The great Sumatra-Andaman earthquake of 26 December 2004 was predictable even from seismicity data of \( m_b \geq 4.5 \): A lesson to learn from nature

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The spatial distribution of earthquakes is found to change before and after occurrence of an earthquake of given size. The occurrence of an earthquake of any size may be related with the self-organized criticality behavior of turbulence in solids. This change is reflected in the temporal variation of generalized dimension \( D_q \) or \( D_q \) spectra. Therefore, the study of temporal variations of \( D_q \) and \( D_q \) spectra may be used to study the changes in Seismicity structure before the occurrence of earthquakes and hence multifractal study holds promise in forecasting earthquake in the regions having potential to generate great earthquake. The study in this paper deals with multifractal analysis of seismicity data of the region which have resulted in great Sumatra-Andaman earthquake of 26 December 2004. The significant increase in \( D_q \) and \( D_q \) spectra has been observed prior to occurrence of \( (m_b=9, M_w=9.1 \text{ to } 9.3) \) great Sumatra-Andaman 26th December 2004 even with seismicity data having completeness of catalogue for \( m_b \geq 4.5 \). The monitoring of USGS global network holds promise to reveal changes in \( D_q \) prior to occurrence of great earthquakes even from earthquake catalogue which have their completeness for magnitudes \( (i.e. m_b \geq 4.5) \).

[Key words: Seismicity, self-organized criticality, multifractal analysis, earthquake, Sumatra-Andaman]

Introduction

Fracture exhibits a fractal structure over a wide range of fracture scale, i.e from the scales of microfractures to megafaults.\(^1-5\) Recent studies have shown that many natural phenomena such as the spatial distribution of earthquakes, fluid turbulence are heterogeneous fractals.\(^6-12\) A number of studies have been made to investigate the temporal variation of heterogeneity in seismicity using multifractal analysis in various seismic regions.\(^12-16\) In such systems, the number of fractures that are larger than a specified size are related by power law to the size. Originally the notion of self-similarity was defined for sets. The generalization from fractal sets to multifractal measures involves the passage from objects that are characterized primarily by one number namely a fractal dimension to objects that are characterized by a function.\(^8,10-11\) This is a transition from characterization by a single number (the exponent in the power law relation or the dimension) of geometrical objects to that by a function which may have any number of parameters. The characterization is not in terms of one or two or three dimensions, but by a family of generalized dimension \( D_q \) as a function of index \( q \), which goes from \(-\infty\) to \(+\infty\).

For some time it has been recognized that the parameters which describe seismicity in a region show a spatial and temporal evolution which may be associated with the process of generation of large earthquakes i.e. evolving of fracture from micro fracture to mega fault. The change in seismicity pattern of earthquakes is reflected in the generalized dimension \( D_q \) or \( D_q \) spectra of the seismicity. Therefore, the study of temporal variation \( D_q \) and \( D_q \) spectra may be used to study the changes in the seismicity structure before and after the occurrence of large earthquakes, which may prove to be of value in forecasting of occurrence of such events. Accordingly Hirata & Imoto\(^12\) have performed multifractal analysis of microearthquake data of Kanto region using correlation integral method. Hirabayashi et al.\(^13\) have done the multifractal analysis of seismicity in regions of Japan, California and Greece using fixed mass and fixed radius methods. Li et al.\(^14\) have performed the multifractal analysis of spatial distribution of earthquakes of Tanshan region \( (M_l> 1.8) \) using extended Grassberger-Procraccia method of dimension \( D_q \) estimation. Teotia et al.\(^15-16\) have
studied the multifractal characteristics of seismicity of Himalaya region ($m_b \geq 4.5$) and have found steep slope in $D_q$ spectra to be associated with high rates of energy release and the gentle slope corresponds to low rates of energy release. These studies have noted changes in temporal characteristic of the generalized dimension $D_q$ and $D_q$ spectra which were found to be associated with the occurrence of some large earthquakes in these regions. This question, however, needs further investigations, particularly in different tectonic domains of the world. In the present study we investigate the temporal behavior of generalized dimension $D_q$ as well as $D_q$ spectra for earthquakes in Sumatra-Andaman region ($m_b \geq 4.5$) during the years AD 1964-2004 to see the precursory behavior of change in $D_q$ and $D_q$ spectra from the data having magnitude threshold ($m_b \geq 4.5$) in the time series analysed.

**Methodology**

Figure 1 shows the study area along with the tectonics of the region. For the analysis of seismicity, the earthquake data set of the USGS\textsuperscript{17} was used as shown in Fig. 2. The time window for analysis was chosen to be 1964-2004 and the USGS\textsuperscript{17} earthquake catalogue for Sumatra-Andaman region for this period was used for the multifractal analysis. Figure 2 shows the Sumatra-Andaman region having seismicity of subduction zone from Myanmar to Sumatra. To gain an unbiased and homogeneous data set, we restricted the data by setting a lower limit and analysis time period and it is found to be complete for magnitude threshold $m_b \geq 4.5$. Under the assumption that

Fig. 1—The tectonic map of region along with area under study (After Kayal\textsuperscript{32}).

