

LECTURE ON “ANTHROPOLOGY OF HAZARD AND DISASTER: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CASE OF MAJULI ISLAND”

On the 14th of October 2023, the Department of Anthropology, D.H.S.K. College organized a lecture on **“Anthropology of Hazard and Disaster: Special Reference to the case of Majuli Island”**, delivered by **Punam Paul, Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya**. The topic sheds light on the Anthropology of Disaster. After an introduction by Dr.Moromi Talukdar, HoD, Dept. of Anthropology, the programme was followed by a song sung by Ms.Simadri Saikia which she released recently on a Youtube channel. Both Ms.Punam Paul and Ms.Simadri Saikia are alumnae of the same department as they did B.Sc course from the Dept. of Anthropology, DHSK College. The programme was attended by 36 students and 5 teachers. The programme was enriched with a lively interactive session.

This discussion was divided into two parts. The first part was based on the importance of hazard and disaster studies in the domain of Anthropology. How anthropologists can look into the research related to hazard and disaster. The second part of the event encompassed the current hazardous and disastrous scenario of the largest riverine Island in the World “Majuli Island”

Miss Punam Paul, emphasised the background of Anthropology of Hazard and Disaster/ Disaster Anthropology/ Anthropology of Disaster and also various theoretical and practical aspects of this sub-branch of Anthropology. She demonstrated that in the case of a holistic understanding of hazard and disaster studies multidisciplinary approach is the best option. As Ethnographic fieldwork is the core of Anthropology hence through ethnographic inquiries one can explore the actual reality of how human beings have been coping and adapting to various hazards and disasters using their resilience system.

Basically, the first part of the talk explained various concepts, models and perspectives (Behavioral response, social change, political ecology etc.) applied by various anthropologists in the realm of hazard and disaster studies. She also pointed out the distinction between hazard and disaster, how a hazard meets with vulnerability and turns into a disaster and highlighted the need for appropriate planning of Disaster Management to reduce the disaster risk of hazard-prone areas.

The second part of the session through some light on the flood and erosion induced hazardous and disastrous conditions of the Majuli Island. According to

the speaker the people of the Island have been experiencing the effects of repeated floods and continued river bank erosion at several places of Majuli. Here she highlighted that with the passage of time local people of Majuli have built a close relationship with flood and hence developed their own coping and adaptive mechanisms based on their indigenous knowledge system. In contrast, people have no other option to deal with the effects of erosion except to wait-watch and shift. In the case of flood management state and local Government authorities show some responsibility towards the inhabitants of Majuli but in the case of erosion management, only a technological approach (construction of embankments, dyke cum road, geo-bags protection) has applied without any concrete planning to protect the land from severe shrinking.

Miss Punam Paul, concluded her talk with the words that there is a need for Anthropological research and a holistic understanding of the current scenario of Majuli relating to flood and erosion. She also recommended that in the case of Majuli Disaster Management planning incorporation of multidisciplinary collaborative research and study can only solve the flood and erosion problems of Majuli.

At the end of the event, there was an interactive part between the speaker and students where students expressed their queries regarding Majuli's erosion activities and solutions. Further, the main output of that interaction was anthropologists must come forward to conduct holistic studies regarding hazard and disaster; along with Government strategies local knowledge and local resilience systems should be encouraged and incorporated in the disaster management planning and programme for the betterment of the human society and culture.

M. Talukdar.

(Dr. Moromi Talukdar)

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