Chapter – 5

Community, Ethnicity and Solidarity in the context of Disasters

Group belongingness and solidarity found among different people has for long been a subject of discussion for many social scientists, philosophers and sociologists. Those living in an environment that involves an element of risk need people to relate to each other, and carry out activities through cooperative efforts for the survival of all individuals. When disaster strikes in whatever form or intensity, it tends to be a totalizing event or process, affecting most aspects of a community (Oliver-Smith 1996). Hence, it has been called a “natural laboratory” or crise revelatrice, as the fundamental features of a society and culture are laid bare in stark relief by the reduction of priorities to basic social, cultural and material necessities (Sahlins in Oliver-Smith 1996). While the literature on disasters brings out the importance of ‘community’, people on their part are more focused on the community’s immediate role in the relief phase. They tend to discuss how well they are able to recover from cyclones or any other disaster, and what losses they have incurred.

Studies in India talk of class and caste differences that exist in the country, and in Orissa, but they do not take a rigorous and detailed look at these attributes in times of disasters, and their impact on the society. The studies do not look into the complex social structures and systems such as ethnic identity and caste, and the kind of role that they play in bringing together various sections of the society in times of disasters. There could be many factors that contribute to the feeling of community and its role in coping with disasters. Certain occupations can also have a bearing on community belongingness. Particular identities such as caste, language or religion might help them in such situations than just the fact that they all live in a hazardous and disaster prone place, facing recurring disasters together. These different nuances in the formation and survival of communities in times of disasters need a closer look. This chapter
discusses issues related to the sense of oneness among different people, at least within a group that they consider their own, and uses the material gathered from the field to discuss how the sense of belongingness enhances group survival. Survival is not seen just as a matter of staying alive, but that this group can sustain itself in both a physical and an economic sense, and carry on the social life that has been in existence for generations.

**Communities: their ‘Way of life’**

**The family in the fishing village**

Every community has its own system of organizing life revolving around the people and the environment which constitutes their ‘life world’. It is essential to understand how each community is organized. To begin with we look at the primary unit of society and discuss the organization of the family in the study villages, viz. the fishing village and the agricultural village.

As described by Poggie and Gersuny (1974: 79):

“It is quite clear that in many ways . . . [family and kinship] must function quite differently among fishermen than among land people; this is in no small part related to the different work environments, or ecological settings, in which the men of these families carry out their occupational activities. This, in turn, influences inter-relationships of such other factors as wife’s perception of her husband’s work, kinship ties to wife’s or husband’s relatives and occupation succession.”

As an occupation fishing requires several people to work together to maximise their earnings. People of various ages and both the genders need to take part in the fishing activities. Even before the people of the village participate in the fishing activities as members of the community, their participation starts with the family as the smallest unit of society which takes part in the work. While the occupation in this village is not based on family ties as such, the family as a unit has important roles in
carrying out the occupation. Men and women from each fishing family take part in the fishing occupation, and taking up different roles connected with fishing. While men are the ones who go out to sea for the actual fishing, women provide subsidiary support to allied activities of fishing such as cleaning the fish, salting of fish, storing them, and drying some of the fish that is to be stored for a longer time. Even children take part in the occupation, where boys help their fathers in loading and unloading fish, and pulling boats, and girls help their mothers in cleaning the fish, and selling it in the market. Women do not go for fishing themselves, but their role is as important as that of the men. Women, as wives or mothers, cook food for the family and take care of the children. Fishing requires a very early start and men leave for fishing at about three am in the morning. It is the women of the house who get up and cook food for the men. They wait on the seashore for the men to come back from fishing and as soon as they come back, women undertake the rest of the work of cleaning the fish etc. They also take some share from the fish catch of the group that included their sons or husband, and sell these fish in the market. Men also look forward to having the women of their family sell this share of fish as it gets them extra earnings apart from the earnings of their share of the catch.

Examining the family would also throw light on the power relations in the households. The family structure varies from one family to another. There were nuclear families with the father, mother and their unmarried children staying in the same house. There were joint families also with parents, their unmarried daughters, and married sons living with their wives and children. Whether the married son stays with the parents in the same house by building a room and attached to the same house where the parents live, or builds separate houses for themselves varies from family to family. While in some families sons chose to stay with their parents, others built *kuchha* houses for themselves, as a temporary place of shelter after their marriage.
Distribution of power in the family is a crucial part of the family. In the Noliya families the father is the head of the household and the key decision maker. He is also the main income earner of the family (as indicated by female respondents) in the household. Respondents in 80% of the sample households mentioned that either the husbands (reported by female respondents) in a nuclear family or the father in a joint family is the head of the household. Men are the key decision makers in all aspects of family matters from spending in the household, to the marriage and property related issues. In the remaining 20% sample households the respondents indicated that as the male head earner had died, women were the main earners in such families. In some cases women who were widowed pursued either fish selling as their occupation or owned a small shop in the village. In one such case the respondent is a widow and lives with her son who works as a truck driver. Her husband died when her son was in his teens. Her husband was afraid of fishing after he met with a severe accident during fishing. He shifted from fishing and opened a shop in the village. After his death she runs the shop. In this case when asked about who is the key decision maker at home the respondent mentioned that as long as her son was young she decided about everything at home. Now that he is grown up and is employed he takes his own decisions, and on his own has even chosen a girl to marry. She said that at times he consults her, and at times does not, and it seems to be purely a choice of the son on whether to consult his mother on any matter.

In the families where the male heads have died, and the son is too young to decide on his own, decisions at home are made by the women. In those families where the son is an adult and earning, and lives with the widowed mother, household decisions are taken by the eldest son, sometimes in consultation with the mother. What it implies is that even though the head of the household, i.e., the father or husband is dead, the next decision maker is not always the wife or the mother, but the eldest son if he is an adult and earning. The villagers say this is the ‘way of life’ in their community and the pattern of functioning of the family.
Although women earn, their earnings are a secondary source of income rather than the main income of the household. This difference in income is also indicative of how it is perceived in the household and is an important determinant of the position that women are given in the house in terms of positions of authority in the home. The income of the men is seen as the main income which sustains the household. Women can go to distant places for their work, which includes manual labour and selling fish. They earn money, but do not have the ultimate say at home where the husband or the father/ father-in-law are the persons with authority. Fishing is also male dominated as well as male-centric. Without the men going fishing in the sea, there cannot be any further business, with no fish to sell without fishing, and women are not allowed to go fishing in the sea. Thus, the gender division is very clear in the community. Women in different roles such as mother, daughter and daughter-in-law do the household chores such as cooking, and cleaning the house, as well as take part in cleaning, and drying fish. Children go to school but girls are expected to help their mothers in household chores and fishing related activities, and sons are expected to help the father in other fishing activities as mentioned earlier. The gendered division of labour is very evident in the upbringing of the children, as also the gendered roles that they are expected to perform from an early stage in their lives. Elderly women also take part in family household chores. The data indicate that female respondents who are above 60 years of age do not undertake any income earning activities. They help with household chores, as it is less tiring than selling fish or doing any manual labour outside their homes.

Family life is closely related to the occupation, i.e., fishing, which the male head of the household pursues. The main source of income in the village being fishing, this occupation has a great deal of impact on the lives of other members of the families. They share in the anxiety when the men of the families go fishing, and leave the family on its own. The men cannot come when required if they are in the sea, and if there is any emergency situation at home. For example, as mentioned by a respondent, whose three brothers are into fishing, while he has a cable network business. When his brothers were out at sea, there have been situations when his
brothers’ children have fallen sick and needed to be hospitalised. It was he who had to take the children to the hospital that is at a distance of ten to fifteen kilometres from their village. Even during my fieldwork, on one occasion he had reported being busy with a similar task of taking his second brother’s child to hospital as the brother was out at sea and fishing. It is a difficult situation for the family and also where other members of the group have to carry out family responsibilities. The family in this occupational group does not stand alone, but has close ties with the remaining members of the group. They comprise elders of the family, the neighbours who are mainly their own relatives or their own caste people, and these are the ones on whom the families depend in a crisis situation such as a disaster, or during the day to day necessities of taking care of family in the absence of the men who go for fishing in the sea.

