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## **DISASTER MANAGEMENT: A CASE OF SANKATMOCHAN TEMPLE BLAST OF VARANASI**

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### **Abstract**

Disasters especially man made disasters as terrorist attacks are relatively new phenomenon in India and the country is experiencing its rapid growth and the consequent fall out. These attacks have various dimensions, one such is management of such Disasters by providing adequate and timely medical relief to the victims, making proper security arrangements at the site from additional and subsequent losses, controlling the news from spreading panic, and ensuring harmony in the larger society. A study has been conducted of the blast on one of the oldest and most worshiped temple of Sankat Mochan in Varanasi and consequent management of the disaster. The paper makes an attempt to appraise what has happened, find out about the mechanism for management of the disaster and its generalization for many of such disasters.

*Keywords: disaster management, disaster managers, disaster preparedness, disaster mitigation*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

A disaster is a serious disruption of the functioning of a society, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses, which exceeds the ability of the affected society to cope using only its own resources (Buchanan, Sally A. 1988). The consequence of disasters has been very severe and has not only been leading to loss of lives and physical assets but also have been making a deep psychological impact on the victims in

particular and masses in general (Cerullo, Steve and Murphy 1994).

Disasters happen all over the world, and often in areas where service infrastructure is minimal, with disaster response resources needing to be imported. Their magnitude requires the coordination of public and private sector service providers in ways, which require that planning and procedures be developed in preparation for the eventual, as well as the real.

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the selected references provides a perspective on the evolution of disaster research. Only recently, but rarely, are quantitative theory-testing studies reported. Much of the literature concerns case studies, or model descriptions, or auto-ethnographic expressions of personal reactions to lived-through disasters. Early efforts to systematize knowledge about disaster management begin with the sharing of one's personal experiences, actions, and feelings, thus informing the social work value of self-awareness in service delivery (Cunha, Martin 1992). Later efforts describe models of infrastructure development and the systematization of disaster management services. Still more recent research has focused on post-disaster symptomatology, recovery and resilience. Literature about disasters also reflects the global nature of disasters - which occur throughout the world and often involve citizens of several countries, as well as reflecting the increasing international awareness of the similarities of such experiences for people wherever they live.

## 3. TYPES OF DISASTER

There are two broad classifications of Disasters:

- 1) Natural Disasters
- 2) Man-made Disasters

### 3.1. Natural Disasters

The term "natural disasters" refers to those disasters that are triggered by natural phenomena. These phenomena (such as earthquakes, cyclones, floods, etc.) are known technically as natural hazards.

### 3.2. Man-Made Disasters

The term "man-made disasters" usually refers to disasters resulting from man-made hazards. Man-made disasters can be divided into three categories:

1) Terrorist Attacks, Armed Conflicts and Civil Strife: Disasters occurring from armed conflicts terrorist attacks and civil wars.

2) Technological Disasters. Technological disasters are usually a result of accidents or incidents occurring in the manufacture, transport or distribution of hazardous substances such as fuel, chemicals, explosives or nuclear materials. The catastrophic gas leak at the pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, in 1984 is an example that may be an indication of future industrial disasters.

3) Disasters in Human Settlements. The principal disaster of this type is urban fire.

### 3.3. Seven Causal Factors of Disasters

Common causal factors play a large role in determining the severity and magnitude of a disaster. The following causal factors are general in nature and not ranked. They may be more or less applicable to any given society and contributes to determine the vulnerability of a society to disasters.

1. Poverty. The single most important factor that increases the vulnerability of a people to disaster is poverty. An impoverished people who lack education, usually lack the economic and political clout to cope with the hazards of their surroundings.

2. Ungoverned population growth. Ungoverned population growth can lead to settlements in hazardous areas susceptible to diseases, competition for scarce resources

and civil strife.

