The Drought That Isn't:

Investigating contesting emergency claims on Yavatmal's drought

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies

by

Bestin Samuel

OXFORD DEPARTMENT
OF INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

QUEEN ELIZABETH
HOUSE
COLLEGE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY

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List of Abbreviations

AIKS: All India Kisan Sangh

BCCI: Board of Control for Cricket in India

BDO: Block Development Officer

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

DACFW: Department of Agriculture, Co-operation and Farmers' Welfare

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation

FRA: Forest Rights Act

GoI: Government of India

HEA: Humanitarian Emergency Affairs

ICM: Integrated Crop Management

INGO: International Non-governmental Organisation

INR: Indian Rupee (1 INR = 0.013 USD)

MNREGS: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

MSP: Minimum Support Price

NCRB: National Crime Records Bureau

NDMA: National Disaster Management Authority

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NRM: Natural Resources Management

OBC: Other Backward Class

OPHI: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative

PAR: Pressure and Release

PDS: Public Distribution System

RTI: Right to Information

SC: Scheduled Castes

SDMA: State Disaster Management Authority

ST: Scheduled Tribes

UNDP: United National Development Programme

VFLP: Vidarbha Farmers Livelihood Project

WHO: World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Summary

This thesis investigates how droughts, commonly perceived as highly complex and context-specific phenomena, are socially constructed via emergency claims (Rubenstein 2015), and what the socio-political implications of such a process are to groups who experience it. My field work sites were two villages in the rustic outskirts of Yavatmal, a predominantly agrarian district in the Indian state of Maharashtra, where I collected extensive qualitative data from farmers, government and NGO representatives in the period July–August 2019. In this introductory chapter I set the background for my project: the first section gives an overview of drought in India and Maharashtra; the second summarises my intellectual concerns; the third outlines my main research questions, and the fourth lays out the broad structure of the thesis and its scope.

Drought in India

According to India's Ministry of Water Resources, 68% the country's geographic area is prone to drought in varying extents. Historically, multiple regions in India have witnessed severe droughts. From 1901 to 2010, about 17% were drought years in India, and they had detrimental effects on agriculture, water resources, food security, economy and social life (Udmale et al 2014a). Some of these led to terrible famines causing massive loss of human lives, the most infamous one being the well-documented Bengal famine of 1943 which killed around 4 million Indians (Government of India 2009). Though a drought intensifying into a large-scale famine

situation has not been documented in the post-independence[1] era, the country remains highly vulnerable to drought as far as hydrometeorological variations are concerned. Of late, India has been experiencing widespread drought every year since 2015, with the exception of 2017. In April 2019, 42% of India's land area faced drought, approximately four times the geographic extent of drought the previous year (Tripathi 2019).

Maharashtra is among the most drought-prone Indian states, facing drought every consecutive year. A study on hydroclimatic disturbance in 634 districts in India found that at least 133 of these 634 districts face drought almost every year, with Maharashtra as one of the hotspots (Sharma et al 2018). In 2015, over 23,000 villages in the state were affected; it worsened in 2016 with 29,000 villages being declared drought-hit. In 2018, the drought affected 20,000 villages. Most of these villages fall in the two regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada (Grey 2019). Of the 4,518 villages affected by drought in 2019, 3,150 were in the Vidarbha region that houses the district of Yavatmal (Deshpande 2019). Drought, therefore, has been a permanent feature of India's agrarian landscape, and it seems as though it is here to stay — there is a high likelihood of increased droughts (in terms of area affected, frequency, and severity) in India in the near future (2010–39) (Bisht et al 2018).

Featuring prominently among the so-called 'natural disasters' that are classified as slow-onset, droughts have often had extreme impacts on large populations over extended periods of time (FAO 2019). Of the 68% net sown area that is drought-prone in India, 33% is chronically drought-prone, receiving less than 750mm rainfall per annum (Government of India 2009). What are the effects of droughts? Maharashtra's rural farmers classified the impacts of droughts on their lives and livelihoods into (i) economic impacts (reduced crop yield and livestock production, loss of employment) (ii) social impacts (distress migration, poor health and malnutrition, conflicts for water and hopelessness and a sense of loss) and (iii) environmental

[1] India achieved independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

impacts (rising temperatures, pasture–forest degradation, poor water quality, damage to fish-habitat and wildlife and groundwater depletion) (Udmale et al 2014b). There have been multiple responses to these effects, but the most visible has been the issue of farmer suicides. Research has shown a direct correlation between instance of drought and high suicide rates.[2]

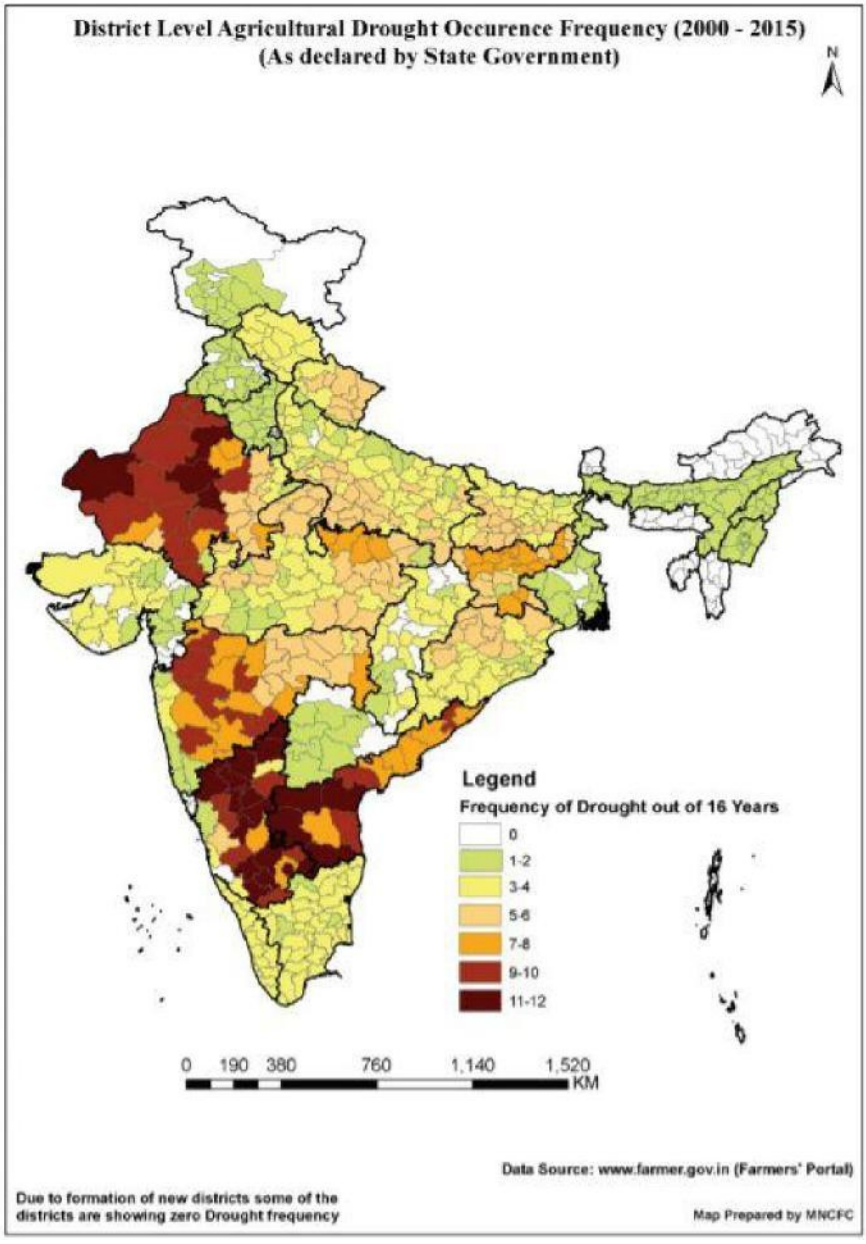

Fig 1: Drought-prone districts in India (2000-2015). Source: Drought Manual 2016

[2] **Tamma Carleton demonstrated using data over 47 years that climate fluctuations —especially temperature —significantly influenced suicide rates in India (2017). This effect takes place "only during India's agricultural growing season, when heat also lowers crop yields."**

In 1986, Sahebrao Karpe from Yavatmal District, Maharashtra was the first farmer to end his life due to agrarian distress (D'Souza 2017). More than three decades later in 2019, Maharashtra reported 2,808 farmer suicides, higher than the 2,716 recorded in 2018. The number stood at 2,917 in 2017, 3,063 in 2016 and 3,263 in 2015 (Gangan 2019). As the state government released the data on farmer suicides early this year after a gap of three years, an RTI filed by activist Shakheel Ahmed revealed that a total of 15,356 farmers had committed suicide between 2013 and 2018 in Maharashtra (Upadhyaya 2019). Further details revealed that in just two months (from Jan 1 to Feb 28, 2019) 396 farmers had committed suicide. The highest was recorded in Amravati district with 144 farmer suicides and among the cities, Yavatmal had the most farmer suicides (40). A total of 10,349 persons involved in the farming sector (consisting of 5,763 farmers/cultivators and 4,586 agricultural labourers) have committed suicides in the year 2018, accounting for 7.7% of the total suicide victims (1,34,516) in the country (NCRB 2019).

What are the features of the existing landscape of response to this devastating phenomenon? Provisions for the management of disasters in India are guided by the Disaster Management Act that was passed in 2005. The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare (DACFW), the nodal agency for drought management in the country released a Drought Management Plan in 2016 drawing out responsibilities of different departments for mitigation, preparedness for drought and relief measures (Mishra 2018). When drought hits the states, the respective state governments submit situation reports to the Central Government[3] for allocation of resources to respond to drought. As soon as the drought is declared, relief and response measures begin. At the direction of the State, districts prepare contingency plans to manage drought. Relief measures generally consist of crop contingency plans, crop insurance, direct cash transfer, relief employment under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employee Guarantee

[3] **However, the latest Manual for Drought Management (guidelines released by the central government to manage droughts across the country) has made the criteria for fund allocation to states very stringent. A State government can ask for funds only if the districts meet the stringent parameters for 'severe drought.' For example, Yavatmal, with severe rain deficit and crop loss still would fall under 'moderate' drought category and thus ineligible to receive the Central Government's assistance.**

Act[4] (MNREGA) and other funds, water resource management, provision of drinking water, food security through Public Distribution Systems (PDS), gratuitous assistance, waivers and concessions, fodder and camps for cattle and promotion of health and hygiene (Government of India 2009). Many drought-affected districts of India are also among the most underdeveloped areas (according to measures like the UNDP's Human Development Index, Indian government's Niti Aayog Aspirational districts[5] and OPHI's Multidimensional Poverty Index). Consequently, multiple grassroots aid NGOs (India has over 3 million registered NGOs) work in these areas towards various 'goals' of development (Ashraf et al 2014). Therefore, drought becomes a site where human suffering exists alongside interventions of humanitarian agents including NGOs and government entities, functioning through various logics and frames of classification, legitimacy and effectiveness.

Theoretical premise

In this section I give a brief overview of the broad theoretical premise of my project; a detailed conceptual framework is given in Chapter Two. The foundational question I grapple with is, how does one make sense of drought as a polyvalent phenomenon? In a bid to answer it, I discuss the empirical validity of the multiple possible enquiries of drought: as a primarily hydroclimatic question (Kallis 2008), a disaster management question (Crisis Management Plan 2006, Government of India 2016), a phenomenological question (Williams 1998) or a justice question that calls for a closer examination of power and inequalities (Sun et al 2018). These questions are located in the terrains of debate between the realist and social constructivist schools, with scholarly analysis occupying various positions along a spectrum that is marked by these reference points. An overwhelming majority of such scholarship has viewed

[4] A labour law enacted by India in 2005 to ensure livelihood security in rural areas by guaranteeing households at least 100 days of wage employment (unskilled manual work) per financial year.

[5] According to Niti Aayog(the policy think tank of the Government of India), these districts (a total of 115) were selected based on a composite index that ranked them on the basis of poverty, health and nutrition, education status and deficient infrastructure (Niti Aayog 2018).

hydrometeorological phenomena such as droughts as 'disasters,' though the use and implications of the term has been well-critiqued, as I shall later elaborate. However, I employ the term 'disaster' as I formulate my theoretical premise here, since the sociology of disasters has been a relatively well-established disciplinary branch as opposed to the specific sense in which I use emergencies here[6].

Historically, disasters have been studied from various schools of thought. In the latter half of the 20th century, adherents to a realist paradigm, viewed disasters through a structural functionalist lens, as disruptive events which prevented "all or some of the essential functions of the society" (Fritz 1961, p 655). This way of thinking was marked by a conceptualisation of disaster as objective and exogenous to society (Tierney 2007). Following this came a development paradigm, which viewed disasters as more than merely the product of 'natural' objective causes and reframed it more as a result of 'underdevelopment'; most disaster problems were "unsolved development problems" (Wijkman and Timberlake 1984). This marked the shift towards social constructivism, which continued to dominate disaster studies in the twenty-first century as well (Sun et al 2018). Subsequently, there arose a vulnerability paradigm that furthered the social constructivist approach that was marked by the milestone Pressure and Release (PAR) Model which configured vulnerability as "determined by social systems and power, not by natural forces" (Blaikie et al 1994, p.7). Later, the justice paradigm made its appearance in disaster debates, featuring environmental justice and Science and Technology Studies (STS); for example, effects of climate change were being unequally distributed among those populations who had little to do with the cause of climate change (see Marino 2015). However, the realist view still remains remarkably resilient in disaster studies (Sun et al 2018). Against the backdrop of these theoretical tensions between realist and constructivist approaches towards understanding disasters, my project aims to advance Williams' revised constructionist

[6] **While I acknowledge the significant conceptual overlap between disasters and emergencies, my primary focus throughout this thesis would be on the concept of emergencies. The exceptions are when I refer to specific references or empirical sources that discuss 'disaster' and I draw from them conceptually to talk about emergencies.**

perspective that strives to avoid the three traps of “strong constructionism” (Dickens 1996, p.73): ignoring (a) the phenomenological process of experience and its mediated nature, and (b) power imbalances involved in these ‘constructions’ and (c) the existence of a ‘reality’ independent of our epistemological claims (1998).

Having situated my project within the broader social constructivist approaches and more specifically, Williams’ revised constructionist school, I now examine the multiple ways in which droughts are socially constructed *via* an explicit focus on droughts as emergencies. As a product of both ‘natural’ unleashing events as well as a range of socially endogenous causes and effects (Albala–Bertrand 2000), droughts are often categorized as disasters, crises, and emergencies. However, these classifications are not always synonymous — they mean and effect distinct processes, as my empirical analysis reveals. Though ‘disaster’ often conveys that the harm has already happened, an ‘emergency’ conveys imminent harm that could be reduced or prevented by human action, and these definitions are frequently "interconnected, interdependent and overlap" (Al-Dahash et.al 2016). I focus on the concept of emergency in my argument, as I consider it best captures the features of droughts both as a crisis (an unexpected disruption embodying severe risk and requiring urgent decisions) as well as a disaster (sudden, unforeseen events that have *already happened* causing loss of life, property and livelihoods)(Al-Dahash 2016). An emergency has been understood as a serious and unexpected circumstance that has already started a negative outcome and calls for immediate action measures. For instance, the United Nations considers drought as "among the most devastating of natural hazards" that could lead to an emergency. Drought has often been declared as an emergency by governments of countries such as Namibia (2019), Angola (2019), El Salvador (2018) and others. My thesis argues that drought *becomes* an emergency through “emergency claims” made by various actors (Rubenstein 2015).

Rubenstein and Saward (2006) form the point of departure for my analysis of emergency claim-making about drought. In the humanitarian space — the political locus of the drought — humanitarian agents including INGOs, NGOs and government representatives claim that the 'uncertainty' and 'actionability' associated with droughts mandate them to be considered as an emergency, and to a lesser extent, a disaster. I question this categorisation of drought as a humanitarian emergency, where it is framed as a phenomenon involving both a "rapid negative divergence" from as well as a return to the (possibly 'improved') *status quo ante* (Rubenstein 2015). My empirical data from small and marginal farmers in rural Yavatmal, who have been experiencing drought first-hand over the past decades, challenge both the 'uncertainty' as well as the 'actionability' surrounding droughts and reject the claims of humanitarian agents that the drought is an emergency on the grounds of chronicity of experience, precarity of life and inevitability of occurrence — aspects that I will elaborate later on.

I build on Rubenstein's theory in two important ways in this thesis. Firstly, I use the idea of social frames (Benford and Snow 2000) to further scrutinize emergency claims. Though emergency claims function as a valid point of departure, its analysis reveals how various actors endorse, employ and effect their preferred discursive framings (Tierney 2018). It becomes imperative to study how such framing works — including its various processes and features, and I aim to examine this in my chapters. Secondly, I note that a mere exposition of drought as having different social constructivist manifestations may imply a de-politicized 'level playing field' where multiple processes of action and emergency claim-making compete for priority. I argue that it is not enough to conclude that emergency politics *exists*, it needs to be bolstered with a lens of disaster justice (Verchick 2012) so that it uncovers the nature and direction of the extant inequalities that Rubenstein talks about. As a concept, disaster justice provides insights to theorize the associations between social inequalities, structural features of domination and exercise of power (Parthasarathy 2018). It helps put into perspective what is lost or gained when the drought is categorised as an emergency or a disaster; within its limited scope, my

thesis aims to discuss these troubling questions from the vantage point of sociology of disasters and the anthropology of humanitarianism.

In a nutshell, my thesis tries to unearth the politics and discursive practices involved in the social construction of particular phenomena as emergencies and disasters, and its implications. In the chapters that follow, I discuss the polyvalence of the category of emergencies through the case study of drought in India's Yavatmal district, and its effect on the emerging emergency politics. I arrive at the latter through an analysis of contesting emergency claims, which are claims made by groups or individuals about the character, causes and consequences of the emergency (Rubenstein 2015). This brings under duress the very category of emergencies, and by extension, the drought when claimants make contesting and sometimes contradictory claims about the very nature, causes and consequences of drought — is one 'frame' of the drought more valid than another? Through distinct, interconnected practices (Mol 2002) such as coping mechanisms of farmers, emergency response strategy of humanitarian NGOs and disaster management mechanisms of the government, I try to make sense of drought as an uncertain, polyvalent phenomenon which is a complicated fit in the category of humanitarian emergencies.

Research Questions

The central research question of my thesis is: *How does emergency claim-making contribute to the understanding of drought as a humanitarian emergency in India's Yavatmal?* This question will be explored through the three empirical chapters where I attempt to trace the nature, development and implications of claim-making and emergency politics. These ideas would be fleshed out on the basis of two guiding sub-questions:

(i) How do contesting emergency claims made by small and marginal farmers and humanitarian agents facilitate the *becoming* of drought as an emergency?

(ii) As the drought becomes an emergency, how does the resultant emergency politics engage with the issue of justice?

Structure of the thesis

After a brief overview of the conceptual framework and methodology in the second chapter, I delve into an in-depth analysis of empirical data collected through my field work in Yavatmal in July and August 2019. In these core chapters (3, 4, and 5) I discuss how emergency claims constitute multiple versions of the droughts, ranging from one that frames it as a disaster to one that frames it as an un-exceptional, chronic condition of life, as well as the nature and implications of emergency politics.

The first chapter traces how humanitarian agents in Yavatmal participate in the process of emergency claim-making, and what its effects are. I note that claims by such entities frame the drought in two distinct ways — both as a disaster and an emergency. As a disaster, the drought is framed as a 'backward-looking' category, highlighting the 'natural' causes that underlie it and a need to 'manage' it. As an emergency, the drought is framed as an exceptional event marked by the gravity of threat, temporal urgency and a window of opportunity for positive intervention. I argue that such inconsistencies in the definition and treatment of drought are reflective of the contested categories of disasters and emergencies, calls into question the efficacy of particular responses to the same as well as the assigning of culpability to the farmer.

The second chapter of my thesis examines how rural India's farmers participate in the process of emergency claim-making. I analyse the rejection of the 'uncertainty' and 'actionability' traits (Al-Dahash et al 2016) of the drought by Yavatmal's farmers, which leads to an apparent rejection of the emergency claim that the drought is a humanitarian emergency. This is presented through an examination of three articulations of their lived experience, namely chronicity, precarity and inevitability associated with droughts. I argue that Yavatmal's small

and marginal farmers use particular discursive frames to shape an alternative reality of the phenomenon of drought that openly contradicts the framing of drought by humanitarian agents.

The third chapter analyses the nature and features of emergency politics that emerges out of the contesting emergency claims shaping drought narratives in Yavatmal. The making and rejection of emergency claims by humanitarian agents, and small and marginal farmers, respectively, frame the drought as a conception of the mind, an operational imperative, and as a tractable disaster. Through an examination of what is at stake for the people who are directly affected by droughts, I argue that the emergency politics transforms the humanitarian space containing drought, from one that is grounded on vulnerability and inequality to one that exacerbates these inequalities. I conclude that emergency politics needs to be bolstered by the notion of disaster justice in order to better capture this transformation. These empirical chapters are followed by a brief conclusion where I highlight my key findings, note the key contributions this thesis makes, as well as directions for future research.

