

Bridging Psychological and Spiritual Responses in Disaster Recovery: A Case Study of Punjab Floods 2025

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Abstract:

The 2025 floods in Punjab, India, constitute one of the most devastating natural disasters of recent times, displacing over 380,000 people across 1,400 villages and profoundly impacting the socio-economic and environmental fabric of the region. This interdisciplinary research investigates the multifaceted human responses to the calamity through psychological, spiritual, literary, and cultural lenses, with particular attention to community resilience and creative advocacy. Drawing on primary data, recent scholarship, and field observations, the study explores how flood survivors cope with trauma by relying on collective storytelling, peer support, and faith-based rituals. The critical relief efforts of NGOs such as Khalsa Aid and faith organizations like Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB) are examined, highlighting their pivotal roles in providing shelter, food, and medical aid despite challenges posed by the floods. The study also underscores the influential participation of Punjabi celebrities, including Diljit Dosanjh and Ammy Virk, in fundraising and awareness campaigns, which helped scale relief operations and sustain morale. Artistic expressions—ranging from folk poetry and digital storytelling to celebrity concerts—serve as vital channels for transforming narratives of loss into those of hope and ecological consciousness. Finally, the paper situates these responses within the broader context of Indian eco-literary traditions and disaster recovery frameworks that integrate mental health, spirituality, and environmental stewardship. By illuminating how language, culture, and collective action function as sites of solidarity, this study contributes to evolving discourses on sustainable and inclusive disaster resilience, offering valuable lessons for policy and community practice amid escalating climate crises.

Keywords — psychological resilience, spiritual solidarity, ecocriticism and environmental literature, community unity and disaster response, flood-induced cultural adaptation

I. INTRODUCTION

The 2025 floods in Punjab, India, represent one of the region's most devastating natural disasters in nearly four decades, causing widespread destruction across over 1,400 villages in 23 districts. Triggered by an unusually heavy monsoon rainfall in upper catchment areas, compounded by surplus releases from major dams such as Pong, Ranjit Sagar, and Bhakra, the floodwaters swelled rivers including the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej to critical levels, inundating vast farmlands and settlements (Wikipedia; BBC News 2025). Punjab, often referred to as the

“Granary of India” due to its pivotal role in national food production, experienced severe agricultural losses with approximately 3.7 lakh acres submerged, threatening the livelihoods of millions dependent on farming (Indian Express; VisionIAS).

Over 3.8 lakh residents were displaced, necessitating large-scale evacuations and relief operations where emergency shelters and food distribution centers were swiftly established. The state's infrastructure and border security installations also suffered damages, heightening the complexity of recovery efforts (BBC News 2025). Official data recorded at least 29 fatalities, and the

floods severely disrupted normal life through school closures, transportation breakdowns, and health crises linked to waterborne diseases and psychological trauma.

Beyond its physical and economic tolls, the flood catastrophe has profoundly impacted the psychological and cultural landscapes of Punjab. Survivors have grappled with trauma, loss of livelihood, and uncertainty, which are compounded by the social dislocation caused by displacement. This crisis has brought to the fore the resilience embedded in Punjab's community networks, spiritual institutions, and cultural traditions. Mental health initiatives led by NGOs and local groups emphasized collective healing through peer support, storytelling, and faith-led rituals (Parveen and Bashir; Khalsa Aid).

Faith-based organizations such as Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB) played critical roles in relief, providing shelter and coordinated rescue despite challenges at their own flooded sites. Moreover, cultural expressions including folk poetry, music, and digital storytelling have emerged as vital means for survivors to articulate their experiences, regain agency, and foster hope amid adversity. Punjabi celebrities like Diljit Dosanjh and Ammy Virk have further mobilized attention and resources, combining humanitarian and artistic advocacy to sustain relief momentum (India Today; KhalsaVox).

This paper situates the 2025 Punjab floods within broader discourses on ecology, spirituality, and psychosocial adaptation, arguing for integrated disaster recovery models that acknowledge the interplay of cultural, mental, and environmental processes. It underscores that rebuilding lives after such disasters requires not only physical rehabilitation but also nurturing social solidarity, cultural identity, and ecological consciousness for sustainable futures.