**Manifestation of community solidarity in the fishing village**

Before proceeding with the discussion, we can mention here the indicators of solidarity as they were first suggested by Durkheim and Toennies’, and later elaborated by Goffman and Merton. To these scholars, solidarity in a community is demonstrated by holding the same things sacred, following a common way of life, common beliefs, concentrated ties, frequent interactions, social attachments and involvement in institutions (Brint 2001). Fishing in this village is a group occupation that requires the support of several people, or as the villagers themselves say, requires the help of all the villagers, catching fish to selling it. Every day, they need to interact with members of the village who are in this occupation. Almost all the villagers (Noliyas) are in one way or the other related to this occupation. One man alone cannot go fishing in this place, as their boats use at least six men to throw the nets to catch fish, and afterwards unload the fish on the beach. The later work of cleaning, storing and drying (required for some varieties) is not done by the men, but it’s the women of their families who carry out these tasks.
The occupation of fishing entails the actual fishing in the sea as well as certain other activities such as net weaving, pulling the boats on shore, cleaning and drying fish and selling it, which require the efforts of several people i.e., it is group work. The fishermen go fishing with groups (comprising six to nine members as mentioned above) which are formed of members from the Noliya caste, who speak a common language i.e., Telugu, and belong to this particular village. The group is not only of family, brothers, or relatives, accompanying them. A crucial requirement is that only those who have the courage to venture into the sea can join the troop. The fact that the formation of fishing groups is not based on fraternal ties is because in the fishing occupation there are numerous jobs to be carried out in which a single family may not have enough members to perform them. The work is shared by all the members of this caste group, which constitutes their community.

The fishermen find the occupation itself very risky because it requires them to go to sea where they are at the mercy of the sea and weather, with only a small boat on which they are completely dependent. They do not carry any life saving equipment, and when they face a storm at sea, they can swim to the shore only if the distance is short, and not if they were to swim eight to ten kilometres to get back. The other crucial aspects of the fishing occupation that they mentioned are the various factors that need to be correct for a venture to take place. This includes an adequate number of people to make a trip (at least six people and a maximum of nine in one boat). They must be healthy, and also willing and daring to go for fishing in the sea; they must have a good fishing net; the weather must be calm and not windy or stormy. In the sea it is all up to them to locate where they can get a good catch, though with years of experience they can usually locate the fish. They take turns to stay awake to monitor the situation in the sea, as well as the fishing, and observe whether there is a catch. They also take turns in rowing their artisanal boats or manoeuvre the motor boats. Thus, there is a need for coordination and understanding among the members, as at times it might take a whole day for the fishing. However, a problem that they occasionally encounter is competition from fishermen from the
neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh who have better fishing equipment and larger mechanized boats. This often results in a poor catch. The fishermen from Andhra Pradesh can undertake fishing in these areas along with trips to deeper parts of the sea, and take away fish which fishermen from Noliyanuangan could have got. Noliya fishermen have to take a chance every day to catch a reasonable quantity of fish. There are times when they take the additional risk of going fishing even in turbulent weather, though they are well aware that it is much more risky. Thus, whether in good weather or bad, they seem to be always in need to go to sea because their livelihood depends on it. The occupation itself makes them vulnerable to cyclonic hazards. In really bad weather, i.e. during cyclonic weather, they certainly stay on shore.

With the clear perception, that fishing in the sea is a high risk occupation, the fishermen are very particular about the group with whom they go out to sea. The learning process of fishermen starts from their fathers and older brothers. And from growing up in the same group and environment they develop the feeling of community i.e., feeling of "one-ness", a feeling of belonging to a particular group. Noliyas indicated that they depend on their own caste people to go fishing, as no other people outside their caste (and in this neighbourhood) have the required skills of sea fishing, nor is it easy for any outsider unfamiliar with the vastness and depth of the sea to learn and master sea fishing even after several months. We do not suggest that no one other than this group takes up marine fishing, but only that to these people, familiarity is also a reason to stick together. When they venture into the sea each member knows that his life is now at risk as the sea could be unpredictable. Therefore, this also becomes an essential decider on who would be a member of the group. They explicitly stated that they do not trust outsiders, nor do they want to risk the life of someone who is not of their community. Hence, a strict exclusion of outsiders is practiced in the context of fishing. This interdependence on their own group members belonging to a particular caste and region while pursuing their occupation demonstrates the importance of the identities that they hold. By not pursuing their occupation with ‘outsiders’ they also display their solidarity and closeness with the in-group, and
simultaneously preserves the boundary between themselves and those outside the group.

The fishing occupation works on principles of group work, and mutual help from the members. During fishing, members on the boat take turns to row the boat while others take rest in rotation so that each one gets a rest. As these people have to search for fish, they put out their nets wherever they expect to get fish. When they have caught all the fish that their boats can hold and there are still fish in the area, they call nearby fishermen and indicate the spot. However, they also expect about 40 percent of the catch in exchange, which the other group of fishermen agrees to pay. This is because getting a good catch is more essential than not getting a catch at all. Hence, they do not feel reluctant to pay the 40 percent to the other group.

**Caste, occupation and ethnic identity**

A feature that figures prominently in the lifestyle of the people of the fishing village and their patterns of interaction in various institutions such as the family or their occupation is the place of caste in their group identity. An individual usually has several identities, each of which takes precedence in a specific social situation. In the case of these fishermen, caste identity, which is also characterized by their occupation of fishing, has the added importance because the community identity is built on it. Their language also sets them apart from the neighbouring groups and people who speak Oriya. Their caste identity is interwoven with their occupation and occupational skills. Caste can be seen as an ethnic identity exhibiting a feeling of oneness and a sense of belongingness to a particular group. Caste can also be seen as an ethnic group in the same sense as, to quote Parsons (1978: 56), “This is a group the members of which have both with respect to their own sentiments and those of non members, a distinctive identity which is rooted in some kind of a distinctive sense of its history”. Caste as also ethnic identity is ascriptive in nature, and acquired at birth. It is a crucial means of forming a community in the fishing village. They perceive themselves as a separate community on the basis of their caste intertwined with language,
occupation and region or spatial boundary of the village. They find caste a more important determinant of their community identity. This particular caste occupies a lower rung of the caste hierarchy. In Orissa, any caste that engages itself in fishing is generally considered as a lower caste and included in the list of scheduled caste\textsuperscript{ii}. However, the Noliyas, being a Telugu group, is classified as a Backward Caste\textsuperscript{iii} (Salagrama 2006: 81).

Another caste group, the Sundis, has also settled within the fishing village but are into financial activities and not fishing (lending money to the Noliyas). Their interaction with Noliyas is much less than between the Noliyas themselves, and is more of a professional or business relationship. Evidently, the Sundis are not a part of the Noliya’s sense of community, though they are all part of the same village.

**Language as a part of ethnic identity**

In terms of culture and language, the community of fishermen is different from the Oriya speaking people in this part of Orissa. Acculturation, or a limited form of assimilation or adaptation has definitely taken place, and most of the village people can speak Oriya. This is also evident from the earlier discussion on occupation, that although they perform a group activity, they still need to interact with people outside their community. Men who manage the fishing business have frequent interaction with people who are not from this community. Considerable interaction takes place between the Noliyas and the Oriya people. However, one needs to mention here that even though they speak Telugu, which is an essential part of their group identity, the group feeling is restricted to Telugu speaking people within this village. Not only this, but for them the community feeling is shared only among the groups that live within this village, and does not include even people of the same caste who live in other, nearby villages. They do not consider all the people who speak Telugu in other parts of the state or the neighbouring state as their community. However, when the concern is about identity or group belongingness, the different language provides them a separate identity from that of the Oriya people, even though it does not relate them to other Telugu speaking people who are not from this village. Although
language is a crucial part of their group identity, it is not the sole identity that defines their community.

