

Conclusion

One of the larger aims of this book is to examine the earthquake as a sociopolitical process in its historical context. While doing so, I have discussed how experiences with past disasters and the contemporary sociopolitical setting affected responses in the aftermath. The very disruptive nature of an earthquake, literally throwing people off their feet, crumbling buildings and destroying lives and livelihoods, makes the event into a process of change experienced by communities and individuals on a psychological and physical level. Whether viewed as an opportunity for change or an unwanted agent of destruction, or both, the devastation wrought by the earthquake led to a set of responses that can enhance our understanding of vulnerability and resilience.

Throughout the chapters of this book, the relationships between various disaster responses, that is, the approaches of the government, civil society actors and victims are at the centre of analysis. A disaster calls into question who cares, and for whom. The diversity of needs, the invisibility and the visibility of neglected and prioritised relief receivers respectively, tell us about the unequal effect disaster have on people, not just in the long or short aftermath but also for historians relying on archival sources. Greg Clancey suggests that disaster victims 'may be the ultimate historical subalterns'.¹ In the case of the dead, the victims' voices are complicated to recover as a group, whether in a historical or contemporary disaster. Yet the dead are often instrumentalised in, for instance, disaster reconstruction where they become evidence of needful changes in construction improvements or settlement patterns. In the more recent past, the perception of the disaster body as the ultimate subaltern historical subject resonates with Henry A. Giroux's reflections on the body politics of the dead in the aftermath of the hurricane Katrina.² Giroux argues that the invisibility of bodies post-Katrina was the effect of a 'politics of disability'. The bodies rendered invisible were

not simply the outcome of failed governance and a natural hazard. According to Giroux, the government's disaster policy in Katrina rendered 'disposable' lives invisible by editing out bodies, death and human suffering and focusing on material destruction. His analysis places racism at the core of how citizens were negated protection, access to relief provisions, media attention and sympathy. In this way, the victims in Katrina were historically and socially produced as a vilified group of poor and therefore vulnerable people, rather than victims of a hurricane.³ From a historian's point of view, depictions of victims or missing victim narratives in the primary sources may produce significant insights into the aftermath's politics of relief, as in the case of biopolitics after Katrina. In the reading of the archives, deeper reflection upon the representation of disaster victims, relief providers and aid may reveal the complexity of relationships that is needed to analyse the course of events in an aftermath.⁴ In an attempt at such a reading of sources, the 1934 aftermath can provide an understanding of how responses to a disaster follow established patterns and yet becomes a moment for change. How disasters reveal or, as Hoffman puts it, 'unclothe' the social world, and how they give birth to transformations and adjustments⁵ form the core of this book.

Patterns and Ruptures in the Politics of Relief

The book's exploration of responses in the aftermath provides an argument for seeing the earthquake as a moment of rupture in terms of political demands for change in governance. The balancing act and inter-relational character between what was in existence before the earthquake and the social processes generated in its aftermath will be discussed next. Past experiences with disasters—the development of patterns in responding to emergencies—played an important role in the aftermath. Both among civil society organisations and in the official government's approach, previous experiences with disasters partially shaped responses. The narratives of the local government's response in the earthquake's immediate aftermath and during the emergency relief phase situate the event in the context of a broader frame of governance. Through an analysis of the narratives of the aftermath in Chapter 2, I argue that the official emergency disaster response can be understood as embedded within the ideas and everyday practices of colonial governance. Communication and information played important roles in understanding the government's response as well as in its master narrative of the earthquake, as outlined in Brett's report. The

