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Civil Society, Community, Disaster and State Responses: A Critical Study on Ockhi Cyclone 2017, Floods in 2018 and 2019 in Kerala, India

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Abstract

Purpose

Civil society is often defined as an umbrella term and an inclusive concept. Many civil society formations occur in the context of natural calamities. Natural calamities force people to question the established norms and practices and are likely to be aligned with new collectives and movements. Such a new collective often acquires the character of a civil society movement and positions itself against the government and the dominant narrative of the causes of natural hazards. Recently, three natural hazards occurred in Kerala, a state of India, as the Ockhi Cyclone in 2017 and floods in 2018 and 2019, which led sizeable civil Society collectives to demand better relief and rescue and look at the root causes of flood disasters from a hazard perspective. On the other hand, the government and ruling political parties build counter-movements to counter civil society resistance and opposition to take full ownership of risk management.

Methodology

The paper's research design evolved out of continuous engagement with the community affected by the disasters from 2017 to 2019. Interviews with the flood-affected people in the study area, key informants who are involved in the relief and rehabilitation, newspaper reports on floods and cyclones, and other published sources such as state disaster management authority's published documents are used for this paper. Interaction with fishers, flood victims, journalists, bureaucrats, and civil society activists over the period helped frame the research method.

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Findings

The state and ruling parties are not happy with civil society's articulation of the root causes of disasters, risks, and vulnerabilities. This civil society may not be able to challenge the state, and the state has the authority to overrule such articulations of risk and dictate the public perception of risks.

Keywords: Civil society, Kerala floods, Ockhi cyclone, Political response, State control

1. INTRODUCTION

Community and community collectives and civil society movements' involvement in disaster response is universal. Shaw and Goda (2004) observed that earthquakes in Japan lead to the large-scale formation of voluntary and non-government activities. People's participation also increased in these organisations. Community movement builds the relationship between the public sector, civil organisations and culture in a broader perspective. HENCE, they could be stakeholders in the socio-political impact and improvement of the affected community (Özerdem & Jacoby, 2006). Civil society is expected to act as a defense mechanism against unwarranted interference by the State in individual rights after the disaster (Edwards, 2004). Civil society organisations can interact with the local NGOs to ensure civil engagement (Twigg, 2004). Local organisations would act and balance the government plans (Aldrich & Crook, 2008). Civil society organizations can interfere between the affected community and the Government to mainstream disaster risk reduction and management activities with development initiatives (Victoria et al., 2014). Civil society interventions in disaster management often act as an instrument to shift the focus from disaster responses to development (Korten, 1990). Civil society movements were active in the tsunami response in Tamil Nadu, and they could influence the state policies to consider the real needs of the affected people (Srinivasan & Nagaraj, 2007). It assumes that linking post-disaster relocation and recovery with local community collectives ensures the sustainability of interventions, participatory risk management, and sustainable development (Abe et al., 2012; Paterson, 2006). Disaster risk management often leads to institutional changes at the local level to respond to the risks (Christoplos et al., 2017). The local community would mobilize under multiple institutional forms to respond to disaster situations. The aim of this paper is to discuss how and why civil society mobilise out of disaster events, how effective they are in influencing the policies, and also what makes it a sustainable entity in the context of a politically active society and country.

The local community turns out to be the first respondent to natural hazards. Such a local community gathering often turns into a civil society collective. Local knowledge-based practices, and local knowledge consensus have enhanced the level of catastrophe adaptability among community members (Dasanayaka & Matsuda, 2022). Studies show that community participation ensures effective rehabilitation (Takenouchi, 2020). Individuals with poor

community and social networks seek external support for rescue and relief in disaster (Dynes, 2006). Local responses further expose the institutional weakness of the system to respond to catastrophe. Disasters expose a socio-political system's inherent weaknesses, limitations, and varying degrees (Hewitt, 1983). Civil society organizations also use state policies to involve the community in development projects (Menefee & Nordtveit, 2011).

Disasters are the most critical events in which Society is exposed to administrative vulnerabilities. Every government action becomes accountable to the public vis-a-vis the impact of natural calamities. Politically and ideologically committed civil society organisations could restrict total bureaucratic control of crisis management. There are arguments that the absence of civil Society also displaces community representatives in decision-making (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009), and often, other stakeholders occupy that space. Civil Society can influence robust recovery. Nonprofit civil society initiatives effectively establish inter-organizational collaboration in post-disaster recovery (Demiroz and Hu, 2014). As Ersdal and Aven (2008), Dubois and Guyonnet (2011), and Globle (1998) observed, risk-informed decisions should accept both right and wrong probabilities or consequences. Studies on civil society and disasters prove such organizational interventions could effectively respond to the disaster. The local political context also determines the success of civil society engagement in a disaster situation.

This paper discusses the civil society interventions in the post-disaster situation of Kerala, a state of India where political parties dominate the public sphere. The political parties have grassroots-level involvement in Kerala, and the democratic processes are close to the people. Heller (2012) theorized that Kerala is a prototypical example of social democracy compared to other Indian states in the periphery. Democratic practices are deeply infiltrated into the social life of Kerala and often challenge the authoritarian nature of State and non-state actors. The above-explained natural calamities happened in this social democratic context; hence, institutions and actors drive the social democracy force to demonstrate its commitment to democracy. Joseph et al. (2021) show that disaster-affected communities demand distributive and procedural justice. So, disaster-affected communities in such a society wherein the grassroots level of democracy does not find much political challenge in mobilizing themselves for justice in the public sphere.

The article describes the concept of the public sphere as defined by Habermas et al. (1964). Habermas defined the public sphere as a process in which public opinion and expression of choice are formed. This paper has selected three natural disasters in Kerala, such as the Ockhi cyclone in 2017 and the Kerala floods in 2018 and 2019, as cases to discuss the interface of State and civil society during relief and recovery. Disasters are not new to Kerala; however, unlike others, these three disaster events have been widely discussed within the affected communities. These disasters-led local-centric community collectives often challenge the state narratives of the cause and effect of disasters. These are local-centric and perspective-based civil society movements; hence, this paper focuses on the agency perspective of the movement. The agency could be an individual or a grassroots entity that is not being coordinated on a large scale. It could be a discursive, hybrid, and post-liberal form of peace (Richmond, 2011). Barnes (2000) argued that an individual agency is an internal power, making it an *active* entity constantly intervening in ongoing events.

