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*Article*

# Understanding Women's Lived Experiences during the time of Flood of Assam: Narrative Analysis of Pandemic Time

Purabi Bhagawati

**Abstract:** Flood is one of the most common disaster in Assam. The situation gets worse when pandemic hits the place during the flood time. The paper indicates about women's flood related lived experiences during pandemic. It is thought that floods will increase the global burden of disease, morbidity, mortality, social and economic disruptions and will place a continuing stress on health services, especially in low-resource countries. Natural disaster hampers both the men and women. Pandemic means the disease whose prevalence has been all over the world. Covid 19 has been the recently developed pandemic that touches each and every corner of the world. But within such obstruction, both the male and female's lived experiences of health might be different from each other. This paper articulates the gendering lived experiences of pandemic during the time of flood. However here an attempt has been made to understand women's negotiation with their everyday life during such time and whether different social, political and cultural capital have been significant factors as far as the negotiation is concerned that has also been discussed through this study. However, on the descriptive note, narrative analysis has been done to understand the women's negotiation in their everyday life. The study is conducted at different places of Nalbari and Golaghat Districts of Assam. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated into English and qualitative analysis was done. How disaster made adverse impact on women's everyday life that has been tried to understand through this paper.

**Keywords:** flood; pandemic; lived experiences; women; everyday

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## Introduction

Flood is one of the most common disaster in Assam. The situation gets worse when pandemic hits the place during the flood time. Flood is considered as most common natural disaster in the world and different aspects such as economic, environmental, social and health perspectives are attached with the flood (Jonkman and Kelman, 2005). The degree of damage to societies in flood disasters is depended upon the physical location, topographic nature of the place and the nature of the built environment (Du et al. 2011). The impacts of natural disaster affect differently on both men and women and subjective perception also differs on the basis of gender, class and geographical locations of the people. Gender is considered as social understanding of reality. Lived experiences are based on one's perception, subjective understanding. This study tries to study women's flood related lived experiences in the context of Assam. The study on women's lived experiences of flood is important because it helps to understand the gendered notion of flood. In general gender relations and social norms often reinforce women's vulnerabilities to floods and disasters. A range of social, cultural and religious practices across socio-economic classes reinforce such vulnerabilities. The type of vulnerabilities can change over time and space, creating new opportunities and new distress. Through this study an attempt has been made to understand gendered notion in dealing the natural hazards. How women of different class and geographical location have been negotiating with the natural disaster that has been tried to understand through this study. Here relationship between agency vis-à-vis structure has been tried to understand by studying women's flood related lived experiences. Women are not homogeneous group, because intersectionality with class, caste, religion affects their consciousness and lived experiences.



Reyes and Lu (2016) in the article, 'Gender dimension in Disaster Situations: A Case Study of Flood prone Women in Melabon City, Metro Manila' discussed a gendered approach of flood. Here gender approach has been discussed in relation to cultural, socio-economic vulnerability of women. The study is based on triangulation methods where both quantitative and qualitative analysis have been done. For quantitative analysis data has been gathered through a survey of 68 women. Majority of the women belonged to the lower income group, and a considerable number were single parents. Being tied to the home while their male counterparts were away for work is detrimental to the women because they immediately encountered the brunt of the effects of the disaster. While men were recognized as the household heads and leaders, it is evident from the data gathered that women took more roles and responsibilities before, during, and after disasters. For theoretical understanding the study took help classical work of Barbara Ehrenreich (1976). Ehrenreich pointed out the structure confines the women to 'feminine' responsibilities and that make them more vulnerable towards the situation of disaster. Though this work tried to give an overview of gendered understanding of disaster, still one of the limitation of the study is not able to give much emphasis on class differentiation of women. Class has one of the prime factors in dealing the natural disaster that has not coming out through this article.

