ROLE OF DEFENCE FORCES IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN INDIA – A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

India is one of ten most disaster prone countries of the world. In India the involvement of Defence Forces in providing support for rescue and relief work during calamities is a normal practice. The primary objective of this research paper was to conduct extensive research survey and to summarise the occurrences of natural calamities where Defence Forces were involved in Disaster Management. Defence Forces have done well whenever called for rescue and other operations during calamities. National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) established in year 2005, has formulated policies and procedures for Disaster Management. Defence Forces who are having primary role as Defence of the country against external threat, are having one of the secondary roles as disaster management. For this, coordination between civil authorities and Defence Forces needs improvement. Forecasting, Coordination and Quick Response have emerged as key factors for better results. The grey areas in such operations have been identified during research survey and corrective action has been suggested at the end of the paper.

Key words: Defence Forces, Civil Administration, Coordination, Natural Disasters.


http://www.iaeme.com/jom/issues.asp?JType=JOM&VType=5&IType=3

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Defence Forces have always proved themselves whenever called to support civil authorities in social issues. Especially, at the time of natural calamities or man-made disasters, Defence Force has shown excellent results in providing relief to civilians. In general, the Defence Forces get involved and take on specific tasks only when the situation is beyond the capability of civil authorities. However, in practice, Defence Force are the “core of the government response capacity” and tend to be the first responders of the Government of India in a major disaster. Both the Indian government and the public have shown full faith in the
Defence Forces and consider that all emergencies can be handled by the Defence Forces effectively and efficiently.

**Indian Perspective for Disasters:** India is one of the ten worst disaster prone countries of the world. The country is prone to disasters due to number of factors; both natural and human induced, including adverse geo-climatic conditions, topographic features, environmental degradation, population growth, urbanization, industrialization, nonscientific development practices etc. These factors either themselves or by accelerating the intensity and frequency of disasters are responsible for heavy toll of human lives and disrupting the life supporting system in the country. The basic reason for the high vulnerability of the country to natural disasters is its unique geographical and geological situations. As far as the vulnerability to disaster is concerned, the five distinct regions of the country i.e. Himalayan region, the alluvial plains, the hilly part of the peninsula, and the coastal zone have their own specific problems. While on one hand the Himalayan region is prone to disasters like earthquakes and landslides, the plains are affected by floods almost every year. The desert part of the country is affected by droughts and famine while the coastal zones are susceptible to cyclones, storms and tsunamis.

**National Policy:** The Indian Ocean tsunami of Dec 2004 brought a paradigm shift to Indian approach to disaster management. National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was constituted under the Disaster Management Act of 2005 to draft policies and guidelines on disaster management, risk mitigation and prevention of disasters and to coordinate the implementation of plans for disaster preparedness and management. National Policy on Disaster Management was approved by the Government in November 2009. This comprehensive policy document lays down policies on different aspects of management of disasters in the country. Consequent to these developments, a plethora of structures and procedures have been put into place at various levels.

**Role of Defence Forces:** The unambiguous and primary role of the Defence Forces is related to the defense of the country against external and internal threats. The secondary role of the Defence Forces is to support the civil authorities in the situations of natural calamities and disasters. In addition to above, few other reasons for which the Defence Forces can be called out to aid the civil authorities to meet various contingencies, are as follows:

- To maintain law and order.
- To maintain essential services.
- To assist during natural calamities.
- To assist in execution of developmental projects.
- Any other type of assistance which may be sought by civil authorities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

