

A Book Review

Disaster Law: Principles and Practice by Amita Singh

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Few books possess the ability to fundamentally reshape one's understanding of a subject, but Dr. Amita Singh's *Disaster Law: Principles and Practice*, achieves precisely that. It is an exploration of current public policy on disaster management. What began as an intellectual curiosity swiftly evolved into an enlightening journey through a meticulously researched and compellingly argued treatise on disaster law, one that refuses to treat disasters as mere "natural" calamities, but rather as manifestations of systemic failures, legal inadequacies, and administrative negligence. Spanning 205 pages of incisive analysis, this work transcends conventional academic discourse, offering instead a bold, intersectional, and deeply humane examination of how disasters unfold, who they impact most severely, and how legal frameworks can and must evolve to address them.

Dr. Singh's book distinguishes itself from the outset by adopting an interdisciplinary lens, weaving together insights from administrative law, policy studies, social sciences, and geopolitics. The early chapters lay a robust foundation, defining key concepts and principles with clarity, ensuring that readers, whether scholars, practitioners, or policymakers are well-equipped to engage with the more complex discussions that follow. Yet, what truly sets this book apart is its unwavering commitment to amplifying marginalized voices. Disasters, as Dr. Singh compellingly argues, do not affect all equally; they disproportionately ravage vulnerable communities, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, indigenous populations whose suffering is often rendered invisible in mainstream disaster narratives. By zeroing down on these deficits of disaster policies, the book not only fills a critical gap in legal scholarship but also challenges readers to confront the ethical dimensions of disaster response.

The legal discourse in disaster policy transcends human suffering as over planet earth, there are many other denizens who share this only habitat for life. Therefore, the book stands out in thoughtfully addressing the often-overlooked plight of animals and ecosystems, which bear the brunt of environmental degradation and reckless human activity. This inclusion underscores a central thesis of the work: disasters are rarely "Acts of God", but rather the consequences of anthropogenic recklessness, institutional apathy, and governance failures. This reframing is not merely academic, it carries profound implications for legal accountability, urging a paradigm shift in

how liability is assigned in the wake of catastrophes which is also a dark area of public policy analysis.

One of the book's most striking strengths is its impeccable organization. Each chapter builds upon the last, guiding the reader through a logical progression from theoretical foundations to practical applications. Chapter one, for instance, establishes a critical framework by interrogating governance failures, social exclusion, and legal doctrines such as public trust and vicarious liability. It seamlessly integrates international instruments like the Hague Convention and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) while remaining firmly anchored in India's unique socio-legal context, referencing crisis-prone regions like Manipur and Kerala.

Subsequent chapters delve into even more innovative terrain. Chapter two and Chapter seven, for example, expand the boundaries of disaster law by incorporating zoonotic pandemics like COVID-19 not merely as public health emergencies, but as legal and environmental failures. This timely analysis underscores the necessity of redefining disaster law to encompass biological threats, a perspective sorely lacking in existing literature. Perhaps the book's most groundbreaking contribution emerges in Chapter four, which introduces an intersectional lens to disaster law, scrutinizing how gender and LGBTQ+ identities shape vulnerability and recovery. By asking, 'who will live when not everyone can live', Dr. Singh exposes the biases embedded in disaster response mechanisms, challenging legal scholars and policymakers to design more inclusive frameworks. This focus on intersectionality is rare in traditional legal texts, making the book a pioneering force in the field.

While the book excels in its critical analysis, it does not merely dwell on problems, it offers solutions. Chapter five presents a compelling longitudinal study comparing Odisha's catastrophic 1999 super cyclone, which claimed over 10,000 lives due to inadequate preparedness, with the state's remarkably effective response to Cyclone Fani in 2019. The latter disaster saw dramatically reduced casualties thanks to early warning systems, mass evacuations, and inter-agency coordination. This contrast serves as a powerful testament to how legal and policy reforms can convert vulnerability into resilience.

Equally innovative is Chapter six, which links disasters to global supply chains and foreign trade, a dimension frequently neglected in legal academia. In an era of economic interdependence, Dr. Singh argues, disasters in one region can trigger worldwide disruptions, necessitating international agreements that facilitate swift recovery and equitable resource distribution.

The book concludes on a visionary note in Chapter eight, reframing disasters as opportunities for resilience and diplomacy. India's vaccine diplomacy during COVID-19 exemplifies how proactive disaster response can foster international solidarity, reinforcing the book's overarching argument: disaster law, when wielded effectively, can be a transformative tool for justice and sustainability.

Disaster Law: Principles and Practice is nothing short of a landmark work. It is among the first to treat disaster diplomacy as a serious legal domain, blending rigorous scholarship with urgent advocacy. By interrogating institutional shortcomings, proposing innovative frameworks, and centering marginalized voices, Dr. Singh has crafted a text that is as intellectually rigorous as it is morally compelling.

This book is indispensable for law students, researchers, policymakers, and judges, but its relevance extends far beyond academia. It is a clarion call to reimagine disaster law as an instrument of equity, dignity, and ecological preservation. In a world increasingly besieged by climate crises and systemic inequities, Dr. Singh's work is not just timely, it is essential. A masterful, thought-provoking, and indispensable contribution to legal scholarship, which is highly recommended.

Reference

Singh A. (2025). *Disaster Law: Principles and Practice*. Eastern Book Company.