

Issues Relating Disaster to Journalism Education

Deb Raj Aryal*

Abstract

Nepali newspapers manage to include disaster-related incidents with priority. A huge number of stories about calamities have got space on the front pages based on their gravity and worthiness. However, it is debatable whether they are fulfilling their social responsibility. A reply to this question can make a huge commitment to overseeing tough spots connected with disasters. Journalism is expected to make it easier to deal with issues that arise before and after disasters. This necessitates that journalists comprehend the various tangents (distribution, causes, effects, ramifications, and possibilities) of disasters. In like manner, the debacle ought to be consolidated in news coverage and schooling so our reporting practice could contribute to that.

Keywords: disaster, journalism, social responsibility, risk mitigation, and hazards

Background

It is essential to focus on the various dimensions of the study of journalism and mass media from an academic perspective. According to McQuail (2016), systematic research on the media and its various components did not begin until after 1920. However, journalism practices and the process of mass communication were already in motion prior to that time. Newspapers like the ones we know today emerged from Europe in the early 17th century. Similarly, newspapers began publishing in the United States of America in the 1690s (Turow, 2020). The Banglee Gazette was the first newspaper to appear in neighboring India in 1780. During 400 years of history, different fragments, parts, and areas of broad communications and news-casting have been progressively investigated. Journalism has been one of the most important fields of study in this setting.

Disaster/catastrophe is closely associated with human lives, the biological world, and entire nature. Hence, the production, distribution, and display of messages relating to disaster are vital not only to humans but also to entire

* Lecturer, Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tribhuvan University

nature. Consequently, disaster communication and disaster journalism have drawn significant attention in the field of mass communication research.

Understanding the Term ‘Disaster’

The meaning of disaster is loss and this has been taken into consideration as damage. In the real sense, disaster refers to all those situations that take place suddenly which includes human loss, monetary loss, and loss of possessions. Before a disaster strikes, in particular, conditions like vulnerability, hazards, and risk are witnessed. They may result in deaths, injury, damage, homelessness, and damage to structures and properties. These events are extremely petrifying and heart-wrenching. According to the government report, approximately 900 people succumb to death and around 132 thousand families suffer annually from such disasters. Likewise, annually approximately 30 thousand houses/properties are damaged. (Ministry of Home, 2020)

Calamities can be categorized into natural and non-natural. Earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, floods, landslides, hailstorms, erosion, avalanches, extreme rainfall/acute rainfall, droughts, glacier explosions, flashes of lightning, wildfires, cold waves are examples of natural disasters. Likewise, pandemics, famine, fire, attacks by wild animals, snake-bite, road accidents, poisonous gas, emission of chemical gas and radiation, gas explosions, contaminated food products, environmental pollution, deforestation, and desertification are non-natural forms of disaster. The various types of natural and non-natural disasters have been elaborated under the disaster risk reduction and management clause, 2074 B.S.

Mainly, disasters are a series of accidental events; these kinds of situations are sudden and unpredictable. In particular, disasters that are caused naturally cannot be eradicated by human effort. Events like these can't be predicted or foreseen. Human beings can only work towards reducing the risk factors and implement precautionary measures in these types of disaster situations.

Non-natural disasters can be averted to some extent by managing human activities. The media can play a vital role to this end. Disaster journalism is intended to achieve the specific target of realizing the essence of disastrous events. Only when the journalist can fully comprehend disastrous events, can they handle the related issues with the utmost sensitivity. And to that, it's felt that disaster journalism has become indispensable (Ginsberg, 2010).

Reasons for Disaster

Various factors trigger different types of disasters. When ‘Tectonic Forces’ of the earth become active, they lead to earthquakes. Volcanoes, faulting,

expansion of gases, and contradiction of surface play a major role in facilitating the procedure. Likewise, volcanic eruptions occur when there is an imbalance between the active forces in the earth's core. In which, compressional and tensional forces along with an imbalance in temperature also play a role. Fractional changes in temperature cause the plates of the earth to expand and contract. And as a result, volcano eruptions and earthquakes also occur together. Due to this, additional disastrous situations are experienced on the earth's outer surface (Shingh 1995).

In the same manner, the reasons for landslides also vary. And the reasons for the explosion of glaciers, torrential rain, erosion, excessive rainfall, droughts, and tornadoes are also different. Also, the reasons for non-natural disasters also vary. In disaster journalism, it is vital to understand the mentioned reasons.

While elaborating in the context of disaster journalism, it is crucial to gain knowledge regarding the formation of the earth, specifically regarding the Lithosphere, the Hydrosphere, Atmosphere, and internal structure. And not only that, the earth is mobile, internally it's gyrating and externally it's orbiting. It has to be understood as daily pace and annual pace. Likewise, the Endogenetic force and 'Exogenetic forces, which are active on the earth, should also be studied.

