

# Visualizing Vulnerability: A Post-colonial Gaze on Post Disaster Representation of Women

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## Abstract

There has been a significant increase in the number of studies carried out on disasters along with an increase in the number of disasters in the last decade. Women as a group were and are identified as being more affected by all kinds of disasters owing to the specific and unique socially constructed gendered vulnerabilities. As such, a common narrative within disaster research, both in academia and by development agencies, suggest that a large number of women are affected more negatively by disasters when compared to men in the same situation. While the focus on specific conditions of gender differentiated populations in disaster situations aims to produce more gender friendly humanitarian responses and mitigation strategies, and is to be welcomed, one of its pitfalls has been the perpetuation of the image of vulnerable 'third world' women as agency less victims of their circumstances.

Focusing on the aftermath of the earthquake that took place in April and May 2015 in Nepal, and drawing examples from secondary sources, I put forward that in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, it is the images and stories of, predominately women that fill up the reports of human rights organizations. In disaster literature, women are discursively constituted as the vulnerable subjects. Drawing from postcolonial feminist scholarship, and tracing a history of 'development' in Nepal, I argue that the discourse of (mis)representation that started in 1980s still holds relevance especially in development context where previous colonizer countries are now the 'donors' and the colonized the 'recipients'.

## About the Speaker

Rachana Upadhyaya has a Double Master's Degree in Gender and Women's Studies from University of Hull, U.K., and University of Lodz, Poland as a part of prestigious GEMMA program. She is also a visiting lecturer in M.A in Gender Studies Program, Tribhuvan University and is working in collaboration with the Gender Studies Department to institute feminist movement through academia. Rachana also has more than 8 years' experience of designing, implementing and monitoring women empowerment projects in Nepal. She is particularly interested in research that tries to understand the intersection of gender, disaster, and resilience. Currently, she is working as a research fellow in South Asia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS), a platform for advanced research and scholarly exchange in the South Asia region.