

Kosi Floods 2008: Devastation, Displacement and Migration Experience

Prashant Kumar (1) and Monica Ahlawat (2)

(1) Department of Geography, Delhi University, Delhi, India (prashantkumar5063@gmail.com), (2) Department of Geography, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar College, Delhi University, Delhi, India (monica_ahlawat@yahoo.co.in)

The massive Kosi River floods of August 2008 caused unprecedented loss to lives, livelihoods, infrastructure and property in north-eastern Bihar. The five flood-affected districts (Araria, Madhepura, Purnia, Saharsa and Supaul) are among the poorest districts in India. In 2011, during the last national Census, the total population of the five districts was about 11 million. About 1,000 villages in these five districts were affected and nearly three million people were displaced. Displaced people had to face various kinds of problems like lack of livelihood, loss of house and property, lack of health and hygiene etc. Post flooding, because of constrained livelihood opportunities, depressed economy, and probability of future flooding event, many families have migrated to other parts of the country. This study was done to find out how displacement as well as migration has affected their lives, how they have coped with it, and what the government response to this disaster was. Both primary as well as secondary data have been used for this study. Secondary data was collected from government offices and websites, news articles and satellite images. Satellite images were used to detect the change in course of river and how much this change in course affected the displacement pattern. For this purpose the satellite images of affected area from an earlier time period and during the floods were taken and their impact was studied. Primary data has been collected through questionnaire and field survey and has been used to understand migration experience of affected population. With the help of these data, the paper analyses the 2008 Kosi flood as a socio-ecological regime shift and explains migration as a societal response to such a shift.

Keywords: Floods, Displacement, Satellite Images, Socio-Ecological Regime Shift, Migration