Trapped in the Cycle of Vulnerability?
Evictions, Resettlements and Disasters in Chennai, India

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"தீதும் நன்றும் பிறர் தர வாரா!"

I would to my express my gratitude to my mother and grandfather for providing me all the strength in need.

I would like to thank Nannke, for supporting the whole and without any hesitation even on the last minute. Thank you, Sonja, for all the valuable feedback.

Finally, I would like to thank all my participants

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List of Acronyms

CCID   Climate Change-Induced Displacements

DID   Disaster-Induced Displacement

DRM   Disaster Risk Management

DRR   Disaster Risk Reduction

FGD   Focus Group Discussion

GoTN   Government of Tamil Nadu

JNNURM

      Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission

R&R   Resettlement & Rehabilitation

Abstract

This paper unveils the lived experiences of women in Chennai resettlement areas of Perumbakkam and Semmencherry encountering continuous disasters, focusing on how they navigate their lives through the multitude of challenges and adapt to the risks. Using feminist ethnographic method along with interactions, the study captures the realities of everyday lives of women, tracing the experiences from evictions to resettlements and how the gendered aspects of inequalities exacerbate the existing social vulnerabilities. Within the context of disasters and resettlements, understanding the gentrification and challenges faced by women that are intertwined with the social, economic and political structures, reveals the difficulties in accessing the resources, family issues, health and security concerns. The paper also emphasis on the critical aspects of imposing resilience, which further leads to reproduction of vulnerability in terms of overlooking the larger systemic errors. By employing a gender lens, the study highlights the need for amplifying women's voice and agency in resettlement and disaster polices. This work contributes to the deeper understanding of lived experiences and calls for more gender-inclusive policies. Overall, the study suggests that rather than underlining the individual adaptation strategies, its needs for a better systemic support.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research contributes to the field of development studies by focusing on the gender inequality and social constructs. The study of women in Chennai resettlements areas provides insights on how the vulnerable communities, experience and respond to the challenges such as disasters and displacements. It scrutinises the nuanced understanding of gendered impacts in place of structural threats and reproduction of vulnerability. The findings of the study are relevant to policymakers and practitioners as it provides real-time solutions to the practical issues, fostering gender equality.

Keywords

Resettlement, Disasters, Women, lived experiences, Chennai, Social Vulnerability, Inequality, Resilience

Chapter 1
Introduction: Contextualising the Weathering Realities of Women in Chennai Resettlements

1.1 Background

Globally, by the end of 2023, as a result of disasters more than 26 million people were internally displaced. In India, an estimated 56.5 million internal displacements have occurred between 2008 and 2023 (IDMC, 2024). The phenomenon of disaster-induced displacement is complex, as a number of factors such as population density, socioeconomic status, and extreme climatic patterns impact people to move (Kakinuma et al., 2020, p. 1). These usually affect the low-income households or communities as they lack the resources to survive the effects of hazards (PDD, 2020; Stephens, Patnaik and Lewis, 1994). Consequently, resettlements are the common approach to post-disaster reconstruction strategy. In some cases, resettlement has also become a global development trend influenced by national policies such as slum upgrading, increased transportation and other infrastructures (Gomersall, 2018; Patel, Sliuzas and Mathur, 2015).

India emerging as a global power, development projects are constantly aligned in response to the effects of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation (Mathur, 2013, p. 2). The process of resettlement in urban areas for any scenario (disaster or beautification) is always triggered by the state's interest. As a result, majority of the marginalised communities residing in the urban informal settlements are easily evicted and resettled in the city peripheries. Pushing the population to the outskirts of the city without proper compensation and rehabilitation furthers them to impoverishment risks. However, in a patriarchal society, the experiences of women are often silenced or unheard. The adversities of disaster-induced displacements and resettlements impacting vulnerable groups create several social crises.

1.1.1 Chennai Resettlements: A Unique Case

In the previous session, I briefly spoke about the disaster-induced displacements and resettlements. Here, in the case of Chennai resettlements, the State saw disasters as a unique opportunity to implement its developmental policies. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) was launched by central government in December 2005 to develop the Indian cities and facilitate a large-scale urban infrastructure (Wankhade, 2012, p. 25- 26). Slowly down in years, the mission was a failure due to its haphazard and one-size-fits-all approach. It failed to acknowledge the inter-state differences and many states misused the funds in policies without proper plan and implementation in municipality levels (Gupta, 2012). One of them is Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN), as post-disaster strategy both in 2004 tsunami and 2015 floods under the JNNURM's urban poor programme, they built thousands of tenements in Kannagi Nagar, Perumbakkam and Semmencherry without proper adherence to the guidelines of the policy (Jain, Singh and Malladi, 2017, p. 3). Even though, JNNURM focused on 'Slum Upgrading'; its scope was not disaster management. Hence, GoTN took the opportunity of the disasters to resettle the urban poor and framed the slums as disaster prone areas. Simultaneously the municipalities upgraded the Chennai city.

1.2 Research Problem

Chennai, a large bustling port city, capital of Tamil Nadu is the fifth highly populated city in India (UN World Urbanization Prospects, 2018). The city is located in the East Coromandel coast and vulnerable to climate change impacts like sea-level rise and flooding. There are three major rivers flowing in the city: Adyar, Cooum and Kosasthalaiyar along with a man-made Buckingham canal to carry floodwaters to sea. There are also lakes all across the city, some man-made and some natural. However, over the course of years, encroachments of rivers, lakes and wetlands has reduced the natural capabilities to drain the excess rainwater and preventing floods. The health and quality of peri-urban lakes are declining as a result of urbanisation and population growth (Sudha, Ravichandran and Sakthivadivel, 2013, p. 1158).

According to the Census of India 2011, the population in Chennai was 4.64 million and in 2024 it is estimated as 6.59 million. Within this almost 30 per cent of the population live in informal settlements (Census, 2011). Majority of them, resides near the water bodies, which makes them vulnerable to floods.

"…experts referred to as a 'super-charged monsoon', Chennai…experienced heavy downpours resulting in 'record-breaking' rainfall for the months of November and December. As the city submerged rapidly, homes and apartments were flooded, communications were cut and transportation came to a standstill, including the closure of the airport for several days. With lives lost, extensive property damage and businesses affected, Chennai was declared officially a disaster." (Arabindoo, 2016, p. 801)[1].

In recent history, 2004 Tsunami and 2015 floods were the biggest disaster events in Chennai. Following this, the disasters have made it simpler for the ambitious state to evict these informal settlers to the urban fringes (George and Nautiyal, 2006, p. 8). As seen in Chapter 1.1.1, most of evictions in Chennai since 2000s have been carried out under the name of restoring water bodies or disaster-prone areas. However, many of families were resettled without any proper impact assessments or rehabilitation efforts. The resettlements were 20-30 kms away from the city. Without proper access to basic amenities as water, education, health, transport etc. These actions cause suffering by upsetting social networks and livelihoods (Diwakar G. and Peter, 2016; Tiwari, Shukla and Purkayastha, 2023). Moreover, from 2015 to 2023, recurrent flooding is observed in the resettlement colonies of Semmencherry, Perumbakkam and Kannagi Nagar. Families who are already struggling with the effects of losing their source of income and livelihood during the post-resettlement period are made more vulnerable by these flooding events. The resettlement and rehabilitation policies are ambiguous in nature resulting in further crises and developing inequalities in the society.

An assessment conducted by IRCDUC (2021) in Perumbakkam, revealed that 48 per cent of the women lost their job after relocation. The report also points out concerns of women, *"…lack of adequate transportation facilities connecting to their workplace, time taken to travel to work, and concern for the safety and well-being of children who are home alone till the women return from work, which is usually around late evening…The availability of employment opportunities in the vicinity is a challenge."* (IRCDUC, 2023, p. 1).

Gender inequality in South Asia is a result of patriarchal norms and injustices that have also made several socioecological issues and climate adaption harder (Sultana, 2013, p. 378). Similarly, in this context, women's lived experiences reveal the complex dynamics of disasters and resettlements differently affecting them. Through this research, we can look into how migration patterns are altered, livelihoods are disrupted, and already-existing inequities are made worse by climate change and environmental gentrification. With a focus on the gender

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[1] Snippet about 2015 Chennai floods

perspective, I aim to explore the power relations and lived experiences of the households in the resettlement areas.

1.3 Why only women?

"In his struggle to survive, (he) released his daughters one after the other, so his son could survive" (Akhter, 1992, quoted in Enarson and Morrow, 1998, p. 3)

As a women grown up all my life in the same urban city, my day-to-day encounters in the patriarchal society has taught me the importance of educational and financial freedom. Similarly, when it comes to disasters, I felt women are affected differently. I remember, how my mother and I used to work extensively on these days than the normal days. I also understand the stigmatisation and gender roles associated with these issues. Commonly looking at the Asian societies, women are easily given 'victim' cards and men are given 'frontline' roles (Enarson, 1998). From that point, the perpetuation of structural constraints starts at the blink of a disaster. The combination of culture and patriarchy in the society reinforces the gendered inequalities and vulnerabilities (Cutter, 2017; Enarson and Morrow, 1998; UN women, 2019). Therefore, I decide to strongly empathise women's emotions and the need to amplify their voices and empowering them is critical. Also, to avoid the same circumstances in the future.

1.4 Relevance and Justification

With the increasing frequency of changing weather patterns globally, the vulnerable groups render to be inescapable from the enduring struggles and their exposure to the risks makes them 'powerless victims' (Faas, 2016, p. 16). In global south, with the temporal policies and imposing on individual agency furthers their vulnerabilities exposing the existing inequalities. Similarly, several variables have been neglected in the disaster and vulnerability scholarship historically. The current strategies also on DID and resettlement frameworks often remain gender-blind and lacks the understanding of the necessary context to support women. Only on focusing towards the power structures and political ideologies helps to understand and mitigate the risks better (McEntire, 2005, p. 212).

Likewise, Chennai floods are becoming more intense, this study looks at the long-term effects of displacement and the lack of viable resettlement options. Given that women are particularly vulnerable to socio-economic constraints, caregiving roles and mainly lack of access to essential resources, while this study intends to fill the crucial gap of understanding their lived experiences in the existing feminist disaster literature (Enarson, 1998). As the plight of these communities in literature are under-researched. The study is particularly relevant in the context of Chennai resettlement areas and tracing how they have been impacted by disasters. The study delves into lived experiences of women. This research paper will shift focus on the nuanced understanding of disaster vulnerability and resettlement challenges in the lives of women.

So, the study findings critically look at the adversities of Chennai's resettlement policies and the role of gender, especially the way they force populations to migrate to locations that are vulnerable to flooding. This also highlights the necessity of more inclusive and fair strategies for resettlement and disaster management policies. It offers insightful information to development professionals and policy makers who are trying to build more resilient and sustainable communities in the face of urban issues and climate change.

