

WHAT SATYODAYA HOPES STILL TO DO

The immediate and also the short-term tasks are nearly over, though requests come occasionally for assistance that has not been available, for instance, for shoes and socks for girls and boys who want to go back to school but find the waves have carried away their footwear. Three things especially will call for our attention: the reconstruction of dwelling places; the tools needed for resuming pre-Tsunami employment; befriending the victims, especially the orphans and the youth. The government (from government-to-government aid) and the big international donors will certainly move into these areas. But there will always be places and persons that do not fall into the Relief and Reconstruction net. It is to these that we must find access.

Finally, there has to be analysis of the direction the country should take in the post-Tsunami chapter of its history.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Today (Jan 26), marking the end of one month after the Tsunami, seems to be the perfect time to assess what has been done and what still needs to get off the ground. Everyone is unanimous on the need to relocate the displaced and rebuild the nation. However, how these tasks are to be done, what are the deadlines, where will the necessary funds come from, are still only partially answered questions. With many individuals, governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the same field, there seems to be some overlapping of the efforts and not enough of the decisions made by the rehabilitators seem to reach the grassroots.

Satyodaya's relief and reconstruction intervention is twofold: immediate and long term. In the immediate phase we provided Tsunami refugees with food and other essential items through three relief journeys: to Amparai – AkkaraiPattu – Thirukkovil, to Batticaloa and, third, to Galle-Matara. Now we are at the beginning of the long-term phase of our intervention.

Many of our friends - from plantation workers and adjacent villagers to foreign friends - supported us in many ways, including the financial. We take this opportunity to thank them all and to say, "Your goodwill and concern give us great encouragement".

I saw a letter inside a till offered to us for Tsunami relief by Thara and Hansi, the little children of Priyanthi Wijesinghe, our librarian, saying "We are really sorry for what has happened to you. At this time of sorrow, we also stay with you". Our notice board displays a note sent by a Grade One child from St Edward School, Nashville, Tennessee, USA, saying, "Dear Tsunami survivors, we are praying for you. Try to stay strong and have faith".

Satyodaya has extended its supportive hand when emergency situations occurred in the country in the past. The minds of our seniors go back to 1977 when Satyodaya went to the rescue of 2667 Tamil estate families (the lists are still with us) which had lost everything, or nearly every thing, in the communal riots of that year. This time, maybe the most destructive single disaster to befall our Island, Satyodaya is determined to do its best for the affected people. Perhaps it will take many many months to rebuild

to loot ear-rings. There are reports that victims, some of them dying or dead, were sexually molested and that some orphaned children have been taken to unknown locations for unknown purposes. The mafia underworld in its present proportions is a post-1977 phenomenon. Doctors get on channels and charge ever-increasing high fees for a less than 5-minutes consultation and private hospitals levy sky-high charges even on the poor with no action taken by the State to regulate the charges. "International" schools mushroom all over the country going back to the days of fee-levying education. Is all this the consequence of the opening of our country in and after 1977 to the robber barons of the world? Will the tsunami help us to retrace steps, revise and re-order?

Nor is world society taken as a whole favourable to humanity taken as whole. The riches of the world are most unequally shared among the nations. A few mainly white and Christian nations have too much. Many mainly coloured and non-Christian ones have too little. Consumerism and materialism are roaring ahead in a way that Gandhi described as satanic. The ancient values of simplicity and sharing are under threat even in the poor countries of the world. Against the background of such a world, the Asian Tsunami is a defining moment, not only for Asia, but for the world. When a princess died in a car crash, or when the Twin Towers tumbled, the western media said they were defining moments. What did they finally define? – fundamentally, nothing, as the world went on its merry way again.

The Asian Tsunami is – should be - a different and real defining moment in the history of Sri Lanka, Asia and the world. **-Paul Caspersz, sj**

tower at Siloam fell on them. Were the eighteen and those mowed down by Pilate's soldiers, the people asked Jesus, merely receiving the just punishment of some sins they had committed? In both cases Jesus firmly answered, I tell you, they were not. But Jesus in each case continued to say: But unless you repent you will all perish as they did.

Their sins therefore were not the cause why men, women and children – in our small island more than forty thousand of them – were mercilessly taken away by the raging sea. And what sins could little children have committed to deserve such a fate?