breakdown in communications caused by the earthquake and a fear of losing control of government offices partially explained the government's security-oriented response. In the local colonial government's narrative of the aftermath, damages to communication infrastructure, as well as the 'natural' difficulties of navigating Bihar's landscape, explained delays and lack of information. The government's narrative of challenges and failures in responding to the earthquake followed 'the classic paradigm of British administrative writing' in disasters⁶ by explaining its shortcomings as having arisen due to the lack of communication infrastructure. Instead of accepting the local government's inability to review the situation and respond accordingly, not only the earthquake's damaging effects on infrastructure but also Bihar's landscape was blamed for its administrative failure in providing emergency relief. The government's ability to overcome the hurdles in providing relief—that is, the damaged infrastructure and the volatile landscape of Bihar—was, according to its own narrative, dependent on the use of technological advancement in the form of aeroplanes and the relatively swift resurrection of an erratic telegraph connection. Even if a next-to-completely-ruined land transport system indeed affected mobility and information, the disruption of communication created a disaster narrative that justified a security-oriented response. A lack of information and communication, not instances of violence or crimes, made the local government ensure reinforcement of public institutions and mobilise the police. It was a response that reflected the government's anxieties regarding losing control of communication rather than a fear that its institutional capabilities weakened by the earthquake would be unable to maintain public order.

That the earthquake was a major jolt to the local government's administrative structure is also evident from the organisation of the Reconstruction Department and the Earthquake Branch in the weeks following the earthquake. The administrative set-up testified to the need for coordination that the initial chaos in the aftermath had only given a foretaste of. In the emergency phase of relief, previous experiences offered little opportunity for the government and civil society to have 'learnt' how to respond to specifically the large-scale, sudden and deathly destruction in urban areas, combined with the particular damages wrought on agricultural land, the waterways and communication infrastructure. A further reason to emphasise the role communication and information had in shaping the government's response and narrative of the aftermath can be gleaned from the challenging position that civil society and eyewitness reports expressed in view of government data. These so-called un-official reports on the numbers of deaths and descriptions of damages and calls for relief did not only serve to

describe the government's official data as deliberate underestimates, but also fundamentally challenged the government's ability to access information about the disaster's scope. In effect, the local colonial government's faulty data and lack of knowledge in these counter-narratives illustrated the government's weak hold on the region. The publications by BCRC and those in the newspapers provided counter-narratives that undermined any belief in the government's ability to respond in a responsible manner in the extreme event of a disaster as well as its capability to gather information. In view of the role disaster narratives had in shaping responses, numbers and data from all publications should be approached carefully with their plausible methodological faults in mind.

If the local government's narrative of the aftermath justified its failure to provide relief as explainable by the disrupted communication, there were no attempts at explaining the great extent to which it relied on local and regional resources in the provision of relief material and manpower. The local government's lack of institutional coordination and infrastructure for providing emergency relief appear as part of a set strategy to rely on voluntary resources, ranging from private individuals and corporate bodies to persons connected with the government, official institutions, European enterprises and the Darbhanga Raj, civil society organisations and medical associations such as the Indian Red Cross and the Indian Medical Association. To a considerable extent, it viewed emergency and medical relief as a domain of its close cooperation partner, the Indian Red Cross. Contrary to the efficient mobilisation of police, the local government exerted less effort in providing or organising medical relief but rather viewed itself as a facilitator of provisions by the Indian Red Cross and other major established relief providers. These relief providers were, like the local government, unprepared for a disaster such as an earthquake. For instance, the local Red Cross branch used its epidemic fund for emergency relief in the aftermath and argued for the necessity to establish a permanent disaster relief fund. As such, the government's response was disjointed and depended on cooperation with local actors and their resources, many of whom were inadequately prepared to deal with the situation effectively. Notably, in the narratives of BCRC and the nationalist-friendly press, Rajendra Prasad and other civil society organs began mobilising—and importantly—coordinating with local relief providers before the local government took such an initiative.

Like humanitarian work by Indian nationalists on an international stage during the 1930s can be understood as 'political humanitarianism' in its overt articulation of political motivations,⁷ earthquake relief was embedded within broader nationalist claims for sovereignty from British colonial rule. Considering

