



Theme 2

Media narratives on the flood problem in Bihar, India- Communicating or complicating the problem?

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Taking the social nature of water into account, the observer becomes as important as the observed (Linton 2010). The role of language and metaphors in the production of hydro-social realities, and their impact on hydro-social interactions, is crucial here. Print media is a dominant mode of production of such imageries and meanings about water. This study will look at the media narratives on the flood problem in the state of Bihar, India. Lying in the middle Ganga Plains, Bihar faces the problem of water surplus in the form of recurring floods. Management for the recurring floods in the region also requires transnational cooperation with Nepal, located immediately north of the state, where most rivers originate. Mainstream narratives on floods in the region have focused largely on hydro-engineering solutions. Over the past six decades, several barrages were constructed and extensive embankment was done. Yet, the intensity of floods has only increased. More recently, there has been a trend of blaming Nepal for the annual flood woes. Thus, while the cause of floods is framed as Nepal's fault, the solutions are generally seen in terms of more embankments. Counter-narratives advocating for community-driven nature-based solutions exist, yet, they are not popular. Trends in the publication of news on water issues in local newspapers can be a source to understand how some discourses get more acceptance and are often translated into action while others are not. It is hypothesised that due to several constraints of the market as well as general power dynamics in the region, water news reporting in the region is often sensationalised, one-sided and under-researched. Through media content analysis, this study will look at media narratives on water issues. Taking the case study of the most widely read daily Hindi newspaper (*Hindustan Dainik*) for 2019-2020, articles related to water management, especially floods, shall be collected for one year and coded thematically. Five aspects of news coverage will be coded - i) scientific validity; ii) wholistic approach (issue-based v/s event-based); iii) inter-basin or nationalistic approach; iv) gender-balanced reporting; and, v) role of climate change. This thematic analysis will be complemented with critical discourse analysis to identify which discourses were considered valid and by whom. The study will generate scientific evidence of water news reporting patterns in the region and help identify the mainstream narrative and counter-narratives in print media. The patterns that emerge can provide insights into the power dynamics that are embedded in such discursive framings. This will strengthen counter-narratives based on a more ecologically sustainable approach.

Key words- Media Narratives, Bihar, India, Floods, Discourse Analysis

J. Linton, (2010), *What is water, The History of a Modern Abstraction*, UBC Press, Vancouver.