Research scope

The limited scope of this thesis has necessitated certain conscious inclusions as well as omissions in terms of the themes and domains for study. Within the field of disasters, I have focussed specifically on drought, omitting the category of quick onset disasters like floods, earthquakes, cyclones, and so on. I have also excluded from my analysis the broad category of complex humanitarian emergencies, which are almost exclusively the result of overt political phenomena for ultimate institutional aims (Albala-Bertrand 2000). Additionally, within the broader category of emergencies, my thesis examines exclusively those that are frequently associated with humanitarian action through NGOs and government bodies, excluding such emergencies that require military or diplomatic interventions.

My interest lies primarily in the socio-political discursive practices that frame the phenomenon of drought under different categories like disaster, emergency, and everyday practices by actors

directly involved in these exercises. Though broader economic, psychological, legal and climatological disciplinary discourses are bound to add value, within my conceptual confines I have deliberately avoided linking these with my project, except when essential. Methodologically, I have restricted my primary time window to 2015–2018, as my work is chiefly a retrospective study where informants give recollective responses about various aspects of the most recent, severe droughts. Though India has multiple drought-prone regions like Bundelkhand and Marathwada, my work focusses on Vidarbha, in three villages where I was able to get access to via the NGO I worked with. My attention is entirely on the small and marginal male farmers' experience of the drought; gender, class and caste dimensions of the drought experience fall outside the scope of this thesis. Lastly, it remains a wholly qualitative study that has relied on anthropological principles; it does not claim to be a full-fledged ethnography, considering the paucity of time.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Summary

This section gives an overview of (a) the conceptual framework within which I trace the key concepts I use to anchor the idea of 'social constructedness' of an emergency and its politics and (b) the research methodology I employed, with information on the participants, process and challenges involved.

Conceptual framework

Rooted in the anthropology of humanitarianism and the sociology of disasters, I employ three main concepts — those of emergency claims, social frames and emergency politics to further my argument. The conceptual framework has four sections: the first reviews the category of emergencies and its internal inconsistencies; the second discusses themes of humanitarianism and how it endorses the concept of the emergency; the third traces how emergencies have come to be socially constructed, and the fourth describes how emergency politics engages with the

justice question. Though emergency and disaster are often considered synonyms (Beckett 2013), my focus remains on the concept of emergency as noted in the introduction, and I distinguish these terms in the following section. However, as both the terms frequently share the themes of disruption, harm and corrective action, I do draw from scholarship on 'disaster' as well, with reasonable reservations.

(i) The conundrum of categories

As mentioned in the introduction, there exists little consensus regarding the appropriateness of the vocabulary of classification around emergencies. There has been broad consensus that emergencies and disasters are somewhat different, with the former considered as a broader category that includes "disasters, catastrophes and smaller disruptive events" (Alexander 2005). Emergencies are marked by (a) a nature of urgency; (b) being unanticipated and imminent; (c) creating damage; and (d) meriting immediate action (Al-Dahash et al 2016). In essence, the emergency has a potential to transform itself into a disaster, and it is the *actionability* that sets it apart. Viewed through this lens, a phenomenon like drought is "inherently an emergency situation" (Ibid). Emergencies and disasters do not happen in a vacuum, and are marked by their own cultural histories, power and security scenarios (Aaltola 2012), they differ in the aspects of unexpectedness and 'what can be done.' However, scholarship also notes that emergencies are not just rare, unpredictable exceptions that occur in an otherwise stable trajectory of life. For many, "life is lived in a state of emergency in which situations endure on the verge of emergency" (Adey et al 2015). Drought as a phenomenon that primarily concerns vulnerable rural populations draws from both these categories, and wrestles with their boundaries in its preoccupation with, as I argue, 'living on the verge of emergency.' My thesis examines how drought, by virtue of its slow onset, mass impact and sense of urgency fits into these categories (Fig. 2), what it takes for such a 'fitting into,' and what its implications are.

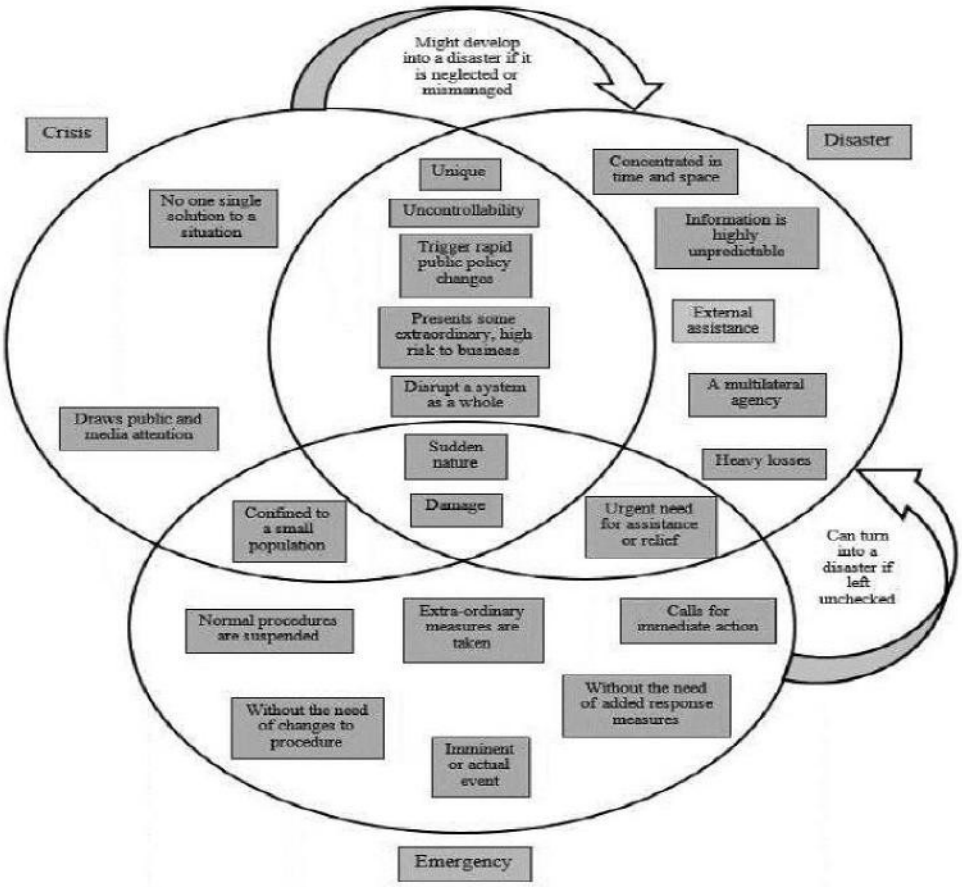

Fig. 2: Set Diagram for disaster, crisis and emergency (Al-Dahash et al 2016)

The difficulty in reaching a consensus on what exactly is an emergency spills over to the question of scale and how one responds/should respond to an emergency; scholarship is ambivalent on this as well. While some classify the global outbreak of the H1N1 pandemic as "a real emergency" (Caduff 2015), others illustrate as emergency a situation when you discover an intruder in your house at midnight (Jorgustin 2012). While one perspective towards emergency responses emphasise "saving life and preventing or minimising serious injury," (Adey et al 2015), another argues for how emergency relief needs to focus just as much on improving the long-term quality of people's lives (Eade et al 1994). While one approach notes the short interval of time that governs emergency action (Anderson 2016), another expands the time

frame to incorporate “chronic emergencies” into the conversation (Munslow et al 2010). Emergencies are usually unanticipated (Al-Dahash et al 2016) and exhibit a feature of being a "result of uncertainty" (Porfiriev 1998), but on the other hand emergencies can and should be planned for (Alexander 2005). Does an emergency precede a disaster, or does an emergency mean a disaster? A common opinion is that an emergency could lead to a disaster if left unchecked by human intervention (Jorgustin 2012), it is also seen as the disaster itself (Alexander 2005). This contentious conceptual backdrop reveals how establishing an emergency often involves adhering to or fulfilling of multiple, and sometimes contradictory logics. However, in the specific context of drought I adopt the definition of emergency as a serious and unexpected circumstance that has already started a negative outcome and calls for immediate action measures (Rubenstein 2015), in a sense embedding a disaster as a *constituent* of the concept of emergency.

(ii) Humanitarian moorings

The idea of emergencies as ‘sites of action’ is deeply rooted in the language of humanitarianism. Humanitarianism has multiple definitions, including “one way to ‘do good’ or to improve the aspects of the human condition by focusing on suffering and saving lives in times of emergency” (Ticktin 2014). It remains a field of study that has broadly been viewed from different theoretical perspectives, engaging with both humanitarian action as well as the conceptual framework itself (Christie 2015). There have been efforts to view humanitarian action from two major theories, problem-solving theory and critical theory. The former is concerned more about whether the instances of human suffering called for "outside intervention to alleviate it" and what those interventions could be (Bellamy 2003). On the other hand, critical theory is concerned more about the underlying structural causes and looks to execute "alterations of established relations of power" that were at the root of human suffering (Christie 2015). I aim to

critically situate drought in the category of humanitarian emergencies, the response to which lies at the intersection of both these theories — the specificity of interventions, as well as the structural issues that exacerbate it.

The concept of humanitarian emergencies are based on modernist assumptions, with the key ideas being those of security and corresponding technologies of rescue and protection (Duffield 2015). Humanitarian emergencies marry the 'humanitarian' with the 'emergency,' qualifying the latter as a site of action or a window of opportunity where the humanitarian impulse — "an innate, altruistic urge to assist fellow human beings who are suffering" — are in action (Slim 1997). Emergencies concerned with 'natural' disasters are perceived as "random accidents or unnatural occurrences that originated outside of normal society." However, postmodernism found a more 'internal' approach towards emergencies by identifying the "unstable social-ecological interface" that was being continuously jeopardized by human activity (Duffield 2015). This leaning from modernist to postmodernist perspectives is also inclusive of the economic aspect of emergencies, from social–-democratic/Marxist towards neoliberal. The un-naturality and instability creates a phase of uncertainty, which is activated when there occurs a "disappearance of the cleavage between the scopes of activities in which actors and structures are used to operating" (Gilbert 1998).

The humanitarian response to emergencies is split between relief and development, a key debate viewed as a modernist dichotomy within the realm of disaster management (Duffield 2015), where "most disaster problems are unsolved development problems" (Wijkman and Timberlake, 1984, p. 233). Aid NGOs like Medicines Sans Frontiers consider emergencies as a "classic form of action" and "romantic points of reference," and claim that "disasters — not development — lie at the heart of the organisation" (Redfield 2013). INGOs like World Vision claim that they are shifting from their old strategy that maintained emergency response and development as separate, towards a new one that integrates disaster management and

development (World Vision International 2019). How this relationship between emergency and development, where each potentially constitute, contradict and compound each other, unravels in a drought context is of interest to my work.

(iii) Social construction of an emergency

How are emergencies socially constructed? Building on the overview of the foundational theoretical debates around this theme which I provided in the introductory chapter, I now elaborate on claim-making as the underlying constructive process. The idea of representative claim-making has been advanced by Michael Saward, who proposes representative claims to be highly variable claims that denote shifting power relationships and operate across boundaries. They are made, received and judged both democratically and undemocratically, and this constitutes a certain kind of politics (Saward 2010). The representative claim bases itself on the familiar idea of when "an individual or a collective stands for, speaks for or acts for, another" (Ibid). The form of the representative claim has been elucidated as constituting a maker, a subject, an object, a referent, and an audience. A general form of the representative claim takes the following shape: a maker of representations (M) puts forward a subject (S) which stands for an object (O) that is related to a referent (R) and is offered to an audience (A) (Ibid). Two points are to be noted here: firstly, the makers of the claim could attempt to represent either themselves, or another entity; secondly, the claim is directed at the audience, and they may receive, accept, reject or ignore them. In a thematic vein, other studies have described claim-making as a political action via which groups (like citizens) pursue access to public resources, featuring underlying beliefs, expectations and politics (Kruks-Wisner et al 2018).

Advancing these ideas, my preliminary point of departure would be the notion of emergency claims. Jennifer Rubenstein proposes emergency claims to be claims that "a particular (kind of) situation is an emergency, made by particular actors against particular background conditions

to particular audiences, which in turn accept, ignore, or reject" those claims (Rubenstein 2015). She notes the three main aspects that mark emergency claims: firstly, claims are deliberate pronouncements; secondly, they have deliberate directions (towards resources, etc.); thirdly, they can be judged (in terms of normative validity, etc.) (Ibid). These claims are considered as claims mainly about value, threat, and human agency, and constitute 'emergency politics' — a sphere of politics comprising of multiple actors "making and not making, accepting, and rejecting, a wide range of overlapping and competing emergency claims" (Ibid). According to Rubenstein, claimants use various channels of communication (verbal, textual, visual) to convince their audience that certain "(i) person(s), thing(s), or state(s) of affairs are valuable, but (ii) they are threatened with imminent harm or destruction, yet (iii) human agency is capable of preventing or reversing at least some of that harm or destruction" (2015). Based on the criteria of value, threat and human agency, it can be inferred that Rubenstein's emergency claimants execute three significant actions: firstly, they claim legitimacy as a "competent judge" of an emergency by virtue of them being a subject; secondly, they claim the degree of association between the referent (the situation being described) and the object (a 'true' emergency as defined by the value-threat-agency framework); and thirdly, they engage in claim-making against a background of impressions, institutions and assumptions (which could determine the legitimacy of their subject positions, nature of claims, and reception by audiences).

I use the concept of 'framing' as a tool to advance Rubenstein's notion of 'claiming,' in that it provides conceptual depth and analytical clarity. Social frames have been used by sociologists for long, as systems of interpretation (Goffman 1974) that help individuals to situate, recognize, discover and classify experiences within and outside their life spaces. Later sociologists have used the exercise of 'framing' to denote an active, processual phenomenon within groups engaged in social movements, which includes creation of 'interpretive frames' that may not only be dissimilar from but also dispute current frames (Benford and Snow 2000). Framing by one

group, hence, could be met by counter-framing by another, entailing an articulation that aims to neutralize the 'version of reality' or interpretive framework provided by the first group (Benford 1987). Judith Butler notes how frames "are themselves operations of power" and are effectively "political apparatuses" as she contends how frames seek to "contain, convey and determine what is seen," but sometimes it "does not quite contain what it conveys" (Butler 2009). At once a strategic as well as a discursive process, framing is further broken down into diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing activities, as well as multiple frame alignment tactics (Benford and Snow 2000). I use social frames and its subsets, therefore, as a useful tool to deepen the study of the nature and types of emergency claims that constitute emergency politics.

(iv) Emergency politics

Though I employ emergency politics in the specific sense Rubenstien employs, the core idea arises from a sociological understanding of disasters, which views disasters as producing politics and politics as producing disasters (Guggenheim 2014). This is embedded in the notion of social constructedness of disasters; a physical event which is a hazard *becomes* a disaster primarily due to its social effects (Perry 2007). "An earthquake happening in a region where no humans live is not a disaster, it is just a trembling of the earth" (Guggenheim 2014). Such an understanding classifies a disaster as an exaggerated social *effect* of a normal physical event (Woodhouse 2011); this sets the ground for charting power relations linked with the unravelling of such events. The declaration of emergency by governments, "operates on the tacit understanding that emergencies are moments of great danger that necessitate an urgent response" (Beckett 2013). This leads to a suspension of powers and a sense of absolute legitimization reflecting the fact that emergencies and its declarations often correlate with servicing of existing power hierarchies (Ibid). As embodiments of power, the interactions

between state capacity and democracy "shape human vulnerability in natural disasters" (Thung-Hong 2015).

This sphere of power relations that govern emergencies draws from the allied concept of disaster politics. Disaster politics is concerned with the "interaction of social and political actors and framing institutions in preparing for and responding to extreme natural events, and suggests that the disaster events and their management are part of unfolding political histories" (Pelling 2010). Rubenstein's framework seems to be building on Pelling's, attributing the tool of emergency claim-making to pry open his 'interactions', to highlight the various directions and dimensions of the politics involved. Disaster politics helps make sense of disasters as critical political moments; furthering Pelling's observations, I note that disaster politics could either generate *minimal* political impact, when political elites effect a strict return to *status quo ante* of the vulnerable, or generate *decisive* political impact, when disasters change the very composition of political regimes by becoming as a 'critical juncture' that alters political trajectory for the better. The political outcomes of disasters are path-dependent, in that they are heavily determined by both pre-disaster precariousness as well as severity of loss (Ibid). This is important for my work as I track how the drought experience shapes farmers' political 'interactions' as well.

What does a return to *status quo ante* mean? The question summarises the crux of my analysis of the emergency politics, and I argue that it is manifested in four interlinked themes: (a) blame, (b) passivity, (c) vulnerability, and (d) resilience. Firstly, an explanation of the notion of blame by Jasper et al, while acknowledging the blurred boundary between human culpability and "natural disasters" due to political and cultural framings, nevertheless concludes that the politics of blame is largely marked by an essential triad of "villain-victim-hero" (2020). Secondly, the precarity experienced by the rural farmers, I observe, forces them to prioritise their subsistence over organised political resistance in response to a politics of blame. As Scott

notes, the lack of alternatives and the difficulty of revolt leads to a *forced* choice: a dominant measure of passive adaptation (1976). In line with Scott's insights on South Asian farmers, I observe that his explanations for political passivity, which essentially marks a retreat of Yavatmal's marginal farmer from organised political resistance, remains valid, albeit to varying extents. More recently, Pelling observes that pressing concerns of extreme poverty are extremely likely to keep people from organized forms of political action following natural disasters (2010). Thirdly, vulnerability features as a prominent frame within the sphere of emergency politics. Recognizing this dimension, international humanitarian organisations take into consideration the social, political and economic processes that co-produce a disaster, alongside so-called natural factors (Douglas 2018). Both the global frameworks of humanitarian action surrounding disaster risk reduction — the Hyogo framework (2005-2015) as well as the Sendai framework (2015-2030) stress heavily on the ideas of human vulnerability to risks posed by disasters. Humanitarian strategies and models have emphasised the logic of disaster risk being a product of vulnerability and hazard. While hazard refers to the probability of occurrence of a potentially destructive natural event within a specified period of time, vulnerability has been defined as traits of an individual or collective in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (Wilhite 2000). The actual historic event, disaster, occurs "when a significant number of vulnerable people experience a hazard and suffer severe damage and/or disruption of their livelihood system in such a way that recovery is unlikely without external aid" (Blaikie et al 1994, p 45). These ideas are crystallized in the landmark PAR model (that has been subsequently critiqued and modified), which perceive the disaster as "the intersection of two opposing forces," highlighting both the pressures that people face due to their vulnerabilities , as well as the release that is needed to reduce the pressure, implying reduction of vulnerabilities (Fig 3.). Despite its limitations, the PAR model serve the important purpose of tracking critical social processes responsible for creation of vulnerability (Douglas 2018), extending the observation that disasters occur in political spaces (Cohen et al 2008).

