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**Strangulated by Care: Life in Koshi Diyara**

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**Abstract**

Rivers have been at the forefront of colonial and post-colonial state attacks to entrench governmentality by ensuring land revenue and developing infrastructure to enable mobility. This was predicated upon a need to delineate land from water and control seasonal inundation in fluvial ecologies. The dominant technology to achieve these objectives has been embankments that constrict the river to free up the adjacent land. Interestingly, despite the official stance of adequate rehabilitation being given to people whose land remains trapped within the embankments, riverine islands remain densely populated geographies. Since mega hydraulic interventions like embankments are based upon the reductionist ontology, they bring about some definite transformations in the ecological backdrop of the region and people's lives in terms of intensifying floods, land erosion, and loss of livelihood. Here, seasonal circular migration of the male members of the household is vital in keeping the family afloat. The state's 'care' in terms of disaster relief operations in the context of a state-induced disaster through development only ends up entrenching the Janus-faced identity of the sovereign. This duality is instantiated by the treatment of riverine communities by the state, which is designated as 'anti-social elements' and living in the 'wrong place', which is technically inundated by the river.

This paper aims to unearth the state-community interactions in a fluvial ecology through the lens of the biopolitics of disasters. This study is critical as it brings back the material setting of the region while engaging with issues about power. In a fluvial ecology, land and water form an everchanging matrix that state-led structural interventions can tweak. In the case of the Lower Koshi Region, where the fieldwork for this paper has been conducted, the statist interventions have been done in the name of caring for the flood-prone communities, which, in effect, have redistributed the vulnerabilities hitherto spread over a larger space and population and have confined the same to the population trapped within the embankments. As a result, the lives of the people trapped within the embankments have become more precarious, as they live under the shadow of floods, land erosion, and erosion of livelihood opportunities. Added to this are the incipient fears of climate change, which have the potential to catalyse the hydrology and geomorphology of the upper Koshi region with definite yet uncertain implications for flood, sedimentation and erosion patterns downstream. The intensification of the impacts of floods now provides a situation for the state to bolster its caring face. In this spirit, it undertakes disaster relief operations. Incidentally, the community's people are also internally fragmented, with the community simultaneously harbouring plural views regarding the dominant flood

paradigm. Not all are affected equally and similarly by the floods and its associated effects. Much depends on the location and alignment of the interventions. Hence, people located differently from the structures resist or demand the structures. This internal fragmentation of the community provides an entry point for the state to entrench further its logic of controlling the river, caring for its people and punishing those who resist.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Disaster, Floods, Governmentality