Maclean (1999) argued that agency is often dominant in people and acts. It would be socially established in a particular historical period as a natural limit of social reality and social practice. Community associations do not necessarily have an organized form; they could be an 'agency' that acts counter to or separate from the local state authority. Such an 'agency' wants to make public decisions socially produced through negotiations, and it would neither be anti-government nor a substitute for the Government (Ostrander, 2012). As Sulkunen (2010) argued, if the citizens never claimed the role of an agency, the State often imposed it on them through rehabilitation plans, contracts, and other state-driven institutions. Also, it led to the exclusion of those who needed to demonstrate their commitment to the State. This paper considers the local mobility of citizens (civil society) against the 'local-specific determinants of articulating disaster risks and ideas of rehabilitation.

Disasters never displace the democratic rights of a citizen, and social democracy inevitably encourages citizens to demand rights during a disaster. Social democracy certainly inspires the people to demand justice. The critical argument of this paper is drawn from the literature that the civil society movement is an inevitable political outcome in societies like Kerala, in which the political parties are pretty active in public discourse. The community has the right to prevent a corrosive community formation (Irshad & Joseph, 2015). This elaborates the agency perspective of Civil Society in a disaster context and accepts that the community can question the state intervention for well-being. The critical agency of civil society space and political agency of a democratic/political party that dominates the State focus on the paper's analysis. The case studies of these papers are located in Kerala state, where the left political parties and liberal right political parties are pretty active in the public sphere. Based on this conceptual debate, this paper attempts to understand the critical conflict between disaster-induced civil society movements in Kerala's politically empowered public sphere.

The paper attempts to see what kind of impact these spaces created by disaster-induced civil society formation have on disaster rehabilitation. And also to understand the impact of civil society initiatives in changing the perspectives of disaster management in a society wherein the grass root democracy exists.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are many concerns over the definitions of civil Society. Hegel (1896,1952) defined civil Society as an interface between family and the State. Hegel (1896,1952) argued that '*moreover, the creation of civil Society is the achievement of the modern world which has for the first time given all determinations of the Idea their due. If the State is represented as a unity of different persons, as a unity that is only a partnership, then what is meant is only civil society.* Hegel interprets civil Society as a space between the State and the family, emphasizing the importance of civic articulation of rights between the State and the private space (family). Interpreting disaster risks between the State and the private space is necessary to prevent the risk from the State to private. Jones (2002) discussed the Hegelian concept of civil Society; Jones argued that Hegel presented a prophetic critique of economic liberalism and

communitarian solutions to the financial problems. Alexander (2006) explained that civil society is an aggregate of multiple institutions engaged in non-state activities, which could be read as private, friendly, and part of the public sphere. Baker (2002) also referred to civil society as pluralists' demand for an active role of democratic state to meet the needs of the citizens. The liberal thinkers, however, argue that it is civil society's responsibility to prevent the over-concentration of power in society. Robinson (1995) observed civil society as a political discourse that emerged during the middle of the 1980s. Robinson emphasized both the neoliberal and neopopulist paradigms of civil society to promote democratic values and challenge the State's domination. The core argument is that civil society could be an effective counterbalance to state power. This could be a larger vision of civil society and an important political position on state domination in defining disaster response and community initiatives.

Baker (2002) also observed that citizens could constitute civil society for their purposes. Civil society can intervene in the democratic process if democracy does not offer any self-determination process. Baker argued that self-organization, i.e., action outside the State and self-determination, move together to make a civil society. Civil society in a democracy is meant to strengthen the representation of the public in multiple forms and not necessarily through electoral representation. The natural disaster-induced crisis in the global south quite often necessitates multiple models of victims in decision-making and state interventions. Otherwise, the bureaucracy takes the lead in all aspects of decision-making.

Dependencies on the government for basic needs make the government more potent in deciding matters about the communities. Hence, as Gellner (1995) argued, civil society comprises diverse non-governmental institutions that are strong enough to counterbalance the state and stop the state from dominating and atomizing the rest of society. Bauman (1999) explained that civil Society is a collective of the active involvement of those who want to shape their world rather than letting somebody shape it for them. Perception and the degree of freedom are very much at stake when one is exposed to the risk of natural hazards. The weakening of institutions furthers the risk of non-freedom; hence, society needs to look for plural and democratic civil society initiatives. As Harvey (1998) argued, from a liberal perspective, civil Society represents the plurality of civil associations and people to counterbalance the power of the State and promote democratic values. Natural hazards in an unequal and heterogeneous society often force the community to pull together to seek state attention on their differential needs.

2.1 Community and Governing Risks

Rose (1996) observed that '*the community not simply the territory of the government, but a means of government: its ties, bonds, forces, and affiliations are to be celebrated, encouraged, nurtured, shaped and instrumentalised.* Rose and Miller (1992) explained that political power is exercised by shifting alliances from one authority to another and putting constraints on citizens' choices. Such conditions result in regulated freedom; hence, individuals play a part

in turning power rather than being merely subjected to power. So civil society organizations have a specific routine function in everyday situations. Warren (2008) explained that civil society organisations could effectively engage with the State, Society, and the markets. Civil can represent individuals' concerns more directly than the market. Disasters in developing countries like India primarily disrupt the social and economic network, including the local market. Natural hazards lead to the livelihood at risk; hence, the community becomes more concerned about risk and mobilizes to fight for justice. It results in a public consensus for building a public sphere to tackle the crisis. As Habermas (1996) argued, 'the associative network of civil Society generates public spheres, which not only detects and identifies the problems but analyses them to find solutions. Disaster victims' ideas and perceptions of solutions are closely associated with their exposure to risk and loss, both collective and individual.