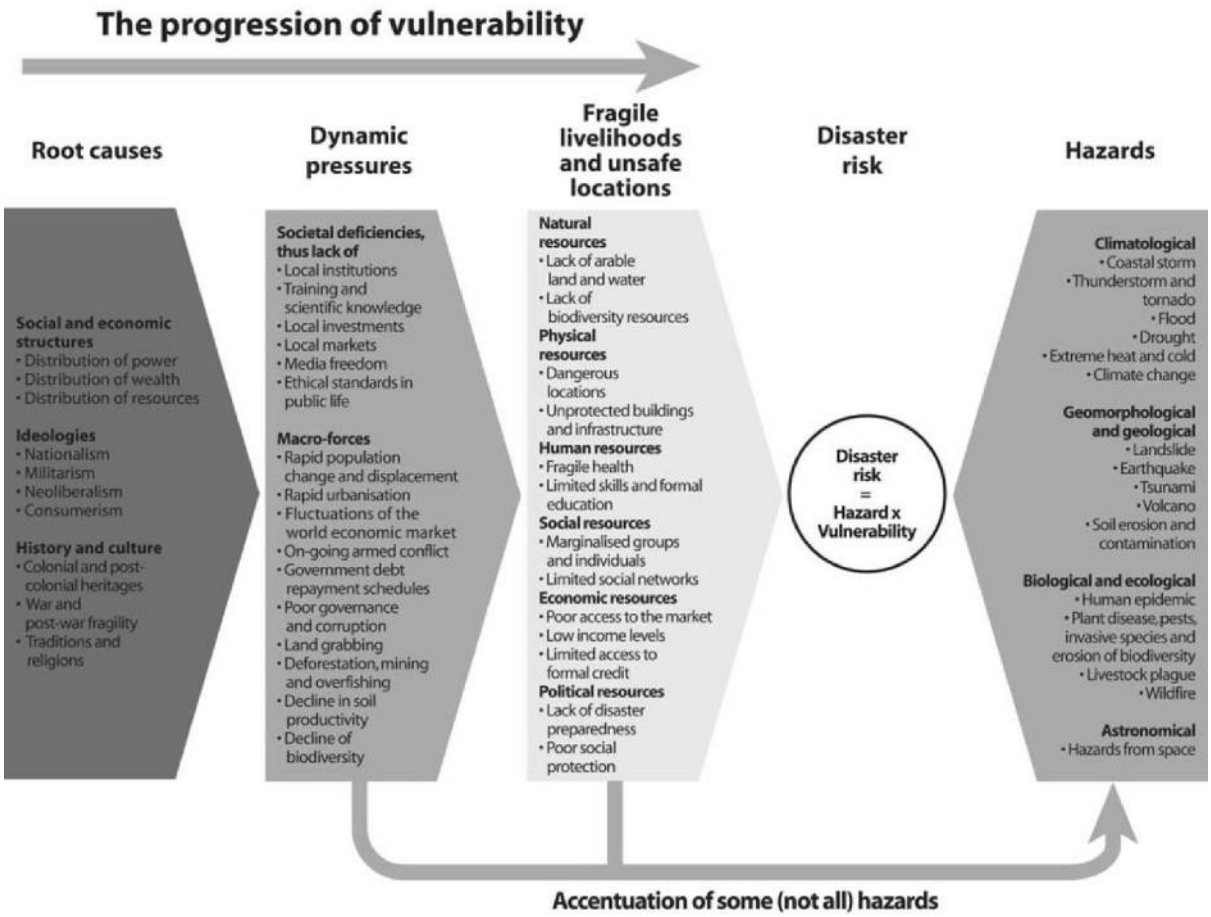

Fig 3: The Pressure and Release (PAR) Model, highlighting how vulnerability and hazards interact to create disaster risk (Blaikie et al 1994).

Lastly, I note that such efforts founded on the humanitarian imperative to ''do good' culminates in the emergence of the frame of resilience. Resilience is defined as the "ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from, and more successfully adapt to adverse events" (National Academies 2012). It is believed that enhanced resilience translates to better anticipation of disasters and consequently, improved planning that could minimise disaster losses — rather than waiting for expensive post-disaster reconstruction (Ibid). However, resilience remains a term that is at once highly evocative from a humanitarian action perspective, and vague from an academic point of view. In fact, sociologist Leah R Kimber goes on to point out how the UN,

while using the concept of resilience to legitimize its programming and priorities, also feels a need to maintain a vague definition of the same (2019). This vagueness, in local contexts, could lead to vague governmental strategies aimed at either improving resilience, or largely neglecting disaster risk reduction citing the (apparently) high resilience of certain populations (Parthasarathy 2018). I note two main risks associated with resilience, especially in conditions of chronic suffering. First, there exists a real risk of essentialising resilience, perhaps overriding or obfuscating concerns of value, threat and human agency (Rubenstein 2015) and thus contributing towards the normalizing of experiences of exceptional adversity. Secondly, the popular humanitarian motto to 'build back better' following disasters is rooted in claims of finding a "developmental potential for reconstruction of social and political as well as physical infrastructure" in affected places (Pelling 2010). In many cases, this transforms into a logic of legitimization for the (perhaps unjust) presence and performance of humanitarian agents in disaster settings.

Disaster justice

Why disaster justice? Disaster justice serves, I argue, as a lens that offers a justice–direction to better examine the effect of emergency politics in exacerbating existing inequalities (Rubenstein 2015). The concept links the correlated experiences of structural vulnerability and disaster vulnerability, experiences of exclusion due to particular socio-political arrangements that govern disasters, and the consequent exacerbation of inequalities (Parthasarathy 2018). Founded on the proposition that disasters always occur in political spaces and demand efforts towards inclusion and equity, disaster justice has been portrayed as a "moral claim on governance, which arises from anthropogenic interventions in nature that incubate environmental crises and magnify their socially and spatially uneven impacts" (Douglas 2018). The idea of disaster justice was popularised by legal scholar Verchick, who used it to link both disasters and justice, referring to its social and political meanings.

Further, disaster justice is concerned more with governance than *just* disaster response, and thus justifies both its explicit focus on injustice suffered by social groups who have directly experienced disasters, and an implicit focus on inequality. Parthasarathy invites attention towards the potential of disaster justice to spotlight the abject living conditions, the subsequent heightened vulnerability, the unequal social and political arrangements and structural forms of domination (Parthasarathy 2018). An inclusive politics based on disaster justice could attract attention towards rights of citizens to make claims — emergency claims as far as Yavatmal's farmers are concerned — to (a) reduce patterns of vulnerability via the underlying social and spatial processes, (b) access participatory forms of disaster governance, and (c) enjoy the fruits of a just distribution of resources that would aid recovery (Douglas 2018).

Drought has been studied as a polyvalent phenomenon; climatologists have observed how multiple ways of knowing it has policy implications (Kohl et al 2016). Their study pointed out how scientific measures of drought are seldom value neutral, and how stakeholders pursue their political goals through specific framings of the drought. Furthering these arguments, I contend that the drought is a socially constructed phenomenon, with its multiple ontologies being constituted by frames (Butler 2009) and practices. The recognition of multiple ontologies of drought is necessary to flesh out an ideology of disasters that "uses disasters to legitimate certain political goals" (Guggenheim 2014). To this end, I note that a thorough examination of emergency politics via a lens of disaster justice is required, as it would greatly contribute to (a) minimise harm and (b) reduce the overt powers of individual rescuers (Adey et al 2015). Often, this requires moving beyond the paradigm of the 'state of exception,' and occupying a 'governance' question. This recent shift in understanding disaster politics thus foregrounds a longer-drawn process of equitable governance which acknowledges that phenomenon like drought are always *already* politicized (Douglas 2018). The legitimacy provided by emergency, founded on logics of urgency and immediate action, gets consolidated over a long term in the

case of long-drawn phenomena like droughts; this continuity produces an opacity that permits "strategic, economic and moral derogations" of whole populations (Pandolfi and Rousseau 2016).

Methodology

(i) Case study

My case study for this thesis was the drought in Vidarbha, which was studied respect to the various groups that were directly involved in the phenomenon. This included an INGO, an NGO, government officials as well as small and marginal farmers. A slow-onset disaster that had decisive effects on rural lives and livelihoods, the drought was selected due to its severity of impact, longevity, frequency of occurrence in this region, and complex management processes. This enabled me to study how emergency claims outlined its definition, causes and impact, and the nature and effect of an emergent emergency politics. This was a purposive choice made after taking into consideration factors like (a) familiarity with drought issues, (b) prior work experience in emergency response and disaster management, (c) easy access to distinct participant groups via the host NGO and (d) severity of drought in these locations in the past few years that made it the ideal site for examining emergency claim-making.

(ii) Location

The location for my study was Maharashtra, which had witnessed some of the worst droughts in India. Maharashtra is one of the large states in India, situated towards the west of India and has had four straight droughts declared since 2014. The state holds the region of Vidarbha, which is the site of a lion's share of farmer suicides in India. Yavatmal is one of the larger

districts in the region with a majority (88%) of its population depending on rainfed agriculture; my field work was conducted in two of its villages, namely Ghodkhindi and Shivni.

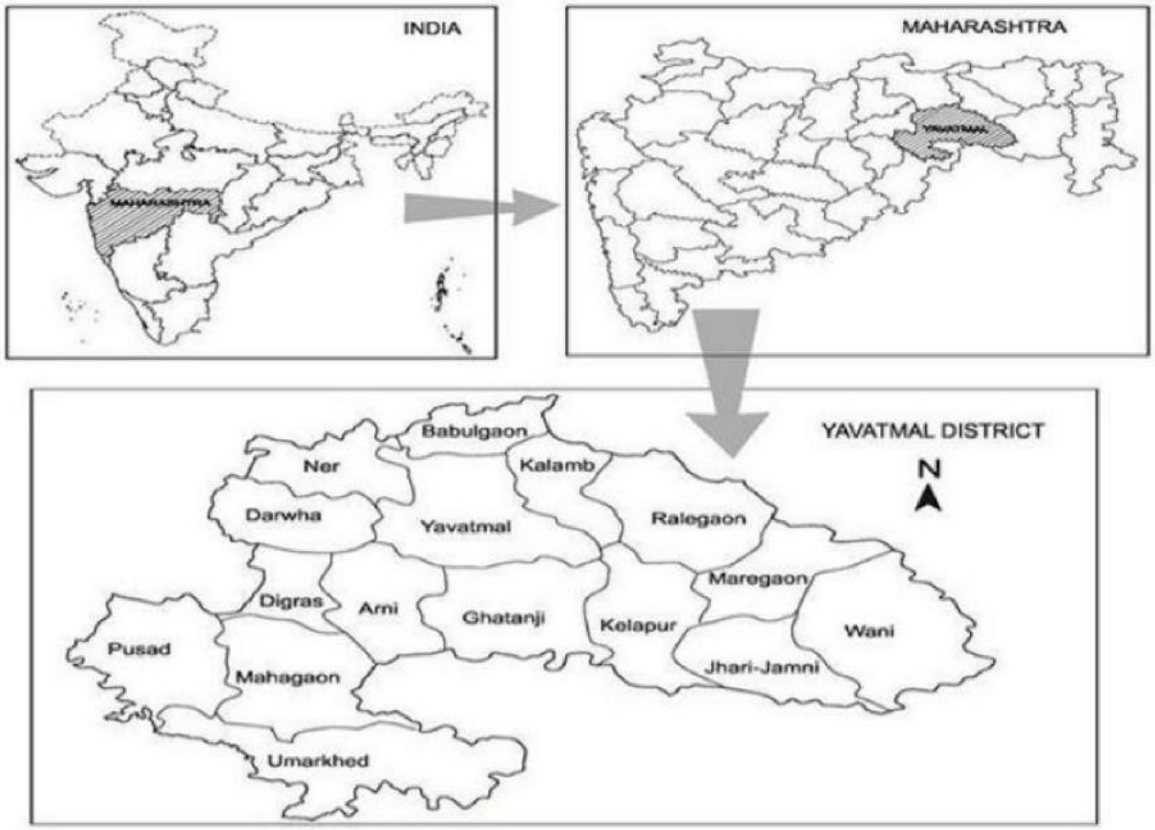

Fig 4: Map of Yavatmal, Maharashtra. (Source: Phaneendra 2015)

(iii) **Research participants**

Participants for my research included organizational representatives from both governmental and non-governmental bodies, apart from activists and people from Yavatmal's drought-hit villages, as given in Appendix 1.

Firstly, I studied two non-governmental organizations — World Vision India and Dilasa. The Indian arm of the INGO World Vision International, the former runs long-term project cycles in

underdeveloped regions, called Area Development Programmes (ADPs) which are mainly funded by foreign 'support offices.' The rationale for selecting this NGO for my research, therefore, was (a) Long-term project cycles, (b) Presence in multiple drought-prone locations, (c) Direct grassroots presence (d) Access/familiarity and (e) Operational and technical expertise in both 'routine' development and emergency response. Dilasa, on the other hand, was a local NGO established in 1994, chiefly funded by Indian corporate donors through government-mandated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects. Engaged in Natural Resource Management (NRM) initiatives, the NGO's stated goal was "to ensure food, water, livelihoods and income security together with a growing quality of life to vulnerable and disadvantaged communities on a sustainable and equitable basis" (Dilasa 2020). They run farmer's support centre, disseminate information on various Government schemes meant for the benefit of the farmers and rural population. The reasons for selecting this NGO we (a) local presence, (b) less focus on treating the drought as a disaster/emergency, (c) politically opinionated, and (d) locally sourced funds. The NGO respondents consisted of both field operations staff as well as in-house technical experts, sometimes blending both these areas of work.

Secondly, the farmers I interviewed hailed from the villages of Ghodkhindi and Shivni. I interviewed mostly adult male farmers, since most of the income burden of the household is perceived to fall on them,[7] and a small number of woman farmers and farm labourers. The farmers include those with operational holdings across the categories specified by the Indian Government: marginal (below 1 hectare), small (1-2 hectares), semi-medium (2-4 hectares), medium (4-10 hectares) and large (above 10 hectares) (GoI 2019). Apart from these landowning farmers, I also interviewed landless labourers who either worked for daily wages in the farms owned by others, or in factories or similar enterprises as unskilled labour on low

[7] This is perhaps reflected in the suicide rates — where female farmer suicide rates are considerably lower than male (Parida et al 2018). However, there could be further explanations for this, though 85% of India's rural women are engaged in agriculture, only about 13% own land (Basu et al 2020).

wages. Apart from the size of the operational holding, there were variations among farmers in terms of income, family size, level of education, and status in the village.

Thirdly, the government representatives whom I interviewed functioned in multiple levels, including Yavatmal district administration and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). The sample of respondents comprised a mix of local and national representatives, facilitating micro and macro perspectives on the issue. It included both decision makers and implementers, with representatives who located themselves in multiple interfaces — between the farmers, NGOs, activists, private sector and donors, media, government and international organisations. Some of the representatives were from Yavatmal, some from nearby districts (in the larger Vidarbha region), some from other parts of Maharashtra, and some from other parts of the country — all of them worked, in various capacities, on addressing the humanitarian emergency of droughts.

(iv) Time frame

Field work for this study was conducted in Yavatmal during July–August 2019. I focussed on the droughts witnessed in the region from 2015 to 2018, three years out of which two witnessed severe 'declared' droughts. Participants were requested to provide recollective data about the drought experience specific to this period, though some interviews also featured discussions about experiences prior to 2015.

(v) Empirical material

Entirely employing qualitative methods, bulk of my empirical material was sourced through detailed interviews with research participants and participant observation. I engaged in semi-structured interviews with INGO and NGO representatives, government officials and rural

farmers, probing their understanding of, involvement in and perspectives on drought. With rural farmers, I continued interviews till I reached a point of theoretical saturation, where the inflow of new information had effectively ceased. In my effort to build a thick description, I also was involved in extensive participant observation, attending multiple meetings between government officials and the public, NGO staff and rural farmers, and NGO coalition meetings that drew like-minded participants from across Yavatmal. Documents were also a source for extensive analysis, these included programme strategy documents, monitoring and evaluation reports, financial statements and research publications concerning World Vision India and Dilasa; policy guidance, legal documents, disaster management guidelines and technical overviews from the NDMA; sizeable media documentation of both the farmer and government perspectives on drought; and reports, strategy and publications by global organisations including the UN, WHO and the World Bank. The empirical material was transcribed, coded and categorised to flesh out patterns, agreements and contradictions and formed the basis for a critical 'frame' analysis.

(vi) Challenges

Some of the significant challenges I encountered over the course of this work included negotiating access, ensuring objectivity, language, positionality and ethical concerns.

(a) **Access**: Firstly, access to remote villages in rural Yavatmal was facilitated by World Vision India, since they had been working in the area for years and had a sound working relationship with the communities. However, access was affected both positively and negatively by this association as scholars have pointed out (Gooding 2013). Also, it was difficult to interview government representatives as their schedules and bureaucratic levels proved to be a challenge.

(b) **Objectivity**: Most of my interviews were with participants who had a certain kind of stake in their relationship with World Vision India, the organisation that was endorsing

my access. This meant that there could have been a possibility of responses being influenced by bias, as well as being aligned to the NGO's stances. While fully appreciative of the importance of being objective as a researcher, I was faced with the challenge of obtaining objective information in a location marked by asymmetries and inequalities (Moss 2001). Data was treated with an amount of deserving and necessary suspicion in contexts where beneficiaries of an NGO talked about the functioning of the same NGO, since there is a question of incentive. The government attitude, which largely maintains a disapproving approach towards NGOs, is likely to have influenced the responses of government representatives.

(0) Language: As a non-speaker of the native language *Marathi*, I had to rely on a local translator who was a native speaker of the language. This meant that there could have been minor slippages as no translation is perfect, and a risk of glossing over of cultural cues, non-verbal responses, semantic specificities and incidental mistakes. However, I arranged for key interview transcripts to be translated twice, by different translators, and I relied on my working knowledge of Hindi (which has substantial similarity to the local language) to minimise the effect of the language gap.

(a) Positionality: I was acutely aware of my positionality in these contexts, especially as a privileged 'other' hailing from a different cultural, linguistic, religious and educational background (Desai 2006). Though exhaustive lived experience within India and familiarity with its culture and ways of life enabled me to build trust with participants, I was also perceived as an associate of the NGO that was working with these communities and involved in aid initiatives — thus my positionality was embedded within the identity of this organization. Care was taken to treat participants with respect and allow them to navigate the interactions on their terms. Though I employed pre-prepared questionnaires to guide the interviews, considerable margin was left for open conversation that often gave unanticipated insights. These were conducted in the office spaces, community spaces or homes, as per the convenience of participants.

Additionally, the local translator used to have brief introductory interactions with the participants in *Marathi*, the content of which I was not entirely aware of; we were viewed as a unit and therefore it is possible that some of those impressions were projected on to me as well. Care was taken to minimise any effects on my reflexivity due to my obligations and relationship with the host NGO.

(e) **Ethics:** Lastly, deliberate efforts were taken to anticipate and minimise potential ethical concerns. Informed consent was sought from all participants prior to interviews; participants were made well-aware of the purpose of the study and use of their data through information sheets. All responses were pseudonymised to minimise any risk arising out of participation. All ethics guidelines suggested by the University of Oxford, Department of International Development, and my thesis supervisor were adhered to, including data security, transfer and storage.

CHAPTER 3

EMERGENCY CLAIM-MAKING BY HUMANITARIAN AGENTS

Introduction

This chapter considers how humanitarian agents in Yavatmal participate in the process of emergency claim-making. Through detailed personal interviews with representatives from INGOs, NGOs and the representatives of the Government of India (GoI), I try to unpack the realm of emergency claim-making, observing that these claims engage in nuanced acts of framing the drought — as both a disaster and an emergency. As a disaster, the drought is framed as a 'backward-looking' category, underlining how 'natural' it is. As an emergency, the drought is framed as an exceptional event marked by the gravity of threat, temporal urgency and a window of opportunity for positive intervention. I argue that such contestations in the definition and treatment of drought are reflective of the inconsistent emergency narratives surrounding the drought, the efficacy of particular interventions as well as the culpability of the farmer.

How does drought affect agriculture in Yavatmal? India has two major crop cycles — the kharif [8] and the rabi. Around 94% of Yavatmal's total cultivable area of 960,500 hectares contain Kharif crops, among which cotton is the most popular[9]. Any unpredictability or delay in the southwest monsoon rains leads to a situation where the farmers are unable to sow the kharif crops, which

[8] India gets most of its rain from the southwest monsoon (between June and September), and the crops that are sown during this time are called the kharif crops — these include cotton, rice, maize, pulses and millets. A good monsoon rainfall is critical for the sowing and harvesting of these crops. Similarly, the smaller northeast monsoon (between October and December) determines the sowing and harvest of rabi crops like rice, potatoes, tomatoes and onions.

[9] India is one of the world's top cotton producers, with the distinction of being the leading country in terms of area under cotton cultivation, and third in the world in terms of production. Within India, the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Telangana are among the top cotton producers, accounting for about 70% of the area under cultivation and 67% of the country's total cotton production (ICAR 2016). State-wise, Maharashtra is the biggest producer of cotton, covering about 34% of the country's total cotton area and 17% of the production (MOEF 2018).

leads to reduced yields and diminished economic returns. In most cases, this means reduced food security and increased debts. This has driven farmers in the district to risky farming practices. In 2017, 34 farmers died in the larger Vidarbha region after inhaling toxic pesticides; 18 of them belonged to the district of Yavatmal (Hemalatha 2017). To address the problem of bollworms — a pest that drastically affects cotton cultivation — farmers (both landowning and landless) were increasingly depending on highly toxic pesticides, often containing Monocrotophos and Metosystox[10]. An inquiry found that farmers used combinations of multiple pesticides, which were aimed at removing bollworm infestation as well as other sucking pests, and also at boosting growth. Most of the dosages used were higher than the ones recommended by the government and pesticide companies (Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture et al 2017). Rather than highlighting the need for accountability among government departments, pesticide manufacturers and pesticide dealers, the blame for the tragedy has mostly fallen on the 'ignorant farmer' (Ibid).