Mullick et al. (2015) in the article 'An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Of The Lived Experiences Of Flood In A Rural Setting Of West Bengal, India' have discussed lived experiences of flood among the residents of a rural setting of Ghatal, which is situated in West Bengal. Through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study seeks to explore the insider's perspectives of the flood that are a very habitual event at Ghatal. Seven participants were interviewed using semi-structured interview method. The findings of the research for convenience of representation have been classified into three thematic subheads- (a) sensing flood from positive and negative frames, (b) living the flood and its consequences, and (c) the issues of relief and local politics. One of the limitations of the study is that it concentrate on a specific population where larger part of the affected areas are being untouched.

Yulianti and Hastuti (2019) in the article 'The Role of Women in dealing with Risk of Flood' have discussed on women as vulnerable group during the time of flood. The research method used is descriptive qualitative by conducting in-depth interviews. The purpose of this study is to analyze how women's participation in dealing with the risk of flood disasters in Kalianda District, South Lampung Regency. The results of this study are that women participate directly in the Disaster Preparedness Village group by conducting counseling and initiating and participating women in Disaster Preparedness Cadets. The research method used in the study was a qualitative descriptive method, with secondary data sources on flood-prone areas obtained from the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) of South Lampung Regency and for the primary data used namely in-depth interviews with Mothers Village Heads and Housewives whose areas are affected by floods. The study is based on 'Indonesia'. It is one of the vulnerable places where flood uses to create severe damage to the people of it. The results of the study show that the role of women in the face of flood risk shows that women have a dominant role in reducing the risk of floods, women's participation in Disaster Alert Villages (Ksb) and Disaster Preparedness (Tagana) in the face of flood risk. reduce casualties during a disaster. The study has certain limitation as it did not discuss details analysis of women's role in protecting the disaster. Again there is no specific understanding on socio-economic background of the women who have been playing active role during the disaster.

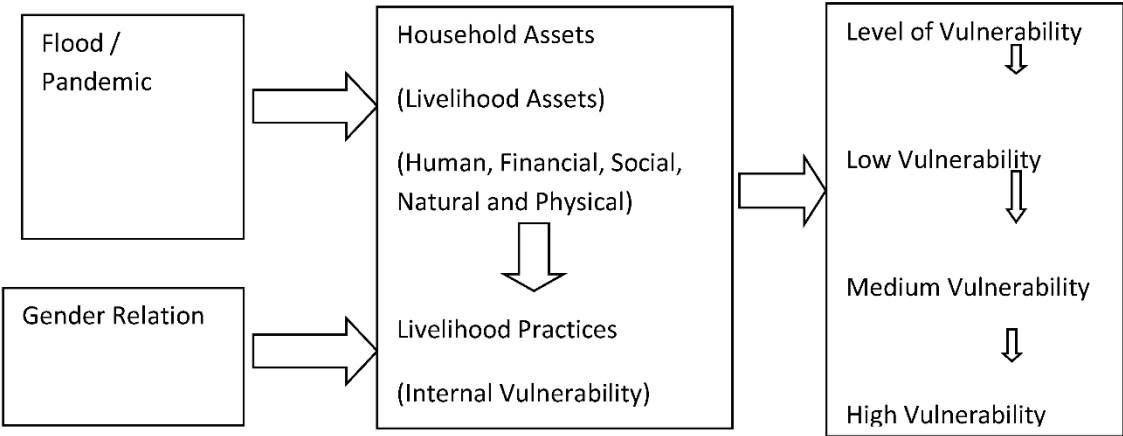
Naz and Saqib 2021 in their article 'Gender-based differences in food vulnerability among men and women in the char farming households of Bangladesh'. Gender and vulnerability have been the prime issues of flood problems. Natural disaster affect both the male and female differently. This study tries men and women's level of vulnerabilities and their choices of livelihood practices in Char framing households in Zanjira, Bangladesh. The study is based on primary and secondary data. The study is based on triangular research model, where both quantitative and qualitative data have been used. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to assess men and women's vulnerabilities, including three indices of vulnerability measuring access to livelihood assets were used. A hierarchical regression model was used to perform a gender-based analysis. The percentile



