

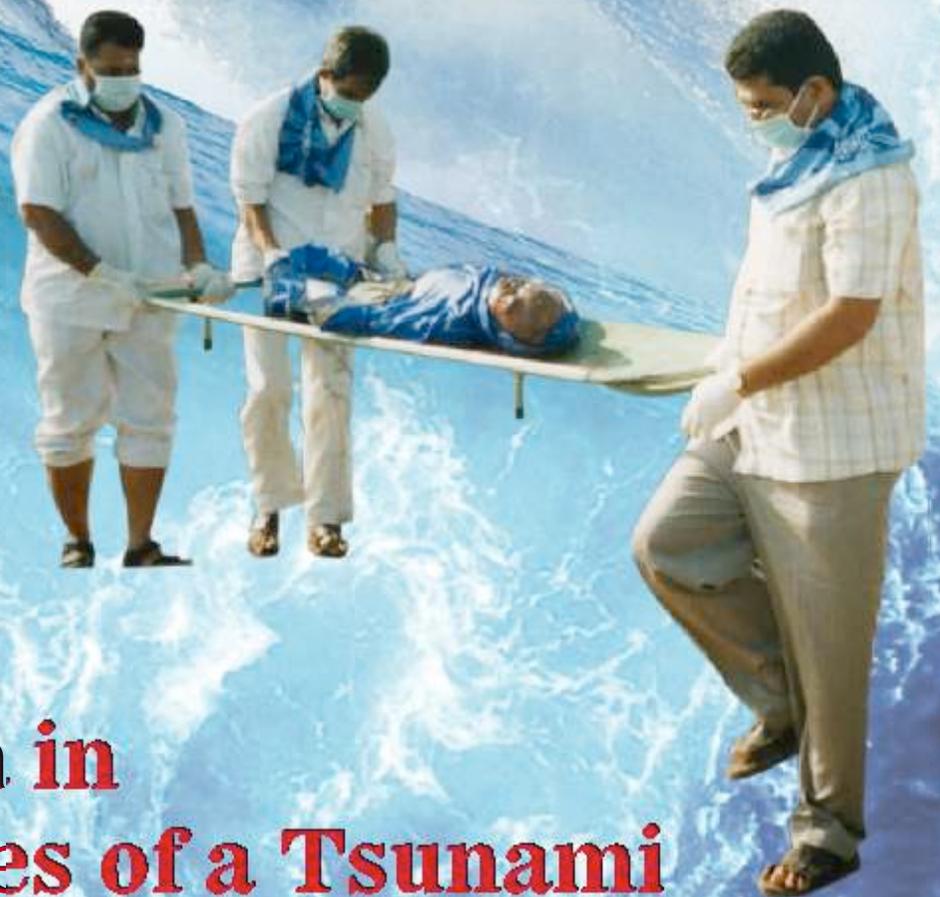


HEART TO HEART



RADIO SAI LISTENERS' JOURNAL

God does not Punish
but sends Help



Sai Seva in
the Times of a Tsunami



PRANAMS AT THE LOTUS FEET

Journal

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EDITORIAL

This is a Special Issue of H2H dedicated entirely to the recent global calamity or catastrophe of Biblical proportions. In the Indian Ocean region where this tsunami struck, this tidal wave, killer wave, tiger wave as it has been variously described, is regarded as a wake-up call for having a proper Early Warning System such as is found in the Pacific. But is that all there is to it? Somehow in this hurried jet age, people seldom seem to look beyond what meets the eye.

That is something we shall do in this Special Issue. However, in order to put the matter in the proper perspective, we start off with an in-depth "tutorial" on tsunami. We freely concede that our description is neither exhaustive nor far from complete. Be that as it may, we believe our overview is adequate for the present purpose.

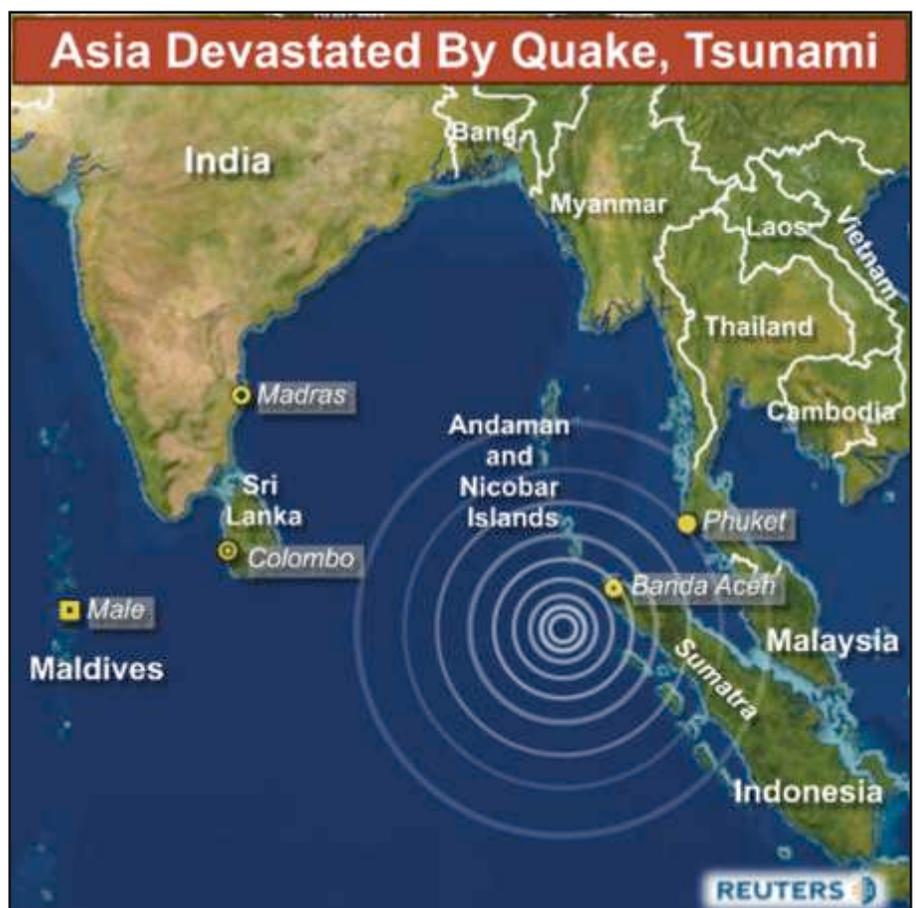
This overview is followed by a presentation on the Indian Ocean Tsunami 2004. After this comes a description of Sai Seva rendered in the affected regions, both in India and abroad.

Wrapping it all up is a 'Reflections' article that looks at the disaster from a deeper perspective. The 'Reflections' article sums up our thoughts. What about yours? Why don't you share them with us? If you do, then we can share them with our entire H2H family. You will write, won't you? As always, we can be reached at: h2h@radiosai.org

Thank you for your attention.

Jai Sai Ram.

SGH TEAM.

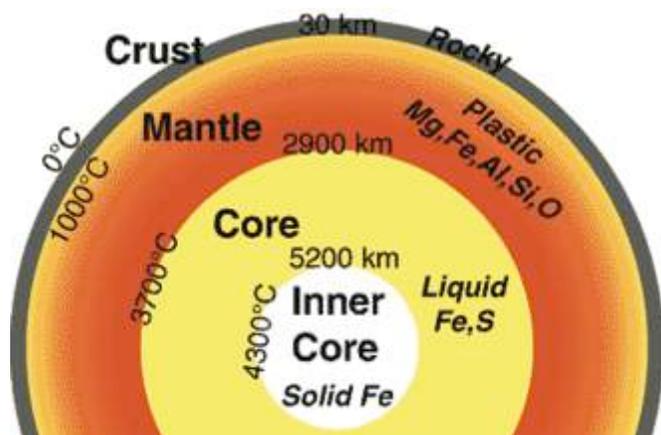


ON TSUNAMIS

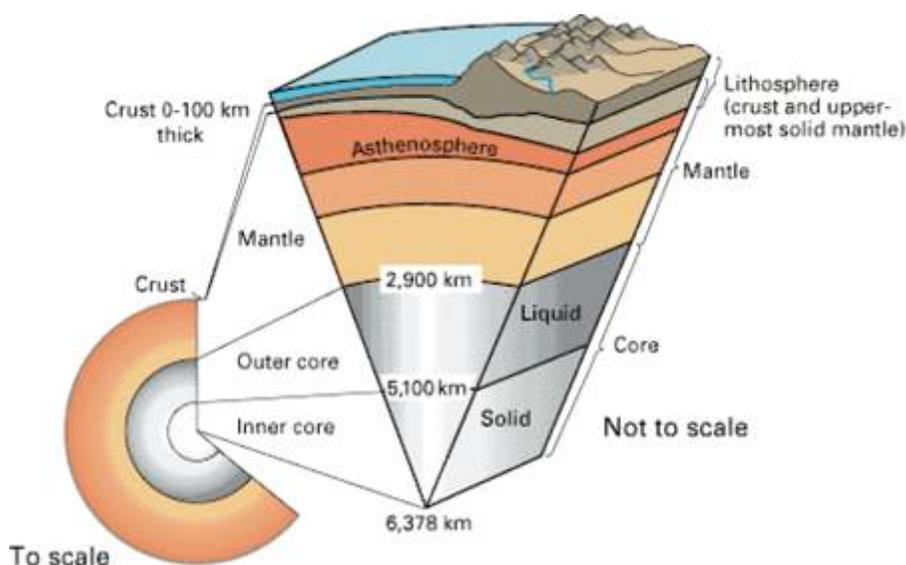


THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH

The earth was formed about five billion years ago as a big hot ball. Since its formation, it has been cooling off. During this period, denser materials like iron [from the meteorites] sank into the core of the earth, while lighter silicates, oxygen compounds etc., rose to the surface.



The structure of the earth as it is at present consists of four main layers: The inner core, outer core, mantle and crust.. The inner core is almost entirely made up of iron, and despite the high prevailing temperatures, iron is in a solid form due to the very high pressure acting on the inner core. The outer core consists of iron and about 10% sulphur, and is in a molten state. The mantle which is at a temperature of about 10000 C, is solid but soft and plastic. It consists mainly of iron, aluminium, silicon, oxygen-silicate compounds. The crust is much thinner than any of the other layers, and consists of calcium- and sodium-aluminium silicate minerals. Being relatively cold, the crust is rocky and brittle and can fracture in earthquakes.

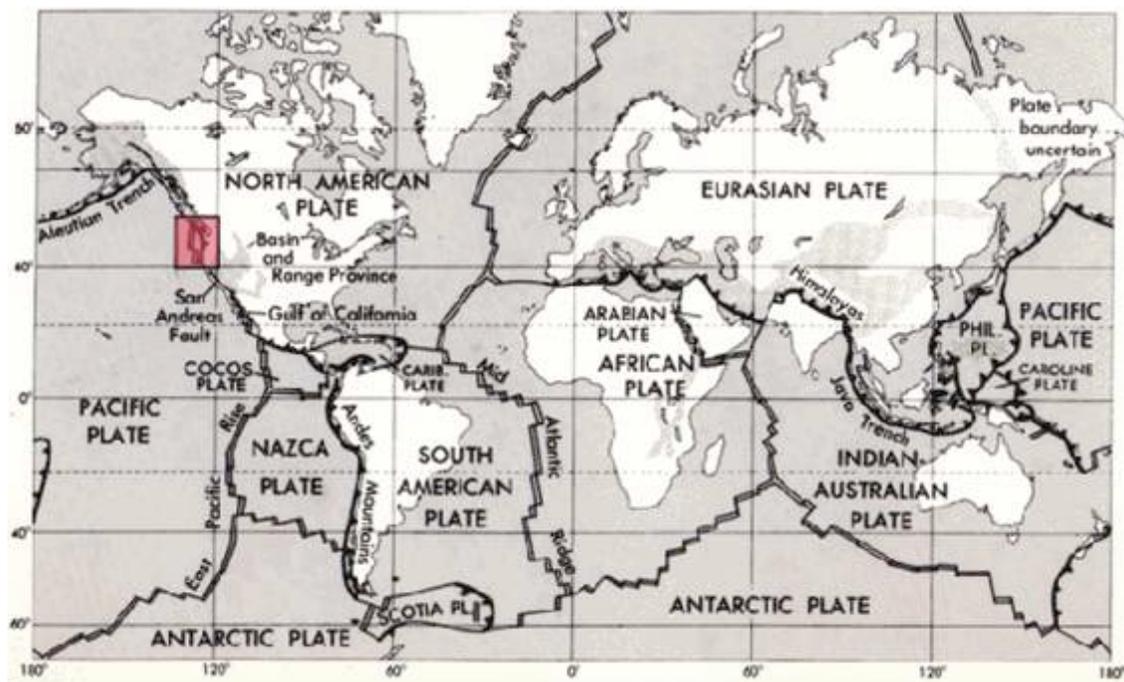


HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE EARTH'S INTERIOR?

