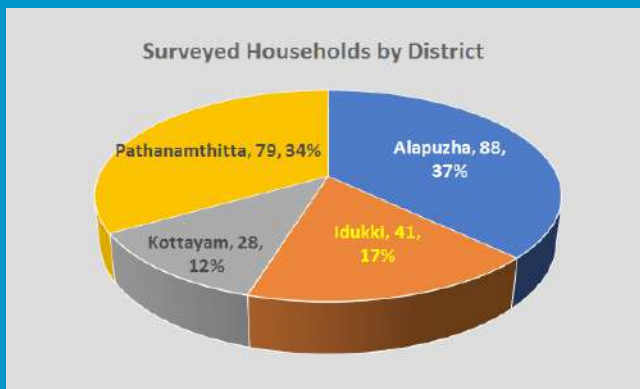


Figure 1.2: Surveyed Households, District wise

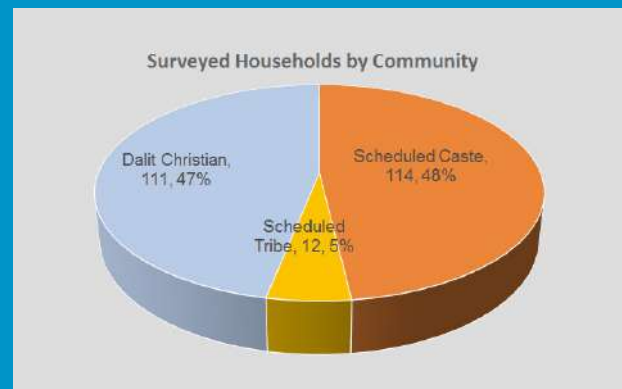


Figure 1.3: Surveyed Households, Community wise

This study derives its motivation from the need to interrogate and counter the dominant narratives by shedding light on the plight of the marginalized and documenting their distress along with the manifestations of various forms of social exclusionary behavior encountered by them during different stages. The subjects of the study and the locations have been purposively selected to cover largely the Dalits, Adivasis and the Dalit Christians.

as equal citizens and discriminatory attitudes surfacing in the disbursement of immediate cash relief and compensation for loss. But these cases have been downplayed as exceptions and not given the importance they deserve, which could be due to the prevailing historical bias and the mainstream tendency to overlook caste-based historical injustice. Genuine social inquiry must begin with the recognition that social reality should be captured primarily from the extremes of the margins. It is this understanding that necessitated the initiative to carefully study the experiences of the marginalized sections of Kerala during and after 2018 extreme rainfall, flood and landslides.

This study derives its motivation from the need to interrogate and counter the dominant narratives by shedding light on the plight of the marginalized and documenting their distress along with the manifestations of various forms of social exclusionary behavior encountered by them during different stages. The subjects of the study and the locations have been purposively selected to cover largely the Dalits, Adivasis and the Dalit Christians. The approach is a combination of collecting qualitative and quantitative information in a participatory manner. The study grew organically from the challenging relief and rehabilitation activi-

ties carried out by the investigators in some of the locations where the marginalized faced not only the disaster situation but also social exclusion in both implicit and violently explicit forms while the state seemed to be indifferent to such situations where even state institutions were biased towards the victims.

The term marginalized in this study denotes Dalits and Adivasis. This study has further categorized Dalits as Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians (DC) owing to the specificities of historical backwardness, Constitutional guarantees, protective laws and the compensation to the affected people available to Dalits in India. The household level survey carried out as part of this study covers 237 households from the marginalized communities purposively selected to constitute a representative sample of the marginalized. The sample is drawn from Alappuzha (37.1%), Idukki (17.3%), Kottayam (12.2%) and Pathanamthitta (33.3%) districts (*Tables 1.1, 1.2; Fig. 1-2, 1-3*). Out of the 237 households, 48.1, 5.1 and 46.8 percent respectively belongs to SC, ST and DC communities.

Although, the Dalit Christians—Dalits who have adopted Christianity as their religious belief—experience social exclusion equally as

District	Number	Percentage
Alappuzha	88	37.4
Idukki	41	17.3
Kottayam	29	12.2
Pathanamthitta	79	33.3
TOTAL	237	100

Table 1.1: Number of Households Surveyed, District wise

	Scheduled Castes (SC)	Scheduled Tribes (ST)	Dalit Christians (DC)	Total
Households Surveyed	114	12	111	237
Proportion of Total	48.1%	5.1%	46.8%	100%

Table 1.2: Number of Households Surveyed, Community wise

the Scheduled Castes, they are not separately enumerated in the Census/official statistics because they are not recognized as Scheduled Castes. This is despite the fact that freedom of religion is a fundamental right in India's Constitution. The call for justice by Dalit Christians is mostly go unheeded until now. Hence, we have given attention to the Dalit Christian situation during the disaster in this study. The term Dalit Christian is explicitly used according to the context.

1.5 Immersive Research Approach

This study was not premeditated and was originated from the circumstances. On 15th august 2018 a group of young researchers and activists from our circle gathered around in Pennamma Bhavanam, Thiruvalla in Kerala with an aim to extend support to the flood affected areas in central Kerala. The idea for such a gathering was influenced by the relief work carried out earlier by Mr. Stanly Johnson, a Dalit activist and musician, who single handedly undertook volunteer relief work in the remote villages of Kuttanadu during the annual flood that preceded the deluge. Our group had extended some relief through him during the annual floods and soon we also realized that the situation of Dalits during floods was alarming. That prompted us to organize more relief, especially to distribute cooked food to the affected people in the isolated and remote sites in Kuttanadu where governmental and non-governmental relief materials hardly reached during the deluge. Though the work was started with half dozen volunteers and a sack of rice, we received tremendous support from our friends, both as volunteers and in the form of relief materials.

This support enabled the enthusiastic youth in our team to experience the reality of floods in Kuttanadu while carrying out the relief work. We had made no compromise in reaching the isolated bunds in Kuttanadu during the deluge (*Appendix-1*).

This relief work provided insights to two major aspects of Dalit situation that aggravated their sufferings during the floods: a) backwardness, and b) caste hatred of non-Dalits towards Dalits. This enabled us to recognize and hence identify the two major tasks that a group like us should undertake. One, the need to strengthen the discourse around imagining and rebuilding Kerala based on environmental justice and social justice, upholding values of humanity. Two, the need to assess the extent to which the disaster affected the marginalized communities, and to bring it to the attention of the state government and to the public at large. For this, Centre for Social Studies and Culture and Abhayaloka Buddhist Community jointly organized a consultation for discussing the Government's call for rebuilding Kerala.

The consultation was titled "*Imagining a New Kerala: Priorities, Possibilities and Challenges*" in which thinkers, activists and students from various spheres shared their views on the rebuilding mission (*Appendix - 2*). Meanwhile, we realized that debates were already ongoing on rebuilding Kerala and on Nava Keralam (New Kerala) and that in these debates and in the proposed projects, the concerns of the marginalized sections are rendered invisible. Thus, we as a group who had experienced the naked reality of caste in the floods, took the responsibility in unfolding the marginalized experienc-



CSSC-ABC volunteers visit Kunnumma- Thakazhy, a waterlogged Dalit settlement in Alappuzha District | CSSC

es and narratives of the disaster. The study is more like action research than a highly structured academic exercise. We have adopted an immersive research approach with which the investigators attempted to understand the experiences of the flood affected.

This study has focused on four districts: Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Idukki. We have made attempts to address the geographical differences of Kerala—the Highlands, Middlelands and Lowlands and the differences in the region-specific characteristics of the disaster. Our team of researchers visited 237 households of the marginalized in 21 villages across four districts. We have adopted an ethnographic and immersive approach for the study and gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. We came to a unanimous agreement that direct observation of the disaster-stricken areas is a must to have a reasonable understanding of lives those affected by the disaster. The immersive approach adopted exposed us to the extent of atrocities inflicted by fellow humans on those affected by a natural calamity. We decided that the key decisions taken by the government officials in the case of danger zones and liveable/non livable

houses are to be observed in order to realize how a dignified existence and equal citizenship are denied to the marginalized. We have also listened to the people’s voices through focus group discussions in order to gather narratives of the disaster, including their experience with floods, landslides/ and land slips, escape stories, caste and other forms of discrimination faced and shared life in the camps. We used structured questionnaire and unstructured checklists. Study included purposive house to house survey, one to one interviews, consultations and group discussions (*Appendix -3*) Another way of marshaling information was focus group discussions at specific sites visited.

Our household-level survey attempted a quantitative assessment of the losses and the economic situation of the marginalized groups (*Appendix-3*). We have adopted purposive sampling method for the household survey because it was our intention to find how the marginalized sections are affected. The central idea of the study was to organize the scattered voices and narratives from the marginalized sections in order to analyze them supported by social science knowledges of disaster, marginalization and citizenship.

The various aspects of the experiences of marginalized sections recorded in this study are the following:

1. Why do the pre-disaster vulnerabilities and disadvantages of the marginalized sections cannot be separated from their sufferings during the disaster;
2. How did the marginalized people experience official and non-official rescue and relief measures during the disaster;
3. How did the marginalized experience the official disaster management system of the state, and;
4. The extent of damages and losses faced by the marginalized in the disaster.

The real-life experiences of the marginalized in this study undoubtedly serve as a powerful critique of the dominant narratives by the powerful and the privileged sections of the society. The documenting of the voices of the marginalized and the recounting of their struggles for survival in the face of adversities and inhuman treatment meted out to them even amidst a disaster would be cathartic. The interviews in most cases have been conducted confidentially and given the conditions of the respondents struggling to survive, their names are being kept confidential. Because of that, we have used pseudonyms at many places, even though we have records and necessary evidence. The names of the localities, however, have been given as it is.

1.6 Organisation of the Report

This study has eight chapters, a foreword and appendices. The first chapter—Introduction—contextualizes the study, discusses the motivation and the approach used. The second chapter summarizes the conversations around the agonizing experiences of the marginalized in the disaster and their struggles for survival facing both the natural calamity and social exclusion when humanitarian spirit ought to have prevailed. The third chapter portrays the rescue operations and relief camps as a concentrated form of the social reality that is characterized by caste hierarchies and historically perpetuated marginalization. The fourth chapter takes a closer look at the role of the state and the disaster management system against the experiences of the marginalized. The fifth chapter discusses gender related aspects and the encounters with patriarchy; both of individuals and in its institutionalized forms. The sixth chapter focuses on the plight of the Dalit Christians who face social exclusion but are not officially recognized as victims of historical and continuing discrimination. The seventh chapter summarizes the analysis of quantitative data collected from the household surveys. The eighth and last chapter is the conclusion consisting of reflections and thoughts about the future, envisaging rebuilding based on the experiences of the marginalized. The appendices include some background material and the checklists used in the study.

CSSC-ABC volunteers carrying out relief operations in isolated places | CSSC





A Dalit house completely destroyed in the deluge | CSSC

Chapter-2

Marginalized and Worst Affected

2.1 Background

There is a widely shared understanding that the state of Kerala, India, has offered to the world a 'model' of social and economic development and has 'experienced' high social and economic development compared to other federal states in India. Certain indices of Kerala's social development are comparable to that of Scandinavian countries. Assessing these celebratory accounts of the 'model' or 'experiences' social development in Kerala in the context of recent Kerala floods, this section analyses the lived experiences and lived realities of the marginalized sections of Kerala—the Dalits and Adivasis, and of women in particular during the August 2018 floods.

A Dalit christian house in West Othara, collapsed due to heavy rains | CSSC



Spatial marginalization, or the higher risks associated with the living and working environments, is a widely experienced feature of the marginalized communities in most parts of the world and it applies to Kerala as well. The gains of Kerala society seem very rosy when seen as that of the aggregated entity expressed in terms of overall statistics ignoring the internal differentiations and the historic vulnerabilities faced by the marginalized.

Spatial marginalization, or the higher risks associated with the living and working environments, is a widely experienced feature of the marginalized communities in most parts of the world and it applies to Kerala as well. The gains of Kerala society seem very rosy when seen as that of the aggregated entity expressed in terms of overall statistics ignoring the internal differentiations and the historic vulnerabilities faced by the marginalized. However, be it disaster vulnerability, citizenship, quality of life or any such aspect, the experiences of the marginalized stand in sharp contrast to that of the dominant sections or the mainstream. Therefore, inferences drawn exclusively on macro figures carry the risk of reinforcing or even aggravating the marginalization of the marginalized.

Although the central and northern part of Kerala were severely affected by the unprecedented, torrential raining and floods, the experiences of the disaster varied from region to region and community to community. The experiences of landslides¹ in Idukki district were different from the experience of the perennially inundated people living in the Kuttanadu region in the Alappuzha district. The flow of rainwater and discharges from dams impacted differently to the dwellers in the low-lying riversides in the

1. The term 'landslide' is used synonymously with landslip. Landslide/ landslip is the movement of a mass of rock, debris, earth, or soil (soil being a mixture of earth and debris) down a slope. Landslides occur when various types of shear stresses within a slope exceed the shear strength (resistance to shearing) of the materials that form the slope. According to the United States Geological Survey, the landslide encompasses five modes of slope movement: falls, topples, slides, spreads, and flows. These are further subdivided by the type of geologic material (bedrock, debris, or earth). Debris flows (commonly referred to as mudflows or mudslides, called 'urulpottal' in Malayalam) and rock falls are examples of common landslide types.
https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-a-landslide-and-what-causes-one?qt-news_science_products=0#qt-news_science_products

midlands which differed from both the Alappuzha and Idukki in the coastal and Western Ghats regions, respectively.

Rather than pursuing a simple and uncomplicated narrative of "every sections of the society getting severely affected by the floods", the cases represented here demonstrate how social and historical injustices, structural oppression and marginalization played a crucial role in accelerating the sufferings of the marginalized. Living in remote, isolated and ghettoized situations facing everyday humiliation and lacking social capital added significantly to death and destruction of the marginalized in the recent floods.

2.2 Ghettoized Settlements

Discrimination and marginalization of Dalits and Adivasis in Kerala has a long history. Predominantly, the settlement pattern of Dalits in the state is such that while they are distributed across the state, an estimated 60% live in over 26,000 'colonies', which are termed habitats in official studies. This is an insidious form of segregation perpetuated by supposedly affirmative policies. Such conditions have been termed 'subordinated inclusion'². The Dalits living in such colonies face greater discrimination and lower status. An article in an online Malayalam news portal *Nava Malayali* points out that most of these colonies remain outside neighborhood collectives, and are not actively participating in the local governance system³. They have a very weak or almost no links to

2. Pramod, K. M. (2015). Subordinated Inclusion: The Developmental State and the Dalit Colonies of Southern Kerala. *Development and the Politics of Human Rights*, 198, 45.

3. Meera Velayudhan (2018) Towards social acceptance and inclusion – The need for comprehensive change. <https://navamalayali.com/2018/10/29/towards-social-inclusion-meera-velayudhan/> (October 29, 2018)

The frequently occurring disasters such as floods, the pre-existing vulnerabilities, the lack of risk reduction measures and an existence trapped in a risk prone location forms a vicious cycle that aggravates poverty, marginalization, vulnerabilities and historically induced disadvantages.

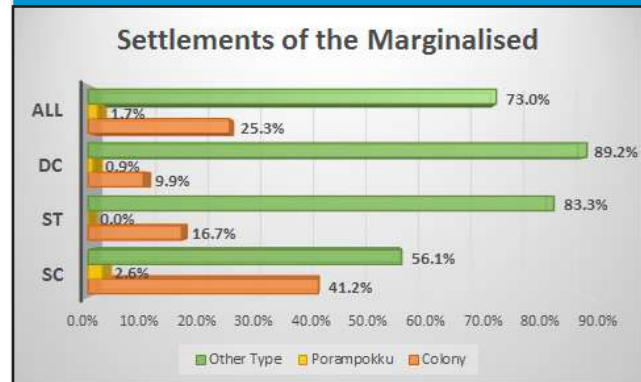


Figure 2.1: Settlements of the Marginalized

social networks facilitating access to opportunities and benefits.

Although there are several state sponsored welfare measures for the marginalized, there are hardly any dedicated disaster risk management measures or disaster preparedness efforts for these highly vulnerable communities living in highly risk prone areas. For instance, there is no mechanism to support these communities frequently subjected to flood hazard, which not only sets the community back by destroying most of the small progress they may have made but also make them considerably weakened than before. The marginalized are thus forced to carry the recurring burdens of disaster on their own shoulders.

In the absence of adequate support, and a permanent solution to the recurring hazards, the complete responsibility of safeguarding lives and assets from the terrible calamities fell exclusively on the individual families of the marginalized. The State does not have any policy to address the problems faced by the marginalized, and secondly State does not have any mechanism to support them in the event of natural calamities. This makes the marginalized equally vulnerable to structural oppression in the society and natural calamities.

Overall, the frequently occurring disasters such as floods, the pre-existing vulnerabilities, the lack of risk reduction measures and an existence trapped in a risk prone location forms a vicious cycle that aggravates poverty, marginalization, vulnerabilities and historically induced disadvantages. More than 41 percent of SC, about 17 percentage of Adivasis and nearly 10 percent Dalit Christians live in Colonies or Ghettos (Table 2.1, Fig. 2.1).

2.3 Status of Dwellings before Disaster

The following table shows the community wise ownership of houses among the marginalized before the disaster. Important information we have gathered is that 4% people from the marginalized communities did not have their own houses before the disaster. Nearly 97% SCs, 92% STs and 95 % Dalit Christians had their own houses before the disaster (Table 2.2). It is important to note that 3% SCs, 1% STs and 6% Dalit Christians do not have own housing. They had found alternative dwelling places such as rented houses, living in relatives' house etc.

To the homeless people, we enquired the reason for their homeless condition. Among the respondents who do not own a house, 60% did

Table 2.1: Settlements, Community wise of Surveyed Households

Settlement Type	SC (%)	ST (%)	DC (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
'Colony' (i.e., ghetto like)	41.2	16.7	9.9	60	25.3
Porampokku	2.6	0.0	0.9	4	1.7
Other Location	56.1	83.3	89.2	173	73.0
Total	114	12	111	237	100

	SC	ST	DC	Total
Own House	111 (97 %)	11 (92%)	105 (95%)	227 (96%)
Without Own House	3 (3%)	1 (8%)	6 (5%)	10 (4%)

Table 2.2: House Ownership, Community-wise of Surveyed Households

No	Nature of House	SC	ST	DC	Total
1	Concrete, completed	7 (6.1%)	1 (8.3%)	6(5.4%)	14 (5.9%)
2	Concrete, incomplete	39 (34.2%)	7 (58.3%)	20 (18.0%)	66 (27.8%)
3	Tile/Asbestos thatched, complete	10 (8.8%)	1 (8.3%)	22 (19.8%)	33 (13.9%)
4	Tile/Asbestos thatched, incomplete	46 (40.4%)	1 (8.3%)	50 (45.0%)	97 (40.9%)
5	Old House – Livable	3 (2.6%)	-	2 (1.8%)	5 (2.1%)
6	Old House - need immediate replacement	3 (2.6%)	-	1 (0.9%)	4 (1.7%)
7	Hut – thatched with plastic/ palm-leaf	3 (2.6%)	1 (8.3%)	4 (3.6%)	8 (3.4%)
	TOTAL	111(97%)	11 (9%)	105(95%)	227(96%)

Table 2.3: Status of Dwellings before the Disaster, Community-wise of Surveyed Households

not possess land to build house, savings to purchase land. The remaining (40%) families own land but do not have funds to build a house. The case of SCs and STs are comparatively manageable since they are eligible for various government schemes for purchasing land and constructing new houses. But the case of Dalit Christians is complex and pathetic since they are not eligible for the housing schemes available for SC and ST but compete with the dominant communities which are powerful and are close to the political parties and elected representatives through caste-based networks.

There is considerable politicization of the local bodies and their decision-making, and because of that political influence is a big factor in the distribution of benefits. The Dalit Christians who are not politically organized and wield very little political influence get a raw deal in the allotments when they compete with the powerful and influential applicants in the general category. In the process, often they are placed very low in the eligibility list of potential beneficiaries prepared by the Panchayats (local governing bodies) for the schemes applicable for general category. Unless some changes are brought about, it is difficult for the Dalit Christians to access benefits which they have a legitimate right over.

Many Dalit Christians have, indeed, benefitted from the housing scheme of the Kerala State Corporation for Converted Christians and other recommended bodies, the only governmental housing scheme for them. However, many such houses remain unfinished. The Corporation has issued recovery notices to several Dalit Christian families who have failed in the repayment of loans due to various reasons. Government must ensure that such schemes reduce and not aggravate social exclusion of Dalit Christians.

Owning a house is undoubtedly related to land ownership and land rights. Government schemes for constructing new houses are available to SCs and STs but land ownership remains a problem. Historically landless Dalits have received 10 cents of *kudikidappu* land or became ghettoized in 'Colonies'. The new generation faces the problem of not having land ownership. The colonies have now become very overcrowded and the small parcels of *kudikidappu* land are divided and sub-divided into tiny portions.

The government schemes supporting purchasing three cents of land by a Dalit Christian family is not solving the problem. Generations of Dalit Christians are facing the same problem while

	Type and Condition	SC (%)	ST (%)	DC (%)	Total
1	Concrete, finished	6.1	8.3	5.4	5.9
2	Concrete, unfinished	34.2	58.3	18.0	27.8
3	Tile/asbestos roof – finished	8.8	8.3	19.8	13.9
4	Tile/Asbestos roof, unfinished	40.4	8.3	45.0	40.9
5	Liveable old house	2.6	-	1.8	2.1
6	Old in need of urgent replacement	2.6	-	0.9	1.7
7	Plastic sheet or coconut leaf thatched hut	2.6	8.3	3.6	3.4
	Total Households (Number)	111	11	105	227

Table 2.4: Condition of Houses of Dalits and Adivasis before the Disaster

the privileged castes are coping up with such schemes. In this context we enquired about the number of couples sharing a single house among the surveyed households, and there are a few cases in which three or four couples are living under the same roof. If they become eligible for one of the housing schemes, they must shift to a plot of three cents where a small “livable house” can be built.

2.4 The Idea of a Livable House

The ‘standard’ housing schemes for the Dalits and Adivasis is three to five cents of land and a house with minimum facilities. The scheme operates without allowing any flexibility to ac-

commodate the preferences or wishes of the ‘beneficiaries’. The schemes are rigid with the same financial assistance irrespective of the regional variations. The same funding is available for housing in different locations—be it the hazard-prone and remote low-lying Kuttanadu region, close to road roadside in middle lands and on a hill top in the higher ranges. It is obvious that with such an approach, multi-hazard resistant housing as envisaged in development with disaster risk reduction is not possible for the marginalized.

The post-disaster rapid assessment of the damages to houses was carried out in such a manner leading to incorrect reporting of the

A hut on the verge of collapsing, Mundody colony, Vadayar I CSSC



Landholding Group (cents)	SC (%)	ST (%)	DC (%)	Total	Proportion
Landless	4.4%	0.0%	5.6%	11	4.7%
Above 0 to 2	1.8%	0.0%	1.9%	4	1.7%
Above 2 to 5	46.5%	9.1%	40.20%	97	41.8%
Above 5 to 10	18.4%	18.2%	19.6%	44	19.0%
Above 10 to 20	20.2%	9.1%	16.8%	42	18.1%
Above 20 to 50	4.4%	45.5%	8.4%	19	8.2%
Above 50 to 100	4.4%	18.2%	7.5%	15	6.5%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%		100.00%
Total (N) Households	114	11	107	232	

Table 2.5: Farmland-holding (cents), Community wise of Households Surveyed

Note: Excluding cases of incomplete data

damages. It is difficult to understand how many severely damaged and unfit to live houses have been marked as livable houses. This is the case in many parts of Idukki district where housing damages have been extensive due to series of landslides. Very many badly damaged houses in Idukki have been marked as livable house just because the front portion or a part of the roof appears not to have been damaged while the rest of the house has been extensively damaged. It appears that caste bias has played a role in denying compensation to the damaged houses of the marginalized and declaring it as fit for living. A serious investigation or social audit is needed to determine how such strange anomalies have happened even in damage assessment.

Among 227(96%) households having their own houses, only about six percent possessed concrete houses which were in a completed condition before the disaster (Table 7.7). About 28 percent were living in unfinished concrete houses, with the work stopped at different stages due to various constraints. Nearly 40% SCs and 67% Adivasis have attempted building concrete houses whereas only about 23% Dalit Christians have attempted building concrete houses. This is a notable difference between Dalit Christians and Scheduled Caste Dalits who are eligible for government

It is evident that most of the people from the marginalized communities (41%) live in *katcha* houses roofed with tiles or asbestoses sheets (Table 7.7). About two percent were living in old houses that are considered “livable” while

and 1.7 percent were living in old houses that are in such poor condition that they ought to be repaired/rebuilt immediately. Nearly 3.4 percent are living in small huts thatched with coconut leaves or tarpaulin before the disaster. Among these families, 25.1% houses are registered in the name of women, 71.4% in the name of men and 3.5% jointly in the name of both men and women.

2.5 Land Holding

Nearly 5 percent of the marginalized households covered in the study are landless (Table 2.5). Most households own land between two to ten cents.

2.6 Indebtedness

Among the households covered in the survey except 50 houses others have different degree of indebtedness from various sources. This study covers 237 households having 1025 members and their total debt is about Rs.2.38 crores (Rs 23.78 million), which amounts to an average debt of over one lakh (Rs 1,00,341) per household or Rs 23,200 a per head. The smallest amount of debt per individual is about rupees two thousand and the biggest rupees ten lakhs (one million). Of the 251 borrowings from different sources, 44 are from self-help groups like *Kudumbashree* (State approved SHG/micro finance). Ninety of the loans are from banks and 102 from local money lenders. Thirteen borrowings are from personal contacts. Terms of borrowings from SHGs range from one month to twelve years. The terms of

bank loans range from 6 months to 40 years. The term of borrowings from money lenders range from 2 months to 6 years and from other sources 4 months to 15 years.

2.7 Isolated and Miles Away from the Mainstream

The voices of the marginalized people living in highly hazard prone locations have been incorporated in this study by conducting in-depth and extensive interviews in such locations with people who have been experiencing the recurring floods and have experienced the unprecedented deluge of 2018. It is, indeed a sad commentary on the Kerala society that the dwellings of the historically disadvantaged communities continue to be on such risk prone and desolate areas without any major change in the situation. Some of the respondents interviewed for this study are from Kuttanad, a region through which flow four major rivers—Pampa, Manimala, Meenachil, and Achankovil. The region which lies 2.2 m to 0.6 m below the mean sea level is one of the few places where farming is carried out below the sea level. Dwellings in Kuttanad are built on raised mud platforms (earthen mounds) in the low-lying lands in the flooded paddy areas or the purambokku bhoomi (unassigned government

land). The result is the proliferation of ghettoized, exclusionary and exclusive Dalit settlements, known as “colonies”.

Flooding and inundation in varying degrees is a recurring phenomenon in such low-lying areas. Yet, the conversations with the people living there and our field visit made us realize that there are hardly any disaster risk reduction systems in place in those regions. It is as though the disaster management assumes that the people living in the riskiest locations are so habituated to the risks that they can take care of themselves with hardly any organized external support. Some striking excerpts from the poignant and saddening face to face interviews are reproduced here, although the soul of the statements have been lost while translating them into English.

SAJEEV of Kavalam (Alappuzha): *“Once the paddy fields submerge, as happen in every flood,, Dalits suffer the most because they lacked safe houses and lose their daily work and wages. But these sufferings hardly figure in the mainstream discussions on the disaster. ... Whatever may be the rebuilding plan and whoever may be executing it, Dalits must get priority. Everything else in re-building may be considered secondary.”*

A toilet, collapsed at Ezhumamthuruthu | CSSC





Remains of the floods, a sight from Ezhikkadu colony, Pathanamthitta | CSSC

SASHI: “Dalits have been suffering for a long, for generations, and the unprecedented flood has alarmingly aggravated the distress!”

