

The Impact of Amphan in an Urban Sphere of West Bengal: An Anthropological Understanding

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Abstract: *The present article tried to depict the horrifying situation due to the disaster (super cyclone Amphan) in an urban sphere of Kolkata. The findings of this study majorly focus on the issues like the problems and crisis of water and electricity, anxiety among the people, changes in the pattern of lifestyle, and due to these problems there is a possibility that different kinds of precautions for COVID-19 may go in vein. This study also suggest to do intense ethnographic study for this kind of vulnerable conditions, so the strategies which will be taken for well being of citizens can be managed through proper plans, policies and necessary steps.*

Keywords: Super Cyclone, Problems, Disaster, Precautions, Ethnography

1. Introduction

Tropical cyclone is an intense circular storm that originates over warm tropical oceans and characterized by low atmospheric pressure, high winds and heavy rain. A tropical cyclone generates winds that exceed 119 km/hour and in extreme cases the winds may exceed 240 km/hour. 20th May, 2020 West Bengal witnessed one of the most devastating tropical cyclones (Amphan) in the last few decades. Apart from West Bengal, Odisha is also badly affected by this disaster. The coastal areas of both states are highly affected. The southern part of West Bengal, mainly Kolkata, South and North 24 Parganas are the worst-affected parts of this state.

In this context, Government of West Bengal was informed (through the forecast) by Indian Metrological Department (IMD) (Source: <https://mausam.imd.gov.in>) few days before the cyclone hits Bengal and the Government had taken some crucial steps, such as- the high alerts and warnings from the state to the people of coastal areas, build shelter homes, remove many people from the perilous areas and keep them in a secured place, and other preventive measures through different social networking sites, print media, oral communications and so on. On the other hand, the employees of both government and non-government sectors are present so less in numbers because of the effect and rules of lock down due to the COVID-19. So, it is obvious that the kind of service which was provided by the government before the lockdown; in this situation it is almost like a daydream. Naturally, it is expected that the alternative plans of both government and non-governmental essential service providers should ready to make comfortable life for the citizens.

In the post-Amphan period, a huge number of people faced massive loss of their properties along with crisis of water and electricity. It is not only insufficient amount of necessary material but also fundamental basic material of their daily life and so on. Basic amenities like food, electricity and internet connection, water, medicines along with medical facilities, become rare in this period. The continuous effects of Amphan break the backbone of patience of every suffered individual of urban settings of West Bengal.

The aftermath of COVID-19 creates a situation, where any political, economic, social organization are mostly dependent on virtual reality and provides very little amount of services on the basis of work from home strategies. On the other hand majority of service providers are intentionally and unintentionally unable to do their job to fulfill the essential needs of citizens of Kolkata specially who belongs in the poor socio-economic section. As it was previously stated that electricity and Internet connections are one of the fundamental part and parcel of life during the phase of COVID-19, it's also plays a huge role in present working places. Because of cyclone Amphan dominating crack was formed between the relations of the citizens and the public service providers. Till date these problems are faced by numerous people of the southern part of West Bengal when this short communication is written and this research is under a continuous process to understand the social reality of the studied area under this kind of horrible and vulnerable situation.

2. The Objective

The fundamental objective of this study is to understand the baffling condition and the management of other crucial situations of daily life of the people in this turmoil period in an urban area of the state West Bengal, India.

3. Methodology

The area of study is the different parts of Kolkata has been purposively selected in which researcher's native place is also included which helps to interact with the participants frequently. Ethnographic method was opted for perused this qualitative study. The data have been collected through case studies, semi-structured interviews, conversation in different social networking sites, researcher's own observation and experience. Besides, participant observation which is so relevant to study this kind of situation was used for data collection. The convenience sampling was the sampling method of the study.

4. The Findings

To begin with the findings, it is essential to state that the super cyclone Amphan hit West Bengal in the evening of 20.05.2020. Various places of this state are badly affected. The effect of this cyclone becomes more severe because it arrives in that time when whole India including West Bengal is suffered from the COVID-19. People are instructed to avoid any kind of crowd and except any kind of emergency, no need to go outside of the home. Basically, citizens of India (including West Bengal) are instructed to follow the rules of lock down or in other words to stay at home to be safe in this period. In this aspect and to depict the findings, I would like to describe the reality and the condition of society, response of the people, and some other significant dimensions of the studied area in post-Amphan period.

