

Weathering the Storm in Ersama by Harsh Mander.

- Prashant went to Ersama, a small town in coastal Orissa, on 27 October, 1999 to meet his friend.
- In the evening, a violent storm hit the area.
- The storm caused widespread devastation. People and houses were washed away.
- Prashant was worried about his family.
- He returned to his village, Kalikuda. The scenes he witnessed there were heart breaking.
- At the Red Cross shelter he found his family who hugged him tight in relief. Prashant became the leader of the village.
- He appointed a group of volunteers to clean the shelter, help the injured people and sent a delegation to get full rice quota.
- On the 5th day, a military helicopter dropped some food parcels. After that it made regular rounds of the shelter, airdropping food and other basic needs.
- Women took care of the orphans while men secured food and materials for shelter.
- He helped the widows and children to make up their lives.
- Even after six months, the widows and orphans seek Prashant in their darkest hour of grief.

Questions and Answers

Ques1-What havoc did the super cyclone wreaked in the life of the people of Orissa?

Ans1-The super cyclone devastated everything in Ersama, a small town in coastal Orissa. As a result, majority of the houses were destroyed, people lost their families and belongings, trees were uprooted. Only the strong cement houses were spared. The air was filled with screams. As far as the eye could see, the land was seen covered with dirty brown sheet of water with bloated animal carcasses and human corpses floating on that water. The scenes were gruesome. People could be seen trying to save whatever they could lay their hands on. There was shortage of food. People were sad and helpless, and a pall of gloom had descended on the people all around.

Ques2-How did Prashant, a teenager, help the people of his village?

Ans2- Prashant showed the true leadership qualities. The first thing he could do was to take a grip over himself because initially he himself was shocked to witness the destruction all around. Then he decided to step in as the leader of the village and motivated other people for self-help. He organized a group of youths and elders to jointly pressurize the merchant to give rice for the people living in the shelter. He was successful in this task. His next task was to organize a team of youth volunteers to clean the shelter of filth and to tend to the wounds and fractures of the people who had been injured because of the cyclone. Prashant also brought a number of orphaned children together and constructed a polythene shelter for them. While women were mobilized to look after them, the men secured food and other essentials for the shelter. When he realized that the women were becoming too grief-

stricken, he persuaded them to start working in the food-for-work program, which was initiated by an NGO. He also organized sports events for children. This way Prashant, with the help of other volunteers, helped the other people in picking up the broken pieces of their lives.

Ques3- How did the people of the community help one another? What role did the women of Kalikuda play during these days?

Ans3-The people of the community joined hands and began to help one another under the leadership of young Prashant. They succeeded in pressurizing the merchant to part with his rice for the people in the shelter. They gathered branches from fallen trees and lit a fire, on which they cooked rice for all to eat. When the military helicopter dropped some food parcels but did not return, the youth task force gathered empty utensils from the shelter and made the children lie in the sand with the utensils on their stomachs to communicate to the passing helicopters that they were hungry. The message went through and the helicopter made regular rounds of the shelter, air dropping food and other basic needs.

Women were mobilized to look after the orphans, while the men secured food and materials for the shelter. In spite of being grief stricken, the women started working in the food-for-work program started by an NGO.

Ques4- Why did Prashant and other volunteers resist the plan to set up institutions for orphans and widows? What alternatives did they consider?

Ans4-Prashant and other volunteers resist the plan to set up institutions for orphans and widows because they believed that in such institutions children will grow up without love and affection and widows would suffer from stigma and loneliness. Instead, Prashant and his group suggested that the children and widows should be resettled in their own community where they can get a homely environment. To create a sense of belongingness and to foster love and affection, they planned to complement the needs of orphaned and childless people. They brought them under one roof to heal their mental wounds.

Practice Questions

Ques1-Where and why did Prashant go on 27th October 1999?

Ques2-Why was falling of two coconut trees on the roof of Prashant's friend's house a blessing in disguise?

Ques3-Why did Prashant leave Ersama as soon as possible?