Citizens of a sovereign State support the State at times of risk if state activities are meant to narrow down the impact of a calamity. Carlin et al. (2014) argued that citizens support public policies during natural hazards and support government schemes for mitigating the risks. Shaw and Goda (2004) observed that earthquakes in Japan led to the large-scale formation of voluntary and non-governmental activities in the country. People's participation also increased in these organisations. Twigg (1999) observed that community-based organisations help people with emergencies efficiently and rapidly, and the system could use the resources economically. Such a critical engagement with civil society groups is possible only when the bureaucracy is open to engaging with civil Society. Maskrey (1989) argued that the top-down programmes, in which communities are not involved only sometimes reach out to disaster-affected people. A study by Aldrich (2012) based on time series data on about thirty-nine neighborhoods in Tokyo after the 1923 earthquake found that social capital was the best method to predict population recovery after the earthquake. Civil Society acts as a counterweight to the State (Hasegawa, 2004). Individual and civic 'agency ' and state's ability to control the civil space within the state administration is demonstrated in disaster situations. As Sunil (2002) argued, civil Society incarnates a desire to recover social power illegitimately usurped by the State. Agency of civil Society came along into the public domain and challenged the State. Natural hazards in an unequal socio-political order activated individual agencies of victims to get along with the civic agencies. It could be read as an attempt to secure rights as citizens. Civil society movements can be well-integrated into state welfare policies and act as an agency for ensuring deliberative democracy and citizen participation (Fishkin, 2009). Community associations do not necessarily have an organised form, it could be an 'agency' that chooses to act either counter to or separate from the local state authority. Such an 'agency' wants to make socially produced public decisions through negotiations and would neither be anti-government nor a substitute for the Government (Ostrander, 2012).

Community and civil society responses are possible in a democratic system; hence, a government in a democratic system hardly prevents such formations. It is possible in disaster situations, too. It speaks on behalf of Society, even in a democracy, and their articulation of disaster vulnerability never matches the state's definition of disaster impacts, losses, and causes.

This paper adopts Chatterjee's (1990) theory of civil Society to discuss the critical engagement of the affected community and the state. The reason to assume this theory is that disaster results differential impacts on society and structural vulnerability matters in determining disaster impacts. So, in Kerala's context, Chatterjees's theory is enable to discuss this issue in detail. Chatterjee argued that civil society is indeed becoming the space for the different lives of individuals in a nation. Disasters have differential impacts on the community and society, so a common or homogenous concern cannot resolve the impacts of a calamity. So, the community mobilizes for individual rights and collective justice. That discursive and diverse perception often challenge the bureaucratic definition of disaster relief and rehabilitation. Bureaucratic control in relief and rehabilitation is routine in country like India, so as state within the country, state bureaucracy dictates the rules and regulations of disaster rehabilitation. Bureaucracy and state follows the principle of procedural justice which often ignores the community's differential needs. So, disaster enables them to mobilize themselves and critically engage with the state in the context of democracy. So, Chatterjee's idea of civil society indeed represents the civil society mobilisation after the disasters in a politically active state like Kerala. It is a challenge to the state as these civil society movements primarily contest the state narratives of rights and justicesThis theoretical position opens wider possibilities to engage with the civil society formed after the disaster in Kerala and its challenge to influence the policy decisions.

2.2 Methodology

The methodology used in this paper/study has evolved through the unstructured interaction with the disaster survivors, participant observations in relief camps, and silent observation in protest movements, Five key informant interviews were conducted (three were the community leaders and other were the official of Kerala state disaster management authority[1]), newspaper reports, etc over three years. An interview with twelve fishers who were affected by the 2017 cyclone was conducted in 2018. These twelve fishers were directly affected by the Ockhi Cyclone and, later on, part of relief and rescue. Also, the researcher has interviewed the local community leader working for Fishers. These fishermen were selected based on their Cyclone experience and represented the Vizhinjan and Poonthura fishing villages on the Kerala coasts. These two fishing villages were severely affected by Cyclone 2017 and still have not recovered from the disaster loss. Court Judgments, Kerala Government's official resolutions, and Newspaper reports are also used for this study. Also, interviews with the 2019 flood victims in the Malappuram district of Kerela, with the help of an unstructured interview schedule, help gather information on the institutional engagement of government and bureaucracy during disasters. The study purposefully selected the Tribal Community members affected by the 2019 natural disaster in the Kavalapara region of Kerala, which helped to understand the importance of civil society in the political context of Kerala. This community group is living in a temporary shelter. The author has conducted focus group discussions with the group

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[1] Keep the name anonymous

members to understand their experience in engaging with the government after the disaster. Focus Group discussions with the fishers of Vizhinjan and Poonthura happened after one year of the event. The discussion was with the fish workers, and their concern was the difficulties in practicing livelihood and poor income and environmental securities results of the cyclone. The major concern was the casual approach of the state towards their region and livelihoods. The discussions were about the government, disaster management, and general public approach towards fisherfolks. Focus Group discussion with flood-affected people of Kavalapara was again conducted one month after the event. Unlike cyclone victims the community affected by 2019 were not bothered much about the government relief and recovery questions and their concern was the environmental risks over there and for the tribal community the concern was the slow response of the state towards them. The data for this study was collected over a period of four years i.e. 2018, 2020 and 2021. The purpose of the paper is to discuss with them and avoid some questions that they do not want to make any public comments on. The purpose of considering the 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 data and civil society movements is that otherwise, it is difficult to connect the civil society response to the disasters. This author's engagement with the fishers, flood victims, journalists, bureaucrats, and civil society activists is helpful in getting information and developing a conceptual framework.