civil society's central role in the provision of aid, we can also reflect on the impact that participation in disaster relief had on civil society associations. Roy suggests, compared to the nineteenth century when the market dominated relief and rebuilding, the colonial state gradually expanded response mechanisms in natural disasters in the period leading up to the 1934 Bihar earthquake and the 1935 Quetta earthquake.⁸ He argues that the inclination towards a more interventionist stance coincided with the increasing involvement of civil society in relief, combined with a growing dissatisfaction with charity.⁹ The BCRC represented one such mobilisation of resourceful civil society bodies that were able to exert political pressure on the government, as discussed in Chapter 3. The Congress used the committee's work in disaster relief as a site for 'parallel governance'¹⁰ or to show 'credibility';¹¹ by providing relief through BCRC, INC tested and proved its ability as a political force in power. According to the colonial government, aid of all kinds could be converted into different forms of political capital: through practising parallelism in governance, pocketing the possible financial gains from disaster relief funds or by launching an oppositional political campaign of non-cooperation. The government here clearly referred to 'political capital' as moulded from financial or material resources and social power. The BCRC was an attempt at state-building by establishing parallel institutions, which sometimes filled a gap where government infrastructure was lacking, and sometimes outdid the government by providing relief provisions better in its capacity of 'knowing' the region. The attempt by Congress and Prasad to organise disaster relief for Quetta in 1935 was actively blocked by the colonial government, based on the assumption that they would earn political influence and make financial gains out of it. The initiative to organise disaster relief in Quetta was, even though curbed by the government, an act that echoed Prasad's previous success in Bihar. The earthquakes were in these ways arenas for nationalist undertakings, a disruption that worked as a window for civil society bodies to garner political support.¹² It should, however, be noted that when it came to implementation of the envisioned tasks by its parallel institutions, the Congress was accused of a lack of accountability. Although relief served as a site for the expansion of civil society as a political force, primarily and most significantly by members of the Congress and the BCRC, government officials and the public perceived overt political agendas to be guiding the course of the relief programme.

While the aftermath saw a surge in civil society organisations partaking in the relief fund collections, foremost represented by the BCRC, Chapter 4 discussed the colonial government's attempts at reaffirming its position as the official

agency for disaster relief by issuing publications and by seeking public support for the VERF. The charitable fund headed by the Viceroy had the support of the Mansion House fund in England which rested on established principles for relief of famine victims in India since the second half of the nineteenth century and was the preferred institution for the government to collect national as well as international disaster relief funds.¹³ Support for the VERF was ensured by prescribing local government officers with the duty to supervise and to encourage fund collections. Monitored and put on display, this was a form of public charity controlled by the government, in terms of both collection as well as distribution of funds. It was an institutionalised form of charity, by Roy perceived as 'state-aided'.¹⁴ The state's interventions appeared partly in reaction to the organisational abilities of a politicised civil society. Collections to the fund were reinforced with the help of financial support, information campaigns and networks by relying on the colonial government's institutions, which extended beyond disaster relief. The importance of the VERF to the government rested both with the fund's function as an auxiliary financial source and as a display of the government's authority as the principal provider of relief. The state being contested in disaster relief not only challenged its role and abilities as a relief provider, but also its authority as a political force.

Since the government's mandate to carry out relief to a certain extent depended on charitable funds from the public, the BCRC's fund collection and its coordination of voluntary associations and other fund collections challenged the government's position as the official relief provider. The 'national' support for BCRC showed that the government lacked not only credibility but also authority as a political force. In terms of governance, the government's dependency on donations for disaster aid weakened its accountability to the broader public. This was apparent as, at the same time, its ability to provide relief was a mandate granted by the public's willingness to give to its relief funds. The Congress could, with BCRC as a relief provider, display its abilities as a political force that could be counted on. In this manner, the government's reliance and utilisation of relief funds appear to have weakened its authority. The government's increasingly centralised and controlled collection of charity under the auspices of government offices can be seen as an attempt at displaying an ability to act as the provider of tangible goods and relief in times of need. At the same time as the government actively encouraged and invited civil society to contribute, its control over charitable relief from the VERF served to give it a mandate not only as the principal provider of relief, but also as a legitimate government in power.