Apart from the men who are in the fishing business who need to interact with Oriya people, women who have to go out and sell fish in the local markets frequently interact with the people outside their community. They also regularly work as manual labourers, which require their interaction with construction contractors, and the nearby farmers, who are all Oriya people. They face no language problems as they can communicate easily in the Oriya language. Although their interaction with those outside their village is restricted almost entirely to the work situation alone, it acts as the major link between the community and the people outside. Women of the village carry relatively small quantities of fish to sell in the nearby village, and this earning is considered as their personal income. The men who manage the fish business undertake a much larger scale of business than women. They carry the fish catch in vans, while women carry the fish in small bamboo baskets.

Communication between the people of the fishing village and those from outside this village area depends also on the language skills of the people. Those who (as mentioned above) have regular interaction with the nearby villages learn and also use the local language (Oriya) more often than the fishermen themselves. The younger generation of the village is fluent in the local language because they study in local schools, and the medium of education is Oriya and English and the teachers are mostly Oriya people. To an extent, language is one of the important cohesive factors in terms of the community identity in this fishing village. For those who speak only Telugu, language is the means of keeping them within this community, and because of this they also tend to develop an insular outlook towards those who are not part of their own group. Language at the same time provides them a shared bond of togetherness while also keeping their separate identity and sense of difference from the Oriya speaking people. As Horowitz (1978: 121) observed the contact with ethnic strangers can have an influence on shaping or altering group boundaries.
Language, which constitutes part of ethnic identity, is crucial as it is also the medium of interaction and communication. However, it may also be restrictive, as in the case of many of the older fishermen, who do not understand or speak Oriya. Along with the fact that they are in an occupation that separates them from others and needs them to stay off the land for part of the day, it leads to lesser contact with the people outside the community. This also enhances the bond of togetherness between the community members who go fishing. They stay with the fellow fishermen almost all the time in a day, and have very close interaction with each other, spending working hours as well as leisure time together. The less frequent contact of the fishermen with other people in their area, except for those of their own language and occupation, also results in these people not learning the local language. The fact that they also depend on their own people for occupational assistance further reduces interaction with the local people (Oriya speaking). The possibility of their interacting with nearby fish vendors is less as the intermediaries from the fishing village carry out the negotiations and bargaining for them. Sometimes, after getting a catch and unloading it on the seashore, the boat owner sells the fish to the agents or whole sale vendors (who are from outside the village) at the same spot (seashore). In such cases it is only the boat owner and not the fishermen (even if on occasion the boat owners are also fishermen) who interacts with the outside buyers. These boat owners (who are also fishermen) have interacted with Oriya whole sale vendors and have learnt the language in the course of interacting with them. It needs to be mentioned here that there are approximately one hundred and fifty boat owners in the village, according to the people of the village. The boat owners are also Telugu speaking people belonging to the same village, and many of them are also fishermen.

While strong ties are maintained within the Telugu speaking group, we could also mention the existence of weak ties that have some value. The weak ties in this case are with the Sundis who inhabit this village, and the relations with the other fishing groups living in nearby villages. As the occupation is such that they need to know more about the opportunities
available in often places, that needs better networking, possibly through the weaker ties rather than holding onto only stronger and closer ties. As mentioned by Coser (cited in Granovetter 1983: 203-204) there may be a weakness in strong ties as it may ‘prevent individuals from articulating their roles in relation to complexities of outside world’. This is observed in the village under study, where the younger generation is encouraged by the elders to learn the local language and also interact more with the people of the nearby towns and villages who belong for different language and caste groups. This proves beneficial to them to get information on new educational possibilities as well as job prospects. As Barth (1969: 9-10) remarked “ethnic distinction does not depend on absence of mobility, contact and information, but does entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained,” or in other words “ethnic distinction does not mean absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundation on which embracing social systems are built.” The perception of difference by other groups is as important for group identity as the sense of oneness among the members (Yinger in Kidd 2002).

The Noliya group of this village shares similar characteristics of language, caste and occupation with some nearby fishing villages. However, they do not consider those people as their own community, and people on whom they can depend on during emergencies. Common language, caste and occupation do not work as unifying factors across villages. They do not share relations of antagonism either. The fishermen tend to take only their own village people as their crew members while going fishing and do not work with fishermen from other villages. The village boundary also acts as a line of separation for the occupational space of pursuing fishing in the sea adjacent to the village area. The lack of community consciousness across villages is also evident in the fact that the fishing villages in this area do not have a single caste panchayat but has a separate caste panchayat in each village to maintain relation in the village and the fishing occupation. The problem of disasters also plays a significant role in building intra-village solidarity among the Noliyas as they are in a risky occupation and live in a disaster prone place. At the
time of emergencies it was the villagers, mostly kith and kin, who act immediately to rescue those in difficulty. Those from other villages do not come to their aid as they need to save themselves. Hence, they depend on the people of their own village both in normal as well as disaster situations. The relations with the other fishing villages is not that of hostility, but there is virtually no interaction as the fishermen are busy in their occupation most of the time, spending much of their time on fishing activities (catching fish, unloading the fish, sending it for sale) or on the shore (relaxing with fellow fishermen either drinking alcohol or playing cards).

Women also prefer going out in small groups of their own village women to sell fish. They do not interact much with women of other villages unless they meet them in the market while selling fish. Noliya women interact much more with Oriya farmers as they work in their agricultural lands as wage labourers.

**Festivals and celebrations**

Other than the occupational activities, Noliyas in this village also engage in certain group activities such as celebrating a village festival called *Thakurani Jatra*, or worshipping the mother goddess. This is an important event of the village, and the entire village has to contribute towards it. The Noliyas consider this festival as a community festival, which is related to their caste, language and village. The contributions here generally refer to monetary payments. The festival is celebrated annually, and even those who have migrated to other places but who have their families in the village, are required to send money for this festival. There is a fisherman who officiates as a *pujari* (priest) called the *kaliri* in Telugu and performs the *puja* (worship rituals). He is from a Noliya family that has been performing these rituals for generations. The men of that family are very knowledgeable about the rites and rituals that are to be performed during this festival. While this ceremony takes place, the other members of the caste also participate by offering fruits and flowers. In the village temple, where there is daily worship a hired Brahmin priest who lives in the village performs the rituals. This distinction between the one who
performs the daily temple worship of gods and goddesses, and that of the village goddess during the village festival is also related to the practice where the Thakurani or the village goddess who is worshipped during the festival accepts and ‘feasts’ on non-vegetarian food like fish and meat, while the temple deities are vegetarians. The village people consider the goddess as very close to them, and who is just like them while the temple gods and goddesses are sacred. Thus, a Brahmin priest performs the rituals of the temple gods while the kaliri from the fishing caste performs the rituals of the village goddess. The festival is mainly of the Noliyas, though being a part of the village the Sundis also enjoy the event. Women headed households where there are no male adults need not make any monetary contributions to the festival. The caste panchayat collects funds from the villagers and manages the festival.

While the festival is a significant occasion for the people in the fishing village to participate in and enjoy, to which they refer to as their village festival, this festival is also celebrated in the agricultural village as their village festival, although there is no role for a caste panchayat or any such institution. People in the agricultural village too attach considerable importance to this festival, and for them a Brahmin pujari performs the puja. In the fishing village the festival is celebrated by the fishing community themselves, and no one else participates in it, except that others can come and watch.

On enquiring about the interaction patterns of the people in the fishing village, it was observed that the close interactions are between people of the same caste. Activities that are conducted in groups also help in group bonding and instil a sense of closeness with neighbours and people of the village. Leisure activities of men include fishing net weaving—or more accurately repairing the nets, and playing cards, whereas in the case of women, their activities include gossiping, helping each other in household chores such as grinding spices and cutting vegetables. These are some of the neighbourhood related social interaction. Even while going out for daily labour or selling fish, women go in small groups of four or five, as the places to which they need to walk up to (usually walk, sometimes they
also travel in the vehicles which carry fish.) are four to five kilometres from the village.