On Emergency claim-making

As mentioned earlier in my thesis, Rubenstein is one of the preliminary points of departure for my overall argument; I will be exploring her notion of emergency claims (Rubenstein 2015) in the context of Yavatmal's droughts. According to Rubenstein, claimants use various channels of communication (verbal, textual, visual) to convince their audience that certain "(i) person(s), thing(s), or state(s) of affairs are valuable, but (ii) they are threatened with imminent harm or destruction, yet (iii) human agency is capable of preventing or reversing at least some of that harm or destruction" (Ibid). Furthering Rubenstein's observations, I propose that such exercises in emergency claim-making are exercises in social framing of phenomena, where claimants generate and employ interpretative 'frames' that identify, employ and further, particular ways of representing particular versions of reality (Benford and Snow 2000). Benford and Snow describe these as activities employed by social movement organizations, and I draw from their

[10] **Both these pesticides are fatal if inhaled; these have been reported as being used by farmers attempting suicide.**

essential concept which helps understand modes of articulation of key 'frames' by interest groups, who project and prefer a particular version of reality surrounding drought. These exercises in framing could be understood as a *subset* of exercises of claiming; I contend that it helps flesh out the nuances of emergency claims.

In the case of Yavatmal's droughts, I suggest that humanitarian agents engage in making claims that are not always necessarily congruent, but nevertheless highlight subjective versions of reality in their understanding of drought. It must be noted that 'humanitarian agents' here does not imply a fixed, coherent, homogenous category — for narrative purposes, I employ the term to primarily refer to a group of claimants, which includes grassroots INGO staff, local NGO staff, technical experts and activists, and representatives from t district, state and national governments. Major differences exist in their proximities to the lived experiences of the farming communities, nature and project of work they are involved in, social and political capital as well as motivations. What binds them is the criticality of droughts to their work, and their involvement in the broader humanitarian project of relief and reconstruction.

(a) Drought as a disaster

Some of the humanitarian agents framed the droughts to be more of a disaster, featuring only an incidental role for social endogeneity of causes and effects (Albala-Bertrand 2000). Such framing of the drought as a disaster foregrounded the management of an adverse event where harm had *already* occurred, conveying in a certain sense the inevitability of ill-effects on the people directly suffering. I interviewed Ajay, one of the founding members of India's National Disaster Management Authority[11] (NDMA) and a senior expert in the field of disaster management, also having worked with the World Bank and UN agencies on disaster management. Ajay explained in detail about how India is a country that is heavily dependent on agriculture, the performance of which, in turn, is heavily dependent on rainfall patterns.

[11] Formed following the Disaster Management (DM) Act of 2005, the NDMA is headed by the Prime Minister of India, and the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) are headed by respective chief ministers of the states.All of these bodies work to "implement a holistic and integrated approach to Disaster Management in India."

Hydrometeorological disasters are increasing in terms of frequency and impact, and water security is critical, he said, tracing a direct connection between water security and food security. Droughts, in his opinion, "*will need to be considered primarily as a hydrometeorological disaster, as a slow-onset disaster at that. There are early warning systems that can predict droughts and respond to droughts better. The drought manual released by the Government of India lists out the kinds of droughts — hydrological, meteorological, and agricultural and how it relates to rainfall patterns.*"

What is the 'nature' of the disaster drought is framed to be? While the WHO lists drought under 'natural hazard profiles,' many organizations call it a 'slow-onset disaster.' Albala-Bertrand makes a useful distinction between "natural and socially induced" disasters, where the former is caused primarily by an extreme natural event and the 'unleashing event' is mostly exogenous to society (2000). However, while Ajay highlights the 'natural' causes, Majnu, the Programme Head of a local NGO called Dilasa[12] based in the outskirts of Yavatmal, explained how climate, rainfall and topography were key factors, but according to him, social factors were more relevant. He commented upon how erratic, untimely rainfall and climate change has ended up pushing things over the edge. "*This year too, the average rainfall will be around 700mm. Earlier, the total number of rainy days was 90, and it used to rain for around 60-70 days. Now, the entire 700mm of rain falls in 30-40 hours. The (rainfall) pattern has changed and we observe a flood-like situation*," he said. However, he believed that drought can be managed in the long term; and that it is possible to reverse these conditions despite the "natural" factors like rainfall variability and topography — things which "we can't do anything about." The drought "is mostly man-made," he said. "There is nothing wrong with the nature; man has disturbed things."

While discussing the phenomenon of drought, Ajay made a critical distinction between a disaster and an emergency. The NDMA founder framed drought as a phenomenon that could

[12] Founded in 1994, Dilasa is operational only in the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra. It functions in partnership with 25 other local NGOs. The stated goal of the NGO is "to ensure food, water, livelihoods and income security together with a growing quality of life to vulnerable and disadvantaged communities on a sustainable and equitable basis." In all three of the 'goal,' 'vision,' and 'mission' components of the NGO, the recurring themes are agriculture, communities, and sustainability.

display features of a natural disaster, while simultaneously having the potential to *become* an emergency. In his words: "*I think the transition from a drought to famine, when food insecurity becomes life-threatening, would be a time when you need to move from looking at it as a disaster to an emergency. As long as people are able to understand and anticipate, though the negative situation will continue to threaten their normal, routine livelihood and things like that — it is still manageable by policy intervention. And that is what the government has been doing too, by providing certain policy responses to address this.*" This transition from a disaster to an emergency was driven mainly by a framing of the drought as a phenomenon that *could* get worse, implying a potential to transform from a manageable disaster to an unmitigated emergency marked by a higher spread and severity of detrimental effects. This comment contradicted the commonly accepted academic distinction between disaster and emergency, where an unchecked emergency became a disaster and not the other way around (Al-Dahash 2016, Rubenstein 2015).

Declarations

At what point does a drought become a disaster according to humanitarian agents? Is there a definitive claim that makes such a framing 'official'? The simple and often-heard answer among my respondents is "when governments issue drought declarations"[13]. However, the government's approach to droughts and drought declarations have undergone a significant change over the past decade, concurrent with the worst drought-decade in multiple parts of the country, including Vidarbha. The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare released the *Manual for Drought Management* — a document that outlines how to measure, manage and mitigate droughts — in 2009. Seven years later, the Ministry released an updated version of the Manual with multiple modifications, in a move towards making drought a more centrally recognised, technologically driven and objectively identifiable event. Significantly, the criteria

[13] Drought declarations are made by state governments across India during the summer months when unavailability of drinking water hits its peaks. These are often made in order to coordinate relief interventions from the government departments, attract higher resources (disaster funding) from the Central Government and assistance from affiliated agencies like the NDMA.

for declaring a region as drought-hit were modified — as per the latest guidelines state governments could now request for Central-Government funding (financial assistance under the National Disaster Relief Fund) only if the drought "is of a severe nature" (GoI 2016). The criteria for a 'severe drought' was made more stringent and centralised, rendering invalid previous measures by the state governments which were more relative, ground-based and flexible (for example, one of the parameters was 'crop yield which is 50% less than the average of the last 10 years') (Jamwal 2018).

This near-complete delinking of crop assessment with drought assessment, weakening of state government's agency and overarching use of technology and satellites to measure a highly relative, complex, regional and humanitarian concern such as drought has been criticised by many, including prominent Indian journalist and activist Palagummi Sainath (2018). The problems of such declarations that established the drought as a disaster were also highlighted by Majnu in that these were heavily political. He accused the government of protecting insurance companies like 'Reliance,' which are involved in crop insurance[14] disbursements, by not declaring droughts on time. In his words, the government "*has stopped providing data also. Nobody has control over the data that is used to back drought declarations. The criteria and the indicators for this are not known to anybody — only the government officials know about it. There is no neutral agency to look into this matter. Farmers have even started cultivating (the next crop cycle) but the drought situation is still there. The government is in an election mode (and does not care). So, this is politically motivated — we do not have any system to declare drought in India. It is all dependent on politics."*

I note that these observations show how the framing of droughts as disasters by humanitarian agents exhibits two key features associated with the exercise of 'frame alignment' — namely frame bridging and frame transformation (Benford and Snow 2000). Firstly, the disaster

[14] The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) was set up to give insurance coverage and financial support to farmers, covering eventualities that caused crop failure, like natural calamities, pests or diseases. One of the major companies that provided crop insurance under this scheme was Reliance General Insurance Co. Ltd.

framing allows for frame bridging, which involves a linking of two or more social frames that may not be directly connected structurally. In their articulation of drought as a disaster, the humanitarian actors draw legitimacy for their definitions and strategies through both by 'bridging' the hydrometeorological process with scientific and technical processes, and also by 'de-bridging' it, downplaying the significance of links between the severity of drought and the intensity of 'human' experience — instead opting for a decentralized, satellite data-based framing of drought. Similarly, the framing of drought as a disaster was bridged to themes like privatisation of crop insurance and opaque bureaucratic processes, in a bid to highlight how disaster declarations are politically driven. Secondly, the frame alignment exercise also includes frame transformation, wherein old understandings or meanings are changed to modified ones or produced new ones. When the drought is framed as a disaster which has a potential to *become* a famine if unmanaged, it reflects a frame transformation where somewhat of a less dangerous, manageable event is likely to get transformed into a more severe, unmanageable 'emergency.' I view this framing of the drought as an 'emergency-in-waiting,' as an effort to claim credibility for centralized, technology-based policy responses surrounding disaster management.

Why is a discussion of such framings important? These exercises of framing show how emergency claims, in different ways, work towards (a) establishing legitimacy for the claimant's function, and (b) furthering a political narrative that could have implications on how audiences receive and respond to them. Firstly, the NDMA, established in the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake in 2001 in which around 20,000 people lost their lives, was entrusted with the explicit goal of disaster management. Furthering Rubenstein's value-threat-agency framework, the NDMA draws upon discourses which project technology and development as critical to justify the nature of the acts of 'human agency' that they engage in, to "build a safer and disaster resilient India" as per their stated vision (NDMA). Secondly, this 'disaster' framing is embedded in a narrative of politics — the NDMA refers to itself as the "apex body" that discharges its responsibilities, which could be clubbed into the categories of national policy, fund allocation

and co-ordinating state responses. By framing the drought as a disaster, the claimants foreground policy, resources and power as necessary instruments to manage it. This tendency for consolidating and centralising what essentially in most contexts is a state response is also reflected in the revised criteria for drought declaration, as discussed earlier. Lastly, declarations also gather significance as such framings could be a reference point for the larger group of claimants and audiences who may have varying interests in and understandings of droughts. For example, World Vision India[15] conducts an independent need assessment locally; based on the severity of the issue it declares an emergency. "We highlight the issue and look for support within the World Vision partnership and among other supporters (for funds)", says one of its local programme managers. However, in a larger national context, the INGO considers drought declarations made by state governments as the first step towards emergency response.

(b) Drought as an emergency

While Rubenstein notes the features of unexpected occurrence and the need to immediately act as characteristics of an emergency (Rubenstein 2015), other definitions highlight how it could be an imminent event (that was unanticipated) that puts people, property and environment under threat, and which calls for rapid and co-ordinated response (Alexander 2005). How is drought framed as an emergency? In this section, I examine how certain humanitarian agents make the emergency claim that the drought is not an emergency-in-waiting, but an emergency-in-motion. They are mostly respondents from INGOs, NGOs and activist circles. Emergency claims from these actors have focussed largely on three themes: (i) gravity of the threat, (ii) temporal urgency, and (iii) emergency response. It needs to be noted that there exists certain overlaps in the frames of a disaster and emergency as it appears in discourses forwarded by these actors, in a sense reflecting the confusions regarding these very categories (Al-Dahash

[15] World Vision India, the Indian arm of the global INGO World Vision International, was established in 1951 in a single-room office in Kolkata. According to their website, World Vision India bases its work on a community development model with a focus on children, specialising in humanitarian emergency assistance and broader developmental concerns like education, nutrition, gender and development, disability, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). The organisation, through projects across 25 Indian states "impacts" 2.6 million children and "transforms" 6252 communities.

2016). However, I contend that the three themes mentioned form the pillars on which the drought is framed as an emergency, the detailed discussions of which constitute this section.

(i) The gravity of threat

The gravity of the threat posed by drought features prominently among the emergency claims by some of the humanitarian agents in Yavatmal. Firstly, there is a reliance on hydrometeorological data to ascertain the gravity of the threat — what Rubenstein measures in historical, absolute and diachronic terms. How exceptional, or abnormal, is Yavatmal's current drought? Climate research points to the disastrous consequences of the variability of the monsoon in central India (including Yavatmal), which "has amplified in the recent decades, with a gradual decline in the monsoon circulation and rainfall," and simultaneously caused "a phenomenal rise in extreme rainfall events" (Roxy et al 2017). Climate data suggests a decrease in the northern summer (June–September) average rainfall — 10–20% — over central India that severely affects rainfed agriculture, and this has been attributed to "a weakening monsoon circulation, owing to a combination of factors including the warming of the Indian Ocean, increasing frequency and magnitude of El Niño events, increased air pollution and land use changes over the subcontinent" (Ibid). According to rainfall data, the percentage departure from normal, for India's rainfall has fallen from -4.5 (1999-2000) to -13 (2014-15) (Ministry of Agriculture, GoI 2016). Thus, Yavatmal's drought has been, from a hydro-meteorological perspective, progressively worse in historical, absolute and synchronic terms.

Guided by these technical insights, World Vision India devotes human and material resources through its Humanitarian Emergency Affairs (HEA) division to ensure droughts receive the 'emergency response' they merit, as the threat to lives and livelihoods is too great to ignore. Benjamin, one of the senior leaders of the HEA division observed that the INGO had been monitoring country patterns as they treated drought as an emergency. Such a close monitoring he said, "has revealed that both the number of states declared drought-hit by the government as

well as saturation (percentage of drought-hit districts within a state) rates have been on the increase especially in the last five years."

While the INGO recognises this threat as already in motion and affecting vulnerable populations, the NDMA views such a threat as imminent, one that has not *yet* happened but is a possibility if "disasters are not managed well." Ajay tried to draw a distinction between the disaster and emergency framings of drought based on the gravity of threat it posed to the well-being of populations:

> *"...But one thing we need to recognise is that when this (drought) becomes crippling to the community, it becomes something that creates malnutrition, creates life-threatening situations — that is when it needs to be treated as a humanitarian emergency. For example, in Africa, in many pockets you would find that happening. In India also, there are certain tribal pockets where we have already reached that level of water scarcity and water stress — which might actually be necessitating this thin line of distinction between calling it as a disaster or calling it as a humanitarian emergency. You will probably need to come up with criteria which can actually help you come up with some distinction between a disaster and a humanitarian emergency. One of the parameters could be the number of people affected. You could also look at how many are under deprivation — all poor people are not necessarily deprived. Also, you could consider the loss of livestock."*

The two responses reveal how the approaches of the NDMA and the INGO differ in the aspect of how grave a threat must be in order to frame the drought as a disaster to be managed, or an emergency to be avoided. The NDMA acknowledges a necessity for a clearer line of distinction between a disaster and an emergency, with Ajay suggesting how the number of people affected could be one of the parameters that conveys the gravity of the situation. On the other hand, World Vision India's HEA protocol highlights how it has a system already in place, that grades

the gravity of threat of an emergency based on the same indicator — number of people affected. The severity-based categorisation divides events into (i) Category 1: 100,000 or fewer people affected; livelihoods and development potential threatened, (ii) Category 2: Between 100,000 and 1 million people affected (or 25–50% of the national population); potential for increased rates of death or disease, and (iii) Category 3: More than 1 million people affected (across several countries, mostly, more than 50% of the national population); potential to cause high death or disease rates (Squires 2017).

(ii) Temporal urgency

The temporal urgency associated with an emergency was described by Benjamin, who works mostly outside the comfort of the air-conditioned head office that he is based out of — coordinating distribution of relief materials in disaster-ravaged areas, leading rapid assessments of damage immediately after disasters, and networking with the government and NGO partners to execute collaborative efforts treated as 'emergency response.' Experienced in both rapid-onset (floods, earthquakes and cyclones) and slow-onset phenomena like droughts, Benjamin's work takes him across the country for several months together. Always ready for a deployment, Benjamin says his line of work relies heavily on the 'immediacy' of deployment, adding that the organisation follows the motto of being "the first to reach and the last to leave" when it comes to emergency response.

One of the field staff members of the INGO engaged in drought-related emergency response corroborated these observations; "we are the first to step in," he noted as he described how emergency work differed from 'routine' work. Emergency situations are often "unplanned," and require immediate action, reflecting the WHO's description of an emergency as "a state in which normal procedures are suspended and extra-ordinary measures are taken" (WHO 2002). Staff investment becomes high during an emergency response, where working hours are stretched to 24x7, and staff members stay in the villages as work demands increase. Routine work, concerned with addressing long-term developmental needs, is side-lined as the more 'urgent'

concerns are prioritised. “The seriousness of the issue” encouraged staff members like him to work overtime and go the extra mile, as “we don’t need any motivation — we feel like we are helping people more, and that they respect us more.”

The temporal urgency also creates challenges in logistics and administration of these responses, since there needs to be an instant co-ordination between various partner entities. Working as an important member of a coalition of humanitarian agencies, World Vision India collaborates with multiple governmental and non-governmental agencies as the drought intensifies. During the emergency, the urgency generates a higher level of co-operation, and the INGO enjoys more partner support. There is a higher and more concerted partnership with the local administration, who are “more cordial” and there is “little hindrance to work.” There is also a faster procurement of material through professional supply chains. Since basic food and water could be unavailable in emergency situations, the INGO distributes essential food items among affected villagers. These mostly take the form of one bag of dry rations per affected household, which includes wheat flour, rice, cooking oil, biscuits and proteins such as lentils for a month. As one of the programme managers said, the temporal urgency is one of the most defining features of an ‘emergency context’, “during emergencies, we jump into action without waiting, we touch the lives of vulnerable people”. An emergency situation is all about action, and “doing”, he said, “which is usually very easy for us.”

(iii) Emergency response

The gravity of threat and temporal urgency finally translates into what humanitarian agents call the ‘emergency response’ — manifestations of optimistic human agency that aims to make use of the “windows of opportunity for helpful action” (Rubenstein 2015). However, these ‘windows’ are far from straightforward. One important dilemma humanitarian agents face is regarding the nature of drought as a slow-onset phenomenon. It causes a tension between two broad approaches that humanitarian agents employ in Yavatmal — one that views the drought as a long-term developmental challenge, and hence relates closely to the idea of ‘routine’

development work, and one that views the drought as an exceptional, short-term issue that needs corresponding short-term measures. Dilasa viewed drought as a long-term project that needs material interventions. Their interventions include soil and water conservation, rainwater harvesting, integrated pest management, self-help institutions for rural women, irrigation systems and farmer support centres.

Despite having relatively larger resources at their disposal in comparison to Dilasa, the INGO had shifted from a material intervention approach to a community empowerment approach. Since 2007, World Vision India had been providing economic assistance for individuals and families, and interventions in health, education, livelihood assistance through the supply of goats and poultry to the farmers. "However, we had to close that mode of programming in 2016, as our partner[16] — World Vision Finland — stopped funding the project," a staff member explained. Why did the Finland office stop funding? "Maybe because their government (Finland) changed their (humanitarian funding) priorities", he offered. Consequently, the more resource-intensive approach that focussed on economic resilience came to an end, and World Vision India started VFLP[17] which was less resource-intensive. "The situation in Yavatmal has been really bad in the last decade. We used to have a very high number of suicide cases. People used to call Yavatmal a cursed land — due to the rising number of farmer suicides," he said. Based on the 'need' and the history, World Vision India started the Vidarbha Farmers' Livelihood project (VFLP). The idea was to treat Yavatmal as a "lab," where drought and livelihood-specific interventions could be tested, in order to scale it in the larger Vidarbha region. "This is why we named it the Vidarbha project. Our focus now is to build the psychological resilience of these farmers who are undergoing drought. We are working towards changing their mindsets", Sundar said.

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[16] World Vision works as a partnership system where partner organisations (called fundraising/support offices) like World Vision US, World Vision UK, World Vision South Korea, World Vision Australia, etc., in the developed countries fund organisations in predominantly developing countries (like India, Somalia, Syria, etc.) using various means including child sponsorship programmes, government and private grants, individual donations and corporate partnerships.

[17] VFLP refers to the Vidarbha Farmers' Livelihood Project.

The change in the programming approach was directed at the goal of 'empowerment'. The idea is, to change the mindset of the drought-affected farmers "so that they could avail maximum benefits from the government", through the programming approach called "Empowered World View." However, this is by no means an easy task. "For the last forty, fifty years, these people have been following one tradition. One way of doing things. Now to change the fifty-year-old practice will take time", Sundar remarks. The NGO also reduced its footprint in the area, from 45 to 25 villages as a result of the approach shift. The paucity of resources necessitated a cutting down of manpower, and thus the work has been scaled down in terms of number of target villages, staff and programme budget. How were these 25 villages selected? Sundar replied that there was a comprehensive mapping exercise ('vulnerability mapping') as well as 'wealth ranking' carried out in these locations, which enabled the NGO to identify the communities most in need of their assistance — with the biggest intervention being psychological empowerment of drought-affected farmers. The 'Empowered World View' is based on the ideas of "adaptability" and "sustainability" — economic assistance is not sustainable, Sundar added.

