Chapter II

CRISIS AND CRISIS ADMINISTRATION

The success or failure of any government largely depends on its administration. The responsibility of administration increases in the crisis situations and it is more in a democratic government. The capacity and alertness with which a Government tackles a crisis situation indicates to a great extent, its efficiency and effectiveness. It has been seen that Governments have lost their positions as they could not meet with the crisis situations effectively.

Every country faces crisis situations during its history and development. It is more true in respect of India which is almost a semi-continent having diverse geographical and climatical conditions. In this vast country, on the one hand, there are areas which have heavy rainfall and on the other there are areas which have received very little rainfall. In one region of the country, there may be floods while in other regions, there may be drought-like situation. Sometimes there may be a grave law and order problem in one part of the country, whereas the other parts may be comparatively peaceful.
Definition and nature of the crisis:

Crisis may be defined as an extraordinary situation which is not confronted by the nation in its routine. A crisis may be the result of natural phenomenon like excessive rainfall, cyclone or drought or it may be due to conflicts and agitations created by human beings resulting into racial or communal riots.¹

A crisis may be a local one or widespread one involving large areas. For example, a riot in a village is a crisis at a local level, a communal riot involving many districts is of a regional magnitude while 'Emergency' situation created by war may be called as a 'national crisis'. Thus the crisis situation can occur at a micro level, meso level or a macro level, depending upon the nature and extent of the area and human population it involves.² However, one factor is constant that in all the three types of crisis is every kind of crisis brings in its wake untold misery, devastation and loss of human lives and properties. It also leaves behind unpalatable or difficult task for the Government and administration, which have to try their utmost to alleviate the misery of people.³

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3. Ibid., p. 51.
Another aspect of crisis is that sometimes, it is predictable to some extent and some time, it is sudden leaving little scope of advance preparedness. A drought like situation, which is a natural consequence of failure of the monsoon can be predicted, but occurrence of an earthquake cannot be predicted. In the first case, the administration gets time to meet a crisis and remove sufferings of the people before it becomes too harsh. But in the later case, the administration has no option but to initiate rearguard action only after the crisis has passed off. However, the basic thrust of administration in all the situation is the same.\textsuperscript{4}

Thus, crisis can be stated as an extraordinary and abnormal situation which causes great sufferings to the people. It signifies those events and operations which do not normally occur during the routine life of a Society. Nevertheless crisis do occur with varying degree of frequency and intensity in all Societies and tests the efficiency of their administrative systems. It dislocates the normal life of the community throwing it into disarray due to loss of human life or property or due to loss of

income or due to migration of the population etc. Sometimes due to unpredictability of a crisis the place and time of occurrence is difficult to anticipate and so is its magnitude. A crisis situation may comprise of many variables of uncertain nature which even in this hi-tech electronic age can be beyond human comprehension. This is the reason that there has been a growing awareness about the need to focus serious attention on crisis management.\(^5\)

'Crisis' is defined as a turning point in the course of anything, decisive or crucial time, stage or event, a time of great danger or trouble whose outcome decides whether possible bad consequences will follow.\(^6\)

The term crisis must not be equated with 'emergency' although according to dictionary they/are synonymous. This is because in India, the word 'emergency' has acquired a strictly constitutional connotation from which no departure, however, symbolic or slight is permissible.

Part XVIII of the Indian Constitution running from Article 352 to 360 incorporates the emergency provisions and delineates three kinds of emergency, viz.

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5. Raman S. and Jaysankar V., Director, NITIE, Prof. NITIE, A System Approach to Disaster Management, Bombay, p. 4. (Training Programme on Crisis Management (monograph) 4th August to 8th August 1986 - MIDA Poona).

1. emergency created by external aggression or/
   internal disturbance;
2. emergency on account of failure of constitutional
   machinery in the State and
3. financial emergency.  

In most situations of crisis, the position is very
complex and bristles with many difficulties. But in course
of time, administration has been developing new sensitivity,
techniques and sophistication to meet the various types of
crisis, whether anticipated to a certain extent or otherwise.
Slowly, 'crisis administration' is acquiring an identity
of its own. Still, it is treated almost as synonymous
with 'the administrative response to emergency' since a
crisis makes quantitative as well as qualitative trans-
formation in the working environment.  