The risks related to life and livelihood in fishing activities have led to certain family practices that are meant to secure the lives of fishermen and their livelihood too. Women of the village report that to ward off dangers of high tides and storms, endangering the lives of their family members who go fishing, and also to get a good catch, they worship the sea every day, before their husbands or sons leave for fishing. This is a daily practice of women, praying that the sea remains calm and their family members safe. There are even songs in praise of the sea as a provider of livelihood sung by women. These songs are in no way indicative of any reference to the sea as a potential disaster. The farmers in the agricultural village mention that unlike the fishermen, they do not worship the sea, as they do not feel threatened about the sea, nor do they depend on the sea for their livelihood. According to the farmers, the fishermen worship the sea as a powerful entity that has a direct impact on their lives and livelihood, and they pray to her to prevent harm to their family members who go fishing. The people in the fishing village perceive the sea as having an important place in their life. They have grown up with her presence in their lives and they do not want to stay away from her, but at the same time want to be protected from danger.

There are various ceremonies that every community performs in the normal course of life and which form an important part of the cultural system. Other than that, rites of passage such as those of birth, coming of age, and death, are important for the people, and they perform these ceremonies during normal times, but postpone them at times of disasters. These customs not only have an obvious or manifest meaning and function related to the particular event such as the birth, and to welcome the new born, but also the latent function and significance of bringing the whole community or the ones close to the family together, and welcome the child into the group. To know who is invited during these important events also indicate who is considered an important member of the group, and means something more than just the fact of being invited. These are the people who form an integral
part of the group to which a person relates. In the fishing village the respondents mentioned that they invite their kith and kin for the ceremonies such as birth and death. Marriages of children are an important occasion in a family. They celebrate marriages in the month of *karthik* during the Shivarathri festival (February). Noliya people in the fishing village usually invite only the kin to the marriages. However, this also depends on their financial capabilities. Those who can arrange for more money to spend on the marriage invite people from the village apart from their relatives, whereas those who have less money invite only the relatives who stay in the village. The financial requirements are not managed within their own savings, as they fall short of money most of the time, and they take loans from the rich Sundis or other money lenders to meet the expenses of the ceremonies.

**Community solidarity and risk perception: the role of women, and non-fishermen**

When we look at the various members of the community the role of caste becomes even more prominent in showing its relevance in the formation of group identity, and its strong link with the fishing occupation. The community comprises men and women of various age groups with different roles as members of the community. When the community is based on an occupation that requires collective effort, the role of each member becomes crucial and specialized. Apart from the fishermen, the fishing community also has other members such as women and non-fishermen, who have roles to play in the fishing, and in the community as a whole. Not all Noliya men of the fishing village are engaged in catching fish as an occupation. A few men find marine fishing a dangerous occupation and hence choose to avoid the sea. However, they are attached to the caste based occupation, i.e. fishing, by managing the fishing business in the village. A limited form of division of labour is maintained in this village with the men who are willing to face the sea go out to catch the fish, while those not interested in the actual catching of fish manage the fishing business and arrange transport to get the fish catch to whole sale vendors. The agents, who are most often from within
the same village and also of the Noliya caste, have considerable standing and importance in the fishing occupation. It is also a crucial job to manage because the market involves fluctuations of price, and keeping abreast of information as to what kind of fish are in demand, which also requires a good deal of knowledge and contacts. The agents who are among the non-fishing men of the village have an economic niche in the fish business, and serve a very useful function. The fishermen find it difficult to maintain the necessary contacts, and keeping track of fluctuating demands and preferences, owing to the fact that they are in the sea most of the time. Moreover, since they do not have any means to preserve the fish, unless the fish is sold almost immediately after it is caught, the whole effort of fishing may prove to be a very costly waste (except for the relatively small quantity of fish that is dried and sold later).

Being on the sea most of the day, specifically at the time when the markets work, makes it difficult for the fishermen to manage both the jobs of fishing and finding a market for the fish catch. As such, they would usually like to sell the catch to some agent immediately. However, there are some fishermen (the boat owners who also accompany the troop in fishing) who have direct contacts with the wholesale vendors, who send their vehicles to carry the fish catch from the sea shore the moment the fish is unloaded. The boat owner (who is also a fisherman) is paid the money immediately after handing over the catch to the intermediary or agent, and the boat owner then divides this money among the members of the troop on the spot. According to some fishermen, they prefer to give the catch to their wives and their own relatives to sell in the local market. The fishermen who are engaged only in catching the fish are also convinced that the intermediaries have a crucial role in the fish business, in whose absence the fish business would not be complete. They also believe that they cannot trust outsiders from other caste and language groups to do this crucial job for them, as their entire income depends on proper management and selling of the fish on time, as the fish are a perishable entity.
There is more of community interdependence which is very significant to
them. As such, being engaged in a risky enterprise is a crucial factor in
binding the fishing village together. The roles played by different
members, women and men, are different in the work sphere. There is a
differentiation in the fishing activity itself. Women are not allowed to go
out to the sea for fishing, and it is a man’s domain in this village. They
do not share the same risks as the men who go fishing. This strengthens the
feeling of oneness among the fishermen at sea. For the women their main
domain is normally within the house, though they also work outside the
village because of economic necessities. Most women undertake daily
manual work at construction sites, besides selling fish in the local
markets. This is not to suggest that the men who are not in the fishing
activity are not a part of the community, or that the women remain
outside the community either. The sense of community is also related to
the risks of living in this area, due to natural disasters, and this factor is
common to all who live in the village. In any case, the fact that some men
go to the sea for fishing evokes a sense of trepidation among others in the
family. The men who are connected with the fishing enterprise but not
engaged in the actual fishing too share this anxiety. For all of them, the
fact of family members being engaged in a risky enterprise brings its own
stresses and strains, and a sense of shared burden.

During the cyclone seasons, when there are low pressure conditions over
the sea (April-May, and September-November) there is usually no income
from fishing as the men cannot go out to sea. This kind of situation stays
for several days at a time, and whatever little savings they may have gets
exhausted in a very short while. Hence, they need to find alternate work.
At these times, it is the women who go to work on a daily basis. While
conditions on the sea make it impossible for the men to go out fishing, the
conditions on the land may still be manageable for women to get work.

Women are not included in the fishing activity because of the general
feeling that they are physically too weak to take up a job like fishing,
which requires considerable strength. As for the other activities
associated with fishing, that include cleaning, drying and selling of fish in
the local market, which are also important responsibilities, the community depends on women carry out most of these tasks. Thus, even though women do not exactly share the risk of fishing in the sea they form an important part of the fishing enterprise and also the community. The bonding between the members is maintained even during normal times through the interdependence inherent in the fishing occupation.

Women in the fishing community do interact with outside men, and in fact have lots of work with the men, as they often have to bargain for the price of fish with the customers in the market. They also have access to the sea shore and work there to manage most of the fish related work. They also interact with the caste headman, shopkeepers, fishermen in the community, the cable T.V. operator.

As the livelihood is such that the community needs to be near the sea throughout the year, their access to the sea is essential. Women in the villages were asked whether they have access to the sea and the beach. Although they stay near the sea where the sea is the main source of income through fishing, and they are also involved in the fishing occupation as an integral part of it, women in the fishing village do not have access to the sea to be able to go for boating or fishing in the sea. They do not even learn swimming to be able to save their own lives. However, they can go to the beach, as most of the work other than actual fishing is done by the women, which include drying and cleaning the fish which has to be done on the beach.

