

SUMMARY OF THESIS

Socio-Political Approach to Disaster Management by Community Participation and Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Case Study of Nainital Area

SUPERVISED BY

PROF. ZA. MZANII

SUBMITTED BY

RA.JIVE KOHLI

Disasters not only pose a serious threat to normal life but also affect the development process in adverse manner. Development and disasters have been inextricably linked and in general it is the development of a society that decides its vulnerability to disasters. Extensive human interference in the natural process in the name of development has acted as detonators to disasters. Disasters are extreme events that cause great loss to life and property. Natural disasters, which are both sudden and powerful, damage national economy and cause hardships to a large section of the population. Disasters are the results from the impact of hazard occurrence on man-made structure, components and systems, which are weak. Disasters cause substantive loss to the humanity and infrastructure. The economic, social and psychological dimensions of disasters adversely affect the socio-economic and political settings. Natural disasters, which are both sudden and powerful, damage national economy and cause hardships to a large section of the population.

Disasters may be **classified** as (i) Water and Climate related, (ii) Chemical, Industrial & Nuclear related, (iii) Geologically related, (iv) Accident related, and (v) Biologically related. Among the natural disasters, there is a wide variation of time scales with a few seconds for earthquakes to year or more for drought. Out of 35 states / union territories in the country, 27 are disaster prone. Though more or less the whole country is prone to disasters, Himalayan region due to its specific geophysical condition is highly vulnerable to various forms of natural disasters. The environmental degradation along with increasing human vulnerability has

exponentially increased the intensity and magnitude of natural disasters and thus has been the major factor for transforming natural hazard or a climatic extreme into a disaster in fragile domains like the Himalayas.

Disaster management in general comprises of **three main stages** i.e. pre-disaster, emergency and post-disaster stages. Disasters can also be looked as a cycle from the impact of the calamity to phases of emergency response, relief, mitigation, rehabilitation, reconstruction, preparedness, merging with development and leading to disaster reduction. Disaster reduction by sustainable mountain development has specific significance to the Himalayan region of India especially of Uttranchal suggesting linking disaster management with rural development with the need to shift focus from response and relief to mitigation and preparedness. Social scientists describe a political economy model of disasters with interrelationships of vulnerability at household level. The objectives of Panchayati Raj are decentralisation, development and social change.

The **social aspect** of the problem represents both socio-cultural and socio-economic condition of the society, which reflects their behaviour and attitudes towards disasters and disaster management practices being implemented. The misappropriation of relief fund, non-occupancy of houses constructed, lack of training and awareness of the people, increased vulnerability of the people, poor cooperation of people in relief or rescue operations, psychological shock, no link between need and relief supply, higher expectations of the people, etc. are the various problems which are directly or indirectly linked to the socio-cultural and socio-economic

aspect of disaster management. Local communities are the first responders to any disaster but lack of an effective agency creates communication gap among various stakeholders of disaster management system in the community, resulting into various problems and shortcomings.

In India the **traditional approach** adopted for disaster management had been reactive with activities mainly focused on disaster relief. This shift in approach has brought a significant positive change in the field of disaster management, which is clearly reflected in the Disaster Management Cycle. A **National framework** including major aspects of disaster management like institutional framework, disaster prevention strategies, early warning system, disaster mitigation and preparedness has been drawn up. As disaster management is basically the responsibility of the state government, the states have also been advised to set up Disaster Management Authorities. They are also to involve local community based organizations and NGOs in all stages of disaster management, including planning. The focal point for implementation of all plans and activities, including that of disaster management is the district administration. The PRIs in rural areas and the local municipal bodies in the urban regions will have definite role in all spheres of disaster management and the states are supposed to ensure an active involvement of these bodies.

The general physiography and socio-political system of a region forms a base for its planning and development. The region is thickly forested and rich in wild life. Deforestation, forest fires, landslides, gully and soil erosion, floods etc. are the major outcome of this environmental degradation in the area. The development

pattern ultimately works as a decisive factor for the vulnerability of a society or region to natural hazards. The rising population and its increasing need have put tremendous pressure on natural resources with forest being worst affected. The **forest fires** are also responsible for the degradation of forests. **Earthquake** is the most common natural hazard in the Nainital Region. Almost every year one or more major **landslides** affect this region. Along with natural causes, human induced activities are much more responsible for landslides. The region is also prone to flood and soil erosion.