We know what we know about the earth's interior mainly through the study of seismic waves generated during earthquakes. There are basically two types of seismic waves and they have very different propagation properties. Based on this difference and data painstakingly accumulated over decades from hundreds of earthquakes, they were able to literally "x-ray" the earth! The picture just described is now universally accepted.

INTRODUCTION TO EARTHQUAKES

To understand earthquakes, we must first appreciate that the earth's outer surface is broken up into what geologists refer to as tectonic plates or simply as plates. These slabs or plates are about 50 – 70 km thick and move continuously, though very slowly, anywhere between 10 to 100 mm/year. The boundaries between the big plates are called faults, and that is where most of the earthquakes occur. Normally, the two plates adjust to each other through slow movements – it is like two passengers in a crowded bus squeezing against each other but adjusting. But at times, there could be a violent disturbance, and that is when a big earthquake occurs.



Tectonic Plates

Many types of processes can occur when two slabs work against each other. For example, they can slide past each other. They could also collide. All such processes lead to earthquakes, when the interaction is strong. Subduction is one such process, and of a special type. In this, one of the colliding plates slides under the other plate. The softer plate goes under

while the harder one rides higher. This lifting of the crust results in an earthquake. Sometimes, one of the two plates is a continental plate while the other is an oceanic plate. It could also happen that both plates are oceanic in nature.

Subduction is important for two reasons; one is that it

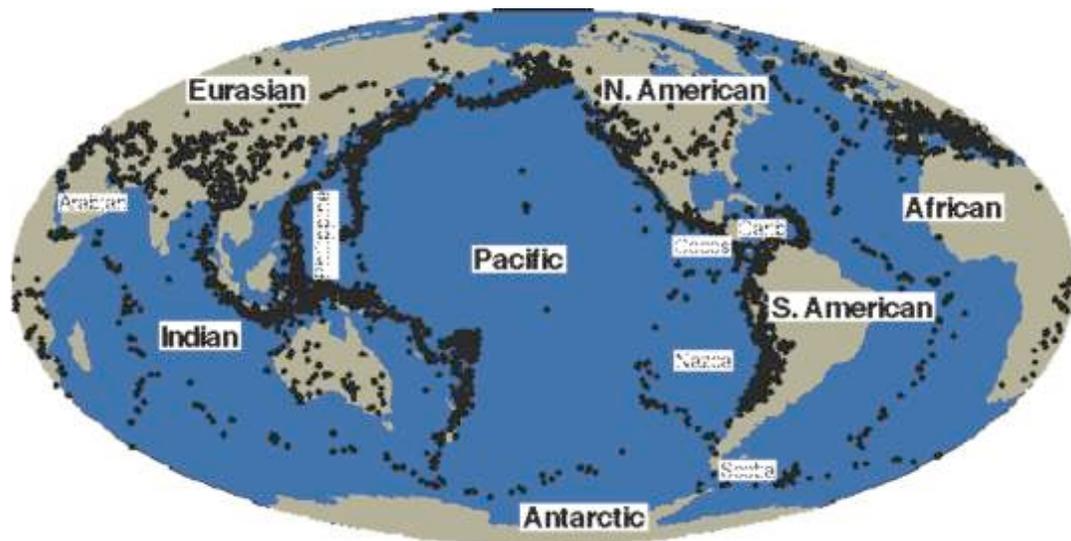
INTRODUCTION TO EARTHQUAKES

generates a tsunami when the event takes place in the ocean. Next, it can lead to volcanic activity. We shall come to that later.

Earthquakes generate shock waves which travel with supersonic velocity. There are basically two types of shock waves generated in the earth's crust. One is a compressional wave and is called the P wave. The other is a shear wave called the S wave. Instruments called seismometers are used to detect these waves. They are usually placed underground in earthquake detection centres. Modern seismograms can detect these waves even if of very small amplitude. There are

seismic observation centres all over the world. Thus the same earthquake can be detected in many different parts of the world. By combining all this data, one can easily pinpoint not only the location of the earthquake and its exact time of occurrence but also its magnitude.

Before a major earthquake occurs, there is a "rumbling" locally; this is referred to as foreshock. After the earthquake, there is a process by which the disturbed region settles down. This leads to a number of comparatively minor quakes which are referred to as aftershocks. After shocks may occur within hours, days or even over months.



Incidence of Earthquakes

Earthquakes cannot be predicted as yet, but one thing is certain; they tend to occur mainly in the fault zones. By the way, it seems that many animals and birds can sense an earthquake much in advance. There are reports that in China, snakes, rats, rabbits and some birds too, show unusual activity prior to an earthquake. In the recent earthquake, not only snakes, elephants and bird but also tribals in the Nicobar

Islands took shelter in high regions before the tsunami hit the islands. It is said that these tribals came from Africa about 60,000 – 70,000 years ago. They still lead a "primitive" type of existence, resisting all attempts at modernisation! For example, when after the tsunami, planes of the Indian Air Force flew over the islands to assess the damage, the tribals shot arrows at the planes!

THE RICHTER SCALE

Earthquakes release a lot of energy, and seismologists use a magnitude scale to measure the energy released. The most popular scale is the one proposed by Dr. Charles F Richter, and this scale of magnitude is understandably called the Richter scale. The Richter scale is a non-linear scale, meaning a quake of magnitude 2 does not release twice the energy of a quake of magnitude 1. Rather, the release is sixty times more.

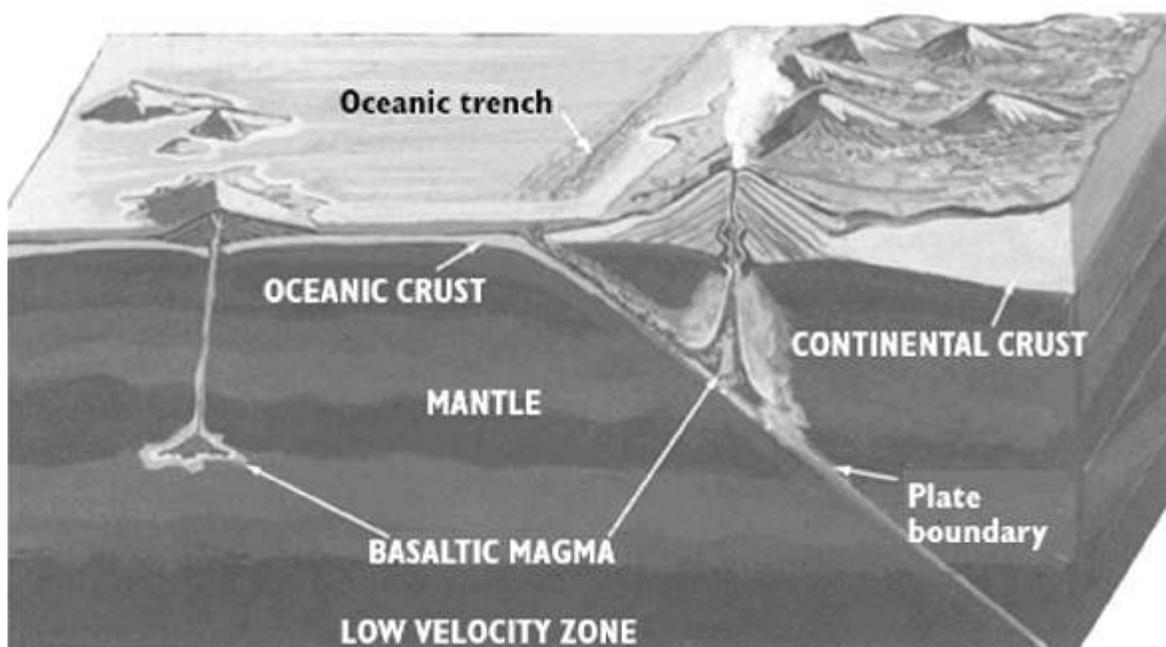
Given here is a rough tabulation of how the energy release varies with Richter magnitude. To get a feel, it is usual to compare the energy released in a quake with that released when TNT a common explosive is fired.

An earthquake of intensity 9 and above is called a GREAT EARTHQUAKE. Such quakes occur a few times every century.

MAGNITUDE	SEISMIC YIELD IN TNT EQUIVALENT	EXAMPLE
1	15 kg	Large blast at a construction site
2	1 ton	A mine blast
3	30 tons
4	1,000 tons
5	32,000 tons	1.5 times the Hiroshima bomb
6	1 million tons	A megaton hydrogen bomb
7	32 million tons	32 megaton bombs
8	1 billion tons	A thousand megaton bombs
9	32 billion tons	32,000 H-bombs or 1.5 million Hiroshima bombs!

VOLCANOES

Volcanoes are mountains but are very different from ordinary mountains. They are not formed by the usual processes of erosion and crumpling of the uplifting of land and folding over. Instead, they are mountains built up by the fiery products they spew out, most familiar of which is lava or molten rock.