EDWIN, a Dalit Christian: “Dalits in Kuttanadu region have somehow managed to live on mud platforms in purambokku bhoomi and Dalit ‘colonies’ are situated within low-lying perennially submerged paddy fields. The people forced to live in low lying; waterlogged lands are always surrounded by water. They have no option but to step into water to reach home. Lack of funds and other resources force them to live in such pitiable conditions.”

One crucial defining feature of Dalit lives in Kerala is the remoteness of their settlements, which make it difficult for them to access basic services and amenities essential for a dignified, decent, existence. It also makes their engagement and participation in the local governance either difficult or negligible. A consequence of the marginalization is the restriction on the citizenship rights of the marginalized. It is an anachronism that in a state with human development indices matching that of some of the highly developed countries, developmental initiatives have not tried to address the harrow-

ing conditions of existence of some the most marginalized. Incidentally the same region is a globally well-known tourist destination and tourism is actively promoted by the tourism department of Kerala.

In general, most of the settlements of the marginalized; the Dalits and Adivasis, consisting of decrepit sheds, dilapidated huts and semi-permanent houses are in remote, under-serviced and natural hazard prone locations lacking infrastructure. Many are located on risky hill slopes, marshlands or perennially submerged lowlands cut off from the ‘mainstream’ Kerala, disconnected from the ‘model’ that the state is proud of. The fertile and bountiful lands along roads and rivers in the high ranges in Kerala are historically occupied—legally and illegally—by the dominant privileged castes and other elites. Historically, Dalit Christian settlements, settlements of the people who had joined the protestant missions in Kerala since the 19th century, are on the hazardous parts of the hills or in the marshy areas. This is because in the 19th and 20th century missionaries purchased land for them in remote places in order to assure their safety from the landlords who used to physically manhandle them

One crucial defining feature of Dalit lives in Kerala is the remoteness of their settlements, which make it difficult for them to access basic services and amenities essential for a dignified, decent, existence. It also makes their engagement and participation in the local governance either difficult or negligible. A consequence of the marginalization is the restriction on the citizenship rights of the marginalized.

owing to their caste pride. With no efforts to eliminate the effects of spatial marginalization, these spaces continue to perpetuate social exclusion.

On the other side, Dalits settlements are in the remote, perennially submerged paddy fields of Kuttanadu, the tiny pieces of land allotted to them as kudikidappu (homestead land) measuring nearly 500 square feet, as part of the 'successful' Land Reforms in Kerala. Aggravating social exclusion, they stand out as stark examples of what is wrong with development process in Kerala. Large proportion of Dalits are living in exclusive ghettos, called 'colonies', often caricatured as barbaric and dangerous in the dominant consciousness. Few Adivasis, and the Dalits who owned land in the early decades had lost/mortgaged their fertile land to the rich to meet day to day necessities or as a result of being usurped by the rich. The spatial marginalization has been an important aspect of humiliation inflicted on the Dalits. In the context of flood and landslides of 2018, the extent of humiliation reached such extremes that it destroyed several myths of progressiveness. This is evident in the few accounts given below.

RAHUL narrated the situation of Dalits in Idukki district: Most of the Dalits are living in what are considered "danger zones". They were forced to sell the small plots of lands in the plains and had to move to these places. Calamities always unfailingly visited those Dalit settlements. Most Dalit houses are on the rocky/slippery/sloppy sides of the hills. For instance,

Maniyarankudi, a tribal settlement, witnessed a huge, devastating landslide. The entire hill slipped, and five members of a family died at the spot. Nobody could reach the place and help the affected family due to heavy rain and repeated landslides on the way. People could not trace the bodies for four days. Even for the 'JCB' (earth movers) could not reach there. When one 'JCB' driver attempted to reach there, the vehicle got stuck in the mud. Only when the rain stopped and the atmosphere became calm that the rescuers could recover the decomposed bodies.

LISSY a Dalit Christian woman shared Dalit "helplessness" in the context of calamities. She said most of the Dalits had their relatives in Kuttanadu region. So, they could not relocate to relative's home during floods like non-Dalits. Initially when the flood water rose, some relocated to the relatives' houses in some other places in Kuttanadu in the hope that they would be safe there. But suddenly the new place also began to submerge, and all of them were left with no option but to move to a relief camp.

A pertinent question in the context of disaster management is who should be informed of/alerted first in case of an impending disaster? How does the disaster management mechanism reach the intended population living in the remote places (such as bunds in Kuttanadu) and isolated, precarious settlements elsewhere?

It is the responsibility of the disaster manage-

ment authority to inform the people regarding the impending disaster, however remote they may be located. In some places police reached the houses in the remotely located bunds and asked them to relocate to safety. In some locations, the Grama Panchayat (local self-governing body) alerted the people. In many places, the announcement vehicles passed through the main streets and crossroads and issued warnings but these alerts did not reach remote areas. In some cases, the warnings made at the main streets reached remote homes when people returned to their homes in the evening after the day's work. However, most of the people remained uninformed and were struck by unexpected floods. People living in a remote bund in Muttar in Alappuzha were comparatively fortunate to receive information from radio announcement before midnight.

Another issue is the lack of infrastructure in ensuring speedy rescuing of the flood affected people. Many Dalits in Kuttanadu opined that it is important to have highly efficient motorized Yamaha engine driven boats for rescue operation because country boats could not withstand strong currents. However, Dalits and Dalit families lacked such facilities and boarded the available country boats or had to beg to the rich people to save their lives, with no state support reaching them. People from the mar-

ginalized sections could not arrange even the necessary rescue equipment like motorboats to save their life and property. When the state fails to extend support to the marginalized, the condition of the marginalized becomes difficult. And the state continuously and miserably fails to offer support to the marginalized.

2.8 Modes of Exclusion Reproduced Every Day, Every Occasion

An insidious discriminatory behavioral pattern pervasive among the privileged that targets the marginalized is humiliation. Humiliation in numerous forms, implicit and explicit, is the important mode through which caste hierarchy manifests along with other forms of domination in the caste-based Indian society. A disaster is considered a very rare occasion when humanity triumphs over such viciousness. Nevertheless, during the floods, Kerala witnessed the recalcitrant appearance of casteism in the form of humiliating the marginalized even when they were facing the worst difficulties of their lifetime. Such incidents of humiliation are to be viewed as a serious violation of human rights, denying a dignified existence to the marginalized. Yet, there were hardly any institutional intervention that recognized such abuses are occurring or were any attempts to deter such behavior. On the contrary, it is





A Dalit settlement in Alappuzha district | CSSC

evident that many of these regressive attitudes have become systemic. The following narratives show how Dalit and Adivasi groups were subjected to humiliation in the context of the disaster.

The experience of Dalits in Kunnumma village in Thakazhi, Kuttanadu is really disturbing. The working of caste-based discrimination even in the midst of natural calamities was exposed in Kunnumma as never before. The houses of Dalits are located on a marshy land in Kunnumma, and for nearly six months the houses are inundated. Water recedes only when the paddy cultivation begins, making Kunnumma safe for habitation. Dalits routinely move to the relief camps with the onset of monsoons. The routine to and from movements of Dalits to camps evoke mocking laughter among the well-to-do elite *Ezhavas* (a lower caste) and upper castes living in the area. Dalits feel humiliated by their disparaging murmurs and the lewd comments. In the last season also, they had to bear it while moving to the camps with the onset of monsoons. However, when the huge floods occurred, the laughing neighbors

too were forced to leave their houses and property and join Dalits in camps. Dalits remember the embarrassed faces of the casteist neighbors when they joined them in the relief camp.

In the northern Wayanad district of Kerala, the Adivasi communities have been suffering for long and were humiliated by the public and government authorities. The display of elite power is extremely vulgar in Wayanad. Narayanan, an academic and a member of the Adivasi community narrated the humiliation experienced by the Adivasis when the 'benevolent', 'forward looking' and industrious relief workers visited the Adivasi settlements for relief work. In Pulpally, Adivasis including his community received relief materials from different groups. A group of relief workers approached Narayanan to help them to distribute relief materials among Adivasis in remote places. The group wished to visit isolated Adivasi areas and to handover materials directly to the Adivasis. They kept on asking for broken and leaking houses that looks pathetic and wanted to take selfies and photos along with Adivasis after distributing the relief materials.



CSSC-ABC Volunteers during relief work | CSSC

NARAYANAN realised that the relief team held stereotypical and prejudiced view of Adivasis as uncultured and was using ‘relief work’ to nurture the same. The Adivasi youth accompanying the rescue and relief team plainly told them that they would not allow such intentions anymore. It is a sad commentary that there are aid workers objectifying Adivasis as savages, undeveloped, and uneducated, in the 21st century, even in the midst of a humanitarian crisis. Such tendency to objectify Adivasis is not just the curiosity of a lone group but a trend in the mainstream Kerala, who are happily nurturing such an elitist consciousness. This biased consciousness needs to be kept in mind while analyzing various psycho-social dimensions of the disaster experience of the marginalized in the ‘model’ state.

The misconceptions in Kerala’s mainstream/elite consciousness regarding Adivasis are alarming and shocking. The mainstream looks down on the Adivasis as a group pampered by the state, which is giving them free all kinds of goods and services. Travelling by bus Narayanan overheard people in the bus talking about Adivasis. One passenger opined that no Adivasi would be ready to do manual jobs and that people should not expect them to lift a finger after the disaster as they are now flooded with goodies as relief. In another context, a person asked an Adivasi co-passenger why he did not go for work on that day. The

Adivasi youth’s response that he could not find work on that day made the passenger angry and he made fun of him very rudely. He suggested that Adivasis no longer need to work since government and NGOs have dumped sacks of free rice in their homes that they can consume it leisurely. Some of our friends from Wayanad also shared the instance of the youth wing of a major political Party debating why aid workers are distributing “excessive” rice to Adivasis when they are providing relief kits on behalf of their Party and free ration is also being distributed by the government. The youth wing concluded that there was no need of any more supply to the Adivasis because that would pamper them to the extent of making them lazy.

These narratives show that even a mammoth disaster can hardly change the deep rooted and historically existing structural oppression and stereotypes and the dominant notions carefully cultivated on the lives and experiences of the marginalized sections of the society.

2.9 Unexpected Knocking on the Door: Survivors Narrate Experiences

This Section discusses another important aspect: the social backwardness of marginalized sections in education, awareness, information, and their perceptions of the likely impact of an impending disaster. However,

On his way back home, from a distance Jayaraj witnessed a huge landslide on the slope of the hill, where his house stood, and that it was washing away his very house. He rushed to the hills and found his son, a child, standing crying near the place where his house once stood. All others were washed away in the landslide and they died on the spot. The mortal remains of his loved ones were recovered only after three days.

one cannot avoid a discussion on its historical roots to understand the helplessness of the people involved in a situation of disaster. Discussion on the social backwardness in this context need to acknowledge that the mechanisms of the state completely failed to understand that social backwardness would shape disaster in specific ways and hence there is an urgent need to act accordingly.

It was surprising that people from many regions shared with us that they never expected such a devastating flood and that they would suffer in this terrible manner. This unexpectedness is to be viewed in the context of existing communication facilities in Kerala and the widespread alerts issued through media when the water level in the dams rose every day. Of course, there were problems of power failure and low battery level in mobile phones everywhere. Yet some people from Kuttanadu region believed that the flooding would be as usual and some people in the midlands believed that no flood would affect them because their houses were located at a height for water to “touch” them or the water would recede soon even if it rises unusually high. Others said they never thought that the landslides would occur in their area or their life’s earning would be lost forever.

We can see the shadow of social backwardness when we see the expectations of Dalits and Adivasis about the possible dangers of the disaster and the real impact of the disaster when they came face to face with it. We can, on the one hand, find social backwardness leading to their inability to forecast the disaster and on the other hand, the same backwardness which made them stay at home

to safeguard their lifelong earnings, despite the forecast. Hence, various dimensions of backwardness determined the sufferings of the marginalized social groups including varied levels of social backwardness and material holdings. One cannot then conclude with the “inability to forecast”—a part of social backwardness of Dalits and Adivasis as reason for terrible sufferings of disaster by the marginalized groups. The responsibility to issue warnings and alerts and to evict people from danger zones, completely rests with the disaster management mechanism of the state. What really happened was that the disaster took place in a context in which people with such backwardness had to find their own ways of making effective forecasting, taking accurate decisions and act accordingly to safeguard their lives and assets. We have to analyze how such a situation emerged in the worst disaster of the century in a state like Kerala which leads in development indices. The following narratives point to the way in which backwardness of marginalized communities played a crucial role in the manner in which they are affected by the disaster.

JAYARAJ is a driver belonging to Mannan Adivasi community from Perumkala in Idukki district. He visits home once in a week. On that day when he came home, he met his wife and children and in-laws at his home and spent some time with them. His rented house was located in the slope of a huge hill. It was on 15th August when media in Kerala was seriously discussing the disaster including the land slips and landslides occurring in Idukki district. In the evening, he went out of his house to purchase fish and provisions. On his way back



A landslide that killed four members in an Adivasi family, Perumkala, Idukki | CSSC

home, from a distance he witnessed a huge landslide on the slope of the hill, where his house stood, and that it was washing away his very house. He rushed to the hills and found his son, a child, standing crying near the place where his house once stood. All others were washed away in the landslide and they died on the spot. The mortal remains of his loved ones were recovered only after three days.

This narrative shows that people were not aware of or warned about an impending disaster. When we asked people why they did not move away from their houses to camps or safer places, they replied that leaving their own houses, they had stayed in comparatively safer places/houses in the same hill slope during night. The question is why people living in such slope of the hill did not expect a land slip even in the context of widespread disaster occurring in other parts of the state? For most of the people, moving to safety often meant moving to equally vulnerable hill tops nearby.

KALLEMADAM, an Adivasi colony adjacent to 56-Colony in Idukki district too shared the same experiences about the disaster. There was a massive landslide and it brought serious damages to the huts and belongings of Adivasi communities including Mannans and Ooralies. Several huts were washed away. The Moopan of Mannan community in the area escaped unhurt from his home by jumping out through a hole made in the mud wall of his hut. Later he was shifted to one of the quarters that was

provided for the flood affected people. Another incident occurred in the morning around 6.30 am when most people were asleep, and it was raining. The landslide occurred and covered the houses, and once they realized that their lives are in danger, they rushed to save their lives. At the same time landslide occurred in many surrounding places too. People took few necessary things and left their houses. Some people who stayed in the Colony for some more time also shifted later and when they were on the way to the camp watched landslide playing havoc. It was a dangerous situation. At the beginning, people were not ready to shift to the camp because they did not expect such a terrible disaster. People of this area had seldom experienced landslides and it was for the first time in their life that they were experiencing or watching it occurs. Later the authorities intervened seriously in this matter and people were forced to shift to the camps. After shifting to the camp, a dangerous landslide took place in the Colony area.

RAHUL a Dalit Buddhist from Cheruthoni recalled that people from 56-Colony, Perumkala, Maniyarnkudy etc., did not expect such a situation in their life even the elder people told him that they had never seen such a disaster in their life. In the 56-Colony area, there were 12 cases of landslides occurring one after another within a radius of one kilometer. This area was one with substantial Scheduled Caste population in 4 colonies. A number of landslides occurred in the forest nearby. Another serious

aspect was that the landslide occurred on the village roads too. Almost two hundred meters of road was completely washed away in the landslides which seriously affected the movement of people, rescue teams and the materials.

JAYAN BABU, a Dalit Buddhist activist and a resident near 56-Colony narrated his unexpected experience with landslide. It was in the evening that massive landslide took place near his home. He was standing in the courtyard after feeding grass to his cow. It was still raining heavily, and he was washing himself after the day's labour. He heard a sound as if the occurrence of an earthquake. At the same moment a huge mass of land, 10 meters ahead of him completely washed away. The land was steep, and his house also stood there. The landslide took place at a distance of nearly 3 meters from his house. Shocked and in awe he rushed to his house and asked his family to escape quickly. They ran to safety; he carried one child and his wife another child. They could not take any belongings, not even dress from home. His house was located below the road. He thought that the road itself was going

to be cut into pieces. Running to safety was the only thought he had at that moment. They ran to the road and safely reached the neighbor. He did not know what to do. He thought of his cow and came back after 5 hours to shift them to a safer place.

RAMACHANDRAN, JAYAN and their families, like others in 56-Colony, stayed in the Colony because they did not expect such a widespread land slip and landslides, although it was raining continuously for almost a week in Idukki district. Relief camps had been opened for those who were affected by landslides. Did the government mechanisms as well as Adivasis failed to forecast such widespread land slips and landslides even after continuous rains for almost a week without sunshine and the "day appeared as if it was night"?

Dalits in **KAVALAM, KUTTANADU** region in Alappuzha recollected with fear and anger their struggle to stay alive from the rising flood waters and felt relieved once the realization dawned on them that they had escaped. For them the experience of flood this time was really frightening though they faced floods every

A collapsed house in landslip killing three members of a Dalit family, Cheruthoni, Idukki | CSSC



It was in the morning when Rajamma was preparing breakfast and feeding her child she saw the flood water rising. The house is close to a paddy field on a purambokku land in Othara. Suddenly the water rose with a frightening sound and started to invade their house. The child started crying and she ran fast to safety carrying her child. In almost ten minutes their house was completely submerged in front of their eyes. Her experience shows how the people were hit by an unexpected flood which they thought would be another usual day during rainy season.

year since Kuttanad is a flood prone area and is below sea level. For them, what contributed to the peculiarity of flood this time was its unexpectedness. No flood survivor said that they expected such a huge and devastating flood this time or recalled that they had expected similar floods in the past. Based on their past experiences people thought that water would recede soon.

KUNJUMOL shared that the floods that they had witnessed earlier were less threatening unlike this time. This time, they could not shift their belongings to safer place when they decided to leave home. The only thought visited them was where to move with children. People started to realize the danger of the situation only when the level of water started to rise above the 'flood level'. Dalits from other parts of Kuttanadu region including Mithrakkeri, Muttar, Karumadi etc., shared the same experiences. A glaring aspect was that there was no high ground to escape to and the canals were clogged with weeds and waste. The rich and the elite left their houses days before the water increased over the 'normal flood level' and Dalits started to leave their houses only when they were submerged. In the case of Dalits in Kuttanadu, we need to ask the question why people did not expect such a disaster in the context of widespread information and alerts.

OTHARA is part of the midland region of Kerala situated near the banks of River Pamba. When the dams on Pamba opened shutters, the rivers flooded in a way which did not happen earlier. In West Otharaa, a flood survivor recounted his experience of unexpectedness

of the disaster. He was well informed of the looming calamity that had been discussed in Kerala for some days. But he never expected that the water from Pamba River would flood this time and devastate the entire home appliances in his home. On that day he was taking rest caused by a wound on his leg. There was incessant raining, throughout the day and night, and his neighbor invited him and his wife to their house on that night, to sleep in his house. The neighbor's house was located at higher ground. In the morning when he reached own house, he found his house submerged up to its roof. Since he was not expecting such a huge flooding that night, he had not moved a single important thing from his house to a safer place.

It was in the morning when Rajamma was preparing breakfast and feeding her child she saw the flood water rising. The house is close to a paddy field on a purambokku land in Othara. Suddenly the water rose with a frightening sound and started to invade their house. The child started crying and she ran fast to safety carrying her child. In almost ten minutes their house was completely submerged in front of their eyes. Her experience shows how the people were hit by an unexpected flood which they thought would be another usual day during rainy season. There are some other astonishing experiences of Dalit women and children from Thuruthikkadu Colony, Pandanadu in Pathanamthitta district. In Pandanadu, area the flood water from the river Pamba invaded submerging houses and other buildings under the water. A group of women and children narrated their experience of the flood unexpectedly shaking their otherwise quiet life.



Life in a relief camp | CSSC

One rescue boat developed cracks and drowned in heavy currents. This incident took place in the night. People in the cracked boat swam and hung to nearby trees and its branches. Elders helped to rescue children and women and held tightly their hands around coconut trees. They were drowning and few courageous women swam under water and rescued the 'missing' children. Nearly 22 people hung to whatever things; stationary and floating, for hours. An old man and a child hung on a fence around for nearly half an hour. It was a thorny fence with a lot of floating waste struck on them. All over the child's body there were deep wounds. Some feared that they were sure to die. Later they swam and got hold of an iron grill of a house.

15th August, India's Independence Day, was as usual for the residents in Thuruthikkadu Colony. They thought that the flood would not harm them since it had never happened earlier. But water started to rise soon. People consoled each other not to worry because they have never experienced heavy flooding earlier. But water suddenly rose in the mid night. They thought it would be fine next morning. A young lady shared that her son told her that the flood would be severe this time and asked all to take some precautions in advance. She put bricks under the cot in order to lift it up in case water level increased. But water unexpectedly increased up to her neck. She realized that the life is in danger. They started to walk towards nearby church. It was open and nobody was there. But soon the church was not found to be safe.

Some people called them from far asking them to come there. It was a two-story house with as-

bestos sheet roofing. The first floor was under water, but upstairs was manageable. People from the surrounding knew that this house was the only two-storey building in the vicinity and all of them swam to the house. Nearly 38 families and 150 members stayed in the house. For three days people stayed there without food and water. Some children approached nearby houses and got few bottled water and coffee powder. They prepared coffee and had it after three days of fasting.

The next day they heard the sound of a rescue boat. They crawled into the country boat and they reached the nearby Parumala church. All of them were not able to go together and by that time another boat reached them. In the meantime, one rescue boat developed cracks and drowned in heavy currents. This incident took place in the night. People in the cracked boat swam and hung to nearby trees and its branches. Elders helped to rescue chil-

dren and women and held tightly their hands around coconut trees. They were drowning and few courageous women swam under water and rescued the 'missing' children. Nearly 22 people hung to whatever things; stationary and floating, for hours. An old man and a child hung on a fence around for nearly half an hour. It was a thorny fence with a lot of floating waste struck on them. All over the child's body there were deep wounds. Some feared that they were sure to die. Later they swam and got hold of an iron grill of a house.

These happened by the early morning, around 3 am. Water was very cold and frozen and all of them started shivering, especially the kids and elderly. Their hands and bodies became numb. Later a country boat reached them and rescued all of them. The boatmen were volunteer fishermen who had joined the rescue operations and were searching for people in isolated areas. Although alarms were raised by police and issued warnings, people believed that the flooding would be same as in earlier times. But no warning came later.

Another woman recalled that it was when she was coming out of her house with her teenage daughter that she encountered the floods. Her daughter did not know swimming. Both of them held tightly their hand not to be separated in strong currents. They were unable to step forward due to strong currents and her daughter fell down, getting separated from mother. Mother searched for daughter in flood water and caught hold of her hair. She tightly held her hair and pulled her back from the deeper side of the inundated road. She said that if she could not hold her hair, the daughter would not have been with her now and thanked God while narrating it with tears. They had left all the valuable things in their home and lost everything in the flood. They were later active in rescue work. Another woman narrated her story of coping with flood with a paralyzed husband. It was very difficult to carry him, and she was alone at home. Somehow, she managed to make him sit on a chair and brought him above water and tied the chair to the roof and left the place. The next day he was rescued by voluntary fishermen rescuers. She found it





Women sharing their experiences at an interactive session at Kavalam I CSSC

Dalits from different parts of Kavalam Panchayat shared that Panchayath Member told them to escape to safety very early. During seasonal floods they kept their belongings at a high rack and lived there. But this time the water level rose, and the toilets became clogged and useless. Then some people were forced to move to relief camps. Another reason for leaving home was the frightening situation caused by disruption in power supply and entry of snakes into houses. EDWIN, a Dalit Christian had to kill snakes including highly venomous cobra several times from his house in two days. Some people shifted to relief camp only when the water rose up to their neck.

difficult to recall those experiences and explain the agony of leaving her husband alone in the flooded home.

During field visit we found a cooking gas cylinder stuck to the roof-top water tank of a house in Thuruthikkadu colony. The residents of the house informed us that they found the cylinder there after the floods. With markings in Tamil we assumed it must have been carried down by the flood waters from Tamil Nadu bordering Western Ghats.

2.10 Reluctance to Leave Village and Home

Some people played down the alert information received in advance. Since people of Kuttanadu were familiar with floods and have been experiencing it for years, many of them

did not want to leave home. On the fourth day of flood, our rescue team found some families staying on the roof top in Kavalam. In order to persuade them to escape to safety, a member of the rescue team jokingly told them that he would inform the police about their stay for which they got angry with them. A Dalit family with toddlers was found in a country boat with roof preparing rice gruel and sleeping inside the boat in Kavalam.

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Ramachandran managed to save himself and animals were also rescued. He ran towards his home and asked everyone to escape. He stood numb and with empty mind for a moment. At the same time, he witnessed a frightening scene of trees being uprooted and in his own words felt that

“huge trees walking towards me in a fit of rage!”

by disruption in power supply and entry of snakes into houses. EDWIN, a Dalit Christian had to kill snakes including highly venomous cobra several times from his house in two days. Some people shifted to relief camp only when the water rose up to their neck. LISSY, a Dalit Christian woman admitted that people in her area decided to leave their houses only when their belongings, including stored drinking water cans & pots started to wash away.

RAMACHANDRAN residing in 56-Colony in Idukki district narrated his experience of the unexpected landslide. He stayed at home with other family members, despite the heavy rain, looking after the livestock which was his main source of income. On that fateful rainy day he could not hear any sound from outside due to water flowing in the nearby stream. The stream was overflowing due to the incessant rains for the past three days. All of a sudden, a huge mass of cracked land slipped and fell over his house. Smelling trouble, he rushed out of his house and attempted to release the goats in the nearby pen.

The moment he turned back to assess the damage to his house, another landslide took place at the pen. He found 6 goats were covered with the mud and the shed was broken completely. While attempting to save the goats, the remaining broken part of the land slipped on him. Half of his body was sunk under mud. He managed to save himself and animals were also rescued. He ran towards his home and asked everyone to escape. He stood numb and with empty mind for a moment. At the same time, he witnessed a frightening scene

of trees being uprooted and in his own words felt that *“huge trees walking towards me in a fit of rage!”* Meanwhile, the cattle shed was damaged completely. People across the stream asked Ramachandran to move to safety. The stream was overflowing and there was only one possible way to escape. Using a ropeway that was used in a nearby construction site, Ramachandran and his family escaped to safety.

Narratives of the marginalized groups from three different regions including high lands, middle lands and low lands show that there are no differences when marginalized face calamities. Analyzing the narratives of unexpected disaster we find that social backwardness of the marginalized is the main reason for the unexpectedness of the disaster and subsequent sufferings. This unexpectedness has caused heavy losses including loss of lives among the marginalized communities. It is in this context that we need to discuss the question of how a section of the society in Kuttanadu region, specifically from Kavalam, the rich and the caste elites, could save their lives and property unlike Dalits? Social development has played a crucial role in the timely decisions of the upper castes and the aspects of social backwardness lay in the sufferings of Dalits and other marginalized groups.

Social backwardness is the backwardness in education, availability of information, awareness, etc. In this context the inability to take decision can be viewed as one of the important parameters of social backwardness. When Dalits and Adivasis are informed about a danger, there are several things that restrain them



Dalit experiences during the flood: A session at Kavalam I CSSC

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from taking a quick and wise decision to leave home immediately. Though they are aware about the dangers, some people are not willing to leave home. There is something restraining them from taking this decision. One reason is the loss of their house and property, the loss of daily earning and the means of survival, as in the case of Ramachandran. But the delay in taking a decision sometimes takes their lives forever. The delay is reflected in bringing knowledge into practice. This is an important parameter of social backwardness. The backwardness in terms of living in remote locations and lack of infrastructure contribute to the suffering of the marginalized. The dimensions of social backwardness do not stop here. The experience of the marginalized sections when they live along with upper caste elites are discussed in the following Chapters.