David Etkin, Kenneth McBey, and Cliff Trollope (2018) – The authors of this paper have introduced the role of the military during situations of crisis, ranging from emergencies to various types of disasters, in reference to Canadian perspective. Two issues have been addressed; (1) the role of the military within the disaster/emergency management cycle, (2) the implications of militarization of crisis management. Ability and resources enables Defence Forces to play an important role in disaster management, particularly during large scale catastrophes. However it is controversial that how to best place them within the disaster management cycle and to what degree the military model is suitable. This paper addresses few such issues such as command and control, decision making structures and the constraints to the use of military forces in disaster management.
Major General (Retd) Amar Krishna, Dr Pramod Damle (2017) - The major objective of this research was to identify the areas where the performance of the Defence Forces in Disaster Management has been affected badly due to lack of proper coordination. The second objective of this research was to suggest measures to overcome the same. The authors have selected two instances where such lack of coordination had been seriously noticed; first is the cases of the floods in J&K (2014) and 2nd in Chennai (2015). Direct interaction took place with the J&K persons who got affected from flood in 2014 for which a Questionnaire was used to collect data from the victims (130) and officials (30). The Army’s After Action Report was also studied. The findings highlight that the civil administration was totally out of picture when the disaster occurred and the large amount of relief material was not properly managed by civil organization.

Sanjeev Singh, Kaveri Tandon (2015) – The authors have stated that the major role of Defence Forces in disaster management is to perform the rescue operations and evacuate the people. The authors found that the major challenge to Defence Forces is always being the first respondent to any disasters in India. The authors emphasized on cooperation between the Defence Forces and civil organizations of that area during the entire operation.

Dr. Satendra Dr. K. J. Anandha Kumar Maj. Gen. Dr. V. K. Naik, KC, AVSM (2014) – Have reviewed in the disasters during the previous years, are reinforced the need for sustainable development and also the significance of the need for mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction in all developmental activities.

Mahalingam (2013) Has stated that the Defence Forces are neither properly trained nor equipped for managing disaster situations. The results produced by Defence Forces in disaster management operations so far are only due to the inherited self-discipline and culture developed within the forces. He raised a question mark on assigning key responsibilities of disaster relief operations to senior bureaucrats. He advocated assigning such duties to senior officials of Defence Force as they better understand how to tackle with such problems.

Oberoi, Lt. Gen.Vijay (2013) – His study of destructive floods, cloud bursts and major land slides in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh (HP) have highlighted the incapability and inefficiency of governments in dealing with disasters effectively. Once again, the Defence Forces played role of a lead force in rescue operations for the betterment of the affected people. However, some units of the NDMA and other forces like ITBP, CRPF, SSB, were also deployed, but the Defence Forces made the difference in handling the situation.

Uttarakhand Disaster 2013 (REPORT) - The Uttarakhand disaster of June 2013 became the reason of huge damage, devastation and loss of life. The event has raised several question marks on government in relation to attentiveness, improvement and disaster risk reduction. The major reason of such tragedies is lack of documentation about such experiences and lessons of disasters. Systematic documentation can guide and facilitate disaster response and recovery at faster pace.

Pranab Kr. Das (2013) -. Garhwal district of Uttarakhand is very well-known for several high altitude pilgrimages and very popular among tourists. Due to its religious significance, this region is frequently called as ‘Dev Bhumi’- Land of Gods. After the Multi days (14th June to 17th June) cloudburst and heavy rainfall, the entire region especially the Kedarnath area faced overwhelming flash floods and subsequent landslides. Rudraprayag, Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Pithoragarh districts were badly affected. The total deaths during just four days were up to 10,000 and 3000 persons were missing and several hundreds were injured. The flash flood was so massive that it was called ‘The Himalayan Tsunami’. The author has further suggested few measures and precautions in order to reduce the damage caused by disasters and to enable improved overall coordination. He has advocated the use of Doppler Weather Rader (DWR), Automatic Weather Station (AWS) and Radiosonde / Rawinsond (RS/RW) for
timely forecasting of such disasters. Further he has suggested constructing big dams on highly seismic areas like Uttarakhand and other hill areas. Furthermore, the author has firmly suggested not to construct big dams at vulnerable areas.