The Tsunami was therefore not a punishment for anybody's sin. Yet it was a call to all of us to take stock, to re-order our lives and our values. On March 2004 a terrorist attack on a train in Madrid left hundreds dead and wounded. The following day Spanish youth carried a banner proclaiming "We were all travelling in that train". Rather therefore than look at the Tsunami as an act of God punishing God's creation and the people can it be indeed an act of God suffering with the people and pleading with them to right the wrongs of the society, national and international, that is around them.



This was a fortunate school: only the bottom floor succumbed

We know what the main wrongs of our own national society are. Looters, hard on the heels of the havoc of the tsunami, got working on the dead bodies of Tsunami victims, sometimes cutting fingers to loot rings and ears

the country, but Satyodaya will stay strong and unchanged to face any challenge that will impede the way to help our devastated people.

This special issue of our Bulletin helps you to know what we did from the very first moment of the news of the Tsunami. What we did may seem as small as a needle in a haystack, but we did it with much care and concern. Therefore, we are happy.

Extracts from our first post-tsunami letter to our friends (27.12.04)

We are compelled to write this email by the shocking news about the heavy damages to life and property of people in the Southern and Eastern Asian countries by the Tsunami waves. Though we know that Satyodaya cannot make a big change in the situation, we cannot also neglect the appeals we have been receiving since last evening from our friends in the Batticaloa and Ampara Districts to be with them in this pathetic situation.

-Lalith and colleagues at Satyodaya

Extracts from our letter of 29.12.04 to Rowena Western, Brisbane: she had telephoned Fr Paul asking how she could help.

Dear Rowena

The Tsunami has brought terrible, probably unprecedented, tragedy to our Island. The Government announced yesterday that the death toll was 18,706 but, with hundreds more bodies being washed up to the shores every day, officials fear that the deaths may exceed 25,000. A staggering 2 or even 2.5 million people have been displaced. When you think that the total population of Sri Lanka is about 20 million, this means that 1 in 10 have been forced to abandon their homes to the waves and seek security where they could. The displaced people have flocked to churches which are often on high ground and to Buddhist temples. Disease is feared because of contaminated water and broken sewage systems.

Kandy, where Satyodaya is located, is in the central hills and so has not been sought by the tidal terror. Yet all of us at Satyodaya - precisely because we have ourselves been spared - feel that it is our sacred duty to do all we can to succour those who have been so badly affected. In fact, tomorrow morning Lalith, the leader of our team, is going to Ampara on the

east coast with a lorry load of dry food rations, soap, medicines and bandages and clothes - all collected by us in and around Kandy - hoping to be of some assistance to the people who have suffered enormously there, especially Tamil people in the area who seem to be attracting less attention than the Sinhalese and the Muslims.

Your friends and you may want to know something about Satyodaya. It was founded by Bishop Leo Nanayakkara, osb (R.I.P. 1982), Bishop of Kandy, and me in 1972. In its origins it was chiefly to be a social research centre. But it was soon drawn into the struggle for peace and justice in favour of the poor people of our country, especially the tea plantation Tamils and the deprived peasants in the adjacent villages. Today, besides educational programmes of all types at our Centre in Kandy, we work in 72 places in the field: 45 estates, 22 villages and 5 urban areas. It is uphill work all the time, but immensely satisfying as it is work for the poorest, who are God's undoubted favourites.

- Fr Paul Caspersz, sj

Extracts from the three reports on our relief journeys to Ampara-Akkaraipattu-Thirukkivil, Batticaloa, and Galle-Matara

SATYODAYA'S RELIEF JOURNEY TO THE EAST COAST

The Tsunami visited us on 26 December morning. On 27 December we began collecting all the possible donations from our people. The Sixteen Plus youth movement together with local community leaders organized a grassroots collection programme, which was warmly welcomed by the poor estate and adjacent village people. These poor people taught us what actually sharing is. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had" (Luke 21: 3-4).

Within 2 days our Seminar Hall was full of dry food parcels, medicines, clothing and other essentials. The poor people's contribution may be valued at around Rs 1.1 million (c. USD 11000).