The Structure of a Volcano

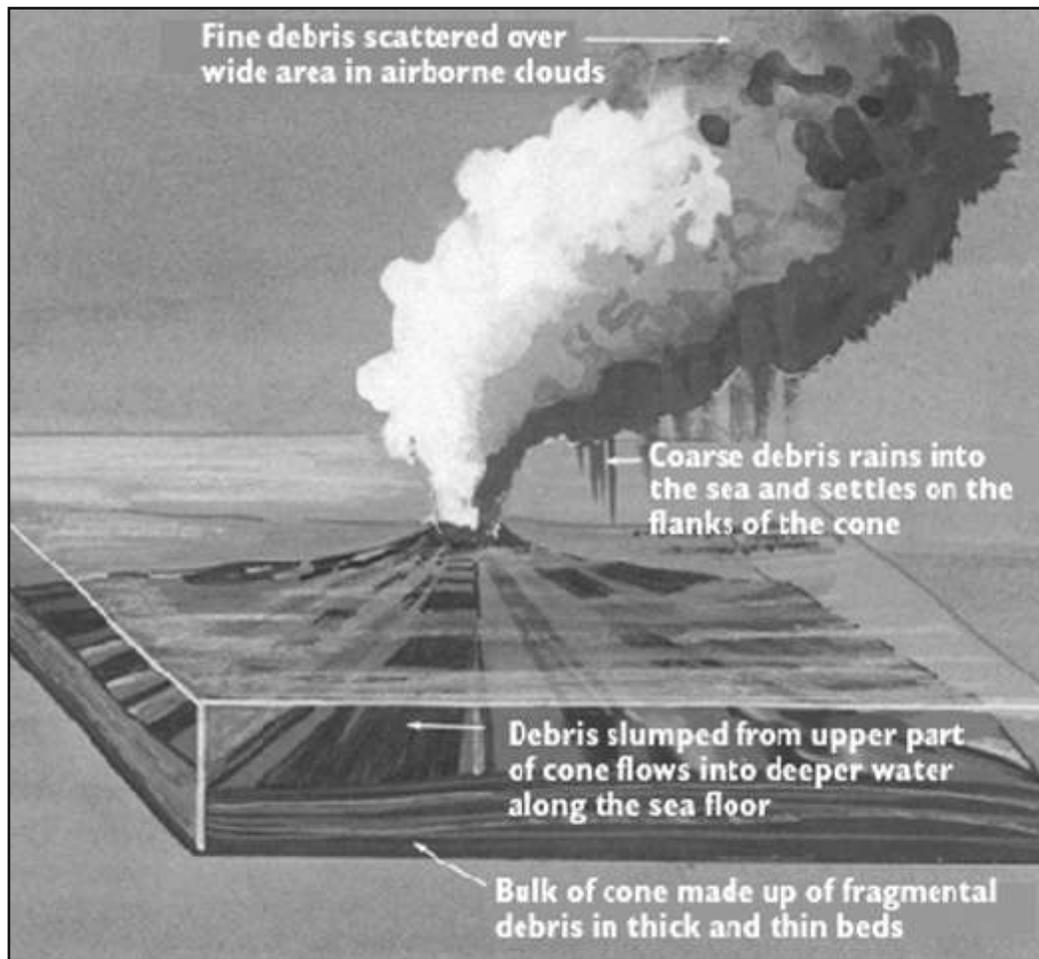
Volcanoes are usually conical in appearance with a crater at the top which acts a vent connecting to the underground reservoir of molten earth. How are volcanoes formed? Here is a simple primer. Matter deep down below is in a molten state. In some regions, molten rock and solid rock co-exist. Since the molten stuff is lighter, it floats on the solid matter. When pressure inside increases [and there are many

factors that can cause such an increase], then, driven by buoyancy the molten rock forces its way upward through zones of weakness in the earth's crust. Eventually it gushes out from the surface of the earth. In regions where an existing vent is available, the pouring out takes place through that vent – we describe this as the volcano becoming active.

Large fragments fall back around the vent while lighter matter, ash, flows down the volcano slopes. The finest ash goes up into the atmosphere and spreads across wide regions by stratospheric winds.

Volcanoes also exist in the sea, some of them in shallow waters and others in deep water. The unlimited supply

of water surrounding submarine volcanoes make them behave differently from volcanoes on land. To date, no direct observation has been made of submarine eruption in the deep ocean. However, deep-diving submersible vessels operated by scientists have, in recent years, done extensive studies on underwater volcano formations.



Volcanic Debris

THE KRAKATAU ERUPTION

Krakatau is the name of a very famous volcano in the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java. This volcano is located on an island that used to be called Rakata; the island is now called Krakatau. The region where Krakatau is located is famous for intense volcanic activity. It is believed that giant volcanic eruptions occurred in the geological past, going back 75,000 years.

In 416 A.D. a super colossal volcanic eruption occurred, that created three small islands namely, Rakata, Panjang, and Sertung. Thereafter, moderate eruptions appear to have occurred in the region, particularly in the Krakatau volcano. On August 26-27, 1883, there were a series of massive and violent explosions.

The first of these occurred at 17.27 GMT on 26th August. This giant explosion was followed by many smaller ones. The result of it all was a huge black cloud of smoke that rose to a height of 28 km. The sunlight was cut off over the entire Sunda Strait.

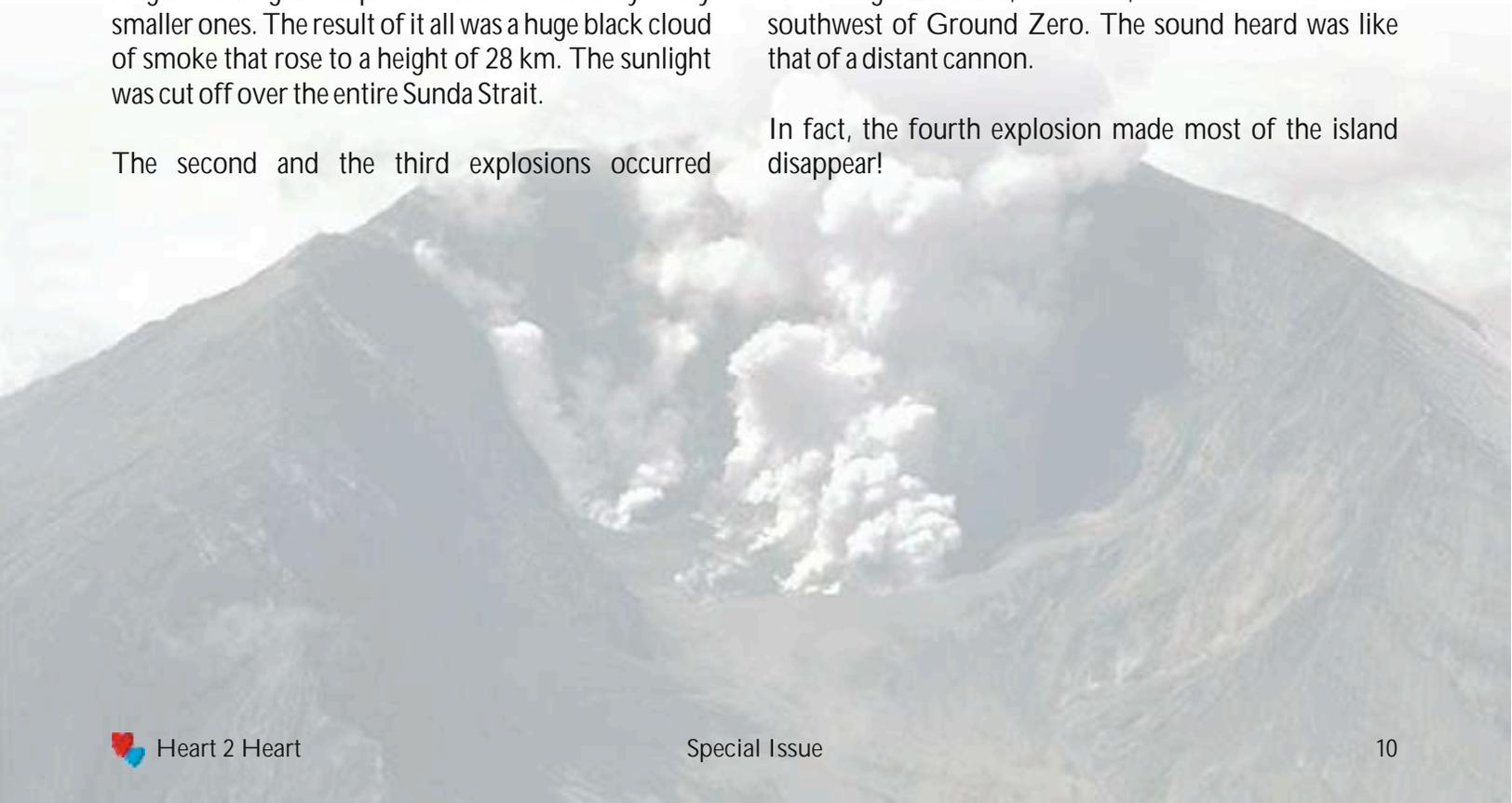
The second and the third explosions occurred

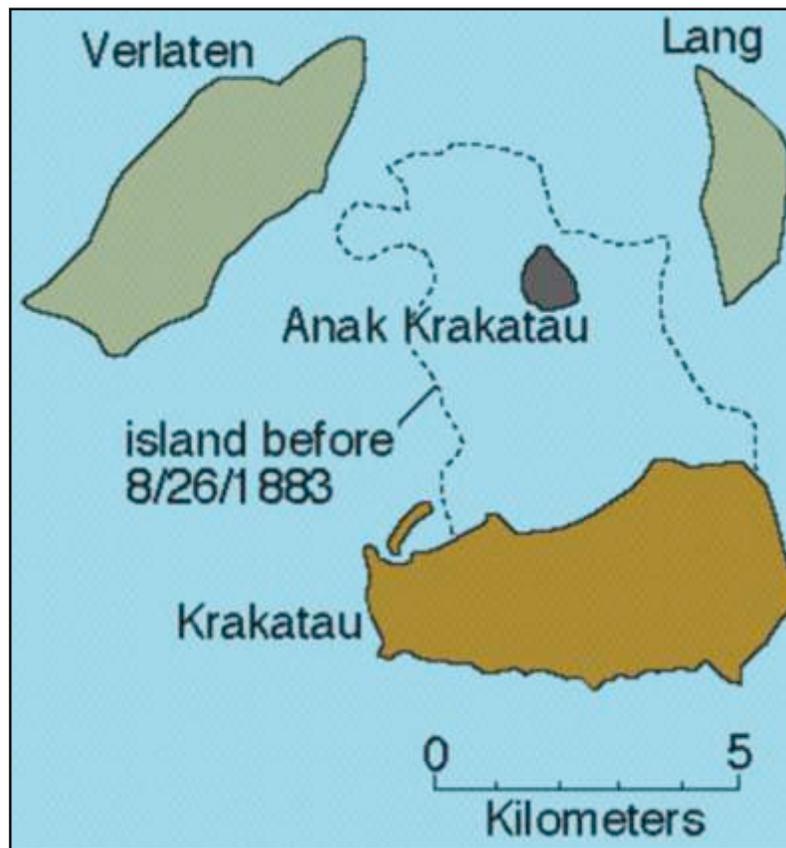
respectively at 05:30 GMT and 06: 44 GMT on 27th August. The fourth explosion, which was the biggest of them all, occurred at 10:02 GMT on 27th August 1883. Naturally, the fourth explosion produced great damage, and the entire series of explosions are referred to as the paroxysmal phase.

The fourth explosion was given a Volcanic Explosive Index [VEI] of 6, which means it was a “colossal” explosion. It is estimated that the four explosions in all released an energy equivalent to 200 megatons of energy, which is the equivalent of 10,000 Hiroshima bombs [the Hiroshima bomb released 20 kiloton equivalent of energy]. Of this energy, about 170 megaton equivalent is believed to have been released by the fourth explosion.

Many things happened. First of all, the sound of the fourth explosion was so loud, it was heard as far away as in Rodriguez Island, about 4,600 km to the west-southwest of Ground Zero. The sound heard was like that of a distant cannon.

In fact, the fourth explosion made most of the island disappear!





Most of the Island Disappeared

All explosions generated tsunamis, and naturally, the fourth produced the biggest of them all. However, the tsunamis did not travel very far on account of the fact that Ground Zero was "boxed in" by land masses, with only moderate openings into the sea. Even so, moderate pressure waves on the sea that showed up as small sea-level oscillations were detected as far away as Hawaii, west coast of South America, Aden and even in England and France.

The volcanic eruption associated with the fourth explosion threw out as much as 20 cubic kilometres of volcanic ash. At least 2 cubic km of the finer material was blown up as a plume up to a height of about 25 km.

Coming to the tsunami itself, it generated huge waves estimated to be as high as 200 or even 300 metres. There is an interesting account recorded by a German

Engineer which has now got into the official record. This man was in charge of a quarry in a neighbouring island. He was in the top floor of a three-story building, that was itself on a rock about 100 metres high. From his balcony this man saw the tsunami come rapidly forward, and before he knew what was happening, he was swept away. He was being carried by the current, and found himself on a small plank - not very safe. Just then, he saw to his amazement, a crocodile that was being pushed by the current. The man thought for a minute, jumped on to the back of the crocodile, and dug his fingers into the eyes of the croc! Apparently he rode the croc for about ten minutes or so, when the wave dumped both of them on a shore. He jumped off and ran! We don't know if that was the way it actually happened, but that is what the man wrote and it has got into the official history of the Krakatau explosion. By the way, explosions of this type apparently occur only once in several centuries. ■

TSUNAMI DESCRIPTION

Tsunami is a Japanese term, literally meaning 'wave in the harbour'. This term is now universally accepted.