The word 'crisis' may be defined like a point in the
progress of a disease when a change takes place which is
decisive of recovery or death; also any marked or sudden
change of symptoms etc. It is a turning point in the
progress of anything, also, a state of affairs in which
a decisive change for better or worse is imminent.  

7. Pylee M.V., India's Constitution, Asia Publishing House,
   1962, pp. 302.
In other words, crisis or disaster could be defined as "An occurrence of such magnitude as to create a situation in which the normal patterns of life within a community are suddenly disrupted and people are plunged into helplessness and suffering and as a result, may urgently need food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, protection and other life sustaining requirements."\(^\text{10}\)

A crisis situation calls for a good understanding between the people and the administration. There is also a temporal dimension to the management of crisis situation.\(^\text{11}\) In some cases, the crisis itself may pass off quickly while the administration has to settle down to bring the situation to normalcy. There are some other crisis which lasts for longer period of time. It often dislocates the normal life of the community and creates a strain on the administration putting it to test. It calls for the best in man, to reduce human sufferings. Administrators have to act quickly overlooking the traditional and routine methods of management. It also indicates the nature of preparedness called for to meet such situations.


"Crisis means an emergency or a "time of danger" particularly when viewed in relations to fires, house collapses, natural calamities etc. A crisis poses an immediate danger to life and loss to property - two precious possessions of human beings. The disturbing characteristics of a crisis are such that its time and place of occurrence are difficult to anticipate and its magnitude is left to one's own imagination. A crisis strikes with amazing speed and surprise unlike a problem which spreads over a period of time. In the larger interests of the citizens and the country, effective dealings with a crisis requires no delay. It is a complex situation comprising of many variables of uncertain nature. The actual and potential consequences of crisis are so serious that much greater emphasis has to be given and is being given in all the countries to crisis management.¹²

Administrative structure and crisis:

The normal time structure of administration at different levels consists mainly of a secretariat composed of a number of departments most of which are charged with line functions and some like the Finance Department, and

the General Administration Department with the staff functions. There is the Secretaries' Committee to sort out inter-departmental matters. The role of the Chief Secretary in achieving coordination deserves special mention.\footnote{13}

For the purpose of Revenue and General Administration, there is a hierarchy of special units consisting of the Division, District, Sub-Division, Taluka, Circle and Village. At the village level, the Talathi is the base line functionary of Government. At successive levels, the Circle Officer, the Tahsildar, the Sub-Divisional Officer, the Collector and the Divisional Commissioner lookafter their respective jurisdictions.\footnote{14}

Most of the departments in district administration have a link with their corresponding department at the State level. As planning in each segment is necessary and has to be coordinated for the state as a whole and as the Departments have to play important role in this process, the links are close between the State directorates and the departments at District level. One consequences of these close links is that the Collectorate system has

\footnote{14. Ibid., p. 29.}
fallen open to the influence of the State level Directorates. As a result of vertical control by Departments that are beyond the immediate command of the Collector, the task of the Collector has become so delicate that in several ways, it is very difficult to manage.\textsuperscript{15}

In the District, the Collector alongwith the hierarchy of revenue officials constitutes the focal authority. The Secretariat treats the office of the Collector as the point through which information about field administration should pass to the State headquarters and vice-versa. It tends to lend support to the coordinating role of the Collector. The chain of command and the normal lines of communication and control in case of many departments are vertically moving from the Secretariat Department through the circle and the division to the lowest territorial unit, the sub-division. The Collector is not ordinarily involved in any way with the structure and operations of this set up. Of-course, he gets in touch with the district heads of departments at the meetings which he calls periodically. Similarly, the Divisional Commissioner holds

\textsuperscript{15} Dayal I. Mathur K., Bhattacharya Mohit, \textit{District Administration}, A survey for Reorganisation, New Delhi, 1976, p. 19.
periodic meetings of the regional heads of departments to discuss matters of common interests. He advises the Collectors under him, coordinates their activities and exercises general supervision. Between the region and the State headquarters, he serves as the connecting link, because he has to report periodically to the Government.  