Claiming the drought to be a failure of effective natural resource management (NRM), Benjamin too emphasised improving the mindset of the farmers — a key objective of VFLP. It was not an easy task according to him:

> *"...the key is how well you change the mindset of the people and the community participation around it. Especially in Vidarbha which has seen so many farmer suicides, there is this sense of hopelessness in these people. When we started the project, one of our priorities was to bring back the hope that things are possible. And I remember in the initial days, every time we went to the community, we used to only see the dry land with boulders and stones. And the farmer would say, 'Just tell me what can I do with this? There's nothing'. But I think the next two years we just focussed on just caring (for) their fields, taking out all the stones. When they*

started doing that, it was not easy. They would say, "No, it is not possible, nothing could be done here" .

What, or who, is to blame?

Historically, the district of Yavatmal was assigned to the British East India company in 1853 as part of the Berar province. Though cotton was cultivated in the area prior to the colonial rule, extensive cotton cultivation began "under pressure from the British administration in a bid to increase agricultural production in India" (Plahe et al 2017). Britain's industrial revolution, the high demand for cotton during the scarcity that arose from the American Civil War (1861-65), and continued colonial export meant a dramatic increase in cotton production in the area. Post Indian independence in 1947, cotton production continued to expand, aided in no small part by the Green Revolution technology brought to India through institutions like the Ford and Rockefeller foundations. Technology resulted in hybrid cotton varieties being developed (first in 1972), characterised by their requirement for large amounts of water (Ibid). In essence, an expensive, irrigation-intensive crop that required use of strong pesticides (due to newer and more severe pest-vulnerabilities of the hybrid varieties) was being extensively cultivated in a district with 87% rainfed agriculture area. Today, with mostly below-average statistics in terms of district GDP, literacy and other socio-economic development indicators (SECC 2011, NFHS-4 2016), Yavatmal currently does not feature among the more productive, or 'developed' districts, neither of India nor Maharashtra. In addition, the region has witnessed the worst agrarian distress in decades and a bizarrely high number of farmer suicides.

Against this backdrop of a historic 'drought-proneness,' there have been many attempts from humanitarian agents to 'support' the small and marginal farmers through improved farming techniques. In a small classroom of a government primary school in the village of Shivni, Yavatmal, I attended a meeting where some of the GO representatives were meeting the local farmers. It was one of the regular monthly meetings, where the GO functionaries discuss

farmers' concerns, review the status of agriculture, provide feedback on their grievances, and supply agriculture-related material like seeds and other equipment. Around 30 farmers were in attendance, mostly dressed for farm work in their soiled *dhotis* and turbans. A few of them came with their cows and goats, which were left outside on the dirt road as they came in for the meeting. Once they were in, the officers had a brief chat, and then walked out with them to the cotton farm right next to the school and checked the leaves for worm infestations. They called the farmers near, who solemnly made a circle around them. Then the officers opened a sealed cardboard box, unveiled a new bright-green protective vest and mask, and helped a volunteer wear it. This was followed by a brief explanation of its purpose, with a special emphasis on insisting its use while the farmers sprayed pesticides. Over a dozen farmers had died from pesticide poisoning in Yavatmal in a recent tragedy.

After the meeting, I sat down for a conversation with the officers. The small group comprised of Omkar, a *Krushi Sahayak* (Agriculture Assistant), Tejas, a facilitator, and Deepti, a Cluster Assistant. All of them worked directly with the farmers in Yavatmal, engaged in conducting training events for farmers on farming techniques, information dissemination on pest management, and water conservation. They affirm that in their experience of over 15 years working with these farmers, they are well-acquainted with droughts. What is the main reason for drought? It is mainly due to the rainwater not percolating the topsoil, the officers say. The topography is hilly, and the land rocky. However, the fault lay mostly with the farmers:

> *"The farmers here do not care about it (water conservation). Whatever amount of water they need, they use, and do not care about the rest of the water. They do not think that they have to save water as it will be useful in the summer... They only talk about not cultivating (leaving the field fallow) to save water in summer season. But they do not think about the future. They must think about how this could lead to one, two, three seasons being non-cultivating seasons. They do not think about the future... Even when we teach them new things like conservation farming and crop*

rotation, we have to give them a demo. They will not do it directly on their farms, they will follow only after seeing it on some others' farm, if they see a benefit in doing it. We interact with farmers directly – the irony is that if we tell something to a hundred farmers, only ten will follow. If we reach out to ten, only one or two will follow."

The officers added that the farmers need to consider drought seriously, because it affects the whole village, including the farmers, the women and the livestock. "We government people get salaries for our work. But these farmers will be in a loss due to droughts," said Tejas.

When asked how this could change, the officers said how the first goal should be to change the mentality of the farmers. I looked at Sundar from World Vision India who was sitting across the table, and he was nodding. World Vision India had collaborated with these officers in many activities, and they agreed with the "mindset" issue: the emphasis had to be more on facilitating a change of the farmer's uninspired, uninformed mindset. "They are not changing; they take something from one person and a few things from a second person and do farming," Deepti said, hinting at how the farmers do not strictly adhere to suggestions from these officers that could perhaps improve their agricultural yields and overall situation. "Very few are convinced with the idea of change," she claimed, citing the example of scarce community participation for a village-wide event organised by Paani foundation[18]. "I could hardly convince four people."

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to trace out the realm of emergency claim-making by humanitarian agents on droughts in Yavatmal, where the phenomenon plays out in two main frames — that of a disaster and that of an emergency. Though the distinction is difficult to consistently maintain due to the many conceptual and operational overlaps, I have suggested that the drought has

[18] Paani foundation is a non-profit set up by popular Bollywood actor Aamir Khan and his wife Kiran Rao in 2016, with the aim of making Maharashtra drought-free.

been framed both as a disaster that 'had already happened', and as an emergency that is both 'imminent' as well as 'already in motion'. The former frame, employed mainly by the NDMA, treats drought as a culmination of adverse hydrometeorological events, technically transcribed and needing to be politically managed via centralised, policy-based disaster management plans. However, the non-governmental actors foreground actionability associated with droughts; they view drought declarations — routine techniques for activating emergency response (Anderson 2016) — by the state governments as an approval for initiating emergency response protocols.

This emergency claim was justified by invoking the exceptionality of the threat that put lives and livelihoods at great risk, the temporal urgency of the situation that called for immediate action, and possibility of human agency that could minimise suffering. However, the many inconsistencies in the claims and conflation of categories by the humanitarian agents reflect how despite deliberate efforts to structure the humanitarian emergency to specific components that could be broken down, it "cannot easily be reduced to a single underlying self-contained process" (Aaltola 2012). The examination of emergency claims by various claimants, I argue, reveal the multiplicity of frames that are employed for particular purposes, resulting in an unravelling of the category of emergency in a way that realist classifications based on hydrometeorological data alone cannot.

Of particular interest to me, however, is how different emergency claims converge to the point of the small and marginal farmers' "mindsets," which are simultaneously claimed to be a cause as well as a window of opportunity. These narratives indirectly frame the farmer as uninformed, uninspired, undisciplined and undecided. The drought, therefore, is claimed to be as much shaped by the farmer as it shapes him. However, how does the farmer, arguably the biggest stakeholder in the emergency narratives, participate in emergency claim-making? Wedged in the ambit of physical, social, economic and psychological vulnerability to droughts, do they perceive droughts as disasters or emergencies? I would attempt to answer these questions in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

REJECTING THE EMERGENCY

Introduction

This chapter of my thesis examines how rural India's farmers participate in the process of emergency claim-making. From data collected through personal interviews with drought-affected farmers from Yavatmal's villages, I attempt to answer this question in three sections. In the first, I analyse the rejection of the 'uncertainty' and 'actionability' traits (Al-Dahash 2015) of the drought by Yavatmal's farmers, which leads to an apparent rejection of the emergency claim that the drought is a humanitarian emergency. This is presented through an examination of three articulations of their lived experience, namely chronicity, precarity and inevitability associated with droughts. In the second section, I make sense of this rejection of an emergency claim using the sociological dimensions of 'counter-framing', (Benford and Snow 2000); tracing how the former follows illustrative and processual traits of the latter. Subsequently, as they engage in particular discursive processes of framing, I observe that Yavatmal's small and marginal farmers shape an alternative reality of the phenomenon of drought that is markedly different from the framing of drought by the humanitarian agents.

Yavatmal's battered farmers

The rural small-landholding farmer in Yavatmal has been an embodiment of vulnerability for the better part of the last decade. Among Indian states, Maharashtra has the highest percentage of drought-prone land area (Parida et al 2018) and within the state, the district of Yavatmal has recorded the highest farmer suicides rates (Bomble et al 2020). Faced with constraints including small land holdings, illiteracy, large dependent families, 'bonded labour' practices, government corruption and lack of access to credit, Yavatmal's farmers are left to deal with

substantial stress (Venugopal et al 2000). In the context of sustained pressure exerted by these adverse circumstances, it could be safely assumed that farmer suicides could be a proxy in understanding Vidarbha's "agrarian crisis"[19] in general and the status of drought-hit farmer's well-being in particular. Crop failure and resultant debt have been among the principal reasons for farmer vulnerability in Yavatmal, often being forced to borrow money at interest rates as high as 50-60% (Chu 2006) due to crop failure. In a recent period of six years (2009-2015), it was reported that 5,943 farmers committed suicide in Amaravati division that includes Yavatmal. Many of them submitted applications for government compensation. However, out of these, 2,532 applications were rejected and 182 remain pending. Only around 3,228 applications were found eligible for compensation. In total, Yavatmal witnessed 1,647 farmer suicides in the six-year period (Times of India 2019). Though multiple studies in Sri Lanka, Canada, England and Australia highlight farming as a high-risk industry with high rates of suicide than the general population (Fraser et al 2005), it is evident that farmers in Yavatmal have been exceptionally battered by severe shocks from multiple sources.

For my interviews, I selected farmers[20] from Mahrashtra's Yavatmal district which falls under the larger Vidarbha region, known for both cotton cultivation and farmer suicides (Agarwal 2008). The respondents were from farming households since at least the past two generations and were mostly school educated. The main crop they cultivated was cotton; other crops included *jowar* (sorghum), *tur* (pigeon pea), *dal* (red lentils), *urad dal* (black gram), *moong dal* (green gram) and *soya* (soybean). Many of the farmers also reared livestock. My respondents belonged exclusively to the Hindu religion, and were primarily from the "other backward

[19] The agrarian crisis has been a phrase commonly used by India's activists, political figures, media and academics in a non-technical sense, often referring to a gamut of issues that have been ailing Indian agriculture in general and farmers in drought-affected regions like Vidarbha in particular. It captures issues including, but not limited to crop failures, indebtedness among small and marginal farmers, policy shortcomings, large-scale privatisation of agriculture, steep rise in input costs, poor management of natural resources and untimely rains.

[20] Though farmers included those with operational holdings across the categories specified by the Indian Government – marginal (below 1 hectare), small (1-2 hectares), semi-medium (2-4 hectares), medium (4-10 hectares) and large (above 10 hectares) sizes, I mostly interviewed farmers with small and marginal holdings.

castes," "scheduled castes" and the "scheduled tribes" – as per the Indian government's official categorisation.

Key framings of the drought

(i) Chronicity

Illustrating the severity of the drought, most farmers who were interviewed emphasised how it has been a *prolonged* crisis. Many claimed that the situation has gradually worsened over time, and that this year was exceptionally difficult because of a severe scarcity of drinking water. Laxman, a 57-year old cotton farmer who had been living in Ghodkhindi since his birth claimed that no farming is done during the four summer months as water is unavailable. Another farmer supported this, adding "There have been droughts, and we have always done this. We do not farm during these months, as there are no irrigation systems. These months are spent in digging our wells deeper, repairing tube wells and clearing our fields for the next farming season." Though some farmers like Prakash, whose entire family works in his field, pick out the 2015-16 drought as the most severe, it is attributed mostly due to a severe lack of rain and acute shortage of drinking water. His neighbour Ashok claims that the situation is usually bad, but "we were able to somehow manage things in the last few years," adding that 2017-18 was exceptionally bad. In most cases, the claim of having experienced exceptional years does not imply that the other years were any better; "the last five years none of us have had any good harvests," said a 70-year-old farmer.

How does this frame of a prolonged crisis compare with the 'realist' evidence of hydrometeorological data? Rainfall data analysis has established that Maharashtra in general had undergone 26 large-scale meteorological droughts from 1901-1998, with 11 years among them "worst drought years," when 50% of the land area of the state was affected (Gore et al

2001). The most severe meteorological drought in almost a century occurred in 2015, when the Indo-Gangetic plain, Maharashtra and Western Ghats received 20-50% less rainfall; the farmer Prakash was therefore rather accurate in his categorisation of 2015 as an exceptionally bad year. The Vidarbha region has a predisposition for a high number of drought spells, with Yavatmal being associated with severe droughts in most of the years between 1953 and 2002 (Daksh et al 2012). For the district, an analysis of climate data from 1975 to 2005 has observed a decreasing trend in terms of rainy days from June to September (Deshmukh et al 2014). Another study based on analysis of monsoon rainfall data and extrapolation concludes that Yavatmal is a dry region and predicts long, drier seasons and markedly variable rainfall in the next 75 years (Deulkar et al 2015). This strengthens the assumption that the farmers had been accurate in their claim that the drought has been a prolonged condition, with some infrequent, exceptionally dire years in the last decade. It corroborates some of the definitions of hydrometeorological drought, which has been described as a phenomenon that creeps upon regions, which "originates and crawls due to lack of precipitation over an extended period of time" (Daksh et al 2018).

As one ties together these two observations on the drought duration, there arises an important question: how do these farmers make temporal sense of Yavatmal's drought as a humanitarian emergency? By popular definitions, the emergency is characterised by its temporal nature – sudden, quick and brief. However, when a condition is chronic – crawling and creeping almost unrecognisably – to cover regions and populations, it pushes the boundaries of categorisation. The prolonged experience in a sense *normalises* suffering, what Henrik Vigh calls "crisis as context" (2008). The long duration of drought, seen as a crisis of a severe order, *creates* a context. This is in contrast to the temporary, episodic and isolated nature of an emergency; the chronic condition creates an ever-present possibility of disorder, marked by a 'terrain of action and meaning rather than an aberration.' This layered and slippery terrain that comes into being through articulations of chronicity, a notion referred to by the medical anthropologist Sue Estroff as "persistence in time of limitations and suffering," or dysfunction (Estroff 1993, p 250).

She outlines the traits of the manifestation of chronicity in illnesses, many of which reflect farmer responses about drought: (1) *An obscure beginning* – in how the phenomenon creeps up into their lives, (2) *A persistent condition* – when droughts are prolonged, (3) *Becoming apparent at particular stages* – when droughts at times create visible/tangible effects like drying up of wells or lakes, (4) *Detrimental effects* – in terms of livelihoods, and (5) *Interference with development* – similar to how it disrupts growth or survival trajectories. Chronicity, therefore, becomes a useful concept to map farmers' understanding of the drought.

However, despite the broad consensus among the rural farming community, there were peculiar inconsistencies in the responses of some of the farmers. Marand, one of the more knowledgeable and experienced farmers claimed the year 2006 was the worst, and that the years 2009 and 2017 were bad. Another said it had been bad before 2016, but the last two years had been relatively better. This could point to variations within the farmer communities on the perception of the duration of drought. It is likely that this is related to the financial situation of the respective individual farmers, marked by the level of debt, size of operational holding and number of dependents. These aspects in turn invite attention to the lived experience of precarity that the farmers find themselves in.

(ii) Precarity

In the context of such a *prolonged* drought condition, it becomes imperative to investigate how farmers perceive its effects on their individual lives and livelihoods. Does the extended chronicity associated with the drought imply a proportionately disastrous effect as opposed to a brief phenomenon like a flood[21], perhaps? Yavatmal's farmers were of the broad consensus that their livelihoods remained precarious through the course of recurring droughts. Though the precarity experienced was spread over multiple dimensions, it would be useful to look at the economic dimension in detail.

[21] Though floods can be periodic, and sometimes a constant feature of certain areas (like India's north-eastern state of Assam which is highly flood-prone), here I am using it as an example to contrast the drought with, in terms of the relative difference in duration of the weather phenomena.

In economic terms, precarity was evident for both income and credit. In terms of income, farmers had to depend on their savings for at least four to five months of the summer, when they were forced to stop farming operations. This necessitated a reasonable income in the months prior to the drought, which was in most cases, unrealistic. Farmers cited multiple issues, including the lack of a Minimum Support Price (MSP), a government-guaranteed price that would enable them to sell their produce without getting exploited by unscrupulous middlemen and 'agents' at a loss-making price. Marand, a senior farmer with a large operational holding, was vocal in his grievance:

> *"The government promises us financial assistance before the elections, but we do not get anything. When we have a good yield, they buy our crops at a low price. When there is a low yield, they buy our crop at a high price. That is the problem. The farmers are working hard, but they never get a good price for their crops. They do not give us anything, we are saying 'at least give us something to cover the input cost.' The city people (urban, employed class) get salary increments every year, as vegetable and grocery rates go up (inflation). But what do farmers get? Nothing."*

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS)[22], an income lifeline for millions of rural households that depend on the ailing agriculture sector, had not been implemented well in Shivni and Ghodkhindi villages, according to the farmers. A 65-year old woman farmer mentioned how she worked for eight days but did not get paid. Another farmer says that she did get paid for the six days she worked under the scheme. Why did she not work for the government-guaranteed 100 days? "After six days, we were told that the scheme had stopped," she stated. There have been widespread reports of corruption in the implementation of MNREGS in multiple Indian states, including Maharashtra.

[22] The MNREGS came into effect after an Act of Parliament was passed in 2005, to provide a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment every year at minimum wages for at least one able-bodied person in every rural poor household.

Credit concerns were another marker of the farmers' precarity. Laxman, the cotton farmer explained: "If the rains fail, I do not get a good yield. If I do not get a good yield, I default on my loan repayment. But the bank people are good – they do not get angry. If we default, they just deny us loans in the future." The access to credit is as much a part of the problem as the necessity for credit. "Since I already have taken a loan from the bank, I now must borrow money from (local, informal) moneylenders. They charge high interests – INR 25 every six months, for a sum of INR 100. We always pay them back on time, even if it means selling our cows or oxen. Because if we do not, they will not give us loans in the future," he said.. Laxman's father, a farmer, had committed suicide because he could find no way to pay back his bank loan. Around 15 people in the village had committed suicide due to debt in the last 10 years, with most of them in the last five years, he adds.

How do the farmers, often languishing at the lower rungs of social, political and economic agency in contrast to the educated, skilled, non-farming citizens habiting the urban and semi-urban spaces of this vast country, react to drought-induced precarity? Many of them stated that migration to the nearest urban centres was one of their preferred ways of dealing with the increased precarity that followed droughts. This seemingly obvious strategy was always aimed at exploring alternate livelihood options, working as unskilled labour in shops, factories, or construction sites. This, like the cessation of farming operations during the last quarter of the year, was not perceived as an exceptionally bad threat. In the words of a woman farmer, "we don't see it as a problem," though this almost always leads to an acute financial crunch and generation of debt. When it came to severe scarcities of drinking water, they claimed that they "bring water tankers (trucks) every day during the four summer months, "that is where we get our drinking water from." However, these trucks are often unreliable, infrequent or simply not enough for entire villages. One of the woman farmers said:

> *"There is one deep well, which has a little water left during droughts, at the bottom.*
>
> *We wait for a long time to get some water from the well. The water is muddy and*

dirty. We filter it with cloth in our homes. It will still be dirty, so we leave it for a while till the dirt settles at the bottom the vessel. We then use it for cooking and drinking. The government people came and asked us not to drink it but we still do."

To better situate these experiences and expressions of drought, it requires an examination of the politics behind the notion of precarity itself. The term goes beyond the commonly accepted notions of vulnerability or instability; the dictionary definition mentions a condition of persistent uncertainty or insecurity with regard to employment, income, and living standards (OUP 2010). I would approach the notion from two key perspectives. Firstly, Judith Butler discusses the notion of precarity from a critical theory perspective. Butler calls precarity and precariousness intersecting concepts, arguing that precariousness[23] is an existential, universal state of human life at some points – *all* lives, by definition, are precarious. However, precarity is (a) politically induced, (b) maximises precariousness, and (c) involves a differential exposure to suffering (Butler 2009). Precarity is a condition which people find themselves pushed into, by forces or circumstances beyond their control (like refugees or internally displaced populations). Secondly, from a broad Marxian economics perspective and not on an entirely unrelated thread of thought, precarity has been used as a foundation for the category of "precariat," notably by Guy Standing. An admitted neologism that combines both "precarious" and "proletariat" to denote a distinctive socio-economic group, he uses 'precariat' to describe a global population consisting of millions "without an anchor of stability," referring to social security measures such as a universal basic income (Standing 2011). The precariat is marked by two important lacks that are normally not applicable to citizens of a state: of political agency and intra-group solidarity, in that they are more denizens[24] than citizens (like migrants or those who work the lowest-paid casual jobs for survival). Though an outright superimposition could be susceptible

[23] Butler, while observing that precariousness refers to the possibility of loss, damage or systematic neglect of human life, implies that normatively, shelter, work, food, medical care and legal status could be some of the determining factors. However, she acknowledges how precariousness cannot be conclusively recognized.
[24] Standing suggests that denizens enjoy a more limited range of rights than a normal citizen, caused by certain political and economic conditions (Standing 2011). The idea takes root from Roman history, where foreigners were given limited rights, like right to residence, ply and trade, but not full citizenship rights.

to inconsistencies (as Standing's precariat primarily comprises of the lowest rung of the working class, often exploited under living wages, zero-hour contracts, casual/informal labour and similar vulnerabilities), positioning the idea of a precariat and Yavatmal's rural farmers side by side does generate both significant parallels and useful insights.