score for men was 0.430 units higher than for women, revealing that male respondents were less vulnerable than female respondents in the study area. The results of the regression model showed that the use of gender as an explanatory variable increased the explanatory power of the model and was highly significant. The overall findings of quantitative and qualitative data analysis revealed that floods' impacts were different for men and women and that indicates a gender related socio-cultural norms. Impact of vulnerability has direct relation with one's gender. Women are considered as relatively inferior gender to their male counterparts. Therefore, the study indicates that the women are comparatively more affected by the disaster. The study includes following research objectives. Firstly to understand women's understanding on Flood; secondly how women live with the flood during the pandemic and thirdly to understand the relationship between agency vis-à-vis structure in understanding women's negotiation with the flood. For conceptual understanding of the study, the study use certain concept, that are discussed as follows:

**Lived Experiences:** Lived Experiences consist of one's perception, concept and subjective understanding of everyday life. Phenomenological understanding helps to understand the concept of Lived Experiences. In *Perception of Phenomenology* (1962) Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of 'lived body'. Ponty stressed that perception, experiences, and practices are embodied, and these are part of lived experiences. For Ponty, the body is an important phenomenon that plays a crucial role in understanding human experience, perception and practices. Different bodily practices produce the meaning of experiences. Phenomenological understanding helps to understand the different bodily experiences. The concept of lived body has been developed by the later feminists who opposed the binary of Mind-Body, Nature-Culture conception. Bodily experiences are itself the beyond of such binary condition. Simone de Beauvoir brought the 'physicality' of body in social science discourse. She defined lived experiences in relation to 'body in situation'.

**Vulnerability based on gender:** Vulnerability to flood and other natural hazard impacts vary from place to place. Vulnerability has direct and indirect impact on gender. In this study vulnerability means women's health risk during the time of flood and pandemic. The study tries to see women's negotiation during the time of flood and pandemic. Here with the help of diagram the relationship between vulnerability and gender has been discussed.



**Figure 1.** A Conceptual Framework of Gendered Vulnerabilities.

The above figure highlights the relation between gender and vulnerability. Natural vulnerability affects both men and women differently. Being women one has to internalise and practice different gender role in the household. This study indicates women are overburdened specially during the time of flood. The situation was even getting worse during the time when natural hazards hits. The process gender socialisation compel the women to inculcate the different gendered role in their everyday life. Meanwhile different factors as for instance caste, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic background of women have been playing significant role in terms in terms of experiencing



vulnerability. Women is not the homogenous category. The lived experiences of women are different on the basis of caste, class, ethnicity and geographical location. Gendered notion are embodied by the women and that have been everyday notion of one's everyday life.

### *Health, Illness and Embodiment*

Elizabeth Ettorre in her book *Culture, Bodies and Sociology of Body* stated that bodies are positioned in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, able bodied and class are simultaneously understood in terms of health, diseases, leisure, emotions, attractiveness, consumption, style and risk (Ettorre 2016). As Ettore suggests, one's intersectional location is important in understanding one's lived experiences of health and illness. The study will be looking at the way women in the field implicitly and explicitly understand and experience their body, health and illness.

Most scholars have pointed out that the concept of the body in everyday life has mostly remained 'absent' or taken for granted (Leder 1990). People are only aware about the body when illness occurs. Williams (1996) has articulated people's perception of the body during the course of any chronic illness. He explained how the experiences of chronic illness involves a move from an initiate state of embodiment to a state of dis-embodiment or re-embodiment. Thus, people try to reconcile their self with their ill body, which influences their illness narratives.