2.11 Conclusion

Analyzing the experience of the marginalized during the flood disaster reveals that the pre-disaster backwardness of these sections has played an important role in making the sufferings of these groups unparalleled. We can-

not find any differences in the experiences of disaster among the various Dalit communities. Dalit Christians, Dalit Buddhists and Dalit Hindus have faced the ruthlessness of the disaster and the social and other backwardness of these people have accelerated their sufferings. This is because all these three groups belong to the same ostracized caste groups who are ex-slave castes of Kerala and the experiences of everyday humiliation, backwardness, isolation and sufferings among them are similar and shared. The differences are in the sufferings of the people are its regional specificities. This point is important when we look at the discrimination in distributing compensation and relief materials by the government to Dalits following various religious faiths. Adivasis and women among all the marginalized communities are the other affected people who are sharing additional sufferings due to the nature of their marginal existence. Adivasis are mostly affected by the isolation of dwelling places. Women who suffer the most must be taken for serious consideration in the context of disaster. They had to compete with the privileged men and women in order to rescue themselves during calamities.



A girl child from Alappuzha being rescued by CSSC volunteer, Simon VS | CSSC

The Untold Stories of Rescue and Life in the Relief Camps

3.1 Background

In the post-flood scenario, two self-congratulatory images have dominated Kerala's public sphere through social media, print media and visual media. One, celebrating Kerala as the epitome of unity, which stood united as one entity during the deluge, and second, the complete vanishing of caste during the deluge. The former, asserts that Kerala society and the state disaster management mechanism faced the floods with such a remarkable unity and determination that all rifts and divisive tendencies in Kerala society were kept at bay during search, rescue and relief operations. The latter presents a picture in which caste, a pernicious presence in India's social life, abruptly disappeared with the disaster, temporarily and miraculously, presumably 'washed away' in the flood. It is thus claimed, the disaster brought about an unprecedented 'unity' of the people of Kerala.

The screenshot shows the top portion of a news article on the website 'THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS'. The date is Wednesday, May 08, 2019, 05:54:54 PM. The article title is 'Here's how Kerala floods broke the religious barriers'. Below the title is a sub-headline: 'Instances of unity have come forward wherein people together are giving their best to help bring life back to normal.' There are social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. The article is dated 'Published: 01st September 2018 11:19 AM | Last Updated: 01st September 2018 11:19 AM'. A large photograph shows a flooded area with buildings and trees. On the right side, there is a 'Latest' section with several news snippets: 'Huge explosion rocks Kabul as attorney general's office targeted', 'Finding purpose in training key when not in XI, feels Delhi Capitals pacer Trent Boult', 'Saffron, chants of 'Jai Shree Ram' dominate Digvijaya Singh's roadshow in Bhopal', '1 dead, 8 hurt in Colorado school shooting, 2 in custody', 'Key to our success has been condition-specific planning: Mumbai Indians spinner Jayant Yadav', and 'Cricketer, not woman cricketer: Smriti Mandhana asks why there should'. There is also a 'Ketto' donation banner for a 4-year-old child named Aayush.

While people found common ground and work united in times of disaster, it need not take the forms popularized in these dominant narratives. The conjectures, actively propagated by the state, mainstream political parties, state's disaster response establishment and dominant social groups in Kerala, have captured the imagination of many within and outside Kerala.

How realistic are these narratives? What, indeed, are the lived experiences of the marginalized vis-à-vis such rosy imageries? Unsurprisingly, during our enquiry, we found these two complementary, cultivated images to be far removed from the harrowing real-life experiences of the marginalized and even misleading. The narrative of an overwhelmingly united Kerala, acting as one body and mind, transcending all divisions is not merely hype, implicitly and explicitly it ends up overlooking the very real and community-specific problems encountered by the marginalized. The exaggerated tales of unity has, in effect, diverted attention away from the recurring contrary experiences of the marginalized during floods.

Analyzing the conversations with the survivors among the marginalized, we observe that both these highly romanticized imageries were untrue. Instead, for the most part, Kerala functioned in the 'normal' mode, business-as-

usual, as it were, during the disaster and in the course of relief operations with some exceptions. While being critical of the exaggerated emphasis on disappearance of divisions and discrimination in the dominant narratives, we are not denying many manifestations of selfless cooperation and solidarity of citizens across many divides. Instead, in this study, we are contesting the conjecture of a brief interregnum in which the entire Kerala society—vertically and horizontally, individually and socially, informally and structurally—became almost completely free of social fault lines and the prejudices of the dominant sections against the marginalized vanishing, creating virtually a seamless fusion of the privileged and the discriminated as one body.

The divisive, exclusionary and discriminatory practices and attitudes did not disappear. Rather, in most interfaces of the dominant sections with the marginalized, the ideologies and forces driving social exclusion prevailed over humanitarian considerations, aggravating the sufferings of Dalits, Adivasis and Women, who by their very social loci were comparatively less equipped to cope with the crisis. Analyzing the experiences of the people from the margins of the society, we argue that the marginalized people faced difficulty even in getting enrolled in the relief camps. There were severe prob-



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Kerala floods: Some fishermen recruited for rescues say survivors insulted them

By Swati Gupta, CNN

Updated 04:17 GMT (12:17 HKT) August 21, 2018



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Shelter during Flood	SC (%)	ST (%)	DC (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
Relief Camp	90.4	100.0	86.5	211	89.0
Relative's House	5.3	0	5.4	12	5.1
Neighbour/Friend	0.9	0	5.4	7	3.0
Other	3.5	0	2.7	7	3.0
Total	114	12	111	237	100

Table 3.1: Shelter during the Disaster

One of the key principles repeatedly emphasized in disaster management is the need to be aware of pre-disaster social inequities and the need to take proactive measures to prevent any manifestation of social exclusionary practices or tendencies in providing humanitarian assistance. Despite the preoccupation of the mainstream media with the dominant narrative of unity overwhelming everything else, there were occasional reports of caste based discrimination during the deluge. While cases of discrimination were numerous, the reports were very less on the same and media stuck to the enthusiastic, feel good narratives of oneness.

lems during the distribution of relief materials including clothing, stationery, and food items in which the local political parties and caste elites were involved.

About 90 percent of the marginalized communities covered in this study had taken shelter after the intense rain, flood and landslides (*Table 3.1*). For most of the marginalized, they had no shelter other than relief camps. The conditions in the hastily established relief camps and the difficulties of managing them meant that the much-needed humanitarian sensitivity and special attention to prevent discriminatory practices was conspicuous by its absence in many camps. In this context, it must be recalled that one of the key principles repeatedly emphasized in disaster management is the need to be aware of pre-disaster social inequities and the need to take proactive measures to prevent any manifestation of social exclusionary practices or tendencies in providing humanitarian assistance. Despite the preoccupation of the mainstream media with the dominant narrative of unity overwhelming everything else, there were occasional reports of caste based discrimination during the deluge. While cases of discrimination were numerous,

the reports were very less on the same and media stuck to the enthusiastic, feel good narratives of oneness.

The callous and bureaucratic approach resulted even in forced closure of relief camps and even evictions. Disturbing instances of caste-based segregation and discrimination have been reported from many camps especially when the camp was managed by the privileged caste organizations such as Nairs and Syrian Christians. In many places, the pre-disaster issues of caste hatred and discrimination encountered by Dalits and Adivasis got aggravated as the disaster conditions worsened. Often, this assumed terrible forms, triggering disputes, quarrels and tensions in many relief camps, as those used to privileged status for themselves downgraded Dalits in the camp. It will be a grave mistake to overlook these widespread instances of explicit and implicit social exclusion both for rectifying the flaws in disaster management and in post-disaster rebuilding.

It is, therefore, necessary to challenge the highly exaggerated narratives of oneness and equality of Kerala society during the disaster.


Abki Baar
Kiski Sarkaar?

News / India /

Dalit community alleges caste discrimination in Kerala flood relief camp

Alappuzha and Kottayam districts have been the worst affected by monsoon this year.

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Greed and inhuman attitudes also made its ugly presence during the calamity. The following narratives from various districts give insights into the same.

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There were, indeed, many laudable examples of unity and camaraderie, a sense of oneness and equality that Kerala can rightfully be proud of. Nevertheless, while recognizing the remarkable initiatives, it is also necessary to not allow such narratives to divert attention from the more disturbing realities of many manifestations of social exclusion. To do that, we must take a close look at the lived experiences of the marginalized people; their experiences before, during and after the disaster. The stories that emerge from the extensive interviews, surveys and discussions we undertook as part of this study, which are presented in the following sub-sections, present troubling accounts of inequities, prejudices, caste hatred and bureaucratic arrogance.

3.2 Humanity vs Greed: Rescue and Relief in the Time of Flood

One of the defining aspects of the 2018 extreme rainfall and floods was the spontaneous initiatives by the youth cutting across all segments of the society motivated by humanitar-

ian spirit. In surprisingly selfless manners and showing incredible dedication, they participated or organized search, rescue and relief operations in the disaster affected areas. On their own, they put to maximum use all their skills, capabilities and resources in the gigantic effort. Often, their work was filling the crucial gaps, complementing or supplementing the official response. The efforts included direct engagement in search, rescue and relief as well as backend coordination working from safe locations to coordinate the operations or bring some order into situations that was often chaotic. They helped to locate people trapped in the flood, exchange crucial location-specific information with those involved in search and rescue or take steps to ensure safety of people at risk.

In one rescue operation, a group of Dalit youths in Akathanthara village near Kallara in Kottayam district had to unexpectedly undertake a burial. What they have narrated is a shocking case. One family did not move to relief camp because their very old grandmoth-



CSSC-ABC volunteers during the relief work | CSSC

People had to leave their livestock behind as they had to rush to the relief camps to save their lives. Saji and his friends collected these animals at his house and looked after them until the flood waters receded and the owners of these animals came back to collect them. Saji and his friends collected the plants and plantains that were submerged/ floating in the water and found fodder and food for cows, dogs, goats and cats in those days. In an interesting instance, a pet dog refused to join her old master and stayed with the team that rescued her.

er was on deathbed. The only way the family could move to a relief camp was to abandon the grandmother, which was unthinkable for them. They spent a few days inside the flooded home looking after her. By the time the rescue team came, the grandmother had passed away. However, with the whole area flooded, there was no land available to bury her. The rescue team started work to create a platform for burial by dredging mud from the inundated area. They succeeded in making a *Chira* (a mud platform, usually created as part of agricultural operations in the Kuttanadu region) and helped the family to bury the dead grandmother.

In many places, the youth had to save and protect the domesticated animals trapped or abandoned by owners in the isolated, remote small islands (*thuruthukal*) in the flooded areas. SAJI from Kavalam shared some unique interventions by Dalit youths in protecting the lives of animals of a vast area affected by floods in Kuttanadu. People had to leave their livestock behind as they had to rush to the relief camps to save their lives. SAJI and his friends col-

lected these animals at his house and looked after them until the flood waters receded and the owners of these animals came back to collect them. SAJI and his friends collected the plants and plantains that were submerged/ floating in the water and found fodder and food for cows, dogs, goats and cats in those days. In an interesting instance, a pet dog refused to join her old master and stayed with the team that rescued her.

During the disaster, in general, many people worked together to face the humanitarian crisis. Youth, fisher folk, voluntary organizations, officials, and individuals volunteered, risking lives, giving time and using own resources. While there is much to be appreciated and applauded, an uncritical celebration carries the risk of diverting attention from the realities of recurring harassment and discrimination faced by the marginalized. Greed and inhuman attitudes also made its ugly presence during the calamity. The following narratives from various districts give insights into the same.

In Mithrakkeri, (Kuttanadu, Alappuzha district),



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Caste discrimination in Kerala relief camp, district collector orders probe

Sajimon P S | TNN | Updated: Jul 22, 2018, 23:03 IST



ALAPPUZHA: In the wake of 23 Dalit families residing in a relief camp at Pallippad grama panchayat here alleging that they faced caste discrimination, district collector S Suhas ordered a probe into the incident.

Speaking to TOI, Suhas said



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people shared their harrowing tales of suffering during the flood. No rescue boats reached them during the floods. Country boats and privately-owned motorboats were the only available options. Some boat owners found it a good opportunity to earn money by transporting people. They charged an amount of Rs.3000 (\$60) to rescue each stranded family, which was a huge amount for the poor and the marginalized who are daily wage workers. One member of this 'cash for rescue' team confided that he made a windfall gain of Rs 70,000 in one week. The logic of the team worked to the effect that since no official rescue teams were operating, people would rather cough up the money than play with their life.

A young priest with Gomentha church at Muttar, Alappuzha had taken the initiative to provide relief to the flood victims. The church under the priest had collected relief materials such as rice, clothing, medicines and drinking water. He had also collected fuel for operating boats needed to distribute relief materials and carry out rescue operations. He assigned some people to supply food and other provisions to the needy people. However, some of them sold petrol in the black market and did not distribute the relief materials to the needy. The priest came to know about it and realized that the people are not committed to humanitarian values even in such a dire situation. He then stopped cooperating with the corrupt volunteer groups and took upon himself the responsibility

of distributing relief materials. These are some instances in which the two faces—humanity and greed—confronted Kerala during disaster.

The team of volunteers of CSSC & ABC undertook flood relief works in the Kuttanadu region. The volunteers had chosen remote places for the distribution of relief materials because remote places were not approachable and hence were not preferred by the relief teams of government and other voluntary groups. Our team of volunteers swam through water for hours and found people isolated in remote places. During volunteering, our team came across some 'greedy' people engaged in relief work. The government had hired tipper lorries (trucks with high capacity) for transporting food and other materials to the localities where no relief materials ever reached. The tipper owners were to be paid according to their service and were given a list of places to visit. The payment by the government was to be calculated based on the number of camps served by the trucks and materials distributed. The official norms worked in favor of the truck operators. The tippers preferred to deliver materials to the easily accessible and nearest sites to increase the number of sites served in a day. At the same time, the tipper lorries which were the only mode of transport to distant, remote areas willfully avoided many such places. Due to this, CSSC volunteers had arguments with the tipper lorry staff. In one case, a lorry was refusing to serve a remote location. When they



The CSSC team's primary aim was to provide relief to the remote areas not served by other agencies for rescue and relief. The lorry staff was not willing to go to the remote site because it was clear to them that if they made such a trip, that will spoil their plan of maximizing number of camps served and his earnings will take a hit. Our team had to block the truck and make them understand that they have been hired by the government for helping the flood affected and what we were demanding is in accordance with the rules. Although, initially they were not willing to do as we requested, with great difficulty our team managed to persuade them to undertake the urgent trip.

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were confronted by the CSSC volunteers, they gave the excuse that they are supposed to finish distributing the relief materials quickly and pick up new supplies for another trip.

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with great difficulty our team managed to persuade them to undertake the urgent trip.

SURENDRAN from Kavalam became agitated while sharing his experience. He said that the 'mainstream' social workers' escaped first at the first sign of the flood. Another respondent, **EDWIN**, said that the numerous politicians active in 'normal' times were conspicuous by their absence during the floods.

More than greed and unethical conduct, the most glaring aspect was the near absence of disaster preparedness. The most serious question is why there was widespread lack of preparedness by the state's disaster management authority. The authorities must re-think why they fixed the norm of paying the truck

Historically, food has been an omnipresent signifier of social hierarchies. The Relief camps are congested spaces where this aspect of human interaction is unavoidably put to test. We have noted numerous instances of the aversion the ‘upper castes’ like Nairs and Syrian Christians to share living spaces, kitchen, dining tables in relief camps with Dalits and Adivasis. In many relief camps, the Ezhava community —one of the ‘lower castes’— were also hesitant to prepare food together with Dalits and dine together. In this study, we have recorded the humiliating experiences of many Dalits in this regard. Excerpts from some narratives of the same are given here.

based on the ‘number of camps’ visited and supplied rather than rescuing and providing relief to the people stranded in isolated and remote locations? How can such official norms ensure that relief reaches the suffering people who had no other support? The decision was not only unplanned, unscientific and immature but ran counter to the basic principles of rescue and relief, when a major disaster affected a very large area having human settlements in remote locations.

When our team came across narratives from different regions during disaster, we are convinced that during floods traits of humanity was visible but was to be eclipsed by the looming greed and insensitivity to people scattered in remote areas. Put it differently, the institutional bias aggravated the suffering of the marginalized in several ways. The norms used for rescue and relief was inimical to rescue and relief operations considering the spatial location of the marginalized.

3.3 Caste Bias and Discrimination

It is worrying but not surprising that the privileged castes carried with them their deeply entrenched caste prejudices when they moved into the relief camps, although it is usually assumed that it will not be the case in such crisis. This was starkly evident during the ‘camp life’ and particularly during distribution of relief materials. Although most concede that caste exists in Kerala society, most do not concede that caste discrimination exists. In contemporary society, the historical forms of caste manifest itself disguised in new forms that appear to be socially or legally acceptable.

It is the responsibility of the state to preserve social harmony and eliminate tendencies of discrimination, special privileges and nepotism. That is especially true in times of disaster. The onus of preventing and eliminating all forms of discrimination in humanitarian assistance and rescue, and the day-to-day operations of relief camps vests with the government. This is important since we have Constitutional and legal safeguards to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Constitutional morality and legal framework mandate that the state must not allow or facilitate any form of discriminatory practices. There is no need to emphasize that the reproduction of structural inequalities in any manner in the relief camps would aggravate the sufferings of the victims of historical injustices and cultural hegemony. By analyzing the experiences of the Dalits and Adivasis, we are able to expose the purposeful omissions in the dominant narratives and reveal discrimination in relief operations.

Prohibition or taboos that the privileged castes observe regarding food, especially dining together with the members of the castes that they consider lower in the caste hierarchy has traditionally been a hallmark of the caste-ridden Indian society. Historically, food has been an omnipresent signifier of social hierarchies. The Relief camps are congested spaces where this aspect of human interaction is unavoidably put to test. We have noted numerous instances of the aversion the ‘upper castes’ like Nairs and Syrian Christians to share living spaces, kitchen, dining tables in relief camps with Dalits and Adivasis. In many relief camps, the Ezhava

community —one of the ‘lower castes’— were also hesitant to prepare food together with Dalits and dine together. In this study, we have recorded the humiliating experiences of many Dalits in this regard. Excerpts from some narratives of the same are given here.

Karukayil village in Muttar, Alappuzha district is an isolated inland area of Kuttanadu. Usually, flood hits Alappuzha gradually. People who reside in this area usually move to camps before water level rise dangerously. Dalit Christians and Ezhava community are the two majority communities in this village. Every year they cooperate in everything including arrangements for opening camp and preparing food for everyone. This year too they opened a common relief camp during the first flood and Dalits took the initiative to cook for everyone. However, when the disaster conditions worsened, the Ezhava community started a separate camp. Since they were powerful compared to Dalits, they gathered relief materials from Panchayat and other sources.

The state authorities usually grant permission to open only one camp in an area. When Dalits came to know that the Ezhavas had started

separate camp, not at the usual place, they approached the authorities to register a new relief camp. The authorities, however, denied permission for a second camp overlooking the local situation. The permission was delayed, and the Dalits found it difficult to find a roof over their heads and to secure relief materials. Subsequently, a new camp was opened for them. After floods, the person who initiated a separate camp for Ezhavas got infected with ‘rat fever’ (*leptospirosis*). He feared that he would die and began to think that he had invited the wrath of God for discriminating against others who were also equally in need of comfort and materials. Overcome with fear and guilt, after recovering, he visited every Dalit Christian family in the area and apologized for his wrongful deeds.

DIVYA from Muniyara, a Dalit Christian locality, shared her experience of caste discrimination during the disaster. She experienced and witnessed caste discrimination in relief camps everywhere. One Ezhava person said that he would prepare food separately for himself. Diana’s brother was the convener of a camp management committee. Being a very docile person, he did not object to the way the camp was

A temporary relief camp in Kochi | Reuters





A hut in Alappuzha caught in floods | CSSC

Divya's house had completely collapsed. She had nowhere to go. Her parents insisted that she and her husband stay with them, which she refused. People in the camp had lost their houses and had no money with them and camp was going to close. It was really a helpless situation. However, later government officials visited the camp and informed them that they need not leave the camp until order came from the District Collector. After about four days, the camp was declared closed. Government officials on duty kept insisting that all must vacate the camp. Most of the Dalits had no place to go. It was a highly depressing situation for the marginalized. It appeared as though the old slavery days were returning with the floods.

being managed by the **ASHA** workers, political leaders etc. Discrimination was evidently visible during distribution of relief kits. The camp management committee stored relief materials and distributed them as they wished.

After nearly fifteen days, it was announced that the camp where Divya and others were staying would be closed soon, and the campers were asked to remain prepared for it. Even those who had lost their houses were forced to leave camp. At that time Divya and others intervened. Divya's house had completely collapsed. She had nowhere to go. Her parents insisted that she and her husband stay with them, which she refused. People in the camp had lost their houses and had no money with them and camp was going to close. It was really a helpless situation. However, later government officials visited the camp and informed them that they need not leave the camp until order came from

the District Collector. After about four days, the camp was declared closed. Government officials on duty kept insisting that all must vacate the camp. Most of the Dalits had no place to go. It was a highly depressing situation for the marginalized. It appeared as though the old slavery days were returning with the floods.

There were caste hatred of very severe nature and discrimination in many camps especially when the camps were run by upper castes including Nairs and Syrian Christians. The relief camp in Travancore Devaswam Board School at Ithithanam near Changanassery witnessed several such incidents. A family from Kavalam shared with our team that there was no camp management committee involving the representatives of campers in this camp. This camp was managed by the Nair Service Society (NSS). While distributing materials they showed outright discrimination towards Dal-

its and the marginalized. They distributed old dresses received as relief materials to Dalits and new and fresh dresses always went to non-Dalits. There was no information on different items that were received in the camp, the quantity and the items distributed among the campers and whether all recipients of the materials were registered campers. The camp had not been officially shut. Nevertheless, campers vacated without any official declaration because of the atmosphere in the camp.

Another narrative from Muttar in Alappuzha is about the caste pride of Syrian Christians in the midst of the severe flood. A young priest in Gomentha church in Muttar had taken the initiative to extend his support to the flood affected people in several ways. He opened the parish hall of the church for all people from the surrounding villages. Majority of the people who

reached the church early belonged to Dalit communities since they were the first and most affected, with their houses located in low lying areas. A Syrian Christian family, who consider themselves equivalent to some of the privileged Hindu castes, also reached the camp. They had to mingle with the Dalits residing in the parish hall. Soon, the Syrian Christian family felt uneasy and asked the priest to provide separate accommodation for them. When the priest refused to heed to their demand, the Syrian Christian family left the Parish hall to seek shelter elsewhere. In a single instance we find the assertion of caste pride by the Syrian Christian family even while facing a highly distressing situation and the priest's humanitarian spirit out rightly rejecting the same.

The caste pride of traditional casteist sections manifested itself during the disaster all

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CSSC-ABC volunteers during relief work in Tiruvalla, Pathanamthitta district | CSSC





over Kerala, particularly in the central part of Kerala. This observation can be substantiated through the response of NSS Hindu College, Changanassery and the St. Berchman's (SB) College, Changanassery. These colleges are managed by the traditional upper caste Nairs and the Syrian Christians, respectively. They are located close to the headquarters of Nair Service Society (NSS) and the headquarters of the Archdiocese of Syro-Malabar Church of Kerala.

When flood inundated Kuttanad completely, people from Kuttanadu rushed to Changanassery town, located at a higher altitude. Almost all schools in Changanassery were crowded with the flood affected. Day and night people rushed to Changanassery as water level rose. It was a pathetic situation for all—the flood-affected and others as well. No relief materials—food, shelter, clothing, drinking water, toilet facilities—were available to thousands of people. Most people halted at KSRTC bus terminals and railway station. Government authorities and other agencies faced difficulties in accommodating those displaced by the flood. Meanwhile, many Muslim Mosques, Christian Churches and parish halls were opened for public. However, the recalcitrant management of NSS College and SB College refused to heed to the calls made to open relief camp in these institutions.

Students started updating status on social media asking for the opening of all colleges and university buildings and to extend support to the flood victims. However, both colleges stood on their decision not to open the college for the flood affected evacuees. After reportedly exerting power by the district administration, the management of SB College in Changanassery opened a relief camp in the college for the flood affected victims from Kuttanadu. People also rushed to NSS College and stayed there for almost a week. Before leaving the camp, the management asked the campers to clean and wash the rooms where they had stayed. One lady from Kavalam opined that “they know that we are from Kuttanad and that we belong to the ‘untouchable’ castes”. Majority of the flood affected were from Kuttanad and they belonged to Dalit community which is the reason why the Hindu elitist management of the NSS College and caste elite Syrian Christians felt hesitant in opening their ‘sacred’ institutions to Dalits and when forced asked the campers to clean-up rooms before they leave the camp.

LUKOSE K. NEELAMPEROOR, a Dalit activist shared his experiences in relief camps as a social worker. He said that he had visited 12 relief camps during the flood. In all camps there were instances of caste-based discrimination. In a relief camp in Sachivothamapuram School

Lukose K. Neelamperoor, a Dalit Christian activist shared his experiences in relief camps as a social worker. He said that he had visited 12 relief camps during the flood. In all camps there were instances of caste-based discrimination. In a relief camp in Sachivothamapuram School near Kurichi, Kottayam he found dumped old cloths near the compound wall. When he enquired about it, the Dalit campers informed him that the leaders of a prominent party were managing the camp. They had been distributing good and new cloths to their party followers and the old and damaged to the Dalits. When learnt about it, a group of Dalit activists collected some relief materials and reached Sachivothamapuram School. They were denied entry by a prominent local political leader and the camp Committee complained to the police that some anti-socials (ruffians) are creating trouble in the camps.

near Kurichi, Kottayam he found dumped old cloths near the compound wall. When he enquired about it, the Dalit campers informed him that the leaders of a prominent party were managing the camp. They had been distributing good and new cloths to their party followers and the old and damaged to the Dalits. When learnt about it, a group of Dalit activists collected some relief materials and reached Sachivothamapuram School. They were denied entry by a prominent local political leader and the camp Committee complained to the police that some anti-socials (ruffians) are creating trouble in the camps. In another occasion the camp authority refused to receive 10 blankets and food items delivered to it by a Dalit activist group and therefore they had to take this back.

LUKOSE also shared the situation of a relief camp in Ithithanam School mentioned earlier. In the Ithithanam School camp all campers were provided saffron towel and saffron dhoti. Saffron is the colour used by organizations associated with Sangh Parivar, including Bharatiya Janata Party which has been ruling India since 2014. It was two-storey building in which the ground floor was for 'allotted' to Dalits and the first floor for upper castes. The camp was managed by local leaders of Bharatiya Janata Party. The camp at SB College, Changanasserry did not allow any visitors. When Lukose attempted to enter this camp to visit families and persons from Kavalam, his native place, they asked him to give

the details of campers who he knew. Discrimination was evident in the distribution of relief kits and receiving of relief materials in all camps.

3.4 Adivasis Face Humiliation

Experience of a human rights activist in Wayanadu is very important in the context of caste-based discrimination in the relief camps. He had witnessed blatant caste discrimination taking place in Panamaram relief camp in Wayanad. In that camp Adivasis stayed in the ground floor of the Christian management school while upper castes stayed in the first floor. He was involved in training children in the camp and Adivasi children told him that children in the first floor did not interact with them for four days although they met very often. People in the camp were clueless about what they would do after floods and it was Onam season. During a visit to the camp, the activist and his friends saw Adivasi families returning to their home. Upon enquiry, they replied that management had asked them to vacate the camp due to celebration of Onam. The government of Kerala had cancelled Onam celebrations because of the flood. To a question to the camp authorities on the arbitrary closing of the camp, they replied that they did not force anybody to leave the camp and people are leaving in their own interest. The camp authorities were careful because they knew that what they were doing was illegal.