1.5 Research Objective

The study aims to explore and understand the lived experiences of women in the Chennai resettlement areas of Perumbakkam and Semmencherry facing the extreme weather events. While examining the ability of the coping strategies employed during adverse situations. It will further critically focus on the complex interplay between resilience and reproduction of vulnerability. By understanding these factors, the research seeks to contribute to the understanding of the gendered experiences and inform gender sensitive and equitable policy responses.

1.6 Research Questions

The central research question is, **"How does government-led resettlement and extreme weather events shape the everyday lives of women in Chennai?"**

Sub Questions:

1. Why and how have women in Perumbakkam and Semmencherry been resettled?
2. How have their lives and livelihoods changed due to resettlements?
3. What coping strategies have emerged both in their daily lives and during extreme weather events?

To answer these questions, the study will look into the lived experiences of women in Perumbakkam and Semmencherry under the context of resettlements and the extreme weather events in order to scrutinise how they are resulting in social vulnerability.

1.7 Structure of the Paper

With this introductory chapter, the research paper consists of 7 chapters in total. Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework deriving from different literature, concepts and theories. In following, Chapter 3 underlines the methodological framework of adopting feminist ethnographic research with my personal experiences in the field, along with reflection on positionality including the ethics and limitations of the study. Then, the Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the findings, analyses and discussions from the conducted fieldwork. I have presented my findings of the lived experiences of women in resettlements. Finally, in the ultimate chapter, I have concluded with some policy recommendations.

Chapter 2 Chapter 2 Not Just a Resettlement: Transversing the Literature, Concepts and Theories

The underpinnings of this research work are based on the quest for understanding how urban resettlements, are impacted by extreme weather events and disasters. Here, the terms 'extreme weather' and 'disaster' are defined and interpreted as an extreme weather event can lead to a disaster (in this case, severe heat, heat waves and floods). Susman, O'keefe and Wisner (1983, p. 263) defines disaster as *"an event (or a series of events) which seriously disrupts normal activities"*.

Firstly, in order to get a grasp of the 'resettlement' concept, especially in the developing countries, it is crucial to understand urbanisation. Notably, these (in)voluntary resettlements happen due to disasters and urban transformations. These process of urbanisation takes forth the initial step of gentrification. Moreover, looking into the resettlement, the research leads into the discussion of climate adaptation, where I have look into few theories and concepts for this study. Finally, moves into the feminist disaster literature and intersectionality for understanding the importance of gendered aspects. By exploring these literatures, concepts and theories in the context of urban resettlement in Chennai, it reflects how women's lived experiences are very important.

2.1 Urbanisation and Resettlement: A Global View

> *"…the city continues to grow inorganically, indeed cancerously"* (Mumford, 1961, p. 543)

With the end of World War II and decolonisation of countries, significant shifts in trade and human mobility were witnessed as a mark of globalisation. Also, with that several 'third-world' countries started transforming their regions, leading to experience rapid urbanisation process albeit not uniformly. 'Urbanisation' has transformed these cities and created a constant urge of development without looking into the societal problems and increasing inequalities (Liu and Peng, 2023; O'Rourke and Williamson, 2002, p. 23).

To understand the term 'Urbanisation', it is also crucial to comprehend with the theory of 'Urbanism'. Max Weber's (1921) theory of urbanism and the concept of city critiques the overall idea of metropolis while exploring the power structures and social stratification[2] within the cities (p. 91-93). He also notes the rise of modern bureaucracy and economic transformations. Moreover, urbanism thinking from Weber (1921) and Simmel (1902), denotes a pessimistic tone on the future of city and their influence on the urban life. Now, looking into the concept of "Urbanisation" which comes with different connotations evolving over time. The traditional theorists like Kingsley Davis (1965) talks about population growth and their concentration in cities. Similarly, authors like Louis Wirth (1938) gives a historical overview while discussing about the social heterogeneity and the impacts of social, cultural and also ecological factors that defines urbanisation. Therefore, all these authors from varied disciplines and different time period puts forth the whole picture of urbanisation as not only a change in physical space, but it also redefines the individual behaviour along with the social and cultural values. However, today many contemporary urbanists like Saskia Sassen (1991) talks about weaking of democracy and Naomi Klein (2014) discusses about

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[2] Social stratification is based the class distinctions. For instance, in India urban dwellers are classified by castes (p. 21, 52, 81).

the links of capitalism, urbanisation and climate change. They both increasingly argue for the modern complexities of urbanisation and followingly also pave the way for a theory of de-urbanisation. Yet, de-urbanisation is a long way to reach though it might reduce gentrification, while changing the socio-economic and mobility patterns in altering the demography of urban spaces.

In recent years, developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America has undergone tremendous transformations and still ongoing (Beier et al., 2021). Several cities have been initiating urban upgrading projects, such as beautification and restorations, as a result of the persistent demand of this urban development and expansion (Garschagen, 2015, p. 139; Jayaratne and Sohail, 2005). However, while looking into these urban upgrading initiatives titled 'Slum- free', 'Slum- clearance', or 'Slum upgradation', they easily target the urban poor communities, due to the lack of political and social factors. Most of these development policies are funded by international actors like World Bank, International Development Bank (IDB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) (UN Habitat, 2003). Several cases illustrate this attempt of improving the lives of urban slum dwellers or informal settlements. For example, slum clearance project in Nigeria (Olu Sule, 1990), impacts of slum eviction in Indonesia (Ichwatus Sholihah and Shaojun, 2018), using citizenship as a tool of governance in the slum upgrading project in Brazil (Nuijten, 2013) and other massive projects in Chile (Portes, 1971). Likewise, Kampong[3] clearance in Singapore and urban renewal in Hong Kong (see, Drakakis-Smith, 1976; Seng, 2009) are the classic examples of the large-scale development of third-world countries after the world war.

Further, looking into the context of India, we see big metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Chennai implementing 'Smart city' policies. Roy (2016, p. 37-38) reveals the significant challenges of the current Smart city framework that strives only to develop technologically advanced urban spaces. Even the previous and most ambitious Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM), which have failed to address and consider the 'uniqueness' (Kitchin, 2013, p. 10) of the local environment and their needs. However, Ghosh and Arora (2021, p. 320) describes the concept of 'Smartness' as a top-down approach, where technocracy is seen as the ultimate solution for the emerging economies (Das, 2019, p. 60; Vanolo, 2014, p. 889). Critics like Kitchin (2013) and Das (2019, p. 56 - 57) argue that this 'proliferation of neoliberalism' has only elevated the living standards of elitists by 'centralizing the power and decision making'. Often these smart cities tend to overlook the everyday complexities of urban poor and marginalised communities continuing in reproduction of socio-economic problems and they are usually reflected as 'forced evictions or relocation' (Ghosh and Arora, 2021, p. 320; Kitchin, 2013, Roy, 2016, p. 38).

The global phenomenon of forced evictions has become an emerging trend in many scenarios of development and infrastructural projects, urban redevelopment including mega international events and also as a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategy (du Plessis, 2005, p.123- 124; Ocheje, 2007). While Bhan (2009, p. 136) argues that the evolution of governance and "developmentalism" in the post-liberalised world are often fostering the economic growth over social equity and inclusion. As a result of this emerging neoliberal economies, inequalities are normalised and "considered both just and ethical" (Ibid, p. 138). *"Evictees all over the continent[4] have one thing in common: they are the poor and marginalized in society"* (Ocheje, 2007, p. 180). Ocheje (2007, p.181) and Rhoads (2018) highlights the inheritance of colonial urban planning policies which was based on strengthening the social hierarchies. Even today in many countries, they influence the contemporary policies resulting in spatial segregation and inequality (Ibid, p. 183). This further leads to what Leckie (1994, p. 131) refers to forced

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[3] Village or Slum
[4] African Continent

evictions as "internal displacement" or "population transfer". He provides numerous cases studies from South Africa, Palestine, Thailand and India. Although this segregation or gentrification is not only limited in the Global South; several evidences show this approach in Global North as well (see, Bernt and Holm, 2009; Blokland and van Eijk, 2011; Carpenter and Lees, 1995; Pegler, Li and Pojani, 2020).

In the aftermath of these forced evictions in the urban settings specifically targeting the low-income groups are usually followed by displacement and state-led resettlements. The terms "displacement" and "resettlement" are two distinct concepts; Vanclay (2017) defines displacement when people are forced to leave their original place due to certain factors (conflict, urban development, disasters). While, resettlement is defined as removing people or a community from their "home" (Feng and Zhu, 2021; Shutzer, 2012) to another planned relocation site (Bennett and Mcdowell, 2012, p. 1; Vanclay, 2017). The literature on displacement and resettlement has been growing in a linear trajectory since the 1990s. Although Cernea (1997), identifying the impoverishment risks and developing a risk and reconstruction model (Impoverishment Risk Reduction) (IRR) to avoid the flaws and minimise the potential mainstream practices of resettlement (Cernea, 2003). Several evidences of displacement and resettlement has been constantly reestablishing those risk factors. For instance, the risks factors in the Three Gorges dam in China (Heming, Waley and Rees, 2001), Kigali informal settlers in Rwanda and low-income households of Addis Ababa (Gebre Yntiso, 2008; Nikuze et al., 2019), IDPs in Kenya post-election violence (Shutzer, 2012), triggered by floods in Mekong Delta (Dun, 2011).

With these, it is evident that the implementation of the state-led resettlements are large-scale involuntary practices around the world aiming at the marginalised communities. As a result of the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation of the states, the ambitious and spontaneous nature of developmentalism is influenced by political ideologies and have been seen embedded as a long history (Bhan, 2009). Scholars and critics have also highlighted the ethical dimensions are always challenged by impacting their livelihoods of urban poor. Also, some of the authors critique urban resettlements policies, because they may reproduce vulnerabilities among the marginalised populations (Bessey and Tay, 2015; Coelho, Venkat and Chandrika, 2012). Hence, looking from a global perspective is it clearly stated that resettlement in the name of removing people from risk or danger or marginalisation and relocating them without proper risk assessment further pushes them into vulnerability.

2.2 Resettlement and Climate adaptation (Add to refer.)

Despite these reservations, resettlement or planned relocation in the 21st century has emerged as a climate change adaptation or resilience building measure globally (Arnall, 2019, p. 254; Mathur, 2015; Oliver-Smith and de Sherbinin, 2014). This intertwined relationship between climate change and resettlement highlights a more complex phenomenon of Climate Change-Induced Displacements (CCID) (Askland et al., 2022, p. 268). This significant and prolonged; loss and damage are usually witnessed mostly in the marginalised populations including their livelihoods, physical and mental health, property, and other dimensions of their well-being (Askland et al., 2022, p. 269; Cernea, 1997; Kam et al., 2021, p. 1). Though the principle of resettlement is viewed as the 'last resort' in development or climate change-induced displacement literature (Ferris, 2012, p. 17; Mathur, 2015, p. 125), many of the state's combine the aspects of 'development' and environmental change usually resulting in (environmental) gentrification (Doshi, 2018). Arnall (2019) highlights that these states prefer resettlement as a means of development rather than as a strategy for climate adaption. Under the pretext of climate adaptation or disaster relief (Narayan, 2017), this idea of resettlement

exemplifies the layers of power for economic or political benefit (Arnall, 2019, p. 254, Doshi, 2018). This further leads to push resettlement policies into vulnerability.