### **Materials and Methods**

To under women's everyday life during the time of flood researcher took the help of phenomenological approach of qualitative research. Qualitative research is conducted through an intense or prolonged contact of 'field' or 'life situation' (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this context both flood and pandemic have been considered as 'life situation' which reflect the everyday life experiences of women. In such qualitative study the researcher attempts to capture the data with the help of 'verstehen' method where Actor's first hand experiences consider as important sources of data. In Phenomenological research approach in-depth understanding is required to know the everyday experiences of women in the above mentioned situations. Dilthey mentioned 'For social interpretation deep understanding over the subject is required' (Dilthey 1977). Phenomenologist often use interview schedule and transcription for collecting the data. In this study also methods like interview schedules, observation methods have been used for collecting the data. This research design focus on thick description where everyday experiences of women have been taking into consideration. Researcher tries to understand meaning making of the narratives that have been told by the respondents. In qualitative research words are considered as important sources of data collection. Dealing with the lived experiences of women, researcher tries to understand their perception on health, social structure, prejudgments and presuppositions (Manen 1977) and how such meaning are being connected through social world. But while doing the field work, being outsider to her field settings researcher faced different challenges. These challenges are inevitable because the researcher is the outsider to the field. Different post colonial scholars have questioned on the relationship between researcher and researched subjects. Rose (1997) argues that power position of the researcher could affect the rapport building process of the researched people and it leads to disrupt the process of data collection. Later Rose (1997) suggested the process of reflexivity that could be helpful in maintaining relationship between researcher and researched. Meanwhile various feminist scholars also pointed out about the importance of self-reflexivity techniques for creating rapport between researcher and researched. By keeping the facts in mind researcher has tried to build the rapport with the respondents to minimize insider-outsider issues. The field work was done from the period of 2021 to 2022 in the two specific flood affected villages of both Nalbari and Golaghat District. Nalbari is located in the Lower part of Assam where Golaghat is located in the Upper part of Assam. Barximaliya village, is one of the flood affected villages of Nalbari District which is situated in 14 km of east side of the district headquarter. Again Bhaganmari Char area of Nalbari District was selected for field work. To get a comparative analysis in two different locations of Assam, another village i.e Mohpara of Golaghat District is selected. Mohpara is situated in the west division of Golaghat District. In each years flood hit the village in a very adverse way. Meanwhile the village



comes under the purview of Kaziranga National Park, therefore, for them perception of the situation of 'flood' is different from the people of Barximaliya village of Nalbari District. A sample size of 20 from each villages have been interviewed for this study. Meanwhile interview schedule, observation methods have been used as tools of the data collection for this study. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Data reduction process is used during the time of data analysis of this study. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcript tions. In qualitative research data reduction process has been applied in different stages of the research and it continues till the final report is completed( Miles and Huberman, 1994). For analyzing women's everyday experiences during the time of flood and pandemic, interpretivism method has been used. Dilthey (1977) in terms of using interpretivism method said that human activity was seen as text as a collection of symbols and that are expressed through different meaning. Interpretivism method is considered as an important tool in understanding the lived experiences. Methodologically lived experience is a representation and understanding of a researcher on the research subject; such as emotions, perceptions, situations over the subject (S and Gogoi 2021).

The study is conducted at different places of Nalbari and Golaghat Districts of Assam. Both the districts have been the representation of Lower and Upper Assam respectively. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated into English and qualitative analysis was done. This paper emphasised on women's lived experiences and negotiations with Covid 19 Pandemic during the time of flood. How women negotiate with such conditions in their everyday life and what would be gender implication that has been tried to understand through this paper. Both the primary and secondary data have been used to collect the data for this study. For primary data, field work have been done; for which interview schedule, observation methods are being used. Different journal articles, books, reports have been used as secondary sources for the study.

#### *Brief Understanding on Field*

The field is located in two different district of Assam. The reason behind selecting the diverse field is to know about women's lived experiences irrespective of their geographical location, caste and class. Here details of the both the villages have been discussed as follows:

#### *Barximaliya Village of Nalbari District*

Barsimaliya is situated in Barbhag block of Nalbari District. The acreage of the village is 172.80 hectares. According to the 2011 Census, the total number of households in Barsimaliya is 285, and the total population is 1,394, of which 683 are women. The village is bounded by Gharamsin village in the east and Boroliya sub-river in the west. Adhgharia village is situated in the north, while the south side of the village is bordered by Borbukia village and Boroliya sub-river. Boroliya is spread from west to south. Most of the people of this village belong to the Namasudra community, which is categorised as scheduled caste as per the scheduled tribes and scheduled caste orders amendment act 1956 of the Government of India. According to the 2011 Census, about 74% of the population of the village (1,036 people) belonged to the scheduled castes. Among the scheduled caste population, there were 528 men and 508 women of the village.