The tsunami is not one wave but a series of them formed in the ocean. Tsunamis are produced mostly by undersea earthquakes. Sometimes, they are also caused by volcanic eruptions in the sea.

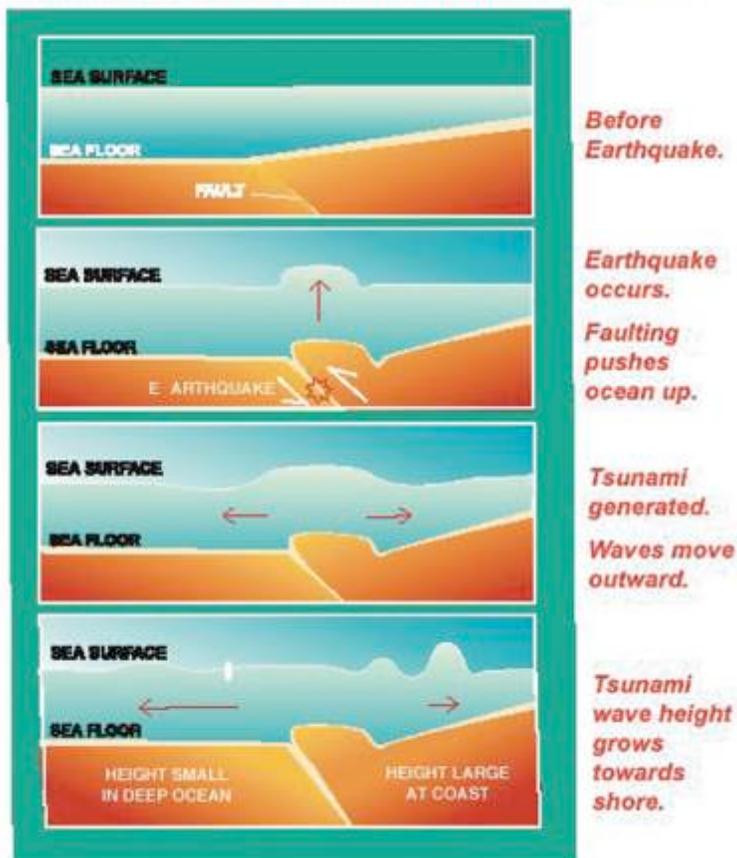
When the sea floor moves consequent to an earthquake, it pushes up a column of water that in turn generates a series of waves. This disturbance then moves outward in all directions, much like the ripples caused by throwing a stone into a pond.

The waves are huge, and the time between successive waves varies a lot. It could be as small as 5 minutes or as large as even an hour and a half. These waves travel with very high speed, as much as 700 km/hour. However, in mid ocean, their amplitude is generally quite small. Thus if a person is travelling in a ship and a tsunami wave crosses the ship, the person might not even notice it.

Tsunamis are not surface waves, that is to say waves riding on the surface of an ocean that is still below. Far from it. It is as if the entire water column from the ocean surface to the bottom is being lifted up together all at once. Therefore its power is awesome, many times greater than surface waves whipped up by the wind.

Though the tsunami wave may not be very evident in mid ocean, it is a different matter when the waves approach shallow waters near the coast. What happens then is that the waves slow down considerably to as slow as 50 km/hour. As a result,

Earthquakes CAN GENERATE TSUNAMIS



there is a pile up of water. It is rather like what happens in a highway where cars are travelling at great speed close to each other. Suppose one car suddenly stops due to an accident; the other cars simply pile up on the first car; this is something well known. When the pile up occurs, the huge energy in the massive water column that crossed the ocean now gets packed into waves of just a few metres height. And that energy compression bestows enormous destructive power to the waves as they cross from the sea to land.

When tsunami waves approach the shore, they manifest in three different ways. They may show up as a tide – this means that there is no big wave that crashes all of a sudden. Instead, the water level rises as a whole rather like during a high tide. However, while during a tide the rise occurs over several hours, during a tsunami the rise occurs very rapidly, in a matter of minutes.

The second manifestation is as a series of tall waves crashing on the shore. This is what happened in many places recently. The third manifestation is the BORE,



Earthquake Causing a Tsunami

which is essentially a step-like wave with a steep breaking front. Bores get formed when water moves from deep water to shallow water over a short distance. To the observer, the bore appears like a huge and massive wall of water, advancing menacingly at something like 50 km/hour. It is like an army of bulldozers! Depending on the circumstances, the height of the wall could be anything from 2 to even 30 or 40 metres. That is something! From first person accounts, it would seem that in many places the recent tsunami manifested as a bore. By the way, a remarkable wave was produced in Lituya Bay Alaska, in a landslide-generated tsunami in 1958. The height of the wave was 525 metres! Incredible is it not?! It did not travel far!

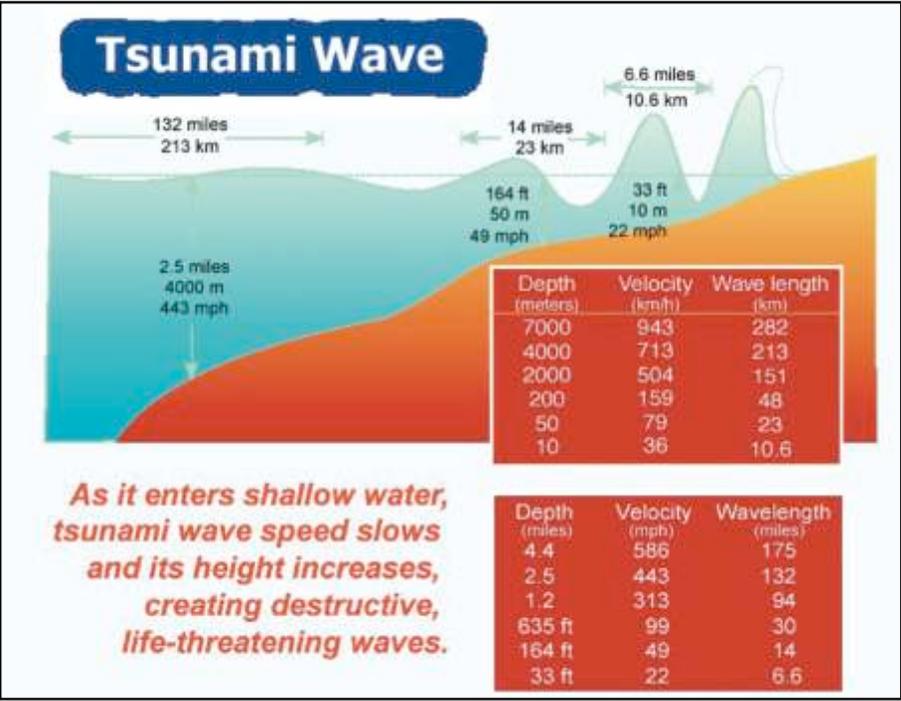
Offshore and coastal features determine the impact tsunami waves have. Reefs, bays, entrances to rivers, undersea features, and the slope of the beach all help to modify the tsunami as it makes landfall. Thus, while one region of the coast may suffer severe damage, another just two kilometres away may escape with little damage.

Depending upon the nature of the coastline, the water invading from the sea can penetrate as much as a few

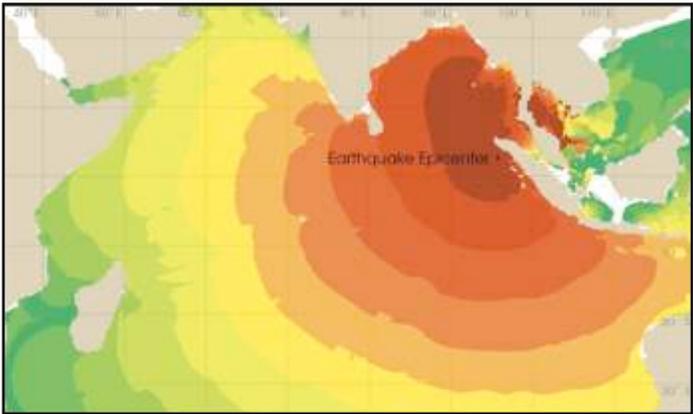
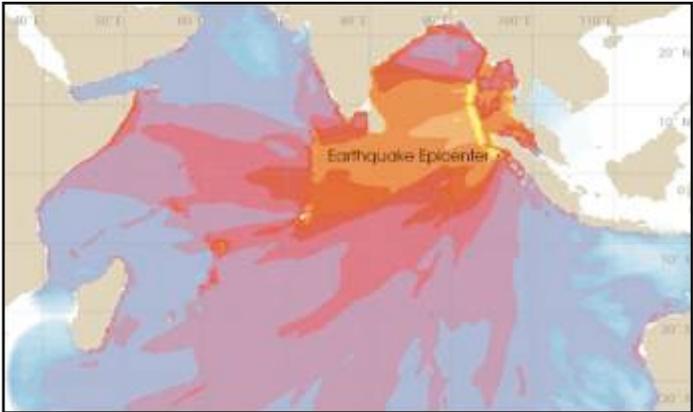
kilometres or just a hundred metres or so. One important feature of the destruction is the following: first a huge mass of water rushes in engulfing everything on its way. This huge mass of water then recedes. And when it does so, it sucks everything around like a vacuum cleaner, and drags them away into the sea. During the recent tsunami, many reported this phenomenon. By the way it is said that before a tsunami, the water line near the coast to be affected recedes considerably. Apparently, many communities that see this, immediately sense danger and move away from the coast.

Between 1900 and 2001, 796 tsunamis were observed or recorded in the Pacific region. The greatest number of tsunamis in any one year was 19 in 1938. Of the 796 tsunamis reported, 117 caused casualties near the source only. Only 9 of the 796 events caused destruction throughout the Pacific region. As far as the Indian Ocean is concerned, it is said that the last big tsunami was over a hundred and fifty years ago. After the recent tsunami, Tamil scholars went back to some old classics and opined that the disappearance of the port town Poompuhar many centuries ago was most likely due to a tsunami. Many other historical explorations are being pursued. ■

TSUNAMI DESCRIPTION



Speed and Depth of a Tsunami



Height and Depth Depiction of Tsunami 2004

THE TSUNAMI WARNING SYSTEM

Consequent to the damages caused in the middle of the 20th century in Hawaii and elsewhere, the US decided to establish a tsunami warning system. Over the years, it has been greatly improved and presently a very good and efficient system is in operation. It is called Deep Ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunamis, known better as DART.

The idea of the DART is as follows.

! Place and anchor on the ocean floor at a few select places, pressure recorders. The ocean floor pressure recorder, records pressure waves caused by earthquakes or other disturbances. The pressure transducer can detect a pressure wave as small as 1cm at a depth of 6000m of water.

