

READING MATERIAL

Prashant was a young boy of nineteen years of age. He belonged to Kalikuda, a village in the coastal state of Orissa. 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. A coconut tree had been uprooted and fallen on the roof of the house. This was bloom in disguise as they survived on the coconuts for two days.

Prashant was worried about his family and that's why he decided to go back to his village. He took a stick in his hand. With the help of the stick he was able to locate the road and also check how deep the water was. Brown sheet of water was spread as far as the eye could see. Prashant saw human bodies- men, women and children and animal carcasses- dogs, goats and cattle being swept by the water. At last prashant reached the village. His house was swept away. All ninety-six houses were swept away and eighty four lives lost in the village. There was no food to eat. Prashant organised a group of youths and elders to pressurise the merchant to give rice. Food was cooked for the 2500 people in the cyclone shelter. A team of volunteers cleaned the shelter of urine, filth and vomit and floating carcasses.

On the fifth day a military helicopter flew over the shelter and dropped some food parcels. It was not seen afterwards. The youth task gathered empty utensils from the shelter. Then they deputed the children lie on the sand with the empty utensils on their stomach. The message was successfully communicated that they were hungry and after that helicopter made regular rounds of the shelter airdropping food and other basic needs.

Prashant brought the orphaned children together and put up a polythene shelter for them. Women were mobilized to look after them, while the men secured food and materials for the shelter.

Looking that the women and children were sinking in deep grief, he persuaded the women to start working for food-for-work programme. For the children he organised cricket matches as he himself loved cricket. Prashant helped the widows and children to pick up the broken pieces of their lives. Earlier the government had a plan to set up institutions for orphans and widows. However this step was successfully resisted, as it was felt that in such institutions, children would grow up without love, and widows would suffer from stigma and loneliness.

Prashant's group believed that children should be resettled in their own community itself, possibly in new foster families made up of childless widows and children without adult care.

Even after six months of the devastation of the cyclone, Prashant's wounded spirit has healed simply because he had no time to bother about his own pain. His handsome, youthful face is what the widows and orphaned children of his village seek out most in their darkest hour of grief.