2.2.1 Social Vulnerability Theory

Social Vulnerability scholarship has grown with the risks and adaptation to the hazards and disasters. The concept of 'vulnerability' associated with disaster risk has been largely moved away from only framing the scientific technicalities to social sciences towards the end of 20th century. The term "Vulnerability" is defined as a broad and multi-dimensional concept with several integrating factors (see, Fig. 2.1 political, social, economic); not just limited to poverty or loss. Nevertheless, with such ambiguity, evaluating the vulnerability in diverse conditions would often overlook the crucial 'structural and non-structural' losses (Bohle, Downing and Watts 1994, p. 39; Cutter, 1996, p. 530). Researchers in the field of vulnerability studies uses different conceptualisations and methodologies in understanding and assessing the level of vulnerability. Cutter (1996) points out these pragmatic challenges and calls for recognising the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of vulnerability. She also adds on to adapt flexibility to these frameworks, particularly in consideration of the differences between developed and developing countries (Cutter, 2003; Cutter and Finch, 2008; Susman, O'keefe and Wisner, 1983, p. 275-276).
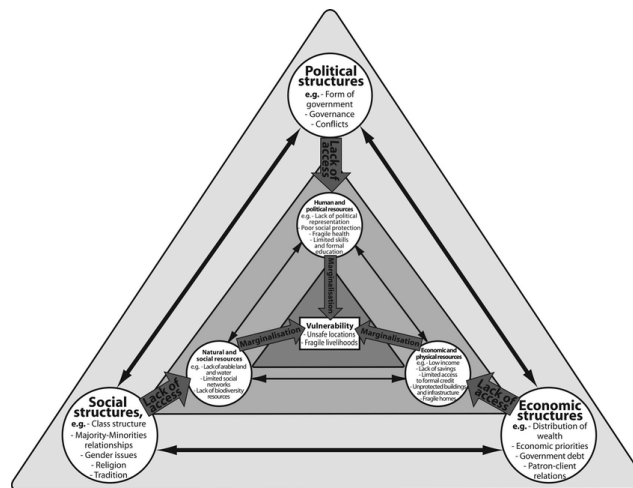
Figure 2.1: 'Triangle of Vulnerability' (Wisner, Gaillard and Kelman, 2012, p. 24)

Notably, social vulnerability refers to the wider society and their relationships within the build environment rather not just limiting their scope to the individuals. Therefore, social vulnerability is emphasised as an emergence of 'stratification and inequality' (Chen et al., 2013, p. 169) and *"…a social dynamic rooted in gender, class, race, culture, nationality, age, and other power relationships"* (Enarson, Fothergill and Peek, 2007, p. 131). Susman, O'keefe and Wisner (1983) argue that the degree of vulnerability is closely linked to the different classes of the society in absorbing the effects of a hazard. Multiple scholars have proposed several frameworks and approaches in assessing vulnerabilities, mentioning some of the critical ones: Pressure and Release model (PAR), Risk- Hazard model (RH), Method for the Improvement of Vulnerability in Europe (MOVE) framework and Socio-economic Vulnerability Index (SeVI), (Birkmann, 2007; Birkmann et al., 2013; Cutter and Emrich, 2006; Cutter and Finch, 2008). Each of these models have their pros and cons in assessing the vulnerability in different ways. Still all these models fail to recognise the lived experiences. Hence, in this view, the

complexity of the analysis of the human-environment system at different spatial levels must be acknowledged (Cutter and Emrich, 2006, p. 104; Cutter and Finch, 2008). Social vulnerability is not static and evolves over time and space. I would be evaluating the risks using Tringle of vulnerability, a classic model.

2.2.2 Disaster Risk and Disaster Displacement Theory

Disaster risk is a potential loss of life, injury or damage experienced by a system, society or a community in a given period of time (UNDRR, 2015). As a consequence of the risk with the interplay of a hazard which renders people and places vulnerable and exposed (see, fig. 2.2). The traditional equation of risk was only associated with hazard, but later the contemporary research took vulnerability and exposure into account. These amplified the important of addressing the social inequalities, vulnerabilities and the way they were exposed to it (Wisner, Gaillard and Kelman, 2012).

$$\text{Disaster Risk} = \text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability} \times \text{Exposure}$$
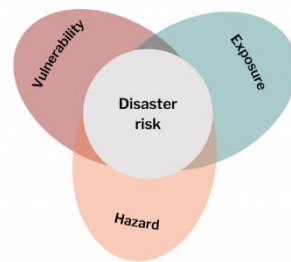
Figure 2.2: *"Disaster risk is the dynamic intersection of hazard, exposure, and vulnerability"* (Haznet, 2022)[5]

In recent years, coping 'capacity' is also being included into this equation tool. But still, the capacity can always be measured through the knowledge of vulnerability (Koks et al., 2015). By assessing the risk through this powerful tool, a multifaceted and an integrated approach would serve well towards a qualitative study. Overall, in an urban setting, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) or Disaster Risk Management (DRM) as an immediate 'resilience' (displacement) strategy that has emerged as a prevention plan or response (Guadagno and Yonetani, 2023, p. 16). These strategies often end in displacement or resettlement. The disasters risks leading to resettlement would better understand under 'disaster displacement theory'.

"Environmental Refugees", the predictions of Norman Meyer (1993) have intrigued the academia and media and depicted the threat of 'mass migration' in the global north (Hantscher, 2019). Conversely, recent studies suggests that displacement occurs usually within the borders (shorter distance) and temporary in some cases. Floods, cyclones, droughts, mudslides, earthquakes and inundation paves way for displacement due to prolonged and irreversible conditions or damages. Yet, UNHRC's capacity to cover environmentally displaced persons (EDP) constitutes as an institutional issue (Hantscher, 2019).

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[5] https://haznet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Elements-of-disaster-risk-1140x881.png

Guadagno and Yonetani (2023) unfolds three dimensions of risk involved in displacement: *"the risk of displacement occurring", "the risk of people remaining displaced", and "the risk stemming from displacement"*. Applying these risk dimensions in the urban context reveals the unsustainable practices of disaster displacement. Also, looking into the cases of the hurricane Katarina, climate action plan of New York, cyclones in Bangladesh and floods in Japan again reinforces the structural inequalities of the present century. Disaster displacement as a dynamic phenomenon impacts the societies, further increasing the severity of the pre-existing vulnerabilities.

2.2.3 Resilience

Another common concept constantly ringing through the climate and disaster literature is 'Resilience', the term indicates the capacity of individuals or community to recover or exhibit resistance over a certain situation. The concept is now widely used in climate change and other development initiatives. Jackson (2024) argues for resilience as governmentality and reveals how power functions by downplaying structural inequalities and encouraging individual responsibility and adaptation. His views on climate resilience governmentality puts emphasis on the limitations of gender, race and class; often overlooked in the dominant discourses. In revealing the relation between disaster and politics, incorporating governmentality in disaster studies is a recent approach. The "art of governing populations", a Foucauldian framework asserts that the risk governance, DRR or DRM are critiqued of being a neoliberalist approach that focuses on developing the 'government capacities' (Foucault, 1991 cited in Ghosh and Boyd, 2019, p. 3). The government demonstrates its power to manage the risk, but ultimately, they increase rather than lowering the vulnerabilities (Ibid, 2019). Resilience as a governance approach reinforces rather than addressing the root causes of vulnerability (Bahadur and Tanner, 2014). Similarly in this case, only as an immediate recovery strategy, resilience policies (resettlement) are used by governments.

2.3 Feminism(s) through Disasters

The term 'Feminism' has evolved largely since the Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" (1949) took a seminal debate on the social oppression of women as 'other', men as the norm in a patriarchal society. Slowly moving forward, hooks (1984) highlights that the lack of definition(s) hinders the movement. Although it was pivotal construct in critiquing the second wave feminists; she emphasised on an inclusive movement while challenging the existing 'classist, sexist, racist social structure' (p. 15). Moreover, today the term has been pluralised to "Feminisms" as radical collective construction of accepting their diverse positionings (Salgado, 2016, p. 24-25). Hence, in this view, the focus is given on gender performativity as there are social and cultural construct (Butler, 1990). The idea of gender is socially constructed and that drives us into feminist disaster literature.

In relation to disaster scholarship, gender has been critical yet underdeveloped in various dimensions. In order to scrutinise the gendered aspects during a disaster, evaluating gender stratification and gender differentiation is crucial (Fothergill, 1996, p. 23). This can be evaluated through feminist disaster literature. Enarson, Fothergill and Peek (2017, p. 131) brings the theoretical lens to investigate the multilayered oppression that becomes more apparent and strengthened in these crises' situations. Feminist disaster literature critiques the gendered dynamics as historically rooted in the societies that are invisible and pre-existing structural problems. Likewise, as in non-disaster periods, gender positions and inequalities have been "maintained and reproduced" in disaster situations (Ibid, 1996, p. 23). This prolonged neglect of differences in 'his and hers' aspect portrays a predominantly male-oriented societies and

policies (Anderson, 1994; Enarson, 1998). Especially, in South Asia, the cultural norms deciding the gender roles plays significant part in shaping the individual's experiences (for example, even more vulnerable population in this category are single mothers, female-led families, etc.) (Ibid, 1998). Anderson (1994, p. 8-9) suggests gender analysis as a critical tool in understanding the 'arrangement of societies' (p. 8), increasingly vulnerable during a disaster.

2.3.1 Intersectionality

The concept of Intersectionality was introduced as a social movement by the women of colour and in the late 80s, the term was used widely across different disciplines in the academia. The term 'Intersectionality' refers to the interconnections and interdependencies between different social systems and categories including race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. Here, the et-cetera arises concerns about the diverse number and types of categories within the society (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013, p. 786). Collins (2015, p. 2 - 3) emphasis this as a 'definitional dilemma' of the intersectionality; as the influence of power relations and social inequalities makes it difficult for the social actors to synthesis the reality. In essence, the concept of intersectionality illustrates forms of oppression; Whereas Collin (2000, p. 18) goes on to the 'Matrix of Domination' providing key insights into how different forms of oppression are intersecting within existing social structures. She also describes four domains of power relations (structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal), that uphold and perpetuate the systems of inequality. For instance, applying the matrix of domination in a disaster situation is not only limited to identifying the form of oppression based on their colour, sex, religion or class, but it further delves into the four power domains to a deeper understanding of how gendered inequalities shape their lived experiences.

