

Weathering the Storm in Erasma

Harsh Mander

The Summary

Prashant was a young boy of nineteen years of age. He belonged to Kalikuda, a village in the coastal state of Odisha. He had lost his mother seven years ago.

On 27 October 1999, when he was visiting a friend in Ersama, a super cyclone hit the area. There was large scale devastation. The gushy winds and rains continued for two days. They remained on the rooftop of the house and survived on the tender coconuts from the coconut trees that had fallen on the roof. As the rain stopped, Prashant left for his home as he feared the worst for his family. He took a stick to help him find the road. At times, he had to swim through the flood waters. On the way he met two friends and their uncle and the group moved together. They came across dead bodies of human beings and animals which floated with the current. As they crossed villages, not even a single house could be seen. Prashant's house was shattered too and he saw the belongings hanging on the branches of the trees. He wept as he felt that he had lost his beloved. He went to the Red cross shelter in search of his family. There Prashant met his maternal grandmother. She was elated to see him alive as they had not expected that he would have survived the storm. Prashant saw a crowd of 2500 people at the shelter. Many had lost their families in the disaster. They were grief stricken as the catastrophe had snatched everything. For the last 2 days they had survived on coconuts but they were running out of stock. Prashant took control of the situation. He formed a group with some elders and young people. They forced the merchant to give them the stock of rice and were successful. After 4 days the crowd ate a meal. Then the group of volunteers cleaned the shelter and tended to the injured people. Prashant engaged the widows to work in the NGO named "Food for work". He engaged the children by arranging sports matches for them. The volunteers managed to set up foster families comprising of the widows, orphaned children and lone men who would form a family and support

each other. Like this Prashant overcame his grief and learnt to smile even in the face of adversities.

Long questions

1. How has Prashant, a teenager, been able to help the people of his village?
2. How have the people of the community helped one another? What role did the women of Kalikuda play during these days?
3. Do you think Prashant is a good leader? Do you think young people can get together to help people during natural calamities?

Short questions

1. What havoc has the super cyclone wreaked in the life of the people of Orissa?
2. Why did Prashant's heart go cold when he reached his village?
3. How did the villagers make the helicopters drop regular supplies of food?
4. Why do Prashant and other volunteers resist the plan to set up institutions for orphans and widows? What alternatives do they consider?
5. What first step did Prashant take as a leader?
6. How did Prashant and his friend's family pass two days of the super cyclone?