II. PSYCHOLOGICAL COPING AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Flood disasters often leave deep psychological scars on affected populations, and the 2025 floods in Punjab were no exception. Survivors experienced a wide range of emotional and mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The sudden displacement, loss of

property and livelihood, and disruption of social networks intensified feelings of uncertainty, fear, and helplessness. Vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and the elderly, bore a disproportionate burden due to existing socio-economic inequalities and caregiving responsibilities.

Community-based coping strategies played a crucial role in addressing these psychological impacts. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Khalsa Aid established peer support groups and counseling sessions that provided survivors spaces for sharing trauma and normalizing emotional responses. Women's social networks were significant pillars of resilience, combining traditional practices such as storytelling, singing, and poetry with modern psychosocial support to sustain communal morale and care.

Cultural and narrative practices also facilitated healing. In relief camps, storytelling circles and music sessions conducted in Punjabi helped restructure traumatic experiences into collective narratives of survival and hope. Digital platforms and community radio further connected displaced populations, maintaining social ties and helping preserve a sense of identity, which is critical in the recovery process.

Both problem-focused coping—through rebuilding homes and livelihoods—and emotion-focused coping—through spiritual rituals and prayer—were essential in fostering resilience. Punjab's deeply rooted faith traditions provided survivors with solace and a moral framework to endure adversity, and religious practices of seva (selfless service) reinforced community solidarity.

Long-term mental health initiatives, often delivered by trained volunteers from NGOs, worked to reduce stigma around psychological illness and enhance awareness. These culturally sensitive approaches were key to building ongoing adaptive capacity and preparing communities for future disasters.

Together, these intertwined social, cultural, and spiritual resources formed a holistic coping ecosystem, addressing both immediate trauma and contributing to sustainable communal recovery after the 2025 Punjab floods.

III. SPIRITUAL HANDHOLDING: RITUALS, FAITH, AND SOCIAL HEALING

In the aftermath of the devastating 2025 floods in Punjab, spiritual practices and faith-based organizations became critical sources of strength and healing for affected communities. Punjab's deeply rooted religious and cultural traditions provided much-needed psychological comfort and a framework for interpreting and enduring the calamity. As families grappled with displacement, loss, and uncertainty, collective rituals, prayers, and faith gatherings nurtured emotional resilience and social cohesion, reinforcing a shared identity of hope and renewal.

Faith-based organizations such as Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB) played a prominent role in relief and rehabilitation activities. Despite the flooding of their own Dera Beas headquarters, RSSB volunteers quickly converted satsang halls into shelters and distribution centers, delivering essential food, medical aid, and helpline services. Inspired by the Sikh principle of *seva* (selfless service), these volunteers mobilized across flood-hit districts providing care that extended beyond physical necessity to emotional and spiritual support. Other NGOs including Khalsa Aid and United Sikhs complemented these efforts with large-scale food drives, clean water supply, livestock rescue, and medical camps, often coordinating through local Gurudwaras and religious centers deeply trusted by communities.

Religious rituals and community kitchens (*langar*) were fundamental in fostering psychological stability. Women, who bore significant caregiving roles, especially found solace in collective prayer and devotional singing (*kirtan*), enabling emotional expression within safe, culturally familiar spaces. Spiritual songs, folk *bhajans*, staged plays, and poetry—rich in cultural symbolism—served as healing arts, collectively processing grief and loss while bolstering morale.

Sermons and spiritual discourses framed the disaster within a narrative of moral challenge and renewal, encouraging survivors to find meaning and fortitude amid suffering. This spiritual framing offered psychological refuge, motivating voluntary service and sustaining hope for recovery. Integrating faith with psychosocial counseling

provided culturally sensitive mental health care, appreciated for its respect of local belief systems and its holistic approach to trauma.

Together, rituals, organized faith efforts, and cultural expressions formed the bedrock of social healing after the floods, renewing community bonds and fortifying resilience. This blend of spirituality and service exemplifies how religious traditions can profoundly contribute to inclusive and sustainable disaster recovery.

