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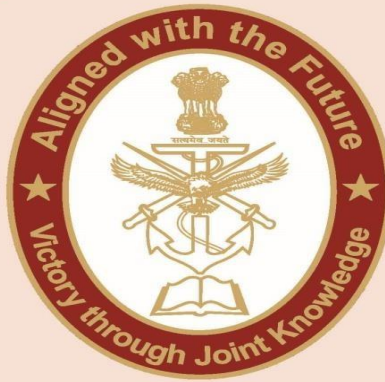
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ROLE OF THE INDIAN ARMY IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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Role of the Indian Army in Disaster Management



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Abstract

Disasters whether natural or man-made can cause a lot of harm to people, homes, and important buildings. Because India has different types of land and weather, it often faces problems like floods, earthquakes, cyclones, and landslides. When these disasters happen, it's very important to act quickly and in an organized way to help people, give relief, and rebuild what was damaged.

In these tough times, the Indian Army plays a very important role. They are usually among the first to reach the affected areas. With their training, discipline, and ability to work in difficult situations, the Army helps rescue people, give medical help, and provide food and shelter. They are always ready and have the tools and experience to deal with such emergencies.

This paper talks about how the Indian Army helps during disasters. It will look at real-life examples and explain how the Army is able to do such a great job in helping people when they need it the most.

Introduction

The Army is usually one of the first to reach the affected areas. They help rescue people who are stuck, fix broken roads or bridges, and even give medical help to the injured. Over the years, the Indian Army has become a strong and trustworthy helping hand for the country. They don't just protect us from enemies, but also stand with us during tough times like floods or earthquakes.

About 58 per cent of India's geographical area is earthquake prone, and sixty-eight per cent of the area is drought prone, 12 per cent is flood prone and eight per cent is prone to cyclones.ⁱ About one million houses are damaged annually with irreparable losses so there is a need to adopt a proactive approach for prevention, mitigation and preparedness.ⁱⁱ The numbers clearly show that a big part of our land and population is at risk. Because of this, just taking action after a disaster happens is not enough.

We need to be ready in advance. This means building stronger houses and roads, having systems that can warn us early, teaching people what to do during a disaster, and making sure different departments work well together. All these steps can help reduce damage and save lives. The government's dependence on India's armed forces for disaster response due to lack of capacities and capabilities of civil administration set-up at the state, municipal and local bodies' level led to a review of the national disaster framework (Raj 2008) and culminated in enactment of the DM Act.ⁱⁱⁱ This act sought to enhance civil administrations' capability to deal with natural disasters and thereby reduce the involvement of the armed forces.^{iv} In the past, whenever big disasters happened, the state and local governments often found it hard to handle the situation. They didn't always have enough people, proper training, or the right equipment to respond quickly and properly. Because of this, they struggled to help everyone in need.

That's when the armed forces, like the Indian Army, stepped in. Since they are well-trained, disciplined, and have good resources, they became the main support during these tough times. People started depending on them whenever there was a big emergency, because they could reach quickly and manage things better. The Disaster Management (DM) Act wants to make sure that we don't always have to depend on the armed forces during every disaster. This is a good idea, but the change needs to happen slowly and with proper support. Local teams and officials need to be truly trained and prepared not just on paper, but with real training, good equipment, and better teamwork between different departments. At the same time, the Army should still be part of the plan. They can be called in when the situation is very serious. But their role should be clearly planned so that local authorities can also do their job without feeling left out or weak. Working together is the best way to keep everyone safe and respond better during disasters.

The Armed Forces are the first responders to calls of disaster management, during the tsunami of 2004, Indian armed forces carried out one of the biggest peacetime relief operations.^v The Indian armed forces are not just strong in transport and logistics with ships, helicopters, and planes but also have the power to help people even outside India as they helped victims from Maldives, Indonesia and Sri Lanka as well. This kind of support made India look good in the eyes of other nations. So, the armed forces didn't just help in disaster relief they also helped India build better friendships and respect in the world.

The Indian Armed Forces have two very important roles as they protect the country during wars and also save people during disasters. Because of this, people trust and respect them a lot. But this doesn't mean that the government should stop working on improving civil disaster management teams. The Army did an amazing job in helping people and saving lives. But it also showed us that we need to make our local disaster response systems much stronger. We can't always depend on the Army for everything. If the state invests in better training, equipment, and planning for civilian teams, then the Army can

be called only when really needed. This way, both the Army and local teams can work together in a smart and balanced way.