![Region Map](image)

Fig. 2—Seismicity map showing epicenter distribution of earthquakes which occurred in between January 1964 to March 2005. The analysed data set covers two regions with apexes latitude and longitude as (0°, 88°), (0°, 100°), (16°, 88°), (16°, 100°) in the first region and (0°, 88°), (0°, 100°), (30°, 88°), (30°, 100°) in the second region.
geological processes are steady over historical time and the observation capabilities are steady over the time window under consideration for \( m_b \geq 4.5 \), the temporal changes the frequency of earthquakes may be attributed to the aftershocks of the large earthquakes and the local temporal variation in the seismicity. Figure 3 shows the yearly change in number of shallow earthquakes for different magnitude thresholds. The number of earthquakes of \( m_b \geq 4.5 \) vs the time curve shows a poor trend in data set for Sumatra Andaman region. Thus, the available data set can be considered as fairly complete in the time series for magnitude threshold \( m_b \geq 4.5 \). The analysed data set covers two regions i.e. region I and region II with four apexes having latitude and longitude as \((0^\circ, 88^\circ), (0^\circ, 100^\circ), (16^\circ, 88^\circ), (16^\circ, 100^\circ)\) in region I and \((0^\circ, 88^\circ), (0^\circ, 100^\circ), (30^\circ, 88^\circ), (30^\circ, 100^\circ)\) in region II. The total number of events occurred in smaller and bigger regions were 3652 and 4675 respectively during Jan.1964-March 2005. However in the present study the time window (Jan.1964-26th Dec., 2004) has been selected for the multifractal analysis in small as well as bigger regions. The great Sumatra earthquake of 26th Dec., 2004 is 1598\textsuperscript{th} event in smaller region (region I) and 2719\textsuperscript{th} event in bigger region (region II).

The available methods for calculating \( D_q \) are the box counting method\textsuperscript{18,21}, the fixed-radius methods\textsuperscript{22} and the fixed-mass method\textsuperscript{23,24}. These methods work well provided the number of data points are very large\textsuperscript{22,24}. The extended\textsuperscript{25,26} Garssberger & Procracci method is used in this analysis, which can recover the dimension from a time series. It is described as:

\[
\log C_q(r) = D_q \log r(r \rightarrow 0) \quad \ldots (1)
\]

\[
C_q(r) = \lim_{r \rightarrow 0} \left\{ \left( \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \sum_{i \neq j} H(r-X_i-X_j) \right)^{q-1} \right\}^{1/(q-1)} \quad \ldots (2)
\]

where \( r \) is the scaling radius, \( N \) is the total number of data points within a search region in a certain time interval (also called the sample volume); \( X_i \) is the epicentral location (given in latitude and longitude) of the \( i \)th event, \( X_j \) is the epicenter (given in latitude and longitude) of the \( j \)th event, \( C_q(r) \) is the \( q \)th integral and \( H(.) \) is the heaviside step function.

In the procedure for estimating \( D_q \) spectra as a function of time, a time series of earthquake epicenters has to be formed and divided into sub-series (subsets). Let set \( \{X_i, M_i\}_{i=1}^{M} \) be a complete set of earthquakes occurring in time period analyzed, and \( M_i \) the magnitude of an earthquake occurring at time \( t_i \). Thus the earthquake constitutes a time series of \( N \) elements. The time series consists of 1600 events in the smaller region and 2750 in the bigger region. We consider these time series as the original data sets for multifractal analysis of these regions. In the

Fig. 3—Yearly change of the number of earthquakes from January 1964 to December 2003 different magnitude threshold in region having apexes \((0^\circ, 88^\circ), (0^\circ, 100^\circ), (30^\circ, 88^\circ), (30^\circ, 100^\circ)\).
present case the original data sets for Sumatra-Andaman regions are divided into 24 subsets for smaller region and 45 subsets for bigger region. The subset in Sumatra-Andaman region consists of 500 events with an overlap of 450 events. The shift of 50 events has been used in the analysis. The correlation integral \( C_q(r) \) is calculated using Eq. (2) for the epicentral distribution \( X_i \) of the subset. The distance \( r \) between two events is calculated by using spherical triangle\(^{27-28}\). For epicentral distribution having a fractal structure, the following power law relationship is obtained in the scaling region.

\[ C_q(r) \sim r^{D_q} \]

An appropriate scaling region has been estimated before the computation of generalized dimension \( D_q \). The scaling region is a linear segment in the graph of \( \log r \) versus \( \log C_q(r) \). The scaling region may be characterized by the circular boundary defined by scaling radius around epicenter. We use the method of Li et al.\(^{14}\) to determine the scaling region in Sumatra-Andaman region.