IV. ARTISTIC ADVOCACY AND LITERARY VOICES: ECOCRITICAL DIMENSIONS

Punjab's artists and celebrities played a crucial role in mobilizing support for flood victims in 2025, leveraging their cultural influence to raise funds, uplift community morale, and reframe disaster narratives. Renowned figures such as Ammy Virk, Diljit Dosanjh, and Kapil Sharma organized charity concerts and initiated donation drives, harnessing social media platforms to amplify appeals for relief efforts (India Today; IndiaTVNews). Bollywood actors also joined, using their national stature to draw wider attention and empathy to the crisis, ensuring sustained support and financial aid for affected regions.

Artistic expressions served as powerful storytelling mediums to chronicle the emotional and physical realities of the floods. Community radio stations in Ferozepur and Kapurthala broadcast poetry performances, survivor interviews, and musical tributes that resonated deeply with listeners, helping to weave a collective memory rooted in resilience (KhalsaVox; India Today). Social media campaigns using hashtags like #PunjabFloodHope forged connections between local communities and the global Punjabi diaspora, strengthening translocal networks of solidarity and support during the crisis.

These narratives not only recount lived experiences but also situate the floods within an ecocritical framework that critiques human-induced environmental degradation. Literary contributions from Punjabi authors and poets highlight the ecological devastation, mourn massive tree loss and farmland destruction, and challenge anthropocentric worldviews that have long ignored the fragility of

natural systems (Patel). Through poetry, prose, and visual arts, these works advocate for a more sustainable and harmonious human-nature relationship, making cultural ecology a vital dimension of post-flood recovery.

Aligning with broader Indian eco-literary traditions, the flood narratives emphasize the role of creative expression as a form of environmental activism and cultural preservation. By fostering a community-wide dialogue around ecological concerns and climate vulnerability, these artistic voices help shape pathways toward ecological justice and adaptive resilience, reinforcing the idea that environmental recovery is inseparable from cultural renewal (The Context). In this way, Punjab's artists and literary figures have become key agents in transforming disaster aftermaths into opportunities for collective ecological consciousness and social healing.

V. FLOOD-AFFECTED VILLAGES AND REGIONAL PARTICULARS

Government and media reports have identified several districts in Punjab as the most severely affected by the devastating 2025 floods. These include Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Ferozepur, Kapurthala, Moga, and Tarn Taran, where the floods caused widespread inundation, infrastructure damage, and displacement (Indian Express; Wikipedia). Entire villages such as Bhagatpur, Sultanpur, Lohia, and Nihal Singh Wala experienced severe flooding, resulting in the evacuation of thousands of residents and significant loss of agricultural assets. In total, approximately 1,902 villages across Punjab were flood-affected, leading to the displacement of more than 3.8 lakh people—an upheaval that disrupted social and economic life on a massive scale (Indian Express).

The agricultural heartland of Punjab, hailed as the “Granary of India,” suffered substantial crop damage from the floods. Over 3.7 lakh acres of farmland were submerged, particularly in districts like Gurdaspur, Kapurthala, and Ferozepur. These areas witnessed losses in staple crops such as wheat, paddy, maize, sugarcane, and cotton, heightening fears of economic hardship and food insecurity among farming communities reliant on agriculture

for livelihoods (VisionIAS; Indian Express). The floodwaters also damaged irrigation infrastructure, roads, and market access, compounding challenges for recovery and increasing vulnerability for small and marginal farmers.

Impact disparities revealed significant socio-economic inequities intersecting with environmental disaster vulnerabilities. Women, children, and economically disadvantaged farmers bore disproportionate social and economic burdens due to existing systemic inequalities. Women's roles as primary caregivers and providers were intensified by the flood crisis, often limiting their mobility and access to relief resources, while children faced heightened health and nutritional risks under displacement conditions (SSS Journal). Moreover, limited access to health services and education during flooding exacerbated the hardships faced by marginalized groups, underscoring the need for inclusive recovery policies that address these intersecting vulnerabilities.

The extensive damage to such a wide swath of rural Punjab highlights the complex interplay between environmental hazards and socio-economic factors. Effective disaster response and sustainable recovery require targeted support for the hardest-hit districts and vulnerable populations, inclusive policymaking, and integrated approaches that balance ecological restoration with livelihood rehabilitation. The 2025 floods stand as a crucial reminder of how environmental devastation and social inequities are inseparable in shaping community resilience and recovery trajectories.