Absence of Electricity and Crisis of Communication

Trees are fallen on the power cables and electric poles are damaged almost every part of several districts. As a result, load-shedding occurs in many places and other communication mediums are affected badly. The cyclone Amphan occurred in the month of May which was the season of summer in West Bengal. So, in this time, due to the absence of electricity people was in a turmoil condition specially in the night. Residents of different places can not use different essential electronic goods like fans, mobile phones, tube lights and so on. For lack of charge in mobile and laptops, people switched of these goods for immediate uses. One more thing is notable here, because of the lockdown regarding the COVID-19, most of the government and non-governmental sectors had instructed their workers to work from home. So, to continue the above mentioned situation was also very difficult to them. Besides, the residents of apartments suffered a lot for the absence of electricity. For this reason, they can not start water pump to store water in their water tanks. As a result, those people came in road and collect water from the water tap and used the stairs of their apartment instead of lift.

Due to the cyclone, the communication of this city hampered was in a great extend. Mobile networks of many citizens did not worked properly. So, people are hardly communicating with their relatives and some of them are failed to do so in this situation. Government and non-governmental organizations can not work (cutting and removing the fallen trees, repair the broken lamp posts and power cables) properly because most of the roads of Kolkata were under water. It is very difficult to work under this condition (many roads are under water) and also risky for the citizens of the city.

Scarcity of Water

One of the most important phenomena of a human life is water. Water is mainly used for the drinking and other useful purposes of day to day life. Due to this cyclone, most of the water taps of roads came under water and for this reason many people of different places face the scarcity of water. It also affects the other essential purposes of daily life. So, many people have to travel a long distance to collect safe drinking water. The scarcity of water is able to change the lifestyles of people to some extent. Use of water

becomes very less for bath, drinking, cooking and so on. Clothes are washed so less during these days.

Neglecting the Social Distancing

Due to the above mentioned harassment from last few days, citizens lodge complain against this situations to the concern authorities. But service getting delayed and as a result, people lost their patience. People of different places started to come on road and blockade different parts of the city. In some roads, the crowd was huge. In this case, the most important aspect to worry is all these crowds occurred different places of the city at the time of epidemics of COVID-19. People forgot to maintain social distancing almost everywhere and it is a blunder by them specially at that time when it was instructed to avoid gatherings and maintain social distance to stop the spread of COVID-19. There is chance of spreading COVID-19 among the people because no one knows the carrier of the virus in the crowd. But according to the citizens of various parts of Kolkata, they are obliged to do this kind of incidents. From their point of view, probably this is the last remaining option or most appropriate way to send their appeal for the essentially required service to the concerned authorities.

The Root of the Problems

Indian Metrological Department gave detail information and the warning to the state government regarding the cyclone Amphan and its severeness at least 7 days before it hit the West Bengal. It is impossible for any human being to resist the effect of natural disaster but human can control the effect it to some extend if they like to do so. Somehow the effect is the disaster is out of control and the root of this problems lies somewhere else. Some crucial steps should be taken which can reduce the effect of the cyclone on the people and those steps were not taken as per the situations demand. Some of those are highlighted below-

First of all, government should prepare with the adequate number of disaster management teams who can start their work as soon as possible on war footing basis. But there are some lacunas in the necessary activities of the disaster management teams of West Bengal. Government of West Bengal could seek for the help of central government as per their need.

As it is early stated, due to the lockdown regarding COVID-19, many staffs of different government and non-governmental sectors were absent or unable to back from home (those who live in distant places). There should be an initiative by the state government to bring back all their staffs of the necessary departments in this emergency period.

Apart from some news channels, most of the news channels did not telecast any kind of news regarding cyclone Amphan. It is expected that the situation of the people of West Bengal facing due to this massive cyclone should be informed and telecast in every corner of the nation.

One more aspect needs to add here. As it is about the discussion of the effect of cyclone in an urban setting of West Bengal, the author will like to tell the main problems of worst effected districts of this state in some words. The

condition the essential infrastructures specially the roads, sewage and drainage system, local dams are very poor. The development of these dams should be the main focus to provide some relief to the citizens of these areas in this kind of disastrous conditions.

5. Concluding Observations

This study tried to show glimpses of sufferings of the citizens of the studied area in post-Amphan period. The situation is worst for West Bengal because two consecutive disastrous natural phenomena i.e. COVID-19 and cyclone Amphan and specially the cyclone appeared when the former one continues its impression in all over the nation. Though, according to many experts, the effects of the latter may be come under control rapidly if more actively and timely the steps were taken or strategically those plans were implemented.

Through this study the author has some recommendations for the better and comfortable life of the citizens and enhances the policy making in the future. Some of them are the requirement of micro level ethnographic study, development of poor sewage and drainage system, development of other necessary infrastructure and management processes and so on. Lastly, there are some aspects in which people should take care of themselves as much as they can in the pre-disaster and post-disaster period which may reduce the amount of damage in their life.

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Important Web-links

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Author Profile



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