I argue that Standing and Butler's ideas, referring to socially imagined universal categories just two years apart, converge to trace a distinct framework that helps locate the drought experience of Yavatmal's farmers. Though the role of the primary antagonist is occupied by the State and capitalism in Butler and Standing, respectively, both these elements come together in a layered interplay, helping explain precarity. In line with Butler's observations, apparent apathy and negligence from the government in Yavatmal has resulted in persistent structural causes for the farmers' heightened vulnerability to drought, as opposed to populations from other livelihood sectors, social sections or geographic locations. While drought may only be an experience of precariousness for, say, farmers from Kerala or factory workers in Vidarbha, it is a pronouncement of precarity for ailing farmers from Yavatmal's villages. Also, deprived of state guarantees and welfare like access to MNREGS and credit from public institutions, marked by a lack of political agency and intra-group solidarity, the farmers make a compelling case for membership in a peculiar, locally evolved sample of the precariat.

However, what is of crucial interest to me is how, despite a *reasonable fit* that they display as a population that fulfils requirements to be considered as 'precariat' in a conceptual sense, Yavatmal's rural farmers articulate this somewhat differently. Regardless of economic precarity in terms of access to a stable income and access to credit, I argue that their articulation of drought experience stems from a *dilution of precarity*. There are always ready *solutions* (or desperate measures) for the multiple aspects of the overarching precarity they find themselves in; the solutions range from not farming for four to five months, migrating to the nearest urban locations in search of alternate livelihoods (which they are unskilled to do), paying extra for water trucks to get drinking water, and using cloth as filtering equipment. These actions have

been entrenched in Yavatmal's 'everyday' and made sense of as *necessary practice* in the context of droughts. The very fact that these actions have become everyday practice follows from the earlier discussion on the chronicity of droughts. In essence, both precarity and chronicity work as concepts that reveal how farmers comprehend their lived experience as members of a precariat and denizenry, both as constituting their everyday practices and constituted by drought.

(iii) Inevitability

In addition to chronicity and precarity, a third descriptor used by the farmers was the idea of inevitability when it came to expressions regarding the drought. A common refrain was that in Yavatmal, droughts are inevitable, and that nothing, or no one, could stop it from occurring. Most farmers agreed upon the fact that the drought was *certain* to occur; it seemed unrealistic to even *imagine* a situation in which the villages could be free of drought. "I do not have a choice – in summer I will have to just do whatever work that comes my way," said a 62-year-old farmer. "I never borrow, whatever little we have, we live with it," he added. Another farmer who cultivates sorghum and cotton said that the expectations from a listless government have come down to the bare minimum: "If the government gives us (just) drinking water, I'll be happy." Young Swaran had given up work on the farms due to repeated droughts and stated working in a shop in the town. "During the droughts I do not get any work in the fields, and so I work full time here in the town. I have no issues now," he said. One of the older woman farmers summed it up, saying "there is no help from the government, no help from the *panchayat* (village council) no support. Only a well was given by the government 18 years ago. I cannot do anything. I just leave my farm and look for labour work elsewhere." Many farmers said that the soil quality, rainfall patterns, government indifference, precarity and associated vulnerability are unlikely to change, and therefore the situation is only bound to get worse. Another farmer summed up the prevalent sentiment among his peers, saying "farming is getting harder every year." "That has become

their way of life," said my interlocutor who hails from the Vidarbha region and owns a small field in his village, about the drought effects. He added that "you need not ask any more farmers about this – they all go through the same thing year after year, it is normal." Evidently, the responses carry a common thread which conveys the sense that the drought is inevitable, and the ill-effects on various aspects of the farmers' life certain.

I now examine this underlying certainty that is a marker of drought-related articulations from a semantic perspective, which could mean two things. For example, while one could be 'certain' about the results of a recently concluded election, one could also be generally talking about 'certain' candidates who lost their deposits. These simultaneously analogous and distinct semantic connotations help locate some of the farmer experiences surrounding droughts. While they seem to be certain of the occurrence of droughts in the future as an indisputable fact on a macro level as an expected phenomena, the farmers' expressions seem to be less sure of the exact kind of micro level reactions, or responses they ought to adopt – the coping mechanisms range from migration to poultry farming to a search for alternate livelihoods. Interestingly, the etymological histories of the words 'certain' and 'crisis' intersect. The English term 'certain' which comes from the Latin 'certus' (meaning 'determined' or 'resolved'), originates from the Proto-Indo-European root "krei-" (meaning 'to sieve,' therefore to 'discriminate,' 'distinguish'). This is the same root from which the Greek word 'krisis' (meaning a turning point or judgement of a trial) originated, which later paved way for the English word 'crisis' (meaning "a vitally important or decisive stage in the progress of anything; a turning-point; also, a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent" (OUP 2010). The farmers of Yavatmal display a synchronous embodiment of the dual meanings of 'certain' in their articulations and practices associated with the crisis called drought – both a moment and a condition that calls for imminent change.

How does one reject a humanitarian emergency?

The previous sections of this chapter have nudged into focus three core ideas – chronicity, precarity and inevitability – closely associated with how Yavatmal's farmers make sense of the drought. I now consolidate these ideas to contend that, together, they reject the intuitive claim that the drought is a humanitarian emergency, established in the previous chapter. I intend to present this through three sequential stages, elaborated in the coming paragraphs. Firstly, I illustrate, using brief reminders from the previous chapter, that the drought is a humanitarian emergency for certain development actors in certain contexts on the basis of their emergency claims founded on the notions of uncertainty and actionability. Secondly, I argue that the farmers reject these claims on the basis of their experiences and expressions of chronicity, precarity and inevitability, thus *rejecting* the drought a humanitarian emergency as per extraneous understandings of the term. Thirdly, I put forward the argument that such a rejection of claims that frame the drought as an emergency is an act of *counter-framing*.

The first chapter of my thesis argued how there was a compelling case for the consideration of drought as a humanitarian emergency, through multiple claims of varying natures made by Yavatmal's development actors including government and NGO representatives. The development actors made emergency claims that hinged on the 'actionability' associated with droughts that demanded short- or long-term interventions towards the objective of ensuring welfare (Anderson 2016). Strategically implementing particular 'actions' to address the 'defeatist' farmer mindset and to a smaller extent, local water scarcity, World Vision India established their emergency claims on emergency-governing logics associated with local needs, funding flows, organisational capacity and reputation, and the language of emergency declarations. Similarly, Dilasa, an NGO set up specifically for addressing local water resource management and improving the status of vulnerable and disadvantaged communities in the region, implemented programmes including soil and water conservation, rainwater harvesting, integrated pest-management, irrigation systems and self-help institutions for farmers. On a moderately similar strain with some points of distinct contrast, the local, state and central government representatives perceived the drought as a 'disaster' to be 'managed,' as evidenced

by the central government's Disaster Management Act of India (2005) and the subsequent Disaster Management Guidelines for Droughts (2009). The state governments, including that of Maharashtra, articulated their claim using the tool of 'drought declarations,' literal emergency claims directed at the central government for additional resources to address the effects of droughts, and described as activators of emergency response (Anderson 2015). Despite some slippages and contestations, the development actors' emergency claims largely converge from adjacent, aligned trajectories to establish Yavatmal's drought as a humanitarian emergency.

On this stage set by those actors who respond *to* the drought, I now present Yavatmal's farmers who respond *in* and *to* the drought as primary participants, in an effort to trace the particular emergency claims that they make vis-à-vis those of the development actors. Firstly, the farmers make sense of the drought as a *prolonged* condition that ceases to be an aberration from the normal, or a momentary emergency – transforming into an everyday experience in which the crisis becomes context. Importantly, this concurs with relevant historical and hydrometeorological data that marks droughts and dry conditions as endemic to the region. Both of these observations lead to a perception of the drought as a chronic, persistent condition in which various stresses are normalised and stop being an exceptional *moment* of adversity. Secondly, Yavatmal's farmers situate themselves not as a population who faces precariousness, but as one that exhibits traits of the 'precariat.' As members of a particular, localised precariat, they no longer experience brief disruptions to well-being, but a durable, lasting state of being, characterised by state apathy and socio-economic shocks. However, their identity as members of a precariat constructs a new model of everyday life and practices. Thirdly, the drought is a condition that is inevitable. Through various statements and observations that highlight the certainty of occurrence, impact, powerlessness, the farmers portray the drought as inevitable, a peculiarly persistent condition that is to be expected to make a regular appearance. Principally, the drought is made sense of as a phenomenon that is chronic in nature, associated with particular forms of normalised precarity, and marked by a certainty of occurrence and measures for response.

How do these arguments fashion the exercise of emergency claim-making by the farmers? Certainly, a particular emergency claim arises from the responses of the development actors associated with the drought (as a window of opportunity for remedial or mitigatory action), and founded on accepted knowledge on the concept of emergencies – characterised by (a) Sudden emergence (something that surfaces quickly, for a relatively short duration of time, (b) Types (natural, technological, man-made), (c) Temporality (focus on the critical moment in time when the emergency happens, and the subsequent paucity of time for action), (d) Rush-in (a hurried, temporalized imagery of the initial trigger, Western intervention of humanitarian aid and normalcy), (e) Probability of spread (localised versus potential to spread across space) and (f) Situational agency (the helpful protagonists versus the inhuman antagonists)(Aaltola 2012). This leads to a substantial claim that the situation in Yavatmal is indeed more of an emergency than not, from the perspective of these agents. Against this claim, the farmers posit the counter claim that the drought (a) is more of a chronic condition than a suddenly emerging momentary disruption, (b) is difficult to categorize as natural or man-made, as it exhibits both hydrometeorological and economic, social and political causal elements, (c) is marked by prolonged suffering and a permanent window of action, (d) challenges the idea of a linear mode of progression that involves a trigger, intervention and return to normalcy, (e) firmly remains a local concern through frequent references to the 'other' – urban spaces, or other regions that suffer less, and (f) complicates the idea of situational agency as there are contesting notions about protagonists and antagonists, if any. In essence, through a series of articulations that chiefly reject the principal causes and consequences of the emergency claims made by the development actors, I argue that the farmers make an assertive claim that rejects the drought as a humanitarian emergency, while introducing new modes of understanding of what constitutes an emergency. It is to be noted that this rejection cannot be considered as just a failure to make emergency claims (Rubenstein 2015); it in fact foregrounds the potential for slippages between definitions and emergency claims.

Rejection as counter-framing

A rejection of claims that frame the drought as an emergency does not mean that Yavatmal's small and marginal farmers deny that the hydrometeorological drought occurred at all. While denial communicates a sense of constant opposition, Yavatmal's farmers are involved in a much bigger engagement including denial and more – that of *counter-framing* the drought in a manner that is different from the framing that underlies the emergency claims made by humanitarian agents. These conflicting processes of framing cannot be stated as direct antonyms of each other. A brief foray into the philosophy of logic helps inform this reflection. American philosopher C. S. Peirce had suggested in the 19th century, in the context of logical notations in applied logic, the possibility that denial existing as not the polar opposite of assertion: "the denial of the assertion of *p* is not a non-assertion of p, but an assertion of *not-p*" (Pietarinen et al 2017). Applying this in the context of emergency claims, I would argue that it helps frame the farmers' rejection – not as an active, conscious dismissal of the idea of a hydrometeorolgical drought, but an active, conscious assertive claim of a *version of reality*. Their claim becomes rejective in content and assertive in form. Here, the counter-framing is a proactive, deliberate action founded on credible strands of lived experience which, when articulated emphasising its dire chronicity, normalised precarity and fatal inevitability, suggesting a prolonged duration of vulnerability in Yavatmal that is indistinguishable from the dry seasons and the monsoons.

What are the features of this counter-framing? While the term 'frame' has been used to refer to systems of interpretation (Goffman 1974) that help individuals to situate, recognize, discover and classify experiences within and outside their life spaces, later sociologists have used the concept to examine the field of 'framing,' an active, processual phenomenon which involves creation of interpretive frames that may not only be different from existent frames but may dispute them (Benford and Snow 2000). I argue that Yavatmal's farmers, through their articulation of the drought experience, engage in a 'diagnostic framing,' wherein they identify (a) the central problems and (b) the causality or culpable agents (Ibid). As it concerns a group of

individuals, Yavatmal's farmers display a shared understanding of the key problems they experienced: water scarcity for drinking and irrigation, untimely rains, government neglect, lack of access to credit and alternate livelihoods, and crop failure. Regarding causality, the responses were lesser about the exceptional hydrometeorological manifestations of the drought than the structural vulnerabilities that have persisted over time. Following such a diagnosis, their articulations of the drought effectively manifest as a product of counter-framing, where they attempt to neutralize the variety of reality or interpretive framework (Benford 1987) proposed by the NGO and government representatives.

However, what effect do these counter-frames have? Against the backdrop of strong assertive framings of drought as an emergency, how credible are the farmers' rejective claims? The overall credibility of these claims – which determine how well they resonate to other groups – depends on the aspects of consistency, empirical credibility and credibility of the claim-makers (Benford and Snow 2000). In terms of consistency, Yavatmal's farmers are both consistent in their claims, as well as consistent in their 'speech and action.' Empirically, they did not engage in making factually incorrect framings, and made claims exclusively about things they, and *only* they had first-hand knowledge about. However, at this point Yavatmal's case study goes beyond Benford and Snow's assumptions – the credibility of the farmers' claims did not translate into a higher degree of resonance of their claims. These claims did not find resonance with the NGOs, government representatives and even other farmers in their villages, when viewed from a social movement perspective. The small and marginal farmers in these villages *did not* mobilize for the massive farmer demonstrations that drowned Mahrashtra's capital Mumbai in 2018, most of them claiming "nothing good will come of it." In other words, despite making a compelling case for a credible, resonating framing of the drought, Yavatmal's farmers stop short of stepping into the terrain of 'prognostic framing,' wherein they articulate a proposed (political) solution and strategies to the problem (Ibid). Most of the small and marginal farmers I interviewed cited narrow, utilitarian solutions, despite articulating larger, structural causal mechanisms for their predicament. For instance, digging deeper wells, regular supply of drinking water, water for

animals, a better road, burial ground and closing of open drains were among the most common 'solutions,' many of them not exclusively related to the humanitarian agents' framing of drought as an emergency. On the contrary, the prognosis was aimed more at improving the everyday living conditions, the *normal*.

Lastly, such a deliberate, active participation in the framing process of these emergency claims also underscores how it was simultaneously a discursive and a strategic process. Firstly, as a discursive process, it entailed the emergency claims – in the form of speech acts of assertion – featuring both frame articulation and frame amplification (Benford and Snow 2000). While the former was revealed in a coherent, consistent frame of chronic crisis – with a clear rejection of an emergency of an exceptional nature, the latter was manifest as their frame accentuated certain issues of everyday life, as discussed earlier, as more significant than others. Secondly, as a strategic process, the framing of emergency claims ought to have followed a deliberate, strategic path towards a goal. This invites questions about what the clear goal of these emergency claims were. Was it aimed at a complete overhaul of their chronic and unjust structural vulnerability? Was it a temporary addressal of the *worst* phases of suffering? Significantly, the farmers *did not* mention a single political party, political figure, or government functionary by name, even as lack of relief from the government, bias against farmers and general resignation regarding political apathy were frequently mentioned. This, coupled with the remarkable withdrawal from active political mobilization for meeting these demands, complicates the consistency and efficacy of the strategy behind these claims. With many of the farmers expressing how they wanted to quit farming, migrate elsewhere and did not want their children to continue farming, it is likely that the claims were primarily aimed at short-term relief and not long-term transformation.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed droughts from the point of view of Yavatmal's farmers, based on their perceptions of the drought and its impact on their lives. I described how farmers used the notions of chronicity, precarity and inevitability for framing their version of the drought. Conceptualising the drought experience as chronic throws open new modes and possibilities of understanding the phenomenon. Even as their well-being was affected by severe levels of precarity, the fact that it was commonly seen as 'normal' was in contrast to the observations by the development agents that stamped the situation as "exceptionally bad" (Rubenstein 2015). Lastly, the droughts were perceived as inevitable – a 'certain' crisis that percolated into and constituted the farmers' everyday practices.

What the farmers' claims strive is to highlight the possibility of a different phenomenological experience, for what is perceived as an emergency. Analysis of contesting emergency claims in Yavatmal highlight robust activities of 'framing' of the drought as an emergency by the humanitarian agents, and 'counter-framing' of the drought as a chronic feature of everyday life. Counter-framing extends beyond a simple 'assertion *vs* rejection' binary; more than a mere denial, it is an active formulation of an experience with its own descriptors and logics. The farmers' emergency claims, while displaying traits of diagnostic framing, refrained from making prognostic frames – the proposed solutions and strategies to ameliorate drought effects were in fact aimed at improving what they perceived as *normal* challenges, and not the *exceptional* ones. However, framing processes do have their slippages – while its discursive characteristics are strong, its strategic directions are fraught at best.

In conclusion, I contend that the drought is a problematic term, rife with contestations. Surpassing the popular realist conception predominantly based on its hydrometeorological features, the singularity and coherence of drought as a phenomenon falls apart, when viewed through the prism of emergency claims. Contesting emergency claims reveal it as a dynamic category, with multiple, simultaneously occurring and distinct framings. Analysis of emergency claims lead us to *droughts*, all of which are socially located while occupying the same geographic

space and engaging the same actors. However, the assignment of blame, as noted in the previous chapter, reflects a power imbalance; it is an exercise that is both cognitive and social, regulating social behaviour, intrinsically relying on social cognition and needing a warrant (Malle et al 2014). In turn, this manifests itself as a judgement pronounced at a person who has caused or engaged in a violation of prevalent norms (Scanlon 2008). These discussions lead us to a more detailed scrutiny of what these contesting emergency claims and multiple realities of drought mean to people who are most vulnerable to it, in this case, Yavatmal's small and marginal farmers. What is at stake? In the next chapter I examine the emergency politics that emerges from these acts of claiming and framing, and how it reveals the formation of a new humanitarian space, its inherent inequalities and how these are exacerbated.

CHAPTER 5

EMERGENCY POLITICS AND YAVATMAL'S DROUGHTS

Introduction

This chapter examines the nature and features of emergency politics that emerges out of the contesting emergency claims shaping drought narratives in Yavatmal. I note that the making and rejection of emergency claims by humanitarian agents and small and marginal farmers manifests in three forms of politics marked by distinct, but related foci: politics of blame, politics of vulnerability, and politics of tractability. While the first concerns itself with the ideas of blame, blameworthiness and passivity, the second discusses how a framing of vulnerability is central to some claims. The third heavily leans towards proposing how tractable the situation is, projecting resilience as the key to 'disaster management.' I argue that these three dimensions of emergency politics frame the drought as a conception of the mind, an operational imperative, and as a tractable disaster. Through an examination of what is at stake for the people who are directly affected by droughts, I argue that the emergency politics alters the existing humanitarian space, to one that exacerbates these inequalities as a result of unequally competing claims. I conclude that emergency politics needs to be bolstered by the notion of disaster justice in order to better capture these inequalities.

From emergency claims to emergency politics

As has been noted in the first and second chapters of my thesis, Rubenstein's conception of emergency claims provides a unique lens to better understand the political and moral dimensions of large-scale humanitarian emergencies. Emergency politics refers to the "broader field of actions and omissions" where multiple actors are "making and not making, contesting and not contesting, and accepting, ignoring and rejecting a wide array of overlapping and competing emergency claims" (Rubenstein 2015). Why study emergency politics? Firstly, an

analysis of emergency politics reveals how emergency claims impact marginalized groups, as these claims are Janus-faced - they function both as "weapons of (or for) the weak" (the marginalised sections within affected populations) as well as "weapons of the strong" (affected elites and humanitarian agents). Secondly, a study of emergency politics sheds light on injustices that are encompassed in failed, ignored or rejected emergency claims, as well as, crucially, "possible emergency claims that were never even attempted" (Ibid). Thirdly, emergency politics may contain constituencies that could threaten the interests of people who experience chronic adversity. Emergency politics offers a discussion on agency: about whether the directly affected people of adversity (a) have the power to make their own emergency claims, and (b) contest emergency claims made by others.

