ABSTRACT

Disasters are a regular phenomena in some places while in others it may be a rare event. Whatever may be the case those facing such disasters need to take appropriate action for survival. The need for preparedness is particularly necessary in those areas where disasters are recurring phenomena. People not only need to deal with the present disaster but also prepare for the next one. The present study starts with this recurring phenomenon, and focuses on how a community adapts and continues to live in a condition of regular and recurring disasters. Their lifestyle is seen through various dimensions such as their religion, occupation, political structure of the community (such as village heads or caste heads), and through other actors such as civil society (mostly NGOs). While analysing the role of civil society another actor would inevitably be in the picture and is considered in this study, and that is the Government or the state, whose agencies also affect the lives of people who live with recurring disasters.

We place considerable importance on the concept of community, an integral part of the study of society, and also a concept often found to be surrounded by controversies. In this study the community is seen in the context of disasters. The study explores whether community is still prevalent, and in what form, tracing and locating its conceptual support from Durkheim, Tonnies, Turner and Sumner. By placing the community in the context of disasters, the role and presence of the community becomes more apparent, and more so its role in minimizing the destructive effects of disasters.

The study was conducted in Orissa, located on the east coast of India. It has totally 30 districts. It is also one of the poorest states of the country, with 47.2% people living below the poverty line. In Orissa, disasters in the form of excessive rains and cyclonic storms strike with periodic regularity, particularly during each successive monsoon. Communities that live in coastal areas have to deal with them, so that their occupations and living
conditions do not deteriorate to such an extent that they cannot continue to live in those places. Under extremely severe forms of the disasters, people must think of preserving their lives, before looking at other problems that people have in that area.

The study explores the coping strategies of the communities by analyzing the roles played in building resilience to disasters by various institutions that are inbuilt in the social system of these communities. Institutions those are outside the community such as voluntary organizations and state led organizations which play considerable role in managing disasters are also studied.

Vulnerability of these communities to disasters and their resilience is also assessed in this study. Livelihood (pursued by the two communities) and the state of poverty of these communities, especially the fishing community has a bearing on the intensity of impact of a disaster that they would face.