**Shared experiences as the basis of community formation**

This village has faced severe disasters earlier such as the super cyclone of 1999, apart from other cyclones. The people of this village perceive these shared past experiences of disasters and impending threats of the same kind for the whole community, as building blocks of community cohesion. The required preparedness to face disasters strengthens the need to act collectively and build resilience, to the perceived threats or hazards. This sense of cohesion is found in this fishing village, since they could only rely on their own immediate village members in the event of a disaster, or
even in the preparations to face any fresh disaster (having received warnings about an impending event such as a cyclone). The logic is simple in that owing to the distance from other villages and towns, and being situated in a disaster prone coastal belt and living on the sea shore, there is always a risk involved and the fear of a possible disaster. In such circumstances, the only people they can depend on to react in a very short time span are people of their own community, of the same caste and language group. In the interviews with those in the fishing village, when the Noliyas were asked whom they entrust their family with when they go fishing, the men answered that they depend on their elders at home and their own caste people in the village. They do not depend on aid from outsiders for immediate help because that would take time, due to the distance from other places or towns. The neighbouring villages also face similar problems during disasters, and cannot provide aid to them. They also have very close relations with the neighbours who are mostly their own kith and kin. They believe that they will take care of the family in case there are emergencies on the land while the men are out fishing. This is a very important consideration for the fishermen, much more than for the farmers, because fishermen are mostly in the sea from where they cannot come as and when needed. Although now-a-days some fishermen carry mobile phones along with them while going fishing, technology has its own limitations as connectivity to the phone may not be there. Even if there is connectivity it might not be possible for the men to return immediately from the sea, to attend to the family emergencies. If fishermen get into any difficult situations at sea they would need to be rescued before they can come to help their family. The fishermen mention the importance of relatives, and even neighbours who are not their kin.

In situations of crises they need the help of each other, in rescue operations for instance, because no outside help reaches them in the initial stages of disasters. The first help is received from the community members. Such help includes assisting older people to safer places such as *pucca* houses. One should mention here that they are of a lower economic status and most of the fishermen live in small houses with thatched roofs. If they rear animals these have to be taken to safer
places. After the cyclones pass they require help in rebuilding broken houses and boats, clearing the debris of fallen trees and houses. All these necessities bring them together as a community in the event of a disaster. As was demonstrated, a shared situation of risk further instils community feelings in this group and also strengthens other identities related to a we-feeling such as caste and language.

**Relevance of caste panchayat (council) in the occupation and the community**

As fishing is a group activity closely related to the caste, and relations involving several families in the village who need to work in concert with each other, there is a need for overall control, to be able to make the work more organised and smooth. The presence of the caste panchayat in the fishing village contributes to this control and management of fishing activities. All the villagers obey the voice of the council because it not only regulates local activities but also solves disputes whenever they arise. The caste council is an essential part of the fishing community, which maintains their caste relations and occupational relations within the village, and with other castes and villages.

As we had started with indicators of community solidarity that Brint (2001) suggested, that include a common way of life, common beliefs, concentrated ties, frequent interactions, social attachments and involvement in institutions, we also assessed their possible manifestation in the two communities. All these attributes are evident in the fishing village. The common way of life that they follow and everyday interaction that they have is clearly visible in the fishing occupation. This involves members of the community, may it be old, young, women or men, on an everyday basis, sharing even the catch that they get, as well going fishing together with fellow fishermen from the same village. The love and faith in the sea, which every villager shares, the togetherness with which they perform the village festival, contributing to the fund and collectively enjoying the festival, as well as contributing towards the village fund for disaster mitigation indicate the common beliefs they share and their involvement in a common social institution. Their dependence on their
own caste and village people to take care of the fishing business, and also
the trust of the people of their own community point towards the strong
social attachments that they share. The presence and power bestowed on
the caste panchayat that operates in the fishing community is also a sign
that not only is there a need for such an institution but that it is only the
support of the people of the fishing village that sustains it, since it does
not have any official or constitutional sanction for its existence and
functioning. The fishing community depends on the caste panchayat for
maintenance of order in the occupation, and their normal life in general.
They jointly decide on the nomination of the caste head and other council
members, as well as monitor their working to ensure that proper service is
being provided to the villagers. All these point towards a community
displaying characteristics of solidarity.

Agricultural village

The family in the agricultural village

In the agricultural village the farmers have a patriarchal family system,
and the father or the husband is the head of the family and the key
decision maker as well. Generally, women are free to work in the
agricultural lands of their own families, but do not work as agricultural
labour outside the village. There are some poorer families who allow their
women members to work as hired labour in the agricultural lands of the
Brahmins. They play an important role in agriculture. They also carry out
all the household chores. Brahmin women in the agricultural village do not
work in the farmlands. They are housewives and manage the household.
Children in the agricultural village go to school and also help in the
agricultural activities of their family after school. Elderly men also take
part in agricultural activities. Brahmin men do not undertake agricultural
work themselves, even though they are the main income earners of the
house. Their earning is from working in the temple, and from the
agricultural production which they manage by hiring agricultural labourers
from among the Khandayats (farmers). In the Brahmin families too men
are the family heads and key decision makers.
**Sense of Community**

In the agricultural village no one runs the kind of risk to their lives due to the occupation that he/she is engaged in among the fishermen. Even the women of the Khandayat families work along with the men on the land, and the agricultural fields are not far from their homes. In case of any emergencies they can come back immediately and attend to the needs of the family.

All the villagers in both the villages mentioned marriage as an important event for them to interact with close relatives. In the agricultural village, marriages are fixed according to the *tithi* or the proper date decided according to the *panji* or the sacred calendar of Hindus, where the auspicious dates are provided. In the English calendar the Hindu marriage months are November, December, March, April, and May. The villagers in the agricultural village invite all their kin and relatives as well as friends from the nearby villages and towns, depending on the number of people they can afford to invite.

Among the farmers (Khandayats) not many group activities take place. Even the leisure activities that the farmers engage in are often not group activities, but individual ones such as relaxation, unlike in the fishing village where they involve groups of people playing cards or in repairing their fishing nets (strictly speaking this is not a leisure time activity, but it is done at a time when they are not engaged in fishing). Farmers are for the most time busy in working in their own fields. During whatever spare time they get, they watch television, either at home or at a neighbour’s house. Sometimes, men sit and gossip among themselves. Women do agricultural work as well, and they grow *chilli* all by themselves. They also cook, clean the home, and are busy most of the time. Whatever spare time that they get is spent gossiping with the neighbours. This is virtually the only form of leisure time activity that women engage in. A common way of life or group life is not as vibrant as that of the fishing community. They are involved in face to face interactions with other villagers which include both their own caste and Brahmins, but it is restricted to occupational requirements, mostly wages, and water related problems,
such as allocation of water to the agricultural fields. There was hardly any interaction among the farmers and Brahmins during their leisure time. In the fishing village on the other hand, the son of the Brahmin priest (not the priest himself) was found frequently interacting with the fishermen. This has a significant implication, and that is the special place that the Brahmin priest has in the fishing village, that though he and his family are of the highest caste, they interact with the fishermen who are normally seen as being near the lower end of the caste hierarchy. There is no caste distance of this scale between the Khandayats and the Brahmins in the agricultural village, but in ordinary times (i.e. when there is no disaster that they face) they maintain a distance between these two groups in terms of social interaction during leisure time.

**Caste, language and community**

Caste in the agricultural village is an important identity too. In this village the Khandayats are farmers, and that is the basis of their caste identity. Brahmins are the temple priests. However, they also own agricultural lands which they cultivate with the help of the Khandayats in the village. Both the castes serve each other. At normal times their caste identities work as individual group identities where the farmers identify themselves as a group separate from the Brahmins. The farmers are below the Brahmins in the caste hierarchy. The interaction with Brahmins benefits each other but does not proceed beyond a point. Brahmins have a separate caste association that covers several villages. However, it has no role in the management of disasters, or even daily life activities. The association is more a place where Brahmin men from among the neighbouring villages get together. But it also serves as a line demarcating the interaction between the farmers and Brahmins, as it makes the caste boundaries stronger between the Khandayats and Brahmins. The Khandayats also said that the Brahmins in this village are in a small number, while they (Khandayats) constitute the majority of households. Thus, when asked about any dominance by the Brahmins they indicated the lack of such an opportunity for the Brahmins, owing to their relatively small number. Their relations with the Brahmins in normal times (when there are no disasters) are restricted to the occupation,
where the farmers cultivate the agricultural land for the Brahmins who, because of their cultural norms do not touch the plough. The Brahmins, perform temple work, which includes worshiping the temple deities every day, and cooking the *mahaprasad* or the offerings to deities. They also performed sacred rituals in the Khandayat families as and when required, for which they are paid. The Brahmins pay wages to the farmers for the work that they do in the agricultural land. This is the practice among Khandayats and Brahmins in this village. It is not a one to one relation between one family and another, but between the Khandayat caste group and the Brahmin caste group in the village as a whole. Unlike the fishermen community and Sundis who are not closely involved in any occupational relation, Brahmins and Khandayats in the agricultural village share a relation in the occupational field and the necessary interdependence. This comes from the fact that Brahmins do not work in their fields, and the Khandayats work as farmers, and also work on the Brahmin land holdings.