3. Rapid urbanization and migration. Rapid population growth and migration are related to the major phenomenon of rapid urbanization. It is characterized by the rural poor or civilians in an area of conflict moving to metropolitan areas in search of economic opportunities and security. These massive numbers of urban poor increasingly find fewer options for availability of safe and desirable places to build their houses. Here again, competition for scarce resources, an inevitable consequence of rapid urbanization, can lead to man-made disasters.

4. Transitions in cultural practices. Many of the inevitable changes that occur in all societies lead to an increase in societies' vulnerability to disasters. Obviously, all societies are in a continual state of transition and change. These transitions are often extremely disruptive and uneven, leaving gaps in social coping mechanisms and technology. Compounding the problem is the formation of post disaster communities of survivors who find themselves without social support systems or networks to assist in relief and recovery. Traditional coping mechanisms may not exist in new settlements and the population becomes increasingly dependent on outside intervention for assistance. Conflicting cultural practices can also lead to civil conflict, and strife. Examples include events leading to violence triggered by religious intolerance.

5. Environmental degradation. Many disasters are either caused or exacerbated by environmental degradation. Deforestation leads to rapid rain runoff, which contributes to flooding. The destruction of mangrove swamps decreases the coastlines ability to resist tropical winds and storm surges. The

creation of drought conditions - and the relative severity and length of time the drought lasts - is mainly a natural phenomenon. Man-made contributions to drought conditions include: poor cropping patterns, overgrazing, the stripping of topsoil, poor conservation techniques, depletion of both the surface and subsurface water supply, and, to an extent, unchecked urbanization.

6. Lack of awareness and information. Disasters can also occur when people who are vulnerable, have not been educated on how to get out of the probable harm they may face or take protective measures before the occurrence of a disaster event. People may be unaware on where to turn for assistance in times of acute distress. Nevertheless, this point should not be taken as a justification for ignoring the coping mechanisms of the majority of people affected by disasters. In most disaster-prone societies, there is a wealth of understanding about disaster threats and responses. This understanding should be incorporated into external assistance initiatives and planning.

7. War and civil strife. War and civil strife are regarded as hazards or extreme events that produce disasters. War and civil strife often cause the displacement of the population. The causal factors of war and civil strife include competition for scarce resources, religious or ethnic intolerance, and ideological differences. Many of these are also byproducts of the preceding six causal factors of disasters.

#### **4. CONSEQUENCES AND EFFECTS**

The variety of possible situations generating displaced people makes generalizations difficult, but the following

may be experienced in varying degrees:

- Loss of means of livelihood.
- Communities becoming separated from services previously provided.
- Lack of shelter and household necessities.
- Communicable diseases and overcrowding.
- Additional burdens for women, especially as heads of households.
- Large numbers of unaccompanied children separated from family.
- Possible communication and logistics problems.
- Insecurity due to tensions and military activities.

## 5. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

"Disaster management" can be defined as the range of activities designed to maintain and control over disaster and emergency situations and to provide a framework for helping at-risk persons to avoid or recover from the impact of the disaster (Eulenberg, Niebuhr. 1993). Disaster management deals with situations that occur prior to, during, and after the disaster.

The University of Wisconsin defines Disaster Management Program as "protection" and intervention by governments, international organizations or private relief organizations to protect persons threatened by armed conflict. Intervention for refugees or displaced persons may include provision of sanctuary or a means of escape from conflict and emergency support to victims threatened by disease, starvation, and exposure to the environmental elements (Barton, Laurence. 1994).

### 5.1. Objectives of Disaster Management

The objectives of disaster management are:

- To reduce or avoid the human, physical and economic losses suffered by individuals, by the society, and by the country at large
- To reduce personal suffering
- To speed up recovery.
- When assisting refugees or displaced persons, a fourth objective is to provide protection to victims or persons whose lives or property are threatened by armed conflict, tribal animosity, religious persecutions etc.

### 5.2. Disaster Managers

The term "disaster manager" is applied to a person who has responsibility for planning and managing pre- and/or post-disaster activities (Fortson, Judith. 1992). Disaster managers may be found in a variety of positions in many different types of agencies. The most prominent disaster managers are the personnel in governmental disaster preparedness agencies, national emergency or relief agencies, national reconstruction agencies, and emergency service agencies, departments or ministries (Barton, Laurence. 1994).