#### *Bhangnamari Char Area of Nalbari District:*

Bhangnamari Char village is located within the Barkhetri region of Nalbari District. Barkhetri is the southern side of Nalbari District. Due to massive erosion in the Brahmaputra River recently, some new villages have emerged and then merged with the sandbank. The region is mostly surrounded by the sandbanks. The area is under the administration of Bhangnamari District Council, which includes the Kalasar Village Panchayat, Bhangnamari Village and Kurihamari Village Panchayat.

#### *Discussion on Mohpara Village*



According to Census 2011 information the location code or village code of Mohpara village is 294175. Mohpara village is located in Bokakhat subdivision of Golaghat district in Assam, India. It is situated 17km away from sub-district headquarter Bokakhat (tehsildar office) and 55km away from district headquarter Golaghat. As per 2009 stats, Madhya Kaziranga is the gram panchayat of Mohpara village. The total geographical area of village is 222.47 hectares. Mohpara has a total population of 529 peoples, out of which male population is 265 while female population is 264. Literacy rate of mohpara village is 57.28% out of which 60.38% males and 54.17% females are literate. There are about 104 houses in mohpara village. The demographical structure of the village reflects a mix population where both Assamese and Mazdoor community of tea garden have been living.

## Results

### *Gendered Approach of Flood*

The study aims to understand women's everyday life during the time when both pandemic and flood hit the people. Barximaliya village is one of the flood prone villages in Nalbari District. Parbatee Namasudra, described her experiences during the floods, thus. She said, 'During the floods, we usually use bamboo-made structure called 'bahar sang'. Before the monsoon season arrives, we start to make it... we used to keep all our belongings on bahar sang . . . the floodwater won't touch them'. From her narratives it has been understood that prior to flood they have to prepare themselves in the facing the flood. In such prior preparation women's involvement has been predominant in nature and that need both physical and psychological groundwork. The narrative shows gender based division of labour where household chores are considered women's activity. Ehrenreich(1976) discussed about feminine responsibility during the time of flood and that makes them more vulnerable. Karlsson(2020) in the study of 'When the disaster strikes: Gendered (im)mobility in Bangladesh' stated irrespective of catastrophic situation women have to look after the household work, no matter what happened with them, at the end of day they have to involve themselves in the household chores. Thus due to patriarchal social structure, women have to play care giver role and that has been inculcated by them through gender socialisation. Household work is considered as highly feminised which undertaken predominantly by women (Enarson 2014).

Parbatee has been living in this village for the last three decades and has witnessed situation of flood for many times. Flood has been her everyday experiences. She also endured pregnancy during the floods. She said, 'Most of the duration in my first pregnancy there was flood... As my pregnancy progressed, the intensity of the floods increased day-by-day . . . District administration told us to leave the place as soon as possible. Shifting was difficult in my condition . . . still went to the neighbouring village along with my husband. The journey from one place to another was traumatic . . . with flooding everywhere. Everywhere, we could see only water . . . nothing was visible except water. The biggest problem came when the neighbouring village which we went was also affected by the floods. Again, we had to move to another place. We have seen the worst days . . . the foetus in my womb and I had to run from one place to another with terror . . . Finally, after two months in this condition, we got a baby boy'.

Tutu Namasudra, another respondent from the village, also spoke about her experience during a flood. She said, 'Just a few years ago, I had a terrifying experience related to the flood. That time, I was nine months pregnant. Gradually, the level of water kept rising and we were told to go to the mathauri (embankment) . . . to go to the mathauri was a challenge . . . all of us took a boat to go there. It was a terrible journey which I will never forget. The level of water kept rising due to rain and changed the course of the river water. In the middle of our journey, the boat lost control and was about to sink in the flood . . . We were screaming with terror . . . it was a fateful day for us . . . After some time, three boats came to rescue us from our near death'.

