



## **ARMED FORCES IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES IN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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### ***Abstract***

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*The role of the Army in disaster management is very essential. It continues to be amongst the first responders in a disaster situation even before the civilian resources have been deployed. The unique geo-climatic conditions of India make it highly vulnerable to natural hazards. Disaster management is an area of primary concern for governments around the world today. Part of the reason for such a state of affairs is the increasingly aware and informed public perception of disasters and calamities. Armed forces, which are ultimately responsible to the head of the state in a democratic form of government, are expected to carry out all directives that are assigned to them. Professional soldiers are trained to ignore their personal situation and state of mind and carry out their duties regardless of the distress caused or the difficulties faced. It is this dedication and their training that can prove to be a valuable asset for disaster planners. The major role of armed forces in disaster management is to conduct the rescue operation and evacuate the people. Always the first respondent to any disaster is the major challenge for them. There is a need for better cooperation between the armed forces and other government and civil organizations of that area.*

**Keywords:** Armed Forces, Disaster, Evacuation, Rescue

### **Introduction:**

India has been traditionally vulnerable to natural disasters on account of its unique geo-climatic conditions. Floods, droughts, cyclones, earthquakes and landslides have been current

phenomena. About 60% of the landmass is prone to earthquakes of various intensities; over 40 million hectares is prone to floods; about 8% of the total area is prone to cyclones and 68% of the area is susceptible to drought<sup>1</sup>.

At the global level, there has been considerable concern over natural disasters. Even as substantial scientific and material progress is made, the loss of lives and property due to disasters has not decreased. In fact, the human toll and economic losses have mounted<sup>2</sup>.

A disaster is a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

### **Types of Disaster:**

Disasters can take many different forms, and the duration can range from an hourly disruption to days or weeks of ongoing destruction. The various types of disasters are **natural and man-made or technological**.

- a) **Natural disasters** are naturally occurring physical phenomena caused either by rapid or slow onset events which can be:
  - **Geophysical** (earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis and volcanic activity),
  - **Hydrological** (avalanches and floods),
  - **Climatologically** (extreme temperatures, drought and wildfires),
  - **Meteorological** (cyclones and storms/wave surges)
  - **Biological** (disease epidemics and insect/animal plagues).
  
- b) **Technological or man-made disaster** (complex emergencies/conflicts, famine, displaced populations, industrial accidents and transport accidents) are events that are **caused by humans** and occur in or close to human settlements. This can include environmental degradation, pollution and accidents.<sup>3</sup>

### **Disaster Risks in India**

Disaster risks in India are further compounded by increasing vulnerabilities, due to a variety of factors. These include the ever-growing population, the vast disparities in income, rapid urbanization, increasing industrialization, development within high-risk zones, environmental degradation, climate change, etc. Clearly, all these point to a future where disasters seriously

threaten India's population, national security, economy and its sustainable development; therefore the urgency to issue the guidelines for the preparation of the State Plan for Disaster Management(DM) as mandated by the disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM ACT, 2005). The DM plans will build in region and hazard specific management tools in the context of regional and multi-hazard vulnerabilities<sup>4</sup>.

In recent years India has seen an increasing number of natural disasters with alarming intensity – the 2001 Bhuj earthquake; the 2004 tsunami; the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir; heavy rainfall in Mumbai in 2006; the 2008 Bihar Kosi river flood; the August 2010 cloud burst in Leh; the September 2011 Sikkim earthquake; the unprecedented flash floods and cloudbursts in Garhwal, parts of Kumaon and Nepal, and Kinnaur region of Himachal Pradesh in June 2013; and most recently the floods in J&K in September 2014.

### **Disaster Management:**

Disaster management is an area of primary concern for governments around the world today. Part of the reason for such a state of affairs is the increasingly aware and informed public perception of disasters and calamities.

### **Disaster Management Cycle<sup>5</sup>:**

A holistic and integrated approach will be evolved towards disaster management with emphasis on building strategic partnerships at various levels. The themes underpinning the policy are:

- Community based DM, including last mile integration of the policy, plans and execution.
- Capacity development in all spheres.
- Consolidation of past initiatives and best practices.
- Cooperation with agencies at national and international levels.
- Multi-sectoral synergy.