Bindu lives in this damaged shelter in Wayanad's Venniyode Vaishyan Adivasi Colony after the floods | TA Ameerudheen

The approach of state officials towards Dalits and Adivasis has exposed its vulgar face of the 'model' state. There were widespread malpractices initiated by the local party leaders and Panchayath members. In short, the relief camps had not really offered the humanitarian ideals in Kerala, but relief camps were spaces with graded inequality occurring. This point to the fact that a dignified existence to Dalits and marginalized are denied even in the context of a disaster which affected 'all' people alike.

Adivasis returning to their houses faced several problems. Adivasi homes are not thatched properly. Most of them collapsed in the raining and flood and they were not suitable for habitation. Leaking roof made their effort tedious for survival. The Adivasi houses were built as part of government projects spending nearly Rs. 3.5 lakhs for each house, and these were not properly constructed since corruption plays havocs in such contracts. The Adivasis who returned found the reinforced cement concrete (RCC) roofs leaking when it rained! They had to request the authorities to provide them tarpaulin sheets. A few asked for asbestos sheets. The irony of the situation is pointed out by Narayanan. He said that it would be bizarre to imagine a situation where Adivasis request to the state to issue them tarpaulin to provide shade to their concrete houses built for them by the state. The camp authorities found it difficult to concede to the demand and some people came forward to support them with tarpaulin and asbestos roofing materials.

3.5 Caste Vitiates Camp Life

The experiences of the marginalized communities in relief camps were manifold. Relief camps in most places continued to be the recasting of social life elsewhere during 'normal' days. Upper castes preferred to be stay away from Dalits and in separate buildings or separate floors. Wherever this separation was not 'strictly' possible, people preferred to stay distant as far as possible from Dalits even in the same classroom of a school building. The approach of state officials towards Dalits and Adivasis has exposed its vulgar face of the 'model' state. There were widespread malpractices initiated by the local party leaders and Panchayath members. In short, the relief camps had not really offered the humanitarian ideals in Kerala, but relief camps were spaces with graded inequality occurring. This point to the fact that a dignified existence to Dalits and marginalized are denied even in the context of a disaster which affected 'all' people alike.

There was wider criticism regarding the distribution of relief materials including dress, stationery and food items in the camps. The group in Kavalam told us that there was mismanagement in distributing materials in the camp where they were staying in Leo XIII School at Alappuzha. There were several instances of mismanaging the store of the camp. While some collected materials in the morning, noon and evening from the store, many others did not receive anything. The mismanagements of the camp in a disaster situation prove both the influence of elite social groups in the camp authorities and poor disaster management/ professionalism in our state in dealing properly with a situation of havoc raised from the disaster.

There were caste issues in camps where people from different caste groups stayed together in a camp. In Chengannur, one camp was organized in a school managed by the Mar Thoma Church. The CSSC relief work team had visited this camp for distributing relief materials during the flood. They found that Dalits and other castes are residing in separate buildings in the school. Dalits were residing in a single building which was away from the

main building where the administration of the camp was conducted by the officials. Other caste groups were residing in the building in which office and administration was set up. All vehicles reached in the administration building. Dalits were given old clothes and relief materials only after the selection made by other caste groups. Upper castes received things directly from the vehicles and did not take them to the office but took directly to their room. Dalits watched this standing away. When SIMON, one of our team members, wanted to distribute something to Dalits who were watching them, the officials blocked them. When complaint was made to camp officials that relief materials are not distributing properly but they replied that they would manage everything. SIMON was forced to call Dalits outside the school and distributed to them some good relief materials.

In Mithrakeri, Kuttanadu, distribution of relief materials epitomized social divisions based on caste and corruption in the larger society. There are three separate colonies for Dalits, Ezhavas and Nairs in the same locality. There is another area of residence for the Viswakarma community. In Dalit colony some materials were brought to the house of a Panchayath

CSSC-ABC volunteers during relief work | CSSC





Ajayan Babu, the coordinator of Abhayaloka Buddhist Community listening to the survivors at Perumkala, Idukki | CSSC

member because there was water rising in the school building where the camp was running. The member of the Panchayath distributed the materials but gave priority to the families of her own party members.

Women and children from Thuruthikkadu Kolony, Pandanadu in Pathanamthita district shared their camp experience in the relief camp run by Parumala Church. They alleged that local ruling Party leaders pilfered flood relief items, rice and groceries from the relief camp. Refugees caught the driver of the vehicle in the night when he was attempting to shift relief materials from camp to somewhere else. Tension broke out in the camp against the smuggling of materials from camp. People from various caste groups were staying in the camp. The driver filed a complaint stating that he was manhandled by the campers and the police charged case against Dalits based on a complaint made by the driver although the driver was caught red handed by people belonging to several castes. Women shared with us that the food items were not distributed properly in the camp, but they simply dumped them in a corner, especially baby food. The village officer and a priest took major role in hiding materials and food items and transported them to unknown places. A group of women said that they did not get even a piece of cloth

and had to wear the same cloth for 3 days. The priest and officials did not distribute clothes when new clothes arrived and they selectively supplied clothes to the people of their caste/communities. Few Dalits got old or worn out clothes. They formed a committee after Dalits from Thuruthikkadu colony reached the camp, but Dalits were denied representation in the committee.

3.6 Casteist Disruption of Relief Work

Our rescue team came across the narratives of marginalized social groups narrating the incidents in which the upper castes were laying trucks carrying relief materials and collecting and cornering materials for themselves. As we have already noticed, Dalits are mostly living in remote places and the crossroads are always under the control of higher castes and the rich. When the vehicles approach the crossroads the higher caste people stop the vehicle even though the vehicle was meant to distribute materials among the remote people. They then 'plundered' the fresh and valuable materials and convince the relief team that many vehicles have already visited the far-flung Dalit colonies and people there have received enough support from the government. In the Thuruthikkad Dalit colony the same incident repeatedly occurred. There is only one road connecting

Analyzing the experiences of the marginalized, it became clear that there existed strong divisions among the flood affected people during the disaster. The celebratory narratives of humanity of Kerala, selfless service, oneness of the people, voluntary serviced, effective management etc. had its own glaring flip sides. And it is imperative to understand these lived realities for effectively rebuilding the proposed Nava Keralam (New Kerala) in the post-flood scenario.

Thurithikkad Dalit colony to the outside world and is located far from the main crossroads. Relief team was to reach this village through the unfinished, dilapidated road. When a relief team came with materials, the locally powerful lower caste Ezhavas and others stopped the vehicle and collected the materials. They argued that the Dalits are getting all kinds of help and there was no need to visit the remote Thurithikkad Dalit colony.

3.7 Dalits Deprived of Aid

Bishop Pramod of the Bible Faith Mission, Parashala, Thiruvananthapuram, came forward to extend support to the villagers residing in remote Mepral in Alappuzha district. When they reached Mepral they found it difficult to move in the flood waters and decided to return. But people of Mepral presented at the place objected to it and wanted the relief team to visit the colonies. A young person stood before their vehicle and asked them to distribute relief materials to them. There was verbal quarrel between them. The vehicle was halted before a two-storied house. Some people came out from the house and told Bishop that relief items are stored in that house and they are distributing it to the needy people when required. The Bishop and the team realized this may not be true.

The CSSC volunteers accompanied the vehicle secretly and enquired the matter with him. He said he belonged to Dalit community and for that reason they were denied relief materials and relief items were hoarded into the house at the junction. They distributed it only

to the rich and the caste elites and that was why he was forced to stop the vehicle. Our team assured him that relief kits would definitely reach them. The young person informed other members in his Colony. Suddenly three country boats reached there and collected material for all those who were stranded in the colony. The upper castes became very angry and they organised their members for a physical confrontation with Dalits and questioned the team why they had provided relief items to them. Bishop and the team pacified the upper castes and left the place after giving a few sacks of rice to them.

3.8 Conclusions

Our field work among the flood affected areas and the culling of ethnographic information from the flood affected people belonging to the marginalized communities drove home the point that the grand narrative of efficient management of the deluge was inaccurate. The flamboyant and colored representations of humanity rising along with the rising flood waters effectively eclipsed the humiliations and sufferings that the marginalized underwent during the floods. Analyzing the experiences of the marginalized, it became clear that there existed strong divisions among the flood affected people during the disaster. The celebratory narratives of humanity of Kerala, selfless service, oneness of the people, voluntary serviced, effective management etc. had its own glaring flip sides. And it is imperative to understand these lived realities for effectively rebuilding the proposed *Nava Keralam* (New Kerala) in the post-flood scenario.



Chapter - 4

Floundering State, Struggling People

4.1 Background

The multiple responsibilities of disaster management in India are bestowed on the governments at State and Centre, under the legal framework for disaster management. These responsibilities include providing early warnings and alert, saving lives, search and rescue operations, organise humanitarian assistance, helping in rehabilitation and facilitating recovery. The much-publicized claim is that the Government of Kerala, especially the government agencies tasked with disaster management, were remarkably successful in facing the disaster following the unprecedented rain and flood of 2018. However, many questions have been raised about the state of preparedness, the adequacy of systems— technical and institutional—for management of the network of dams and rivers, the ways in which early warnings were issued and ultimately about the effectiveness of the incident command systems at different levels.

A sight from Kuttanad in Alappuzha | AP PHOTO/TIBIN AUGUSTINE



The spontaneous mobilization of the people in facing the disaster has been globally acknowledged. The state government congratulated the youth and general public for their timely and enthusiastic intervention during the disaster, acknowledging particularly the yeoman service rendered by volunteers of the fishing community. The historic civil society response has dominated the disaster response to the extent of making it difficult to dispassionately examine the validity of the official claims. The crucial question is how effective the performance of the state's disaster management was on its own. We need to listen to the voices from the bottom of the society—those who suffered the most during disaster—to get an unbiased understanding of the disaster management in Kerala. This chapter attempts to critically examine some of these questions relying on the lived experiences of the marginalized and their valiant two-pronged struggle for survival—pitted against the flood and social barriers aggravating their suffering.

4.2 Confusing Early Warnings and Misleading Alerts

Monitoring the weather, providing forecast

and issuing warnings about hazardous events such as cyclones, extreme rainfall and flood is a responsibility bestowed mostly with the government agencies in India. While the technically challenging tasks of monitoring and forecasting are carried out by the agencies of the central government, it is the responsibility of the state government and its agencies to disseminate the relevant information and to ensure that the information reaches everyone. It is the duty of the state government to transmit graded alert messages to people living in areas that are at risk in an area-specific manner. The legal framework of the disaster management mandates that the state and district level authorities have prepared multi-hazard disaster management plans (DMP). People living in risky areas should be identified and listed in the DMP and should be relocated to safer places under evacuation plans under relevant responsibility framework.

Modern democratic states anywhere in the world consider it as their prerogative to safeguard the life and property of its citizens not just in normal times but during disasters as well. It is only natural that any failure in this respect would invite criticism. During the havoc

A sight from Kuttanad in Alappuzha | AP



“

I had just switched on the radio to listen to my favorite programme, Kannadi Kazhcha (Mirror Images) and I paid attention to an unusual alert asking people of low-lying areas of Kuttandu to leave those places to safety as the flood waters were rising unexpectedly. By then the water had touched my bed.

”

played by cyclone Katrina in the U.S., the U.S. government came under severe criticism for their failures. Although Kerala is often hailed as a model state for having achieved social development equivalent to several developed countries, the structural oppression and marginalization of the marginalized have often been left unattended. The continuing dehumanized experiences of the marginalized sections of the Kerala society having an oppressed past and caste slavery are often missed in the congratulatory celebrations. Denied of a dignified existence even during ‘normal’ times, their suffering worsens during crisis situations and disasters. It is in this context several deeply troubling experiences of the marginalized are presented and analysed here.

Providing appropriate early warnings and actionable alert is important. It is also necessary to have adequate preparedness to face a disaster. The mode of communication of the alert message through reliable media broadcasting or by police and revenue and general administration departments, and the content of the information is very important in facing an impending disaster. During the field work we have found that people received alerts of different types. Dalits in Kuttanadu who routinely faced floods, more than anyone else in the region, said that they did not expect such a terrible flood nor were they warned by the authorities to prepare for anything unusual. And for that reason, they remained in their houses monitoring the flood level with the usual assumptions and their extensive experience. The group discussion among Dalits in Kavalam Panchayath shows that the timing of alerts was not helpful. As we have observed, at a later stage, people began to realize that the flood water is increas-

ing in a pace they have not seen never before. Water was rising in an alarmingly different way than what they had expected. Before anything could be done, they found their belongings, kept at a safe height were being carried away by the flood water. And at that time, they began to move to safety. Around that time official information also reached them. We find here a situation where the disaster management failing to perform its duty in offering accurate information in advance. Remoteness and lack of infrastructural facilities only added crisis to the situation.

In Karumadi (Kuttanadu) by the time police reached remote settlements to advise the people living there—marginalized Dalits—to evacuate, they were already preparing to move. In Mithrakkeri, Muttar and other places also the situation was same. This is evident in the observation made by **KUNJAPPAN**, a resident of Muttar in Kuttanadu: “I had just switched on the radio to listen to my favorite programme, Kannadi Kazhcha (Mirror Images) and I paid attention to an unusual alert asking people of low-lying areas of Kuttandu to leave those places to safety as the flood waters were rising unexpectedly. By then the water had touched my bed.” Arrangements to evacuate the people at risk, however, had not been made by the state/government authorities and they had to move to safer locations on their own.

The story of Idukki district is not different from that of Kuttanadu as far as the experiences of Dalits were concerned. **RAHUL** recollected that the relief camp at Cheruthoni was opened for people affected by landslide. However, people living in the known danger zones of the hills had not been alerted until the wide-

spread landslides and landslips started rocking the entire area. He said that people began to flee after realizing that the situation was getting worse every hour. RAHUL said: “We had packed our belongings and were ready to move much before the Panchayat authorities informed us of the impending situation”. Sadly, here also, there were no arrangements for evacuation. Beyond sounding the alert when it was too late, very little support was provided.

Metpinpuram is located near the Idukki district headquarters at Painavu. Metpinpuram houses a rehabilitation centre, *Swapnagramam* (Dream Village), initiated by a Malayalam TV Channel, Flowers with the aid of Government of Kerala for housing physically challenged people and those suffering from chronic diseases. The Centre is located on a hilltop, which is over two kilometers from any other nearby habitation. Neither warnings nor any rescue team ever reached Swapnagramam to alert them of the impending dangers or helped them to shift from there to a safer location. Landslides were occurring along the roads and nearby areas after the incessant torrential rain. The inmates of Swapnagramam remained isolated. Somehow, they managed themselves to reach a relief camp braving heavy wind, heavy rain, poor visibility and very dangerous conditions. It was only after reaching the camp that they came to know that the hill on which Swapnagramam stood had started collapsing in the rain and that they should have moved out much earlier.

The experiences of people in Akathanthara, Mundodi Colony, and Korikkal near Thalayolaparambu in Kottayam district were different from Kuttanad and Idukki. Here, flood was triggered by damages to the shutter (valve) of an irrigation canal linked to Muvattupuzha River. It happened during daytime. The water rushing from the flooded Muvattupuzha River barged into the nearby places after the shutter failed. These places were already burdened with overflowing paddy fields. According to the victims, “the shutter of the irrigation canal was the only thing capable of stopping water from the river, but it was damaged, and water gushed to our side; we all are staying here with family and kids. Water level was rising minute by minute, so we decided to seek shelter in houses located on higher ground. We moved leaving all our belongings. We were terrified! It was our first experience of this kind”. These disaster-affected people hardly received any meaningful official warning of the imminent dangers and ferocity of the flood.

The conversations with the affected people during the study make it clear that the people living in the midlands were fortunate to receive somewhat reliable early warnings compared to those living in the remote locations in hilly parts and lowlands. Official vehicles made public announcements warning people in the mid-land regions before the rivers got flooded and started over-flowing. People living on the riversides also got alert information in advance. In Idukki, the most important alert re-





Water gushes out of Idamalayar dam as shutters of the dam opened with the storage level crossing 169 metre | AFP

“ We were informed about the trial run from Idukki reservoir, but not about the opening of shutters of the dam when rain intensified (reservoir) ”

ceived was of the advertised release of water from the Idukki reservoir on test basis. RAHUL and other residents of Cheruthoni shared with us their experience after trial run and later. “We were informed about the trial run from Idukki reservoir, but not about the opening of shutters of the dam when rain intensified (reservoir)”.

The Idukki Dam is a double curvature Arch dam constructed across the Periyar River in a narrow gorge between two granite hills locally known as Kuravan and Kurathi. At 168.91 meters (554.2 ft), it is one of the highest arch dams in Asia and a popular tourist destination. The rising water level in Idukki dam reservoir, which is a confluence of Idukki, Cheruthoni and Kulamavu dams, was a frenzied news story in TV channels and newspapers. The Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), which manages the hydroelectric reservoir and the power station, had announced that it will issue ‘Orange Alert’ if the water level touches 2,395 ft and ‘Red Alert’ when the level reaches 2,398 ft. Media carried reports that water will be released 24 hours after sounding of the alert. After the water level in the reservoir touched nearly 2,395

ft on July 30, 2018, KSEB informed the public that water will be released on a test basis if the level goes up by another three feet.

In the absence of awareness campaign and preparedness drills by the authorities, the public had no clue about the true significance of the colour-coded alerts. Ironically, the media and the general public appeared to take the coded alert lightly. Some of them appeared to celebrate the changing ‘Colors of Alert’ as if they are like traffic lights. Social media postings even worried about the non-opening of the shutters in the event of decline in rainfall. Some shopkeepers and hoteliers even speculated that the likely opening the reservoir shutters after 26 years would boost their business opportunity, when tourists gather to enjoy the beauty of the water flowing out from the reservoir resembling a gigantic waterfall.

When the trial run was made water flowed under the Cheruthony Bridge without leaving much destruction. The disused canal through which water flowed was clogged although some cosmetic cleaning and clearing were

made by the district administration using earth movers before trial run. However, after the trial run unprecedented raining started and the reservoir was filled beyond expectation. The KSEB found it had practically no time between the test release and the issuing of the highest alert, the Red Alert. This was done without making advance preparations. It unleashed a trail of destruction not only in the Cheruthoni town but also downstream in the plains.

The residents in Cheruthoni opined that during night more water was released from Idukki dam because water from more than a century old Mullaperiyar dam also started flowing to Idukki reservoir. On the upper stream, more water was released from Mullaperiyar without informing the residents in the downstream Upputhara. People in Upputhara, downstream of Mullaperiyar, were badly affected by the discharge from Mullaperiyar. Dalits and Adivasis residing in Upputhara are dwellers on the old course of the Periyar River. Water flowed through the old course of the Periyar River washing away the houses and agricultural lands. People escaped through jungle to save their lives including the old and the physically challenged persons. The sudden filling of Mullaperiyar forced the authorities to open all shutters of the dam in the night. The delay in an early trial run and early opening of shutters were huge miscalculations by KSEB, which

was interested in maximizing the water storage to increase the power generation potential (Newspaper reports, KSEB statistics). KSEB says that in the absence of reliable quantitative rainfall forecast, they were unable to anticipate the situation. In the end, KSEB had no option but to release the excess water by which time monsoon had started showing its fury in the plain lands as well.

4.3 Inadequate Warnings, Non-existent State Support

The information received by the people of Kavalam in Kuttanadu through public announcement was to leave the area quickly. There was no mention of any relief camp. There was no hint on any arrangements to evacuate people. There was no sign of any kind of transportation. Flood in Kuttanadu has always been very frightening to the marginalized and they had to make their own arrangements to reach safer, higher areas and relief camps. In this flood, the rising water and strong currents made travel very difficult. The only hope was motorized country-boats.

Decades ago, the region had a number of boats. That was the means of local travel. With 'development' all that changed. Now, with almost all parts connected by roads, even among the rich very few owned boats. The haphazard

Boats are the only means to rescue many people in Kuttanad ITK Devasia | Firstpost



development of local road network ignoring the drainage patterns and hydrology also aggravated the flood. The few Fiber Reinforced Plastic (FRP) boats available were finding difficult to negotiate rising water and strong current. The crucial question was, where to find the boats? The shortage of motorized country-boats and the failure of official machinery to respond created a tragic situation. Realizing that their life is in danger and no state support in sight, most of the people struggled hard to find their own ways to save themselves.

SURENDRAN recollected how his son rescued the entire family with their engine driven country boat. According to **SURENDRAN** hundreds of people came face to face with death and swam through neck-deep cold water to save their lives. Two or three boats owned by the Kerala Water Authority were engaged in rescuing people. **SAJEEV** remember that hundreds of panicked and frightened people thronged each boat Jetty at the same time and these boats were filled with people from the first jetty itself. People had to wait for hours and hours to be rescued in an uncertain situation. There were some rescue teams operating only during the day. **KUNJUMOL** recalls that sometimes people lost contact of their dear ones, parents, children, spouses in the melee. It was really a frightening situation. Several things were floating in water and no distinction could be made between inundated lands and natural water bodies, the fear of boats capsizing, and boat-wreck was a concern of those who operated the boats.

SASI was angry while recalling the failure of government mechanisms in informing people in advance on the possibility of flooding in the low-lying regions. People hardly received any reliable and official information and had to rely on hearsay and opinions of lay persons. **SASI** feels that the government bodies failed to give warnings. In his view, the authorities seemed to be unaware of the interlinkages between Western Ghats and Kuttanadu region. According to him and several others, it is the people of Kuttanadu who have to bear the brunt of landslides in the Western Ghats because four important rivers originating in the Western Ghats—Pamba, Meenachil, Manimalayar and Achenkovil—flows through Kuttanadu before joining the Vembanad backwaters and the Arabian Sea. The State Government was aware

The locations chosen as temporary shelters/ relief camps indicate how much flawed the preparations have been despite some certainty that the extreme rainfall and the flood is of a kind not seen before. It seemed the disaster management system had not reviewed the contingency plans and had not worked out proper evacuation plans or had an awareness of the enormity of the developing situation. Many relief camps were in places that were not really safe from flood risk.

of the hazards in different parts. However, it failed to prioritize the warnings and responses in accordance with the differences in the threat levels applicable to different parts.

4.4 Risky Relief Camps, Disconcerting Rehabilitation

The locations chosen as temporary shelters/ relief camps indicate how much flawed the preparations have been despite some certainty that the extreme rainfall and the flood is of a kind not seen before. It seemed the disaster management system had not reviewed the contingency plans and had not worked out proper evacuation plans or had an awareness of the enormity of the developing situation. Many relief camps were in places that were not really safe from flood risk. **CHELLAMMA**, a resident of Ezhikkadu Colony said when the flood intensified people were advised to shift to the nearby Community Hall. By the time arrangements were being made to turn the Community Hall into a relief camp, the Community Hall itself showed fears of getting submerged. Panicked people were then shifted to some schools in the higher ground. The shifting of relief camps from one location to another was widespread in the Kuttanad region in Muttar, Thakazhi, Kavalam, Mithrakeri and Karumaadi. In Idukki a relief camp in Painavu was shifted when landslides occurred in the area and the camp itself was affected. The problems in evacuation, the flaws in the identified locations for relief camps and how all these were organized prove beyond doubt that disaster

District	Households Surveyed	Compensation Not Received	
		Households	Proportion
Alappuzha	86	10	11.6%
Idukki	41	34	82.9%
Kottayam	29	2	6.9%
Pathanamthitta	77	12	15.6%
Total	233	58	24.9%

Table 4.1: Compensation Not Received District Wise among Households Surveyed

District	Households Surveyed		Not Received Compensation Percentage of Households			
	Number	Percentage	SC	ST	DC	ALL
Alappuzha	86	36.9	8.1	0.0	14.6	11.6
Idukki	41	17.6	83.3	70.0	89.5	82.9
Kottayam	29	12.4	10.5	0.0	0.0	6.9
Pathanamthitta	77	33.0	11.4	0.0	21.9	15.6
Households (%)	NA	100	17.9	58.3	28.4	24.9
Households (N)	233	NA	20	7	31	58

Table 4.2: Compensation – Not Received: District and Community wise of Surveyed Households

Note: Excluding four cases of incomplete data

management authority was unprepared and was operating without sound instructions from higher authorities about the impending danger. Lack of coordination of the departments was evident everywhere during floods.

4.5 Bureaucratic Highhandedness and Arbitrary Decisions

It is very important to look at the way the government authorities in Idukki district ran the relief camps at Vazhathoppu and Painavu. Vazhathoppu camp had inmates mainly from 56-Colony, one of the ecologically fragile 'danger zones' in Idukki district. Most of the houses in 56-Colony were not directly damaged but the surrounding areas had been badly affected by landslip and landslide. 56-Colony is located on two hills, their slopes— located face to face— in the valley of the hills. Although the houses were comparatively safe, danger loomed over the 54 Dalit and Adivasis houses after several landslides and landslips around them.

Dalits and Adivasis of 56Colony initially stayed in the relief camp at Higher Secondary School, Vazhathoppu. In the camp they discussed with the revenue and relief officers about their plight. Officials suggested to them that their area has been declared as a dangerous zone

and not suitable for living. The authorities informed the camp inmates that until alternate arrangements are made, they can continue in the camp. However, very soon, they demanded that Dalits and Adivasis must vacate camp. But by that time rains intensified, and more people began to arrive in the camps. The people of 56-Colony shifted to another relief camp at Medical College Hostel, Painavu.

Government regulated development work in the hazardous zones and any construction in such zones had to be carried out with the special permission of the District Collector. Despite these orders, the authorities wanted the marginalized groups to leave camps and move to the danger zones. All these orders of 'eviction' were issued verbally. Upon enquiry by Dalit Human Rights activists, Thahsildar informed them that Collector had ordered to evict the camps, and when they enquired with the Collector on this matter he informed them that he had received special instruction to evict camps. Dalits who resided in the Medical College Hostel camp met the collector and requested to him to make special consideration and separate package for SCs and STs. But the collector refused special package citing instructions from the Government. In this context Dalits and Adivasis requested to the Col-

lector to allot vacant government quarters to those living in the danger zones. Collector did not allow it. It is alleged that, in the meantime, the victims of flood and landslides patronized by the ruling parties were given shelter in that government building.

4.6 ID Proof Strict for Registration in the Camps

When Dalits and Adivasis of 56 Colony shifted from Vazhathoppu relief camp to the Medical College Hostel (MCH) Camp at Painavu, after more than 20 days of camp life in Vazhathoppu, the camp authorities in MCH Camp made identity proof compulsory for registration in the new camp although they had registered once in the Vazhathoppu Camp. Some were unable to carry ID cards while escaping to safety and some had lost or misplaced such documents. The Camp authorities at the Painavu Camp refused to register anyone without ID proof. When pointed out that all of them were registered inmates at the Vazhathoppu Camp authorities casually dismissed their claim by saying “the names and other details of these people were missing in the register of Vazhathoppu Camp”. One government official was adamant in denying admission to them, which led to a big duel. Those from 56-Colony finally forced the camp authorities to allow them to stay in the camp.

In Kavalam (Alappuzha), a Dalit family was forced to travel kilometers through the flood water because the Camp authority in Leo XIII school in Alappuzha denied them entry to the camp saying that their “name was not in the list”. They had to then travel to Cherthala, 20 kilometers away, and the camp authorities in Cherthala turned them back to Alappuzha citing some obscure rules. After such a terrible ordeal, when they returned to the Camp in Leo XIII School, there was a lot of anger and frustration. The camp authorities relented only after the flood-affected threatened to start an agitation before the district collector. Demanding identity cards at the time of a disaster is an unacceptable and unpardonable act. It militates against all norms of responding to humanitarian crisis. Villagers can vouch for the identity of their neighbours, friends or acquaintances which should be accepted as a provisional authentication, which should suffice in such situations.