Sabita Das, one of the respondents of Bhangnamari village narrated her own experience of vulnerability during the floods. 'My second child was born at the time of the flood. It was a gloomy, overcast morning and by mid-day, the rain had started coming down. Gradually, the entire area was flooded. By that time, I started experiencing severe labour pain. Outside the house, there was heavy



rain and thunder, and my screaming remained unheard in that weather. Oh . . . what a day it was . . . even today, when I think about it, I feel so scared. Finally, I was carried to the primary health centre with the help of a boat . . . where I gave birth to a baby boy. The journey from home to the hospital was one of the deadliest journeys I ever have experienced’.

Similarly, another respondent of Mohpara village expressed the poor public health facilities during the time of flood. She said ‘inadequate public health facilities makes worse situation specially for pregnant women during the time of disaster.

In developing countries most of the women have less preparation to face the disaster like flood and for which the level of vulnerability may be increasing (Morrow and Phillips 1999). Meanwhile along with the gender vulnerability woman mostly suffer social vulnerability because of her low social status in society. Women are most likely neglected and discriminated in terms of getting assistance for disaster (Swatzyna and Pillai 2013). Vulnerability also affects one’s social position and that might have impact on one’s psychological state. According to feminist thinkers such linkages has been seen in specially the developing countries, as for instances in the post disaster situation women suffer relatively more than their male counterpart (Elaine and Morrow 1998)

#### *Women’s lived experiences of Public Health During Flood*

Flood has been one of the major disasters that Assam faces every year. It creates major havoc in across the state. Disaster has made severe impact on the socio-economic life of people. Flood in Assam is a yearly phenomenon which creates catastrophic situation from May to September. Field observation indicates that there are several phenomena that are intersects with the situation of flood as for instance ; role of state, social structure and gender relation. Assam has been facing flood problems for decades and flood persuaded destruction also increase in every year. According to Economic Survey of Assam, every year Assam loses 200 crore rupees due to flood. Flooding has a negative impact on people’s general health as well as the reproductive health of women. Parker (1983) stated natural disaster like flooding can impact upon people’s health in a number of ways. Inadequate access to health care has been one of the major issues during the time of flood. One of the respondent said ‘The poor availability of medicines and doctors is not only a problem during the floods.. absence of doctors is a major problem we face at other times too. But we have a village medicine man from whom we buy medicines. However, during the floods, such facilities are also not available, and we have to depend on government (district administration) again’. Sakuntala, another respondents of Mohapara village stated ‘ASHAs or the Nurse are the only available health worker from whom the villagers get various medicines. Flood situation distrupts the health scenerio . Most of the cases the Primary Health Centre of the villages which have been considered the prime units of village health care system have also been affected by the catastrophic flood and for which the ASHAs or Village Pharmacist become the sole person as far as health care delivery is concerned. The situation of char area is relatively more vulnerable. The nature of flood is quite catastrophic in Char areas because of the geographical location of such areas. Within each district, there are landmasses created by deposits along the course of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. These areas are known as char areas. These are the mid-channel bars that are an integral part of the fluvial process of the river and its tributaries in Assam( Assam Human Development Report, 2014). These are the mid-channel bars that are an integral part of the fluvial process of the river and its tributaries in Assam (ibid). The river’s interlaced channels, during times of flood, deposit large amounts of silt to create almond-shaped islands within the river’s flow called chars (ibid). . Alekjan, an inhabitant of Bhangnamari Char village, stated, ‘Most of the time, we don’t get doctors at the village PHC . . . it is quite normal. In their absence, the pharmacist acts as the doctor’. Another respondent from Char area shared ‘For us the Pharmacist is our doctor, he is the person who provides health care services specially during the time of flood’.

ASHAs are the most available and accessible health workers for the respondents during the time of flood. They have played significant role during the time of pandemic. ‘Due to poor road situation, doctors would not come to our villages. ASHAs are the only medium for us to get medicines or health advice’ ---- One of the respondents of Mohpara village stated. Another respondent of Mohpara



village stated ' Our major concern is where will we go for better health care facilities. In our areas, there is no better health care facilities'.

