



Suppressing geo-facts in landslide-affected areas

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The Western Ghats, the bold westerly escarpment of India and which borders the eastern portion of Kerala State (India), bears the testimony of frequent landslides, especially during the monsoon season, and they cause widespread damage to life and property. The natural hazards can turn into disasters in this hilly state, due to the high density of population (~800 per km²). The elements at landslide risk in any area include human population, livestock, land and its resources, environmental values, buildings and economic activities. The loss of lives is the most heart breaking side of the story and cannot be compensated in pecuniary terms. The role of the geoscientist comes into picture to protect the life and property from imminent landslides. But the unbiased role of a geoscientist is blocked by several societal issues like fear of disapproval by the public, political interference, false information propagated through the fourth estate and last but not the least the lack of confidence in her/himself as the profession is now mainly non-societal. This paper aims at looking into these issues in a landslide-prone area of the state. The ontological vs consequential ethical behaviours that characterise the responses by the official machinery and the common man conspire to create disastrous situations, which ultimately brings suffering to the common man, while straining the resources of the state through recurrent payment of damages, every year. The “moral vs monetary” values of society and its government is laid bare in Kerala, especially during landslide disasters and the state’s social contract obligations sometimes become ambiguous. Another aspect that has to be addressed is the impact on the marginalized during landslide disasters in Kerala. Does the newly instituted ‘Disaster Insurance’ scheme adequately cover them? What is the ethical dimensions that such schemes address? The Kerala state is the most socially, educationally, and demographically advanced one in India and has been the pioneer in women empowerment, palliative care, etc., and if the state takes crucial steps in framing a geoethical response to disasters, it would be the first such attempt in India and could pave the way for more such responses in the different states of the nation.