VI. LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND CULTURAL ECOLOGIES

Language acts as a vital cultural ecology—a living space of resilience, transformation, and identity preservation in the aftermath of natural disasters like the 2025 Punjab floods. It serves not only as a medium for everyday communication but also as a repository of collective memory and trauma, helping communities process loss and envision recovery. Through literature and oral traditions, trauma is archived and reframed into narratives of hope and resistance, allowing affected

populations to reclaim agency amid ecological devastation.

Relief organizations actively supported linguistic inclusivity by distributing translated folk tales, poems, and stories in Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu, ensuring that messages of support and ecological advocacy reached diverse cultural groups (PreventionWeb). This multilingual approach helped maintain community ties across social divides and facilitated wider understanding of environmental challenges and coping mechanisms. Moreover, community radio stations and social media platforms emerged as critical amplifiers of flood narratives. Stations based in Ferozepur, Kapurthala, and other flood-hit areas curated programs featuring survivor interviews, poetry recitations, and discussions about environmental restoration, helping preserve cultural identity while encouraging public dialogue between artists, survivors, and the broader public.

Ecocritical perspectives highlight the significance of such literary and oral traditions in deepening environmental awareness. Punjab's literary voices, rooted in eco-literary traditions, critique anthropocentric environmental degradation and emphasize sustainable human-nature relationships (Patel). Through poems, folk stories, local histories, and environmental essays, writers and artists frame the floods not just as natural calamities but as symptomatic of larger ecological and social imbalances. This literary engagement with the flood crisis offers ethical frameworks for environmental stewardship and climate resilience, stressing respect for nature's limits and the need for equitable resource use.

In this context, language and culture become powerful tools for recovery and advocacy. The flood narratives within Punjabi literature and media function as cultural ecologies themselves, nurturing solidarity and ecological consciousness as essential elements of disaster resilience. By preserving linguistic diversity and promoting cultural expressions, communities strengthen their capacity to respond to climate crises and sustain flourishing futures amid ongoing environmental change (The Context).

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The 2025 Punjab floods stand as a collective trauma that has indelibly reshaped the mental health, spirituality, culture, and identity of the affected communities. This paper has demonstrated how the people of Punjab utilized an intricate web of psychological, spiritual, and artistic resources—fortified by vital support from faith-based organizations like Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB)—to heal, adapt, and forge paths to recovery. These forms of resilience emphasize that disaster recovery extends beyond physical reconstruction; it is fundamentally a cultural and ecological process that demands narrative, ethical, and spiritual engagement alongside material relief.

Crucially, the flood response spotlighted the extraordinary unity and spirit of Punjab's people. From neighbors braving dangerous waters to rescue stranded families, to tireless volunteers organizing relief camps and supplies, and communities invoking hope through songs and stories, the collective action epitomizes human solidarity at its best (Instagram flood relief stories). This grassroots mobilization cut across religious, caste, and class divides, revealing a social fabric strengthened by empathy and shared hardship. The inclusivity and reciprocity witnessed challenge conventional images of disaster-affected populations as passive victims, underscoring instead their agency and mutual support systems.

Moreover, the flood aftermath revealed how digital and social media served as powerful platforms for solidarity and information diffusion. Through real-time updates, fundraising appeals, and shared experiences, social networks connected villagers, urban supporters, diaspora members, and NGOs in a broad coalition of care and activism. These translocal networks enhanced material support, psychological encouragement, and advocacy for environmental justice, symbolizing an evolving model of community resilience in the digital age.

Looking forward, the floods underscore the urgent need to integrate ecological consciousness, cultural heritage, and social justice into disaster recovery frameworks. Recognizing recovery as profoundly interconnected with mental health, cultural identity, and environmental stewardship is

essential to build adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable communities. Punjab's response to the 2025 flood disaster offers a hopeful blueprint—one where resilience emerges not only from rebuilding infrastructure but from nurturing the spirit, traditions, and collective wisdom of its people as the foundation for flourishing futures.

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