The field work has shown that ASHAs have been playing an important role when both flood and pandemic situation getting worse. The ASHA worker of Mohpara Village expressed her experiences of pandemic during the time of flood. She said 'I have seen and even experienced the severity of flood during the time of pandemic. I have seen other women's suffering in front of my eyes. Pregnant women have to suffer the most specially during the time of flood'. She said, 'In the previous flood, Ranu was Nine months old pregnant . Just few days before her delivery time flood situation was getting worse. The entire village was affected by flood ...the road were filled up with water. There were no transportation facilities also except the boat...Suddenly she complained about some issues and in this situation she was compelled to walk to hospital by foot'.

The field work shows that the women across the three different places have experienced similar scarcity of health services specially during the time of Flood. The structure of public health has been severely affected by flood situation. Again the existing public health care system has certain shortcoming for which it can not meet issues during the time of disaster.

#### *Social Location and Flood:*

Flood has not only geographical impact, similarly it has social, psychological impression over the people. The field works have been done in the peripheral areas of both the districts. Geographical location of each place has been one of the responsible factors of flooding. During the fieldwork it has been observed that most of the people show their worries about the location of their residence. One respondent from Barsimaliya village, shared her experience of the floods. 'I fear flood-related conditions . . . It hampers day-to-day activities. To get adequate medicines is a challenging task during the floods. We don't have a personal boat . . . we face problems in going from place to place.' This narrative indicates that having personal boat means the higher strata of class system. In this studied village not all the people have occupied personal boat, very few of people stated about the existence of boats and that have been used most during the emergency like flood. From the field observation in this village, it has been known that majority of the people are belong to poor socio-economic background and in such situation their level of vulnerability is relatively high.

32 years Respondent of Mohpara village stated her experiences during the time of flood, 'The floods have created havoc for us every year. Sometimes I feel . . . if our homes had been somewhere else, our health may have been better. After the floods, the situation gets worse. After the flood . . . diseases like diarrheal infections and debility, tuberculosis and cholera are common in our area. Every year, many people fall sick with different diseases during floods . . . their health becomes weak over a period of time'. Another person from Char area depicted her thoughts 'Being inhabitant of char area has been our plight, as you see the intensity of flood is too high which can vanish our home, crops, animals within few minutes.' From this study it has been observed that most of the people are not happy with their place of residence as every year flood situation creates havoc to their life and many of them expressed a hypothetical situation if their place of residence were in different place, it would have been good for them.

#### *Experiences of receiving Aids During Flood*

Government provides aids during the time of time. Respondents shared their experiences on receiving incentives from the Government during the time of flood. One of the respondents from Bhangnamari Char village, stated, 'Those days are very difficult for us. We struggle because of the scarcity of food. There is no safe place to stay . . . we must shift either to the relief camp or relative's houses. To go from one place to another is quite difficult . . . usually go to houses on relatively higher land . . . But up to how many days can I live in those places? At one point in time, we are told to leave the place . . . it is difficult for others to give us shelter for such a long time. There are no rehabilitation camps in our area. . .'. Another respondent of Barximaliya village expressed her dissatisfaction on receiving aids from government, she added ' I feel the entire distribution system is not based of equality, if you are familiar to the distributor there is a chance that you will get more than other'.



Mohpara is one of the flood affected villages in Golaghat District. Parul One of the respondents of Mohpara Village of Golaghat District stated about her experiences during the time of flood. She has been living in the village since last five years. Flood has been her lived experiences since her childhood. She said 'Groceries were given by the Government during their stay in the camp'. After camp days over, they would not received any ration facilities.' Again some of the respondents expressed about inequality of public distribution system. During the flood, ration is one of the important mediums through which victim people get some bit of relief. During the time of field work it has been known that most of the time non government organisation play an important role in distributing different essential things among the flood victims. Again few of them said that Government provides grocery during their stay at camp. Therefore they questioned 'after returning home the major challenges come, what to eat, how to collect'. Catastrophic flood made severe damage to people's life and therefore it takes time to normalise the situation.