In India the nodal agency for coordination of response, relief and overall natural disaster management is under the Central Ministry of Home Affairs. However, when any disaster breaks, it is the Armed forces under the Ministry of Defence that is called upon to intervene as an aid to civil authority. Most of disaster management in India has seen the active involvement of the armed forces in the relief operations. That is the main reason of armed

forces plays an important role in disaster management. In this background the following part of this paper deals with the role of armed forces in disaster management.

### **Role of Armed Forces in Disaster Management**

By armed forces we know the military forces of a country. Armed forces include army, navy and air force who served as the military force of the nation. Armed forces symbolize the defence of the nation. For this they trained, equipped and prepared themselves for all operations expected to be carried out during any unwanted circumstances. With the increasing threat created by terrorism and localized disturbances armed forces have had to adapt and train themselves in order to carry out operations. Disaster management and response is one of these activities. The role of armed forces in disaster management is very important. The Disaster Management Act 2005 is a vital instrument which explains the role and functions of various agencies. It is also a tool to bring in a sense of accountability and responsibility. This act mentions the deployment of naval, military and air forces and other armed forces of the Union or any other civilian personnel as may be required for the purposes of this Act<sup>6</sup>.

Theoretically, the Armed Forces are called upon to assist the civil administration only when the situation is beyond their coping capability. But, in practice, the armed forces form an important part of the Government's response capacity and are immediate responders in all serious disaster situations. On account of their vast potential to meet any adverse challenge, speed of operational response and the resources and capabilities at their disposal, the armed forces have historically played a major role in emergency support functions. These include search and rescue operations, health and medical facilities, and transportation, especially in the immediate aftermath of a disaster<sup>7</sup>. It can be said that armed forces played a vital role in disaster management as part of overall national strategy to cope with disaster in India. The main role of armed forces is to coordinate the employment of forces and conduct relief operation in disaster management. Various roles of armed forces are discussed below:

- **Rescue operation** as it is the main work for every organization at the time of any disaster. In rescue operation the armed forces plays an important role as they are well trained and well equipped as compare to the other civil organizations.
- **Evacuation of people** as in disaster management one of the most important parts is to safely evacuate the people to a safer place.

- Provide essential needs like foods, shelter and clothing etc.
- Immediate restoration of essential services like electricity, water and telephone lines etc.
- Set up emergency hospitals
- Repair of roads and bridges

### **Challenges faced by Armed Forces in Disaster Management**

In India the armed forces have played important role in disaster management as a force of the nation. If any disaster may be natural or manmade breaks out the Government called them to help and rescue the people. But, when they are helping the people they are also facing many challenges, some of the main challenges are follows:

- **Preparedness for disaster response** as most of the disaster comes without any intimation especially manmade disasters.
- **Conducting relief operations** a huge challenge in case of disaster with grave magnitudes.
- **Increasingly uneven frequency of disasters** in the recent years in both types; natural as well as manmade.
- **Always the first respondent** in any disaster is the main challenge for the armed forces as they have to face the unknown situation.
- **Resource constraint** is also huge challenge for armed forces and in situation of disaster they have to use their limited resources which even cause them mental distress.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions:**

Armed forces, which are frontline defence of any nation, are expected to carry out all directives that are assigned to them. And they are playing a very big role in disaster management in our country. Their dedication and training are proving a valuable asset for disaster planners. But, there is still some areas like coordination with other agencies which needs to be improve for better disaster management, some suggestions are given below:

- Disaster managers need to understand and analyse how armed forces operate during a disaster response exercise.

- There should be proper coordination between the armed forces and other civilian authorities such as the police, fire services and first aid providers, to prepare for how to organise a successful response to any disaster.
- The skills that are specialised to armed forces should be disburse within the disaster response community to better prepare them for disaster management processes.
- To overcome coordination issues, simulation and training must be conducted on a regular basis.
- The National, State and District level and the local representatives of disaster management authority should include the armed forces in their executive committees to ensure closer coordination.
- There should clear distinction between the respective roles of armed forces and other civil authorities paying particular attention to disaster management.

While the primary responsibility for disaster response lies with civilian agencies at local, state and federal levels, only the armed forces has the manpower, equipment, training and organisation necessary to gather the relief effort required during any disaster situation.

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