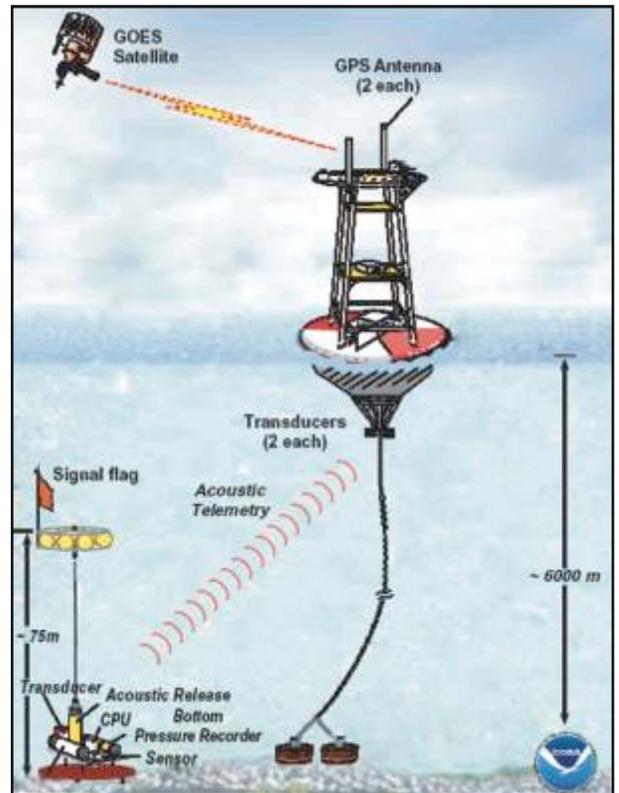
! The pressure transmitter then sends a directed acoustic signal. This signal is directed towards a buoy placed on the ocean surface, roughly above the pressure recorder below.

! The buoy has an instrument that picks up the acoustic signal sent by the pressure recorder on the ocean floor.

! This signal is then transmitted by the buoy as a radio signal to a satellite in space.

! The satellite picks up the signal sent by the buoy and retransmits the signal to a central control station.

! This control station receives signals from different buoys placed on the ocean. It also receives seismic signals recorded from the earthquake. By combining



the signals from the different buoys, the control room would be able, especially with computer analysis, to not only monitor the progress of the tsunami wave but also forecast when it would reach different coastlines.

! The alarm system is now set in operation and warnings are sent to different locations.

! At each location, the civil authorities, after receiving the warning, initiate evacuation and other procedures. In Hawaii, for example, there are sirens similar to World War II air raid sirens, which go off as soon as the warning is received. Immediately, the public on the beach front are expected to rush and move inland. Simultaneously, evacuation buses are pressed into service and so forth.

Did the Pacific System Spot the Indian Ocean Tsunami?

Yes indeed.

! It was 25th December 2004, 2.59 P.M local time in Hawaii, when the earthquake occurred off Sumatra. At the epicentre of the earthquake, it was roughly 8.30 A.M 26th December when the quake occurred.

THE TSUNAMI WARNING SYSTEM

! At 3.07 P.M, The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre [PTWC] in Hawaii received signals from detectors near Australia.

!At 3.14 P.M, the PTWC issued a bulletin stating that an earthquake had occurred and that there was no tsunami threat to the Pacific nations participating in the Pacific Warning System.

!At 4.30 P.M Hawaii time, the PTWC managed to contact the Australian Emergency Management Department who confirmed that they were aware of the earthquake.

!By 5.30 P.M Hawaii time, there were Internet reports of tsunami damage and casualties in Sri Lanka.

!At 5.45 P.M PTWC alerted the U.S Pacific Command in Hawaii. Around the same time, PTWC received a call from the Sri Lankan Naval Command asking whether there were likely to be further tsunami waves from the after shocks.

!At 6.00 P.M, the U.S Ambassador in Sri Lanka called PTWC to ask for immediate information about aftershocks so that he could notify the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.

At 10.15 P.M PTWC advised the U.S State Department that there was a potential threat to Africa and Madagascar. The State Department then set up a conference call with the U.S Embassies in Madagascar and Mauritius, and PTWC advised them of the current situation.

Tsunami Waves as Seen from Space

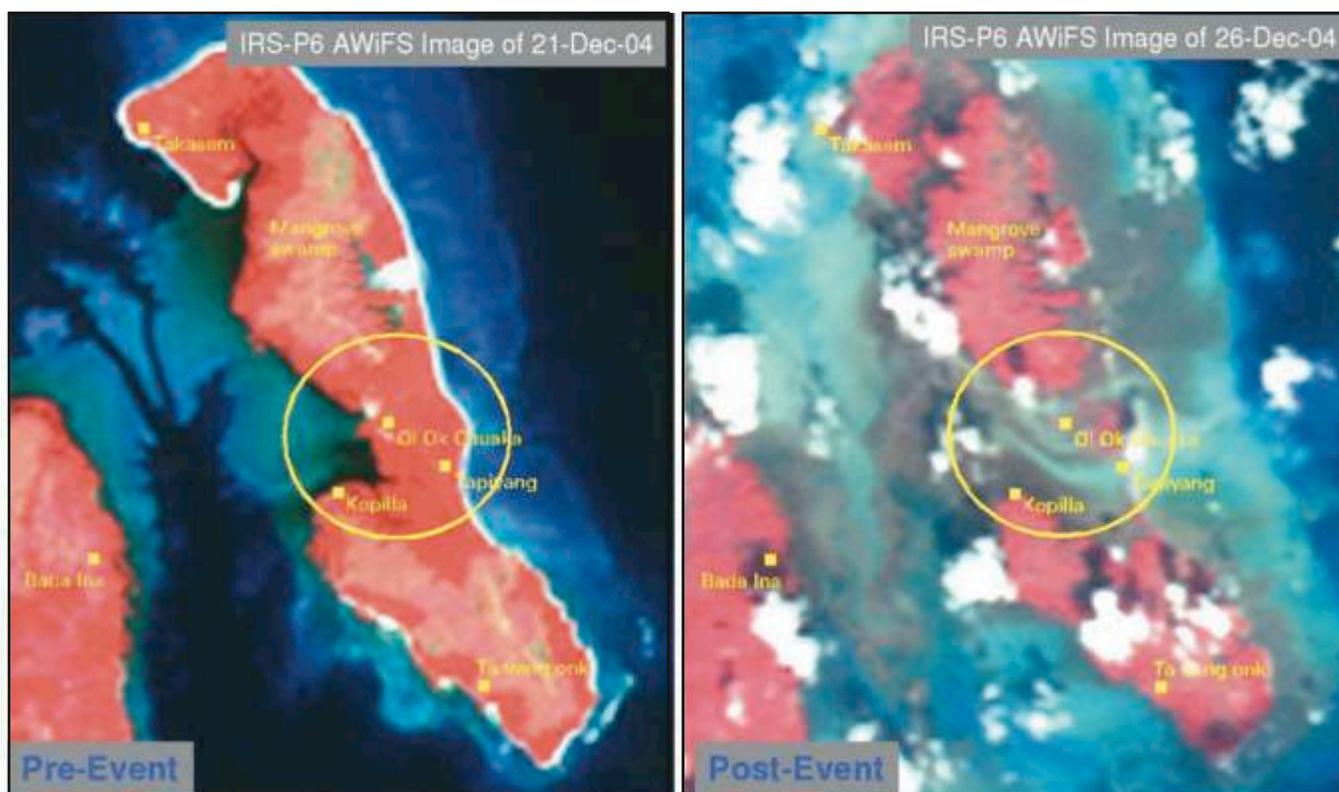
As already mentioned, the tsunami manifests as a water wave on the ocean surface, and its energy decreases as the wave spreads farther and farther. Two hours after the quake, the surface waves had a height of about 60cm. By about 9 hours, the amplitude of the water wave had dropped to about 5 – 10cm, the limit of detection by the radar satellites.



Satellite image showing the advance of the Chilean Tsunami

THE IMPACT OF TSUNAMI 2004

Waves on the ocean surface are best picked up by satellites equipped with radar equipment. There are a number of such satellites going round, and all these earth-orbiting radar satellites routinely monitor sea level variations from space for a number of purposes, including the mapping of uncharted ocean floors. By chance all these satellites were at the right place at the right time. They have thus monitored quite well the recent tsunami. Presented here are satellite images showing the devastation caused, followed by ground level photos.



Before and After the Tsunami: one of the Andaman Islands; notice the centre of the island swamped with water

For videos on Tsunami, go to the Tsunami page on Heart2Heart at www.radiosai.org



Banda Aceh, before the tsunami



After the Tsunami: Banda Aceh, Indonesia



Banda Aceh, before the tsunami



Banda Aceh after the tsunami; notice the playing field's disappearance amidst other destruction



Before the tsunami, Banda Aceh



After the tsunami: Banda Aceh



Flooded Port Blair, India



Chaos on the coast, India



Survivors at Port Blair, India



Damaged buildings on Nicobar Island



Damaged Airforce Base, Nicobar Islands, India



Kolachal, Tamil Nadu, India

THE IMPACT OF TSUNAMI 2004



Grave for Mass burial, India



A ruined house, Cuddalore, India



Devastation at Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, India



Upturned car at Unawatuna, Sri Lanka



Track and train overturned at Hikaduwa, Sri Lanka



Pamadura, Sri Lanka



Galle, Sri Lanka was decimated



Mass Burial, Sri Lanka



Upturned vehicles, dead bodies, Unawatuna, Sri Lanka



Khao Lak, Thailand



Phuket, Thailand



Unidentified Bodies, Thailand



Banda Aceh, Indonesia



Unidentified bodies, Banda Aceh



Injured women, Banda Aceh

MIRACLE STORIES

It has not been all doom and gloom. The tsunami stimulated a great outpouring of compassion around the world. And there seem to be many instances of the Divine Hand at work saving people from certain death. We present a sample of them here.

Man Rescued after Two Weeks at Sea

Ari Afrizal's home town of Calang has been destroyed. This Acehese man swept out to sea by the tsunami has been rescued two full weeks after the wave destroyed his home town. Ari Afrizal had lived on makeshift rafts and a leaky fishing boat until he was spotted by an Arab container ship at midday on Sunday. At first Mr Afrizal, 21, feared the ship's crew had not spotted him, but after passing him once it returned and plucked him from the water. He is the third Indonesian rescued from the open water since the tsunami. Speaking on his arrival at a Malaysian port before being taken to hospital for medical checks, Mr Afrizal told how he had given up hope of surviving his ordeal before his rescue. "I managed to survive as I ate the flesh of old coconuts for about 12 days. "For three days I didn't get to eat anything. I gave up all hope of living." Ari Afrizal was building a house with friends in the Aceh town of Calang when the tsunami struck on 26 December. Caught up in the wave, he was first pushed inland and then sucked out to sea when the tsunami

waters receded. The man survived on a makeshift raft; for 24 hours he clung to a log to survive. Then he clambered inside a damaged wooden boat before finally settling on a raft cobbled together from floating debris. Mr Afrizal waved repeatedly at passing ships, but none stopped for him. When the UAE-registered al-Yamamah appeared on the horizon Mr Afrizal was determined to be seen. "I managed to whistle at the ship and then waved my hands. The ship sped on but it sounded the klaxon and I stood up. I thought the ship had left the area and I sat down and cried. But the ship returned and cheered me up." he said. "I then waved at them as I knew I was safe."

Courtesy BBC

Tsunami 'Miracle' Woman Pregnant

An Indonesian woman who was discovered last week after surviving for five days in the Indian Ocean is pregnant, doctors have announced. Malawati, in her early 20s, knew she was expecting a child but had not



told her rescuers because she assumed she would have lost it in her ordeal. "I'm very glad, very happy," she said on hearing the news, from her hospital bed in Penang, northern Malaysia. However, her husband - who was swept out to sea with her - is still missing. Doctors were stunned to discover, on giving Malawati medical checks following her rescue, that she was 18 weeks pregnant. The foetus was alive and healthy, said Helena Tuanakotta, the Indonesian vice consul in Penang. Malawati has also been giving more details of her five days at sea. "I almost drowned twice as I could not swim and was thrashing in the water trying to keep my head up when I chanced upon the tree trunk," she told The Star Online. She survived by eating the fruit and bark of the sago palm she clung to. "I slipped twice but managed to hold on," she was quoted as saying by Reuters news agency. "I saw sharks around me but prayed they wouldn't hurt me." Malawati said she was looking forward to going home to Indonesia's Aceh province, but Ms Tuanakotta said the coconut farmer would probably stay in Malaysia until some of her relatives in Aceh are found.