Integrated Disaster Response

The neighboring country of Nepal was severely affected by earthquake in April 2015 and the Indian Army was among the first to dispatch relief material and men to help the mountain nation tackle with the aftermath of the natural calamity.^{vi} Operation Maitri was launched by Indian Army where large transport aircrafts, Mi 17 helicopters evacuated Indian and foreign citizens and Indian Air Force airlifted medical personnel, engineering teams, water, food, blankets and tents.^{vii} This showed how the Indian military can quickly come together and provide help not just in India, but also to other countries in need.

The Indian Army and the Air Force worked side by side. They sent planes, helicopters like the Mi-17, doctors, engineers, and all the important supplies like food, water, and medicine. They helped rescue not only Indian people but also foreigners stuck in Nepal. Even though the land was rough and full of mountains, they still managed to reach the worst-hit areas fast and give people the help they needed. This mission showed the considerate side of India's foreign policy. It proved that India doesn't use its military power to scare others, but to help people during tough times like disasters. The Army was there not to fight, but to rescue, give relief, and bring peace to the region.

Operation Maitri also showed why the armed forces are still so important. Even though the government is trying to improve civilian disaster teams, in really big emergencies especially when help is needed fast or in other countries the Army is the best at handling it. Their speed, planning, and teamwork make a huge difference when every second counts.

The NDMA Act lays down institutional, legal, financial and coordination mechanisms at the Central, state, district and local levels, these institutions are not parallel structures and will work in close harmony.^{viii} The new institutional framework is meant to ensure implementation of the national desire for a paradigm shift in disaster management from a post-event and relief-centric syndrome to a regime that lays greater emphasis on

preparedness, prevention and mitigation, leading to a more prompt and effective response to disasters.^{ix} One of the most important things about disaster management in India is that different departments and agencies are not supposed to work alone. They have to work together as a team. This helps make the response to disasters faster, more organized, and more effective.

The Disaster Management (NDMA) Act brought a big change in how India looks at disasters. Earlier, help was given only after a disaster happened, and the focus was mainly on relief. But now, the Act promotes a smarter way by being prepared in advance and trying to reduce risks before anything goes wrong.

This new approach includes:

- **Preparedness** – making plans and practicing through drills.
- **Prevention** – finding out which areas are at risk and trying to keep people safe.
- **Mitigation** – taking steps like building stronger buildings or using safer methods to reduce the damage.
- **Capacity-building** – training people and spreading awareness so everyone knows what to do.

As per the Act, development plans should be made by keeping disaster management in mind. The schools, hospitals, roads, building, etc should be made by keeping in mind that if any kind of disaster happens then they can be strong and safe for people inside and outside. This way we can decrease the risk of major damage at the times of any disaster and protect civilians in a more effective manner.

We should believe in prevention rather than taking action after the disaster happens. Preventing a disaster can be done by forecasting, monitoring these forecasts can help us gain an insight to when and where any kind of disaster might take place and a pre-planned framework can be drawn to prevent the disaster harming most of the region.

According to the law, all the governments of the country should work together but this is many times not possible mainly because the central, state and local government are not able to coordinate in a proper manner. Sometimes there is lot of paperwork of which government should take which responsibility which leads to a lot of confusion and escalation of damages. In small town areas like villages and country side places the government is less efficient to take action because of the weak infrastructure, less trained individuals and reduced budget.

The Indian Armed Forces render timely assistance to civil authorities under “Defence Service Regulations” for the maintenance of law and order, maintenance of essential services, assistance during natural calamities, and any other types of assistance which may be needed by the civil authorities.^x In times of big trouble, like floods or earthquakes, the Indian Army is often the fastest and most effective at helping people. They are super well-trained, very organized, and have the right equipment to reach places quickly and save lives. That’s why they’re really important during emergencies.

But at the same time, we can’t always depend only on the army. If we do, then it becomes hard to see the difference between what the army should do and what the regular government should do. A proper training is required for the soldiers, police, courts and disaster as India is a democratic country and has the world’s largest population exceeding China. The disaster management team should be ready whenever they are required so that they can take a quick action. Natural and man-made disasters, both can cause a lot of damage and they can happen without any clear warning. In today’s time, as the climate change has increased, the disasters are likely to happen more so the Indian army should be ready.

As Indian Army has to quick action at times like these with limited supplies, they also have to be the one to reach first in the areas. Working in such stressful and difficult situations can affect their mental health, but they keep going strong so they can save people and bring things back to normal.