Judge Michael Finnane and his wife, two of our friends in Australia, imme-

ugly worm. It was not the way it once had been, not the way God wanted. Isaiah, the great poet and mystic of the 8th century B.C., had a poet's dream of this pre-fall world. The lamb lived happily with the wolf, the panther lay down with the kid, calf and lion cub fed together and were led to pasture by a little boy, the infant played over the cobra's hole and the child fearlessly put his hand into the viper's lair, for "the country is filled with the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters swell the sea"...



*The words say: Help us who have lost everything.
The white flag mourns for those who died in the house which has been damaged*

But if we should thank God that it did not strike at night, that some of us were standing on ground too high for even the highest Tsunami, would it not be legitimate for us also to ask God also why he allowed the tectonic plates to shift the way they did and so allow the tsunami to come to our people with such fierce and destructive power.

Some primordial rupture in the order of things took place. It broke the harmony of the divine with the human and of the human with nature. The soil became difficult to sow, the forest began to grow sharp branches, thorns and thistles which bruised the hands of the farmers. Men and women had to suffer the fate of becoming homeless. The mark of Cain was not only Cain's. It was everyone's. Suffering had become the all-pervading fact of human existence.

The question was asked of Jesus after two incidents. The Roman governor, Pilate, had ordered the ruthless murder of some people of Galilee in the very Temple so sacred to the Jews. Eighteen people were killed when a

Matara

Sr Maxima and Sr Sandamalie (of the Sisters of Charity) told us what had happened on that Sunday morning. "Our Parish Priest, Fr Charles Herawasam, was celebrating the Mass. He had just given the elderly Sr Bernadette Koelmeyer Communion and then gave her the Ciborium to distribute the Hosts to the people. Suddenly through the open archway Fr Charles saw the first tsunami approach. He thought that a car was breaking into the church. Then came the second tsunami which took our sister away. The next day we found her body: her white habit was black and her face very disfigured. Later Fr Charles and his parishioners found a car inside the Church; the Tsunami had brought it in through the archway.

THINKING ABOUT THE TRAGEDY

(This article under the editorial caption, "The Tsunami: a defining moment for the world" appeared in the Daily Mirror, 29 Jan 2005)

The Tsunami waves of 26 December have been a terrible and terrifying, probably unprecedented, tragedy. Because of nearly instantaneous live coverage by western television the tragedy of Asia became a tragedy for the whole world. There are two ways of responding to a tragedy of such tremendous dimensions. One is to submit to grief so intensely and so completely as to give way to fatalistic acceptance, ending in a paralysis of activity. The other is to see in the colossal tragedy a colossal opportunity. This is so in every major crisis in our individual and collective lives. The tragedy can either break or make....

The best answer is the scientific one. The tectonic plates under the Indian Ocean shifted catastrophically. This massive rupture in the bed of the ocean generated tremors and caused quakes. The forces thus generated travelled along hundreds of miles of water at great speed and caused huge waves which then made their onslaught on our shores and roared over them to kill life and destroy property along all the coasts from Indonesia in the East to Sri Lanka and Somalia.

The basic answer is that ours is an imperfect world. The rains do not come in time and, when they do come, they are too heavy for our crops; the mangoes on the tree are large and luscious but within each seed there is an

diately came to the aid of our people with a generous contribution to our relief fund. They were followed by Diakonia and Helvetas.



Preparing at Satyodaya Seminar Hall to go to the East Coast

On 30 December 2004 our group started on our journey to the East Coast at 5.30 a.m. after a short moving inter-religious ceremony on the Bahirawakanda Road below Satyodaya. We had 3 lorries, 1 cab and 2 vans full of relief goods. We reached Ampara by 12 noon and were very disappointed to hear that we were not permitted to go to Thirrukkovil as there was fear of another Tsunami. However, Lalith, our team leader, discussed the matter with the chief commander STF in Ampara and got permission to proceed but the risk in the journey was high. The road from Akkaraipattu to Thirukkovil, buildings and houses on either side of the road, were all severely damaged. Nearly 50% of the houses were totally damaged. On both sides of the road were broken beams, rafters, tiles, furniture, mattresses, pillows and household equipment. Vehicles had been damaged and some were standing on their hoods with the wheels in the air. No smiles, but bewilderment, even despair, were seen on the peoples' faces. In a very normal wave, coming to the shore, I saw another Tsunami. The sea was as perfectly normal and beautiful as it could be, but inside me there was a great unwillingness to admire its beauty any more.