In my discussion of emergency politics, I also draw observations from the allied concept of disaster politics, which is concerned with the "interaction of social and political actors and framing institutions in preparing for and responding to extreme natural events, and suggests that the disaster events and their management are part of unfolding political histories" (Pelling 2010). Rubenstein's framework seemingly extends Pelling's, attributing the tool of emergency claim-making to pry open his 'interactions,' to highlight the various directions and dimensions of the politics involved. Disaster politics helps make sense of disasters as critical political moments, during which those with power determine both the direction and pace of post-disaster action.

The making of emergency politics

I observed in my field work that both humanitarian agents and the small and marginal farmers of Yavatmal engaged in the activity of claim-making. Humanitarian agents including the NGOs and the government attempted to portray the drought as a de-politicized phenomenon, embedded firmly in discourses of water 'scarcity,' climate change and farmer incompetency. World Vision India based their drought definition on both government data as well as their own

programme-related data from their operational villages. This combination primarily covered observable aspects including rainfall deficit, crop loss, number of meals per day and economic stress. One of their technical specialists opined that droughts ought to be considered as emergencies due to "the dependency on rainfall, heavy additional input costs that go into farming due to rainfall variability, the consequent economic loss suffered by farmers, as well as scarcity of drinking water." Droughts cannot be anticipated; their intensity and duration cannot be predicted, and thus it needs a different kind of a response – an *emergency response*, that puts *regular* programmes on hold and refocuses attention on 'cash for work' schemes and drinking water supply. This shift in programming sets into motion as soon as the situation meets technical criteria for drought; it is funded by organisational resources earmarked as Humanitarian Emergency Affairs (HEA) funds. Subsequently, as the situation worsens, appeals for funding are circulated within 'support offices' – World Vision offices in developed countries – detailing evidence-based situation reports of scarcity and suffering. These appeals attract funding, as "droughts need big money."

On the other hand, government officials adhered to the official stance that largely downplayed the severity of situation but emphasised the technicality of droughts and responses, largely de-politicizing the experience of Yavatmal's farmers. The key government official in charge of the area (Block Development Officer), responded with silence to my questions regarding the drought. His brief responses were mainly couched in a language of justification of government action and an apparent powerlessness of local administration. Citing a drop in average rainfall in 2019 and a low rainfall in the last 3 years, he was of the opinion that the local government was prompt in its response. Crop loss estimation surveys and revenue surveys gave an accurate picture of the ground situation, he said, and that the government was well on top, with its loan and credit relief programmes, as well as the MNREGS working fine – a claim frequently disputed by farmers. Speaking on political decisions like those about guaranteeing a Minimum Support Price (MSP) to farmers, building more warehouses for grain storage and debt relief, the senior

official transferred responsibility to the Central Government, saying that the local government was always “dependent.” He also tried to downplay the severity of the drought, claiming the neighbouring region of Marathwada was worse off in comparison, and that farmer suicides were an occurrence of the past (despite farmer testimonies and numerous media reports that suggested otherwise). One of the senior scientists working with the government in the area detailed government programmes directed at assisting farmers, citing untimely rains in the last 10 years as something beyond human control. His list of the major drought-related challenges featured technical aspects like challenges of soil testing, minimising cost of cultivation, increasing irrigation potential and improved farming techniques during the critical period of crop growth. Major interventions included digital portals that disseminated technical advice through SMS, promotion of Integrated Crop Management (ICM) methodology and contingency crop planning, with an emphasis on location and situation-based responses.

However, the small and marginal farmers in many instances hinted at the larger structural issues underlying their drought experiences, while rejecting the occurrence of anything ‘exceptional.’ Many suggested interventions by humanitarian agents were non-existent, temporary, insufficient or inefficient. Specifically, they observed that they hardly received any assistance from the government (except the rare ‘drought relief’ package, a small sum aimed at covering input costs), and precious little from the NGOs. Most of their demands required structural, political change – including construction of large dams, removing corruption in implementation of programmes, introducing alternative livelihoods, providing employment guarantee, better access to government credit schemes, and addressing prevalent socio economic and political bias against rural farmers. One of the farmers claimed, “I do not want my children to do farming; I hope to educate them at least up to college, so that they get jobs in the private sector. Competition for jobs is very high, but there is no tension (stress) for other jobs – unlike farmers who work hard, very hard, for 24 hours, seven days a week.” Another farmer echoed the same sentiment: “My son is not interested in farming. I don’t think anyone will do it

in the future; I think I will just sell the land." Such distress selling of land is becoming increasingly common in Yavatmal, as doctors, lawyers and businessmen are already purchasing farmlands at cheap rates, only to sell them later at a profit. Such resignation to adversity reflects the farmers' failure to make claims that the drought is an emergency – they emphasise structural vulnerabilities that are more of a norm than the exception.

(i) The politics of blame

An important feature of the claims by some of the humanitarian agents is an apparent blame of the farmer, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, as uninformed, uninspired and undecided – traits that have at best made emergency action challenging, and at worst aggravated the impact of drought. Though not from a comparable position of power, the farmers too blame the government (and NGOs to a lesser extent) of apathy, neglect and bias; however, in this section I will discuss blame directed *at* the farmers.

If blame could be considered a form of or feature within broader emergency claims, how can we make sense of it as a political expression? An explanation of the notion of blame by Jasper et al, while acknowledging the blurred boundary between human culpability and "natural disasters" due to political and cultural framings, nevertheless concludes that this politics is largely marked by an essential triad of "villain-victim-hero" (2020). However, it becomes an arduous task to assign these labels to the claimants in Yavatmal's emergency politics as it presupposes a comprehensive and stable assignment of moral values to these groups, which is hardly possible. Instead of such classifications, it might be more useful to highlight the politics of blame in general in this context. As a social act that is simultaneously cognitive and social, blame is viewed as relying on social cognition and serving a function of regulating social behaviour and requiring warrant (Malle et al 2014). Blame regulates conduct and acts a judgement directed at

those who violate norms, making it a political expression which could arise from both ends of the power hierarchy.

In the context of droughts and the agrarian economy, there is ample evidence attributing farmer suicides to shifts in agrarian policy since India's liberalisation in the early 1990s – listing the role of the state, agrarian policy, access to and use of credit, role of the market and globalisation as possible explanations (Shah 2012). However, in the case of Yavatmal, the humanitarian agents attribute blame in ways that are both similar and different. While both the government and NGOs blame environmental factors like rainfall and topography, as well as scarcity and the *non-resilient* farmer, they differ in that their blame excludes larger structural reasons. As they propose techno-institutional and behavioural changes as solutions, Yavatmal's humanitarian agents place the blame squarely on the 'meta-narrative of scarcity' of water, natural resources and soil quality, ignoring the structural features of politics played out in rural India.

The political dimensions of what is included and excluded in the act and content of blame could be further noted via the work of the sociologist Thomas Scanlon. He breaks down the structure of blame to include five elements, namely: (i) the ground relationship, (ii) the impairment, (iii) position of the responder, (iv) significance of the impairment for the responder, and (v) the appropriate response (Scanlon 2008). Blame in Yavatmal's emergency narratives could be described as featuring these elements in broadly similar but distinct ways. Firstly, the *ground relationship* in Yavatmal is both between the humanitarian "rescuers" and the "victims," (Fassin 2012) as well as, to a lesser extent, between different levels of organization (for both government and the INGO). According to Scanlon, the relationship provides the standards relative to which impairment could be assessed. Secondly, the drought *impairs* the relationship owing to certain attitudes of the parties. While the farmers do not openly reject or acknowledge these impaired relationships, it is manifested in their registering of the lack of significance assistance from these agents, as well as of their own chronic vulnerability. Thirdly, the *position*

of the responder (the entity that does the blaming) wields power; in fact, while the political power and agency of humanitarian agents enables them to make open, direct statements of blame, the relative lack of agency due to chronic vulnerability forces farmers to be subtle and indirect in their blaming. This also relates to the fourth element of blame, the *significance of the impairment for the responder* – while an impairment has a relatively routine impact for humanitarian agents, farmers are often unable to afford any serious impairment in these political relationships. Finally, on a somewhat ethical note, Scanlon notes that the fifth element of blame examines its *appropriateness.* These dimensions compose the process of blame-making as a sub-process of claim-making and calls for an analysis of farmers' responses to it.

Responding to blame: politics of passivity

How do farmers respond politically to droughts and the accompanying politics of blame? It would be useful to consider it with respect to both time and space. Historically, there have been multiple peasant movements across India, especially a significant wave of movements in the early 1970s that washed over multiple states including Maharashtra. In the 1980s, unionized peasants took out large agitations using multiple strategies including massive demonstrations that lasted for many days, blocking of roads and railways, blocking access of government officials to villages, as well as the remarkable strategy of withholding agricultural produce from markets that caused immediate, steep hike in prices (Lindberg 1994). In frequent displays of substantial political solidarity, these peasant movements gained bargaining power in mainstream politics, notably the *Shetkari Sanghatana* led by the firebrand leader, Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra. The movement pitted *Bharat* against India – where *Bharat* stood for the indigenous idea of India that entailed peasant welfare, and India referred to the westernised name of the country, that was a symbol of exploitation (Omvedt 1994). More generally, the trope has over the years come to mean the rural-urban divide within the country from a predominantly economic perspective (Chakravarty 2015).

Peasant movements gradually lost momentum in the following decades; in the last few years, however, there have been a resurgent wave of peasant movements, primarily in the neighbouring Marathwada region of Maharashtra. From 2016 to 2018, these movements received massive support both from peasants and the general public. The wave of demonstrations led by the All India Kisan Sangh (AIKS) claimed the BJP-led government betrayed farmers, and demanded from the government a waiver of farmer loans, Minimum Support Price (MSP) for their crops, at 50 per cent above the cost of production, and for the Forest Rights Act (FRA) to ensure the land titles and rights over forest produce of the marginalised *Adivasi* (indigenous) population (Dhawale 2018). Notwithstanding this flurry of political activity, Dhawale notes that most of these were limited to Marathwada and not Vidarbha, which houses Yavatmal. In almost all of the interviews I conducted in the field in September 2019, no farmer reported as having participated in these activities that were arguably the biggest farmer demonstrations in recent Indian history, coinciding with the peak of a deadly wave of successive droughts and widespread farmer suicides. This affirms how Yavatmal's farmers now employ a conspicuous passivity when it came to participation in political resistance; the fact that the other protests yielded little significant results might have also played a role.

How does one make sense of passivity as a political expression? James Scott observed through peasant movements that their political responses tend to be mostly individualised, unorganized and localised forms that do not receive much attention in the outside world (Scott 1976). Importantly, the political scientist noted how the peasant's "moral right to subsistence" forms the standard against which they evaluate claims by economic and political agents. I argue that as a people frequently absorbed in subsistence in the face of recurring droughts and falling livelihoods, Yavatmal's farmers languish in a similar setting of precarity. As a coping strategy, Scott outlines individual and temporary responses like migration, a frequent response adopted

by Yavatmal's farmers, that "staves off the immediate threat to subsistence" (Ibid) during the worst months of drought. Logics of subsistence, therefore, lie at the heart of passivity being a pronounced political strategy.

I observe that faced with detrimental threats to subsistence, Yavatmal's small and marginal farmers adopted passivity as their preferred political response. Though an intuitive response would be rebellion and an *active* effort to revise the status quo for the better, farmers chose this – or was it a choice at all? As Scott notes, the lack of alternatives and the difficulty of revolt leads to a *forced* choice: a dominant measure of passive adaptation (Scott 1976). Scott's observations highlight both an *internal* justification that is founded on social order, as well as an *external* justification that is based on 'relationships of force,' or on types of political order. Furthering these ideas, I use 'internal' to refer to inherent features of the caste-based Hindu social stratification that exists in these communities, and 'external' to refer to the activities of mainstream political parties that exert force and influence upon these communities from the district, state and national level political representatives. The justification based on social order stands valid in Yavatmal, where most of the farmers interviewed belonged to the lower castes in the exclusively Hindu villages. In a pan-Indian study, it was reported that among farmers who committed suicide in Maharashtra over 70% were from socially backward sections – Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) as designated by the government (Manjunatha et al 2017). Further, caste plays a decisive role in Indian politics in general and in the Vidarbha region in particular, and almost all political parties field candidates from the dominant caste groups from their respective electoral constituencies.

On the other hand, the external political order – ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been traditionally seen as leaning towards the upper castes. At the time of my field work, BJP was in power, as well as primed for victory in the upcoming election in October 2019. A party known for its influential muscle across the country and use of brute force in suppressing dissent from

minorities, the BJP's dominance may have ensured most farmers were resigned to their fate, in a display of what Scott called "relationships of force" (Scott 1976). Thus, the farmers' political expressions were typically marked by a sense of passivity, which could be attributed to both social relationships as well as political; this led to them being banished to a political position set in the margins of the state's electoral politics where their issues were being neither presented nor considered. As Jean Drèze pointed out, this problem of political marginalisation was overarching; one of his interviewees pointed out, "there is no point in complaining – nobody is going to listen" (Drèze 2017).

(ii) The politics of vulnerability and tractability

Under the garb of vulnerability and tractability, agenda-driven frames contain dominant narratives where both are non-structural and depoliticized. One of the first characteristics of vulnerability is that of economic inequality. Inequality manifests visibly in the non-inclusive trajectory of economic growth in the state of Maharashtra – the state is one of India's richest. Historically, India as a whole has seldom prioritised inclusive growth as much as economic growth: it has been reported that the top 1% of Indians are in possession of more than 4 times the total wealth owned by 953 million Indians - or the bottom 70% of the population (Basu et al 2020). Maharashtra reflects the trend, with the bottom earners – largely comprising of small and marginal farmers, spread over the drought-hit areas of Vidarbha and Marathwada. The almost double-digit economic growth in the state had evidently left the agricultural sector trailing behind (Mishra 2010). The fruits of the economic growth spurred by the onset of neoliberal economic reforms in India were not distributed equally, among workers in the agriculture sector – which provides employment for over 60% of India's population and constitutes 17% of the country's GDP (Arjun 2013). Economic vulnerability, according to small and marginal farmers, called for three preferred responses: migration in search of livelihood, distress selling of land and livestock, and incurring mounting debt. Economists have shown that drought frequency in the origin state increases inter-state migration, with a stronger effect in

agricultural states; magnitude of drought and drought frequency significantly increases migration (Dallmann 2017). The trend of non-agricultural entities purchasing rural farmlands has been noted by researchers (Vijayabaskar et al 2016), usually in anticipation of appreciation of prices. The rising debt and reduced incomes (following neoliberal reforms and general economic growth) plaguing lower and middle-class peasant smallholders has also been documented, in relation to farmer suicides in Yavatmal (Mohanty 2005). These have been exacerbated by successive droughts and repeated crop losses; in the 30 years between 1968 and 1998, Yavatmal's farmers had experienced crop losses on 19 occasions (Ibid). However, these explicit historical and structural backgrounds that constitute farmer distress are subsumed within a blanket framing of vulnerability.

Following the widespread attention on the progression of human vulnerability according to the PAR model (Blaikie et al 1994), much humanitarian investment was focussed on tractability, via building 'resilience' – the situation in Yavatmal was no different. In these drought-hit villages, both World Vision and Dilasa were heavily invested in improving the resilience quotient among rural farmers. One of the disaster risk reduction experts in the former highlighted the experience of the organisation in dealing with disasters for the decades, as well as the deliberate focus on making drought-prone communities resilient to drought. Resilience programming involved both short-term drought relief (that involved distribution of relief packages that included food, dry rations, drink water, hygiene and sanitary products and other essentials), as well as long-term drought-proofing interventions that often blended into broader development plans for the location, which included natural resource management as well as livelihood support. Though World Vision started their work in Yavatmal with interventions on multiple developmental concerns, an increase in the severity and recurrence of droughts coincided with a more specific approach which focussed mainly on addressing drought-related concerns. Over time, this approach of foregrounding resilience-building to make humanitarian response more

tractable manifested itself more in the vocabulary of psychological resilience rather than material resilience.

Seated at the intersection of the politics of blame, vulnerability and tractability, the drought becomes a conception of the mind, a strategic directive and a tractable disaster. Firstly, while the humanitarian agents including government and aid representatives claim the very *nature* of the small and marginal farmers is responsible for their heightened vulnerability, the farmers respond by retreating from acts of direct political mobilization. Their political responses to blame are often marked by an apparent passivity, in contrast to historical trends as well as in comparison to simultaneous political activity in nearby geographic regions facing similar challenges. The narrative focusses on the low psychological resilience of the farmers (Manjunatha et al 2017), their inability to cope with adversity, adhere to instructions, and motivate themselves – making the drought more a conception of the mind. Secondly, the drought becomes an operational component for the NGOs operating on the ground, where it assumes the role of a strategic directive. Both World Vision India and Dilasa view the drought as having strategic significance that justifies the presence and purpose of these organizations in the affected villages. These are in sync with widespread global humanitarian concerns of human security, climate change adaptation, and resilience-building. Thirdly, this broader strategy anchors itself on the idea that the drought is a disaster that is tractable; the assumption that human agency – or humanitarian action by extension – could reduce the effect of the phenomenon. India's Disaster Management Act (2005), the setting up of the NDMA and SDMAs, the official guidelines that offer instructions to local governments and communities for "drought management" are examples. This is also evident in the setting up of a dedicated humanitarian emergency affairs team in World Vision as well as common initiatives aimed at drought-proofing in both World Vision India as well as Dilasa, finding multiple mentions in conversations as well as organizational documents.

The very terminology of making villages and communities drought-proof, calls to mind other terms like water-proof and bullet-proof. Similar to the concept of a material which is absolutely impenetrable to a fired bullet or water, this concept posits that complex human communities can be completely unaffected or immune to a complex phenomenon such as drought. The analogy bases itself on the *external* threat the object of value located within needs protection from, made possible by a strong, impenetrable layer that cleanly cleaves the two apart. However, in most drought-hit villages the situation is chronic, constituted by everyday practices and interactions – where the very idea of drought exists co-produced in a network of narratives emerging out of contesting claims from different groups with distinct traits and objectives. This semantic dissonance also translates to efforts originating in the notion of tractability. In a bid to drought-proof communities, constituencies and complexities of dimensions that are at odds with the uniform cleavage suggested by the term are either erroneously simplified or deliberately overlooked. In the exercise, such humanitarian action reminds one of traditional dichotomies like rich and poor, war and peace, etc. (Pandolfi and Rousseau 2016); the humanitarian agents make claims and perform distinct practices embedded in morality and ethics that de-prioritize nuance and scrutiny of a dynamic terrain characterised by inconsistencies, overlaps and blurred categories.

Altered humanitarian spaces

An examination of Yavatmal's emergency politics reveals the dominant narratives framing the phenomenon as at once a process of de-historicizing and de-humanizing. Firstly, the emergency politics that unravels itself in Yavatmal tends to de-historicize the drought; drought is viewed as a distinct, recent temporal category, despite some important history pertaining to agriculture in the region. While the drought of 1965 was used to "force" the green revolution on India (with World Bank's role being instrumental), the drought of 1972 was used by the World Bank as a plank to promote irrigation-intensive sugarcane cultivation (Shiva 2016). In 1988, the

deregulation of the seed sector by the Government of India facilitated the entry of Monsanto, the American agrochemical and agricultural biotechnology corporation into India's seed market. Monsanto had significant effects on the agrarian sector – firstly, seeds that were primarily under the control of decentralized farmers started becoming the "intellectual property" of Monsanto, resulting in royalty costs and subsequent increase in seed prices. Secondly, these seeds, like that of Bt cotton (open field trials of which started illegally in 1998) required a monoculture practice, with a higher susceptibility of the crop to pests, diseases and droughts (Shiva 2013). Post 2002, the year the commercial approval of Bt cotton (genetically modified) came through, area under cotton cultivation jumped more than twenty times. Bt cotton, touted as an advanced variety that would generate high yields, was more irrigation-intensive, developed susceptibility to the pink bollworm pest, and started demanding high input costs (Menon 2018). While Bt cotton did help India become the world's leading exporter of cotton, (Mishra 2013), it has been criticised for its adverse socio-economic as well as ecological effects (Kumbamu 2006). These historic aspects, mired in economic, scientific and political ecology discourses surrounding drought in Maharashtra are mostly ignored in the emergency claims made by humanitarian agents; claims that do refer to these are largely invisible.

Secondly, the drought is re-cast as a technical category, where emergency claims are modelled in the language of hydrometeorological data, despite the crucial 'human' aspect of the same. The biggest example of this is the government's "Manual for Drought Management" that was released in 2016, which revised the criteria for declaring a region as drought-hit. Five parameters are prescribed by the Manual, as being mandatory for a drought to be officially declared: rainfall, agriculture, soil moisture, hydrology and remote sensing (health of crops). Among these, the rainfall indices are mandatory indicators, and the other four are called impact indicators. If at least two impact indicators are in the severe category, the drought will be declared as "moderate," and if at least three impact indicators are in the severe category, the drought will be declared as "severe." Funding assistance under the National Disaster Response

Fund (NDRF) will be allotted only if the drought qualifies as "severe" (Government of India 2016). However, it is unlikely that three impact indicators together will reflect the 'severity' of drought. Despite a 50% drop in area under cultivation in Yavatmal from 2016-17 to 2017-18, the official declaration was that the drought was "moderate" (Jamwal 2018), which barely provided relief for large populations of severely affected farmers. Prior to the technically established droughts, the government used to declare a drought year if there was (a) deficient rainfall and (b) the crop yield was less than 50% of the average of 10 years (Ibid). Under extremely stringent technical parameters for declaring "severe" droughts, the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare had re-framed droughts as a technical category that could be defined primarily by remote-sensing data, a de-humanizing process that effectively denies states, including Maharashtra, material resources to address food, water and livelihood concerns of farmers affected.