Banerjee, R. Shankar (2013) – Understanding and analyzing the effect of rapid climate change on Himalayan glaciers has become a major concern. The authors of this work have proposed a simple model for debris-covered glaciers and validate it against data from Dokriani Glacier, India. Numerical investigations of the model show that the response of debris-covered glaciers to a warming climate has two timescales. The authors have conducted rigorous analysis of remote-sensing data they collected and found that the responses of the Himalayan glaciers are constant with a climate that is warming on average rate.

Satish Kumar (2012) observed that the present system of demanding and procuring military aid during disasters increases time overheads. He found in his study that the entire procedure compels to take permission from the Central Government while Defence Force units may be procured within the place where the emergency has occurred. He has also emphasized that the Defence Force must work with autonomy as it does not require civil interference in handling operations.


V. Kumar Sharma & D. Kaushik Ashutosh (2012) - Disasters are major threat for every part of the world. According to a World Bank report titled “natural hazards, unnatural disasters,” floods and storms are the most widespread while droughts are prevalent more often in Africa.” Climate change makes the situation even more crucial. Therefore, there is a need to identify hazards and their vulnerability inclusively and ensure prevention, mitigation and management.

Alok Raj (2008) - The Indian Defence Forces have proved themselves as effective disaster aid to a number of countries in the past. Neighboring countries like Nepal, Bhutan always look up to India for many such issues, especially when encountered with any natural calamity. In rising regional and global cooperation during disaster response, the Indian Defence Forces can be proved as beneficial in uplifting India’s status of a regional power.

3. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Inherited self-discipline and work culture of Defence Forces make them most suitable for playing major role in disaster management in wake of natural and man made calamities in India. Defence Forces have proved their worth in such type of past situations. But there is always a room for improvement. The points mentioned below can be further improved for better results.

1. The situation for calling the Defence Forces for Disaster Management should be well defined by joint effort of Civil and Military Authorities by keeping in view the primary role of Defence Forces.
2. Defence Forces can further train themselves for this important secondary role.
3. Weather forecasting and early warning systems with civil organisations to give relevant information continuously to Defence Forces as per their deployment who should in turn prepare themselves in wake of adverse forecasting reports.
4. The procedure of calling of Defence Forces for aid to civil administration during calamities should be simplified.

5. The Defence Forces should try to further reduce their response time.

6. Drills for rescue and temporary rehabilitation operations should be laid down and continuously improved.

Proper documentation is necessary for drawing the lesson and for future improvement.

REFERENCE


BIOGRAPHY

Lt Gen Ranbir Singh is an alumni of the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasala. He has done his M. Sc. in Defence and Strategic Studies from University of Madras and MA in International Security & Strategy from King’s College, London. M. Phil. in Defence & Management Studies from School of Defence and Management Studies, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore. He has held varied command, staff and instructional appointments in the Army in all types of terrain & conflict scenarios and has served in the prestigious appointment of Director General of Military Operations in Army Headquarters. He is
currently posted as Deputy Chief of Army Staff (Information Systems & Training) at Army Headquarters. He has also attended the Anti-Terrorist Course in Royal College of Defence Studies in United Kingdom and has served on two important United Nations missions in Rwanda and Sudan. He has also been involved in coordinating Disaster Relief operations at the directional and functional levels in several disaster situations. For his distinguished and exceptional service in the Army, he has been awarded Ati Vishisht Seva Medal on two occasions, Yudh Seva Medal and Sena Medal. The General Officer is presently pursuing Ph D in Management.

**Col. Dr. BS Dhaliwal:** Received the M.Tech. And Ph.D. degrees from department of Industrial Engineering and Management at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur. His specialization is operation Research applications to management. He served as a Technical officer in Indian Army for 26 years including teaching and R&D assignments there. During his academic carrier of thirty years he has held the post of Professor, Dean of two engineering colleges and Dean Academics of a University: At present he is Vice Chancellor of Guru Kashi University at Talwandi Sabo, District Bathinda, Punjab India.