3. DISASTER RISKS AND CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENTS

3.1 Cyclone and its Impact on Fishing Community

Cyclone Ockhi hit coastal Kerala in November 2017. Kerala had no prior experience of devastating cyclones, and the fishing community also had no such experience. On November 27, 2017, the local fisherfolk in the Vizhinjam area of Thiruvananthapuram district noticed some unusual weather changes in the sea. They informed the local community leaders and tried to contact the administration[2]. The government agencies were not serious about their apprehension. The fact was that the Government depended on the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) for an official declaration of cyclone. KSDMA depends on the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) for scientific data to declare a disaster, including a cyclone [3]. Indeed, the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority could not interpret the information released by IMD and predict a cyclone (Irshad, 2020). The local fisherfolk community perceived this poor response of Kerala Stata Disaster Management Authority as the collective attitude of the administration towards fisherfolk, and they perceived it as an institution-driven exclusion. They had to mobilize against the casual approach and wanted to

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[2] Fr Eugene Pereira, the vicar of Thiruvananathapuram diocese was spearheading the community campaign during the crisis period. During the study, this author interacted with him to understand the exact issues which the community faced. He mentioned that the community informed him that the fisherfolk who had gone to the sea did not come back on 27th November 2017

[3] The author reviewed daily bulletins of IMD from 1st November 2017 to 30th November 2017 and found that the cyclone warning was issued directly on 30th; hence, KSDMA was unable to send proper early warning. Or KSDMA could not make an effort to do an in-depth review of daily bulletin nor apply their own method to predict the weather changes.

participate in the rescue operation. The coastal police and Navy force located in Kerala had not listened to the demand for local fishers, citing strategic and defence-related reasons. On 10th December 2017, the local fishing community organized a protest march toward government headquarters in the district of Thiruvananthapuram, wherein the affected area was located, demanding their involvement in rescue operations[4]. Such massive local resistance was not acceptable to the state government. The ruling left-front government and the ruling party stood against the local fisherfolk. The ruling party's organisations and leaders openly challenged the claims of fisherfolk[5]. The left front government's problem was that they are upfront in public movements and always take ownership of right-based movements. So, they were against the movement of workers against their government. However, the government and the naval force later permitted fishermen to participate in rescue operations[6]. Also, the community protest and active involvement of civil society forced the Government of Kerala to declare those missing as dead and enabled their relatives to get financial compensation[7].

The Ockhi Cyclone 2017 demonstrated the crisis of Kerala's public sphere in engaging with the fisherfolk (Irshad, 2020). In the case of the Ockhi cyclone, the government of Kerala prefers to ignore the community's ability to fight risk (Irshad, 2020). The pressure tactics of fisherfolks could not move beyond a point, especially in influencing any proper rehabilitation plan. The Government could use fisherfolks' dependency on public-funded welfare schemes to dismantle community mobilization. The government could control the decisions precisely because the fishing community of Kerala is largely dependent on government-sponsored schemes. The Fisheries department of Kerala sponsored a number of schemes for fishermen; in infact, they depend more on the Government for survival[8]. The economic backwardness of fisherfolks weakened the civil society mobilisation and community assertion in response to the inadequate response to the cyclone. The economic backwardness of fisherfolks gradually weakened the movement, and the action was progressively limited to the local space only. The fisherfolks are considered a highly governed community in Kerala; hence, civil society organisations intervene a lot. It could be read as the institutional success of the state over the

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[4] The conflict between the Church and the government emerged from the confusion over the number of fisherfolk missing. It began with the demand to be part of the rescue operations. The church leaders made an open statement against the slow response by the government. The Church-based civil society movement totally dismissed the claims of the government on the support extended to the community.

[5] It was evident from the news hour and prime time discussions on Malayalam News channels during November and December 2017 connected with Ockhi cyclone, wherein the representatives of left parties and government were using all the resources at their disposal to deny the claims of the fisherfolk. The community leaders and church leaders on the contrary, put across counter arguments based on their experiences. No government officials or representatives agreed to the fisherfolk community in those discussions. Prime time discussions in Malayalam news channels are referred for this.

[6] The community still believe that because of their involvement they could rescue more people and collect deadbodies.

[7] The government was not agreeing to accept all those who were missing as dead, and the community collective was pushing for this. The community knew that they will not comeback and wanted the government to declare them as dead in order to get compensation for the families.

[8] Fisherfolks are entitled to get financial support during pregnancy, support for children's education, pension, group insurances, subsides, housing and support for girls marriage etc .

civil society and weaken their collective demands. The Kerala state continues this approach in the other two disasters as well.

3.2 Exclusion by Mainstream

The Ockhi cyclone was a challenging experience for the fisherfolk, and they experienced different kinds of treatment by the public. The public sphere of Kerala ignored the crisis of the fisherfolk affected by Ockhi. Interestingly, within a year, the fisherfolk of Kerala got the new social identity of 'The Army of Kerala; upon their active involvement in the 2018 flood, There were many allegations against the government for not taking proper preparation against flood risk. The most crucial among them was a delay in deploying the relief and rescue operation, including the army. The state government was confident that the state police and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) would manage the flood risks. The confidence level of the government did not last long, and within three days, the public and the state government recognized that they needed to call the army. It took one day for the military to reach.

Meanwhile, the leaders of fisherfolk organisations had asked their members to move to the flood-affected areas with their fishing boats for rescue operations. The involvement of fisherfolk boats changed Kerala's idea of relief and rescue. About 950 fishing boats and nearly 4,500 fisherfolk were involved in the rescue operations. They could save 65,000 people in severely affected Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Thrissur, and Ernakulam districts of Kerala.[9]

The entry of fisherfolk into the rescue operations was a new experience for Kerala. The media kept on reporting the bravery of fisherfolk and their contribution to saving lives[10]. Following this KSDMA launched a training programme for the fisherfolk, and it was extended to all and ended up being a more extensive project for the community volunteers in the State[11]. A close analysis of KSDMA's volunteer training is a political task of controlling fisherfolks' 'civic space'. These community volunteer programme could be looked at from a strategic point of view in which the government wants to take the ownership of community interventions according to the state driven method. This state driven method could exclude the indigenous and local knowledge and practices in rescue and rather create a homogenous institution driven rescue and relief. The irony is that the public and state endorse the bravery of fishermen, totally ignore the increasing coastal risk including coastal erosion which affect the livelihood of the fishing communities of Kerala.