2.4 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, these literatures, concepts and theories act as a conceptual framework in understanding the lived experiences of women in Chennai resettlement areas of Perumbakkam and Semmencherry. Most of the post-disaster or resettlement literature hardly talks about lived experiences or narratives; often oversimplifies the intersectional issues (Enarson, 1998). As they are usually concerned about socioeconomic impacts or building community resilience and livelihood. Moreover, the study on women and vulnerability discourses are again very limited in Chennai (see, Greeshma and Kumar, 2016; Vasantha Kumaran, Murali and Rani Senthamarai, 2020). Previous analysis of the literature hasn't largely identified the role of gender and reproduction of vulnerability in terms of hazards (Badri et al., 2006; Bang and Few, 2012; Iuchi, 2014). Overall, I will make use of the triangle of vulnerability in understanding the gendered aspects. This framework offers a concise yet comprehensive scope to interpret and analyse the data.

> *"This lived experience may shape our consciousness in such a way that our world view differs from those who have a degree of privilege"* (hooks, 1984, p. 15).

Chapter 3 Navigating Narratives: Methods behind the Lived Experiences

This study has been carried out through a qualitative approach in understanding the nuanced experiences of women from the resettlement areas of Perumbakkam and Semmencherry in Chennai. Therefore, the research has adopted a feminist perspective. To emphasis a holistic and immersive approach in understanding the lived experiences of women, I have collected data in the "natural setting" for an extended period while watching, listening and engaging in informal/casual conversations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 4). Also, by adopting the method of discovering that all knowledge comes from particular perspectives influenced by social, cultural and political contexts. This research recognizes the "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988) and as a feminist ethnographer in the site, my own experiences have been included.

3.1 Research Site:

Fieldwork was carried out from July 25th to August 30th 2024 in Perumbakkam and Semmencherry resettlement sites of Chennai (Fig. 3.1). The rationale behind choosing these particular sites over the others were, these are one of the biggest sites in the periphery of the city and still being expanded (Perumbakkam).
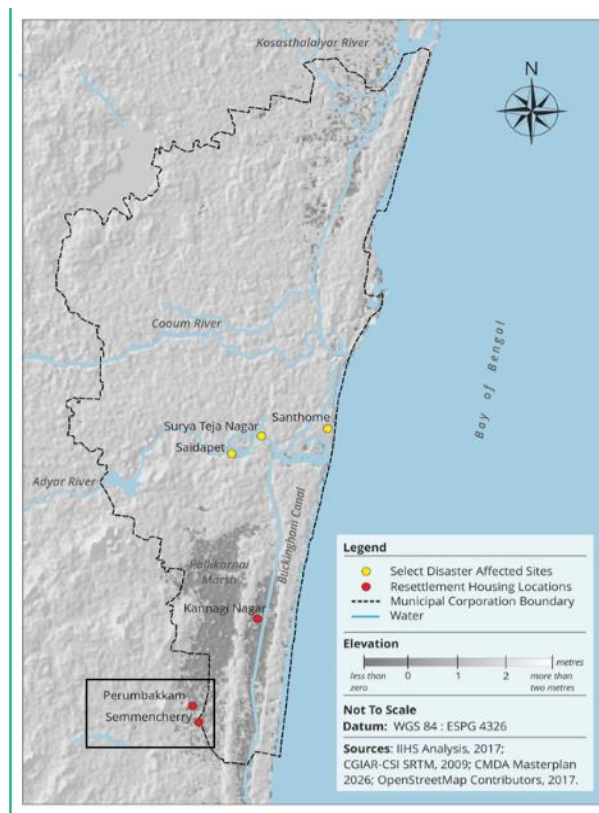
Map 3.1: Map of Chennai with research sites boxed (Perumbakkam and Semmencherry) (Jain, Singh and Malladi, 2017)

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis: Discoveries as a Feminist Ethnographer

In conducting this qualitative research, I have engaged in ethnographic research along with "semi-structured interviews". This more casual way of interacting with participants, was very effective as people slowly started to trust and talk with me openly without much hesitation. I also used some aspects of decolonial research methods, through the "Knowing with others" approach, which contests the hegemonic euro-centric way of producing knowledge and recognises the interconnectedness of human as a part of nature (Walsh, 2015, p. 12). Therefore, this way, I was able to understand in-depth complexities of the real lived experiences of the women. Looking through a feminist ethnographer lens, it begins with gender analysis while including everyone and understanding the power relations between the individuals. The framework explores deeper by adopting feminist epistemology from a standpoint theory that recognises the historical marginalisation of positions, experiences, and knowledge. Finally, by opting 'strong objectivity and reflexivity', the study manages to capture the underlying biases and power structures (Jackson, 2006, p. 531; Davis and Craven, 2023, p. 10, Harding, 1992, p. 460). By this research I want to unbridle a holistic picture of the reality.

To begin with the qualitative study, a combination of primary and secondary sources where included. I developed a questionnaire guideline separately for the women participants and NGO staff to gather different point of views. It included questions about eviction (in some cases) and relocation process, their employment status (before and after), general facilities in the resettlement areas, their experiences and challenges on a disaster day and extreme weather conditions. I prefer to call them 'conversation or interactions' instead of interviews to highlight their more informal and casual nature. To be fully conscious of the situation and give more space to the participants, I opted for a semi-structured method. It was again very helpful interacting with my participants and they felt safe. All the conversations were carried out in Tamil (regional language) and I also carefully picked the important Tamil key vocabulary or words for the guideline in advance.

Every day, I travelled to the research site from my home almost 20- 25 kms. Some days, I travelled in government bus and other days in two-wheeler. I daily kept a track of the temperature (mostly between 32- 38 ° C) and have included my own experiences and embodiment to the study. Initially, I went about and started my field visit with the support of an NGO to identify the willing participants. As, I anticipated some of the participants introduced by the organisation provided information that was a little biased on their independent relation to the organisation. So, after few days, I myself went "into the field" as an independent researcher without any association. I walked through the field in observing the sites and people. Later slowly started engaging with the women once I was a little familiar with the place. Most of them were welcoming and ready for a quick chat, while few of them were scared and hesitant to talk as they thought, I am a media personnel or a government official. So, as an ice breaker, I introduced myself as a student researcher and led the conversation by telling them my experiences of being a woman in this society, how a day of disaster would look in my household and my resilience towards it. I also attended a workshop on women safety and security in collaboration with the state government and different NGOs, and learnt several key insights. Towards the end of my research, I identified another NGO and conducted a small focus group in understanding the challenges and sharing awareness about the extreme weather conditions.

During the conversations, I only recorded some of the participants who were comfortable and mostly jotted down notes. I later turned my dairy notes into field notes for analysing. As all the interactions were carried out in Tamil, I translated them as field notes and used 'Manual Coding' as a method to create open code and place them under respective

themes. This also allowed me to use verbatim methods to capture the actual emotions of the respondents.

3.3 Research Participants

Most of the research participants were randomly picked while strolling through research site. Only 5 of the participants were identified by the NGO. A Focus group discussion (FGD) of 10- 15 women participants was gathered. Before starting the conversations, I collected verbal consent from my participants. The research primary targeted only women participants of different age group above 18, but few perceptions and short interactions was also made with male participants of their kin or neighbours.

Table 3.1: List of Participants

S.no	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Location	Other Interactions
1	Jayanthi	29	NGO staff (Climate awareness division)	Semmencherry	
2	Kaveri	39	NGO staff- Project Coordinator	Semmencherry and Perumbakkam	
3	Minal	26	NGO staff (Climate awareness division)	Perumbakkam	
4	Nalini	61	NGO - Director	Perumbakkam	
5	NGO Staff	-	NGO (TNDWWT) Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Trust	Perumbakkam	Short Conversation with 3 staff members
6	Asha	42	Resident Nurse at UPHC (Urban Primary Healthcare Center)	Perumbakkam	
7	Priya	19	College Student	Perumbakkam	
8	Megha	22	College Graduate	Semmencherry	
9	Yamini	27	Homemaker	Perumbakkam	
10	Nandhini	28	Homemaker	Semmencherry	
11	Sundari	31	Housekeeper in a nearby IT office	Semmencherry	
12	Kamala	30	Resident- Working as Team Lead at a BPO office	Perumbakkam	Short conversation with her other family members (including few men)
13	Alarkodi	34	Homemaker	Perumbakkam	
14	Kothai	36	Shop owner	Perumbakkam	Short conversation as a customer
15	Akila	37	Homemaker	Semmencherry	Short Conversation
16	Thendral	38	Housekeeper	Semmencherry	Short Conversation with passer by and also few comments from her husband
17	Usha	40	Shop owner	Semmencherry	Short conversation of a passer-by
18	Malarvizhi	42	Housekeeper	Perumbakkam	Short conversation with her other family members (Mother-in-law and sister)
19	Amrita	43	Housekeeper	Perumbakkam	
20	Indu	45	Housekeeper	Semmencherry	
21	Shanthi	65	Homemaker	Semmencherry	Short conversation with her daughter
22	Rukmani	68	Former leader in a women's association (committee member of AIADMK political party)	Semmencherry	

3.4 Positionality

Growing up as a woman in a patriarchal society, from home to education and till work, I have faced the odds. Living through all my life in the changing weather patterns of Chennai. Also, residing in a rental house, that too on ground floor during floods was a prep week before and after (continuously moving things and cleaning). Two years back, we were relieved of all this; as we moved to first floor. But it doesn't stop there, the recent year when I started to work made me realise the uneven distribution of workload at home and office. Juggling between all this on a rainy day was itself a disaster.

It is not the same anymore, the city has drastically grown up with me, actually more than me. Looking at the landscapes and built environments which has completely changed. The old theatre and tiny makeshift homes under the bridge next to the river are not there anymore. Everything is gone, but those were shortly replaced by malls and tall luxury apartments. I found that they have been relocated to the periphery of the city. Aren't the mall and apartments 'at-risk'?

Though, I haven't personally experienced displacement; yet I would understand the meaning of what is 'home', living all my life in different rental houses and finally moving into an own home was a relief. That's how, I slowly emerged into this study. I wanted to understand how disasters are disproportionately impacting a group of people (urban poor) in the urban areas and pushing them to the city peripheries. To be more specific, I will look to the adversities of eviction, resettlement and how it is affecting the livelihoods of women in their everyday lives along with the disasters.

While conducting this research, I was completely aware of my multiple identities and positionalities as a middle-class woman from the same urban city, same spoken language and shared experiences of disasters (floods and cyclones). Regardless of some of these 'insider' positionalities; I am also an 'outsider' in that I haven't experienced displacement or poverty. These different layers of experiences and identities puts me in-between the roles of insider and outsider in the research site (Türkmen, 2023). Similarly, Reyes (2020, p.221) argues that reflexivity emphasis how "…researchers' social positions change across space, in interactions with different people, and across interactions with the same people". The fluidity of my positions allowed me to engage with the women participants through navigating back and forth into different roles and reflecting on them.

Likewise, in my research some of visible traits are gender, language, my class background and being person of colour. This has allowed me to spearhead the conversation with the participants. And the other invisible traits had positioned me strategically as being a researcher, my experiences of flooding and uneven burden in households (during disasters). These elements have further helped me to connect with the women more deeply and in building a good rapport.

