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Dynamic Climates of Memory: Environmental Learning, Risk Perception, Remembering and Forgetting Disasters

India is one of the fastest urbanizing societies in the world and Gujarat is one of India's most progressive states with significant agricultural and industrial production. Rapid urbanization has led to landscape transformation and creation of uneven vulnerabilities.

Not surprisingly, Gujarat state has witnessed several disasters over the last few decades. Gujarat also pioneered in establishing institutions and formulating policies in the field of disaster management. My project examines the memory of the Machhu Dam failure (1979) and the Bhuj Earthquake (2001) in Gujarat, India and their role in influencing risk perception. My research revolves around the central question of "What role does memory of disaster play in influencing the perceptions of risk?"

It provides an opportunity to explore the question of who remembers the disasters and how, and what can be learnt from them. Who are the important actors? What is the role of experts in utilizing the perceptions and knowledge from Gujarat and developing a disaster management framework for India? In order to address the issues of governance and disaster justice, it is also important to acknowledge the non-institutional forms of experience and knowledge which is often systematically deleted from recognition (Wayne, 1996).

The Machhu Dam failure is highly under-researched in spite of being listed as one of the worst dam disasters in the history of mankind. On the contrary, the Bhuj Earthquake is credited with having shaped the field of disaster management in India by introducing innovative governance practices for disaster risk reduction.

This comparative study explores the commemorative practices and narratives of these two disasters and establishes links between memories, risk perceptions and learnings to develop an inclusive decision making process.