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[9] https://www.developmentchannel.org/2018/09/01/role-of-fisherman-in-kerala-flood-disaster-management-hailed/

[10] Kuttapan (2019) quoted that a fisherman who participated in the rescue operation said, "we have seen the rough seas. We have braved high tides. Even if we are thrown into the sea for four days, we can survive. So, we were confident that we can do something in the flood-hit area."

[11] Fisherfolk were celebrated as warriors of Kerala for a couple of months and even commercial advertisement films were produced showcasing the fisherfolk as the main theme; however, the livelihood struggles of fisherfolk are not part of the mainstream public debate of Kerala.

3.3 2018 and 2019 Floods and its Implication in Kerala

The second and third cases discussed in this paper are the 2018 and 2019 floods. The 2018 flood took 438 lives and Rs. 82042.82 Million loss to the state government[12]. It was a massive disaster Kerala faced after the 1924 flood, and within days the state government had to respond to the public criticism of poor preparedness and dam management[13]. The post floods relief and rescue operations were well appreciated; however, there were controversies about the root causes of the flood, poor preparedness lack of coordinations. Government agencies, community, and civil society movements have been divided over the reasons for the impact of the flood. The government stood by the conventional reasons of a flood as excessive rainfall as the cause, and civil Society largely blamed the poor dam management and destruction of the environment. State Relief Commissioner-Disaster Management (2018) argues that the excessive rainfall from the 8th to the 18th of August 2018 created flood risks. Kerala received 96% excess rainfall from 1st to 30th August 2018 and 33% excess rainfall from the monsoon period until the end of August. The peak spell of rains from 8th to 17th August 2018 resulted in a heavy flood. The excess rainfall immediately refers to the carrying capacity of the dams in Kerala. The authorities had no option left except release the excess water from the dams and there were news reports that the district administration did not inform the public about opening the dams gates[14]. The media are quite active, and the state is known for its newspaper reading culture. As per the Indian readership survey report (2017) 59. 73 percent of people read newspapers in Kerala compared to 16.55 percent of the national average. Also, the active presence of news channels which kept on telecasting live coverage of dam water release. These media interventions led to multiple narratives and interpretations of the causes of flood. The idea of poor dam management got wider appeal which challenges the institutional incapability to respond to flood risks.

The Government of Kerala had to engage with this public understanding and was under pressure to build counter-narratives with the help of institution-driven data. Like in the case of Ockhi cyclone government had to depend scientific source to defuse the public imagination. The Central Water Commission (CWC, 2018) provided detailed information on the carrying capacities of dams in Kerala. The Commission's report argues that there are 57 large dams in Kerala, of which the neighbouring State Tamil Nadu operates 4. Of the 57 dams, only 7 have live storage of more than 0.20 billion cubic meters (BCM), and they constitute 74% of the total live storage in Kerala. The Commission's report further added that from 1st August to 19thAugust 2018, the total rainfall in Kerala was 758.6 mm against the normal rainfall of 287.6

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[12] Kerala Floods, 2018. National Institute of Disaster Management.
https://nidm.gov.in/PDF/pubs/KeralaFlood_18.pdf
[13] There were allegations that both, the water resource ministry and the electricity ministry, did not want to open the dam to flow off the excess water. Both ministries were concerned about irrigation and electric power generation and did not anticipate the risks.
[14] There was newspaper report that Wayanad District Collector was not informed when gates of Banasura Dam were opened, which led to massive flood risks in Wayanad district. Malayala Manoram dated 22nd August 2018.

mm. It was 164% above normal, so the commission justified the government's decision and argued that the flood risk was not just due to opening the dam's shutters alone.

The Government of Kerala and Kerala State Disaster Management Authority have use these sources to justify the dam water release. The social media pages of KSDMA refer these sources including floods in other parts of the world to caricature the media criticism on dame management. The Commission's report was a big relief to the government to defend themselves against the poor dam management system and inadequate preparations. The Central Water Commission also asses that the total live storage capacity of the dams was 5.8 BCM, and the available flood moderation extent was only 1.16 BCM against the estimated inflow of 2.19 BCM; therefore, it was essential for the authority to release the excess water. The study by Mishra et al (2018) also explained that excessive rain in the catchment areas of dams played an essential role in the large-scale flooding in Kerala. Hunt and Menon (2020) proved that Kerala needed 34% more capacity to hold the excess rainwater. These studies indeed endorse the state government position on flood. Kerala's ruling parties, the media control by them and their social media pages give maximum popularities of the findings of these studies to undermine the civil society criticisms.

These scientific reasons and the public consensus creations ignored the anthropogenic causes of floods. Media and public discussions were strictly on the protocols and procedures for emergency dam safety management. There were news reports that water resource department open the dam without any prior public warning[15]. Such public discussions led to the unparalleled critical debate on dam safety. Local newspaper reporters carry the impact of uninformed dam opening and dam safety management procedures[16]. Critical thinking evolved out of public discussions, and these local media reports were instrumental in building counter-narratives on government claims on the root causes of the flood. Following this a public interest litigation (PIL) was filed in the High Court of Kerala, and the Court had appointed Amicus Curiae to look into the matter. The Amicus Curiae report was very critical and close to civil society criticisms. The report proved that no proper precautionary steps were taken before opening the dam shutters. The Amicus Curiae report argues that the protocols of the Emergency Action Plan was not followed by the government. Amicus Curiae's report supported the claims by environmental activists and civil society groups. There was conflict over reasons for the flood, the state and civil society came up with proved reasons and stood by it.