Suggestions from interviews with Khandayats and Brahmins are that in their caste group and family activities they invite only their relatives and members of their own caste. During festivals such as the village festival of *Thakurani Jatra* all the villagers including Brahmins participate. It is the Brahmins who perform the rituals of the goddess. It is usually only during occasions of celebrations that farmers get together with their relatives, whereas at other times they are engaged in agricultural work that are done as families and they have less of group activities. This is unlike the fishermen who display concentrated ties even during normal times, and celebrations, as well as during disasters. Thus, community relations are much stronger with visible social attachments and frequent interactions in the fishing community than with the agricultural community in the study area.

The agricultural community does not face the kind of risk to life (as with fishing) as to enhance community solidarity. They are not engaged in a hazardous occupation, and the direct threat from floods and the like are much less of a risk than the risks faced by the fishing village. However,
this village, which is situated a kilometre away from the sea shore also
displays a sense of we-feeling across the village, though it is not restricted
to the caste or language as such. The agricultural village is predominantly
inhabited by the Khandayat caste (an agricultural caste). They have the
shared experience of disasters that provides more of the feeling of
oneness for the entire village including both the castes that live in the
village. This is due to the shared sense of problems that all the people feel
in this village. As their main work comprises agricultural activities even
when the Khandayats work for the Brahmins, the sense of shared
problems continues to remain among the villagers. The fact that they live
near the coast and frequently face water surges makes their occupation
(i.e. agriculture) vulnerable to the vagaries of nature. These, however, are
not as much a direct threat to their lives as the ones faced by the fishing
people.

**Festivals and Celebrations**

Khandayats of the agricultural village, generally invite only their relatives to
religious ceremonies at their homes, except for marriages where most of the
villagers with whom they have even less interaction are invited. They save
money from the last crop but, if they incurred losses in the previous year
they borrow from relatives. If the relatives also cannot provide the funds
they go to the village money lenders. Brahmins of the village are also
engaged in money lending and many a time the Khandayats borrow money
from the Brahmins. The Brahmins also follow the same rule of inviting their
own kin to family religious ceremonies. Brahmin families are relatively well
off and do not need to borrow from anyone.

During normal times when there are no cyclones, the ceremonies are
celebrated according to the accepted form. At times of cyclones fishermen
choose to postpone the celebrations until after the cyclones stop. In the case
of the agriculturists, depending on the intensity of the cyclone, ceremonies
could take place on schedule as the impact of cyclones is less on their
houses or on their lives. Thus, while cyclones do have an impact and
obstruct the normal course of life in the case of the fishermen community,
the impact is much less on the agricultural village.
Women in the community

Khandayat women have less restriction on speaking to men of the village or outside the village. The men of the village indicated, however, that as women of this community do not go out to work as hired labour or any other employment, there are fewer occasions to interact with men outside the village. Nonetheless, they do interact with men from Brahmin caste. They are always busy with household chores or agricultural activities, and they are more continuously occupied than the men. They do interact with the women in the nearby houses. The Brahmin women also interact with men of the Khandayat castes but only when required, for example, when they need to pay them for the work they do in the Brahmin family’s agricultural land. Elderly women of the households often keep watch on the work going on in the agricultural land, and many a time make payments when their husbands have gone for temple work, although with prior consultation with the head of the family.

A marked difference is noticed between the patterns of social interaction of the fisherwomen, Khandayat women and Brahmin women, particularly in talking to men. As we noticed, fisherwomen have access to public space and interact with men as and when required, and they even argue with men not of their own community when they are selling fish in the local fish market. The Khandayat women too interact with the men who are not of their families but the frequency is low as they do not have such work where regular interaction is required, although they work in the agricultural fields and have access to space outside their homes. For the Brahmin women access to public space is limited. They are not allowed to work outside the home unlike the fisherwomen or agricultural women. The Brahmin women do not talk to men outside their family, except when they are supervising agricultural activities when their husbands are away.

Shared experience: Occasional dry seasons and drought

The community consciousness of the agricultural community is not related to their occupation of agriculture in normal times, as with the fishing people where the risky occupation binds them together. Agriculturist’s
interactions are not restricted to the village, but also include their relatives in nearby villages and towns. Their vulnerability to the natural hazards of cyclones and water surges that affects their crops and for some families also the place of residence, does contribute to a sense of shared problems. It constitutes their common way of life during disasters. They need the assistance of each other to survive and save the produce. When there are water surges in the rainy season, crops could be submerged. Farmers help each other in clearing the agricultural land, and try to close the openings in the land from where the sea and river water come in, causing water surges. When there is loss of crops after the cyclones or heavy rains, financial needs also greatly increase. Those who suffered less of crop damage, or have financial savings from the last crop provide help to the other villagers who ask for it. The Brahmins provide monetary assistance to the villagers in need too, though they charge interest on it. They are among the well to do people in the village as they own not only *pucca* houses with more than two rooms, but also agricultural land that was gifted to them by the villagers for their temple service. They have multiple income sources including temple earning and agricultural income, as well as their financial dealings such as money lending.

All the agriculturists who were interviewed reported that they needed money for every activity involved in agriculture, from buying seeds and fertilizers, to harvest crops and transporting them to the market. Even in normal times, i.e. when there is no disaster, they still need to borrow money from friends and relatives in the village or from nearby towns. Apart from that, they also borrow from the rich farmers (three families) who are engaged in cashew farming. The borrowing increases when there are disasters, which recur almost every year and cause damage to their crops. Cyclonic conditions of high wind and heavy rains last for several days causing water surges, and damage to their crops. Whenever there is a cyclone, whatever loans they take for the crops get wasted. They need to take more money as loans to survive during those times when they do not earn anything from their lands and crops. Money needs also increase to meet family necessities such as school fees, food etc. They indicated that they prefer to take only the minimal amount of money, which they
can repay. Due to disasters, however, the frequency of taking money has never come down, and has in fact become a vicious cycle, because every year these same conditions recur.

Shortage of water is a major problem as well. The villagers get water from a pond called tampera” in Oriya. Some have water reserves of their own, but those who do not have their own water reserves rely on the village pond tampera. It is up to the discretion of the people who own reserves to distribute water during times of low rainfall. There is also a smaller pond near the fields, and supplies water to agricultural fields, but is owned by a rich landlord’s family. They allow other people to collect the leafy vegetables that grow in this pond. Generally, the larger farmers draw water first from the tampera and then they let others use the water from this source. Since there are so many farmers who need water, it becomes problematic at times to share the water, and there are often disputes between them. The villagers complain that there is no support from the government in providing water canals to irrigate the agricultural fields.

The main problem that the villagers face is related to the disaster proneness of the agricultural lands of this village. This area is near the meeting place of the river and the sea, and heavy rains cause the river to overflow and submerge the land. They complain that there is no dam to protect their agricultural lands. Even when only small storms occur, high tides in the sea can lead to water surges. The worst is if the sea water surges in, as it affects the agricultural lands for a longer period, making it unfit for growing crops. This was the case during the 1999 super cyclone. Generally, agricultural fields are not affected for long periods during smaller storms when only the river water surges in. When there are high tides and sea water surges onto the land, it also brings in sand and salt, then not only are the crops lost but the land too becomes temporarily unfit for farming. It requires at least six months to make it ready for farming again. Besides, trees falling into wells worry the villagers as they would need to expend some effort to clear the open wells.

