

"Natural Disasters Turning into Man-Made Disasters"

How prepared are we to face these disasters?

Nature has always been calm and balanced. However, it is human actions that are provoking it. In the past, we used to understand natural disasters as those caused by nature itself. But now, that perception has changed. The term "natural disaster" has started to imply a "man-made disaster."

When nature unleashes its fury, we usually refer to it as a natural disaster. But today, it's human actions that are driving nature to this point. As a response to these human actions, nature is reacting in the form of disasters.

Whether it's deforestation, industrial pollution, or unsustainable urbanization, human activities are destabilizing the natural environment. What were once purely natural events are now exacerbated or triggered by human interference, turning them into more severe and frequent disasters.

For nearly a hundred years, there have been significant changes in the nature of natural disasters. Particularly in the past decade, human influence behind these disasters has become increasingly evident. This is why the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction has gained unprecedented importance. Every year, October 13 is observed as this day, and it has been celebrated in various countries since 1989. In India, and specifically in Telangana, awareness programs are conducted on this day to promote disaster preparedness. However, the unfortunate reality is that all this attention and activity is often limited to just that one day, which is a grave tragedy.

Natural disasters can occur in any part of the world. Telangana doesn't have a sea...doesn't have big mountains...doesn't have a severe earthquake zone...even rains also falling well...doesn't we take for granted what calamities will come to us. Disasters have increased in Telangana as well. Not only that...great changes are taking place in their intensity and the reasons behind their formation. That has now become a matter of concern for the entire Telangana community.

In Telangana, several incidents of road accidents have been reported. When it comes to floods... even for a small rain fall, streams, rivulets and rivers are overflowing more than ever. The calmly flowing Godavari is looking for new avenues. The raging Krishna river is rushing into the villages.. Until then, the streams and bends that no one knew much about are suddenly appearing in the headlines of the flag. The flood situation in the city is very bad. If rain drips, it's a puddle. Not just Hyderabad, roads in many other cities of Telangana are turning into canals. Forest fires are on the rise. It's not just because of nature, it's human nature. That's why the term natural disasters has become outdated. Man is behind every disaster.

Another important disaster facing Telangana is drought. If there is a flood, the effect will be very visible. People and governments will come forward to help the flood victims. This is not the case with drought. It bites people without being seen. Its effect is not limited to one or two days. At least one year is all. Even so, the aid given to the drought victims remains nominal. Usually, if there is a drought... they try to blame nature by saying that the rains did not fall properly. Those days are gone. Drought is also man made. What if it doesn't rain in a season? Have we stored the rainwater from the previous rainy days?

There is a lot to mention about the storm, If there is a storm somewhere, the effect is felt in Telangana. Between October and December, the effect of cyclones on Telangana is high. A cyclone forming somewhere in the Bay of Bengal is causing Kumbhavrishti (High Rainfall) in Telangana. In many cases we are losing crops. Crop insurance coverage remains limited. We are not able to take measures to save the crop.

And when it comes to hailstorms...the problem of these has been increasing since a few years. Summer is truly a scorching season. Once there were hailstorms only three days in a year. Now the number of such days has increased to 10. The employment of daily labourers is affected. Even the regular employees under the fans are not able to work properly. If you turn on the AC to keep it cool...again it causes the sun to raise more.

Not only these...many other types of calamities are now affecting the entire country including Telangana. Disasters are day by day increasing from Kerala to Kashmir...from Gujarat to Northeast India. Their effects are also increasing severely. If we take the case of Telangana, recently on August 3, thousands of trees fell suddenly in Tadwai-Medaram forests of Mulugu district. So far no such incident has happened in Telangana. Perhaps this incident is a warning for us. There is a possibility that more such incidents will take place.

Temperatures in Telangana may gradually rise due to climate change. If it affects the crops, the yields are likely to decrease. Crops are more susceptible to pests. Cultivation costs will increase. Not only that...the availability of water will also decrease. People's health can be greatly affected. There can be huge fluctuations in rainfall. Heavy rains and droughts will become common. Climate change has a significant impact on the forest animals and trees of the region. Biodiversity is threatened.

Recently in the country, special mechanisms have also started to be set up to deal with disasters in various states. The Telangana government has already formulated a comprehensive plan to respond to disasters, take recovery measures and reduce losses. Disaster Management Authority has also been set up at the state level.