### 5.3. Existing Disaster Managers in World

Intergovernmental organizations often have specialized disaster or emergency management agencies. For example,

1. The United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) provides a wide variety of emergency management services to member governments.
2. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and

3. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) provide specialized assistance to refugees.

4. UNICEF, which has an Emergency Unit;

5. The World Health Organization, which has a Director of Emergency Relief Operations; the Pan American Health Organization (a regional office of WHO), which has an Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Coordination office that focuses specifically on the America.

6. The World Food Program also has a special Office for Emergency Relief.

Some nongovernmental organizations, both at the local level and at the international level, are specifically organized to provide emergency services. The most prominent of these are:

1. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,

2. The League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and

3. The International Committee of the Red Cross.

There is also hundreds of other private relief organizations throughout the world organized to provide specialized assistance to victims. These agencies range in size and scope from small, local ambulance corps to large U.N. agencies with scores of staff and multimillion-dollar budgets.

## 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study attempts to study the disaster management in the context of the bomb blast took place in the cultural capital of India i.e. Varanasi also known as KASHI and in one of the most sacred temple of Hindus "Sankat Mochan Temple". The research methodology adopted is as follows:

### 6.1. Research objectives

1. To find out the losses resulted out of Sankat Mochan Temple blast?

2. To find out what could have been done to avoid such disasters?

3. To find out if there was any administrative preparedness to contain such disasters?

4. To find out how the disaster been approached?

5. To find out how the disaster could have been managed better?

6. To find out the impact this disaster left on the victims in particular and society in general?

### 6.2. Research Plan

The Research is exploratory in nature and tries to explore various practices adopted by the stakeholders and attempts to find the gap between what was done and what should have been done. To gather information, both primary and secondary sources were accessed.

1. Primary Data: Interview has been conducted with all the stakeholders of the disaster as:

i) Planners

ii) Civil Administration

iii) Police Officials

iv) Victims

v) Hospital Authorities

vi) Temple administration

vii) Media covering the incident

viii) Eye witness

ix) Experts from the field

For, a Questionnaire was prepared using drill down approach and response was obtained from the entire stakeholder mentioned above using Quota Sampling method. A certain percentage of the universe

of each category was interviewed.

2. Secondary Data: To supplement the work, secondary data was also used which includes published and non-published materials comprised of booklets, brochures, bulletins, hand notes, survey reports, research reports, project reports etc. The relevant information and statistics was gathered from the authentic secondary sources, particularly from the publications.

### **6.3. Scope of the Study**

1. The study emphasizes on the type of plan required for effective disaster management.

2. It aims to guide various stakeholders about the processes of Disaster Management on how to contain the affect of human created disasters.

### **6.4. Limitation of the study**

1. The study is constrained with the available information as most the officials were not ready to share the information because of its political sensitivity.

2. The study is confined to the incident of Sankat Mochan Temple Blast and in no way makes an attempt to generalize a disaster management system for all such terrorist incidents.

### **6.5. Brief History of the Incident**

There are few places on earth more important for India's hundreds of millions of Hindus than the city of Varanasi, which has been rocked by twin bomb blasts. Incidentally, this was the second attack on a religious place in U.P. in eight months after the July 5, 2005; strike on the Ramjanmbhoomi-Babri Masjid complex in

Ayodhya.

The Sankat Mochan temple, the site of one of March 7th 2006, Tuesday's explosions, is dedicated to the Hindu God Hanuman. This is a god who symbolizes devotion, intellect and unparallel power and protection to devotees. The temple is loved, respected and revered by millions of people as a place of religious worship and ritual. The faith transcends the limits of Hindu religion and is revered by people from various other religions of India as Sikhs, Buddhists, Jain and even muslims.