Akkaraipattu is an area, in which it is estimated that 10,000 citizens have been killed by the Tsunami. We went to an area where massive funerals had taken place. Therefore post-traumatic mental disorders can easily erupt

while the risk to physical health is extremely high. We reached the Thirukkivil refugee camp, our final destination, at sunset. The scenario of the refugee camp brought us nothing except the feeling of disappointment, helplessness, sorrow: there was no leadership, no proper order in the camp. Refugees struggle in order to get something. Some people who have come there with foodstuffs to distribute just threw them out of their lorries as if to dogs and the refugees trampled one another to grab something.

We bade a tearful goodbye to the suffering people while we started on our return journey to Satyodaya at about 6.30 p.m. We reached Satyodaya the following day at 7.00 a.m.
- **Mangala Fernando**

RELIEF JOURNEY TO BATTICALOA

The militant inter-ethnic conflict had lasted more than two decades but was, at least temporarily, halted by the Ceasefire Agreement of 2001. The peace prevailed over a period of more than two years. There was a ray of hope that the peace process would soon reach a final solution.

But then on 26 December 2004 Sunday morning the biggest calamity descended upon us with not a minute's forewarning. It was the Tsunami. It has been a terrible tragedy and probably the most destructive that Sri Lanka has ever experienced since the beginning of her history in pre-Christian centuries.



Mrs PremKumar and some refugees look on as Satyodaya relief supplies are unloaded

Hotels and restaurants: Almost all the hotels in the town are affected. The food services had not yet been resumed. (We were trying to find a place for our dinner but failed to find even one.)

Trade area: Along the Matara Road all shops were completely destroyed by the waves.

Mirissa/ Pollathumodara

This area was also affected by the waves. Everywhere along the roadsides heaps of debris could be seen.



The girl drying her drowned undergraduate sister's books

On our way to Matara, by chance we saw a young girl who was drying some books and papers in the evening sun in front of a newly built house. When we inquired what had happened, she told us the story: "These books do not belong to me. They were used by my younger sister who was selected to the University. But unfortunately the waves took my sister mercilessly to the sea and she is no more. How can I believe that this had to happen?"

A little while later the girl's mother and father also joined her to tell us the story. "We lost our beloved daughter. We were residing in a small hut in front of the new house we had begun to build and the hut was also washed away by the waves. How unlucky we are to reside in the new house without our daughter. The waves did not destroy the new house but were merciless to our daughter." All were crying together. Our own eyes were filled with tears too (*See photo*).

Tsunami. In Dodanduwa, to most of the people fishing was their livelihood. They had a fishing harbour and until 26 December 2004 the place was busy with the fishing industry.



Determined to get back to fishing: "life must go on"

In our journey we met two leading fisher persons, namely Mr Rajah and Mr Premasiri. They explained to us what had really happened to them. "For generations, we have been fisher people. We were independent and were able to make our living through fishing. There are 182 families in the Gramaseva Division to which we belong. The most unhappy day came on 26 December while we were far away in the sea for fishing. We did not know that our cottages, wives, children and friends were attacked by a giant wave. When we were back we could only see a place like a battlefield after an attack. Many things were displaced or had disappeared. We saw the dead bodies of our people. We were so unfortunate to see the big calamity with our own eyes".

Galle

What we found in our visit to Galle Town are as follows:

Fish Market and Vegetable Market completely destroyed. No fish stall or vegetables could be seen anywhere in the town. (We had been told about it, so we went with loads of vegetables, which were much appreciated.)

The Bus Stand damaged. (We learnt that more than 50 buses were destroyed.) Arrangements have been done to restore a bus service to the people with available facilities. International Cricket Ground severely damaged. Repairs are being done.

Our second relief journey was to the north of the first one (cf. Report No 1 of 30 December 2004). Our chief contact in Batticaloa was PremKumar, a distinguish Old Boy of Satyodaya.