**Results and Discussion**

Observation of seismicity suggests a relationship between the distribution of earthquake magnitudes and the distribution of earthquake epicenters\(^{28,29}\). Figure 4 (A, B) shows the temporal variation of \( D_q \) for three different values of \( q (-2, 0, 2) \) for the total time series analyzed. The \( D_q \) values for each subset are plotted at the time where the last earthquake entered the subset. The first subset starts from 1963.202 years (i.e. 14\(^{th}\) March 1964) and ends at 1982.964 years for Sumatra-Andaman region in the smaller region. The temporal changes observed in \( D_2 \) are larger and rough as compared to the variations in other two dimensions \( D_0 \) and \( D_2 \) (Fig.4). The evolving pattern of seismicity structure may emerge in significant trends in temporal variation of \( D_q \) and \( D_q \) spectra prior to occurrence of great a Sumatra earthquake of 26\(^{th}\) December, 2004. The \( D_q \) spectra for smaller region is shown in this study (Fig.5). Therefore, if there is any organized pattern of clustering emerges prior to occurrence of great earthquake may be resolved even from the time series having earthquakes \( m_b \geq 4.5 \). There is a clear-cut trend present in temporal variation of \( D_q \) and \( D_q \) spectra for Sumatra-Andaman region as is shown in Fig.4 and Fig. 5. This trend may be because of the great Sumatra earthquake (\( m_b = 9.0 \)) providing a time
series of better resolution in size ranging $4.5 \leq m_b \leq 9.0$ for understanding the evolving pattern of seismicity. These evolving patterns may result from the presence of significant clustering of events in space and time. The presence of required clustering in the data has resulted in clear-cut trends in temporal variation of $D_q$ and $D_{q-2}$ spectra. Figure 5 shows the consistent increase in slope of $D_q$ spectra i.e. from subset 14 to subset 23. Subset 14 corresponds to seismicity having minimum difference in $D_2$ and $D_{-2}$ which may have less clustering presence i.e. declustering in the region. The spatial distribution of seismicity in this subset may be considered as relatively homogeneous seismicity in the region. The Sumatra earthquake is 498th event of the subset 23 in the smaller region. Therefore, the $D_q$ spectra of subset 23 is mainly defined by earthquake epicenters of events occurring prior to 26th December, 2004 as huge stresses are required in the region for such a great earthquake to occur which may result in high degree of clustering in seismicity pattern as evident from the steep $D_q$ spectra in subsets during and prior to occurrence of great Sumatra earthquake of 26th December, 2004. The seismicity evolves from homogeneous to heterogeneous distribution of epicenters from subset 14 to subset 23. The significant trend in temporal variation in generalized dimension is also available even in bigger region. This may be due to clustering pattern of seismicity involving larger area in great earthquakes. This study suggests that temporal variation of $D_q$ and $D_{q-2}$ spectra may serve as precursor in prediction of earthquake provided the seismicity data of potential regions represents the time series having presence of sufficient clustering of earthquake epicenters, which could emerge as a self organized pattern in the zone of preparation of great size earthquake. In case of great earthquake like Sumatra the zone of preparation of self emerging earthquake epicenters pattern may be clearly reflected in small as well as bigger areas. Both smaller region as well as bigger region show significant trend in generalized dimension of $D_q$ after year 1996 as seismicity pattern evolves from declustering to clustering scenario in the regions as regions may prepare for huge build up of strain energy (see Fig.4). This may be indicative of the fact that great earthquake like Sumatra have much bigger rupture zone involving self emerging patterns of earthquake epicenters. Such changes are also evident in plot of cumulative seismic moments as a function of time for 29 years history of the Harvard CMT catalog, which appears to have high cumulative global earthquake seismic moment release for the preceding decade. One can see the change in moment rate from 1995 onward in the cumulative plot of seismic moments. This further supports the increase in clustering (i.e. steep $D_q$ spectra) in the region due to higher amount of energy release as was observed in Himalaya. The change in clustering in region I is visible in seismicity structure of subset 14 and subset 23 (see Fig. 6)

Conclusion

Studies by seismologists have shown that the occurrence of earthquakes are fragmented, contain gaps, and have heterogeneous distribution both in space and time. The present study suggests that multifractal analysis is more useful for the study of heterogeneous fractals of earthquakes. The spatiotemporal variation in the occurrence of earthquakes may be studied in the framework of multifractal i.e. by studying the temporal variation of generalized dimension $D_q$ and $D_{q-2}$ spectra. We suggest that the regions having potential to generate great earthquake (like Himalaya, Alaska and Chile regions etc) be systematically analysed by even earthquake catalogue $m_b \geq 4.5$ for detection of changes
in temporal variation in $D_q$ and $D_d$ spectra for possible prediction of great earthquake. The temporal variation of generalized dimension involves significant trends in both smaller and bigger area around the epicenter of great Sumatra earthquake. This can also serve as precursor for prediction of Tsunami if such changes are observed prior to great earthquakes in the seismotectonic regions which may result in Tsunami as has been observed prior to occurrence of great Sumatra 26th December 2004 earthquake. The results of this study along with GPS data may be helpful in real time monitoring of evolving scenario of fracture process in the areas where probability of occurrence of great earthquake is high.

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