Through the conversations, I was conscious about the sensitivity and other traumatic experiences that might be exposed. In addition, to avoid the re-traumatization, prior to the conversations, I informed consents and was mindful about the triggers throughout. Emotions are an integral part of our lives and many at times it might influence the researcher's perspective. However, in this research process, emotions and reflexivity should not be viewed as distinct things because they are intertwined (Gray, 2008, p.936). I was as well aware of the challenges of power relations in this context, albeit emotions had the ability to shape the interactions and results (Ibid, p.943). The study was conducted mindfully, I was self-aware of my positions and identities to create inclusive feminist ethnographic research.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research involved women participants from various age groups (adults above 18 years) in the Chennai resettlement sites of Perumbakkam and Semmencherry. So, considering the displacements and structural inequalities present in the field, sometimes the participants can be considered vulnerable. However, the study has been carried out completely on a voluntary basis with informed consent, ensuring the participants are aware of the research process and free to withdraw at any point. Photos, videos and recordings was only made with permission and avoided in most cases due to anonymity reasons. The real name of the participants was changed for the same reason. All the data had been safely stored in my mobile and laptop encrypted with password.

Few parts of the research have been conducted along with the co-operation of a NGO, which has eventually led to some gatekeeping information, as anticipated. To avoid the biases and understand the ground reality, major parts of the study has been conducted individually. Also, as a part of giving back to the community, some of the relevant findings has been shared with the NGO.

Also, the research doesn't necessarily intend to collect any sensitive data (like religion, caste, or ethnic origin). However, I was conscious of the possibility that this factor of discrimination might arise in any situation. Further, I was fully aware of the sensitivity of the topic, which might trigger psychological stress or anxiety. In order to avoid re-traumatisation, participants are given full rights to pause or end the conversation. Building trust and creating a safe space of all the participants is a crucial part of the study.

3.6 Challenges and Limitations of the study

Through the study, main challenges and limitation were anticipated. It helped to look for alternative options. One of biggest resettlement site built during the 2004 Tsunami, Kanngi Nagar was visited once though not included. Due to time constraints and to limit the scope of the study, only two resettlement sites were chosen (See, Chapter 3.1 for the selection reason). Longer distance from home to research site was a daily hustle. It's around 2 hours by bus and these government buses are crowded in peak hours. Another greatest challenge was Chennai's hot and humid weather. Everyday walking through the site without any green cover was a tiresome process.

Biasness was found through NGOs, so most of the participants were picked serendipitously by me. Yet, some of the participants were little hesitant to talk, but most of them were ready for a conversation. As most of them were working, my field work largely starts after five in the evening. Due to the late evenings, sometimes the interactions were rushed as they had to complete their household chores and cook dinner. Also, safety and security concerns were the biggest challenge throughout the research process, many of the participants warned me to be very careful and not to be alone. Additionally, some essence of the vocabulary or words are lost in translation.

Chapter 4 Unveiling the Lived Experiences: Griefs of women in Chennai resettlements

Perumbakkam, Chennai. On a sunny day of July. Bumpy roads into the site with the tall eight storey buildings on one side and huge patch of marshland on the other side was the first view. I drove myself into one of the main alleys of the site. I saw small make shift and temporary shop instalments on the either side of the road. As a cost-efficient strategy, people used asbestos or tarpaulin sheets and similarly, I found most of house windows on the top floors[6] were covered with plastic or old banner sheets. I wondered all these materials would only absorbs heat inside; why do people use them to avoid direct sunlight? Few of the participants responded that they use it as rain coverings, some said to avoid direct sunlight and dust.

With the initial observations into the field. I also noticed another significant feeling among the participants. Whenever I engaged in a conversation with a resident, I frequently heard a tone of grieving about their lives in the resettlement area. Many of the women have mentioned their stories on how they were relocated to the place and how little to nothing has changed ever since. Their lives have only seemed to have become more difficult Further, over 23,000 and more multi-storeyed houses is the overview of Perumbakkam, build upon a marshland with poor infrastructural facilities. Such resettlement *"creates new pockets of poverty"*, where people experience pernicious consequences that again pushes them into impoverishment risks (Cernea, 1997; Mathur, 2013, p. 3). This chapter unveils the lived experiences of women in Chennai resettlements from understanding the eviction process to gendered impacts during disaster situations.

Fig 4.1: Makeshift Shops (Fieldwork, 2024)

4.1 Paths to containment: Slum Evictions

Chennai resettlements posit a unique strategy unlike other regions. Like mentioned in Chapter 1, Chennai disasters of 2004 Tsunami and 2015 floods urged a pivotal step of the state government towards massive resettlement projects that coincided with urban development. Diwakar (2019) explores the aspirations of state development projects (Slum relocation policies) and framing the slum settlements *"at-risk"* to disasters as a preparedness strategy while

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[6] Many of old building didn't have the sunroofs as cost cutting project.

visualising their political agendas of 'slum-free' cities. Also, Roy (2016, p. 38) calls it as *"Big City Bias"*, where the metropolitan cities focus on large-scale investments and excludes the welfare of urban poor, resulting in evictions by exercising its authority over the vulnerable population (Rhoads, 2018, p. 281).

4.1.1 No Choice

Many of the participants felt that they had *No Choice* when evicted. As all the evictees are either urban poor or lower-middle class households. In the context of Chennai, they are majorly evicted for two reasons, firstly, as a disaster prevention or framing risky as mentioned above. Secondly, for the restoration of water bodies, especially the riverfronts which are home (slum settlements) for thousands of families. Even when? some of the participants, who were evicted as a disaster relief, was not actually seriously affected by them. I see that their socio-economic status plays a crucial part in decision-making (Ichwatus Sholihah and Shaojun, 2018), as the city is no longer affordable (in terms of housing and if we they evicted) and they had to move.

Usha, a shop owner recalls her life in Pattinapakkam where they lived until 2004. She used to work as a house-hold help in the nearby areas and her husband was a fisherman. On moving to Semmencherry (also, people called it Tsunami colony), the family of five including their two sons and a daughter struggled hard for basic amenities. She further remembers,

> *"We were stranded at the shores with no home. Then, in 2005, we were all brought to tsunami colony. When we came here, it contained only these houses and nothing was there. No schools, hospitals, proper road or even water and electricity supply. We lost our jobs, home and everything...a family of five had to squeeze in this tiny house with literally a single room, a small kitchen and a bathroom outside."*

Strikingly, almost all the participants had the feeling of that they had *"No Choice"*, but to relocate to the outskirts of the city leaving everything behind. I would sense the desolation among the respondents during the conversations. Even during the FGD, a few ladies from Perumbakkam shared similar experiences of eviction from the Adyar river restoration project. The encroachment eviction drives have left them with the only option of moving to Perumbakkam with the one-time shifting allowance per family and subsistence allowance for a year. However, the little compensation was not any suffice to start over everything or they had to travel to central Chennai every day.

4.1.2 *"We are refugees here":* Ghettoisation or Gentrification?

The majority of informants express that they are invisible and almost do not feel they belong to the city anymore from Semmencherry and Perumbakkam. As the process of capital accumulation and governance; the neoliberal governments are 'creating new dimensions of urban segregations'. Along with the increasing social inequalities and the concentration of urban poor in the outskirts of the city creates a ghetto while gentrifying the city by several urban transformations. The notion of non-belongingness and refugees from the periphery arises various concerns towards citizenship. It becomes a million-dollar question, whether the plan is creating a Ghetto or to gentrify the urban population?

One of my responses from a young college graduate, Megha says about her job search that the challenges of getting into a decent job despite having a bachelor's degree is a struggle. She feels that the stigmatisation comes along with her to the job interviews and the denial without a proper reason even after upskilling themselves. She said:

> *"We are refugees here, nobody outside this area treats us well. The moment, they hear that we are from this area, they upfront deny us job."*

Notably, I attended one of the career development programs through an NGO. I met a few college students and the session was about collaboration with the NGO and training students on vocational courses, i.e., nursing, hotel management, hospitality and others. One of the NGO staff asked *"would there be any other courses other than vocational ones?"*. The event organiser said that they have just started and will be implementing more course in future. The staff gave a smile and later informed me that many people come here to train the students. But they all end up in low skilled jobs. I was able to understand the stereotype and stigma that some organisations come up with and decide the capacity of their ability. Moreover, a mother asked me a lamenting question during a conversation, it just left me thinking of how I live in an uncertain city that contains someone within and sends the other miles away? She asked:

> *"My son goes to the nearby government school and …Will you all send you kids here? Or will your kids study in this school? Why should our kids stay here, go to school, college and work here? …Do they want us to stay inside this area and never grow up..."*

From these narratives, we can understand how the community has been evicted from the city and left with no choice but to relocate to the peripheries. The above session reflects how people are being treated within the community by the outsiders. This sets the backdrop for understanding the following discussions on disasters events in resettlements and how women are impacted by the gendered aspects.

4.2 Disasters in Resettlements

We see CCID and DID scholarships filled with resettlement and rehabilitation strategies. In this context, disasters in resettlements are a new challenge that has not been much explored. Even though several luxury apartments, five-star hotels and malls[7] have been constructed on top of the lake-beds in Chennai. The urban poor communities residing in the slums are easily evicted and relocated as they are considered eyesores. Chennai's government-led resettlement areas such as Kannagi Nagar, Perumbakkam and Semmencherry are built upon ecologically sensitive areas (low-lying and flood-prone areas) (Coelho, 2016; IRCDUC, 2023).

As touched upon in the Chapter 1, undoubtedly, Chennai has not learned from its mistake. Prior to 2015 flood resettlement, it was very much evident that the resettlement areas have been heavily impacted by the floods concurrently for the past years. Not only floods, I as well consider extreme heat and heat wave as a disaster in this study. In this attempt to understand and explore the further impacts of these disasters, I look closely into the gendered aspects as they are under-researched and also the latest Tamil Nadu's Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) framework (2023) has not been drafted in any favour to women (just mention under vulnerable groups). Sharply looking into the R&R framework, they lack to understand the real experiences of women that blind-sided the practical problems.

4.2.1 Gendered Impacts

Concerns deriving from the stigmatisation does not just stop with the whole community. Yet, we can see a more visible negligence on the gendered aspects of the society. By employing an intersectional lens, it illustrates the various forms of discrimination that exist in the community and how women are disproportionately impacted by them. These existing social inequalities and power relations exert more influence on the gender stratification within the society (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013; Collin, 2000). Further, moving towards the

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[7] These luxury apartments, malls and hotels are high-rise, so the impacts are relatively less or they have the capacity to clean and maintain before and after a disaster.

dynamics of organisation and household levels; we can clearly witness the experiences of the individuals are shaped differently according to their positions (for example, single mother or female-led families). Thus, in disastrous situations these elements spiral up and strengthens the pre-existing social vulnerabilities. In this section, I narrate the lived experiences of women in resettlements during extreme weather events and later focusing on the how the 'matrix of domination' intersects with the social structure in shaping different experiences (Collin, 2000; Enarson, 1998).