Case Studies

1. On August 6, 2010, in the dark of the midnight, there were flash floods due to cloud burst in Leh in Ladakh region of North India as it rained 14 inches in 2 hours, causing loss of human life and destruction.^{xi} Search and rescue operations were launched by the Indian Army immediately after the disaster and the injured and the dead were shifted to Army Hospital, Leh, and mass casualty management was started by the army doctors while relief work was mounted by the army and civil administration.^{xii}

Leh used to be a quiet, remote place mostly known for the army. But over time, it became really popular with tourists. So, lots of guesthouses, hotels, and shops were built near the Indus River and its smaller streams. The problem is, these are the exact places where water and mud come rushing during heavy rain or cloudbursts. Since there was no proper planning or safety checks, like maps showing danger zones or good drainage systems, many of these buildings were built in risky spots. That made things worse when floods came, putting both people and their homes in danger.

Teams like the NDRF and SDRF have a hard time to manage disaster at places with very high altitudes like Leh which makes it ineffective for these teams to give proper help. As these teams have small amount of people in their teams, not much training in these regions and no helicopters they have a hard time to help in these high-altitude areas.

But the Indian Army in Leh is totally different. They live there all year, even at heights over 3,000 meters, so they're used to the thin air and tough weather. They have special engineers who can clear roads, build quick bridges, and fix broken supply routes. They also have helicopters to rescue people or drop food and medicine in areas you can't reach by road. Plus, their communication systems work really well, even when regular phone lines and internet stop working.

That's why, when Leh's drainage system completely broke down on 6 August 2010 and everything got flooded, the Army was the first to jump in.^{xiii} They rescued lots of people, flew in supplies, and fixed important roads really quickly. Everyone looked to them for help, and they didn't let anyone down.

2. In the first week of September 2014, the Srinagar weather station in J&K recorded more than 500 mm of rainfall leading to disastrous floods, which killed more than 215 people and displaced tens of thousands more in the state.^{xiv} The state emergency forces were ineffective and people in responsible positions were prominent by their absence, around 2.5 lakh people were rescued by 30,000 troops of armed forces, the NDRF and the locals.^{xv} The Army responded quickly, even faster than the state machinery, showing just how well they are trained and how prepared they are, even in dangerous and confusing situations. But what stood out the most wasn't just the number of people involved it was how well the Army worked together with the Air Force, Navy, NDRF, and local volunteers.^{xvi} They used helicopters and planes to rescue families stuck on rooftops and to drop food, water, and medicines. More than 500 boats were used to help with rescue work, and the Army quickly set up medical camps and shelters within a few hours.^{xvii} All the Army people worked tirelessly to reopen the roads and blocked paths. The disaster was decreased and a lot of help was given to the people effected by it as the Indian armed forces took an immediate and effective action. This showcased the team work and cooperation between the whole community of disaster management. Ganderbal, Bandipora and Anantnag were highly affected by the floods, these areas didn't have proper roads. The army engineers helped the families in these places by dropping aids like food, medicines, fuel from the air. The Indian army engineers used Mi-17 helicopters, as these helicopters are designed to fly up in the mountains they saved many lives.

Conclusion

This analysis shows how the Indian Army has done an amazing job during disasters, whether it was the cloudburst in Leh in 2010, the floods in Srinagar in 2014, the tragedy in Uttarakhand in 2013, or the Nepal earthquake relief mission (Operation Maitri) in 2015.

In all these situations, the Army acted quickly, brought the right equipment, and had well-trained people ready to help something regular civil agencies often can't match.

But while the Army is very important during crises, a strong disaster response system can't depend only on the military. If we build a strong and powerful infrastructure and disaster management high scale disaster damage can be prevented as we should need army help at the time of large-scale emergencies. The citizens should be given training on how and what to do at the times of disaster at disaster prone areas.

The government and the army should work together with proper funding and good practice which can help them cooperate. They should communicate effectively at the times of need in any disaster to avoid major conflicts and delays at the times of need.

A good planning should be made before building any roads, building or cities so that damage can be minimized at the time of disaster. It's also important to involve local communities. Better weather forecasts, warning systems, and apps that give alerts in real time can help people act fast before outside help arrives.

In the end, while the Indian Army will always be a strong support during disasters, the country's safety must not depend only on them. If local people and civil teams are better trained and prepared, and they work smoothly with the Army, India can respond to disasters faster, better, and in a more lasting way. This kind of teamwork will protect lives, reduce damage, and help the country become stronger in the face of future disasters.

DISCLAIMER

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