The government also has the technology to issue timely warnings to people in case of floods and storms. But there is a need to involve the common people in disaster management. People should be trained to that extent. Children should be made aware of disaster management as a curriculum. Conduct workshops and mock drills. NGOs and community organizations should be made partners. Volunteer networks should be established to provide quick help and support. Emergency response teams should be formed. Funds should be allocated for such things. After a disaster there should be an adequate plan for the restoration of various services including housing, health care and infrastructure. If not...all these should be implemented in a specific plan and supervision that can be completed within a specified period.

Modern India has a long history of disaster preparedness. In 1999 itself, high powered committees were formed at national, state and district levels. The National Level High Powered Committee has identified 31 types of disasters. These are classified into five types. Early detection, prevention and management of disasters require huge funds. There should be special departments and staff to do these tasks. This is where the government's negligence seems to have struck. The situation is similar in all the states including Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The recent floods in Vijayawada and Khammam made this clear. And the less said about urban flooding, the better. In Chennai, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad, canals flow on the roads even with small rains.

Revenue department plays a vital role in disaster management. Absence of VRA and VRO at village level in Telangana has brought new problems. There is no possibility to know the field level information immediately. Identification of victims, evacuation and assistance have all become a problem. On the other hand, even if modern technologies are available...there is no record of their widespread use. From time to time the problem seems to be separated from other factors. Disaster remains like a one-day problem, which burdens people for many more days. Some people's lives are turned upside down.

Governments know what the problem is. Also know the solutions. However, there is a lag in solving the problem. Funds available for public attraction schemes are not available for disaster management. On the other hand, the behavior of the people is also the same. They are thinking of disasters as temporary problems, they are failing to understand that disasters are caused by their own actions. Whether governments help or not, people have to protect themselves from calamities. Disaster management should also be made a part of our daily affairs, like festivals and functions. Let's see a small example...The village deities are worshiped to protect the embankment of the pond. Without taking measures to protect the dam... how we can keep the burden on her? That is why environmental protection should be part of our culture. We who respect pond, tree, hill and rivers should also come forward to protect them.

Environmental education and disaster management have been part of education since almost 1950s and 40s. But they remain like secondary subjects, subjects of less priority. Now the time has come to convert the subjects into main subjects. Environmental protection should be done from the individual level. Disaster management should start from home level. There is no doubt that governments play a vital role in disaster management. If not...people need to be conscious to protect themselves in cases where governments are also failing. Any calamity should be prepared to face it timely. Adequate precautions should be taken in advance to avoid such calamities.

For the last sixty years, we have been seeing state governments requesting the Center for help after disasters, Central teams visiting, by that time the severity of the damage appearing to be reduced, and less central funds being received. On the other hand, nationally as well, the needs of the central government are increasing, the defense costs are increasing beyond the estimate, natural disasters are increasing, and all the state governments are also dependent on the center, so the center is not able to help much.

In this context, the state governments are able to manage the disaster on their own due to being prepared before disasters. Keeping this in mind, the Telangana government has recently decided to set up the Telangana Disaster Response Force. Its ambition is to strengthen the state's capacity to respond more effectively to disaster emergencies. The proposal came to light in the context of recent flood relief efforts. In this direction, HYDRA is formed. The Telangana government also intends to train 8 police battalions as part of the National Disaster Response Force. It also decided to set up a command control center to deal with disaster emergencies. Now the situation is not like before. Human-induced natural disasters are on the rise. There are reports that the effect of two or three cyclones will also greet Telangana in the coming days. There are already specific recommendations for dealing with any natural disaster. What is needed now is their implementation. It is in this regard that the various state governments have to show their sincerity.

National Disaster Management Authority has provided good services in various states like Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Meghalaya. Similarly, various states need to continue their activities at this level. The Disaster Management (Amendment Bill) brought by the central government has also increased the responsibility of the states on disaster management. According to this bill, every state will have to set up State Disaster Response Forces. It has given more clarity regarding various committees, their constitutionality, powers, responsibilities, duties, funds, who should act etc. in the government in regards to disaster management. This kind of clarity helps in taking appropriate action in time. The steps being taken by the Telangana government are also in the same line with that. The concept of "our state and our people" should be in leaders and officials. People should also contribute with their own awareness. Only then we can effectively face any calamity.

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