From experience, it is known that in the event of a natural disaster, the prevention, rescue and relief operations are essentially managed by State. In other words, a natural disaster predominantly involves State Government Departments, and in such operations often assistance is taken wherever necessary by other organisations. An examination of the flood and drought manuals, prepared by Maharashtra Government showed that four State Departments were the principal Surveyors of the State action in the case of a natural disaster. These four departments were a) the Public Works Department (P.W.D.), b) the Irrigation Department, c) the Police and d) the Revenue Department and Community Development Department as also the Magistracy. The last three departments because they are under the control of the same person, viz., the Collector and District Magistrate, were taken as one Department. Because natural

disaster are often geographically localised events, action to cope with them are consequently carried out at the District level.\textsuperscript{17}

A number of research studies on disaster and crisis have shown that there are many distinctions between different calamities. To quote E.Fritz, Disasters differ in many ways, it differs in the source of origin (natural forces or human actions), in the nature of the precipitating agent (earthquake, explosion etc.) in their degree of predictability, probability and controllability, in their speed of onset (instantaneous, progressive), in their scope (focalised differed) and in their destructive efforts on people (physical objects and natural environment).\textsuperscript{18} In the same manner the disaster occurs in many forms also. Some time it last only a few minutes during which the incredible violence of a natural phenomenon leaves behind a devastated landscape, others extend over many years in which marks of violence may be hard to discern at any particular moment. A natural disaster is a condition of

\textsuperscript{17} Chaturvedi Anil, 'District Administration!' Sage Publications India Pvt.Ltd. published in 1988, pp. 16-17.

\textsuperscript{18} Gangrade, K.D. and Dhadda S., Challenge and Response - A Study of Famines in India, Delhi, 1973, p. 12.
the environment. The term 'disaster' can refer to the physical consequences of the phenomenon, such as property, damage, injuries and deaths, or to the longer terms social and economic consequences stemming from the event. A disaster as defined by Ritchie "is a situation resulting from natural or man made catastrophe, other than war, demanding total integration and management of the rescue and life support systems (medical aid, water, food and shelter) which are available to the persons responsible for the stricken area, together with the communications and transportation resources required to support the relief operations."

The third world countries suffer most and the nearest of these most severely. Disaster preparedness and effective environmental management are clearly essential requirements, providing the most cost effective means of mitigating the effect of the inevitable disasters threatening the people of the Third World, far into the next century.

Although a crisis is ordinarily a sudden development and it does not necessarily find the administration completely unprepared and destitute of any knowledge of


21. Ibid., p. 3.
how to react to such a state of affairs. In most situation of crisis, the position is very complex and bristles with many difficulties. During the last two decades, the international community has become increasingly alarmed by natural disaster which have tended to be more destructive as they affect ever larger concentrations of populations.

There has thus been a growing awareness by Government of the need to focus more attention on crisis management, and a recognition of the fact that crisis management should be an integral part of the national development policy although the response of the international community has been focussed primarily on relief action. Slowly, 'crisis' administration is acquiring an identity of its own.

In many of the States, there is a well defined machinery to administer and manage the crisis. At the top level, a Secretary to the State Government is responsible for monitoring the impact of a 'crisis' to keep the Government informed of the development and to implement various measures at the field level. Depending on the nature of the crisis, there is a Committee of Secretaries, headed by the Chief Secretary which regularly deliberates over the measure and advises the Government and the Cabinet

headed by the Chief Minister. The nodal officers is called Secretary (Relief) and Commissioner (Relief) or Relief Commissioner, who generally belongs to the I.A.S. cadre.

Crisis and Administrative Steps:

At the district level, the relief team is headed by the District Collector all over the country, who is normally a middle level I.A.S. personnel. During the time of crisis, he channelises the relief assistance granted by the Government through the various Government Departments. He commands over the officers and staff belonging to the various departments at the district level and assigns responsibilities to them, depending upon the necessity. He is also responsible for reporting to the Government about occurrence of a crisis, the developments in the situation and measures to contain it. He also monitors all the tasks assigned by the Government and in case of erring officials, reports to the Government for disciplinary action. In fact, the Collector symbolises the full authority of the Government during the period of crisis both natural or manmade. The Scarcity Manual leaves no room for confusion about the hegemony of the Collector in district relief operations also.23