Courtesy BBC

Indian Navy Rescues Tsunami Survivor

A man has been rescued by the Indian navy 25 days after being thrown by the Indian Ocean tsunami on a remote island in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Michael Mangal was first sucked into the sea and then thrown back onto the shore where he survived on coconuts. The Nicobarese tribesman is said to be exhausted but only slightly injured. Michael Mangal was spotted on the tiny island of Pillow Panja on Friday, the navy said. "He was in his underwear and had used his clothes to make the flag," navy spokesman Salil Mehta told French news agency AFP. "He was exhausted and weak when the rescue team brought him back to Port Blair," Mr Mehta said. Mr Mangal told the rescue team he had searched "high and low" for people from his devastated village. He said he had sat on a tree for several days and nights as he was afraid of being "swallowed by the ocean".

Courtesy BBC

Elephant Saves a Girl From Tsunami

An eight-year-old survivor of the Asian disaster has told how her life was saved by a four-year-old elephant. Amber Mason, of Milton Keynes, Bucks, was riding Ningnong in the Thai resort of Phuket when the devastating waves struck the beach. As the wave swept in and with water up to his shoulders, Ningnong dashed out of the waves to the top of the beach, carrying Amber to safety. Back home, Amber said she felt very lucky that Ningnong had saved her. She said: "I think Ningnong thought something was wrong and was trying to get off the beach. Everyone was running out of the sea and my mum began crying because she thought she'd lost me." Ningnong's owner, realising that seconds were precious, said he had ordered the elephant to run. Amber's mother, Sam, believes Ningnong had been crucial in saving her daughter. "If she had been on the beach on her own or with us on the beach, she would never have lived. The elephant took the pounding of the wave," she said. Ningnong is back on the beach and playing in the waves and as a thank you for saving Amber's life, her family have said they will pay to Ningnong's owner £30 a month.

Courtesy BBC

Girl Saves Bathers

A 10-year-old British schoolgirl saved the lives of hundreds of people by warning them about a wall of water was about to strike, after learning about tsunamis in geography class. Tilly was holidaying with her family on Phuket when she suddenly grasped what was taking place and alerted her mother. "I was on the beach and the water started to go funny. There were bubbles and the tide went out all of a sudden. I recognised what was happening and had a feeling there was going to be a tsunami. I told mummy." Her intuition was enough to raise the alert and prompt the evacuation of Phuket's Maikhao beach.

Courtesy Indian Express

SAI SEVA



INTERVIEW WITH MR. SRINIVASAN

Extracts from the Radio Sai Interview with Mr. Srinivasan (SN), All India President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation (SSSSO) by Prof Venkataraman (GV), on the Seva Rendered Immediately Following the Tsunami.



Immediate response in Chennai, 26th morning

GV: I am aware but the world is not aware of the wonderful work that is being done by Sai devotees especially Sevadals, in India in the tsunami affected regions. So can you tell us where you were and what was your reaction when you heard of this disaster of catastrophic proportions?

SN: Sai Ram sir, I was here in Prashanti Nilayam and I heard about it within an hour and a half from the State President who was in Chennai. Later we started to receive reports of what had happened in Nagapattinam and Cuddalore and so on which were the worst affected areas in Tamil Nadu. I also had reports from Andhra Pradesh and those affected districts such as Nellore and Krishna. The State President from Kerala also contacted me to speak of how the tsunami affected the state.

One interesting fact is that as soon as this happened the Sai Organisation was the first to respond in Chennai. This was because on that day, by Bhagavan's Grace, they had got ready 5,000 packets of food for a pre-planned Narayan Seva. So when the disaster was apprehended these food packets were immediately mobilized for distribution in the affected areas of Chennai, within an hour and a half of the tsunami. So this is clearly a sign of

Bhagavan's Grace that the Organisation could respond within 90 minutes. Although food was not the immediate priority, at least it reassured the people that their basic needs would be taken care of in the coming time. And the sight of the Sevadals gave a lot of reassurance.

Later our Sevadals went from Tanjore and other districts in Tamil Nadu, first to make a survey at Nagapattinam and other areas. Nagapattinam was the worst hit in the whole of India and had the maximum number of casualties.



Mr. Srinivasan

One interesting fact that I would like to bring to your attention is that for the last 2 years we have introduced what is called Disaster Management Training. We have been training select groups of Sevadals to respond to disasters such as floods, earthquakes, fires, building collapses etc. In all these instances you do not just need a pair of hands, you need a pair of trained hands who know what exactly is to be done and what is the priority to attend to.

Though we have not had the experience of a tsunami before, a lot of the training given to the Sevadals proved to be very useful.

GV: Was the training given nationwide?

SN: Yes, this was throughout India. And the ultimate target is that more than 70% of our Sevadal will be trained in Disaster Management. This is a specifically structured programme where we conduct detailed workshops on how to respond – even such things as how to carry people across on ropes when there is a flood and how to evacuate people. This has been carried out using some of the specialists in the fire and medical services.

GV: Was there any procedure for the Sevadals that they followed to remain calm?

SN: This is part of the fundamental Disaster Management Training - to be calm and cool and follow a plan of action. This helps us to keep away from the influence of panicky people and this came in good use responding to the tsunami. One of the spiritual practices that they follow is the constant recitation of the Sai Gayathri. That gives them the strength and also gives them a direct link with Divine Grace, to make sure that what they are doing is the best for their fellow human beings.

In Nagapattinam the first requirement for relief was the recovery and extraction of the dead bodies. This was something that had not been faced before in such massive numbers.



Retrieving bodies from the beach area

Usually in other instances casualties are to be found in one locality; but the tsunami left bodies strewn over miles and miles of beaches. So for the first few days our Sevadals were involved in handling the casualties which many other people were not prepared to do.

GV: One would normally faint seeing so

many corpses.

SN: Yes, seeing such corpses in stages of decomposition would have overwhelmed normal individuals. I was in constant touch with the State President, who was on site, to see what was the psychological impact on the Sevadals. I was reassured when he said that they are constantly reciting Sai Gayathri and they seem to be totally able to adjust to this situation. In fact, in the beginning the police were depending more and more on our volunteers for this kind of work. The police seemed to have unlimited and great respect for the Sai Organisation. In fact when there were restrictions on movement it was declared that anyone who comes with a

Sathya Sai Sevadal scarf is to be allowed unlimited access.

Many of the casualties had jewels on them and there was a fear of looting. So the police were not willing to allow others to go there. But our volunteers were asked to go there as they were sure that all the valuables would be collected and handed



Secretary of the Central Trust helping near Velankanni

INTERVIEW WITH MR. SRINIVASAN

over to the families of the afflicted people.

Our work was in two areas. First was relief and the second was the rehabilitation process. Firstly, was covering the basic needs such as nutrition etc. But the guidance that Bhagavan has given us is that we should also pay attention to restore their sense of dignity. Many people do not want to depend on handouts but want to provide for themselves.

GV: I presume that you have been keeping Swami informed on a day-to-day basis and receiving guidance from Him?

SN: Yes, and Swami has shown a lot of interest. He has sent the Secretary of the Central Trust along with one of our engineers who was involved in the Gujarat earthquake relief operations and also some experienced students. So Swami has really created a high level team to go there and guide the relief work.

GV: Can we go back to the subject of restoring dignity?

SN: Yes, Bhagavan was saying that we must give them articles that will help them such as stoves, utensils, kerosene, rice and provisions in neat packages. And this has been very well accepted.

This posed a logistic challenge for us, as all these items had to be pre-packed into standard packages or kits. And this is being done at Sundaram in Chennai whose open yard now resembles a massive warehouse, but neatly divided with people working in a very organized fashion making ready these kits. As soon as 1,000 are ready they are moved out by truck. There is a

retired army officer in charge and all the district presidents and the State Trust Convenor are also there. They are all making sure that the operation goes smoothly. So we have a constant flow of trucks taking the kits to the sites.

We expect this to continue for some time, until we see that there is some stability. Then there is the next stage regarding the restoration of housing and related issues. We are working closely in coordination with the State Government administration there to see what are their

plans and we have to mesh with that. And we are keeping very close contact with the Collector so that we see what needs to be done, not only tomorrow but over the next two weeks and so on, so that we dovetail into what they would like us to do, and what is their plan for the restoration of normality in that area.



Trucks leaving from Sundaram

GV: Nagapattinam is an area that holds places of religious interest to Muslims, Hindus and Christians. For example, Nagur is a place of Muslim pilgrimage. Velankanni is a place where Christians go. How were the Sevadals received by the survivors from different communities?

SN: Firstly, I would like to draw your attention to one happening. The tsunami seems to respect places of divine worship. The Tiruchendur Temple though right on the coast has not been damaged. In Nagapattinam, while water entered everywhere it did not enter the Church there. Similarly there is a mosque which did not take any water inside, but water went all around it. Also

in Chennai, the Ashtalakshmi temple was not affected even though the surrounding areas were affected by the water. So I think this means that wherever there are abodes of Divinity they seem to have a certain strength and the forces of Nature seem to respect these places.

GV: Prakriti bows to Paramatma.

SN: Relating to the response from people of different faiths it has been a totally human delivery and reception. One interesting occurrence was when there was a woman who had lost some of her family members and she was in deep distress and was saying that she did not need anything. But when our volunteers went to her and said that Sathya Sai Baba has sent Prasadam, she came running and said "This is what I need", and she put Swami's photo to her forehead, saying "He is my only refuge now".

But whether she was Christian or Hindu does not matter as people are going across these differences and saying that here is divinity in the form of the Sevadals. In fact, in many places where the Sevadals were handling the dead bodies the villagers said "Here are the walking Gods" and people started prostrating to them. That was the type of moving scenes that we saw.

GV: Do you have any idea about what impact has occurred to the Sevadals who were involved in this service?

SN: Well, one of the strongest messages we always tell our Sevadals is that the service that you do to others

is not so important - it is what the service does to you that is important. Because this is the way of transformation.

Many of our Sevadals have told us that they now realise the total impermanence of all material possessions and the uncertainty of life. They said that this has made a big impact on us and we are grateful to Bhagavan that we have been able to understand and appreciate this.

The day after the first batch finished their service they all came to Prashanti Nilayam for Darshan. Because they all felt that this is the Source from which they received the strength, this is the Source that guided them and this is the Source to whom they have to come and give thanks and pray for future guidance and strength.

When they left here they all went with total peace on their faces and they felt that they were reassured that they had contributed in a small measure to humanity. They have been praying that they will get further strength to do more service in this way.

GV: Now that you have gained much experience from exposure to this tremendous calamity do you plan to upgrade your Disaster Management Course?

SN: Certainly; first we have to understand what are the potential disasters that could happen that we have not thought about. So we will have a regular training, but also one for advanced groups which will prepare them for disasters that we have not contemplated as yet, and we will take expert advice on this subject.



Sevadals reflected on the uncertainty of life

TSUNAMI RELIEF SEVA IN TAMIL NADU



INTRODUCTION

The devastating tsunami affected large parts of the coast in South India. People were totally unprepared and at the mercy of these catastrophic tidal waves. In minutes, entire shoreline communities were wiped out, families lost, and fishing industries destroyed. It is an unprecedented disaster that has called for a worldwide response to help those affected.

There has been none better placed and trusted to give succour to the helpless than the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation (SSSSO). Crucially the SSSSO had also trained some of its members in Disaster Management. Thus those Sevadals who had undergone Disaster Management Training were uniquely effective in the required work.

With thousands of willing Sai devotees a massive relief effort was underway soon after the tsunami struck. This article will show you how the SSSSO planned and undertook the Seva, the experiences of the Sevadals and of some of the people and situations that they encountered. There are three sections; 'Rush to Organise Relief Seva', 'Accounts of Sai Relief Seva', and 'Moving Experiences'.