Some Dalit Christians in Muttar in Kuttanadu complained that the officials demanded them to produce ration cards for receiving relief. Earlier the authorities used to collect & record ration card details to distribute relief materials. As noted earlier, Dalits in these regions have been experiencing floods and used to relief camps almost every year. But this time, it was a panic escape from flood and many people could not carry with them even the most basic items. In most cases, the camp officials did not show much sensitivity to the depth of distress experienced by the disaster-affected who are in the relief camps. Rather, they were often callous in responding to the requests from the helpless inmates.

Both these experiences—of Dalits from Kuttanadu and Dalits and Adivasis from Painavu—show the helplessness of the marginalized, the powerless and the under-privileged people before the apathetic disaster management officials. Their insistence on proving identity become eligible for relief and support from the state was cruel. The approach of the disaster management officials was insensitive and bureaucratic when they were expected to respect the dignity of disaster affected and provide solace to the affected. Some of the flaws in the response could also be due to the apathetic attitudes prevalent within the state’s bureaucracy.

The functioning of the disaster management system showed that it is not working for the welfare and dignified existence of the suffering marginalized people. It must be reminded again that in the case of the Dalit and Adivasis in Painavu, they stayed in the Vazhathoppu Relief Camp for more than 20 days and were considered as victims of natural calamity but when shifted to Painavu Camp they were treated as “nobody’s people”. The disaster management system must be made sensitive to the conditions of the affected. Some of these changes are urgently needed.

The controversy over Identity Card in Painavu camp had turned into an open fight between the official “camp officer” and the disaster affected people. Another officer who visited the Camp during the dispute noticed that the inmates were recording the conversations in their mobile phones. The official challenged them and worsened the situation instead of



A sight from Kuttanad | Popularindia news

trying to find a solution. Some of the camp inmates alerted police and the police team came to assess the situation. The police Sub Inspector informed District Police Superintendent that the presence of the particular official in the camp is likely to worsen the problems and precipitate a crisis.

The ‘emergence’ of Camp Officer as a powerful authority wielding considerable power challenging even the citizenship rights of the calamity affected is very important in the context of a disaster. And it reaches heightened oppression for the powerless Dalits and Adivasis. It is evident in the case cited next. According to the camp inmates, Thahsildar visited the camp and harassed the inmates saying that they were “enjoying” camp life eating and sleeping without doing any job. He also instructed the people to vacate the camp immediately. He said it was not allowed to live in the camp just for eating and drinking. Rahul said: “As I have told you already, we have somehow saved our lives in the midnight hours, but the officials made fun of our sufferings”. One day the Panchayat officials informed the inmates that they would forcefully close the camp by that evening.

After these repeated harassment campers decided not to leave the camp and instead demanded the authorities to provide ten cents of land to all families to construct houses while retaining the agricultural lands in the danger zone. They organized under the banner of “56-Colony Samrakshana Koottayma” (56-Colony Protection Collective). The authorities retaliated by disconnecting power and water supply to the Camp, and reduced ration to the Camp. Rahul said that the State officials re-enacted usual tricks played by privileged-castes against the Colony dwellers. Cordoning off the marginalized, restricting movements, driving away and appropriating their land and property is the usual tricks played by the privileged castes against the marginalized. In between, some ruling Party leaders approached them and started distributing relief materials only to their “supporters” in the camp. The inmates thwarted attempts to create divisions among them and continued to negotiate with the authority.

4.7 The Question of Compensation

Timely distribution of compensations supports the disaster victims to re-build their life, and

Marginalized people have suffered heavy losses including collapse of houses, livelihood, damages to toilets etc. In such cases they have approached the Panchayat and other authorities. But most of the time, disappointing response awaited them. In Mundodi Colony Vadayar in Kottayam district, a number of houses collapsed or became inhabitable. In Vadayar, three houses, which had submerged in flood water, were leaning on a shaky foundation. These houses were located in a marshy land adjoined by paddy fields. When the house owners approached the Panchayath authority for compensation they commented that the houses were seemed collapsed even before flood. They also demanded photographs of flooded house to receive compensation/aid. Caste bias and caste hatred are two ‘calamities’ that the Dalits are fighting every day.

providing compensations is the duty of the State. It has become difficult for the marginalized communities to get timely compensation from the government after the terrible disaster. These were the people who lost every material thing in the disaster beginning from household utensils. A woman Dalit agricultural laborer from Mithrakkari (Alappuzha) said: “After all, what do we have to lose other than the ration rice?” The government had offered a compensation of Rs 10,000 for houses damaged or collapsed during flood. The SCs and STs were given an additional amount of Rs 5,000. But there were widespread complaints regarding the distribution of compensation. At the time when we undertook the field work, there were lots of people who have not received the compensation. **SURENDAN** from Kavalam said that “the government has given aid to those who are not affected badly by the flood. Those whose houses are really submerged are yet to receive compensation.”

Distribution of ex-gratia relief and compensation to the disaster-affected are major post-disaster interventions by the state to help restore their lives. In case of the marginalized communities such assistance is very crucial since what they have lost is their life-long savings and assets. However, people have reported many anomalies and irregularities in the distribution of such financial assistance. Till the end of our field work in the middle of December, nearly four months after the disaster, there were many families who were yet to be received the assistance declared by the state government.

The government had declared that a compensation of Rs 10,000 would be provided to the families whose houses are submerged or collapsed completely. This declaration was misinterpreted in many cases and many Dalits and Adivasis in Idukki district did not receive any compensation despite the heavy damages to their houses. Most of them were denied compensation when damaged houses which are unfit to live were classified as partially damaged.

Across the four districts and communities, until the time of the survey, nearly 25 percent marginalized households have not received the promised compensation (*Table 4.1, 4.2*). Across communities, 58.3 percent of Adivasis, 28.4 percent Dalit Christians and about 18 percent of the SC had not received compensation at the time of the survey. In Idukki, shockingly, nearly 83 percent of the marginalized have not received it. In Alapuzha, it is 11.6 percent, in Kottayam about seven percent and in Pathanamtitta 15.6 percent. Corroborating the findings in this report are similar observations made in the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report prepared by the UNDP for the Kerala Government published in December 2018, notes, based on certain field visits, that the issues related to compensation for lost land/homes are yet to be resolved for many from the Dalit communities.

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An activist from Maniyaramkudi, Idukki told that "there was a huge calamity and five members of a family died in a landslide. All houses in the area got damaged and there was not even a proper enquiry by the government. The government secured report only of the houses completely collapsed." In Idukki, the damages to the houses are severe but the government decision resulted in excluding some houses from receiving compensation. At first sight we cannot identify the actual damage to the house. But on closer examination, we can find several cracks in the walls which make them uninhabitable which need to be re-built. But the govt. provides financial assistance only to the com-

pletely damaged houses. Government officials inform that they can provide assistance only to the houses completely damaged or completely submerged in water, although the condition in Idukki is different. It seems that the authorities have made this idea of calculating losses based on the flood experience and damages in plain lands. Geographical differences matter and houses near land slide or land slip areas might collapse at any time. The affected people requested the officials to provide plain land or cultivable land for good livelihood, because it was not possible to live at the same location again. The declared financial assistance of Rs 10,000 was also found meager by the affected people to rebuild their life.

There are severe problems in the compensation plan of the government in Idukki district. The assessment of damage to houses is not carried out by experts as in the case of assessments made by Gujarat government after the earthquake disaster. The rule exists in Kerala Disaster Management as well. In Idukki, the revenue or Panchayath officials surveyed and assessed whether the house is completely collapsed. The compensation for 'completely collapsed' houses in Idukki district and submerged houses in Alappuzha district are same. This situation demands that a more serious and expert studies are required before for the reconstruction plans are finalized.

Gendered Vulnerabilities & Patriarchal Institutions

5.1 Background

Numerous studies emphasize that disasters reinforce, perpetuate and increase gender inequality, making situations worse for women. They emphasize that disaster vulnerabilities and coping capacities are gendered in all phases, before, during and after disaster. The UNISDR notes that conventionally, disaster management often overlooks potential contributions that women can offer for disaster risk reduction. The tendency is to disregard the importance of female leadership in building community resilience to disasters. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction states that women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and it is necessary to adopt and implement gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes. It points out the capacity building measures that are needed to empower women for disaster preparedness and to secure alternate means of livelihood in post-disaster situations.

A woman at a Kerala flood relief camp in Alappuzha | AP



The flood of 2018 and the management of the flood disaster shows that the institutions responsible for disaster management at various levels have neither made any attempts to incorporate gender concerns nor exhibit minimal awareness of gender concerns in disaster management.

For Dalit and Adivasi women their multiple layers of disadvantage stem from the patriarchal hegemony, their exclusion and discrimination within social, economic and political life. Women's experiences in the floods must be viewed in this context. Hence when we share experiences, we must understand and address women's experiences specifically. Their contributions and experiences carry special significance in the rebuilding Kerala project. When we talk about suffering at the time of floods, women suffered a lot more than men folk. Many of them had to stay back home for taking care of their children, elderly people and animals. All responsibility fell on their shoulders. The difficulties faced by them are unnoticed. Few examples vividly explain the shocking truth of the extent and nature of women's sufferings at the time of flood. Among the households covered in the study, almost 22 percent were Female-Headed-Households (Table 5.1). As per Census 2011, Kerala has 23 percent female headed households which is the highest in India. The all India figure is 11 percent.

5.2 Multiple Handicaps in Escaping

Women faced difficulties in escaping from the situation of flood. Often their household responsibilities forced them to stay back at home especially for childbearing women. Bindu, a Dalit Christian, from Karumadi had to wait for a day at home even as the water level was rising, since her husband was out of station. Most of the neighbouring people had moved out to

relief camp. Bindu had to take care of her child. Her mother-in-law was not capable of shifting the household items to higher place within the house out of reach of the flood water. They waited until her husband returned home, ignoring the announcements made by police asking people to leave the area immediately. They had to face that risk of waiting until her husband returned home wading through the flood water. Women from Thuruthikkad colony said they had to walk and swim through neck-deep water to reach the relief camp. They had to hold their children in one hand and use the other hand for negotiating through the flood water. A woman narrated a situation when her baby fell into the water when they were about to reach the second floor of a two-storied house where people found shelter. She described how she saved the child by jumping into the water.

5.3 Shortage of Clothing and Essential Items

Most of the women came to camps with only what they were wearing to escape danger to their lives. Women described the conditions in which they had to spend more than three days wearing the same wet clothes. The only way to escape was boarding the boats ferrying the affected people. Many women had to wait one whole day or more in the wet clothes before being rescued by a boat and moved to a relief camp. All kinds of dresses were being brought to the relief camps and it was very difficult to find the kind clothing the women needed from the pile of clothes available in the camp. Another huge problem women encountered in the relief camps was the scarcity of sanitary napkins and diapers for children. The official arrangements overlooked such requirements and most of the non-government relief providers also failed to distribute it. Almost all relief kits distributed in the camps did not include sanitary napkins and

Community	Female Headed	Total Surveyed Households
Scheduled Caste	30 (26.3%)	114
Scheduled Tribe	2 (16.7%)	12
Dalit Christian	20 (18.0%)	111
ALL	52 (21.9%)	237

Table 5.1: Female Headed Households, Community wise of Surveyed Households



Women leaving homes to safety | CSSC

baby diapers. Strangely, even in a state like Kerala, the notion of relief was limited primarily to distributing food and cloth. There was no focus on health and hygiene aspects, especially of women and children. Realizing this, during the flood relief works initiated by CSSC and Abhayaloka team, we distributed sanitary napkins in relief camps.

5.4 Problems with Sanitation Facilities

Absence of adequate toilet facilities was a huge challenge the women had to face in the relief camps all through the disaster. It was a severe problem and they suffered a lot. In some camps, there were no toilet facilities at all. Women had to struggle to cope with the situation. A woman flood survivor from Kavalam shared her experience in the camps and the difficulties women suffered. Her group had to walk almost 5 km to reach the rescue boat. Somehow, they reached the camp in the evening by 6.30 pm. But the camp was in an old warehouse, which was stinking of rotten materials and extremely dirty. They felt as though they are in a waste dump. The conditions there were unfit for humans. They tried to clean up the place but were unable to. They told the authorities that it was impossible to stay so they moved to another camp as soon as possible. They could not stay in the next camp either as it was overcrowded and moved to a third camp which was in same condition. Finally, she reached Thiruvalla after three days. She

could not go to toilet throughout these three days and they stayed in the camp wearing the same set of wet clothes. Another survivor from Karumadi also shared the same experience of shifting camps and the problems with toilet facilities. Half-jokingly she said, there was hardly anything “going inside” as to relieve them!

Some women and children from Thuruthikkadu colony had to suffer a lot before being rescued. They stayed on the upstairs of a house for one day. In the night, they started moving to a camp in a boat. Unfortunately, the boat hit against something, and sunk. All of them found their own ways to escape in the night in fast flowing water by holding the branches of coconut trees. They were saved and moved to the terrace of another house for another day. It was on third day they could reach at a camp, after being rescued by a country boat. All these three days, women could not meet their primary needs. They said that while men could manage without the toilet facilities, women could not!

5.5 Sexual Harassment and Humiliation

Sexual harassment and humiliation are major problems that are faced by women in every spheres of life. Floods increased the vulnerability of women resulting in various forms of sexual violence against women. Among one of such incidents, a young woman shared her bitter experience of wearing the same wet clothes

including inner wears for three days. In the relief camp, she felt sick and threw up. The men folk watching her vomit began to make comments implying that she could be pregnant and alleging sexual indiscipline. They would loudly comment, "If women aren't careful, this is bound to happen. After all, this is relief camp!"

The flood hit all the people. The havoc affected their mental health too. Many of them are facing mental problem. It could be observed from their behaviour. They seem to be highly tension gripped. High BP and diabetic changes are examples of the same during post-disaster period. A medical team which was part of our relief work diagnosed it. It is suggested that the government arrange counseling and treatment for women. Women were also suffering from urinary tract infections owing to lack of toilet facilities, sanitary napkins and wearing wet clothes for long.

5.6 Loss of Livelihood and Economic Stress

An important loss that women experienced is the loss of livelihood sources sustaining them.

Since everyone in a family is not an earning member, women bear additional responsibility of managing the household and taking care of the emotional problems in the family. Most women were anxious about their future owing to the loss of working days of their earning members, loss of other livelihood sources and their helplessness in a situation of complete destruction of life they had never experienced. One grandmother from Thuruthikkadu Colony shared that she has suffered a lot after flood. All means of livelihood were completely taken away. She lost 15 hens, two goats, and a cow in the flood. Her son was a driver and had rented a car. The car got washed away in by flood waters. She was not willing to leave behind all her animals. One pregnant cow was moved to safety using a long rope. The water level was up to neck of the cow. Fortunately, the cow was safe when they returned.

Dalit women also have the responsibility of supplementary livelihoods such as poultry and livestock farming (mostly cows, goats), which provide significant contribution to the total earnings. Most of these livestock suffered severely through partial or complete loss from

A private tuition centre at a flood affected area | CSSC



Women borrow from multiple sources to maintain households, manage domestic finances and to keep the supplementary livelihoods going. Post-disaster, many found it difficult to make regular repayments to the financing agencies. This situation has been exploited by most financing enterprises unethically. They are offering additional loans, which are disbursed after deducting the outstanding dues. This puts women into a vicious circle of debt. The disaster has thus become an occasion for deepening the debt trap and aggravating the economic deprivation.

the disaster. Some of them have invested their hard-earned money in the schemes of self-help groups like Kudumbasree. In one such case, an investment of Rs 25,000 made in a small-scale poultry scheme of Kudumbasree in Muttar was almost totally lost due to the damage by the disaster. They had to escape from house in the night without making alternate arrangements. The farm was submerged in the flood and all the poultry perished. Despite the total loss in the disaster, Kudumbasree demanded repayment of loan without any moratorium or rescheduling of the repayments. Hence, it is important to look at the functioning of such SHGs and the micro-finance institutions in the context of disaster. The experience narrated by respondents raises many questions. Will Are the SHGs, micro-finance institutions and other enterprises truly sensitive and empathic to the distress of the disaster-affected poor clients and members is a question the government must examine carefully and enact a suitable policy.

5.7 Falling Deeper into Debt Trap

Women borrow from multiple sources to maintain households, manage domestic finances and to keep the supplementary livelihoods going. Post-disaster, many found it difficult to make regular repayments to the financing agencies. This situation has been exploited by most financing enterprises unethically. They are offering additional loans, which are disbursed after deducting the outstanding dues. This puts women into a vicious circle of debt. The disaster has thus become an occasion for deepening the debt trap and aggravating

the economic deprivation. In many ways, the unemployed women have been transformed into debt managers. Aggravation of economic stress that financing agencies including the Kudumbasree has brought upon its clients or members appear to be a case of financial malpractice witnessed after the disaster. The government announced special compensation package to Kudumbasree members. One Kudumbasree is eligible for financial support from government. This finance can be divided among the members of a unit, but the existing loans would be deducted from this compensation amount. Is this not a cruel trick played on the disaster affected? This compensation appears to be more of a programme to offset previous loans taken by poor women from Kudumbasree units than help them rebuild livelihoods or reduce the financial distress. This appears to be a violation of the very basic rules of banking not to deduct loan amount from another account of the debtor.

5.8 Overworked Women Development Workers

It is a general tendency in any patriarchal society to pass on additional workload to the women folk. The institutionalization of patriarchal attitudes is evident in the approach adopted by officials involved in relief activities who not only refused to exempt the even the disaster-affected women workers from disaster response duties but also burdened them with difficult tasks. In the case of LISSY, a separated woman living alone and in-charge of anganvadi (child-care center) at her village, the decision of panchayat officials to give her additional workload



People sharing their flood experiences | CSSC

The conversations with the flood-affected women show that they have not been involved in disaster risk reduction activities or provided any training in coping with disaster situations although they live and work in flood or landslide hazard prone areas. It is evident that women faced many kinds of difficulties while trying to cope with the crisis and escaping to safer locations. Their life in relief camps was made more miserable by the scarcity of adequate clothing and items like sanitary napkins. The sanitation, hygiene and other basic facilities were either inadequate or poorly organised without considering specific needs of women.

for three days continuously immediately after reaching home from camp, was shocking. Her house was submerged, all household materials had been lost and the house was full of mud and waste when she returned from the relief camp. Her cousin gave her Rs 1000 to return home. She had to pay Rs. 900 for travel expense from camp to house using various modes of travel. A few of those assigned for the clean-up operations helped her to clear the premises. Water weeds had accumulated in the entire house when the water receded. She could not even enter the house. However, before anything more could be done, she got a call from the Panchayat asking her to report to office immediately. They assigned her the task of distributing Rs 1000 to the flood affected as immediate cash assistance.

The Panchayat 'assigned' her heavy responsibilities, telling her it is her 'duty' as an Anganvadi teacher, without any extra remuneration for the additional heavy work. She could not clean up her house or do anything for her family for three days. The situation in the village was chaotic with nobody knowing what to do or how. Meanwhile she was running pillar to post for obtaining certificates, getting documents and helping needy people to prepare applications for assistance from government and other agencies. She carried out the unpaid heavy work. Lissy said "they don't even reimburse travel cost". It was her vulnerabilities as a single woman that the Panchayath officials were exploiting to make her carry out the difficult tasks without bothering in any way about her own situation as flood survivor. She said

that her duty was to fill the application forms correctly with full details of the beneficiaries. She had to take printouts and fill in the forms based on the report provided from village office. She had to do it as unpaid work and was to complete it within four days. It was not possible to finish everything by a single person with all the details of three wards of a panchayat. She said, “Panchayat provided some ration, which was the only thing they gave after all that heavy work. I could not do anything for my own home after the flood in those days. I was fully occupied with the work assigned to me”. Instead of treating anganwadi workers as development workers, they were, as women, also perceived as performing service or ‘forced voluntary labour’.

5.9 Conclusion

The conversations with the flood-affected women show that they have not been involved in disaster risk reduction activities or provided any training in coping with disaster situations although they live and work in flood or landslide hazard prone areas. It is evident that women faced many kinds of difficulties while trying to cope with the crisis and escaping to safer loca-

tions. Their life in relief camps was made more miserable by the scarcity of adequate clothing and items like sanitary napkins. The sanitation, hygiene and other basic facilities were either inadequate or poorly organised without considering specific needs of women. The camp management did not make proactive efforts to discourage, prevent and penalise abusive behaviour and humiliation. Although the disaster caused severe economic stress and livelihood losses, the support for overcoming the difficulties fell short of felt needs of women although they play multiple roles in the households and community. The approaches of various micro-finance and micro-enterprise promoters seem to aggravate rather than reduce economic stress faced by the disaster-affected women linked to such agencies and associated SHGs. The approaches of most agencies including the Kudumbasree seem to push the women deeper into debt trap. Patriarchal attitudes seem strongly entrenched as is evident from approach adopted by officials who were over burdening disaster-affected women workers by assigning them unpaid additional tasks. All these point to the need for major changes in the state’s approach to disaster management making it truly gender sensitive.

A collapsed house of a dalit family in Muttar, Alappuzha | CSSC





Dalit Christians: Cast(e) Out in the Deluge?

6.1 The Dalit Christians

Appearing as slave or “poor Christians” in the 19th and early 20th century missionary records, the Dalit Christians of contemporary Kerala are descendants of untouchable slave castes who had begun to embrace Christianity since the mid nineteenth century. In the experiential realm of Dalit religious life in Kerala, the idea of religious ‘conversion’ granting power to ‘outside agencies’ has been challenged and replaced with the idea of Dalits voluntary appropriating the new faith of Christianity in their own terms (TM Yesudasan, *Baliyadukalude Vamshavali (Genealogies of Scape Goats)*). Here, religious conversion is the conscious and agential action of slave castes by which slave castes appropriated a new religion which became an indispensable part of the process of the making of their self. This understanding of religious conversion challenges the hackneyed theories of “religious conversion” which gives primacy to outsider influence for religion change (Sanal Mohan, *Modernity of Slavery*). Conversion of slave castes into Christianity resulted in intensified oppression by the upper caste Syrian Christians and upper caste Hindu landlords.

A Holy Bible seen in a collapsed house of a dalit christian family in Ezhikkadu, pathanamthitta district | CSSC



The fear of 'growing numbers of Christians' and the "politics of numbers" was one underlying reason for the oppression by the Hindu forces in the aftermath of every incident of religious conversion. Religious conversion met with strong opposition by the leaders of national movement in India and the Dalit Christians were denied Scheduled Castes status in India. The Presidential Order of 1950, although amended later and was expanded to include Scheduled Castes from non-Hindu religions, continues to refuse Scheduled Caste status to people of non-Indic religions; Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. This continuing denial of Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims is contradictory to the fundamental principles of India's Constitution, and a gross violation of freedom of religion enshrined in India's Constitution. This situation created divisions among Dalits as those who belonging to Indic religions and non-Indic religions.

Most Dalit political discourses fail to recognize these fundamental aspects, particularly in Kerala. Immediately after India gaining Independence, Backward Class Christian Federation (BCCF) led by V.D John in Kerala raised the issue of reservation for Dalit Christians during the first election to the Legislative Assembly of Kerala. Though the Communist Party

had promised to address this question during elections, they went back on their words after elections. The 'inaction' by the Community Party resulted in massive mobilization by Dalit Christians in Kerala and after struggles led by BCCF, Dalit Christians were 'granted' one per cent reservation in government jobs in Kerala. This one per cent reservation was arrived upon without considering the number/population of Dalit Christians in Kerala or the percentage of their representation in government jobs. The one per cent reservation is still continuing in Kerala along with a miniscule amount as stipend granted to Dalit Christian students which is also availed by Scheduled Caste students.

The doors of Constitutional safeguards, priority in development schemes, reservation in educational institutions and employment etc. are closed to Dalit Christians although they share the same social and economic status and were victims of the same historical injustices. The social and economic backwardness of Dalit Christians are meticulously compiled in various studies and Commission Reports. The framers of India's Constitution inserted Constitutional safeguards and measures to ensure equality, dignity and self-representation of the historically and socially oppressed and discriminated in the Indian society. However, even many

A Dalit Christian and Dalit Muslim protest held in New Delhi demanding the same rights guaranteed to Dalits of other religions



There are various sources of oppression of the Dalit Christians: high caste Syrian Christians in the Church and society, upper caste Hindus in the larger society, other castes and social superiors and above all the recalcitrant state that never acknowledges the historical injustice meted out to Dalit Christians. Dalit Christians also face the indignity of being called upon to offer their testimony of faith, as ‘true’ Christians, who have adopted their Christian faith not out of material benefits and/or petty inducements like everyday bread and butter. At least a section of Dalits following Indic religions mock Dalit Christians on Reservations and ask them to come back to the ‘old fold’ since Christian faith offered them ‘nothing’. The Dalit Christians have come to occupy a unique status in world’s largest democracy. It is in this context that we pay special attention to the experiences of Dalit Christians in this report.

Dalit writers and thinkers do not recognize it even in the context of Reservations granted to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among the upper castes and dominant groups in the society through an Amendment of India’s Constitution in 2019.

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6.2 Disaster Context—Caught in the Middle

Pastor Joseph is a Dalit Christian pastor and evangelist at Immanuel Pentecostal Church Karimban in Idukki district. Joseph was in-

involved in rescue and relief activities during the 2018 disaster. Pastor Joseph spoke about the post-disaster situation in the areas such as Karimban, Churuli, Chelachuvadu, Mariyapuram, Keerithodu, Attikkalam and Maniyarankudi, where Dalit Christians have a large presence. His first question to our research team was whether our study would support the Dalit Christian survivors in any way. His question reflected his despair from witnessing the heavy losses suffered by the Dalit Christians and the lack of state support and other support to them. The following section portrays the condition of Dalit Christians during the disaster.

Karimban is one of the most dangerous zones in Idukki district with a history of recurring landslides. According to Pastor Joseph nearly 30 families had to move out, leaving behind their properties in Karimban, Chelachuvadu and Churuly areas due to landslides. Most were Dalit Christians. The landslides and heavy rain affected them badly. They also lost their crop. Dalit Christians are not big farmers. Although they cultivate a few crops on their small plots, they are mainly daily wage earners. The disaster deprived them of work and daily earnings as well for an extended period.

Barring a few, all the Dalit Christians from these localities stayed in the relief camps. All of them lost their houses partially or completely. Complete destruction of four houses occurred in Mariyapuram. Houses of non-Dalit Christians



CSSC volunteer *Jestin T Varghese* interacting with a Dalit Christian priest

were also partially damaged. All these were built by mud bricks. A few who did not own their own houses also lived there, including two widows.

Most of these survivors did not receive any relief materials. The pastor arranged some relief materials with the help of his friends. The priest has documented relief activities carried out under his initiative. The church at Maniyarankudi where Dalit and Adivasi Christians prayed collapsed when a huge tree fell on the church shed. The voluntary labour by church members and paid work cleared the debris of the church shed. Now they are looking forward to re-building the church but are constrained by lack of money. In Attikkalam, three members of a Dalit Christian family were dead in landslides and three families are living without a proper house. Another house was totally damaged in this area.

A Dalit Christian widow ran an Akshaya Centre (government licensed kiosk offering IT enabled services to the public) at Cheruthony town and the Centre was her only means of subsistence. The Centre and the property worth Rs.

7,00,000 was washed away when the shutters of the Idukki dam were opened. During the 'trial run', she was informed by the authorities that her Centre would be safe from the discharge of water and she did not shift the properties to a safer place. Later after rain intensified, and more shutters of the dam were opened without granting time for people to shift their belongings/ equipment.

There are houses in the area which are in a dilapidated condition and are supported using bamboo sticks and ropes which would not stand heavy winds. Some people who had left the danger zone are staying with their relatives. People who are forced to stay back continue to live in their houses in the danger zones.