Normally, before the onset of monsoon, in June or July, the Collector calls a preparatory meeting of the Heads of the various Departments of Government and prepares an advance 'disaster plan' to be implemented in case of floods. It includes the identification of low lying areas in a district from where the local people are to be evacuated in case of excessive rainfall. The Meteorological Bureau keeps the Collector informed about the impending high rainfall, who in turn alters the taluka level agencies and gears the district administration to face the crisis. The plan also incorporates the location of the Government buildings, schools etc. where the evacuees can be shifted, if needed. The Irrigation Department keeps ready the boats etc. to be deployed whereas the Health Department keeps ready the stocks of medicines and disinfectants to clean water. In case, a crisis strikes, depending on the magnitude, a 'Scarcity Cell' is opened in the Collectorate which works round the clock collecting, obtaining, passing the information of the crisis and monitoring the steps taken in the affected areas.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 41.
As soon as the crisis occurs, a Relief Committee is formed under the Chairmanship of the District Collector which meets every week regularly till the crisis is over. It deliberates over the various aspects connected with the crisis, and proposes the remedial measures according to the existing guidelines and infrastructure. The Collector, on the basis of the proposals of above Committee, reports to the Government seeking financial assistance among other things. The Collector assigns the tasks to the various Government Departments on the basis of deliberations of the meetings and calls specific reports from them, if needed. Close Coordination between various Government Department/agencies and Voluntary Organisations as attempted and has to be achieved. The S.D.O. is required to play the role of Coordinator and leader of the team at the Sub-Divisional level.²⁵

At taluka level, the Tahsildar of a taluka is incharge of the relief machinery. He performs more or less the same responsibilities as the Collector at the District level, but in a miniature form. The advance disaster plan made at the District level also includes reports from

Tehsildar who in turn, consult the local non-officials and officials. In most cases, the efficiency of relief administration ultimately means the efficiency of a Tehsildar and taluka level agencies. In case of impending high rainfall, about which he is informed by the Meteorological Bureau or by the Collector, he sends messages to the local people in the affected areas and supervises the evacuation etc. He is responsible for shifting the local people from the affected areas to safer places and arrange for their food till the warning signals are over. For the purposes of relief, the Tehsildar also utilises the resources available with the taluka level Government Department in the same fashion as the Collector does at the district level. At times, a Taluka level Committee is formed which includes local MLA and non-officials etc. to aid and supervise the relief measures. 26

In case of widespread disaster in a State, a 'Control Room' is opened at the Secretariat level in the Capital, which monitors the situation and the relief work round the clock. The Control Room reports to the Secretary to the Government, who in turn informs the Chief Secretary as well as the Chief Minister. These two functionaries in turn

in touch with the Government of India for the purposes of 'Central Relief Assistance'. The Central Government assesses the requirement of financial assistance by sending a 'Central Team' to the affected areas and after receipt of detailed information of the damage and loss to the private and public properties, releases the amount of 'Central Assistance'. However, the quantum of 'Central Assistance' is not based on a set formula and various consideration other than administrative are allowed for deciding the assistance. 27

The Commissioner of a Division and the Sub-Divisional Officer act as supervisory officer over the relief measures at the level of division and sub-division respectively. They are intermediaries between Government and Collector and Collector and Tehsildar. They are expected to tour in the district in the affected areas and guide the relief measures. 28

The Crisis Administration represents a purposive synthesis of resources and coordinated functioning

of administration. It highlights the problem of area administration and the pulls of centralisation and decentralisation. It involves some of the basic principles of administration like motivation, communication, group functioning, delegation of powers and determination of clear lines of authority.

The experience has shown that administration in India is at its best in an emergency, more so is the district administration. The 'crisis administration' has to act quickly and efficiently, overlooking all the traditional and routine methods of management. The vitality and worth of public administration is tested at the time of a crisis during which the decisions are mostly taken on the spot, across the table or on the telephone.²⁹

In all the crisis situations, the decentralisation of authority to the field level is extraordinarily high in comparison to normal situation. It enables and motivates the field officials to act quickly to provide relief and comfort to the citizens. 'Master Plans' if they have already been prepared, are quickly put into operation.³⁰

³⁰. In many States, 'Master Plans' to face the anticipated crisis situations are prepared and kept ready. They can be quickly implemented if the implementing officials are given sufficient authority and flexibility.
Flexibility in Administration:

Finance is a major constraint in normal Indian administration. But one can tackle this problem efficiently and in time, when a crisis situation occurs. Some of the routine obstacles and constraints such as the 'sanctions', 'approvals' and the innumerable 'controls' through accounts and adults are temporarily managed more flexibly to a great extent, in the times of crisis. Even the political support to administrative programmes, which is very important, is usually available in times of crisis. For example, the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister takes special interest in crisis programmes, to minimise the sufferings of the people. The non-officials generally cooperate well with the crisis administration in implementing the scarcity programmes. An atmosphere of urgency is created and everybody is psychologically satisfied with a sense of participation in the decision making process. 31

It is observed that public administration does not generally act alone in times of crisis. The support of different voluntary organisations is usually available in

dealing with a crisis. Even the individual citizens come forward in large numbers, to help the administration. Similarly, while tackling the relief operations, certain obstructions also come in the way of administration, through the actions of some spurious organisation. For example some time bogus organisations start collection of donations in the name of 'relief'.