4.2.1.1 Doubled Disasters

On the first day arriving to Semmencherry, I travelled by government bus around 11 in the morning. After few stops, I noticed a lot of ladies in the bus as it was also a free bus for all female passengers. I reached the destination and most of the ladies got down; walked into different lanes for Semmencherry and Perumbakkam. Later, I understood they were returning from work to home. The streets of Semmencherry were quiet apart from a few people here and there outside their homes. The outlay of the houses were four small portions of two storey tenements (i.e., 8 houses together up and down). It was very similar to Perumbakkam houses (approx. 10m²). It was again a very hot day in July. With the scorching sun and the high humidity, I was melting away. I also witnessed numerous ladies in the bus stop getting in and out. I was completely puzzled about the resistance of these women towards the heat. Still growing up in same weather, I was not able to take the heat for a longer period.

The narrations of the women reflect the lived experiences during extreme weather events. Thendral and Indu (Semmencherry), who work as household helpers in the nearby area mentioned that Semmencherry was little better than Perumbakkam, as it is a bit cooler and they were able to sit outside even during the day time. Thendral said she could not even think about residing in congested Perumbakkam without any trees or shade. She shared their daily routine,

> "We walk almost 4 km every day around 11 am in the hot sun…there would be no one even to give us a glass of water if we 'faint' while going to work. Also, the workplace drains us by giving us all the household chores from cooking to cleaning at a very low wage and without any food. We return back around 4 pm again in the sun and have our lunch and later in the evening continue to do our house chores."

Further, towards the end of the conversation, Thendral's husband called her inside. She told me, "…again I have to go cook dinner and clean the house". This notes the prevalent gender role present in the households. They are almost invisible and imposing the caregiving duties on women has become a culturally rooted norm (Enarson, 1998). Additionally, I noticed several participants mentioning similar scenario of feeding their children or saying that their husbands would arrive from work and etc. An NGO director from Perumbakkam was stated that "…they have suffered a lot this time due to the extreme heatwave. Especially the working women, who were working extensively outside and inside home without any support."

Another participant from Perumbakkam, Malarvizhi recounted her experience of 2023 December floods. She and her relatives resided in the building. As she was living on the top floor, she was able to accommodate her sister and their family from ground floor, which was inundated. There was no power and water supply for a week. The elders and kids suffered a lot without proper food and water. In a conversation, she stated:

> "Chennai is always hot, what to do about that? We have to eat, so we have to work…even during floods, it takes many days for the water to drain. But we have to go to work, to secure our jobs. We walk in that water till our hips. People around here run for their lives; they don't have humanity…they sell milk at enormous prices on those days, what to do again? we have kids to feed. So, we buy it."

Similarly, one of the respondent Shanti spoke about her daughter's pregnancy and labour journey during 2022 floods in Semmencherry. The nearby hospital usually lacks facility

for pregnant ladies, she and her daughter had to travel 25 kms every month to Egmore government hospital. Then, she shared a heavy story of her daughter's labour happened in the middle of the floods.

> *"My daughter had to give birth in this toilet and nearby ladies helped her...even we had to cut the umbilical cord...there was no medical facility. The UPHC had no doctors or nurses, no ambulance…Also during the other days we had to travel all the way to Egmore (Chennai Central) government hospital for scan and other facilities."*

Many of my participants recalled their experiences of the floods and how they were stranded without any help. Women participation in household chores was very intense, as everyone was at home and duty was doubled. As the gender role was clearly divided and they physically and mentally bear the burden without any second thought. These situations take a heavy toll on their health. Lack of basic supplies were the major concern. Some of them critiqued the inhumane way of distributing food. One responder from FGD said:

> *"…they come around 11 or 12 in the night. Firstly, who will eat at that hour? ...they bring food in those garbage trucks by whistling and calling 'food, food…please bring your plates'…how would you eat that? But we have no choice. Even if we stayed in the city, many volunteers would bring us food and other supplies…we get nothing here. Who would come into this lake to feed us? …even the government doesn't care about us."*

Overall, through the conversations with them, I was able to understand that the visible disaster like floods was very concerning and made people immobile. The problem is Chennai's weather that it gets hot, hotter, hottest and torrential rains at the end of the year. With this, the extreme heat hits them invisibly causing more concerns. They commonly felt that the weather today is *"a bit warmer than yesterday."*

4.4 Conclusion

The gendered inequalities at different levels (household and community) play a role reveals that the societal structures, inequalities and gender norms are deeply ingrained in the society that further restricts women's agency and also decision-making capacities (Collin, 2000). The above narratives illustrate the gender dynamics present in the resettlement areas and how it disproportionately affects them. From the eviction, resettlement process and moreover into the disasters, the gendered impacts continuously exacerbate their vulnerabilities is understood through their experiences.

Chapter 5 Beyond a disaster: Challenges in everyday lives

Another sunny morning in August. I was standing nearby the government high school of Perumbakkam. It was busy morning, with two-wheelers and autos everywhere. I heard a teacher shouting at a student about his progress in studies almost threatening him; while he replied in a frightened tone "yes sir". I saw two other school boys aged 14 or 15, driving a two-wheeler with two empty water cans in the front. As I continued walking through the streets, I saw a lot of shops covered with tarpaulin sheets, some without any coverings and some modified shops inside the ground floor of the tenements. It was even difficult to identity what they are selling until taken a straight closer look, they were almost identical. After a point, I was so dizzy and thirsty and was searching for shade, which was never found. I bought a water bottle from a window of the buildings and quenched my thirst. There were no trees until I reached the main road. These few hours of the morning left me with so many thoughts and questions.

Why are students doing the management duties? For a student to be treated well, does the location matter? In an urban resettlement, people are not just losing their 'home'. There are many more things than a home, which can never be replaced. As depicted from the previous chapter, the lived experiences unfold multiple layers of oppression they face in the everyday lives. Over time, it's not anymore just disaster they are facing, it is the risk of being vulnerable to the consequences and moreover being trapped into that vulnerability (Guadagno and Yonetani, 2023, p. 22). Accordingly, the experiences and challenges shared by the women reveals more insights on how they navigate their lives with the greater odds than that is more the resettlement processes.

5.1 Out of Reach: Accessibility to resources

Electricity and water have become a luxury for all my participants. The unreachability of the basic utilities illustrates their socio-economic impacts that has left the community in the state of dilapidation. Additionally, most of the participants were not able to even receive the disaster relief fund provided by the government during floods. Because, as one of the participants shared that their ration card[8] mentioned the old address and new address to Semmencherry was never updated, even after multiple tries. It is difficult to obtain such relief funds without proper identification. Though the regulations were changed in the time of 2023 December floods that the family can receive the funds through the 'Aadhar card'[9] of the head of the family member. After many attempts and struggles many of them failed to receive them. Or in some cases, the funds were collected by the specific officer[10] of each building to distribute the residents. Again, some people complain about the bias of the officers and do not receive the money.

Accessibility to cooling mechanisms, especially during the summers is the biggest challenge. Chennai's weather has drastically changed over the years. It is almost impossible to find a home without an air condition in the city. But the case in Perumbakkam and Semmencherry is very different. If they cannot acquire stable electricity, What's the point of talking about the use of fans or air conditioners? Amrita expressed the rise of temperature to large extends in the summer and surviving the nights without electricity in a small space is a nightmare along with her caregiving duties. She stated:

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[8] Official document provided to each family and entitling to certain ration goods according to their economic status (ID provided by state governments in India).

[9] Official national ID card given to all citizens.

[10] Each building has a TNUHD officer, who oversees all the administration and operational works.

"Power cuts are an everyday scenario in summer, due to small space we can't stay inside the house for a very long time. Sometimes we sit outside, again not for a longer period because of the safety concerns. The higher temperatures at night with minimal access to electricity, it is very difficult to stay indoors as a family of four in a small 1BHK house (approx. 10m²)."

Another biggest and essential challenge is 'water'. Both drinking and tap water[11] is in shortage in terms of quantity and quality. All the families are forced to buy 'canned package water' (locally called Can water) for cooking and drinking. On an average, people buy 1 to 2 cans or more depending on their needs. Each can cost around 30 to 35 INR. On top of this, also tap water is scarce. Every other day or once in three days is the worst situation in summers, when they receive water. Moreover, the water containing higher TDS (Total Dissolved Solids) levels makes it more dangerous for the community. Speaking with Kothai, a shop owner in Perumbakkam, she mentioned:

"…getting good water is a major problem. It is now a little better, but last May and June was horrible…There was no water anywhere. We had to buy water and sometimes the kids will bathe in can water. Because, the water is slimy, smelly and in yellow colour. It is unsafe for anyone. We can't take chances for the kids…it is very difficult."

I also used the water for few days and it left my skin dry and itchy. The water had a slight yellow tint and it almost had a slimy texture. This contamination of heavy metals and particles in water raises several concerns regarding health, if used in a longer run.

5.2 Chronic Barriers: Struggles for Hygiene and Sanitation

The shortage of water and the impurities present in them produces varieties of health risks within the community. In conversation with a UPHC resident nurse, I was able to further understand the major worries around hygiene and sanitation. Even though, the government providing various medical camps and awareness in the resettlement areas. In contrast, the supply of water creates a lot of tension and frustration that furthers the inability to address the matter. Like most of my respondents, Alarkodi and Thendral reported the severity of skin infections due to the use of water. Alarkodi showed her daughter and how the water has reacted in her skin. She said *"…my daughter is constantly itching her skin and during the daytime with the hot sun. It is worst"*. Similarly, Thendral (Semmencherry) showed her feet and also the water from the big plastic barrel stored for days. The water was murky and had some sentiments to the bottom. She said they store and use the water for every three days. Asha, the UPHC nurse said

"You can find at least one family member having a skin infection. It is very common and this is due to the contamination of water. Also, many of these people don't follow a proper hygiene routine. If we teach or ask them about it, they sometimes harshly ask us "There is no water, where do we go for water?". Even at our UPHC, we don't have a good water supply. It's usually thick and yellow in colour. This is the condition here."

Additionally, also during floods hygiene and sanitation remains a big question. Sewage water is easily mixed with the rain waters and gets floods. Children, women in mensuration and also people who works has to get into the water and walk their ways. This happening in the marshland also invites several insects, snakes and rodents. The situation just gets worsen one after another. Pooja, a college student recollects the 2023 December floods. As a family of three with a single mother, a younger sister and herself, they reside in the ground floor. Without any proper support, it was worrisome for them to cross the week of rains. Also, post-disaster, cleaning and settling down was a massive task for their family. She said:

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[11] In India, tap water is not suitable for consumption.

> *"I was in my mensuration period and we stay in the ground floor…last December, our house was completely flooded and also sewage water entered from outside and from toilet. It was very difficult for me, even to change the sanitary napkins and there was no one to help us here."*

The health concerns are taking serious toll on the communities and major problems are stirred up by the disasters.