The explosion at the temple was horrific and shocking. The deadliest attack targeted the devotees at the Sankat Mochan temple, where thousands had assembled to pay obeisance to Lord Hanuman at around 6.05 pm on Tuesday 7th March 2006. When the bomb went off, an elderly couple was waiting to offer prayers for their newly married daughter and her husband. Besides, causing grievous injuries to nearly a hundred odd devotees, several were hurt in the stampede that was followed by the blast. The blast at the place of worship sent shock waves across the city of a population of over a million and to the whole nation.

The temple complex had been closed and media persons were prevented from entering in to and police force arrived within 10 minutes after the incident. The injured were rushed to the Sir SunderLal Hospital, Banaras Hindu University and other government hospitals in the vicinity. The blasts had a major impact as all markets were immediately shut and people could be seen running away to safe spots. According to sources as Telegraph Newspaper- the ambulatory services responded quite quickly between 6.30 & 6.40 pm. Since Sankat Mochan temple has its own police outpost, so the police also arrived immediately. The

Lanka police station, which is barely half a kilometer away from the complex, sealed the temple.

Inside, terrified devotees and priests were caught in a stampede for the nearest exit. With their faith both earthly and divine shaken, there was nobody to quell the panic. The blast drew the hoteliers of the neighboring Banaras Hindu University to the temple in large numbers, who helped in carrying the injured to the varsity's hospital.

Various political establishments including President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam condemned the blasts and appealed for calm and peace. He condoled the loss of lives and conveyed his sympathy to the families. The state government announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakhs to the kins of the deceased, Rs 1 lakhs to the critically injured and Rs 50, 000 to those suffering minor injuries.

Ironically, the blast occurred at a shrine dedicated to a deity whom devotees pray to help them avert "sankat" or danger in their lives.

## 7. FINDINGS

Based on the findings obtained from various stakeholders and people associated with the incident following conclusion have been drawn:

*1. District Administration:* The government is widely accused by almost all the aggrieved parties for not having played the role it should have had. Though the highlights of the district administration and the government actions are:

I) The Civil and Senior Police officials were transferred from the district. This was aimed at two things a) Contain the anger and anguish of the local people against such authorities. b) To punish them because few of them were actually not present on the day

of the incident when the incident happened and they failed in avoiding the incident from happening.

II) The police reached the site within 5-7 minutes and hence overtook the control of the site.

III) The police administration has also been successful in preventing many further blasts.

IV) The administration very quickly gave away the compensation to the victims, perhaps because of the politics involved and the issue was gaining political significance.

Common people accused the police and district administration of following issues:

I) The administration has not made proper security arrangement at the temple or any of the sensitive places. Though the Police says that the security arrangements are looked after by the Temple administration and the Temple administration has not been letting the district administration place its own security system.

II) The authorities were also accused of not recognizing the importance of common man initially and tried to cordon off the place. But when they realized that the task was too big to be handled by them only then they started taking help of people. The civil authorities said they tried to remove people from the site for their safety and prevent from any further damage.

III) The people involved in the task were regular administrative and police officials and policemen who were not adequately sensitive to the issue. They were handling the situation like any other crime site. There was an urgent need felt for specially trained staff.

*2. Temple administration:* Temple administration was also accused of not making proper security arrangements specially on the days where people's

gathering is too much. Following have been the conclusion of the findings generated:

I) Sankat Mochan Temple administration has been very old and has since long been taking the security arrangements on its own. There have been attempts made by the district administration to take over control of the temple or at least security arrangements, but temple administration has been successful in countering the coup. But the limited focus of temple administration was open on the day of blast because on the days of Tuesday and Saturday, there is exceptionally high crowd of devotees from all parts of the country and certainly what most people felt is that there was certainly not adequate security arrangement done by the temple administration to meet any contingency be it the bomb blast or anything other form of disaster.

II) Majority of the respondent felt the structure of the temple is adequately built and has enough exit points, which is very important from the point of view of disaster management. This eases the process of evacuating people from the site in case of any contingency.

III) People had serious doubts about temple administration's ability and resources in handling any disaster. There was only a munshi (Supervisor) along with the regular security staff who was entrusted with the responsibility of managing the affairs of the temple who by no standards can be termed as adequate.