Dominant emergency claims argued that Yavatmal's issue is the drought *per se*, and not the larger aspect of agrarian distress. On the other hand, small and marginal farmers were of the opinion that this suffering (a) had been a chronic feature in the last twenty years or so, and (b) was caused not exclusively by droughts but by larger political and economic factors. When describing the causes behind their predicament, the farmers cited government apathy, poor pricing mechanisms that do not guarantee a minimum support price (MSP), unpredictability of rainfall, and access to credit. The government-driven Green Revolution in the 1960s, opined one farmer, resulted in an increased use of pesticides and fertilizers in many villages. Government apathy was also strongly highlighted by the farmers, who specifically mentioned bias towards the issues of urban, salaried, tax-paying classes, and a neglect towards farmer concerns. "If I invest 100 INR in our farm, I get only 90 INR in return – not 125 INR, which could be a small profit. This happens year after year. And I have to invest 12 months of labour into this. And my entire family depends on it," said one farmer, summing up the impact of the agrarian distress.

I argue that these manifestations of counter-framing that foreground structural causes alters the perception of the humanitarian space surrounding droughts. Humanitarian space, a phrase coined by the former MSF President Rony Brauman in the 1990s, referred to "a space of freedom in which we are free to evaluate needs, free to monitor the distribution and use of relief goods and have a dialogue with the people" (Wagner 2007). Though this usage initially had a 'positive' connotation from the point of view of humanitarian agents, the idea of the humanitarian space has become increasingly fraught with complexities and shared presences of various actors and processes loosely related to the broad humanitarian agenda of 'saving lives.' By counter-framing the drought as a structural , political issue, Yavatmal's farmers call for their villages not to be humanitarian spaces in the old, *inward-looking* sense dictated by humanitarian agents, but as one that "includes the protection and assistance needs and priorities of affected people and the roles and duties of other key actors, including political authorities" (Collinson et al 2012). However, this proposition would seem incomplete without examining what the emphasis of such a politicized humanitarian space means for the people affected by adversity.

A de-politicized humanitarian space as per the claims of the government representatives and the INGO, ignores how the drought is *already* embedded in politics. From the Green Revolution in the 1960s that aimed to boost India's ailing agricultural productivity battered after colonial exploitation, to the neoliberal economic reforms in the 1990s, from the reported state government neglect towards farmer concerns to multiple farmer movements, Yavatmal's drought has been shaping and being shaped by politics on different levels. However, the distinction here is that while the drought was already immersed in politics, its inclusion in the category of emergency changes the terms and nature of the politics; the new emergency politics incorporates Slim's question of how the politicization of humanitarian spaces affects the people who suffer (Slim 2003). By magnifying the moral right of humanitarian action, accrediting higher significance to emergency claims made by non-victims, framing as 'exceptional' the

chronic neglect of farmer welfare and ultimately branding the drought as an emergency, the new humanitarian space in Yavatmal exacerbates particular injustices.

Importantly, this does not imply that all drought-related humanitarian action causes an unjust, negative alteration of the humanitarian space – the internal logic of INGOs and NGOs is far from straightforward. While the NRM initiatives, emergency relief distribution, and resilience-building programmes *do* benefit drought-hit farmers, such a focus on short-term solutions rationalised by emergency claims are guided by three main concerns. Firstly, it is premised on a political inertia, as a 'normal,' chronic drought neither dominates political agendas (as noted earlier) nor spurs socio-political or economic elites into collective action (Tierney 2018). Secondly, it rests on a legitimization agenda, which requires *emergency specialists* from such organisations to be present and functional at a site of drought. The NGOs I worked with had emergency specialists, resilience technical specialists, and NRM specialists. Thirdly, it justifies funding models; exceptional adversities like droughts, floods and earthquakes attract higher funding since it affects a large number of people (as noted in chapter 3). A short-term framing of the drought is likely to transpose an emotional response to victims with broader concerns for corrective politics and justice (Guilhot 2012), and therein lies the complexity of the internal logics of humanitarian NGOs, which tussle with the humanitarian reason (Fassin 2012) on one hand and self-justification and survival pressures on the other.

Towards disaster justice

Tying together the various strands discussed so far in the chapter, I suggest that emergency politics and its traits as observed in the Yavatmal droughts lead us towards the necessity for a disaster justice perspective, a notion that might enable us to better ask Rubenstein's broad question of how to comprehend the seepage of existing social injustices into emergency politics. Founded on the proposition that disasters always occur in political spaces and demand efforts

towards inclusion and equity, disaster justice has been portrayed as a "moral claim on governance, which arises from anthropogenic interventions in nature that incubate environmental crises and magnify their socially and spatially uneven impacts" (Douglas 2018). Disaster justice sits at the intersection of the unequal politics of blame, vulnerability, and tractability. The idea of disaster justice was popularised by legal scholar Verchick, who extended the ideas of both disasters and justice as having social and political meanings which overlap in certain situations (Verchick 2012). Disaster justice offers an important lens to view contesting emergency claims – it becomes a touchstone to understand how emergency politics could be deeply unequal.

In other words, I suggest that emergency politics, if assessed exclusively through emergency claims generates mostly a discussion of contesting claims that runs the risk of being viewed as 'equal' in a sense; hence, to recognise the biases and flesh out the power inequalities involved in these processes, employing a justice approach becomes necessary. Disaster justice is concerned more with governance than *just* disaster response, and thus justifies both its explicit focus on injustice suffered by social groups who have directly experienced disasters, and an implicit focus on inequality. An examination of emergency politics using a disaster justice approach could channel attention towards the rights of Yavatmal's small and marginal farmers to make acceptable claims – to (a) reduce patterns of vulnerability via the underlying social and spatial processes, (b) access participatory forms of disaster governance, and (c) enjoy the fruits of a just distribution of resources that would aid recovery (Douglas 2018). Additionally, disaster justice helps make sense of the 'fairness' of claims and actions by other groups during droughts. For instance, while the number of farmer suicides in Vidarbha spiked and water scarcity pushed thousands of rural households to desperate measures during the 2016 drought, the cricket grounds in Maharashtra spent 6.6 million litres of water to maintain the pitches. "This is criminal wastage. Are your cricket matches more important than people?" the division bench of

justices at the Bombay High Court asked the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the cash-rich national governing body for cricket, in response to a plea by an NGO.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to chart the trajectory of emergency politics surrounding drought, from its emergence through distinct emergency claims to its culmination as a site that demands disaster justice. Along the way, it alters the understanding of drought-hit Yavatmal from an 'old' humanitarian space which was configured by humanitarian agents on their terms, and foregrounded developmental concerns, to a 'new' humanitarian space that magnified the moral rights and interventions of humanitarians via foregrounding of certain emergency claims as legitimate, and ignored the failure of certain claimants to make 'valid' and 'acceptable' claims. This new humanitarian space that housed the active sphere of emergency politics, founded on contesting emergency claims, bears witness to exacerbated injustices suffered by people whose lives and livelihoods are destroyed by recurring droughts. To view this emergency politics in perspective, I use the lens of disaster justice; such a move offers a possibility to examine the processes of re-framing of the drought as a temporal and technical category, and what its implications are to groups involved in emergency claim-making.

It could be observed that categories are rather fluid in the sphere of emergency politics – the ambivalent drought means different things to different actors. Firstly, it qualifies as an emergency for NGOs, when it gets primarily assessed on the basis of its fit into discourses of resilience, risk reduction and resource generation. Routine modes of programming get suspended, and claims are made to donors, governments and the civil society to aid the project of humanitarianism. Secondly, it qualifies as a disaster for the government, which is primarily concerned with handling the associated economic and political fallouts, assessing the management of disasters, negotiating appeals for resources, and the declaration or non-

declaration of drought (as an emergency). Along the process, they re-frame the drought as a technically insulated and temporally exceptional category, sidelining important historical and humane pillars of drought. Thirdly, the drought is recognised by Yavatmal's small and marginal farmers as a perpetual adversity that neither stands out as an exceptional episode, nor as an actionable problem. By failing to make the claim that the drought is exceptional, sudden, and cause for immediate concern, the farmers – ironically the ones who have the most at stake – reveal the unequal nature of the emergency politics that governs the droughts.

Where do these discussions leave the understanding of an emergency that apparently co-exists with the occurrence of drought? While the hydrometeorological data, number of suicides and drop in yield and area under cultivation suggest a realist frame for an emergency, it remains incomplete. Emergency claims made by INGOs, NGOs, government offices and small and marginal farmers thread together a more complete and robust constructionist claim for an emergency, a set of simultaneously occurring processes that are often contesting. While at once a hydrological, agricultural, technical, humanitarian, and a social phenomenon, drought as an emergency is deeply embedded in politics that privilege the making and treatment of certain emergency claims over others. The emergency, therefore, ceases to be a neutral term and becomes a politicized social imaginary – not as a set of imagined ideas, but as "what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society" (Taylor 2004). As politics that governs a set of processes displaying common understandings and common practices within the respective groups of actors involved, emergency politics divorces context and politics from human vulnerability. This calls for an approach based on disaster justice – to ensure that Yavatmal's droughts do not continue to be a fatal distortion of the quotidian where exceptional suffering becomes the normal; a site of blame, where farmer vulnerability is attributed to their own 'flaws'; and a chronic crisis that empowers the already-empowered.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In the past chapters I have tried to answer my central question, *how does emergency claim-making contribute to the understanding of drought as a humanitarian emergency in India's Yavatmal*? Through an analysis of multiple emergency claims associated with drought in Yavatmal, my thesis has uncovered the many *lives of the drought,* reflecting its multiple ontologies. In one of the most dominant frames, the drought *becomes* an emergency, marked broadly by its actionability and uncertainty foregrounded by humanitarian agents. In another, the drought undergoes a process of *unbecoming*, where it is reduced to a chronic condition, a feature of the farmers' *normal* and lying outside the narrative of exceptionality. Therefore, the emergency politics that underlies the process of 'becoming' is constituted by contested claims, some which are stronger, more visible, and more accepted. As some claims, employed as ''weapons of the strong" (Rubenstein 2015) exacerbate inherent injustices that accompany disaster situations (Albala-Bertrand 2000), a disaster justice approach becomes key to locate such dimensions of emergency politics. In the sections below, I present my research questions and elaborate how I have tried to answer them.

I have examined *how humanitarian agents engage in claim-making*; droughts were claimed to be both a disaster and an emergency, with the former encapsulating the idea of harm that has already occurred, and the latter conveying the possibility of imminent harm. The former frame, dominantly used by the NDMA, appraises drought largely as a culmination of particular hydrometeorological events, transcribed by data points drawn from technical platforms, and required to be politically managed through centralised, policy-based disaster management

plans. The latter claim by INGOs and NGOs — that of drought as an emergency — invokes the exceptionality of the threat that puts lives and livelihoods at great risk, the temporal urgency of the situation that calls for immediate action, and possibility of human agency that could minimise suffering. Despite the strands of contradiction, both these claims entail two major themes — causality and tractability. Among other causal factors, the identity of the small and marginal farmer as uninspired, uninformed, and undisciplined is dominantly framed. Subsequently, the best ways to manage the drought, according to the tractability narrative, was to *manage* the farmer's traits, techniques and temperament.

Subsequently, I have examined *how small and marginal farmers of Yavatmal engaged in emergency claim-making*. By rejecting the claim that the drought is exceptional, sudden, and cause for immediate concern, the farmers *counter-frame* that the drought does not qualify as an emergency. This done by a foregrounding of the chronicity, precarity and inevitability of their everyday lived experience with relation to drought. Ironically, the farmers are the ones who have the most at stake, and this counter claim reveals the unequal nature of the emergency politics that governs droughts. The drought, as it *became* an emergency, was claimed to be a naturally caused phenomenon that was exogenous to society. However, contesting claims frame the drought as being endogenous to the social lives of small and marginal farmers engaged in agriculture; it was constituted by the very social, political, historic and economic discourses surrounding the region. Therefore, the multiple ontologies of drought reveal a terrain of emergency politics fraught with competing emergency narratives, with acute implications on not only social and political, but also physical and material levels.

Lastly, I discuss *how the resultant emergency politics engages with the idea of justice*. As I have noted, emergency politics contains two processes. Firstly, it tends to divorce context and politics from human vulnerability. It treats farmers' vulnerability as a temporary, brief, technically defined 'emergency,' a framing which overrides the chronic, structural vulnerability that requires governance measures than temporary political ones. Secondly, it engenders the

alteration of the humanitarian space that accommodates drought in an already-underdeveloped location like Yavatmal, from the 'old' one which was configured by humanitarian agents on their terms, and foregrounding 'developmental concerns' to a 'new' humanitarian space that magnified the moral rights and interventions of humanitarians via foregrounding of certain emergency claims as legitimate, and ignored the failure of certain claimants to make 'valid' and 'acceptable' emergency claims. Hence, I have argued that drought needs to be analysed with a disaster justice approach to minimise the inherent exacerbation of inequalities such an alteration implies. Such an approach reveals how the humanitarian space which accommodates the drought transitions to one where a seemingly 'natural' disaster exacerbates socio-economic and political inequalities.

Do these arguments grounded on emergency claims settle the contested categories of emergencies in general, and droughts in particular? Far from it. The emergency, which cannot be reduced to a unified "underlying self-contained process" (Aaltola 2012), is a category rife with conflicts and contradictions, marked by the multiple ontologies that frame versions of it. The emergency, therefore, ceases to be a neutral term and becomes a social imaginary — not as a set of imagined ideas, but as "what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society" (Taylor 2004). This thesis has also shown that, the category is not immune to vigorous politics, the kind which frames chronic suffering as exceptional, through de-politicizing and de-humanizing lived experiences of people directly affected.

Contributions of this thesis

Within its limitations, my thesis has attempted to make two contributions to the relevant bodies of knowledge.

Theoretically, I have examined the robustness of Rubenstein's framework of emergency claims and emergency politics (Rubenstein 2015), a fairly recent political science perspective founded on Saward's work on representative claims (Saward 2010). By advancing the discursive traits of

emergency claim-making, I have tried to enhance the applicability of her framework in situations where 'slow onset disasters' like drought blurs the distinctions between exceptionality and normalcy. To this end, I have proposed that (a) the exercise of claiming entails various frames that claimants use, and that the sociological notion of social frames (Benford and Snow 2000) which capture framing and counter-framing, diagnostic and prognostic framing, as well as strategic and framing processes are useful to further break down the activity of 'claiming'; (b) the exacerbation of existing inequalities that emerge out of emergency politics may be better tracked using a disaster justice approach which focuses on long-term governance rather than short-term emergency interventions.

Analytically, my thesis has wrestled with the related, but distinct, analytical categories of emergency and disaster and observed how both manifest themselves as social constructs — a process with significant political implications. Though studies have reviewed and discussed how these categories are similar and different (Al-Dahash et al 2016), the identification and analysis of the politics that underlies the *choice* of categorising events has not been undertaken. My work contributes towards making sense of the discursive politics embedded in the use and disuse of these often-overlapping analytical categories.

Limitations and future research

Following my theoretical and empirical explorations surrounding emergency claim-making, I have identified two key limitations which may have scope for future research.

Firstly, my thesis has treated as a relatively unified category the group of small and marginal farmers, who are likely to display differences based on gender, caste, class and political temperament, apart from other factors. It would be interesting to have more empirical studies that analyse intra-group emergency claims. Additionally, extending the sample groups to middlemen, fertilizer/pest/seed companies, and local/state/national politicians may reveal further its dimensions. Secondly, I have not examined in detail the role of media in shaping

discourses around drought. It is a powerful participant in emergency claim-making, since it engages with massive audiences in multiple realms of social framing, including frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation (Benford and Snow 2000).

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Primary sources

a) List of research participants interviewed during field work in Yavatmal during July - August 2019.

S.No.	Respondent	Affiliation	Functions	Interviews
1	Programme Manager	World Vision India (NGO)	Overview of the project	1
2	Development Co-ordinator	World Vision India	Programme implementation, community and local government relations	1
3	Field staff	World Vision India	Community and local government relations	2
4	Technical expert	World Vision India, Dilasa (NGO)	Technical guidance, programme monitoring and evaluation	5
5	Activist	Water Initiative Odisha (NGO)	Advocacy, legal aid, awareness	1
5	Scientist	Krishi Vigyan Kendra (GO)	Technical guidance, monitoring, programme support	1

6	Local officers	Department of Agriculture (GO), Welfare services	Community liaison, technical support	5
7	District officer	District Administration (GO)	Local governance, grievance redressal, policy implementation	1
8	Founder	National Disaster Management Authority	Disaster Management, advisory, policy-framing	1
9	School headmaster	Ghodkhindi Upper Primary School	Education	1
10	Health worker	Primary Health Subcentre	Health, awareness-building	1
11	Village Head	Ghodkhindi, Shivni	Village governance	3
11	Individual farmers			14
TOTAL				37

b) Textual sources

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Appendix A

Data privacy agreement with the translator.

Data Security and Confidentiality Agreement

between.....and.....
regarding transcription services (by the latter)
of interviews conducted (by the former)

As a translator/transcriber working with ..... Oxford Department of International Development, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK, on his/her research work, I agree to the following terms and conditions governing data security and confidentiality. I agree to abide by the list of measures given below:

- **Data protection**: I will take the necessary measures to prevent confidential project files and translated content from being accessed by unauthorized parties. I will not create copies of received files or transcripts; I also agree to return or shred any physical materials received for a project upon request. I shall not store project data in any format in any cloud/device without prior permission from the researcher.

- **Data confidentiality**: All work-related files, content and communications will remain strictly confidential. Confidential project content will not be discussed or shared, in part or full, with unauthorized parties, friends, relatives, colleagues or others. I shall work exclusively from home on secure, wired network. My work computer is password protected, and I shall be the only person who has access to my computer.

- **Subcontracting**: I will not outsource this work to any other translators/transcribers.

- **Ownership claims**: I agree that completed transcripts are the sole property of the researcher and waive any personal rights thereof.

- **Data deletion**: I shall destroy all hard or soft copies data files created specifically for this project, upon completion of the same. I will delete transcript files upon completion of transcription, and I am willing to do so at any time upon request.

- **Encrypted file storage and file transfer**: I will store all project files (original and translated) in encrypted form for extra security. I understand how to and agree to send and receive project files in encrypted format.

- **Archiving**: I am willing to keep copies of project files after completion of work, upon request.

- **Conflict of interest**: If I experience a conflict of interest during my professional work or recognize the possibility of that perception, I will immediately discuss that with the researcher and due action taken.

I agree to abide by the terms and conditions of data security and confidentiality as listed above.

Place:	Address:
Date:	E-mail:
Signature:	Mobile:

Appendix B

Guiding questions for semi-structured farmer interviews

1. Participant profile
    1.1 Name
    1.2 Age
    1.3 Gender
    1.4 Occupation
2. Have you experienced drought in the last few years?
3. How has the drought impacted your job/livelihood?
4. Did you receive any assistance from GO/NGOs during the drought? How did it help?
5. Could the assistance have been better? How?
6. Do GOs/NGOs function normally during droughts? Why/why not?
7. What is the difference between the activities that GOs/NGOs undertake during drought and non-drought periods?
8. What do you do in anticipation of droughts?
9. What are the main coping mechanisms you have during droughts?
10. If you were to decide some plan of actions to mitigate the effects of droughts, what would you do?

Appendix C

Guiding questions for semi-structured interviews with government and NGO staff

1. Participant profile
    a. Participant number:
    b. Professional role:
2. Have you experienced drought in your professional capacity?
3. How do you determine what interventions to introduce in a certain location?
4. How do you assess 'need'?
5. Does the intervention always match the need? Why? Why not?
6. What, in your understanding, is an emergency?
7. How does your organisation respond to emergencies?
8. Do you think drought is an emergency? Why? Why not?
9. How do you think drought affects your beneficiaries?
10. When does your organisation declare an emergency response?
11. What happens following such a declaration? How does your day-to-day work change?
12. What are the differences between working in a non-emergency situation and an emergency context?
13. Do your beneficiaries respond to you in the same way during both the contexts? Why? Why not?
14. How do you think an emergency affects the following?
    a. Funding
    b. Operational strategy
    c. Operational strategy
    d. Work morale
    e. Relationships with the community
    f. Relationships with government/NGOs
    g. Organisational performance?