The civil society initiatives which were evolved in Kerala right after these disasters very much decentralized and local too. There were no organised leadership of these movements, and it could articulate the risk based on local realities only. The heterogeneous and local

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[15] Malayala Manoram dated 22nd August 2018.
[16] Guidelines for Developing Emergency Action Plans for Dams, 2016 by Centre Water Commission. Government of India. This report explained various methods of sending alert prior to opening the shutter of a dam. A close examination of the report vis-à-vis news report proved that the government was not serious about the procedures of dam safety.

specificity of the movement in Kerala also resonates with the decentralized political situation of Kerala. As Heller (2005) argues, democratic decentralization in Kerala could ensure effective political participation and create new institutional spaces for civil society engagement. Such civil society formation could influence the public sphere and eventually nullify the statist articulation of risk and relief at the local level. In Kerala, the government wanted to refrain from engaging with civil society movements concerning disaster risk management. Disaster management is a bureaucratically controlled process largely conceived as ensuring essential minimum supports. Disaster-affected communities are treated as vulnerable and subject to state control in countries like India. Disaster affects the poor and marginal sections of the population; hence, they have to depend on the government to replace the assets and capital. Though Kerala occupies the highest position in the Human Development Index and social development, the victims of disasters are essentially the vulnerable and marginal section of the population. This is pretty evident in the case of the Ockhi cyclone and flood victims.

Governmental interventions are inevitable for them to survive and recover the risks; hence, they expect to be non-critical and accept government policies. In this context, the Government of Kerala also perceived civil society movements as anti-government and anti-scientific. A close examination of the civil society movements and their articulation of rights disown the government's positions on disaster management. The movements and larger community collective resembled Müller's (2006) theorization of civil society as a defensive force against the state, market, and social sphere. In Kerala, the formation of the post-flood civil society was primarily an outcome of growing democratic awareness and consciousness of an emerging civic space in response to the state's failure to regulate destructive practices. Local movements are against the state narrative of risk and question the ruling parties' ideological position (left parities) towards the root causes of floods. The local network of the ruling party at the grassroots helped the government overcome public pressure[17]. The left parties otherwise want to align with the civil society movements; however, in the case of the disaster of 2017, 2018, and 2019, the parties become defensive as the left front government rules the state, and also the local community questions the state's failures. The civil society movement primary criticism was against the natural resources conservation and pro-capital approach of the left front government.

The epicentre of 2019 flood was again the Western Ghat region and it took 103 lives. The Western Ghats is one of the biodiversity hotspots spread across four states in India, i.e. Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, and Kerala. The ecological importance of these areas is well known; considering this, the Government of India's Ministry of Environment and Forest appointed an expert committee to look into the conservation issues in the Western Ghats

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[17] Left parties, trade unions and party networks always projected all those civil society movements outside their party's control as anti-left and bourgeois. They could gather larger academicians and writers who support the Left party's support to the government reasons and it also became 'manufactured public reason'. It is a success of the Left party's network in Kerala.

region[18]. The committee recommended conserving the area and restricting the economic activities over there. However, the plantation owners, mining industries, and settlers lobby in the Western Ghats region put pressure on the government to revisit the findings and suggestions of the committee reports. The expert committee wanted total protection of ecologically sensitive areas by implementing administrative regulations. The committee report resulted in massive protests by people who have occupied the area and done plantation. The left parties also aligned with anti-Gadgil committee reports.

The anti-Gadgil committee mobilization was a classic example of vote bank politics and elite-class communal mobilization to challenge a democratically elected government. It also proves how fragile are the institutions of democratic states in developing countries to overcome economic class pressure tactics. Independent researchers found the diversion of forest land for plantation in Western Ghat regions (Saha, 2022; Jha et al., 2000). Commercial plantations ensured the livelihood of thousands of people as well. So, the community collective in western Ghat uses livelihood as a reason to oppose the recommendations of Gadgil Committee reports. The plantation companies in the Western Ghats region and the local community groups[19] floated a new movement called *Malayora Samrakshna Samithi* (Hill Area Protection Council) to fight for their interests. One of their members was elected from the Idukki Loksabha (parliament constituency) as a Member of Parliament in the 2014 general elections for five years. The Left parties supported his candidature. This candidature gave the local economic class access to democratic institutions and political power. This collective has narrated that their movement was to protect the livelihood of people who cultivate in these areas. Ideally, the interests of the landed class were the driving force behind the collective. The anti-Gadgil movement was the kind of pressure group that acquired the characteristics of civil society in public and even dared to challenge the government. Political domination and the economic power of these new coalitions became the biggest impediment to the civil society movement of vulnerable communities. It is a new GO-Civil Society Movement (GO-CSM) with political support. This GO-CSM could not let civil society mobilise for ecological conservation and vulnerable populations for environmental security. Local Churches and religious organizations were part of the anti-Gadgil report, so it was pretty effective to mobilize the religious public against the conservation of movements. The local community and leaders who support the conservation movements decided not to make any public comments as they feared social isolation. One of the local activists who did not want to reveal his identity told this author that he was against the Malayora Samrakshna Samithi. However, he had no option left but to openly challenge the church-based movements.

3.4 2019 Flood and Challenges of Risk Governance

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[18] Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel.Submitted to Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India, 2011.

[19] The local churches actively supported the settlers and plantation lobby, as they are the members of the Church. Kerala's top Catholic Church groups actively moved against the findings of the expert committee on conservation.

Though the number of deaths was less than the 2018 food, the 2019 floochallenged e government's claims regarding disaster risk reduction and preparedness. Unlike, 2018, 2019 flood and landslide occurred in certain areas adjacent to heavy quarry industry or areas close to massive environmental destructions. The pro-conservation scientists in Kerala kept on publishing popular and peer-reviewed papers to support civil society and challenge the *Malayora Samrakshna Samithi* (Hill Area Protection Council). The study by Sajeev and Alex (2017) on illegal quarries in Kerala that ignited public debate and discussions on the environment and disaster This study prove the illegal rock mining in ecologically sensitive areas of Kerala.. There were a series of public debates on this study, and all those discussions were about the government and industrial lobby's claims. The prime-time discussions on Channels aired the author's views and inspired the famous articulation of environmental risks.