IV) There was no standard disaster management plan lying with the temple administration hence whatever action was taken by them was random and was the result of individual discretion.

Comments: The temple administration was certainly not ready with management of

any type of disaster occurring in the temple premise. People could not anticipate the threat perception though this responsibility lies with the government machinery. But the temple administration could certainly be held responsible for security lapses and for not making adequate security arrangement when more than 10,000 people are being collected at a place specially when there is war of terrorism going on against the country.

3. *Hospital Administration:* As soon as the incident happened, the hospital rushed to the site with all the safety equipments. Fortunately, two of best of hospitals were located at a distance of a Kilometer. Both the hospitals were having good infrastructure. These hospitals were Sir Sunder Lal Hospital, BHU and Heritage Hospital.

- Ist patient reported within 7 Minutes of the blast in Heritage Hospital.

- The ICU & Ambulances with ventilator were ready with the hospital to cope with any such kind of disasters in the city. The hospital claims that they have a team, which can mobilize its resources within 10 –20 minutes in the city.

- Similarly in Sir Sunder Lal Hospital, BHU, Jr. Nurses and everybody worked and reached the hospital within 10 min after the blast, and within 20 min they got the 1st patient. The hospital was also successful in collecting volunteers who donated 500 bottles of blood.

Comments:

I) The Role of the hospitals was highly appreciated by all the stakeholders of the incident. Majority believed that the hospitals did have a disaster management plan which made them successful in their contribution to the disaster management.

II) The time of reaching the health services at the incident site was quite appropriate.



III) Majority of the respondents were also satisfied by the medical support provided by the hospitals.

IV) Despite the fact that the hospitals were not sure of about the payments of their treatment, but they made available best of the treatment and care to the disaster victims. Though large portion of the payments were made by the government support.

4. *Common People:* The most commendable contribution was by the common people of Varanasi who contributed their best in helping the victims, taking them to hospitals, providing them first aid, evacuating them from the site and containing the panic. It is this spirit of Kashi that despite enormous sensitivity involved, no unwanted event occurred in the city. People voluntarily came forward to help the victims in whatever capacity they were. The auto rickshaw drivers left their passengers and voluntarily came forward to take the victims to hospitals without charging a single penny for the services. Students started coming to the incident site and to the hospitals with a placard of "CAN I BE OF ANY HELP". People started rushing in to hospitals to voluntarily donate blood. The rush was so huge that carrying those bloods became a problem for the hospitals. People from a community, to show solidarity with the victims, also came forward to donate blood.

The efforts of common people were not only evident in helping victims and the authorities but also in not letting the panic spread in the city and stopping the event from becoming a cause of subsequent communal tensions or riots.

More than the arrangements by the local administration, it is the spirit of Kashi that helped administration contain the incident and maintain the communal harmony in the city.

5. Media: Role played by media in this entire episode can be hugely applauded. They did not let the panic spread across the city and also kept on emphasizing on the positive aspects of the disaster management. The sensitivity with which the whole incident was covered was appreciated by all sections of the society. Had the event not been covered with enormous care, this would have led to havoc and may have resulted into many more unpleasant stories.

## 8. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. District administration should have a separate disaster management cell with trained personnel. The present structure is highly inadequate and insufficient. Additional District Magistrate (Finance) is the present in charge of the disaster management cell. This position is already stuck with huge administrative responsibility. The present structure is designed keeping in mind natural disasters as floods and droughts. This cell primarily confines its activity to distribution of compensation, which should not be the very basic objective of disaster management. The cell rarely meets and formulates strategy to counter contingency.

2. To make this disaster management cell more effective and efficient, this should have representation from all sections of the stakeholders as Civil administration, Police administration, Intelligence, Hospital administration, Fire brigade, meteorological department, local chapter of Red Cross, Civil defense, NGOs working in the area of disaster management, experts in the area of disaster management and above all common people. Authorities should update the list of

civil defense volunteers or NGOs in their district.