We left Kandy early in the morning in our two vehicles and a truck load of relief – food, clothing and some medicines. We saw and experienced the pitiful plight of the affected people. They were first placed on the Cross by the man-made inter-ethnic conflict. Now they had to climb the Cross again by the nature-made Tsunami waves, sometimes, according to some people who saw them, more than 10 metres high. There was no possibility of swimming over the waves or diving into them. It just took the people away with no respect for age, sex, religion, social position. With the people went everything that belonged to the people: clothes, books, beds, tables, chairs, even cars.

We travelled up to Kottai Kallarai bridge in Batticaloa. The only bridge that connected Kottai Kallarai with Kalmunai was severely damaged. Hence, people who live on the other side of the bridge were short of food and other essentials for almost 3 days. The village was completely destroyed. The main occupation of the people was jewellery manufacturing. Nearly 2000 villagers lost their lives. The road that leads to Kurukkal-madama from Batticaloa is temporally repaired but as the bridge is damaged no vehicle can travel to Kalmunai. In this area there are about 30 refugee camps set up for these people. They are situated both within and outside the city area. Therefore, the camps that are far away from the city are not well looked after. The refugees undergo severe hardships. The risk to health is also very high.



The former Kottai Kallarai bridge has gone forever

We gave our aid to two camps: one at Kaludawalai School with 152 families; the other at Chettipalayam Handloom Industry Centre with 88 families.

In this area some people were engaged in betel cultivation and the Tsunami destroyed the cultivation as if it was a sheet of paper. As sea water had mixed with the soil, there is fear that these people will not be able to cultivate betel once again unless massive soil desalination takes place. Both those at home and those in the refugee camps cannot look for jobs as there are none. Therefore they have only hopelessness and helplessness when they think of their future. Any developmental activity should include the opening up of avenues of employment. Children want to go to school again. But some schools have just disappeared and others have been turned into refugee camps.

What is needed is a long term programme that focuses on the total development of these people.

It is this long-term programme that engages our attention at Satyodaya. It should rest on two pillars: the reconstruction or the new construction of houses and the creation of avenues of employment.

Addendum

The Orphaned

Many of you have asked about the orphans. Many, probably hundreds, have lost both parents or only one. We shall try to send you reliable figures soon. At present all the orphaned – so far as we know – have been taken over by the members of their extended families. We thank God for these extended families and for the values of simplicity, sharing and community of our ancient culture. But there are unverified reports that some orphans have been lured away by criminals for nefarious purposes.

The solution does not seem to be orphanages but subsidized home care.

- (Ms) Malkanthi Kahanda & Alagan Murugan

RELIEF JOURNEY TO THE SOUTH: GALLE-MATARA

Koralawella - Moratuwa

Even though there were some houses built with bricks and asbestos, the mighty waves had made them disappear in no time. We could only see some ruins of houses along the strip of land between the highway and the railway track.

Kalutara, Beruwala, Alutgama and Bentota

Relatively, these did not seem to be severely attacked by the Tsunami. But many villages, close to the sea, were reported to be subjected to the attack.

Payagala, Balapitiya, Seenigama, Telwatte

The highway and the railway are severely damaged. The well built houses have become mere heaps of bricks, leaving only the cemented floor; the rest has been washed away. Formerly the area was highly populated. But on the day we visited, (19 days after the incident) except the people who came from elsewhere in the country to see the Tsunami - affected areas or the people who came for relief work, the owners of the land were in refugee camps. In other words, they were displaced. In many places by the roadside, we saw boards marked "Displaced people's camp", "Refugees' camp", "Welfare camp" to indicate where the Tsunami victims are given temporary shelter.

We also visited Telwatte where more than one thousand people were trapped inside the train and suffocated by the Tsunami while they were travelling on the Colombo-Galle train. The people of the Telwatte/Peraliya area were still stunned and showed us a place of a mass grave where the unidentified and unidentifiable dead bodies of train passengers were buried.

Hikkaduwa

Even 19 days after the attack Hikkaduwa had not come to normality. Almost all the beachside hotels were damaged, some severely. The debris can still be seen scattered all over the beach area and there were no tourists.

Dodanduwa

This is also a place where people experienced the dreadful onslaught of the