PASTOR JOSEPH said that his house had a crack in the wall, and although he had informed the Panchayath authorities, no support came his way. There was also a land slip in his land and 10 cents of land was lost and some of the crops including rubber and plantains collapsed. Pastor said that since the state is not extending support to them, they are looking forward to support from elsewhere. In his un-

Ezhikkadu Colony in Pathanamthitta was established in the 1960's. Government granted 20 cents of land to each family which was later partitioned among the members of their family. There were nearly 40 Dalit Christian families in the Ezhikkadu Colony and it was inundated by the Pamba River during the floods, although it was three kilometers away from the riverbed. The connecting link was a small tributary of the river flowing near to the Colony. Water rose up to nine feet in the houses in the Colony touching the roof of the houses. Flood began in the morning hours and by night the Colony submerged completely.

derstanding, those who have lost their houses and living in danger zones have not received any financial assistance from government other than ration rice and clothes. Once when he enquired the Panchayat member about the relief materials he received two vests and shorts, the only support he received so far. He says he is not expecting anything more because neither state nor public consider Dalit Christians as worthy of consideration.

Ezhikkadu Colony in Pathanamthitta was established in the 1960's. Government granted 20 cents of land to each family which was later partitioned among the members of their family. There were nearly 40 Dalit Christian families in the Ezhikkadu Colony and it was inundated by the Pamba River during the floods, although it was three kilometers away from the riverbed. The connecting link was a small tributary of the river flowing near to the Colony. Water rose up to nine feet in the houses in the Colony touching the roof of the houses. Flood began in the morning hours and by night the Colony submerged completely.

MR CHACKO M J said there was no alert information issued to the people in that area. In the same morning by around 5 a.m. he came to know about the floods and that parts of Ranni (nearby town) was submerged in water. People began to move after 10 a.m., by which time water began to invade them from all sides. It was a frantic run by people present in the Colony. Chacko parked his two-wheeler

at a safer place, 1.5 kilometer away from his house and returned and rescued his cow. By that time water had rose up to his waist and he could not collect anything and household items, electronic items, certificates and identity cards etc., were left at home. **CHACKO** did not move to the camp and stayed in a house which he had been caretaking. By 1'0 clock in the noon everyone in the Colony left their houses. People could save their lives since it was day and had judged the impending danger even without official warning reaching them.

6.3 Dalit Christians as 'General Category' Caste

CHACKO had availed an education loan of Rs 60,000 for his daughter's nursing course. But she could not complete the course due to the demise of her mother and the repayment of the loan became in uncertainty. A year later the dues to the bank rose to one lakh and ten thousand rupees which the lender, Indian Overseas Bank demanded to repay. **CHACKO** started to re-pay the loan, Rs.2000/month, from his daily wages. Understanding his economic status, the bank manager advised him to present his case before the adalat (mechanism to address the grievances of borrowers), and cautioned him that in case of adalat turning down his demand he would have to re-pay the entire amount. Expecting an unfavourable decision in adalat **CHACKO** continued to re-pay the loan installment from his daily wages. **CHACKO** believed that being a Dalit Christian he would

not get such mercy from any governmental or other authorities.

CHACKO said Scheduled Castes receive a state compensation of Rs 15,000 for the repairing of submerged houses while Dalit Christians of the same economic and caste status receive only Rs 10,000, equal to that of general category, because Dalit Christians are not classified as Scheduled Castes. Chacko had applied for house maintenance and attempted to convince the condition to many in the government offices but pins no hope on it because the list was already prepared. "Other people are receiving financial help from government for maintenance of their houses from the very next year of the construction of a house. State and its officers do not understand our situation or accept what we say. They say everyone would get maintenance support, but we never get it. We have to do everything our own", **CHACKO** complains. Chacko points out to a serious problem of considering Dalit Christians as general category for government assistance. In general category Dalit Christians have to compete with privileged and resourceful communities who can easily influence the authorities in everything especially in assistance given by the state.

CHACKO points out that state preference for Scheduled Castes is laudable, although Dalit Christians are discriminated against by the State citing wrong policies. But it is unfortunate that non-governmental institutions also do not consider social deprivations when they implement their social welfare programs. For example, the Mar Thoma Church provides houses for the poor people without considering social backwardness, caste or religion. He argues that institutions like The Mar Thoma Church should give priority to Dalit Christians who are denied state support or any other kind of support.

Dalit Christians of Muniyara were mainly affected by landslide. In Muniyara, houses are built on steep hills after leveling a portion of it. In the raining landslides occurred in the back and front side of the houses. In the back, huge masses of mud slid on the houses and the walls of many houses were collapsed and

mud and soil invaded the house over furniture and home appliances. In some cases, the entire house collapsed with only the front walls remaining unaffected. Most of the houses are built by poor quality mud bricks which are vulnerable to the fury of raining. In some cases, the front side of the house was also affected by landslide putting the entire structure in difficulty. The most apathetic situation arises when government officials, after visiting the place, report those houses as inhabitable. The idea of "inhabitable" houses for Dalits and the marginalized need to be discussed at length!

Panchayat members took the initiative to relocate people to the camps and the survivors living in the camp for nearly 20 days in Muniyara. The camp life was without discrimination and the state and voluntary bodies supplied rice and essentials and distributed relief materials. Help came from the bordering state of Tamil Nadu, and the plantation management from four estates brought materials for the campers. The Church organizations, Cherama Sambava Development Society (CSDS), a Dalit body, were also engaged in relief works. The camp inmates were conscious that the materials are meant for all the affected people, and they should always show dignity and self-respect, with or without disaster.

6.4 Conclusion

The experiences of the Dalit Christians are not very different from that of Dalits in other religious communities when it comes to getting timely warnings, support for shifting to relief camps or in the disbursement of relief and compensation. In particular, the spatial marginalization aggravates their social disadvantages in almost the same way as in the case of other Dalit communities. Since they are not recognized as historically disadvantaged as other Dalit communities, they do not get the necessary support from the state. Unfortunately, the NGOs are also not considering the social deprivation in their relief and rehabilitation work. The Church in Kerala too is refusing to pay attention to the situation of Dalit Christians and their social deprivation. Instead, they too are following an economic criterion.

Chapter - 7

Losses and Damages: Sample Survey among the Marginalized

7.1 Purposive Household Survey

This section analyses the data collected from 237 households of the marginalized communities whose experiences in the disaster are articulated in this report. Of all the households included in the survey, proportion of Scheduled Caste is 46.8 percent, Adivasis 5.1 percent and Dalit Christians 48.1 percent (*Tables 1.1, 1.2, 7.1*). The households were selected by purposive sampling from four districts, Idukki, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts.

7.2 Casualties and Damages to Dwelling Places

Among the marginalized households covered in this survey, four persons (1.7%) died in the disaster and 31 (13.1%) suffered different kinds of injuries, including short-term hospitalization. Among the losses and damages caused by the disaster, one of the most important is the damage to dwellings. It is important to assess the damages to the dwelling places. However, we need to keep in mind some troubling ques-

District	SC		ST		DC		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alappuzha	38	33.3	1	8.3	49	44.1	88	37.1
Idukki	12	10.5	10	83.3	19	17.1	41	17.3
Kottayam	19	16.7	0	0.0	9	9.0	28	12.2
Pathanamthitta	45	39.5	1	8.3	33	29.7	79	33.3
All Districts	114	100	12	100	111	100	237	100
Share of the total (%)	48.1		5.1		46.8		100	

Table 7.1: Households surveyed: Communities, District-wise (%)

	Nature of Damage	SC	ST	DC	Total
1	Completely collapsed, need new house	18%	45%	24%	22%
2	Partially collapsed need reconstruction	67%	45%	59%	62%
	Total houses damaged	94 (84.7%)	10 (90%)	87 (83%)	191 (84%)

Table 7.2: Damages to House Community wise

District	No: of Households surveyed	Houses completely Damaged	Houses partially damaged	Total houses affected
Alappuzha	88	15 (17%)	60 (68%)	75 (85%)
Idukki	41	17 (41%)	19 (46%)	36 (87%)
Kottayam	29	4 (14%)	16 (55%)	20 (69%)
Pathanamthitta	79	14 (18%)	46 (58%)	60 (76%)
TOTAL	237	50 (21%)	141 (59%)	191 (80%)

Table 7.3: Damage to Houses District wise Information

tions regarding housing of the marginalized before going into details. Why should the damage to dwelling places of the marginalized in Kerala assume more importance? What was the nature of their dwelling places? How were the houses constructed? Why do many among marginalised not own proper housing? Before looking at the damages we start with the ownership of houses among the marginalized sections in Kerala.

Of the households contacted in this survey, 22 percent dwellings of the marginalized had completely collapsed in the disaster while that of 62 percent collapsed partially (Table 7.8). The district with highest losses is Idukki (87%). The partially collapsed houses must be reconstructed in a manner that makes it hazard resistant. The disaster damaged nearly 84 percent of the houses of the marginalized. Generally, people can manage with the partial collapse when the structural damage is not severe. In the disaster many of the partially damaged houses have the structure severely damaged. It is dangerous to stay in such houses. In most cases, the damage is visible as big cracks in the walls, or the walls appear to be breaking because the foundation is damaged.

House is a dream for every family and individ-

ual. In the rebuilding of Kerala, providing safe and dignified houses to the marginalized must get high priority. While it may not be possible to fully support this, the state must do everything to treat the marginalized in a dignified manner, as equal human beings, as equal citizens. First step towards this is to address the historical injustice inflicted on the marginalized by the dominant castes and make the institutions of the state become sensitive to the realities that the marginalized face.

Most marginalized families have very modest savings, meager earnings and huge debt burdens (section 2.6). Often, there are delays in the release of funds from schemes or in the disbursement of loans for housing. The delay gives rise to many difficulties and by the time amount is received, many recipients end up using part of that for meeting other commitments. Timely disbursement is important for efficient utilization. For example, what Thankachan has to say about the government housing scheme is pertinent. He feels that the scheme does not consider the many constraints people like him face in the difficult locations. The scheme lays down certain norms and guidelines for a minimal RCC house, which is applicable to all. However, those like him find that the housing support of five lakh Rupees is inadequate in

difficult locations like Kuttanadu where transportation cost is very high.

The processing, sanctioning and disbursal of the funds under government schemes takes very long time. Getting all the documentation ready itself takes a long time. The funds are released in several installments, which are usually delayed. This results in periodic stoppage of work, cost escalations and many problems arising from that. Sometimes the fund is disbursed in the rainy season when the construction work is not possible, which tempts people to divert the fund for other immediate needs. Another issue is that before the fund can be released, the beneficiary must demolish the existing house. Most people shift to a temporary dwelling and until the work on the new house is completed, they must manage from the temporary dwelling—a shed or a hut. Thankachan is of the view that there should be an option for the government to undertake the construction instead of people like him taking the responsibility. Since costs, including that of labour has increased significantly, the sum of five lakh Rupees is not enough for completing the house.

The housing schemes must consider the geographical differences and structure the scheme—the norms and the total financial assistance—accordingly. Given the difficulties the marginalized people face, it may be better for government construct it and transfer to the beneficiary. The work could be undertaken directly by government agency or indirectly through contractors. Instead of common norms, guidelines, designs and funding, all these must be region-specific to ensure safe housing for the poor and marginalized. In post-disaster reconstruction, there are many exam-

ples of NGOs or other agencies handing over to the families fully built houses certified for safety on the basis of agreements with government. All the housing schemes must conform to multi-hazard resistant designs considering the hazard risks specific to the region where the houses are constructed. We need to ask whether the implementation of various schemes is attempting to do that or are these schemes indirectly promoting unsafe housing for the poor and marginalized. It is evident that the current implementation of the housing scheme is, in effect, aggravating or perpetuating the vulnerability of the marginalized.

7.3 Loss of household items

Nearly 74% of households lost their household and electronic items, about 30% must deal with the damage to vehicles (Tables 7.10, 7.11). Almost 1.7% lost their gold ornaments and 21% households have lost other items. Analyzing the losses and damages of the marginalized communities it is important to note how the families have gradually come to own the items they lost. In most cases, the families of the marginalized purchase household items through hire purchase schemes, paying on an installment basis. Since most of them are poor daily wage earners, it is difficult for them to buy essential but costly items such as fridge, grinder, cot and television.

In most cases, these items have been purchased through women’s initiatives. Many of these are durables that reduce the drudgery of their work at home. Often, men consider some of these items as unnecessary expenditure. It is extremely difficult for these families to acquire these items again in a short period,

	Damaged Item	Households (proportion)
1	Kitchen Items	175 (73.8%)
2	Electronic Items	175 (73.8%)
3	Gold	4 (1.7%)
4	Two-Wheeler	26 (11.0%)
5	Car	4 (1.7%)
6	Other Items	51 (21.5%)

Table 7.4: Items Damaged or Lost in the Disaster by Surveyed Households

Item	Number of Households and Proportion							
	SC		ST		DC		All	
Kitchen Items	91	79.8%	8	66.7%	76	68.5%	175	73.8%
Electronics	93	81.6%	4	33.3%	78	70.3%	175	73.8%
Gold	1	0.9%	1	8.3%	2	1.8%	4	1.7%
Two-Wheeler	11	9.6%	2	16.7%	13	11.7%	26	11.0%
Car	2	1.8%	1	8.3%	1	0.9%	4	1.7%
Other	22	19.3%	3	25.0%	26	23.4%	51	21.5%

Table 7.5: Items Damaged or Lost in the Disaster—Surveyed Households by Community

Loss of Livelihood	Number of Households (Percentage)			
	SC	ST	DC	TOTAL
Complete loss	11 (9.7%)	4 (3.3%)	11 (10%)	25 (10.5%)
Partial loss	17 (14.9%)	0 (0%)	15 (13%)	32 (13.5%)
Total	28 (24.6%)	4 (3.3%)	25 (23%)	57 (24.1%)

Table 7.6: Loss of Livelihood, Community wise of Surveyed Households

especially when they may not have completed paying installments to some of the lost items. It also opens business opportunities for local money lenders and agents of all sorts of hire purchase dealers to approach these families again.

7.4 Livelihood Losses

Loss of livelihood is the most serious loss suffered by the marginalized, which affects their post-disaster recovery and survival. The livelihood losses are beyond their control and they do not have alternatives to compensate for the income losses. In fact, the immediate livelihood losses would literally break the backbones of their families. Livelihood losses in this study include agricultural land, crops, tools and equipment of artisans, cattle shed, livestock and so on. An important loss in this regard is the loss of working days itself. Analyzing them compared with the backwardness of the communities we would be in distress to find the heavy losses that suffer by these families. The following table illustrates the degree of loss of livelihood among the SCs STs and Dalit Christians.

Livelihood restoration is considered as one the highest priority tasks in post-disaster recovery

globally and within that restoring the livelihood losses of the more vulnerable is given higher priority. In the case of the flood in Kerala, this requires immediate intervention by the government and other agencies. Among those covered in the survey, more than 10.5 percent of the marginalized households were facing complete loss of livelihoods and about 13.5 percent partial loss. Nearly 24 percent families were coping with severe livelihood loss.

There are many ways in which people lost livelihoods. To people living south-west of Thalayolapparambu (Kottayam) it happened with the breaking up of the shutter of an irrigation canal from Moovattupuzha River. When the shutter broke, flood water from the river invaded everywhere. Suddenly, families lost the stock of hay kept as fodder for cattle. Hay cannot be purchased all times. It is available only during harvest season. People have lost eight to ten thousand Rupees and found it very difficult to feed livestock which is central to their livelihood.

7.5 Loss of Workdays

It is important to look at the lost workdays of the members of these communities since most among them are daily wage earners. More

District	Households Surveyed	Households with workday losses	Average Workdays Lost
Alappuzha	88	71 (80.7%)	52
Idukki	41	25 (61.0%)	56
Kottayam	29	22 (75.9%)	44
Pathanamthitta	79	61(77.2%)	56
Total	237	179 (75.5%)	52

Table 7.7: Workday Losses, District wise of Surveyed Households

	SC	ST	DC	Total
No families surveyed	12	10	19	41
No families affected by landslide	8 (67%)	7 (70%)	13 (68%)	28 (68%)
Average loss	21.5 cents	-	19 cents	27 cents

Table 7.8: Land lost by landslides – Data from Idukki District

	Alapuzha	Idukki	Kottayam	Pathanamthitta	Total
Households	61 (69.3%)	34 (82.9%)	21 (26.6%)	71 (89.9%)	187 (78.9%)

Table 7.9: Damage to Drinking water source District wise

than 75.5 percent families covered in this survey said they lost workdays due to the disaster (Table 7.13). The average workdays lost is as high fifty-two. In Alappuzha district, 80.68% families lost working days. They have an average loss of 52 working days per family. In Idukki district 60.97% families are affected by loss of working days. They have an average loss of 56 days per family. In Kottayam district 75.86% families lost working days in this disaster. They have an average loss of 44 days per family. In Pathanamthitta district loss of working days were in 77.21% families. They too have an average loss of 56 working days per family.

7.6 Land Lost in Landslides

The data on landslides is drawn only from the Idukki district, which was badly affected by landslides. Perhaps, the worst affected by landslides were the marginalized. Among those covered in this study, 68% families have lost their land by landslides (Table 7.14). The land damaged by landslides range from 2 cents to 2 acres of land. The average loss is 27 cents per household. Among SC, 67 percent lost their land and the average loss is 21.5 cents. Among the Adivasis covered in the study, 70% families

have lost landslides. Since the land referred to in the case of ST families include tracts of forest land that are not formally owned by them, we are not computing the average loss. The 68 percent of the Dalit Christian families suffered land loss from landslide with an average loss of 19 cents per family.

7.7 Damage to Drinking Water Source

Drinking water sources is a matter of deep concern for the Dalit and Adivasi settlements. Most of the Dalit localities face severe drinking water problem, especially in Kuttanadu. During our field work we have observed the situation of Mithramadam colony in Mithrakkari with just a single water tap for all the houses. Hundreds were queuing up there waiting for the water to start flowing from it. In Kuttanadu region most of Dalit families are depending on such water taps or purchase drinking water paying high price. Water taps like these were widely damaged during the floods. Wells, which are another source, were also damaged during flood. The wells were completely submerged by the flood water polluted by the mud and other items. Many wells collapsed or became covered by mud and sand brought by the

	Households	Completely Damaged	Partially Damaged	Total
Alappuzha	88	25 (28.4%)	31 (35.2%)	56 (63.6%)
Idukki	41	20 (48.8%)	11(26.8%)	31 (75.6%)
Kottayam	29	2 (6.9%)	18 (62.1%)	20 (69.0%)
Pathanamthitta	79	21 (26.6%)	33 (41.8%)	54 (68.4%)
Total	237	68 (28.7%)	93 (39.2%)	161 (67.9%)

Table 7.10: Toilet Damage District wise among Surveyed Households

Community	Households	Completely Damaged	Partially Damaged	Total
SC	114	32 (28.1%)	50 (43.9%)	82 (71.9%)
ST	12	7 (58.3%)	1 (8.3%)	8 (66.7%)
Dalit Christians	111	29 (26.1%)	42 (37.8%)	71 (64.0%)
Total	237	68 (28.7%)	93 (39.2%)	161(67.9%)

Table 7.11: Toilet Damage Community wise

flooding. In many places, it has taken several weeks to restore the water sources by repairing the damaged water taps, cleaning up the polluted wells or restoring the collapsed wells. But in the case of Idukki district, the streams and wells that were lost due to landslide are irrecoverable. The following table shows the district wise extent of damage to water sources including wells, streams water taps etc. About 79% households had to deal with the damage of drinking water source such as well, stream, pond, pipe connection and others. Among them 69.31% households are in Alapuzha district, 82.92% from Idukki, 26.58% from Kottayam and 78.90% households from Pathanamthitta district.

7.8 Problems in Sanitation

One of the serious problems to be faced by dwellers of Kuttanadu region is that of toilets turning nonfunctional or clogged immediately after heavy rain starts. Though they construct proper toilets on raised ground they cannot function in the flood because they become submerged under water. Every year, with the seasonal flooding during the monsoon, the marginalized communities face this problem of improper sanitation. Most Dalits live in conditions where they must manage without usable toilets even when there is no flood. The prob-

lem of sanitation during the flood must be seen against this situation in the lowlands.

Many Dalit families were forced to leave their houses only because of the damaged toilets. The toilets in 67 percent of households were damaged either partially or completely (Tables 7.16, 7.17). The damages include collapse of walls, breakage of the tanks and doors due to sustained water logging for many days. Sometimes the toilets have been damaged by trees falling due to heavy rain. In Idukki district, no buildings could survive landslides. The following tables show the district wise and community wise details of the damage to toilets among the marginalized communities.

7.9 Loss of Study Materials

The children of more than 27.8 percent families lost their study materials completely and about 17.7 percent suffered partial loss.

7.10 Summing Up

Among the marginalized households covered in this survey, four persons (1.7%) died in the disaster and 31 (13.1%) suffered different kinds of injuries, including short-term hospitalization. Dwellings of 22 percent of the households completely collapsed and 62 percent collapsed par-

	SC	ST	DC	Total
Completely lost	41 (36.0%)	2 (16.7%)	23 (20.7%)	66 (27.8%)
Partially lost	22 (19.3%)	2 (16.7%)	18 (16.2%)	42 (17.7%)
Total	63 (55.3%)	4 (33.3%)	41 (36.9%)	108 (45.6%)

Table 7.12: Loss of Study Materials

tially. The district with highest losses is Idukki (87%). It is necessary for the new housing projects to make houses which are multi-hazard resistant. The current housing schemes are not paying attention to this requirement. The schemes are common for all regions and locations, while region-specific norms are needed. In addition, in most cases the marginalized are unable to take care of all aspects of house construction on their own. Therefore, government must provide options for the houses to be built by government or other agencies and transfer-

ring it to the beneficiary. The marginalized communities have suffered major losses in household items—from minor items to costly durables which had been procured, especially by women through hire purchase arrangements. The livelihood and workdays lost are huge. There are severe losses to drinking water sources and toilets of the marginalized, which is a recurring problem that needs a proper long-term solution. There have been serious flaws in the disbursal of the compensation package which must be resolved urgently.



A girl child from Karumadi, Thakazhy in Alappuzha district

Chapter - 8

Conclusion—Reflections and Looking Forward

8.1 Life on the Margins and New Keralam

This study began with the understanding that a genuine social inquiry must capture reality primarily from the extremes of the margins. The study attempts to give a place for the narratives from the margins that are absent in the dominant discourses about the flood or in the debates about the post-disaster reconstruction. The primary aim of this study is to portray vividly the lived realities of the marginalized in Keralam's social life, which are as a rule neglected. The study wishes to put forward a view from below that can contribute to building a just and democratic new Keralam (Nava Keralam) as proclaimed by the state government and expected by the public.

There are numerous questions that can be posed while envisaging a new Kerala. How far will it be new? What are the prime differences between what is perceived as old and the imagined new? What are the knowledge and information bases on which the imagining of the new, rest? What are the implementing mechanisms of the imagined new or is it going to be new versions of the old? How can envi-

ronmental and social justices be made integral to the process of rebuilding? Such questions are of considerable importance to the marginalized, because neither 'new' nor 'old' development schemes brought substantial changes to the lives of the marginalized in the past. We are confident that this study, though limited in many ways, imagines a new Kerala society from the margins that are not visible in the dominant narratives of the disaster after the flood and landslides.

The mission of rebuilding Kerala must incorporate the views from below and the margins seriously. Those committed to the key principles enshrined in the Constitution of India—liberty, equality, non-discrimination—should view this as a “new tapestry where the floods renew and rebuild a new Kerala”, to quote eminent sociologist Shiv Visvanathan. The most significant point that this study puts forward is that the rebuilding of Kerala should find new avenues to advance human dignity, an aspect that is invisible in the past approach to development. Hence, this study has employed the idea of human dignity as the framework of analysis of the experiences of the marginalized vis a vis

The study has demonstrated that Dalits, Adivasis and women in Kerala society have been the prime victims of the disaster because of their social, economic and historical backwardness and this fact is yet to be acknowledged officially in the dominant narratives. Historical deprivation has played an important role in aggravating the sufferings of these sections. As historically oppressed and stigmatized sections, they faced a great deal of helplessness, humiliation and discrimination during the disaster

catastrophe and related dealings of the dominant. The situations of pre-disaster backwardness, of disaster itself, escape, experiences at relief camps, and their losses are approached from sensibilities of human dignity. The ideas of development pursued by the state and Dalits are critically looked at from this perspective.

8.2 Disaster Aggravated by Marginalization

The study has demonstrated that Dalits, Adivasis and women in Kerala society have been the prime victims of the disaster because of their social, economic and historical backwardness and this fact is yet to be acknowledged officially in the dominant narratives. Historical deprivation has played an important role in aggravating the sufferings of these sections. As historically oppressed and stigmatized sections, they faced a great deal of helplessness, humiliation and discrimination during the disaster. Their present-day social and economic deprivations combined with the legacies of oppression aggravated their suffering during and after the disaster.

All the marginalized—the Dalit Christians, Dalit Buddhists, Dalit Hindus and the Adivasis—encountered similar patterns in the aggravation of their sufferings from the disaster due to the pre-existing deprivations, vulnerabilities and capability gaps and the sharpened manifestations of social exclusion at different levels. We did not find significant differences in the disaster experiences among the various sections of the Dalits differentiated by religious beliefs.

However, the Dalit Christians faced additional difficulties post-disaster due to negligence by the state and denial of protective safeguards against discriminatory practices that are available to other sections of Dalits.

The life in relief camps proved that even a severe humanitarian crisis cannot overwhelm the social evils like casteism, gender bias, nepotism and bureaucratic arrogance. The dignity of human beings was undermined, and the citizens treated were like non-citizen refugees. This was repeated even in the distribution of compensation to the victims of the disaster. It is an abhorrent practice to turn away people from relief camps merely because they were not carrying a particular set of identification documents, or to use coercive methods to shift residents from one camp to another. In future, the state must ensure free availability of vehicles and boats—private or public—for evacuation. The state must have fast track legal provisions to deal with those who indulge in unethical and exploitative practices during disaster response.

The key question is of how, in the face of disasters, the state envisages its own role in engaging with citizens living unequal lives and subjected to severe social and economic deprivations. There must be warning alerts that must first reach the most vulnerable and all those dwelling in the remote, isolated and hazard-prone zones. Dedicated and robust mechanisms for communicating meaningful alert information and arrangements to quickly evict

The key question is of how, in the face of disasters, the state envisages its own role in engaging with citizens living unequal lives and subjected to severe social and economic deprivations. There must be warning alerts that must first reach the most vulnerable and all those dwelling in the remote, isolated and hazard-prone zones. Dedicated and robust mechanisms for communicating meaningful alert information and arrangements to quickly evict those living in hazardous locations and geographically remote areas must be made.

those living in hazardous locations and geographically remote areas must be made. Evacuation of people from danger zones and isolated places must be precautionary in nature. Only meaningful early warning arrangements and systematic precautionary evacuation well in advance can save lives. Considerable planning and rethink on disaster risk management are needed to minimize asset losses and to ensure livelihood recovery after disaster.

Indisputably, the responsibility of preventing and eliminating all forms of discriminations vests with the state including all its agencies and local administration. Accountability must be fixed to eliminate discriminatory practices either by officials or by camp residents. Relief camps must be run in a democratic and socially inclusive manner. Much needs to be done to ensure gender-equality in relief camps. Those responsible for Kerala's disaster management must critically review the relief camp management. Lot more attention must be paid to ensure that relief camps are able to meet the needs of women and children including enforcing minimum standards for safety and hygiene. The officials engaged in disaster management needs to be better trained. Globally, it is recognized that discrimination aggravates the disaster impacts and makes recovery more difficult. However, despite special mention in disaster management guidelines on the importance of social inclusion in disaster management, many of the officials responsible for disaster management during the floods and landslides seem unaware of such basic principles.

