

Hit out of the Blue: Need for proactive dynamism

Driving south from Chennai the day after Boxing Day on a temple tour to celebrate a family reunion is an experience that our group of seven adults and a couple of kids is not likely to forget, ever. With only thoughts of a weeks' holiday from the office routine, I found myself in Chennai on the morning after Christmas Day; little did we realize what the expression 'making waves' could mean, not even when the ground shook beneath us. And so it was with widening and brimming eyes that we watched news pouring in, throughout that Sunday, of exploding numbers.

Deciding to proceed with the planned tour, we left by road towards Pondicherry and adjacent towns after being directed to take an inland route since tragedy was unfolding along the otherwise scenic coastal road. That cloudy Monday, it seemed Nature was showing her gloomy façade, perhaps she was also mourning, as was the whole world. The beach at Pondicherry, hardly a few feet between Gandhiji's statue to the waterline, was out of bounds, but crowds at the roadside watched with awe as the body of that life-giving fluid continued to heave and splash on to the sands.

We continued southward, coming across more news and first hand accounts of the havoc, of families of Air Force friends lost to the sea. At Chidambaram food meant for the thousands of 'Arudra Darshan' pilgrims instead travelled to the refugee camps eastward, at Sirkazhi, which is nearest Nagapattinam, the temple served one of its true purposes as a camp for the homeless and the deprived. My son asked my mother: "Patti, why are you crying?" as a lady came up to her requesting help - a sari, or money, whatever. Her offer of a hundred-rupee note would have set off a Pandora's box, given the numbers of the needy.

Believe me, old clothes are not the solution – neither for their suffering nor to give us a complacent feeling. Given out of compassion or out of mistimed sense of cleaning up household garbage, the mounds of old clothing raining all over is enough to suffocate. What we need to do is go there and adopt children or groups, or villages, or render physical help, psychological support, construct toilets and teach hygiene, keep up the morale. After all, with the Gujarat quakes and Orissa cyclone not quite behind us, we should know how contributions to relief funds (do not) work. One is unlikely to forgive oneself for not pitching in during an hour of need; wisdom dawned late. God and temples could have waited. Family reunion thanksgiving it may have been for me, but have I not learnt 'Vasudaiva Kutumbakam'? Apparently not yet.

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