5.3 Losing Ties: Issues around families

Another quiet commonly noticed issue among women was child marriage. I saw a lot of young mothers. Also, the NGO was continuously monitoring the high school girls and the dropout rates. This showcases the prevalent child marriages in the society. Jayanthi, an NGO staff told me that due to the socio-economic factors and safety concerns; parents stop the education of the girl child and marry them off. This substantial problem does not stop there, it hastens to additional family tensions and also in some cases it ends up in divorce.

Whenever, I was strolling around the streets, I was able to witness some petty to big fights among the families or with the neighbours. A young mother shared her experience of abuse that she went through for years. She was a mother of a 6-year-old boy. She got married at a very young age and staying with her husband and his family in Semmencherry. After the boy was born, the couples had frequent fights and the husband used to beat her up every day. She was patiently adjusting things for her little boy. Some days, she used to go stay with her parents and they negotiate; then they live together. This was happening for a few years. One day, the husband under the influence of alcohol beaten her badly and used offensive language. She immediately reported domestic violence to the nearby NGO and with their help she later also filed a divorce.

From drawing the observations and stories, it can be understood that the increased vulnerability is causing irritability among families and fracturing bonds. The extreme weather events take a heavy toll on the individual's mental health affecting their behaviour patterns as also noted in other contexts (Christensen, 2023; Mayes-Osterman, 2024; Queensland Government, 2024).

5.4 Constraints in Income

Likely to the change of behavioural patterns, the physical ability to withstand the extreme heat impacts in financial crisis. The instable working hours is found vastly in the daily wage workers. Disasters in general is a trouble, that primarily hits hard on their economic conditions. Yamini, a homemaker shared the instable financial situation of their family. Her husband works as a truck driver. She shared *"It is very difficult to drive long distances every day, so he stays at home alternate days"*. Either on hot or rainy days, her husband's job is not consistent due to the surrounding and physical weakness.

Usha, a shop owner said the business is really not going well and also after her husband's death. It has become very difficult for her, because all her children are married and she is living alone. Her only source of income is the shop. Without any help, running business and paying rent for the shop is a big hurdle. Physically and mentally, she is drowned. She said she is doing this for her grandchildren and herself; not being a burden to her sons or daughters. She comments:

> *"We close our shop around 1 in the afternoon and sometimes before that if it was very hot…I come back after 4 pm and stay late night…this is the main source of income for me".*

5.5 Fear of Substance: A battle towards safety and security

The vast majority of the respondents commented about the use of substance among the youth population in the community. The safety and security concerns have been long overdue, which has till date not been eliminated or addressed properly. Recalling the experiences and the efforts made by Rukmani, a former leader in a women's association, reveals that the issues has only been upgraded today. Back in days, she extensively fought for women's safety and the supply of basic utilities to Semmencherry and Perumbakkam. Also, many of the participants from the FGD recalled how nothing was there when they arrived here. Looking at today's scene, nothing much has been changed. People are still struggling for water and it has upgraded to the fear of substance. Rukmani (Semmencherry),staying with her single daughter says about how it is unsafe for her granddaughter and other children to grow up in such an environment. As her granddaughter's education is sponsored by a trust in Teynampet, Chennai (center), she is relieved to an extent and said:

> *"My granddaughter studies in a residential school. I cannot afford to send my child to this school and worry about it every day. Thank God, my granddaughter studies in a very good school and in a better environment. Every month I go and visit her."*

Additionally, Kamala, a working mother of a 7-year-old girl who works in a telecommunication company; her work timings are between 1pm to 10pm. It is very difficult for to come at late night and most of the days they lock the main gate of the building for safety purposes. However, she has to wait outside and call her husband to open the gate. Around 11 or 12 at night, not only for women, it is not safe for anyone. She opined about the safety of Perumbakkam:

> *"It is very scary to go outside after 7pm alone in this area. If you wait and see after few hours, you will find a bunch of youth boys sitting around…by the influence of drugs and alcohol, they would be shouting and screaming all night…they don't even care about the elders and small children…I won't send my kid to play outside without any supervision. You never know what will happen next? ...This is how our lives go on here."*

Nandhini stated on the use of substance between young school boys and her agitation of raising up her children in a surrounding that is filled with crime and drugs. She commented:

> *"I see school boys aged 10 and 12, smoking cigarettes and doing drugs. Nobody can question them. If we do, they would use such cuss words. You can't hear it…how would you change all this? I feel very pity for the little boy's parents. I also have a son and a daughter, every day I pray nothing goes wrong. That's all I can do as a mother."*

This use of substances in younger generation is creating stigmatisation and the fear the among residents impacts the women and children majorly.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings discussed in this chapter outline how women in Chennai resettlements navigate their lives with the underlying currents? of a disaster. The interactions with the women reveal their anxieties around the accessibility of resources, health, family issues and use of substance. The repercussions / afterlives of? A disaster cannot be understood on its own among a vulnerable population. Instead, the interplay between the gender dynamics, cultural norms, power structures and inequalities play a critical role in constructing a unique set of challenges that they face every day. Their overall living standards are significantly impacted by the interwoven effects of extreme weather conditions.

Chapter 6 Is it Vulnerability to Resilience?

On an evening, I was walking under the tall buildings with bustling sounds of two- wheeler and people roaming here and there. Despite the sun fading away (temp. 34° C), its oppressive humidity was still in the air. As wiping away the dripping sweat, I stepped outside of Perumbakkam and walked into the nearby residential area. The feeling of chill breeze touching my face was a perfect soothness to the humidity. Suddenly, I found myself between the trees and quiet portions of gated communities. The instant decrease in temperature was felt and while sipping the water, some energy was restored. The full force of Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect was lived through. This disproportionate distribution of heat among different socio-demographic groups results in (un)intentional 'spatial segregation' (Deilami, Kamruzzaman and Liu, 2018; Hsu et al., 2021).

The Vulnerability to Resilience (V2R) framework is a mainstream approach to understand and reduce the vulnerabilities while strengthening the resilience (Pasteur, 2011). Although this V2R approach looks very convincing and a viable solution; it carries the potential of reinforcing the power relation in the society. As seen in Chapter 2.2.3, Jackson (2024) and Ghosh and Boyd (2019) argues the overemphasis of the individual and local level actions may not efficiently address the larger systemic problems (policy flaws, structural inequalities, economic factors). This sort of imposing resilience or governmentality leads to the theory of marginalisation (See above, Fig. 2.1), once again driving to vulnerability (Wisner, Gaillard and Kelman, 2012). In relation to the UHI, where the built environment is seen as the stressor (vulnerability). However, the communities have been resettled as a coping mechanism (resilience, see chapter 1). Notably, this provides us the crux of the study and delves into analysing social vulnerability corresponding to resilience. Under this chapter, I highlight and discuss how overemphasising of resilience on the marginalised population, adds on to vulnerability rather than actual resistance to combat the disasters.

6.1 Triangle of Vulnerability

Looking from the 'Triangle of Vulnerability', it highlights the complexities of the interconnectedness of political, social and economic factors contributing to vulnerability; during and in the aftermath of a disaster. People who have limited access to those resources are drawn by the theory of marginalisation leading to deprivation of safety nets and positioning them into social vulnerability (Wisner, Gaillard and Kelman, 2012, p. 23- 27).

6.1.1 The Triple Threat: Political, Social and Economic Structure

As previously in Chapter 5, showcased the systemic barriers to accessibility of resources in an urban resettlement contributes in marginalisation. By this, the vulnerable population are easily evicted and relocated to ecologically fragile and sensitive areas that more prone to disasters. Firstly, the political structure that has various flaws starting from communicating policies to implementing them in the name of benefit. The role of power and influence on the vulnerable people depicts the lack of access to safety nets (social benefits, insurance or policies). In this case, it is seen that people are curbed away from the disaster relief funds and flaws in R&R framework (2023), in spite of such critics, it has never been addressed properly.

Secondly, the social structure, in terms of relocation, many of the participants have mentioned that they lost their social networks in the city. In addition, the support received during the hard times through volunteers have been drastically reduced. Some of them felt that they

have been isolated and community support is rarely seen here. The lack of social networks sprawled into social isolation within the community.

Thirdly, the economic structure, people are already living in or impacted by socio-economic factors. This threat targeted at the urban poor communities challenge their way of living. Finally, all these stressors and shocks created by disaster risks puts people again into vulnerability in the name of 'resettlement'. Their livelihoods as well as the environment are triggered by these external factors rises even more concerns on the existing governance and the support systems.

6.2 Governance Gaps: Role of Government

Highlighting from the previous sessions, the weak governance increases the vulnerability by restricting access to resources and decision-making in resilience. The Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development (TNUHD), is the department which oversees the resettlement and rehabilitation processes. This governing body only manages the resettled houses, unlike the name suggests urban habitat development, it does not work along the lines of development of the community. Though it was commenced with the motto of *"God we shall see in the smile of the poor"*; it is definitely contradicting with the realities present in the Perumbakkam and Semmencherry. Besides this, the latest scheme released in "2015 Housing for All programme to attain Slum Free Cities". Despite the fact that these city dwellers (from slums) have been largely contributing to the urban informal economies, they are been marginalised under the urban framework (especially in urbanisation process) (Davis, 2006, p. 175).

Furthermore, the governance framework also excludes the gender perspective by limiting the women's voices and agency. This gender blindness has been already witnessed in the TN R&R framework (2023), where the policy is drafted in a way deepening the existing vulnerabilities of the women. Even in decision-making and disaster response, due to lack of gendered governance and power dynamics; the role of women is often overlooked. Thus, gender inclusivity is the major gap in the governance system, created by cultural norms in the patriarchal society affecting their lives and livelihoods.

6.3 Support Systems? Role of NGOs

Another major pushback is by the support systems. The role of NGOs is persistently aligned with the V2R framework, focusing on strengthening the resilience in household (individual) and community levels. This (un)intentionally exacerbate the social vulnerabilities which are pre-existing in the societies. Drawing instances from my observations in working alongside the NGO for a few weeks. I was able to understand the bias of gatekeeping the organisation's information. Several participants shared their opinions regarding the particular organisation and how they respond to disasters.

Akila asked me if I am working for the NGO, I responded by stating that, I do not have any association with the NGO. Then she trusted me and started sharing information with me. Akila and her family lives right across the NGO office in Semmencherry. She said:

> *"…See, we stay right here. But what do we get? nothing. During the floods, I see lot food and clothing arriving to the office… Me and my neighbours have never received anything. We don't know, where it goes? Or who gets it? ..."*

Likewise, a few other informants have also shared their opinions on the NGOs and some of them haven't ever received any benefit from them. I found some organisations exercises their power over the community, exhibiting their saviour behaviour in order to make people believe they are in vulnerability and being resilient brings them out of the bubble.