The general public meeting on the 2019 floods in Kerala centered on environmental destruction and the unscientific expansion of granite industries[20]. Kerala's parliamentary party politics were divided on this debate. The left ruling parties and opposition parties decided not to take this issue for any further political discussion. This new financial coalition displaces the civil society's articulation of risks and the structural causes of flood disasters.

This paper has taken two villages in the Malappuram district of Kerala to discuss the dynamic nature of state-civil society engagement in Kerala in the 2019 flood. Kavalpara and Puthumala villages were the epicenter of the 2019 flood. Soil piping in Kavalapara and landslides in Puthumala villages in Malapuram district forced the government to listen to civil society's public demands. Fifty-nine people died in Kavalapara, and (as of 17th March 2021) seven bodies are yet to be recovered. Kavalapara is a forest area, and there are 21 quarries in a 10-kilometre radius of Kavalapara[21]. The public were raised against the regional quarry industries and perceived that these quarries were responsible for the land slide risks in the area. There was massive public pressure against such destructive industries. In response to the general unrest the government had placed a temporary ban on the quarry industries; however, the Kerala Government could not withstand the power of lobbying by the financial class. The Government of Kerala withdrew the ban within a week, explaining that there was no heavy rain in Kerala during those days[22]. The Kerala government could overrule civil Society with this government order. Again, the government and ruling party justified the decision by referring to the demand for raw materials for rehabilitation activities and many construction projects running in the state[23].

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[20] The prime time discussions and editorials of Malayalam newspapers were exclusively debating on these issues. The media was also divided about their position on environment. The government and the newspapers run by ruling party ignored the debate and those who stand by the civil society came forward and criticised the state position.
[21] Kuttappan, Rejimon, 2019. Rampant Quarrying Likely To Have Caused Landslides in Kerala. https://www.thelede.in/environment/2019/08/15/rampant-quarrying-likely-to-have-caused-landslides-in-kerala? (accessed on 6th April 2020)
[22] Government of Kerala, Special Order, 314/2019-20/7617/M3/2019/DMG dated 21/08/2019.
[23] There were massive social media campaigns by ruling left front to justify the decisions and caricatures of those who oppose as 'anti-development'.

Two civil society initiatives were formed after the 2019 Kerala flood: the anti-quarry pro-ecosystem conservation and the civil society initiative for ecological security and rehabilitating victims. There was a massive community mobilization in the Malappuram district, such as free shops and contribution of the land for reconstruction, and the local civil society initiatives even proposed an alternative rehabilitation model to the government's scheme[24].

Kavalapara deserves particular reference in the context of flood risk management. Rehabilitation is still not complete; thirty-three tribal families had to live in the temporary relief camp for four years . The government sanctioned Rs. 270 million to purchase land for 462 families, including those relocated, as part of future risk management (Revenue (DRF-B) No. 777/2020/Rev dated 25.02.2020). Each family got land from private individuals, and charity organisations constructed houses. There is no compensation for the loss of agricultural land.

The delay in rehabilitation forces the local community to mobilize themselves under a civil society initiative. Local political parties have yet to show any interest in mobilizing the community. A new initiative called Kavalapara Colony Association was formed. They demanded the following from the government: a) agricultural land for farmers who lost land, b) permanent rehabilitation/relocation of families living in the risk zones, c) write-off of the debt of farmers on the lost land, d) money sanctioned for tribal families' house construction and, e) comprehensive rehabilitation plan for Kavalapara. The convenor of the movement has also submitted public interest litigation in Kerala High Court. They kept conducting protest marches and distributing pamphlets, but the government ignored them. The Government of Kerala claimed that they could deliver maximum justice to the flood victims, and it is a model for the rest of the country. The movement declared that they will not cast their vote in the Kerala assembly election in April 2021 as a strategy to attract the government's and political parties' attention. This movement represents only the victims of floods; hence, their negotiations with the government are also limited. Their movement is against the hegemony of the state. As Nayar (2001) explained, civil society often negotiates with the contradictions of a democratic state. The democratically elected Government of Kerala failed to perceive the differential impact of flood risks. It forced the bureaucracy to design the joint rehabilitation plan, thereby excluding many, including disempowered tribal communities. Ironically, the slow rehabilitation of flood victims will not be an issue of local assembly elections 2021[25]. The ruling political front again got elected, and nobody discussed the minimum support as rehabilitation and ignored the ecological root cause of three major disasters. The decentralized and disaggregated civil society initiatives were further restricted and also failed to challenge the powerful state. All these movements are indeed confronting the democratic State and the left party. The Government of Kerala has to create a public perception that the government is democratic and listens to the people's concerns. Government uses administrative and

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[24] The local community mobilisation in Malapuram district had offered to construct better quality house than the conventional rehabilitation house of Kerala. The primary differences is the plinth area of houses, the general method is 360 Sq Ft houses, however the local community offers 750 Sq Ft houses.

[25] I have collected the manifestos of the candidates and nobody mentioned this as a serious issue to be settled with.

bureaucratic institutions to govern the crisis and establishes its authority. The civil society movements discussed above came out of local needs and institutional negligence.

