

# Preface

In 2012, I joined the University of Leicester's Civil Safety and Security Unit (CSSU) from Cranfield University. Whilst teaching the Master of Science in Risk, Crisis and Disaster Management at CSSU, I came across the systems approach. I was instantly attracted to its inherent richness as a macro-paradigm. My previous research had focussed on women and at-risk communities. Therefore, I wanted to engage with organisational-focus risk and crisis studies in order to gather new knowledge for my professional development. Also, I wanted to understand the problem of human deaths from an organisational perspective rather than from the perspective of social vulnerability and risk only.

I decided to return to Odisha for this research. This decision was rather personal. My relationship with Odisha goes back to 1999. When Odisha was hit by the Super-Cyclone on 28 October that year, I was reading my Master of Arts in Social Work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai. In the aftermath of this Super-Cyclone, I volunteered as a relief worker. Under the guidance of the state government, I spent a fortnight in the district of Jagatsinghpur caring for the widows, orphans and elderly impacted by the Super-Cyclone. This experience was instrumental in shaping my life, career and skills. In 2003, I returned to Odisha once again to conduct nine months of fieldwork for my Ph.D. research in the Department of Sociology at Warwick University. This research was funded by the Ford Foundation International Fellowship Programme. Through this research, I was reunited with the women that I had assisted in the aftermath of the Super-Cyclone. I was also able to document their experiences in depth, not only of the Super-Cyclone but also of later disasters, which included the floods in 2001 and 2003 and drought in 2002 (Ray 2006; Ray-Bennett 2009a, b, c; Ray-Bennett 2010). Therefore, based on my knowledge and experience, I thought Odisha could serve as a 'critical case' (Yin 2012) for systems failure because more than 10,000 people died in the Super-Cyclone.

Importantly, the contacts and networks I established with Odisha State Disaster Management Authority and the local NGOs during my Ph.D. fieldwork were still intact. I have kept in touch with them by sharing publications that have come out of this research. The NGO workers, in particular from Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samity

(BGVS) and Action Aid (AA), became close friends. These well-established contacts and networks prompted me to select Odisha. Furthermore, an opportunity to return to Odisha after eleven years was too tempting to pass up.

I wrote this book at a critical juncture when systems thinking is moribund. Yet, I feel strongly that systems thinking is needed more than ever before in disaster risk reduction studies. I hope that my book is able to generate some interest in this regard. Systems thinking is not an antiquity or something of the past, rather an extremely powerful meta-concept that can contribute to our current practices and change our thoughts. It has certainly changed mine.

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