3. To ensure proper coordination among various functionaries, regular simulative exercises and practice sessions should be arranged. It can also be proposed to institutionalize the training initiatives related to the Incident Management System in the country and towns.

4. A proper and comprehensive training module needs to be prepared for the people who are entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out disaster management.

The training program should have following modules:

i) Disaster Preparedness: This should include disaster preparedness planning, action plans and procedures, training issues and models, preparedness roles and responsibilities, public awareness and warnings, as well as providing preparedness action plans and checklists.

Such preparation is necessary at all levels so that the prepared and trained people should reach the site within no time and could contribute in minimizing the losses.

ii) Damage and Needs Assessment: Second step should include analyzing the damage caused by the incident. Also, there should be training of a separate mechanism to assess the requirements of the disaster site. For, an exclusive assessment teams, survey methods, tools, and techniques needs to be devised by the authorities and people involved must be trained. There should be procedures for handling emergency supplies and services after the disaster.

iii) Disaster Response: At this stage, the authorities should emphasize at disaster-response planning, roles and responsibilities, initial emergency operations, emergency operations by sector, emergency operations support and management, and recovery and

rehabilitation.

iv) Disaster and Development: There should be proper learning about different economic impacts of disasters caused by different hazards, the methods and tools for analyzing potential investment decisions in hazard-prone areas and the mitigation benefits of alternative development strategies. An attempt should also be made to explore environmental management, sustainable development and the roles of communities, governments, and non-governmental organizations in promoting development in the context of disasters.

5. In order to involve common people and increase greater people participation in activities of disaster management, various NGOs, social and religious organisations should be trained by the cell who in turn may spread this among the members of their groups. Disaster management specialists can also be found among common people who are specifically oriented towards disaster management or relief management. People having already worked with agriculture, forestry, public health, defense, and public works, may be assigned with specific roles keeping in mind their professional experience used in disaster management or mitigation roles. It is common, for instance, to find a public works department employee who has handled assignments for flood control activities. To be effective, that person must have expertise not only in flood fighting but also inland use, settlement planning and evacuation.

6. Proper intelligence inputs should be shared with the cell so that they may prepare themselves with the place and kind of disaster they may have to manage. This may also help them in preparing for the required resources and the infrastructure.

7. The Education Department should

educate students about Disaster Management in some form in their schools to inculcate awareness among the students and also to prepare them face any such contingency. This on one hand will help create a generation cope with such situations and on the other enable and equip them to help others.

8. Public Relations Department should be asked to carry out campaigns for creating an awakening among the people on disaster management.

9. Last but not the least, the policymakers should adopt the principle of "Prevention is always better than cure". So the governments should try and avoid happening of such events. Government needs to be proactive in its approach and should refrain from beating around the bush once the mishap has taken place. Proper cause of such incidents should be tried to find out and attempt should be made to resolve the basic reason for occurrence of this.

## **УПРАВЉАЊЕ НЕРЕЋАМА: СЛУЧАЈ РУШЕЊА САНКАТМОХАН ХРАМА У ВАРНАСИ**

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### **Абстракт**

Несреће а посебно изазване људским деловањем, као што су терористички напади су релативно нов феномен у Индији и земља доживљава брз раст и последице ове појаве. Ови напади имају различите димензије, једна од њих је управљање оваквим несрећама обезбеђењем адекватне и правовремене медицинске помоћи жртвама, стварањем одговарајућих система обезбеђења на месту несреће да би се спречили додатни губици, контрола медија како би се спречило ширење панике, и обезбеђење хармоније у ширем друштвеном оквиру. Студија се односи на рушење једног од најстаријих и најцењенијих храмова (Санкат Мохан) у Баранаси и управљање овом незгодом. Овај рад жели да истакне шта се догодило, потрежи механизме за правилно управљање несрећом и њихову генерализацију за бројне друге несреће.

*Кључне речи: Управљање несрећом, менаџери несрећа, спремност за несрећу*

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