4. DISCUSSION

The government and the ruling party put all their frontline organizations into defending the government. It builds parallel institutions, including community initiatives. The Government of Kerala attempts to acquire the characteristics of a voluntary state. Wood (1997) considered the voluntary state as a franchise state. Chandoke (2003) also argued that the voluntary state has removed its traditional responsibilities of supporting people. In a disaster context, voluntary states prefer non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in disaster relief operations (Özerdem & Jacoby, 2006). The Government of Kerala seeks state-owned community mobilisations to counter the civil society initiatives. The government-supported self-help groups and volunteer training programs help capture the 'civic space' of the public against the state interests. The most crucial among them was the Kudumashrre mission, a multi-prong poverty eradication and women empowerment program supported by the government and has 44,91,834 members across the state. This network is based on member's contributions plus government support. It actively mobilized people and captured the anti-state civil society movements in Kerala after the floods 2018 and 2019. Kudumbshree acts as a buffer between the resting poor masses and the government. The distribution of relief materials and the organisation of relief camps make people depend on Kudumbashree and thereby contain the resentment. The close association between the Kudumbashree and the government was decisive in making people depend on them and set aside the public criticism of ineffective state interventions including pro-capital support policy of the state.   It could connect vulnerable people with the state and play the role of the state civil society movement during a crisis. The nature of civil Society in China, as explained by Xu (2014), is quite relevant to Kerala after the 2018 and 2019 flood response. Xu attempted to explain that the nature of Chinese civil societies follows a neo-Tocquevillian approach which talks about the need for civic activity in democratic politics. Xu argued that in China, the government prefers to organize GONGOs (government-organised non-governmental organisations), such as the Communist Youth League, the Red Cross and the All-China Women's Federation as an alternative to Society's involvement in civil Society. It is a method to absorb and take control over the civic space in favour of state interests. The community lose its autonomy in defining the narrating the public reasons. In the case of Kerala, the civil society movements formed after the disaster want to share the public concern in the context of disaster loss and exclusions.

In Kerala, the poor and vulnerable victims of disasters have to depend on the government for well-being and recovery. Also, the vulnerable population has been left with the only option of connecting with informal networks and the government for a transition from crisis to development (Brassard & Raffin, 2011). Financial support from government agencies is indispensable for local-level organizations to respond to disasters (Lein et al., 2009), and the

community is forced to depend on state agencies. It is evident in Kerala. Such dependency also disempowers civil society movements.

We must apply a Gramscian civil society concept to understand this complex process. Cohen and Arato (1997) explained the Gramscian idea of civil society from a critical perspective. They observed that Gramsci theorizes civil society as an institution to reproduce the State; hence, hegemony would continue. Converging civil society movements within the ambit of government institutions was the strategy of the Government of Kerala to govern the post-disaster public distress. The Government of Kerala and the ruling party use all possible institutions and political networks to overcome the local civil society movements' articulation of reasons and narratives of state failures toward the root causes[26].

5. CONCLUSIONS

The more considerable debate of this paper is based on the specific political economy context of Kerala, India, a state known for its political and civic consciousness. So, the focus of the paper is the position of the state towards disaster, which challenges the authority of the state. In Kerala, the government and the ruling party often competed with the 'individual agency' and space in public as humanitarian responses to relief agencies[27] to undermine the anti-government narratives on risk and rehabilitation. The Kerala government, the disaster management authority, and the ruling party wanted to project risk management as a model initiative. As said before, the Government uses its party networks and media to project Kerala's disaster management as a grant success and proposes the Rebuild Kerala concept. The civil society initiatives challenge this total ownership claim of the state and build counter-narratives.

The government and political parties seem intolerant of critical civil society responses to natural hazards. Civil society interventions and criticisms often link the disaster impacts with

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[26] The flood occurred in August 2019 and it was immediately after the parliamentary election in May 2019. The ruling left front candidates lost 19 Loksabha constituencies except one and hence, the ruling party needed to build a public appeal. One mayor of the city belonging to the ruling left front could gather a larger number of relief materials collected through his social media and party network and sent it to Malapuram district. It had to pass through three districts. He could capitalize on the initiatives in a big way. The ruling party social media campaigners projected him as a most efficient mayor and indirectly compared him with other city corporations headed by opposition parties. Sarcastic trolls made him a favourite in the social media. The entire campaign in favour of him in the social media somehow dismissed the anti-state civil society narrative on root causes of the hazard. It was one of the best election strategies during disasters and it could dismiss all other support extended to the community. Later he became a symbol of humanity and efficiency and won the legislative assembly by-election. Strategically, he and his party were correct; however, it left a precedent to electoral politics at the cost of the disaster. A lager public concern was neglected and overtaken. The community movements were not just for relief materials, rather they were meant to address the root causes of hazards. The government and party's strategy of everyday politics set aside those burning concerns.

[27] The icon of 2019 Kerala flood relief and public response was Mr.Noushad, a street garment seller. He gave all his materials to be sold for his livelihood to community volunteers and they put it on social media and it became viral. It could capture the public space and nobody could retain that space. He did not expect anything, noteven the social media coverage; still, he was a centre of attraction and even government wanted to share his social space.

externalities of risk governance, indicating policy failure in developing countries. The state and political actors prefer to see it as an event rather than a result of cumulative hazards and risks.

The entire episode of disaster risk management in Kerala tells how fragile the civil society initiatives by a dependent community are. In Kerala, civil society movements were arguing for a larger conservation plan in the context of disasters and justice in rehabilitation; however, the government and the political parties are reluctant to agree with this plan[28].

A post-disaster civil society formation is inevitable to oppose the state and political parties' authority in deciding the post-disaster life-world of the community. The government's total rejection of civil society movements is undemocratic. Civil society and community movements are asking for resilient and sustainable environmental governance. Such concerns are coming up only in a democratic society, and the governmentalisation of risk management undermines the civic space, which acts as an equitable risk reduction agent. Also, civil society interventions reinstate the idea of governing disaster in a vulnerability paradigm rather than hazard-centric. Civil Society and community movements can articulate vulnerability in a discursive manner in the global south. The governments with neo-liberal perspectives in the global south seldom accommodate civil society interventions. The post-disaster community and civil society movements are inevitable for recognizing 'autonomy' and 'enjoying democratic rights' in defending the *lifeworld* of vulnerable communities.

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[28] The activists who support the conservation of the Western Ghats in the media and also those who kept on writing on conservations of natural resources were silenced by the government. Dr. R. Sunila senior reporter in Madhayamam Daily, a regional language newspaper, wrote a research report on ecological destruction in the Western Ghats and sought the responses on the contents of its storyfrom advocates and activists who were supporting the findings of the Western Ghats were, however, the activists who are in favour of the government and political leaders are reluctant to comment on it. (Interview with Dr. R. Sunil on 2nd January 2020 for this study.)

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