In this context, where the display of political authority appeared in the shape of funds, the public subscribing to the VERF and the BCRC held considerable importance. The colonial government's preference for a disaster relief fund like the VERF under its control was not only a question of the political situation, but a practice well established during previous 'imperial' disasters in the British colonies. The government's level of interference in disaster relief cannot, in this case, be seen as exclusively driven by political pressure or from a loss of governance infrastructure in a certain context. Rather, the government's relatively strong presence in collecting and distributing aid depended on its ability to influence and control public charity through its administration and cooperation partners. Nowhere was the government's grasp over fund collections more evident than in the case of international aid, where its active interference and rejection of an international collection by the IRU served to maximise government-controlled funds. The government's provision of aid largely depended on its hold over public charity and organisational support provided by trusted partners with close ties to the government administration, for instance, the Indian Red Cross and its local branches. The efficient dismissal of the IRU displayed, besides the reluctance towards inter-governmental cooperation in humanitarian relief, the central role funds like the VERF held in institutionalised charity under the control of the government.

The importance of narrative in BCRC's rhetoric for collecting funds and organising disaster relief becomes most pronounced in the light of the government's and VERF's propaganda for collecting funds. As Kathleen Tierney and colleagues write on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: metaphors matter.¹⁵ Media frames helped to guide and justify the actions of those assigned responsibility for the post-disaster emergency response in Katrina and in Bihar. In the historical case of Japan, too, war and conflict metaphors were deployed to describe the devastation.¹⁶ There is, however, a fundamental difference between the examples of metaphors in the respective scenarios, that is, after the 1923 Kanto earthquake and the Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Narratives metaphorically representing the disaster-stricken city of New Orleans as a war zone, with parallels between the city and urban insurgency in Iraq, was used to legitimise the use of law enforcement and military.¹⁷ In Japan, on the contrary, urban earthquake devastation likened to a battlefield brought in the imagery of war in order to call on the nation and the mobilisation of civil society in aid provisioning.¹⁸ In the case of the 1934 earthquake, the BCRC's and supporting funds' use of images and narratives relied upon well-known tropes in the nationalist imaginary, namely the suffering of women and the motherland. In comparison to the VERF publications supported

by the colonial government, nationalist descriptions feminising Bihar and images of victims relied upon a gendered geography. The victimised region was anthropomorphised and the target for a nationalist civil society's rescue and relief mission. Bihar was a 'sister' province 'overtaken' by disaster, and to some extent portrayed as a neighbour in need of help, according to the Mayor of Calcutta, who was divided in his support between the VERF and the BCRC. Whether portrayed as a woman, a sister, a 'dependency' of Britain or a neighbour, all fund collections stressed geographical closeness or regional bonds in creating a sense of affinity between potential givers and the earthquake victims. Contrary to the affect and physical closeness expressed in appeals organised by BCRC and by its supporters in India, appeals for contributions from England articulated remoteness to the disaster. In advertising the VERF, description of the 'Great Indian earthquake' with photographs of urban devastation generalised the local and human side of suffering into an idea of a disaster that was relatable. Geographical distance and the lack of a relationship, if ever so imagined, between the victims and the giving audience may explain why this was thought to be a more or less successful strategy to generate subscriptions to the fund. Instead, in order to create a sense of proximity and affinity to the suffering experienced, gifting was invoked with the help of familiar descriptions of war devastation. Also, European communities were singled out as affected by the earthquake, even though they comprised a small minority of the victims.

In some of these descriptions, government officials expressed the idea that colonial ties would elicit donations among the British public. At a distance, however, the geographical zone of the earthquake and its victims were both Others. The cultural construction of India as a land of 'natural' disasters, a 'tropical other' or a 'disaster zone' helped to shape an image of Bihar as the victim of a capricious nature. Helping the earthquake victims through disaster relief was depicted in publications for the VERF as a form of care that justified interventions in the form of, for instance, promoting 'better' constructions. Aid could be framed as 'palliative imperialism' in the sense that disaster relief was depicted as care to promote improvements that would save lives.¹⁹ Simultaneously, the nationalist imagery of a feminised Bihar, a victim of nature, also served to extend relief programmes. This perceivably 'weakened' figure of Bihar represented the site of the disaster, revivable by financial aid and assistance from outside the province. A comparison might here be made with the relief process after the 1950 Assam earthquake when descriptions of the region as subjected to nature, or incapable of taking care of itself, served to re-inscribe it as a marginal space.²⁰ Like Assam, Bihar was an easy target to depict as disadvantaged and being in need of

'improvements', based on poverty, the lack of infrastructure and, not to forget, its troubled environment and the occurrence of floods.