Other than cyclones that disrupt the agricultural activities of these farmers, there are instances of delayed rainfall that villagers indicated as
another hazard that has the potential to create a disaster (drought) almost every year. The local farmers refer to the condition as ‘burning of crops’, and this destroys existing crops. The ‘burning’ is caused by the heat of the sun, though there is no actual burning as such. Alternating between them, there are times when cyclones destroy their crops through excessive water, and at other times, water scarcity and drought-like conditions cause the dying of crops, giving the agriculturists little reprieve between these extremes. With the hope that for the whole year there is one or the other crop which can be successfully grown and reaped, farmers grow various crops such as paddy during the rainy season (from August to January), and chilli, gram, and groundnut during the summer (from February). Other than these, they also grow green leafy vegetables saag in the pond, which adds to their main income from the major crops such as rice and chili.

The frequency of interaction among the caste members and others in the village increases during disasters than they are in normal times. This was indicated both by the farmers and the Brahmins. Although agriculture is the way of life that is common, it does not involve all the villagers. It is more of family activity. Not all the villagers work together at farming, or as a group activity. The village does not have a caste panchayat or any other institution that works for them, although they are contemplating forming a pani panchayat to manage the water problem.

**Location, vulnerability and community bonding**

“When hazards and disasters are viewed as integral parts of environmental and human systems, they become formidable test of societal adaptation and sustainability. In effect if a society cannot withstand without major damage and disruption a predictable feature of its environment that society has not developed in a sustainable way” (Oliver-Smith 1996: 304).

In anthropological research, a disaster is defined as a process/event involving a combination of potentially destructive agents from the natural and or technological environment and a population in a socially and
technologically produced condition of environmental vulnerability (Oliver-Smith 1996: 305). Blaike et al (quoted in O’Hare 2001: 25) define vulnerability as the characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard. This also shows that certain social and demographic groups are more vulnerable than others to greater difficulties during recovery from disasters (Bolin in O’Hare 2001). These groups include people marginalized by class, caste, gender, race, ethnicity, age, income, and geographic location.

The very fact that some people are poor, pursue a specific occupation and belong to a particular caste adds to their vulnerability. Therefore, various identities within a group sometimes work in concert in heightening their vulnerability to hazards. Poor people lack choices of places to locate themselves. Their occupation forces them to stay in disaster prone areas. Risky livelihood, hazard prone locations of settlements owing to a hazard prone occupation leads to physical vulnerability (Ariyabandu and Wikramasinghe 2005). The inaccessibility to alternative places to settle also forces them to stay in such hazardous areas (Samanta 1997).

The association between community and place needs to be discussed. The place here is important in the context of location or situation. As Scherer (1972) states, we cannot ignore the possibility that some kinds of environment are more conducive to the formation of community than others. If we start with this point we can build up the argument that the very fact of being situated in disaster prone areas, with their dependence on weather and risky occupations, acts as a stimulant for community consciousness.

In the case of farmers, their life is not at risk because of the proximity to the sea. They have agricultural land and prefer to stay near the land, which is not far from the sea and the Rusikulya river. Agricultural activities involve work on the land such as sowing, harvesting, etc. Agriculture requires days of work and needs them to be near their land, so that they can properly manage crops, and avoid crop damage and losses due to insects or animals, or even from human pilferage. Sowing and
harvesting also require considerable manpower and time, which means they need to stay near the land to do it on time. These requirements compel them to stay near the sea and a river, because of the location of their lands, and they are vulnerable to the vagaries of nature. In such circumstances, in the event of any disaster, they have to depend on each other. This is so because they are some distance from towns and supportive facilities. Every facility is relatively far from them. In times of disasters, they do not get immediate relief because there are other factors that determine the provision of relief materials to the people in need, for example, the proximity to roads and the block office. When the area is severely affected by cyclones, providing relief is decided at the collector’s office (i.e. the district headquarters), and their considerations are on the basis of who is worst hit, rather than trying to provide relief to everyone at the same time. It is, therefore, a matter of good fortune to receive aid just at the right time, and when they are most in need. Further, because of the distance, and water logging of the roads, there may be delays in receiving aid even if the collector’s office decides to send relief to these villages. This also leads to the feeling of group solidarity within the territory of the village as the distance from the other villages also restricts the possibility of getting immediate assistance during crisis situations. Not only the major cyclones, even the small ones that may not be considered as particularly destructive by the authorities at the district headquarters, can be destructive for these communities that stay so close to the sea.

The place is very important for the formation of a sense of community. One’s location decides one’s accessibility, or vulnerability to various conditions. A location is ‘given’ in the sense that a person has virtually no control on its geographical features, of being hazard prone, or of temperature and rainfall. When a group settles there, it has to adjust to these characteristics of the location, and more so in the context of economically poor people pursuing traditional occupations such as fishing or farming. In such a case, the location becomes important in furthering cohesion and closeness.
There is close bonding and dependence within the households in both the occupational groups i.e., fishing and agriculture. In both these occupations every member in the household is required to take part and help at various stages of the work that each of these occupations requires. Every helping hand is useful in both the occupations. Because of this all the members in the families help each other and work together. Therefore, family bonding is strong in both the communities as noted by the respondents. This is all the more striking in the agricultural community, where the bonding in the community may not be as strong as in the fishing village due to the lesser risks they face in life. The we-feeling among the family members is indicated by living together in the same house, extending help to each other at all the stages of the work and family life, interacting mostly with their own family members and depending on each other at the time of crisis.

**Religion in the two communities**

Religion is an integral part of the culture and is strongly related to our day to day life. When a community lives in such a hazardous environment the role of religion needs to be examined. Does it provide solace to people, if at all, when their life is in turmoil, and does religion explain the disasters that occur here, as it has been a part of this culture for long? All the people in this village are Hindu by religion. There were a few Christians and Muslims till 2004, after which they left the fishing village. In the fishing village as well as agricultural village, the villagers said the religion provides no explanation on the disasters. They feel the disasters are caused by nature. However, they do the feel that the sea has a link with the cyclones.

Both the villages have temples. There are Shiva, Ram and Laxmi temples in the fishing village, while there are Lord Jagannath, Shiva, and Laxmi temples in the agricultural village. In the agricultural village, the Brahmins in the village perform the *puja* or worship in the temple, whereas in the fishing village they have brought a Brahmin priest from outside the village who stays there and performs rituals in the village temples every day. The women of the fishermen households also perform *Narsingh puja* (worship)
once every month to please the God for a prosperous and safe life.

Although people stated that the cause of disasters is nature, their activities indicated something else. In both the villages residents have been spending enormous amounts of money on temple buildings and their maintenance. People in the fishing village also built a temple to Lord Ram in 2006. It can be interpreted that they are devoted to the God they worship, and there is faith in the deity that they pray to. Their prayers are for their lives to be preserved from recurring disasters.

**Conflicts in the two villages**

There may be conflicts and contestations in a community, which is always possible when several people live in close proximity. Hence, a community not only has solidarity that enhances coping with disasters, but there are also disputes in the community. Conflicts or disputes may be within the village at times or between villages at others. Both the villages face disputes between families, and within families too, or occupational issues or inter village conflicts on one or the other issue. In the case of the fishing village, they have quarrels over matters related to family, marital or occupational disputes within the village. These and many other issues are dealt with by an institution which is part of the fishing community, that is, the caste council or jati gosthi headed by the caste head called gan mukhiya (village head in Oriya) or pedamanusulu (literally big man, in Telugu). The caste head is jointly chosen by the villagers through consensus. The particular person chosen may be one whom all of them find dependable and more importantly, the one who is sensitive in nature, one who listens to them and tries to solve the problems impartially, and takes care of their work. There is no fixed number of seats in the caste panchayat. However, there are usually five members from within the caste, among whom one is the caste head. He is the main decision maker and the others assist him. They can continue as the members as long as they want, as there is no fixed duration of membership in the caste panchayat. Whenever they want to step down as a member they mention it to the villagers, and a new member is nominated. However, there are
occasions when the people are not satisfied with the work that the caste head has been doing, or if he is not effectively fulfilling the demands and needs of the villagers, and is found to be indulging in unscrupulous activities. The villagers then remove the headman by joint decision in a meeting and nominate a new member. Thus, no caste panchayat head is free to act in an arbitrary manner and according to his own wishes but has to work for the people and work satisfactorily, or else he loses his seat. They are, therefore, very careful about how they work for the people, with the mandate given by the people, and do not indulge in corrupt activities.