#### *Flood and Pandemic:*

Flood during the time of Pandemic created major havoc situation specially for the life of women. Shakuntala said 'The Previous flood was occurred during the time of Covid 19. It was horrible experience for us. During that time both of my Mother in Law and Father-in-law were suffering Asthma problem. The hospital authority refused to give the treatment as that time Covid patient were given the priority. Suddenly due to flooding condition we had to vacate the home and shifted ourself to the camp.' She also added her experience while staying at the camp. 'Being women we have to face severe problem while staying at the camp. There are no separate toilet/bathroom facilities for the women at the camp'.

Most of the women of Mohpara village pointed out their food habit problem during their stay in the camp. One of them said 'Stomach Infection problem is quite similar problem which most of the people face while staying at camp. Having other health issues is another additional problem specially during the time of pandemic.'

Both flood and pandemic caused double burden for the women. Women are considered as care taker in the family. While playing the role of care taker she mostly ignore her own health. Most of the women agreed to this statement, while counter narratives are also been found. One of the respondents said 'Along with the family members I use to take care about my own health. I understand my health is equally important to take care the others'.

The narratives across the three different fields indicate that both flood and pandemic make the women life relatively difficult than their male counterpart. Being woman, she has to play the role of care giver for the family during the time of disaster also. A gender based division of labour has been observed during the time of disaster and that made women life even more worse. Reproducing gender in everyday life has made adverse impact on women's life specially during the catastrophic

#### **Discussion**

The narratives of both the district have indicated women's lived experiences during the time of flood. Any kind of disaster have made severe effect on women. In every household women are the members who look after the household and take care the other members as well. Women internalise different gendered traits and behaviour and that become the part of her everyday life. Again women are not a homogenous group, because intersectionality class, caste, religion, age have made impact on women's lived experiences. Despite of heterogeneity, women as a large group generally face greater marginalization and oppression than their male counterpart (British High Commission. 1994). Any kind of natural disaster bring severe burden especially for the women and children. Women are burdened with family responsibilities and because of gendered division of labour they have been assigned to take care the other family members during the time of any disaster. The process of marginalization is simultaneously linked with processes of greater dependency and patronage with powerful families (Sultana 2011)). If male household heads die during disasters, or are away for prolonged periods of time in search of livelihoods, the women left behind effectively become the breadwinners for their children and elderly. These female-headed households often spiral into



greater poverty. From the field work it has been known that when men abandon their families and move away, the women are left in greater economically and socially vulnerable positions, facing greater social insecurities in not having a male household head or protector, often exposing them to greater social stigmatization, harassment and exclusions. Without the support of kin or neighbours, these households can be forced into leading lives of destitution and social marginalization (Ariyabandu 2009). Lack of entitlements to land and resources compound the social sufferings of women who are abandoned or widowed (Hossain, Dodge and Abed (1992)).

## Conclusion

This study tries to understand women's lived experiences during the time of pandemic and flood with the help of narrative analysis. The study highlights the role of ASHAs who have been working closely in the community level. Their lived experiences also indicate how they have been dealing during the time of natural disaster. During such time pandemic makes the situation even more worse. Irrespective of geographical location, caste and ethnicity, flood and pandemic make the situation vulnerable to women. Phenomenological understanding of women have been an important matter through which lived experiences of women could be understood during the time of disaster. Field work of this study has been categorised into different segments, as for instance gendered approach of flood, where flood impact over women has been discussed. Disaster creates more vulnerability for women across different caste, tribe and religion. The study also explores inadequate structure of public health and which becomes worse specially during the time of flood. For marginalised people, public health is only better specially during the time of health emergency. The study indicates poor structural public health has brought severe health issues for people and in such situation women are the worst sufferer. Meanwhile each of the study areas are the flood prone and therefore flood has been part of people's everyday life. The study also indicates about the negotiation of the people with the flood where women have been playing an important role. The field work was done while both pandemic and flood hit the study areas. Both the situation double the vulnerability where women have been the worst sufferer. Thus the study tries to give an overview of women's lived experiences during the time of flood and pandemic.

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