Actually, at the earth's core, 'Endogenetic Force' is active and forces like these are influenced by *Horizontal motion and Vertical motion*. Due to this, structures such as mountains, mountains, and plains get formed and destroyed. In the same manner, in the earth's outer part, 'Endogenetic Forces' are active, which includes weather and erosion. And due to the influence and effect of forces like these, various kinds of disasters take place (Bhandari, 1989).

While analyzing disaster journalism, accurate information has to be generated regarding the forces mentioned above. If this could be achieved in the context of a disaster, then it can be effectively used in the practice of journalism. This is only one example. The time has come to make programs based on education and identify numerous such disaster-related incidents and their causes.

Conceptualizing Disaster Journalism

The incidents of disaster are news in themselves. Disasters and related issues make both hard and soft news. All forms of media, including radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and online news portals cover them.

Since journalists covering the disaster are serving society, social responsibility theories can greatly help in enhancing their functioning. Such theories can help

journalists in each of the pre-disaster, during-the-disaster and post-disaster phases. Extensive responsibility, maturity, and sensitivity are expected in the practice of disaster journalism. Professional integrity is vital in this process and thus journalism education can truly contribute to enhancing integrity.

Normally, disasters make people frightened as they can claim the lives of people and damage properties. Although they cannot be completely prevented, damage can be reduced through effective messaging. For this, we need strong journalism training so that the journalists can handle all possible situations perfectly from suitable angles.

Journalists are expected to plan stories by tracking related information and backgrounds in all stages of a disaster so that the possible damage could be prevented or reduced. In this process, the journalists need to inspect, monitor, and evaluate the activities and performances of related government and non-government bodies minutely. Further, media stories can help a lot with relief, rescue, rehabilitation, and reconstruction in the post-disaster period.

Nepal is considered a disaster-risk zone as different types of disasters like floods, landslides, earthquakes, fire, drought, lightning bolts, incessant rainfall, pandemics, and windstorms are happening in different seasons. Nepal stands at 11th position among the earthquake-prone nations and stands at 10th position in the index of regions with the highest risk of climatic change. Due to Nepal's geographic structure and fragile land structure, Nepal is at the risk of multitudes of disasters, and as a result, floods, landslides, earthquakes, waterlogging, windstorms, droughts, lightning bolts, and pandemics keep coming. In such a scenario, from the viewpoint of social responsibility, research should be conducted to determine the kind of role and responsibility to be played. And in this context, the news relating to the disaster in newspapers and the ratio of other materials in the leading papers, such as *The Kantipur*, *The Gorkhpatra*, & *The Naya Patrika* were studied minutely in this study. The contents of the newspapers from June 15 to 30, 2021 (2078 B.S. from Asar 1st to 15th) were studied in this course.

Disaster Related News Materials in Newspapers

Lately, there has been a sharp rise in the publication of newspapers in Nepal. According to the archives of the Press Council Nepal, by the year 2077/078 B.S., 7 thousand 8 hundred and 74 newspapers had been registered in Nepal. In which the number of daily newspapers is 7 hundred 44 and the number of weekly newspapers is 2 thousand 8 hundred and 59. (Press Council Nepal, 2078). Most of them are published from Kathmandu.

In the latest context, in the newspapers published in Nepal, subject-wise diversity has been gaining space. For various topics, the different beats have been assigned to incorporate topic-wise diversity. And in this context, coverage of broadsheet newspapers like *Kantipur*, *Gorakhapatra*, and *Naya Patrika* which are published from Kathmandu on disaster events and issues are presented in the table below.

The Coverage of Disaster-Related News in the Daily Newspapers

The table depicts the number of disaster-related news published in *Kantipur*, *Gorakhapatra* & *Naya Patrika* in the year 2078 B.S from Asar 1 to Asar 15.

Table -1 Coverage of Disaster Issue in Newspaper

S. N.	Newspapers	Amount of News
1.	Kantipur	49
2.	Gorkhapatra	155
3.	Nayapatrika	21
	Total	255

Source: Content Survey, 2021

According to table no.-1, the maximum number of disaster-related news had been published on *the Gorkhapatra Daily*. During the 15 days, Gorkhapatra, Kantipur and Naya Patrika published 155, 49 and 21 stories respectively. Disaster-related stories were given prominence during the period.

The Placement of Disaster-Related Issues in Newspapers

This section describes the pattern of disaster-related news published on front and inside pages. The front page coverage is considered to be more important than inside pages.