8.3 Disaster Losses, Compensation and the Marginalized

The official post disaster assessment surveys wrongly assessed the damages in many places which resulted in denial of compensation for many whose dwellings were so badly damaged to make them unlivable. Many such cases were reported from Idukki district. Considering the many problems encountered, particularly by the marginalized, a review of the disaster management norms and rules is urgently needed. In order to avoid chaos and panic during disaster, meaningful and timely warnings should reach communities in living in remote settlements and danger zones. Priority must be accorded to communicating warnings to the most vulnerable and in organizing evacuation on a precautionary basis. Detailed settlement-wise hazard mapping must be undertaken by the State disaster Management authority and shared with the communities at risk. Urgent steps must be taken to develop the disaster response capabilities of the most vulnerable marginalized communities living in the hazard-prone areas.

The damage and losses of Dalits, Adivasis and women are not comparable in the same manner of the damages of other disaster-affected persons. Whether it is dwellings, home appliances, durable or non-durable items, land, vehicles or gold, it is important to recognize how the poor and the marginalized have originally acquired have lost in the disaster. Almost for each marginalized family, every possession is

Dalit Christian experiences in the disaster have not been different from other Dalits who share the same historical and contemporary social stigma and backwardness. The locations of dwelling place, economic situation, land holding, and other forms of social supports of Dalit Christians are not different from other Dalits with the status of Scheduled Castes. Lack of timely warnings, no support to escape, humiliation and discrimination in relief camps etc. are shared experiences of Dalits irrespective of religious divisions.

the result of gradually acquiring, often through hire purchase/ installment schemes. Not only are the losses are nearly irrecoverable, in most cases, they have repayment commitments as well. The survey shows that 22 percent of the houses have completely collapsed and 62 percent collapsed partially. This also indicates that the dwellings of the marginalized have not been properly constructed. Dalits and Adivasis who are mostly wage earners suffered heavily from work-day losses even as high as three months continuously.

Loss of livelihoods, land, equipment and more areas becoming landslide hazard prone (mainly in Idukki district) have dramatically increased vulnerabilities and worsened unemployment. Loss of drinking water source, study materials and loss of valuable documents make the post disaster life more vulnerable for the marginalized sections. The new houses and the reconstruction of the damaged houses must be multi-hazard resistant. The current housing schemes are common for all regions and locations, while region-specific norms are needed. In addition, in most cases the marginalized are unable to take care of all aspects of house construction on their own. Government must provide options for the houses to be built by either government or other agencies and transferred it to the beneficiaries in dignified manner. For those who lost livelihood, the government might introduce short term projects for 2 years like MNREGA which will be highly helpful to them.

8.4 Dalit Christian Experiences

Dalit Christian experiences in the disaster have not been different from other Dalits who share the same historical and contemporary social stigma and backwardness. The locations of dwelling place, economic situation, land holding, and other forms of social supports of Dalit Christians are not different from other Dalits with the status of Scheduled Castes. Getting timely warning, support to escape, humiliation and discrimination in relief camps etc. are shared experiences of Dalits irrespective of religious divisions. But Dalit Christians have been discriminated from the relief and compensation distributed by the government authorities.

The Dalit Christians are neither included in any special package nor entitled to any concessions on account of their marginalization despite needing support after suffering losses similarly to other marginalized. The only option available to them is to compete with the powerful caste groups in order to get benefits of the governmental schemes which is nearly impossible. It is worth noting that a stigmatized version of charity and development schemes are followed by the NGOs and mainstream churches together with the government regarding Dalit Christians. They together exclude Dalit Christians from any form of entitlement in their development schemes. Even rethinking of Dalit Christian developmental issues is not an option. The negligence of state towards the

Women faced specific difficulties during disaster as they needed to take care of children, elderly, the sick, and themselves while escaping to safe locations or while moving to the relief camps. Though the families attempted to escape together, there were situations where women had to wait for long for men to arrive home while the flood water was rising waiting for no one. Women faced various kinds of difficulties such as meeting primary needs, proper clothes, health care, humiliation and even harassments in relief camps.

historical backwardness and social suffering of Dalit Christians must be recognized and immediate steps must be taken for the inclusion of Dalit Christians in the rebuilding processes of the state. Providing a system of entitlements for Dalit Christians and separate budgetary allocations is necessary for Dalit Christians to escape social suffering and stigma for which there are precedents in some of the other Indian states.

8.5 Gender Concerns

We did not find any special attention given to women and children during disaster, rescue and relief. They had to struggle in male-dominated spaces worsened by the disaster. Women faced specific difficulties during disaster as they needed to take care of children, elderly, the sick, and themselves while escaping to safe locations or while moving to the relief camps. Though the families attempted to escape together, there were situations where women had to wait for long for men to arrive home while the flood water was rising waiting for no one. Women faced various kinds of difficulties such as meeting primary needs, proper clothes, health care, humiliation and even harassments in relief camps. The post-disaster situation has affected women economically and emotionally in specific ways as managing the household, family, and taking care of the aged and sick fell on their shoulders. Loss of livelihood and indebtedness have created spaces for money lenders to enter the lives of

marginalized, women in particular. Recovering of past loans by Kudumbasree and banking institutions have cut into the ex-gratia relief and the compensation announced by the state to disaster victims. Patriarchal attitudes were evident from the approach of officials who made disaster-affected women development workers, such as anganwadi workers, who also affected by floods, by assigning them unpaid additional tasks. There should be institutional arrangements for protecting women from sexual abuse and humiliation during disasters. Steps are needed to protect women's post-disaster financial transactions. The current policies must be restructured to prevent the financial institutions or even the state itself taking advantage of the financial vulnerability of women. The state should undertake extensive consultations with women in this regard. Disaster affected people must be excluded from post-relief works, since they themselves are affected by disaster, and if employed, they must be paid for the services rendered.

8.6 Socially Inclusive Rebuilding

The official as well as the dominant narratives of the Keralam's 2018 floods have been almost indifferent to the experiences of the marginalized, especially of the Dalits and Adivasis during and after the disaster. Gender-specific challenges that was widespread have hardly been discussed. The exuberant celebration of Keralam's humanity selflessly working together in response to the disaster—many examples

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showing the oneness of people and numerous instances of unprecedented volunteerism by the youth—have almost completely ignored numerous instances that run counter to this rosy picture that are more representative of the hard social realities of Kerala.

The highly vulnerable Dalits in the Kuttanadu region had to fend for themselves while escaping from their remote settlements to the high grounds on the mainland, which were very far from their settlements. Confusing, untimely and inadequate warnings made their plight worse. The social stratifications and discriminatory behavior in diverse forms that existed overtly and covertly in pre-disaster Kerala surfaced often in the relief camps, at times assuming acute or aggressive character. Alongside expressions of humanitarian unity, there were also many manifestations of extreme socially regressive behavior. Dalits and Adivasis faced discrimination and humiliation in the relief camps from many persons from dominant castes and camp officials having deeply ingrained casteist attitudes.

This study challenges the dominant narratives and the official claims that creates a myth of disaster response where social exclusion and casteism never surfaced. Social realities cannot be made to disappear by denial. Women too suffered greatly from the lack of gender sensitive management of the disaster response. If the mission of rebuilding Kerala with a development framework which leads to greater disaster resilience, strengthening the capacities of

the most vulnerable, socially inclusive, democratic and incorporates environmental and climate change concerns, it cannot be indifferent to social and ecological realities.

The government must consult local communities before taking decisions that affect the disaster-affected communities, especially the marginalized. The top to down approach of development has already proved to be a failure. In lowlands, a permanent resolution is needed to ensure safe dwellings and reliable sanitation against the background of recurring floods almost every year. A special scheme is necessary in the waterlogged areas of Kuttanadu and in such places where people must move to camps immediately after the rain starts every year. Such locations must be properly mapped. The question of safe dwelling places must be addressed for people living in danger zones by the state. The household living on land unsafe for living should be allowed to be use such land for agriculture. There is a lot that must be done for the disaster risk management capacity development of the communities in general, especially the most vulnerable marginalized communities living in highly risk-prone areas.

8.7 Reaffirming Egalitarian Ideas, Critically

A critical analysis of the disaster management of the state as experienced by the marginalized sections has uncovered the failures in the system at varied levels. The experiences of

Reaffirming the egalitarian ideas underlying the Constitution of India and entitlements of citizens, the study highlights the experiences of Adivasis, Dalits with Scheduled Caste status and Dalit Christians and women, so that they become part of a socially inclusive rebuilding of the new Kerala.

Dalits and Adivasis in various parts of Kerala demonstrate that the ad hoc responses by the state had limited impact. The flawed warnings added to panic and chaos. The sufferings of Dalits and Adivasis during disaster were exacerbated owing to four major reasons that must be properly understood for coping with disasters in the future. First, the remoteness of dwelling places which is inseparable from the historical background of marginalization based on caste slavery and the spatial inequities imposed on the marginalized. Second, the fear of losing livelihoods and the gains of a lifetime, which is based on the backwardness at economic and material levels. Third, the lack of preparedness, partly due to persistence of social exclusion as a continuation of the historical oppression and capability deficits rooted in deprivations. Fourth, but not the least, the virtual absence of disaster risk reduction efforts by the state's disaster management that is based on hazard risk, vulnerability and capacity analysis specific to the marginalized, resulting in a situation where the most vulnerable communities living in areas highly prone

to flood and landslides are the least equipped to cope with recurring disasters.

This study undoubtedly reveals that the disaster experience of historically marginalized people was totally different from that presented in the dominant narratives and governmental reports. The dominant narratives go hand in hand with the celebration of what is called 'Kerala Model of Development', which tend to overlook many inconvenient and challenging questions about Kerala society and development. The marginalized are invisible in these meta narratives. The aim of this study was to uncover these realities and in this we believe we have succeeded. At the same time, the study is a critical look at the state's obligations vis-à-vis its actual practice. Reaffirming the egalitarian ideas underlying the Constitution of India and entitlements of citizens, the study highlights the experiences of Adivasis, Dalits with Scheduled Caste status and Dalit Christians and women, so that they become part of a socially inclusive rebuilding of the new Kerala.

Appendix

- Appendix-1: Report of the Relief work
- Appendix-2: Report of the Consultation
- Appendix-3: Structured Questionnaire

A Brief Report of
Flood Relief Work
Initiated by



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Centre for Social Studies and Culture (CSSC)
Kottayam, Kerala

Based out of Pennamma Bhavanam, Manjadi, Tiruvalla,
for this particular initiative

1

Introduction

Kerala witnessed an unprecedented and unparalleled flood due to unusual rainfall during the Monsoon this year. Shutters of almost all dams had to be opened due to this, which increased the magnitude of the calamity. It affected all the 13 out of the 14 districts in Kerala. Flood and landslide killed nearly 322 people according to the government reports. Most of the low land areas and kilometers of river shores submerged under water. 14 Lakh families have lost or got their houses damaged and innumerable people lost their livelihood. As on 26th August 2018, there are 1093 relief camps with more than 3.5 lakh people living there. Initially there were more than ten lakh people belonging to 2,78,781 families in 2,774 relief camps. According to the primary statistics of the Government, total loss caused due to the disaster is around 35,000 crores of rupees including the damage of thousands of kilometers of public roads, agriculture, infrastructure facilities and livelihood of people in 14 districts of Kerala. The 2018 flood of Kerala is the biggest flood that Kerala has ever witnessed after the flood of 1924.

This report includes the initial flood rescue/relief activities initiated by Centre for Social Studies and Culture [CSSC] in collaboration with like-minded organizations based out from *Pennamma Bhavanam* in Tiruvalla, for this particular initiative.

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A flooded house in Kuttanadu region in Alappuzha district and a site of land slide in Idukki district

2

Nature of Work

The initial relief work initiated, included rescue of affected people, exchange of information, distribution of cooked food, gathering of resources, collection of relief materials and their distribution in the remote areas.

Rescue Operations

The team of CSSC along with the Abhayaloka Buddhist Community stepped into the situation to rescue people who were stranded in the remote areas of Kottayam, Alappuzha, Idukki and Pathanamthitta districts. We began our work on 16th of August when there were signs that revealed the looming disaster. Immediately we formed teams to begin the rescue operations and tried coordinating the rescue teams as much as possible. We were among the pioneering teams to perform rescue operations from the very beginning of the flood in the affected areas. Since we



gathered the team in the wake of 16th, the second day of the flood, we could reach in the remote areas by walking, swimming and with available transportation facilities. We could move many people to the safe places. Since reaching out these areas was very difficult, we hired *taurres* lorries, the only vehicle that could run through the rising water levels. After reaching the distance the vehicles could reach, we travelled through boats or swam to reach out the people who could not move to the relief camps.

A Girl child from Alappuzha being rescued by CSSC volunteers



Exchange of Information

We had put out information of the help on our individual facebook pages as well as whatsapp. Our teams began receiving calls from various parts of the flood affected areas as well as the relatives abroad and we passed the information to the teams in the respected areas. Since we were not fully equipped and the water level was increasing drastically, we could not extend our rescue help for the information received. However, we passed this information quickly to other rescue teams including the police, fire force and other specialized teams as well as various online coordinating points.

Distribution of Cooked Food

After the quick evaluation on 16th night, we decided to provide cooked food to the stranded people in isolated areas. Since there were many groups involved in the rescue/relief work in the places one could reach, we took a decision to concentrate only the remote areas. Our team reached out to the people who were stranded in the remote areas, with packets of cooked food, bread, biscuits, drinking water and other essential materials.



Packing and distribution of cooked food



Gathering of Resources and Collection of Relief Materials

Along with these initiatives *Pennamma Bhavanam* [the house of former Nagaland Governor Dr. MM Thomas] functioned as a space to collect materials. Several organizations and individuals brought materials and entrusted CSSC the responsibility to distribute them to the needy people, since CSSC was focusing to distribute immediate relief to the places, which were remote.



Distribution of Relief Materials

Though we did not focus our work on the relief camps, we made sure that we gave food materials to the camps, which had insufficient food materials. We also provided food to the fishermen who were engaged in the rescue operations, the police and the workers of the water authority who were also working tirelessly. Since, a complete list of the materials that has been distributed these days is impossible, the listed items in our register are given below. This is apart from the relief materials contributed by various individuals and organisations.

Volunteers distributing relief materials in flooded areas



- Senior friends of Student Christian Movement of India
- Bishop Selvadas Pramoth of the Bible Faith Mission, Parassala and the priests and youth of BFM who joined us with a truckload of food items.
- Rev. Thomas B. contributed food items and volunteers. Rev Mothy Varkey and his parish provided food materials, dress items and medicines and joined us in distributing these items in the stranded areas.
- Rev. Jerry Kurian, Chris Jerry and Daya joined us with packets of food items, cleaning materials, sanitary napkins, diapers and the essential items.
- Dalit Human Rights Movement who contributed a truckload of food items.
- Bishop Geevarghese Mor Coorilose and ICSC provided us with rice and other food items.
- The volunteers of Ambedkar Students Association of Mahathma Gandhi University (ASA-MGU), have been with us since the commencement of the work.
- Ms. Chellamma a friend of ours provided two boxes of dress materials for ladies.
- Partners in Justice Concerns, Programme for Social Action and Delhi Forum have promised support in the further relief measures needed.



**Bishop Selvadas Pramoth of BFM Visits flood affected areas
with CSSC Volunteers**

workshop is being planned from September 8th to 10th 2018. The volunteers will visit the affected areas in groups and collect information focused on the specific questions prepared for the assessment, and will need support in this regard too.



Evaluating the Work

Conclusion

With our limited resources, we could reach many needy people in remote areas. We could extend a hand of solidarity to address the calamity. This is just a beginning of the relief work; now the task remaining is really complex, need dedicated works and resources. According to this understanding we are forming a group of young active and skilled people to continue the relief works to focus on the rehabilitation process in hand in hand with the 'rebuilding mission Kerala' by the state government. We extend our thanks to all who extended their timely support and thus made possible this relief work.

Shibi Peter

Centre for Social Studies and Culture (CSSC)

Centre for Social Studies and Culture (CSSC)

CSSC represents a search for new understanding and creativity in the fields of social sciences, humanities, art, literature, and culture. It takes as its launching pad the concerns growing from reflections on the emergence, since the 1990s, of the little social movements around the questions of caste, land, livelihood, survival, gender, sexuality, project-related displacement, forest rights, environment and ecology. These reflections take into account the cultural nature of the social sciences and the social nature of the human sciences and make a call to take a view from below from the disadvantaged perspectives of the marginalized castes, cultures, regions and genders. This view from below is important as it is discovered that some of the events that further the development of man and society have quite different, even opposite, effects upon social groups such as Adivasis and Dalits. To steer clear of ethnocentrism and reductionism, the Centre encourages interdisciplinary studies focusing on those objects and aspects neglected by disciplines in their attempts to maintain disciplinary boundaries and claims of respectability, scientificity, and objectivity. Drawing on the vision of an egalitarian society ensuring the dignity of the least in society, the Centre proposes to promote studies as well as creativity in art, literature, and culture. The Centre is constituted by a body of academics, research scholars, writers, artists, and aesthetes.

The Centre's objectives are:

- To encourage research studies on marginalized social groups
- To orient young researchers and activists with thorough knowledge on social realities in order to actively engage with society.
- To publish monographs, working papers, theses, journals and books on oppressed communities
- To develop research skills by conducting workshops on methodologies and skills of academic writing and presentation
- To support writers from the marginalized communities to publish their writings
- To promote works of art in music, drama, painting, sculpture, and films by artists from the margins

Pennamma Bhavanam

Pennamma Bhavanam was the abode of Dr. M. M. Thomas, the Indian theologian and social thinker. MM passed away on the Bhopal day in 1996, leaving behind this space—Pennamma Bhavanam—to his friends, colleagues, and comrades. The Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust and the Thiruvalla Sangham, a trust and a fellowship founded by MM have been entrusted the responsibility to keep this space alive and relevant.

The home is named after late Ms. Elizabeth Thomas (Pennamma), wife of Dr. Thomas. It has been just over a decade that we have been striving to keep Pennamma Bhavanam as a mother home for students and youths for diverse expressions of the liberative faith in response to contemporary social realities, and the programmes convened by the centre are for facilitating their enquiries. The house provides a variety of resources to assist the students, youths, laity, clergy, and activists in their creative endeavors. There is a large community of friends and well wishers spread all over the world which supports the functioning of the home and shares the vision.



Workshop on

Imagining **A New Kerala:** Priorities, Possibilities and Challenges

2018 September 7-9

Pennamma Bhavanam, Thiruvalla

REPORT

**Centre for Social Studies and Culture
Abhayaloka Buddhist Community**



CONCEPT NOTE

“A disaster as a narrative must possess the quality of storytelling. Like a fable it must be repeated again and again, retold and rethought. The storyteller and the policy-maker must weave a new tapestry where the floods renew and rebuild a new Kerala”. Shiv Visvanathan

In August 2018, Kerala experienced the catastrophe of a lifetime in the form of torrential raining and consequent floods which is largely viewed as an environmental disaster. Hundreds of lives were lost in the floods playing havoc across the state, and this situation has questioned the perception of many who romanticized Kerala as a paradise with favorable climatic conditions. But for those who have been critically addressing the issues of exploitation of the nurturing Mother Earth, this was not at all a surprise, as various reports, most importantly the Madhav Gadgil Committee report had warned about such climatic disasters due to gross violation of environment in the Western Ghats of Kerala.

In this context, many responsible citizens have opined that we need to re-build Kerala keeping social and environmental justice, critically examining the development paradigm followed until now. However, this is not an easy task to achieve, as the discussions revolving around rebuilding Kerala among the government and public does not seem re-assuring. The whole discourse around re-imagining and re-building Kerala, both by the state mechanisms as well as in the mainstream political spheres, in addressing the concerns revolving around protecting our nature, has quickly reduced to a human-centered approach. The legitimacy sought by this argument is that environmental justice can be achieved only by involving human beings and also considering humans as part of nature at large. Though these are important, while one observe through the lens of environmental experiences of Kerala, these are mere masquerading attempts by the dominant sections of the society. In these discussions, one can observe the coalition of vote bank politics, environmental exploitation for profit, nexus between the political sections and capitalism working in tandem to defeat the epistemological discourses around environment and social sciences. The consensus forged by the dominant communities, the Churches and certain political leadership in this regard is least promising and most frightening.

In this context, the organic environmental consciousness in the life-world of the historically-marginalized sections, including the Dalits and Adivasis, need to be recognized. However, how seriously are these insights available and practiced in the Kerala society is something that needs to be introspected? The labour force of these communities was very often extensively utilized for exploiting nature by the dominant. One cannot also forget the fact that the exploitative forces have in fact gained victories in this regard. The interventions made by the marginalized communities, knowingly or unknowingly in this process, can be seen merely through the lens of a Need Economy, should be re-examined at this crucial juncture. We need to reclaim the ethics of environmental justice practiced by the marginalized communities countering the historic notion of looting resources adopted by the dominant communities. While re-building and re-imagining Kerala, it is very important to blend the epistemological discourses around environment and social sciences, historical notions of environmental justice and awareness practiced by the marginalized sections.

It is well known that the primary victims of a disaster are the marginalized communities. However, these are the sections who are the last ones to survive the perils of devastation brought by disasters. Therefore, while creating a New Kerala we should not repeat the mistake of building Dalit Colonies which was envisaged in the 'Kerala Model of Development'. Naked caste discrimination practiced in certain relief camps during floods and landslides also points to this direction.

Imagining a New Kerala: Priorities, Possibilities and Challenges focus on two major objectives:

- Need to strengthen the discourse around imagining and rebuilding Kerala based on environmental justice and social justice, upholding values of humanity;
- Need to assess the extent of this disaster affecting the marginalized communities and to bring it to the attention of the government authorities and to the larger public.

Research Team, CSSC



REPORT



Centre for Social Studies and Culture (CSSC) in collaboration with Abhayaloka Buddhist Community (ABC) organized a three-day workshop on “Imagining a New Kerala: Priorities, Possibilities and Challenges” from 7 to 9 September 2018 at Pennamma Bhavanam, Thiruvalla, Kerala in the context of the debates and discussions on rebuilding of Kerala after the worst flood that hit the state in the recent decades. The specific context of this workshop has been human centered discussions initiated by the dominant sections regarding the re-construction of Kerala, immediately after the disaster. The workshop was primarily aimed at opening-up discussions on the priorities in the rebuilding of Kerala from the perspectives of environmental and social justices. It was also aimed at orienting a group of young volunteers to conduct a field study in order to assess the intensity of the destruction suffered by the marginalized sections by the disaster. It is proposed to make a detailed report of the field study incorporating the ideas debated in this workshop for the discussion of the public and the policy makers as a “new tapestry where the floods renew and rebuild a new Kerala” as suggested by the eminent sociologist Shiv Viswanathan. The workshop was a huge success and it was attended by survivors of the disaster, academics from environmental sciences, social sciences and cultural studies, theologians, students, social activists, and volunteer organizations with their nuanced views and perspectives on the society in the post flood context. This report contains the ideas debated, list of participants, photographs of the program and the glimpses of a plan of further action. Following is the nutshell of the ideas derived from the discussions in each session.



For the reconstruction of Kerala we have to reinvent the spirit of people shown during the flood. To keep this spirit alive we need to address the issues of social justice with the environmental justice for a proper reconstruction of Kerala.

Prof. Sanal Mohan

Inaugural Session

The Workshop commenced at 5.30 p.m., on 7 September 2018. Mr. Shibi Peter welcomed the gathering and gave an introduction briefly explaining the relief work carried out by CSSC volunteers jointly with Abhayaloka Buddhist Community and Partners in Justice Concern during the recent floods. The joint team was involved in rescue and relief operations in various parts of flood affected areas. Dr. Sanal Mohan of Mahatma Gandhi University delivered the keynote address in the inaugural meeting and Bishop Dr. Geevarghese Mor Coorilose addressed the gathering. A very productive discussion followed these talks in which many invitees shared their critical views.

Keynote Address: Focus on Environmental Justice, Social Justice and Spatial Justice

The programme began in the evening of 7th September with the keynote address by Dr. Sanal Mohan, well known social scientist and associate professor and Head of the School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. He began with the detailed description of large scale deforestation which had been taking place in the eastern high ranges of northern Kerala, since the popularly known Malabar migrations, which has long been glorified in an anthropocentric perspective as 'development'. People from the southern part of Kerala—the princely state of Travancore—had migrated to the northern Malabar region since 1930s. They transformed the forest into agricultural lands and now these lands/villages have become unsafe for human habitation and farming due to unfathomable environmental destruction spearheaded by the rich and powerful and accelerated by recent spate of raining and landslides. These attempts of destruction began much earlier and Dalits and Adivasis were very often engaged or used as labour force for exploiting natural resources. This is a serious situation that requires our critical attention, particularly from the concerns of the workshop. Governmental and civil society interventions are made risky since the exploitations are carried out with the tacit and direct support of those in powers and with money and muscle power. Mohan discussed why should we need to equate environmental justice and social justice and the need to conceive both as inseparable. He shared some views on the idea of private property as well. Mohan reminded forcefully that a new and nuanced understanding of spatial justice is imperative when we discuss reconstruction of Kerala which has a long history of Dalit colonies/ghettos.



There is whisper and sound observations, shared by many at several places, that in the days of natural calamity, caste based discriminations were wiped away. Mohan asked to what extent these happened and what happened after the days of disaster. Material spaces including land and cultural spaces are set historically in Kerala society. There are people living in small houses and usually three-four families together. What would be the government plan to rehabilitate such families stricken by the disaster? They must be eligible for separate pieces of land and houses in the forthcoming rehabilitation plan. For the reconstruction of Kerala we have to reinvent the spirit of people shown during the flood. To keep this spirit alive we need to address the issues of social justice with environmental justice for a proper reconstruction of Kerala. He also shared that there must be emerging sociological, historical and anthropological studies on environment including the dams, rivers, rain, forests and other resources like water. He also shared the need for environmental justice and the need for resources in the process of reconstruction. The extent to which the resources are to be taken is to be fixed.

**“Re-building of Kerala must be a Real Attempt to Create God’s Country”:
Bishop Geevarghese Mor Coorilose**

Bishop Geevarghese Mor Coorilose, a strong promoter of Eco-theology, addressed the meeting and shared many insightful thoughts. He recalled that he was ridiculed whenever he raised the question of eco-theology. Fr. Kappen, a famous theologian of Kerala very often argued that liberation would not be complete until the ecology question as well is addressed. More Coorilose said that the disaster created momentary sense of equality among people quoting the satirical poetry of C S Rajesh “a socialist flood”. Bishop added that this ‘temporary socialism’ is like the practice of savarna Christians who after



Lent would go back to normal life with an apparent mood of 'vengeance' and commit everything that they painfully eschewed during Lent. More Coorilose opined that as a Christian taking faithful rendition from the bible he believes that the re-building of Kerala is to be viewed as the construction of Gods Country on earth with the applying principle, "the least would be the first" and would be honored first. There must not be divisions on the grounds of caste, religion, sexual orientation, gender etc., in this new Kerala. More Coorilose opined that to call the disaster a natural disaster does not appeal to him and instead he wishes to call it a man-made disaster brought on the entire living beings and non-living beings on Kerala by the rich and the powerful in Kerala: the middle class, upper castes and the upper class in Kerala.

The talks delivered by both the eminent scholars were opened to discussion and many responded to the views and ideas shared.