Institutional capacities developed by the government and civil society during previous disasters played a key role in collecting funds. Both actors efficiently relied on established models and followed a pattern of relief that consisted of mobilisation of relief funds and civil society organisations and associations engaged in providing social services and relief to victims subject to any type of disaster. In this way, fund collection and the organisation of relief built upon previous experiences and provided a model for collecting and distributing aid. The response by both the colonial government and civil society to the exceptional event of the earthquake relied on previous disaster experiences such as 'normal' famines and floods. Nevertheless, the aftermath triggered new practices, mostly because the effects of the earthquake differed greatly from previous disasters and those experiences proved insufficient to address the specific 'needs' for relief. As soon as the emergency phase was over, relief and reconstruction schemes were conceptualised based foremost on the earthquake as an exceptional case of destruction. The destruction was turned into an opportunity for both civil society and the local colonial government to intervene by providing aid and relief funds. In this context, it is worth considering the aftermath as an opportunity for revealing or changing structures and relations that the social world consists of.

Disaster Effects: The Ambiguities of Aid

While appeals by relief funds homogenised the spectre of victims into 'sufferers', the process of allocating aid by relief organisations as well as the local government differentiated among the victims according to their social class and material losses. Losses in the present disaster and social relations transcending the disaster event were interchangeably used to argue for who the victims were and their respective needs. Rather than an event, the disaster becomes a social occasion across time and space, where its putative victims emerge as manifestation of the broader forces that shape society.²¹ Similar to in famine relief, as I have argued in Chapter 5, material losses and social position played an important role in shaping categories of 'needs' and qualifying the victims for charitable relief, loans or work-based relief programmes. Significantly, this pattern of relief provisioning based on experiences with previous disaster contributed to both positive and negative consequences. The functioning and evolution of associations and institutions, both informal and formal, provided

an infrastructure for relief that could relatively fast roll out relief provisions. Just like in the case of the Marwari Relief Society, the central work and engagement of many associations lay in welfare activities within a much broader spectre of relief, while sometimes also advocating more or less politicised questions. The existing infrastructure of civil society had a positive effect in the sense that earthquake relief could build upon established networks, committees and funds and were thereby able to swiftly mobilise human and material resources. Most of these pre-established institutions were largely run by community-based networks and urban middle classes. This did not necessarily lead to religious or community-based relief. Targeting their own community in relief was, in some cases, the stated purpose of the aid distributed by organisations. Historically, corruption in famine relief has been explained by the use of go-betweens, as governing elites often relied on sub-bureaucracies and local gentry to identify worthy recipients.²² In 1934, the middle classes, as a part of urban elites and local institutions, were to a great extent involved in defining themselves as the ultimate victims of the earthquake. In line with the classificatory process in famine relief which tended to reduce a person to the status of an individual to a 'pauper' or 'destitute' and thereby shed identities of caste and occupation,²³ earthquake relief classifications revolved around the ability to labour and possession of property.

Both charitable relief funds and loan schemes by the government singled out the propertied 'middle classes' as a favoured category in the distribution of relief. The earthquake was first of all treated as a disaster for this diverse group that was clearly framed by the middle classes themselves, the authorities and civil society organisations as in 'need' of aid. Perceptions of relief categories produced intended and unintended effects. In addition, the middle classes were, when helped by relief societies, given special treatment in light of a reluctance to accept aid in public spaces. Nevertheless, the government and relief societies alike expressed difficulties in reaching out to the middle classes in the distribution of aid. Although it was argued that the middle classes reluctantly received aid, this was far from the material reality as there appeared to be no stigma attached to monetary aid or materials for the reconstruction of property. By proving to have lost what could be defined as a house, people qualified as belonging to the middle classes. The making of this relief category and its compensatory schemes intended to protect the entitlements of the propertied classes, a strategy that could be seen as strengthening this group of people's coping strategies in the aftermath.²⁴ At a first instance, the destruction of property motivated financial aid to this large category of relief receivers

labelled as 'middle classes', yet belonging to a social class defined as unable to labour played an important role.