As indicated by the villagers of the fishing village, somewhere around the year 2009-2010 a new committee was constituted comprising 14 members from within the village, including the gram panchayat sarpanch, to oversee the funds that were with the caste panchayat, and evaluate the use of the funds by the caste panchayat.

Another important aspect is of the accessibility of women to the caste panchayat. A woman from the Noliya community in the village can gain access to the caste panchayat when she needs. However, she cannot take any issue to the caste head unless accompanied by a male member of the household. Only if there is no male member of the household can she approaches the caste head on her own. At times the caste panchayat which is supposed to handle only the issues of the Noliya caste also acknowledges complaints and resolve disputes brought by the Sundis who reside in the village. The Sundis also respect the caste head of the Noliyas and consider him an important person, as they reside in this predominantly Noliya village and they are also considered an important part of the village.

In any fishing venture, the fish catch is shared equally among all the members who accompany that particular trip. This applies to all except the boat owner who gets two shares, i.e. one share as a member of the fishing trip and the other one as the owner of the boat used for this fishing trip. This rule is followed very strictly. In the event that someone does not want to give an equal share to all the members in the fishing venture, the case would be taken to the caste head, who then decides as
to how to punish the person for flouting the rules of the fishing community.

Inter-village conflicts, may be such as the one where a fisherman from this village (Noliyanuagan) puts out a net for fishing and a fisherman from another village, by mistake, puts out his net on top of the earlier net, with the latter cutting the former’s net (at this stage it is not a mistake but a deliberate act), and takes the entire catch of fish. This becomes a conflict that needs immediate resolution. The first fisherman or group of fishermen (of one boat) loses all the fish that they caught, and end in an unhappy situation. This issue is then taken to the caste head of the Noliyanuagan village who sends a letter to the caste head to which the other fisherman belongs. Both the parties, along with the caste heads, sort out the matter. At times, if the issue is not resolved, it is taken to the sarpanch, i.e., the elected head of the statutory panchayat. However, this rarely happens as fishermen prefer that fishing conflicts be resolved within the fishing groups themselves and by including the caste heads.

In a majority of cases, the caste head settles the disputes with all complying with his decisions. If they are not satisfied, then they can go to a court. But they rarely go to court and mostly rely on the caste council to solve all these problems. Even though there are conflicts, they tend to bring them together as a group to solve them. There are rules for certain issues such as occupation related problems. Whoever breaks the rules of group work (e.g. quarrel over getting a place on the fishing trips) is liable to be banned from work for as many days as the gan mukhiya thinks as appropriate. Hence, fishing people tend to avoid committing such faults. Rifts of this type do not break up the group or the bonds that hold the group together, but for some time do create a feeling of antagonism among the families involved in the dispute.

In the farming village, the case is different, as there are no such community institutions to solve internal disputes. They either solve them among themselves, or depend on elected members of the statutory village panchayat to solve their disputes, or else go to the law courts. The disputes do create differences affecting the community, but they tend to
solve disputes between themselves. Access to water creates a major crisis among the farmers, and its sharing becomes a serious issue. Hence, they are also planning to constitute a pani panchayat (water council) for proper distribution of water to all the farmers. They also feel that there is a need for collective efforts in the management of water use, which is both a scarce resource and needed by all for agriculture. No disputes really threaten the group as such, but there are disputes with other castes such as the scheduled castes. These people lived within this village earlier and used to work as wage labourers in the agricultural fields, but as they shifted to nearby cashew plantations, they left the village. This also resulted in antagonism between them and the farmers in the village. The people belonging to the scheduled caste now live in a different village.

**Community and Ethnic Identity**

There is often an overlap where the features which ethnicity portrays are also encompassed by a community, such as location, solidarity, and we-feeling. However, one must bear in mind that whereas community is a form of social organization, ethnicity is a basis for organising a group or society, which exhibits the characteristics of oneness and shared identity for a community to be able to bind itself into a strongly knit group. The shifts in the essence of ethnic identity seem to be related to the persistence of certain external stimuli. Community characterizes a geographical territory, we-feeling, close ties, solidarity, shared norms and beliefs, and a common way of life. It is a social structure which has various institutions within it to manage the social life of the members of the community.

Community identity, as mentioned earlier is shaped by ethnicity. A prominent aspect of cultural identity is language, though it has been closely associated with a relatively diffused conception of common cultural tradition (Isaac 1978: 54). Ethnic identity based on language, for example, of a group of people living in another language dominated area, may lead to the formation of a different community altogether. There may be, however, scope for acculturation or assimilation. The formation of a
new community or coming together of people speaking the same language residing in the same area brings in a sense of we-feeling, and to the other group, if not necessarily antagonistic, the perception that it is a different group, and that there is a distinction between ‘themselves’ and the ‘others’. This would be more so if the people speaking the other language constituted the majority. In such circumstances, the community sentiments and cohesion of the minority or group with the smaller population get heightened.

As has been mentioned the basic definition of community for the people in the fishing village is that they are all people from one caste. Most of the interactions that they have in the village are with the people of their own caste, occupation and language. They share multiple identities which characterise the community to which they belong. There is overlap of these identities i.e., people in this community are from the same caste, that is Noliya, speak Telugu and are in the fishing occupation in some or other way. However, it is essential to remember that the aspect of spatial boundary is considered very important by the people while defining their community. Fishing people of Noliyanuagan do not consider anyone who is not from this particular village, even though belonging to the same caste, or language, or occupation, as their own community.

The fact that both the study villages are located in a disaster prone area and are in occupations that have their own share of risks, leads to the strengthening of the sense of community, and the feeling of oneness. The distance from other villages and towns, and frequent disasters, require them to stay together and help each other as a community, for a safer existence. The occupation that they pursue demands group work, especially for people in the fishing village. The risks to life and livelihood further heighten their interdependence. In the case of farmers, the vulnerability of the occupation to frequent encounters with water surges leading to economic losses, binds the community together. They need each other to assist in recovering from the losses in terms of physical assistance to clear the damaged crops, close the openings from where
water surges in, and also provide monetary help those immediately in need of funds.

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i Ethnic identity is generally acquired at birth, hence it is ascriptive in nature (Horowitz 1978).

ii A list of castes that includes those who were considered as ‘untouchable’ in the past and now enjoy benefits of government programmes (under protective discrimination policies and affirmative action schemes) to improve their socio-economic position.

iii Being classified as a backward class is generally related to their economic conditions and having been born in the lower class (i.e. poor). Noliyas are a Telugu speaking community who have their origins in the nearby state of Andhra Pradesh. Although they are considered as Backward class in Orissa, in the nearby states in the southern part of India the fishing communities have different identities than what they have in Orissa. Various studies show that Mukkuvars of Kanyakumari are Catholic Christians (Ram 1991), Trivandrum district is inhabited by Kochethop a Latin Catholic fishing community and Beemapally, a Muslim fishing community (Hapke 2001). According to Kurien (2000:6), coastal communities in Kerala which include Hindu, Muslim and Christians are all considered as impure and untouchables.

iv This is an interesting and uncommon phenomenon, because the fishing caste is generally seen as one occupying a position at nearly the lower end of the caste hierarchy. Brahmin priests do not usually work in such a capacity when the caste involved is not an upper caste, and the one that is engaged in this kind of activity.

v A pond-like water reserve owned by all the villagers.