Some of the accounts may prove harrowing to some readers. But please be reassured that you will find some heart warming incidents of Sai inspired Seva which gave aid to some of the humanity's most unfortunate people.

This article concentrates on the immediate aftermath of the tsunami; of course, work is still going on and will go on for many months, benefiting the lives of affected people for years to come.

RUSH TO ORGANISE RELIEF SEVA

Here we give a brief rundown of the relief Seva that was immediately organised in the aftermath of the tsunami. (This is material that was passed to Heart to Heart's editorial desk and it obviously does not cover all the Sai inspired Seva.)

At Chennai, as soon as was possible after the scale of the disaster was apprehended, at 10.45 a.m. on 26/12/04, a van full of Sai Youth, Sevadals, food, Swami's pocket photos and also a life size picture of Swami left to Fore Shore Estate, the most affected area in Chennai. The Sri Sathya Sai Organisation was probably the first group to reach the people with Narayan Seva.

Seven Chennai Samithis were celebrating their anniversary on 26/12/04. Normally, they would hold Narayan Seva for about 1000 people. All the Samithis were asked to send these Narayan Seva food packets to Sundaram. Soon afterwards 4000-5000 food packets reached Sundaram and were immediately sent out in five cars in different directions, each with Rs. 1000/- to buy more food for distribution.

Meanwhile, four faculty members of the Disaster Management Training Group, including the founder Sri Shymal Sur, State President of the SSSSO West Bengal, formed a Think Tank Group to coordinate relief efforts in the affected areas.

Nagapattinam District had been devastated by the tsunami and thus 17 Sevadals from Tanjore, under the leadership of a Disaster Management trained senior Sevalal, rushed to the area, leaving at 3pm on 26/12/04. They reported to the District Collector at 6.30pm. He asked them to go to the village of Velankanni, 15 kms away, which had borne the fury of the tsunami.

In Kacheepuram, Disaster Trained Sevadals rushed to give aid at 3pm on 26/12/04. They went to the town of Kalpakkam and found 15,000 people taking shelter who had lost everything in the tidal waves. They informed their Samithi and thus a big food aid programme was underway.

Teams from Trichy, Salem, Tirunelveli, Rajapalayam, Tuticorin and another from Tanjore also sprung into action by the 27/12/04.

Calls of Help from All Over India

The All India President of the SSSSO received offers of help from almost all the State Presidents of India who were ready to do any Seva. Some examples are shown here:

The Karnataka Youth sent five truckloads of relief material to Chennai. This included bed sheets, chappals, HDP floor sheets, biscuits and twenty thousand pocket size photos of our Lord. The Delhi State President remitted Rs. 2 Lakhs to the Sri Sathya Sai Trust, Tamil Nadu. The State President of Orissa was willing to send volunteers for Seva for the removal of bodies. Already more than 150 boys were working in various places.

In the next section we look at how the Seva mentioned above was carried out.



A Recipient of the Narayan Seva Packet



Sevadals working on the beach removing bodies

ACCOUNTS OF SAI RELIEF SEVA

Having read about efforts to organize the relief, this section details how some of the work that has come to Heart to Heart's attention was undertaken. By way of examples, we look at the Tanjore Team and their work at Velankanni in Nagapattinam District, which includes a firsthand account; then Sundaram's Seva; the Kancheepuram Team's relief work; and finally word from Mayilathurai.

Nagapattinam Relief Seva

There is a Mother Mary Temple at Velankanni village, visited by many Hindus as well as Christians. On 26/12/04, there was a function where the Virgin Mary statue was taken out in procession with special prayers. Many people had stayed back in the temple after Christmas, which is less than a thousand metres from the sea. The road in front of the church leads directly into sea. On both sides of the road there are shops, lodges and residences, all less than 600 metres from the sea.

When the tragedy took place people sleeping on the sands, the shop owners and lodges with visitors were all taken by surprise. The tidal wave, which was many metres high, fell with all its power over the lane. Thus the busy morning ended in tragedy and almost all the

people were taken into the sea. A few people managed to run inside the church for safety.

The water came up to the church compound wall and filled houses up to two stories. A super deluxe tourist bus from Kerala was buried into the earth. Many cars were taken into the sea. Many bodies were holding onto something, or couples were seen clutching together, as if they had tried to avoid being dragged into the sea. When the sea receded, dead bodies were scattered all over the beach and inside buildings.

Into this situation, on 27/12/04, came 62 Sevadals, who worked tirelessly under the authority of the Police and the District Collector. The Sevadals carried out their work in teams, continuously chanting Sai Gayathri. Sevadals performed the work, enthusiastically without any hesitation or sense of disgust. As a precaution all were given T.T. injections.

Each team was comprised of 4 people to carry a stretcher, 4 people to find and recover bodies and one person who would apply eucalyptus oil on the Sevadals' noses and sprinkle on the corpses, which were giving off a putrid odour. During the operation Sevadals who were handling corpses did not touch food or drink, but were

fed by other Sevadals specially nominated for this task.

The state administration allowed only the Sri Sathya Sai Sevadal to collect the bodies, and arrange them so that relatives could identify them and take them away. It is heartening to note that they

preferred the Sri Sathya Sai Sevadals for the discipline that they have. Many of the pilgrims happened to be Hindus who were wearing jewellery. With trust and confidence in the Sevadals, 1,200 bodies were collected and put into a big shed on the first day.

On the second day, 28/12/04, the task of removing hidden bodies was undertaken. These were found under debris, under fallen trees and in water. JCB machines issued by the Police helped in this task. At the request of the Parish Priest and the Police, any unidentified and unclaimed corpses still in the shed were taken by tractor-trailer to a graveyard.

In the meanwhile, 4 teams of 7 Sevadals, accompanied by the police were sent to the villages nearby; Serudur, Chinna Thambur, Periya Thambur, Muslim Colony and Kallaru. The teams excavated corpses and buried them with the help of villagers. 76 Sevadals were working on that day.

On the third day, 29/12/04, two teams were working in Velankanni. Any corpses that were found after clearance by JCB machines and corpses washed ashore on that day were taken to the graveyard. Three teams went to the villages of Echambur and Akkaraipatti as per the directions of the District Collector. Corpses were removed and burnt with the help of the villagers. 70 Sevadals were working on the



Sevadals receiving T.T. Injections

29th.

In total, during these three days 1,500 corpses were removed and transported and unidentified bodies buried.

We now turn to a firsthand account written by S.Thyagarajan, who was

present at the above operation. He is a Faculty Member of the Disaster Management Training Group, Tamil Nadu. He reached Velankanni on the 28/12/04.

The major task was already over and the enormity of the disaster hit me like a thunderbolt. The first sight was the digging of huge pits by digging machines and the dumping of dead bodies brought in by tractor-trailers. The first sight of Seva by the Sri Sathya Sai youth is something that I can never forget in my life.

Just near the church was this tractor-trailer loaded with dead bodies with about 7 of our Sai youth piously chanting Sai Gayathri. The vehicle stopped, the boys got down and with all reverence and chanting of Sai Gayathri picked up a dead body by the legs and arms, and moved it onto a stretcher. It was then loaded onto the trailer to be carried to its final burial place, along with 10 more such bodies.

There was a boy from Tanjore, hardly 18 years, who had pleaded with me on the mobile from Tanjore to instruct his DP to permit him to join the Disaster Management Team. I could see no revulsion in his or the other boys' faces handling such a situation, which could shake even the stoutest of hearts. They were properly equipped with masks, gloves and with the applying of eucalyptus oil to ward off the stench, were doing their Seva with love.

TSUNAMI RELIEF SEVA IN TAMIL NADU

The stench of decaying bodies, the grotesque sight of so many dead people in varying stages of decay, of men, women and children lined up in the front pandals of the Velankanni Church shook me up badly. As I went through the place, only the chanting of



Sevadal Team on site

"Sairam" inwardly could restore my sense of balance. By that time, as much as 700 bodies had been moved out either by relatives after identification, or those which could not be identified were moved to their mass burial ground. There were still about 50 bodies and more were coming in. They were retrieved from under the debris of houses and huts by our teams and also by the volunteers of the Catholic Youth Organisation.

Moving on, I met our team members and the leader Sri Gunasekaran. I could not contain myself anymore. I held the hands of our men and said, "I take these hands as your feet and prostrate before you. The Seva that you all did is magnificent." I was in tears then and as I write them now, there are tears welling up in my eyes. The reply was one that should be

etched in gold in the annals of S S S S O , "Sairam. We did nothing. All is being done by Swami".

With death and decay all around, undertaking work that they would never have dreamt of doing in their lives, these boys

were rendering Seva which was aptly described by one of the local men who, pointing to our boys carrying the dead bodies, said "Look at these walking Gods". There could have been no better real life example of Swami's saying, "LOVE WITHOUT DUTY IS DIVINE".

Later, I was discussing the various aspects of the Seva that was being done with our team members when someone came and said, "There are a few bodies under the debris. Shall we go?" Putting on the gloves and mask, I went with them. After a lot



Bodies ready for transportation

work in removing the debris, there was the first sight of a decaying body, a little girl of about 8. Believe me, there was no revulsion in my heart. Working in a planned way and with the assistance of four more Sevadals, I used my hands to extricate this body and carried it to the roadside to be sent to its final



Sevadals locating a tsunami victim on the beach



Retrieving the body

TSUNAMI RELIEF SEVA IN TAMIL NADU



Transporting bodies to the burial ground by tractor



Sevadals carrying a body to the burial ground

destination. The body of the child's mother was also removed from under the debris and carried to the place where we kept her daughter's body.

Having read this moving account we now turn to other places where Seva was carried out to help the tsunami victims.



Vans ready to be loaded at Sundaram

Sundaram Relief Seva

From 26/12/04, 10 a.m. onwards, the Sundaram Sri Sathya Sai Help Line Centre started to operate around the clock. Apart from food packets from the Samithis' anniversary, each devotee began to cook for ten persons each day. Tens of thousands of food packets started to flow in to Sundaram. Members and devotees who had vans and cars filled up their vehicles with food packets. Three to four Sevadals drove down to the seashore area to distribute to whoever needed food and water packets. All the members strictly wore the Sevadal scarf. Mahilas helped in this operation in sorting out the materials and bringing in materials. No Mahila member was utilised in the distribution of food or taken to the affected areas.

Some people who had seen the organised way of distribution came to Sundaram and asked whether they could participate. They were given full opportunity to travel along with us and they could witness that it was not only the distribution of food, but the courteous talk and



Packing for the night flight to the Andamans

the solace given that mattered the most. Many came forward to donate money which was remitted to the "Tamil Nadu State Trust - Relief Work" with receipts duly given. On the 26th evening a surprise came in the form of the vans from five star hotels who arrived at Sundaram laden with packed food with a request to distribute

it through the volunteers. Every single packet reached the needy.

Dispatch to the Andamans from Sundaram

Andaman and the other islands around it were devastated. Bhagavan permitted relief materials to be sent from Sundaram, which had received calls from the Andaman Samithi that their immediate need was water. Next they required baby food and other utility items. Hence 477 boxes of relief materials were made ready at Sundaram by 7p.m. on 30/12/04, and the airport informed.

However the airline stated that they would only transport about 50 cartons. After prayers to Bhagavan, 477 boxes were taken to the airport along with twenty Sevadals. It was then midnight at the airport, and the airlines had received a consignment of water from their supplier. But they did not have any staff to lift the cargo into the aircraft. The Sevadals immediately jumped to the



Andaman Night Flight: a packing machine saved hours of time



Andaman Night Flight: counting out the 477 boxes



This and the picture below show another dispatch to the Andamans, this time by sea



TSUNAMI RELIEF SEVA IN TAMIL NADU



The needed supplies are given out at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands



Sevadals visiting a house to find out if any help is needed

opportunity, and put all the water into the aircraft. It was then found that there was sufficient space for the remaining 477 boxes.

