



11. Picturing the Anthropocene through flood narratives: The environmental disaster discourse in Indian cinema

Sony Jalarajan Raj¹, Adith K Suresh²

Abstract

Narratives of disaster play a significant role in the construction of perspectives on the Anthropocene. In an age where human activity has crossed many boundaries to explicitly reveal the imminent threat of ecological degradation, environmental disasters need to be addressed with utmost seriousness. Cinema being the popular art of the technologically advanced and globalized world, it is possible to realistically visualize environmental disasters and their impact on the ecosystem. For instance, cinematic representation of geographies of the tropical regions affected by climate change and natural disasters helps one understand the complex sociocultural repercussions that restructure the very fabric of organic life. This chapter examines how narratives of flood in Indian cinema define the notion of ecological disaster in India. Floods are one of the most common natural disasters in India as their sudden and long-term impact on the natural environment puts the lives of millions of people and animals at risk. Films that show floods as a narrative tend to emphasize the cultural disorientation as a result of the monstrosity of water. This can be argued as an anti-romantic approach whereas such narratives essentially subvert the aesthetics of rain, a common theme in Indian cinema. When floods alter the geography of a region, it reflects the vulnerability of a given population and the consequences of human activity that force them to vacate the premises of their habitat. Using contemporary disaster discourses, this chapter deconstructs the spectacles of flood in Indian cinema to understand their overarching impact on the geography, culture, and life in India.

Keywords: Flood, Disaster, India, Anthropocene, Environment

Works cited

Aguirre, B., 1988, "The Lack of Warnings Before the Saragosa Tornado", *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 6, 1, 65-74.

Allen, C. E., 2006, "Putting Katrina in Context", *The Alabama Nurse* 33, 1.

Baer, N., Fay, J., 2018, "Cinema and the Anthropocene: A Conversation with Jennifer Fay", *Film Quarterly*, 80-86.

Bator, J., 2012, "The Cultural Meaning of Disaster: Remarks on Gregory Button's Work", *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 21, 1, 92-97. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6781.2012.01156.x

Bekum, K.V., 2020, "Violence in the Flood Narrative: Text and Reception". In: Ruiten, J. V., Bekum, K. V. (Eds.), *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: between text and reception*. Brill, The Netherlands, 67-96.

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, MacEwan University, Edmonton, Canada, e-mail: sonyjraj@gmail.com.

² Research Assistant, Department of Communication, MacEwan University, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, e-mail: adithksuresh@gmail.com.



Cinema, Disasters and the Anthropocene
Enrico Nicosia, Lucrezia Lopez (Eds.)

Brisset, E., Guiter, F., Miramont, C., Troussier, T., Sabatier, P., Poher, Y., Cartier, R., Arnaud, F., Malet, E. and Anthony, E.J., 2017, "The overlooked human influence in historic and prehistoric floods in the European Alps". *Geology*, 45, 4, 347-350.

Cannon, T., 2000, Vulnerability analysis and disasters. In: Parker, D. J. (Ed.), *Floods Vol I*, Routledge: New York, 45–55.

Chakrabarty, D., 2009, 'The climate of history: Four theses', *Critical Inquiry*, 35, 2, 192–222.

Chakrabarty, D., 2016, "Humanities in the Anthropocene: The Crisis of an Enduring Kantian Fable", *New Literary History*, 47, 2 and 3, 377–97.

Cho, C., Li, R., Wang, S.-Y., Yoon, J.-H., Gillies, R. R., 2015, "Anthropogenic footprint of climate change in the June 2013 northern India flood". *Climate Dynamics* 46, 3–4, 797.

Chu, K.W., 2019, "The imagination of eco-disaster: post-disaster rebuilding in Asian cinema", *Asian Cinema*, 30, 2, 255-272.

Crutzen, P. J., 2006, The "Anthropocene". In: Ehlers, E., Krafft, T. (Eds.), *Earth System Science in the Anthropocene: Emerging Issue and Problems*. Springer, Berlin, 13-18.

Dupuy, J., 2002, *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé: quand l'impossible est certain*. Seuil, Paris.