Apart from assistance to the middle classes, the government gave considerable practical and financial support to sugar cane planters and large landowners. Rural relief to a large extent relied upon previous practices in famine relief and the surveys of the Land and Revenue Department that formed the basis of *taccavi* and charitable relief sourced from the Provincial Famine Relief Fund and the VERF. Compared to the middle classes as a relief category, labourers and landless agricultural workers, who did not possess property according to definitions of both relief organisations and the local colonial government, remained neglected in the distribution of relief. The perception of an increased demand for workers in the undertaking of reconstruction and land rehabilitation, coupled with the idea that the 'dwellings' of labourers did not qualify as property, resulted in an official and middle-class-driven portrayal of this socio-economic class as having 'benefitted' from the earthquake. Although reports by relief societies and the colonial local government presented labourers as 'winners' and the middle classes as 'losers', members of the international organisation Service Civil International, which together with the local government and the BCRC formed the Joint Flood Committee in rural north Bihar, found labour wages to be poor and barely enough to sustain the workers. Contrary to a view articulated in the press and by relief societies of labourers profiting from the reconstruction boom while not having had anything of material value to lose in the earthquake, the SCI described their living situation as precarious and made even more vulnerable in light of floods threatening rural areas. In view of the large number of people employed on low relief wages in reclaiming land and reconstructing roads, organised by both relief societies such as the BCRC and by the local government, nothing except for arguments by the advocates of middle-class relief indicate gains made by the labourers. On the contrary, such relief schemes benefited the public since rebuilt or repaired roads and infrastructure are likely to have contributed to a speedy recovery in terms of aiding trade and reconstruction.

The local government failed in distributing grants and loans partly because of a distribution system badly attuned to its administrative capabilities, and partly since the assessment and compensation for lost property were more complicated than first anticipated. Government-subsidised loans were initially considered a viable option for relief but were gradually replaced by grants that could be expedited and required less administrative work in both a long- and short-term perspective. In the end, the provision of aid, open to change throughout the aftermath, underlined the government's approach as not just unprepared for

an earthquake of this magnitude, but perhaps more so, a lack of grasp over its administrative capacities. Even if the aid and compensatory scheme was in its design adjusted to meet the needs of the middle classes, it was a failure without an administration to carry it through.

The earthquake's catastrophic impact, as it turned from a natural hazard into a 'natural' disaster, threw into sharper relief relationships between civil society and the government. Rather than breaking the structure of social relations, the aftermath showed how relief responses negotiated existing institutions and relationships. Like scholars have enquired why South Asia became more vulnerable to famine during colonial rule²⁵ vis-à-vis the impact the crises had on governance and society,²⁶ perceptions and responses to the earthquake may enhance our understanding of the socio-environmental constructions behind vulnerability in 'natural' disasters. What could have made society less acutely sensitive to earthquakes, let alone hazards or shocks in a broader sense? The focus on middle-class relief and urban 'improvements' in the reconstruction phase after the 1934 earthquake showed few traces of 'learning' from the damages or previous earthquakes in the planning process for rebuilding towns, as discussed in Chapter 6. Even if safety in future earthquakes became an argument for widening roads and controlling reconstruction and population density, engineers and administrators relied on established ideas of town planning developed during the late nineteenth century. Town planning had as its goal improvement of sanitary conditions and trade in cities across north India, and the same thinking shaped the colonial government's planning for 'improvements' of bazaars. Although earthquake-safety was used as an argument for making structural changes that entailed widening of roads, rebuilding houses with recommended 'solid' materials and housing plans with reduced population density, the planners tried, first of all, to implement 'improvements' of hygienic conditions and trade.