In times of crisis, the field officials belonging to the various Departments come together and with mutual consultation and co-operation, arrive at unanimous decisions. This type of situation helps in improving the morale of the employees, create confidence, encourage on the spot decisions and develop administrative leadership. Even a crisis situation often appeals to the patriotic instincts of the administrators and others. The satisfaction, they get out of it that they are doing something purposeful, constructive and worthwhile for the nation is tremendous. The Government officers also act with full responsibility round the clock at the time of crisis. The enormous human suffering that is witnessed during the crisis, success- fully appeals to human sentiments of the administrators and others. The qualities of men and traditions of administrators

come to the forefront at such times. Even the vitality and worth of public administration is tested at the time of a crisis.\textsuperscript{33} To do so efficiently depends largely upon a thorough understanding of the nature and consequences of all possible catastrophic events and particularly their impact on the structure of human settlement and the lift of inhabitants.\textsuperscript{34} If certain features of crisis administration are discovered to be very functional, these ought to be formally adopted by modifying the existing rules or invoking the normal and formal rules and regulations.

Among the manifold and diverse calamities that have fallen on mankind, four have probably proved the most instructive and significant viz. war and revolution, famine and pestilence.\textsuperscript{35}

Classification of crisis:

Crisis can be classified into two broad categories:

1) Natural crisis; and

ii) Man made crisis.

\textsuperscript{34} Raman S. and Jaysankar V., \textit{Op.Cit.}, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.},
The following comes in the category of natural crisis:

a) River flooding (caused by rainfall, melting snow, dam failure, ice jams and flows, etc.). Tsunami and coastal flooding (caused respectively by seismic activity and tropical cyclones).

b) High winds (caused by tropical cyclones) typhoons, hurricanes and tornadoes) Earthquake (of rectonic or volcanic origin slides, slips and avalanche (of land rock or snow).

c) Fire and complagrination.

d) Volcanic eruption.

e) Drought.

The following comes in man made crisis;

a) Fire.

b) Explosion.

c) Mining catastrophes and damage contamination of air, water and large scale traffic accidents, soil radiation.36

Riots of various kinds fall in an altogether different category. The situation of crisis may also arise, due to actions such as satyagraha, hunger strike, bandhs and gheraos etc.

36. Ibid., p. 2.
It is seldom that only one kind of natural crisis hits a settlement and its population. In the majority of cases, a chain of events develops and disastrous outcome is a cumulative effect of sequential phenomena and forces. Further when a catastrophe is a combination of various actions of natural forces and elements, often an action in progress may not only 'open the door' to what follows, but may make the latter more destructive than when it occurs by itself.  

Therefore, on a broader analysis, crisis can be of four different types, an instantaneous - diffused type which immediately demolishes the entire community, an instantaneous-localised type which demolishes part of the community but leaves the rest intact; a progressive-diffused type which affects the whole communities gradually; and a progressively-localised type, such as a localised flood.  

A study of the natural calamities which have taken place during the last 30 years or so shows that these calamities more frequently strike third World Countries, such as those in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, rather than the developed countries. Damages from

these calamities are proportionately more in the developing countries than the developed countries. Often, a single natural calamity is enough to set back the development of the area by a decade. Does this mean that nature is also biased against the developing nations? A closer study reveals that the developed countries have, through a series of preventive and ameliorative measures taken over many years, managed to minimise the damage from natural calamities. On the other hand, the developing countries with poor technological base and weak administrative structure fall victim to these natural calamities in the absence of adequate preventive measures. 39

Obviously, any crisis prevention and mitigation activity such as giving the public timely advance information about evacuation procedures is going to be a very difficult task depending upon whether the community is dealing with a recurring annual event or a catastrophic once in a life time occasion. Hazard surveys, prior to the establishment of a disaster plan, are a necessity for realistic public information policies. 40


40. Natural Calamities and role of various agencies in Rescue and Relief and Rehabilitation, Government of Maharashtra, March 1987.