Fay, J., 2018, *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene*. Oxford University Press, New York.

Hewitt, K., 1997, *Regions of risk: A Geographical Introduction to Disasters*. Addison-Wesley Longman: Harlow, UK.

Holm, I.W., 2012, "The Cultural Analysis of Disaster." In Meiner, C., Veel, K. (Eds.), *The Cultural Life of Catastrophe and Crises*. De Gruyter, Berlin, 15-32.

Holm, I.W., 2016, "Under Water within Thirty Years: The Prophetic Mode in True Detective", *BEHEMOTH: A Journal on Civilisation*, 9, 1.

Illner, P., Holm, I.W., 2016, "Making Sense of Disaster: The Cultural Studies of Disaster", In Dahlberg, R., Rubin, O., Vendelø, M. T. (Eds.), *Disaster Research: Multidisciplinary and International Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 51-52.

Kay, G., Rose, M., 2006, *Disaster movies: a loud, long, explosive, star-studded guide to avalanches, earthquakes, floods, meteors, sinking ships, twistlers, viruses, killer bees, nuclear fallout, and alien attacks in the cinema!!!!*, Chicago Review Press, Chicago, Illinois.

Leeming, D., 2004, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*. Oxford University Press, London.

Lewis, S.L., Maslin, M.A., 2015, "Defining the Anthropocene", *Nature*, 519, 7542, 171-180.

Mitchell, J.K., (Ed.). 1999, *Crucibles of Hazard: Mega-Cities and Disaster in Transition*. United Nations Publication: New York.

Murray, R.L., Heumann, J.K., 2005. "Environmental Nostalgia in Eco-Disaster Movies of the Early 1970s". *CEA Critic*, 67, 2, 15–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44377732>.

Murray, R.L., Heumann, J.K., 2006, "The First Eco-Disaster Film?", *Film Quarterly*, 59, 3, 44-51.

National Disaster Management Authority Government of India. n.d., *Urban Floods*. Accessed 22 November 2022. <https://ndma.gov.in/Natural-Hazards/Urban-Floods>.

National Disaster Management Authority Government of India. n.d., *Floods*. Accessed 22 November 2022. <https://ndma.gov.in/Natural-Hazards/Floods>.

Peterson, J., Uhlin, G., 2019, "In Focus: Film and Media Studies in the Anthropocene", *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 58, 2, 142-146. doi:10.1353/cj.2019.0006.

Purdy, J., 2015, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*. Harvard University Press, London.



Geographies
of the
Anthropocene



IL Sileno
Edizioni

Cinema, Disasters and the Anthropocene
Enrico Nicosia, Lucrezia Lopez (Eds.)

Roxy, M. K., Ghosh, S., Pathak, A., Athulya, R., Mujumdar, M., Murtugudde, R., Terray, P., Rajeevan, M., 2017, “A threefold rise in widespread extreme rain events over central India”, *Nature Communications*, 8, 1, 708. doi: 10.1038/s41467-017-00744-9.

Shadbolt, P., 2013, “Indian floods a man-made disaster, say environmentalists”. June 25. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/25/world/asia/india-floods-development/index.html>. Accessed 22 July 2022.

Sontag, S., 1964, “The Imagination of Disaster”. In Sontag, S., *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. Picador, New York.

Varley, P., (Ed.). 1994, *Disaster, Development and the Environment*. Wiley: Chichester, UK.

Webb, G.R., 2007, “The Popular Culture of Disaster: Exploring a New Dimension of Disaster Research”. In Rodríguez, H., Quarantelli, E. L., Dynes, Russel R. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Disaster Research*, New York: Springer, 432-433.

Yin, H., Li, C., 2001, “Human impact on floods and flood disasters on the Yangtze River”. *Geomorphology*, 41, 2-3, 105-109.

Zhou, L., Shi, Y., Zhao, Y., Yang, Y., Jia, J., Gao, J., Wang, Y. P., Li, Z., Zhang, Y., Guo, Y., Shi, B., Gao, S., 2021. “Extreme floods of the Changjiang River over the past two millennia: contributions of climate change and human activity”. *Marine Geology*, 433, 106418.