Therefore, town planning followed a far from comprehensive scheme or a vision of earthquake-safe constructions on a larger scale. Despite complications caused by lack of planning and taking action in the spur of the moment, the government dismissed the problems as negligible compared to the opportunity the aftermath posed for bringing about changes. These were structural changes of building designs and urban planning that in the government's vision led to improved sanitation, trade and consequently better socio-economic conditions. Sanitation and trade were the most important parts of the urban environment in need of improvements according to town planning. Reconstruction was one site where the government perceived it could influence urban life by aiding first commercial interests and improving sanitation.

Since reconstruction with better materials was contingent on private financial capabilities, the government and the GSI viewed an encompassing building code as blocked by the poor financial status of the town residents. Despite the fact that the local government, the GSI and engineers agreed on the dire need for constructions to be modified in view of public safety in future earthquakes, the local colonial government extended help to individual cases instead of attempting a building code for the region. Financial aid and engineering assistance measured out to the propertied urban classes gave the local government an opportunity to influence the reconstruction process in towns. As in the distribution of relief funds and loans, propertied classes were privileged in the planning process while poorer segments and sub-tenants were dislocated and held weaker bargaining positions in obtaining a place to trade or live. The central aim of planning was to undertake 'improvements' of bazaars as a means to remove 'slums' by decreasing population density, which would result in sub-tenants being accommodated elsewhere. Judging by the government's assistance to the propertied population and traders, its involvement in rehabilitation helped individuals and groups with social and financial influence, before taking the interests of the broader public into consideration.

It has now been more than 80 years since the 1934 Bihar–Nepal earthquake. Were Bihar to experience an earthquake like that of 1934 today, it is likely that a far larger number of people would succumb. Based on population and housing data from the 2011 census, a contemporary report issued by the Bihar State Disaster Management Authority estimates the loss of life and damages to houses in case of an earthquake of the same magnitude and scope as the 1934 earthquake. Accordingly, 222,337 deaths may occur if an earthquake takes place at night, and 72,766 if during the daytime. About 20 per cent of the houses would need reconstruction and about 45 per cent would need repairing and retrofitting.²⁷ There are obvious factors at work which make such estimates a baseline at best, for instance, population growth, migration, building techniques and population density. Although after the 2015 Gorkha earthquake two more recent publications provide substantially lower figures, the event of an earthquake similar to in 1934 would be devastating. One estimate states 33,000 victims in Nepal and more than 50,000 in India,²⁸ while another calculation appreciates about 100,000 deaths if the earthquake would occur at night in any of the densely populated regions of the Himalayas such as the Kathmandu valley.²⁹

The continuing significance and relevance of this book can be appreciated from the ongoing disaster in the long aftermath of the 2015 Gorkha earthquake in Nepal where the 'natural' event triggered political decisions for the country's

development agenda, its national border and the constitution. When politicians and the international funding bodies of the aid community directly or indirectly contribute to stalling rather than aiding relief and rehabilitation, answers to how vulnerability in earthquake-prone areas can be minimised appear much harder to tackle head-on than the task of engineering earthquake-safe buildings.³⁰ However, as discussed throughout this book, an understanding of historical disasters gives a better chance for reviewing vulnerability and building resilience and can thereby help to minimise risk during a potentially catastrophic earthquake looming large over South Asia, amongst other regions across the globe.³¹

Notes

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12. Clancey, 'The Meiji Earthquake', 946.
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14. Term used for referring to the VERA in Roy, 'State, Society and Market', 268.

15. Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc and Erica Kuligowski, 'Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 604, no. 1 (March 2006): 57–81, 61. See also Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, 'Reconstructing Devastated Cities: Europe after World War II and New Orleans after Katrina', *Journal of Urban Design* 14, no. 3 (August 2009): 377–97.
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18. Schencking, '1923 Tokyo as a Devastated War and Occupation Zone', 122, 126.
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28. Also based on the 2011 census. Sapkota, Bollinger and Perrier, 'Fatality Rates of the Mw ~8.2, 1934, Bihar–Nepal Earthquake', 7.
29. Roger Bilham, 'Himalayan Earthquakes: A Review of Historical Seismicity and Early 21st Century Slip Potential', in *Himalayan Tectonics: A Modern*

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 31. Roger Bilham, 'Raising Kathmandu', *Nature Geoscience* 8 (August 2015): 582–84.