However, the NGOs are constantly trying to cover the gender gap and establish inclusivity. They fall short in understanding other? power dynamics present within the society and sometimes the privileged get access to these resources while inadequately addressing the social vulnerabilities of the under privileged. The NGOs tendency to focus on the immediate interventions of resilience building overshadows the systemic risks present in the society.

6.4 Resilience: What is the Actual Problem and Need?

"Being or becoming resilient demands economic and social resources…" (Krüger, 2018, p. 2).

Resilience has become a buzzword in everything from national security to climate change. Historically, resilient discourses only focused on disaster risks and prevention, where 'adaptation' was the central theme. However, being a shifting concept under neoliberal governance, due to its approach, it easily become a flimsy concept. It often lacks an explanation of how different vulnerabilities are produced under such social structures. From the early 21st century, people have been endlessly telling terms like 'Bounce Back Better' or 'Build Back Better' and more in association with disasters and pandemics.

Rhetorically, the rise of resilience with greater regards to self-reliance and individualism under the subjects of neoliberalism has become the norm in the growing societies. Schwarz (2018, p. 530) argues that this model of focusing on adaptation and individualism while upholding the hegemonic power, the state keeps on framing resilient policies and transferring the responsibilities to the individuals (Krüger, 2018, p.3). The imposition of resilience on the vulnerable groups through neoliberal subjects reflects that the 'autonomy' is to be managed even beneath the external forces. These tactics covertly fostering the neoliberal norms under the pretext of resilience, often prioritises the stability of economic standards foremost of addressing the root causes of vulnerability and poverty (Joseph, 2013, p. 45).

"Vulnerabilities in this account are thus framed as the unintended consequences of top-down decision-making structures" (Mckeown, Hai Bui and Glenn, 2021, p. 117). As a reactive in post-disaster responses despite the existing socio-economic and spatial inequalities, it tends to normalise the social inequities. Likewise, in Chennai resettlements, NGOs and Governments continuously talking about the resilience of the community without proper support, revealing? the inadequacy of the system. On a 'selection bias', it enacts as a buffer while the government fails to resolve the counterparts (Joseph, 2013, p.47- 48; Krüger, 2018; McKeown, Hai Bui and Glenn, 2021).

Therefore, the repeated overemphasis behind the word that seems to be neutral and supportive, 'resilience' turns into a tool for ensuring that governments and institutions align to a global neoliberal order. Eventually, this leads to reproduction of vulnerability. Here, in this context, it has become a vicious cycle in production of vulnerability among the women in resettlement areas. It becomes an eternal part of the society while creating new challenges every day. In the following, I discuss that the resilience and adaption without any transformation leads to additional uncertainties rather than addressing the pre-existing social vulnerabilities.

6.5 Future Uncertainties

All my respondents confirmed that they do not wish to reside there. Other than two participants, everyone said they do not enjoy or like anything in Perumbakkam and Semmencherry. Malarvizhi and Yamini mentioned about their struggles of open defecation while living in Saidapet slum, Chennai. They felt that was the only betterment in moving to Perumbakkam.

Still, Malarvizhi asserted that it was a huge relief for their family; especially with a growing daughter.

Extracting from the previous sessions, I found that a society cannot adopt resilience in this method. Without the systemic transformational efforts, it lacks the understanding of functioning and psychology of human conditions (Joseph, 2013, p. 51). This merely propels the current issues into the future. Some of uncertainties due to disasters are clearly visible from the beginning of resettlement, yet they were not tackled. Instead, it almost led to 'Environment gentrification' and moreover again resettled in unsafe places.

Ignoring gender dynamics and power structures has resulted in multiple discrimination that intersects with the social positions of women. Moreover, it has limited women's agency and empowerment in the patriarchal society that is bound by cultural norms and gender roles. Consequently, these uncertainties will trigger intergenerational trauma and with the limited access to psychosocial support will perpetuate specific gender vulnerabilities.

Despite not addressing the structural flaws, the resettlements continue to expand in the peripheries of Chennai. This neoliberal governance and policies results in ghettoisation of urban poor. Women's narratives state the fear of living in these areas; they are steadily surging up because of economic disparities, unemployment, crime and lack of basic facilities.

6.6 Conclusion

The preceding discussions encapsulated the role of government, NGOs and how resilience is exercised through these modes. The structural threat is evident, which pushes women into further vulnerability. Enforcing resilience on the vulnerable groups who do not have the capacity to access the resources are taking the hardest hit in the extreme weather conditions. This substantive concept pushes the responsibility to individuals and communities, who are unequally recognised and segregated into different social groups. Hence, adaption as an immediate response only maintains the neoliberal governance structure in lieu of addressing the social vulnerabilities (Krüger, 2018; Joseph, 2018). The exposure of women to extreme vulnerability portrays the existing systemic errors.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Through this paper, I explored the lived experiences of women in Perumbakkam and Semmencherry, who were endured by evictions, resettlements and disasters. As resettlement of urban poor population has increasingly become a norm in neoliberal government policies, it is crucial to acknowledge their pain and struggles that impacts and shapes their everyday lives. The stories shared by these women aren't just simple narrations of their daily lives yet it is beyond that, the actual lived experiences that they have went through or continuing to encounter.

The major findings of the study have established that the changing and extreme weather events indeed have significant effects on women more than men under the differentiated gender and power dynamics within the society. However, in relation with the resettlement in such ecologically fragile areas, the research raised various questions on governance gaps. In addition, it also visibilises social vulnerability through "complex social allocation", where the urban poor are segregated and pushed into the paths of further risks (Susman, O'keefe and Wisner, 1983, p. 278). This suggests that, while resettlement has impacted their lives, it is also important to consider their lives and livelihoods in the context of disasters in which they are being substantially marginalised.

In tracing how different social groups of the urban resettlement with multiple layers of discrimination challenge them. The Chapter 4 underlines their non-belongingness to the city not just by distance; but also representing their solitary nature of life. Through those experiences shared by participants, it can be understood that the eviction, resettlement and even a disaster is not a single event rather they are relentless cycle that never seems to end.

As contributing to the complications, as shown in Chapter 5, the negligence of gendered aspects both in resettlement and disaster discourses, highlights the possible challenges that these women have to confront every day. From accessibility of resources to family issues, instable income to safety and security concerns; these daily challenges are interconnected with the pre-existing vulnerabilities and again intensified in the event of a disaster.

With all these ongoing pain and sufferings, they are made worse with the imposition of resilience. By understanding the concept of resilience as in Chapter 6 from a Foucauldian perspective, it is stated that pushing individuals to bear the responsibility and resistance in the absence of the systemic support is fanning the flames of vulnerability. Thus, these structural threats impact the women disproportionately by spotlighting the gender roles, cultural norms and economic disparities.

Recently in October 2024, Chennai was given a cyclone red alert. People from my nearby localities reserved hotel rooms in advance and also parked their cars on flyovers (despite of the fines imposed; stating that fines are relatively cheaper to car services). Individuals with all resources (especially social and economic) can access and cope up with their resistance. Whereas, enforcing on vulnerable people to be resilient without providing equal spaces in the societies is absurdity. Hence, in this view, women had to bear the brunt of unknown consequences as well.

Evidences from the previous studies has discussed about environment gentrification in Chennai to some extent. Although, not much focus was given in academia with regards to gender and experiences of disasters in resettlement areas. Either is it focused on the climatic patterns of Chennai or the impoverishment risks associated with the resettlements. However, one significant contributions of this paper were understanding the complexities of the real lived experiences of women without solely relying on the governmental data or statistics.

The study is limited to 22 participants including 5 NGO employees, 1 nurse and 16 residents from Perumbakkam and Semmencherry. Likewise, in terms of methodology, it was focused on semi-structured conversations with all the participants. Nonetheless, it was relevant with the residents as they more comfortably engaged in a casual setting. Although, engaging with the organisations and other members, an in-depth interview would have been more useful in understanding the situation.

The participants are largely resettled as a post-disaster strategy and in some cases, reasons varied (urban development and transformation, restoration of waterbodies, city beautification projects, etc.). As Chennai has multiple resettlement locations within and outside of the city; also relocating for various reasons. Therefore, the conducted study cannot be generalised even within Chennai by and large. Despite these drawbacks, this study created an opportunity for conversation and reflection; made a valuable contribution in tracing the real-time experiences of women from their natural setting.

Future research into resettlement and disasters in grasping the lived experiences of women should focus on more younger generations and also include male participants in understanding the essence of gender dynamics. It would set up a clearer image on how these challenges are transforming into intergenerational trauma without any escape.

Policy Recommendations

- Resettlement and Rehabilitation policy framework must be gender-sensitive; including disaster preparedness, response and recovery.
- Women should participate in all decision-making frameworks and policy framings.
- Improved access to all basic resources including water, food, health, sanitation and safety.
- Develop and implement skill development and livelihood programmes that makes them self-reliant in terms of building economy.
- Provide psychosocial support to the women affected by any of the challenges raised disasters, evictions and resettlements.
- Monitoring and evaluation of policies on a regular basis to avoid any further impacts.

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Appendices

Trapped in the Cycle of Vulnerability? Disasters, Evictions and Resettlements in Chennai, India

Interview guideline for Women participants

1. Could you please tell me about yourself?
    a. Where were they relocated from? Which part of Chennai?
    b. Occupation?
2. Could you explain the changes in your daily life since moving to the resettlement colony?
    a. Prior work experiences
    b. What job they go to now?
    c. Any other challenges
3. How do you find the access to healthcare, education, and other resources in the resettlement area?
4. What changes have you noticed in your household responsibilities since moving here?
5. What particular difficulties do you have while trying to get things done around the house during extreme weather?
6. How do you manage your household chores and other duties (if they work), particularly when you're experiencing stress from the climate?
7. What coping strategies do you employ to deal with the effects of extreme weather events?
    a. How they cope up with the hotter days?
    b. How they cope up during floods?
8. What kind of support—from the government, the community, or non-governmental organizations, do you receive during extreme weather events?
9. How well do you think these support networks work to assist you and your family in the event of extreme weather?

Interview guideline for NGO staffs

1. Could you please tell me about yourself?
   a. More about their work in the site
   b. What contributions they make?
2. What are the main socioeconomic issues that women in resettlement colonies face?
3. What effects has climate change had on these women's options for a livelihood?
4. What strategies does your organisation use to help women in resettlements have better access to resources and services?
5. Could you explain the coping strategies that women in resettlement colonies usually employ in the event of extreme weather?
   a. What part does your NGO play in creating or promoting these coping mechanisms?
   b. Also, any mitigation strategies?
6. To what extent have these coping mechanisms helped women in resettlement regions lessen the effects of climate change?
7. What do you think about the existing resettlement and rehabilitation policy?
   a. Is it gender-sensitive?
   b. how do you define and foster it?
8. How do you make sure that putting an emphasis on resilience prevents people from accepting the problems that climate change brings about in a passive manner?
9. Could you provide any examples of your programme's successes on the lives of women in these areas?
   a. Future endeavours