The outcome of the present study reveals that the **problem of disaster management in the area** is multifarious. The social aspects of the problem represent both socio-cultural and socioeconomic condition of the society. These aspects also cover the traditional and cultural values of the community, strengthening the educational system and health facilities and rehabilitation of vulnerable group affected by disaster. The awareness through education is very strategic and significant aspect of disaster management. In the region, though state government has taken a lot of initiatives and a separate Disaster Management Ministry has already been established, yet a strong political will is still missing, due to which desired progress has not been achieved so far in the field of disaster management. To ensure long term and continuous planning in the region, a strong political-administrative will is must for effective disaster management. This requires a disaster management plan, which can convince the political leaders and bureaucracy at local and at national level.

The major drawback of the disaster management planning in the region is the lack of people's participation. The development and disaster management plans in most of the cases have remained as exclusive government program and in general people's involvement has been negligible. To overcome this problem, the only way is the **involvement of the Panchayat** at each stage of the development and other planning. The non-governmental organisations and voluntary agencies can play an important role in disaster management and can provide a strong band of committed volunteers with experience in managing the disasters. Local communities can plan and practice simple preparedness and mitigation measures. Community should prepare a contingency plan to safeguard lives, livelihoods and property.

Community based disaster preparedness brings people together to face any catastrophe. An ideal community based disaster management plan, along with safeguarding lives, livelihood and property, must also give due consideration to mitigation aspects. The role and responsibilities of the entire community i.e. the individuals, families, community leaders, village authorities, Panchayats, NGOs etc. are to be well defined in the plan for effective implementation and better results. Community based Disaster Management planning is for long term and short term activities that a community decides to follow to prevent loss of life, livelihood and property in case of an emergency and also mitigation measures aiming to reduce the vulnerability of the society and making it more resilience to resist the adverse impact of natural hazards. The major role of the Panchayats related to disaster management would be as a catalyst for development and implementation of specific disaster management plans at all levels.

The **planning process** of disaster management must be transparent and open with the inclusion of all stakeholders. A village plan must be linked to the zila and tehsil plans. The development component of the plans should be implemented whereas the elements of the plan to any contingency for disaster should be practised. The establishment of a community disaster task force would be the first step towards effective disaster management and the Panchayats must ensure this. In a disaster prone area, the community, if well aware of the preventive actions that are to be taken, can substantially reduce the damage caused by disasters. Development activities are a regular feature and should be linked with disaster mitigation.

The **major set back** in the current disaster management process is that the main issues of disaster management are not clearly conceptualised and, as a result, little emphasis is placed on constitutional strengthening. The socio-political aspects, covering the social, economical, political and environmental issues are deeply interlinked with the problem of disaster management. Another important issue emerging out of this study is the poor involvement of local communities and other CBOs in disaster management activities in the area. The focus of effective disaster management planning has to be from the community's point of view and not from that of policy maker or planners. Actions taken at the community level tend to cause a considerable reduction in the impacts of a disaster situation. Based on these aspects a Community Based Disaster Management Model has also been suggested.

The following **recommendations** have been made to evolve an effective disaster management system in the region:

- Hazard zonation mapping and vulnerability analysis
- Soclo-political aspects are to be given due place and consideration
- Focus on Community's needs
 - Capacity building of CBOs and PRIs
 - Changes in existing disaster management planning at state, district and other levels
- Role of NGOs in disaster management
- Developmental must have disaster management as integral component in all related planning.
- Community based Disaster Management Planning
Disaster management, being related to development, is useful for the optimum utilisation of the limited available resources. It leads to the importance of community participation in it. The political and administrative institutions of this area must seek an active role in the developmental activities to reduce the vulnerabilities of the community in terms of social, physical, psychological and economic aspects. Hence a participatory model for community based disaster management is a significant aspect.