08 August 2018 :Panel Discussion -I

On 8th September, the first session was a panel discussion on the theme of the workshop, Chaired by Mr. Jestin T Varghese, a volunteer of CSSC and research Scholar of School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University. The speakers in this panel were Ms. Magline Philomina, leader of independent Fishermen Federation and social activist; Mr. Binoji Babu, social activist and the leader of Abhayaloka Buddhist Community; Mr. Babu Kodamvelil social activist, teacher and well known musician in the ecumenical world; Dr. Jesudas Athyal and Prof. Philip N Thomas. Mr. Shibi Peter gave a detailed presentation on the context of the workshop and introduced the speakers in the panel. The Chair discussed the concept of the workshop and summarized the discussions in the inaugural session on 7th evening.

Address Climatic Changes and Restructure the Decision Making Authorities

Ms. Magline made strong criticism of the dominant consciousness of Kerala in which the fishermen community is excluded from the discussions on reconstructing/developing Kerala. It was the volunteers from fishermen community with their timely intervention who had rescued thousands of people from flood waters in many places of Kerala. The fishermen community is a disaster prone people, many of them are in relief camps for 15 years. They are undergoing serious damages every year caused by the combination of



The fishermen community is undergoing serious damages every year caused by the combination of exploitation of natural resources from the sea shore and the consequent loss of the sea shore, and the larger consequences caused by the climatic changes. Nobody is caring for the changes occurred to the sea and its ecology after the disaster.

Magline Philomina



exploitation of natural resources from the sea shore and the consequent loss of the sea shore, and the larger consequences caused by the climatic changes. Nobody is caring for the changes occurred to the sea and its ecology after the disaster. She criticized strongly the disaster management authority for its irresponsible performance during disasters specifically for the failure in passing information during the cyclone 'Ockhi' hit them last time. She demanded a just redistribution of the sea shore by which the fishermen would be enjoying the common land and private land for their private and joint ventures. She also pointed out the need for an 'economic justice' by which fishermen would be benefited basic wages during the loss of work due to anticipated inhospitable weather conditions in the sea. The need to address climatic changes in the long run is one of the crucial points that she opened up. She also reminded the need for restructuring the disaster management authority/ decision making authorities by inducting people with indigenous knowledge and local connections.

Ecological Views of Buddha and Ambedkar would Safeguard the Nature and Humanity

Mr. Binoji Babu's talk was notable for basing himself on Buddhist world-view of preserving ecology, management of disasters and the importance of individual transformation for the betterment of Kerala society. Born and brought up in situations of natural calamity, he has seen and experienced several floods since his childhood. For him marginalized sections in the disaster stricken areas are thinking where to sit and take some rest after the reconstruction of Kerala. Dalits are people having historical experiences of facing various social and environmental disasters. Ironically, it is the educated class in Kerala who were exploiting the nature. Hence they have direct involvement in the suffering of people caused by this natural calamity. He suggested that Kerala should take lessons from various Buddhist societies who have overcome several disasters including the people in Tibet. We need to take the views of Buddha and Ambedkar for the better reconstruction of the environment and the society of Kerala.

We need to take the views of Buddha and Ambedkar for the better reconstruction of the environment and the society of Kerala.

Binoji Babu



Need to Escape from Petty Politics and End to Exploitation

Jesudas Athyal appreciated the work initiated by CSSC and ABC volunteers and congratulated them for their tireless and multi dimensional intervention among the disaster stricken people. He said, to his knowledge, the space of Pennamma Bhavanam has never been utilized productively in a similar manner. His talk mainly focused on the need to overcome petty political interests in the process of reconstructing Kerala. He quoted some ministers of Kerala for substantiating their indolent approach to real changes in the status quo regarding the environmental and social practices of the dominant. He also pointed out that people constructed buildings below the water level of the 1924 flood with



the support of nepotic people in power. He shared his view that the flood relief works based in the home of Dr. MM Thomas has been very relevant and fitting the intellectual and social concerns of that great soul.

Need for an Education for Survival and equality

Mr. Babu Kodamvelil posed many serious questions in his satirical speech. He shared his experience in a relief camp where he was the command of Student Cadet Corps. He pointed out the deep rooted casteist feelings safely carried by the flood affected Keralites even in the midst of terrifying natural disaster and the moments of misery and escape to safety and survival. According to him relief campers from the elite sections were demanding separate rooms and toilets in the camp and laying their hands on whatever good/precious things that was available in the camp. He noticed the difference among children from elite CBSE schools and children from marginalized sections in ordinary government school education living in the same camp. He suggested that the education system must include the idea of ‘Education for Survival’. Even though the Government is discouraging art festivals in the context of the natural calamity, the elites are arguing for it because their children would get grace marks from arts festivals. But in his opinion grace marks are to be given to the student Cadets



and other children who enthusiastically engaged in the relief works during the disaster is not heeded by the state. He also spoke about five loaves of bread and two fish from holy bible and the power and belief of Jesus Christ. For him there was a proper 'management' in Jesus's miracle which unfortunately lacked in the disaster management in the state in our era.



Need for a Christian Approach and Economic Decentralization

Prof. Philip N Thomas focused his talk on the need for an economic decentralization in the process of reconstructing Kerala. For him, the market economy has resulted in cultivating certain un-desirable attitude among the people to engage in competition and achievement for one's own sake. This needs to be questioned. There was the ideology of market economy in the state, then hit by disaster and the market is again emerging as the focus of rehabilitation and reconstruction of Kerala. But it must be the perspective based in Christian values that lead the reconstruction that would contribute to the just reconstruction of Kerala society. The concentration of resources must not be happened again.

Followed by these presentations participants discussed and responded to the ideas presented by the lead speakers.

8 August 2018: Panel Discussion - II

The afternoon session started with Mr. Greenson Pius, Mr. MD Thomas, and Mr. PK Vijayan posing questions and experiences from margins. Mr. Simon V.S, Research scholar at School of International Relations and Politics, Mahatma Gandhi University Chaired the session. The focus of the session was practical questions involved in the building up of a socially and environmentally just new Kerala.



The Island of Pizhala: An Enduring Experience of Exclusion and Isolation in the Cochin Islands

Mr. Greenson Pius's talk introduced to the gathering a long struggle led by the people in the island of Pizhala in Kochi. The long pending demand of the Pizhala people was the construction now completion of a bridge linking their island with mainland. This island was badly affected by the flood this time but no rescue teams could reach the island in time. Mr. Pius explained the situation of the island during the disaster and their long struggle for the bridge. Even though the construction of the bridge was started in 2012 corruption and laziness from the authority have resulted in people's anger. They are hosting a one-day protest on 16 September 2018 as a token protest asking the authorities to act swiftly and complete the construction of the bridge. Mr. Greendson invited all participants to the protest meeting and requested support for their struggle for rights and survival.

No to Discriminatory Policies and Exploitation of the Nature, and Appeal to Address the Needs of Resource-less Communities

Mr. M.D. Thomas spoke about anticipated exclusion and discrimination in the process of re-building of Kerala. His anticipations are based on the experiences of Dalits in the colonies/ghettoes. He fears that the discussions on re-building Kerala and that the plans of government to send the landless and homeless Dalits to the flats would eventually turn into new ghettoes of Dalits. For him it is the victims of the disaster who really want





to rebuild Kerala in a just manner. But the elite authorities are planning to rebuild a Kerala where there are no 'victims' in the picture. He also pointed out that the exploitation on natural resources has restarted immediately after the strike of disaster. Such exploitations are happening with 'on government work' boards in front of the trucks. He suggested that in a new Kerala the people who exploit the nature and discriminate human beings should be referred as 'anti social'. His third point was regarding the need to extend special attention to the resource less social groups who are not even eligible for government support like Dalit Christians and the fishermen community.

Not Disaster and Call to stop 'Masquerading Politics'

Mr. PK Vijayan directly addressed the 'masquerading politics' of the supporters of nature exploitation in a multi-dimensional way. For him what we face is not a disaster. It has been a fashion to address everything as disaster including casualties caused by consuming methyl alcohol. Producers of poisonous alcohol are aware that it would cause death. Then, why do they distribute that? It is because the exploitation of nature and flood, land slide etc. He criticized the tendency of writing for environment protection and 'theoretical' disowning of private property/control over private property shown by supporters of nature exploitation including some family members of the owners of big quarries.

Discussion followed these talks and students from Mahatma Gandhi University and activists from various social settings responded. The discussions have been recorded.

Evening Session On Discrimination

The evening session of 8th September was rich in terms of participation of resource persons and the discussions. The session was addressed by Dr. Vincent Manoharan of National Dalit Christian Watch and he delivered a talk on discrimination in the larger social life faced by Dalit Christians. Dr Sanal Mohan was a discussant in this session in which Mr. Anish R, Research Scholar in History, Jawaharlal Nehru University chaired the session. Eminent personalities from Kerala participated in the discussion including Mr. Sunny M Kapikkadu, Mr. Ambujakshan, Dr. Rekha Raj, Mr. Paul Divakar, etc.

The Need to Address Caste while Rebuilding Kerala

Dr. Vincent Manoharan delivered a talk focusing on caste discrimination and the need for discrimination to be addressed in the context of disaster. Specifically, the issue of caste has to be addressed when the government attempt rebuilding Kerala after the disaster. The discussions should bring the government under pressure that would eventually force the policy makers seriously addressing the caste question. Caste is the first thing that Indians carry wherever they go. When Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism the elites started to address his followers as 'neo-Buddhists'. Manoharan said it is difficult for higher caste people to understand what casteism is. He also presented detailed data of exclusion of Dalit Christians from Christian institutions and priesthood in India. He explained that in this larger context of caste discrimination people are somehow ready to discuss environmental justice but not caste discrimination. We need to take the question of discrimination to the public. He offered a detailed talk on discrimination in the context of disasters to be delivered in the next morning.

Discussions

Dr. Sanal Mohan was the discussant to Dr Vincent Manoharan. Mohan spoke about the 'distance' between Dalit and non-Dalit residents in the same place determined by caste norms and values. He pointed out that there was a time when even Christian sacraments were decided by caste norms. He also spoke about the internationalization of caste domination and international attention that this form of discrimination has attained.

Mr. Ambujakshan, a notable social activist shared his views on the larger theme of the workshop. He recalled the ecological perspectives in the folk songs hereditarily sung by Dalits in Kerala. He opined that Dalits who are now victims of natural calamity have been historically victims of social calamity. Then how can be a new Kerala built simply after receiving some foreign or Indian aids? He pointed out that it is very crucial to address the historical injustice in the processes of rebuilding Kerala.

Another eminent activist Mr. Sunny M Kapikkadu said that the discussions on rebuilding Kerala are surrounded by a pack of lies. According to him, the reason for 'awakened humanity' during the disaster is due to the suffering of elites who had long harbored thinking that they would never be affected by floods or calamities. Dalits were always victims of flood and other forms of calamities. Caste is not a thing that would disappear by a disaster. We should say this aloud now. The discussions are being carried out focusing on the reconstruction of the same Kerala with all discriminations that was there



before the calamity struck. They are planning to confine Dalits in the same colonies and purambokku lands. The continuing focus is still on nature conservation but not on human beings having no resources. Caste is functioning in this context but too very cleverly.

Other discussions were focused on the 'masquerading politics' of Kerala people, need for developing regional based development plans, forms of caste discrimination in the relief camps and felicitations to the CSSC-ABC initiative.

Adivasis during the Disaster: Dr. Narayanan M. Sankaran

Dr. Narayanan M Sankaran shared his views based on his experiences as a member of Adivasi community in Wayanadu and a volunteer among the disaster stricken Adivasis in his region. What he had to share was really exposing the lies that are repeatedly told about the oneness of Kerala society in overcoming the disaster. Adivasis in his region were really isolated due to heavy rain and landslides. The rescue teams never reached them. They had to find their own safety. The volunteers of some organizations approached his group in order to guide in distributing relief materials among Adivasis. But the approach of these volunteers was objectifying Adivasis as savages. They demanded more 'dirty looking' settlements and people to distribute their materials and capture photographs. When his group initiated relief work the authorities linked them with Maoist allegations and attempted to stop them. The non Adivasi people were keen to objectify Adivasis as receivers of endless support and they post many ridiculing and abusing words to Adivasis during the disaster. He challenged the idea of oneness in this context and asserted the need of a more inclusive and dignified approach of rehabilitation and rebuilding of Kerala.





9 September: Morning Session

Morning session of the final day was addressed again by Dr. Vincent Manoharan in which he focused on the discrimination during disaster. The session was aimed at orienting the volunteers for conducting field study. He spoke how discrimination takes place during disaster, initiated by the authorities, in the relief camps, in distributing relief materials and in the process of rehabilitation. He shared former studies conducted by various groups in the contexts of various natural calamities in India. He introduced the National Disaster Management Act and the technicalities and procedures that are to be followed by the government authorities according to this act. He also spoke about how to incorporate these insights in the proposed field study. The importance and necessary contents of a report to be published were also subjected to his talk. His special focus was on the issues of Dalit Christians, the ways of discriminating them in the larger politics of the country, during disasters and in the rehabilitation policies. The need to collect specific data on Dalit Christians was discussed in detail in this session.





The talk by Dr. Vincent was followed by an insightful talk by Dr. Meera Velayudhan, a notable scholar and research fellow at Centre for Development Studies (CDS) Thiruvananthapuram. Her talk focused on the specific areas to be addressed in the proposed need assessment study. She opined that addressing existing inequalities is one of the major tasks of rebuilding Kerala. One central theme in her talk was the need for addressing the issues of gender during the disaster. Sexual harassments of women have reported from various relief camps in Kerala. She also pointed out the need of addressing caste discrimination in the camps. The Adivasi areas were totally isolated and discriminated. Marginalized sections have lost their assets including houses, the result of a lifetime hard work. She said that the major drawback of the rehabilitation is that the decisions are coming from the top. Dialogues are to be done separately with separate groups and new entitlements are to emerge in the plan of rehabilitation. She said that there is no space for Dalit Christians in the government registers. She said that data on Dalit Christians, women, children and their education etc are to be collected in detail.

Dr. C P Geevan environmental scientist and experienced hand in disaster management and studies made an insightful talk. He asserted that we have the right to claim our rights. This would help the idea of better reconstruction. He shared his experience with the disaster stricken areas of Kutch in Gujarat and the model of rehabilitation in the post earthquake Gujarat. He shared his views on rehabilitation in which the skills of people have to be utilized for developing livelihood and reconstructing the state. People's consent is a serious part of rehabilitation policy. Hence the field study has to bring out the details of resources in the form of skills. He shared the need to have a clear picture of the land ownership, damage to houses and livelihood etc. for creating a better rehabilitation plan.

The session was rich with various queries from the participants regarding the land

reforms, the settlement of the Chengara Land struggle by the state government and the idea of the government to rehabilitate the flood victims in three cents of land. These discussions were really contributing to the development of ideas for a good quality field study and a detailed report on the post disaster Kerala and its rehabilitation.

Concluding Session

In the concluding post-lunch session, Mr. Ajayan Babu of ABC proposed a vote of thanks. The flood relief work was carried out with the support of philanthropists from various parts of the country. The notable support extended by the administrators of Pennamma Bhavanam by opening its doors for the volunteers and flood victims was highly appreciated. He thanked everyone who supported the CSSC – ABC endeavor for flood relief by cash and kinds and by volunteer force. The three-day workshop was timely and relevant that became rich with the participation of people of various capacities victims of the disaster, environmental scientists, social scientists, activists, volunteer organizations etc. the session remembered the great efforts and contributions of these people and extended gratitude officially. The programme winded up by 3.pm on 9th September.

Conclusions

We assess the joint efforts of CSSC and ABC as a great success in every sense. The workshop was notable for the encouragements received from various sections of the society including persons and organizations. Participation of people with creative heads was hugely promising since it was beyond our expectations. The central focus of the workshop, the brainstorming for a comprehensive report on marginalized sections and environmental vulnerability in the post disaster Kerala has been found success. This report has given only a brief and relevant account of the ideas debated in the workshop. The transcription of the talks is waiting. The objective of orienting the volunteers for field study was also fruitful. The volunteers would meet with the experts for a final discussion soon. We thank all those great human beings with whose support the joint endeavors of CSSC and ABC was a huge success. We dedicate and submit this report to them.

Shibi Peter

Co-ordinator

Centre for Social Studies and Culture (CSSC)



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Sl.No,	Name	Organisation/Institution
1	Dr. Sanal Mohan	M.G University
2	Dr. Vincent Manokaran	National Dalit Christian Watch
3	Bishop Geevarghese Coorilos	Kerala Council of Churches
4	MD Thomas	Social Activist
5	Dr. Jesudas Athyal	Theologian
6	Dr. Narayanan M Sankaran	WMO College, Calicut
7	Babu Kodamvelil	Govt.HSS, Perumbavoor
8	Binoji Babu	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
9	Sunny M Kapikkadu	Writer, Social Activist
10	Prof. Philip N Thomas	TECT, Thiruvalla
11	Dr. Rekha Raj	Dalit Women Collective
12	Dr.Paul Divakar	NCDHR, New Delhi
13	Manjula Pradeep	WAYVE Foundation, Ahmedabad
14	Syed Rahan	WAYVE Foundation
15	Priyadarshi	MANUSKI, Pune
16	K Ambujakshan	Kerala Dalit Panther
17	Ajay Kumar	RIGHTS, Trivandrum
18	Anish Ravee	Research Scholar, MG University
19	Shibi Peter	CSSC
20	Tomy Mathew	CSSS
21	Priyamol K C	CSSC
22	Jestin Varghese	SEDS
23	Simon V S	Research Schoar, MG University
24	Anupama Jestin	Research Scholar, MG University
25	Ajayan Babu	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
26	Bineesh Soman	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
27	P K Vijayan	Thiruvalla Sanghom
28	Sunil Perumal	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
29	Jijeesh	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
30	Leneesh	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
31	Dhanya Leneesh	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
32	E K Surendran	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community

33	K Bose	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
34	K A Rajan	SVSV (Chengara)
35	Unni Madavoor	SVSV
36	K Raju	SVSV
37	Baiju C	SVSV
39	Aju.s. Sankar	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
39	Kannan	SVSV
40	Prasad OV	SVSV
41	Devasia	SVSV
42	R.Babu	Social Activist
43	Ponnappan	Social Activist
44	Rev.Varughese KC	Research Scholar
45	Sukumaran	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
46	Baburaj MP	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
47	Thilak	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
48	Umesh Dravida	Social Activist
49	Maneesh M	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
50	KS Aji	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
51	Shaji PJ	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
52	Reji Malayalappuzha	Environmental Activist
53	KA Rajan	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
54	Unni Madavoor	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
55	Priyan	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community
56	Yesudas	Social Activist, Pizhala
57	Byju C	Social Activist Pizhala
58	Greenson Pious	Social Activist Pizhala
59	K.Bose	Social Activist Pizhala
60	Antony Aneesh	Social Acticist Pizhala
61	Shibu SK	BFM
62	Sojan CS	BFM
63	Suveesh Lal	BFM
64	Jithin Vijayan	Student
65	Thomas S	Social Activist
66	Praveen SV	SVSV
67	Raghav R	SVSV
68	Radhamani	Abhayaloka Buddhist Community



69	Dr. Jentle Varghese	CSSC
70	Dr. Thomas Mathew	Social Activist
71	Dr. Meera Velayudhan	Centre for Development Studies
72	Dr. Geevan	CESEC
73	Prameela KP	HUC Hyderabad
74	Syamlal	RIGHTS
75	Fr. Jerry Kurian	BCTS
76	Saju	Prasakthi Books
77	Rev. Thomas B	CARD
78	Magline Philomina	Social Activist



Sheet Ref. ID _____

Household Level Questionnaire

(To be filled by the field investigator)

Page | 1

Name of the Investigator	
Date	
Study Area Ref. No.	
District	
Block	
Village	
Municipality/ Municipal Corporation	

Respondent's profile

1. Name :
2. Age :
3. Gender :
4. Community :
5. A. Religion :
- B. Whether belong to the category of Dalit Christian :

House

6. Location of residence:
 - a) Colony
 - b) *Purambokku*
 - c) Owned land
 - d) Others. Specify :
7. Dwelling place before the disaster:
 - a) Owned house
 - b) No house

8. Reason for no Ownership of house before the disaster
- a) No land
 - b) No cash
 - c) Others. Specify :
9. In case there was own house, what was its condition before the disaster?
- a) Concrete house, construction completed
 - b) Concrete house, construction not completed
 - c) Thatched tile or asbestoses, construction completed
 - d) Thatched tile or asbestoses, construction not completed
 - e) Livable old house
 - f) Old house, not livable
 - g) Hut
10. Dwelling place, in case not an own house before the disaster
- a) Rented house
 - b) Relatives home
 - c) Others. Specify:.....
11. Entitlement of the house before disaster
- a) Woman
 - b) Man
 - c) Woman and Man
12. Number of family units dwelling in the house? :.....
13. In case more than one family, note the reason:

Education, Employment

14. Information on Education, Occupation Training etc.

No	Name	age	Children Age in months	Education		Occupation	
				Primary (1) High School (2) SSLC Pass (3) PDC/+2 (4) Degree (5) P.G (6) MPhil/PhD (7) BTech/BE (8) MD/MTech (10) Others (11)	N.A [1] ITI / (U) [2] Computer (PGDCA etc) [3] Informal Crafts Training [4] Informal vocational (tailoring, etc.) [5]	Agriculture Laborer [1] Farming [2] Abroad [3] Govt. Permanent [4] Private Permanent [5] Temporary [6] Self employed [7] Wage earner [8] Student [9] House made [10] Artist [11] Others [12] Unemployed [13]	Annual working days of daily wage earners
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							

15. Details of land owned by residents of this house?

No	Name	How much (Cent/Acre)	Pattayam		Transferable land	
			yes	No	Yes	No
1						
2						
3						
4						

16. If not having title deed/*Pattayam*, note reason:

.....

17. If the land is not transferable, why?

18. Income from land

a) Source:

b) Approximate income per year:

19. How long you stay in this plot? :

20. Clear title to the land with the family? Name the document. :

21. Housing plot received under any government scheme?

a) Yes

b) No

22. Any pending ownership dispute/ litigation

a) Yes

b) No

23. Forest Right Land

a) Yes

b) No

24. Acquired land

a) Yes

b) No

25. Inherited Land

a) Yes

b) No

26. Any other (explain) :

Nature of damage to the household

27. Where did you find relief and stay during the disaster?

- a) Relief camp
- b) Relatives home
- c) Neighbors 'home
- d) Others.

Specify.....

28. In case stayed in camp, which camp?

29. Where do you stay now

- a) Own house
- b) Relief camp
- c) Relatives home
- d) Neighbors 'home
- e) Others.

Specify.....

30. In case still in camp Why?

31. Death/injury during disaster

SN	Name	Woman (1) Man (2) Third Gender (3)	Age Years	Age Months (children)	Death (1) Injury caused for hospitalisation (2) Slight injury (3) Handicapped (4)
1					
2					
3					

32. Damage to house

- a) Completely Collapsed
- b) Partially collapsed
- c) Safe to live

33. Damage in rupees

34. Estimated cost of collapsed house (cost incurred) :

35. Year construction was completed:

36. Damage to household items

- a) Kitchen items
- b) Electronic items
- c) Gold
- d) Two wheeler
- e) Car

37. Total damage in rupees

38. Loss of Livelihood

- a) Completely lost
- b) Partially lost
- c) No loss

39. Specify the loss.....

40. Loss of livelihood in rupees.....

41. Loss of working days of a daily wage earner from this family.....days

41. Loss of land caused by land slide cents

42. Type of damage to land:

- a) Permanent
- b) Temporary

43. Is this land now useful for agriculture

a) Yes

b) No

44. Funds required for restarting farming (Approx. Rs.) :

45. Crop Loss (including trees, in rupees):

46. Specify the loss.....

47. Loss of livestock in rupees.....

48. Specify the loss (number of cows, buffalos etc)

49. Loss of Drinking water source specify.....

a) Water well

b) stream

c) pond

d) Pipe connection

e) Others

50. Could you manage to restore the drinking water facility?

a) Yes

b) No

51. If no why

52. Loss of toilet facility

a) Partially damaged

b) completely damaged

53. Loss of study material

a) Partially damaged

b) completely damaged

Loss of the community

54. Damage to socially important buildings/centers/structures

- a) Community centre
- b) Library/club
- c) worship place
- d) Others

55. Specify the loss.

56. Calculated loss in rupees

Health related information

No	Name	Fever (1) Rat fever (2) Jaundice (3) Diarrhoea (4) Skin Disease (5) Cancer (6) Heart disease (7) Diabetes (8) Asthma (9) Others (10) Specify	How long	Having Treatment (1) No Treatment (2) Rarely take treatment (3)
1				
2				
3				
4				

57. Family members with Disability

No	Name	Type of disability	How long	Remedy taken
1				
2				
3				

58. Financial liabilities

No	Name	Blind (1) Deaf (2) Lost organ (3) Handicapped (4) Cerebral Palsy (5) Others (6) Specify	How long	Attempts to solve if any

59. Information on Debts

No	Name	Debt Amount	Source	How long
1				
2				
3				
4				

60. Did you receive any financial support from government after the disaster?

- a) Yes
- b) No

61. If yes how much:

62. Compensation of what:

63. Is this a Female Headed House

a) Yes

b) No

64. If yes

a) Widow

b) deserted

65. Do you have membership in *Kudumbasree*

a) Yes

b) No

66. If no why? :

67. Are women of this family associated with any organization?

a) Yes

b) No

68. If yes which organization? Specify positions if any :

Centre for Social Studies and Culture

Represents a search for new understanding and creativity in the fields of social sciences, humanities, art, literature, and culture. It takes as its launching pad the concerns growing from reflections on the emergence, since the 1990s, of the little social movements around the questions of caste, land, livelihood, survival, gender, sexuality, project-related displacement, forest rights, environment and ecology.

These reflections take into account the cultural nature of the social sciences and the social nature of the human sciences and make a call to take a view from below from the disadvantaged perspectives of the marginalized castes, cultures, regions and genders. This view from below is important as it is discovered that some of the events that further the development of man and society have quite different, even opposite, effects upon social groups such as adivasis and dalits.

To steer clear of ethnocentrism and reductionism, the Centre encourages interdisciplinary studies focusing on those objects and aspects neglected by disciplines in their attempts to maintain disciplinary boundaries and claims of respectability, scientificity, and objectivity. Drawing on the vision of an egalitarian society ensuring the dignity of the least in society, the Centre proposes to promote studies as well as creativity in art, literature, and culture. The Centre is constituted by a body of academics, research scholars, writers, artists, and aesthetes.

The Centre's objectives are:

- To encourage research studies on marginalized social groups
- To orient young researchers and activists with thorough knowledge on social realities in order to actively engage with society.
- To publish monographs, working papers, theses, journals and books on oppressed communities
- To develop research skills by conducting workshops on methodologies and skills of academic writing and presentation
- To support writers from the marginalized communities to publish their writings To promote works of art in music, drama, painting, sculpture, and films by artists from the margins



“A disaster as a narrative must possess the quality of storytelling. Like a fable it must be repeated again and again, retold and rethought. The storyteller and the policy-maker must weave a new tapestry where the floods renew and rebuild a new Kerala”.

Shiv Visvanathan, *The Hindu*, 28 August 2018

The report presented here is a product of the dedicated efforts of a group of researchers who took to themselves the task of recording and analyzing the experiences of the 2018 floods. Moving across different genres—statistical data presentation, ethnographic account, analysis of narratives—the report tries to address the problems faced by the most marginalized sections as they faced the flood and overcame it heroically. In addition to this, the report also brings to the fore much required historical sensitivity to the problems faced by the caste-oppressed people in the context of natural disasters such as floods.

P. Sanal Mohan in Foreword

Marginalization in Catastrophe:

Rainfall Kerala Landslides and Deluge in 2018



Centre for Social Studies and Culture (CSSC)
in Collaboration with
Delhi Forum | Abhayaloka Buddhist Community |
Socio Economic Development Service (SEDS)