Table -2 The Placement of Disaster Issues in Newspapers

S.N.	Newspapers	Front page	Inside page	Total
1.	Kantipur	12	37	49
2.	Gorkhapatra	25	130	155
3.	Nayapatrika	13	8	21
	Total	50	175	255

Source: Content Survey, 2021

According to table- 2, 50 out of 255 stories (19%) were published on the front pages. Kantipur published 49 stories including 12 on front pages and

37 on inside pages; Gorkhapatra published 155 stories including 25 on front pages and 130 on inside pages and Nayapatrika published 21 stories including 13 on the front pages and 8 on inside pages. Although the total number of disaster news is higher in Gorkhapatra, Kantipur and Nayapatrika have also given priority to disaster issues.

Diversity of Disaster-Related News Materials in Newspapers

Time and again various kinds of disaster-related incidents occur in Nepal. According to a study, Melamchi in Sindupalchowk district received maximum rain in Ashad, a month of rainfall, which caused the flooding. Nepali newspapers published the flood related issues extensively.

Table-3 Coverage of Different Disaster Issues in Newspapers

S.N.	Newspaper	Kantipur	Gorakhapatra	Nayapatrika
1.	Flood	26	56	13
2.	Landslides	2	48	1
3.	Fire			
4.	Droughts			
5.	Lightning Bolts		7	
6.	Excessive Rain	1	21	1
7.	Earthquake			
8.	Windstorm			
9.	Pandemic	19		5
10.	Flooding/Innundation	1	23	1
	Total	49	155	21

Source: Content Survey, 2021

According to the table- 3, different 10 types of disasters are covered by the newspapers. Among them, flood related stories are covered more than others. Kantipur published 49 disaster related stories including floods (26), landslides (2), torrential rainfall (1), pandemic (19) and innundation (1). Likewise, Nayapatrika covered 13 news about floods and Gorkhapatra covered 56 news related to floods. This shows that Nepali newspapers cover disaster-related news especially after it occurs. Therefore, it is observed that newspapers rarely give priority to precautionary news.

Divers Aspects of Disaster-Related Coverage

Nepali daily newspapers cover various aspects of disaster-related materials. Among those, most of the materials are related to the preparing phase while other news materials are related to pre-information, reduction, rescue, relief and adaption. Likewise, the news is also covered about rehabilitation, reconstruction and incidents.

Table -4 Disaster Issues Associated with Different Aspects

S. N.	Newspapers	Gorkhapatra	Kantipur	Nayapatrika
1.	Preparations	5	1	1
2.	Pre-Information	6	5	2
3.	Reduction	10	5	
4.	Adaption	-	-	-
5.	Rescue	41	3	3
6.	Relief	46	1	3
7.	Rehabilitation	4	1	-
8.	Reconstruction	3	2	-
9.	Information on incident	40	31	12
	Total	155	49	21

Source: Content Survey, 2021

According to table- 4, Kantipur and Nayapatrika covered news relating information regarding the incidents. In Kantipur, the number of these materials is 31 whereas in Naya Patrika it's 12. Likewise, in Gorkhapatra, the number of these materials is 40. The news regarding preparations in Gorkhapatra is 5, in Kantipur, it's 1 and in Nayapatrika, it's 1. There is less coverage regarding the information on the precautionary and preventive measures. While analyzing this aspect, it is observed that the Nepali newspapers give priority to the situation after disasters occur.

Conclusion

From a journalist's pedagogical perspective, tragedy is linked to human emotions. Disasters inevitably lead to loss and devastation as their outcomes. Both human and different biological spectrums are affected by these harms. That's why, disaster is terrible, hazardous, terrifying, and heartbreaking. It is the duty of each character in their own function and area to save themselves and others. Journalism can't be kept out of it. The thought of disaster journalism

has developed from an international perspective, and in the context of the Nepali media, this is a cause for worry.

From the viewpoint of the world, the concept of disaster journalism is developed and in the context of Nepali journalism, this is a matter of concern.

Journalism education plays an important role in establishing the code of conduct related to the knowledge, skill, and values regarding the subject. Therefore, this subject has to be incorporated into university education, and its study and the scope of research also have to be explored.

Disaster-related news gets priority in newspapers, both in terms of number and importance. However, disaster related stories are not normally presented by taking their sensitivity, seriousness and possible impact into concern. Their role in fulfilling social responsibility is questionable. So, sorting out these challenges is imperative in the process of disaster management. Journalism has to remain vigilant and cover the issues relating to preparedness and rehabilitation before and after the disaster respectively. For this journalists can gain insights of the elements of disaster (distribution of disaster, causes, effects, possibilities and influence) through journalism education. While analyzing the materials covered in Nepali newspapers, preparedness related coverage is comparatively less. Nepali journalism should not be confused that this is an important area of coverage. In order to present balanced coverage of all stages of a disaster, journalism education can play a vital role. Hence, the importance of disaster journalism should not be ignored.

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devrajaryal@gmail.com