Though the airline had at first agreed for only 50 boxes, at that point they decided to airlift all the 477 boxes from Sundaram. They conveyed sincere thanks for the entire loading operations, without which it would not have been possible for the aircraft to take off at 5.30 in the morning. In the busy hour of packing, Sundaram could not find time for the baby food. It was really a miracle that ten boxes of baby food were found as a part of the 477 boxes that took off to the Andamans. No one came to Sundaram to give it free. There is no company that had sent the bill for the 477 boxes. Other than Swami, who could have taken such decisions in the interests of the children at Port Blair?

Kancheepuram Relief Work

As previously mentioned, the Kancheepuram Team had found 15,000 needy people in various places of shelter near Kalpakkam. By 10.00 a.m. on 27/12/04, 8 Tempo van loads of food, clothing and other items with a team of 32 youths and 6 Sevadals rushed to the Kalpakkam area.

They first visited a small village near Thirukalakundram, where more than 1,000 people were safely taking shelter. They were supplied with food and clothes. Pain balm was distributed to elderly people. From there, the team visited camps at Pudupattinam, Vayyavukuppam, Sadrass, Oyalikuppam and

other villages. After giving out aid they again visited Anupuram Township, where 5,000 people were given shelter. Here they distributed 450 bed sheets. Similar Seva was carried out at Varuganpatti, a village en route to Mahabalipuram where nearly 1,000 people were settled.

Mayilathurai Sai Seva

Before the distribution of relief materials at Mayilathurai, all the recipients are asked to sit, and then OM was chanted three times. Next a Ganesh Bhajan, and then a comment on the gifts being Sri Sathya Sai Baba's Prasadam.

On the 29th, the team members took the materials received from Bangalore to be distributed in the Sirkali area. There was a camp in which 2,000 badly affected people were lodged. They distributed new bed sheets, new chappals (right size given to every individual), 150 square feet of HDP sheets to each person (which can be used as flooring) and new T-shirts for men.

At that time, two MP's from the ruling party and the local MLA happened to be there on a routine visit on the order of the Chief Minister. It seems that to begin with they made a comment as if the Seva was done for publicity. After seeing the organised way of distribution they called for a microphone and made an open announcement stating that this is the best camp that they had seen. They appreciated the Sevadals' method of distribution and their commitment to obey Sri Sathya Sai

Baba. In the closure of his speech the Collector Mr. Veerashanmugam ani also gave a similar opinion about the tireless and committed work of the Sri Sathya Sai Sevadals.



Youth engaged in Seva



Bedsheet distribution

MOVING EXPERIENCES

Sevadals Saved from Exploding Hut

Akkaraipetai is a small village on an island where 4,000 people were living. The tsunami had caused the narrow passage to the hamlet to be blocked by boats. No one had gone there till the 28th morning. Many of the people had been washed away and people had died inside the huts. The administration gave clearance to burn any bodies and the Sevadals entered the village on the 28th to begin work.

At one point they found a hut with 7 or 8 bodies inside. The Sevadals decided to set fire to the house to burn the bodies. As the fire got underway suddenly there was a loud explosion with huge fireballs and pieces of wood flying through the air. A gas cylinder that was inside the house had burst. Our Sevadals who had been continuously chanting "Sai Gayathri" escaped from the blast. Not even a splinter or a spark of fire had hurt them. Swami had saved them.

"Only He Can Take Care of Me"

A middle-aged woman was found alone in a hut in a

remote village. The Sevadals went to give her bed sheets, a sari and some food packets. In her trauma she shouted, "Give me my husband and children! Not these things!" She refused to take them and asked them to go. Then our boys told her "This is Prasadam for you from Sri Sathya Sai Baba". The moment she heard this, she stood up with folded hands, and received the Prasadam. When Swami's photo was given, she touched it to her forehead and said, "Only He can take care of me".

A Policeman is Moved to Wear the Sevalal Scarf
 Sevadals were busy giving out the food as Prasadam. A police official who was there was very much inspired by the work of the Sevadals and said, "Sir, please permit me to wear the scarf and serve some of the affected people; and thereby I will get the grace and blessings of Bhagavan Baba."

Sarva Dharma Seva at Mayavaram

Sevadals visited a camp in a Church. The people there were badly traumatised. They were asked to sit under a tree as the Sevadals started to sing Bhajans in front of



Policeman wearing Sevalal Scarf

TSUNAMI RELIEF SEVA IN TAMIL NADU

Swami's picture. Food, new clothes and bed sheets were being distributed. The Father of the Church was watching. He came and told the Sevadals that they were carrying out such good and disciplined work. He invited them inside the church and told them to bring Swami's photo. All the people were requested to come inside the Church and Swami's photo was kept at the front. They continued the distribution with Bhajans inside the Church and Sarva Dharma prayers.

The Velankanni Parish Priests' Reaction

When the Parish Priests of Velankanni Church witnessed the Sai Seva, they were very much moved and requested that only the Sevadals should complete the task of the removal of corpses. They were prepared to offer boarding and lodging for the volunteers. When the people of Velankanni, saw the Divine Seva, they regarded the Sevadals, as 'Nadamadam Deivam' (Moving Gods).

Nature Respects Divinity

Ashtalakshmi Temple

The Ashtalakshmi Temple in Besant Nagar, Chennai, is just about 300 metres from the sea. The temple faces the sea and is right on the sands of Besant Nagar beach. When the tsunami struck the east coast, the water entered over 500 metres inside the coastline. There was not even a drop of water inside the Ashtalakshmi Temple compound wall or the open

gate that faces the sea. The area around the temple was totally devastated including the parking area of the temple alongside and the shops in the lane connecting the Ashtalakshmi temple.

Velankanni Church

At Velankanni Church, in Nagapattinam District, where almost all the people around this area succumbed to the tsunami, the water did not enter beyond the Church's compound wall. Everyone inside the Church was safe and the compound wall is still standing without even minor damage.

Sathya Sai Prayer Hall in Vetuvankanni Village

In Vetuvankanni village, 15 kms from Chennai, there is a Sathya Sai Prayer Hall that was built by Mr. Farooq Buhari, a Muslim gentleman, owner of the famous Buhari Hotels. He is totally committed to Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He had donated a small piece of land near his Buhari Blue Lagoon Beach resort on the east coast road, on the way to Mahabalipuram. The prayer hall has been used as a community centre for fishermen. Our Adyar Samithi members periodically visit this place and perform Seva. The old students of Anantapur campus, who do service under the banner of 'The Messengers of Sai', periodically visit this village and do service using the prayer hall as the centre. The entire prayer hall is intact but around that area all the villages have been badly affected. ■



Disciplined distribution



Due to the order maintained no one was left out



Tsunami Relief materials being packed in boxes at Sundaram at Chennai

TSUNAMI RELIEF SEVA IN TAMIL NADU



Sevadals packing the Relief materials at Sundaram



Tsunami Relief materials stored at Sundaram, Chennai



Tsunami Relief materials being packed in boxes and loaded in lorries at Sundaram Chennai



Relief Materials loaded at Sundaram in Chennai

MARRIAGE SAVED BY SWAMI'S GRACE

A couple from Ernakalam, Kerala were due to celebrate their marriage on the 26th December. As fate would have it, the tsunami destroyed their house, taking all their money, gold and possessions. Greatly saddened by this cruel blow it seemed that their greatest day had become a tragedy. But by Swami's Grace, the local Sai Organisation came to hear of their plight. Inspired by the Lord's compassion they took it upon themselves to arrange the marriage of the now delighted couple. Truly God does send help!



The ruined house

INTERVIEW WITH DR. REDDY

Extracts from the Radio Sai Interview with Dr Reddy (DR), Chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Committee, by Prof Venkataraman (GV), on the International Seva Organisation's Relief Work Following the Tsunami.



Dr Reddy and Dr Goldstein with the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

GV: Sai Ram Dr Reddy, I am very glad that you are here after a brief visit to Sri Lanka following the tsunami. I would like to ask you two questions to begin with. The first is how has the Overseas Organisation reacted to this catastrophic event? And what did you see in Sri Lanka?

DR: Right after we came to know about this very sad episode we sent a message through the Prashanti Council of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation that we can pray for all the people who are deceased and the affected families of this catastrophe that affected so many people in so many countries. Then we can devise a plan of action; start providing monetary help and also materials like clothes, food and also medical help to the affected areas. That is the action that we took in the first 24 hours, and sent this message to all the leaders of the worldwide Sai Organisation.

Subsequent to that, on December 30th, an international earthquake fund was established right away to which any person who is interested can donate money. We focused on three countries; Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand. Significant amounts of money were sent to the Sathya Sai Organisations in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand.



Dr Reddy

Then we had to decide what help to give. We thought that it is better to personally visit these places. So I and Dr Goldstein went to Colombo, reaching there on the night of the 7th January.

We had a meeting with the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka at 7am in the morning. Our meeting with the Prime Minister was meant to be for a short time, but he was so at home with us that it went on for one hour. Our main reason to meet him was to see how the Sathya Sai Organisation can meet the needs of the people.

GV: Is the Prime Minister aware of Swami and of the Organisation and has he ever come to Prashanti Nilayam?

DR: The Prime Minister is aware of Sathya Sai Baba because his own brother is the Seva coordinator for a centre. So he is the one who really set up this meeting. And the Prime Minister's wife has been a devotee for many years and attends all the functions in Sri Lanka. In fact I was amazed that so many high level dignitaries knew Swami - the President's son, the Prime Minister's wife and family and even the Inspector General of the CID - some of them said that they were devotees for 25 years. Some of them had visited Prashanti Nilayam. In fact I find that

Swami's Name and Organisation has a lot of respect at high levels in Sri Lanka.

So coming back to the meeting with the Prime Minister, it was supposed to be for a short time but it went on for an hour. In fact one of his secretaries had to come in and say "Sir, you have a meeting with Kofi Annan" and he had to fly to that affected area.

He said that he was very grateful to India, the first country that responded with help - promptly sending containers of needed materials. He said that he was amazed that the whole international community responded in such an overwhelming manner and he was really moved.

Then he discussed how we can help; he commented on how so many people have lost their homes and need rehabilitating - a figure of around 890,000. There are so many displaced and bereaved families. This is creating great social disorder with crimes being committed. So right now the priority is providing temporary shelter.

In that regard I said that the Organisation is already providing 500 shelters, each costing 25,000 Sri Lankan rupees. He was very happy but told us to make sure that those shelters are at least 100m from the coastline so that they will not be affected.

The next thing is to provide cooking utensils for them. So we are already getting the utensils from Chennai in one container load. The third thing is to have pure water; water is the main problem that can create epidemics like cholera and so on. They are worried about water borne, air borne and food borne diseases which will have a devastating affect on the population - more than the tsunami itself. So they have been importing mineral water, but more useful are chlorine tablets, which can each clean about a gallon of water.

Another next step is providing sanitation; people need to have toilets, so giving portable toilets is another requirement. Already enough food and clothing has been sent. But with the money sent clothes can be bought, which are suitable for the

people and it will also stimulate the local economy. He said that people are wasting money in sending clothes and in transportation charges which is not a wise thing to do.

Next is the medical help. We have already sent a task force of doctors from the USA to assess how we can help in the relief process. In the beginning we wanted to focus on medical help, but then we learnt from the Prime Minister and in local meetings that it is not just medical help but the total rehabilitation of the community that is needed. In fact it more relates to the community adoption project that Swami set up here. So it is about setting up homes; providing sanitary facilities and then the medical help that is needed.

Another thing that they need more than medical help is that a lot of the people have major psychological traumas; this has been the worst event in their lives. So we need to provide psychological counselling. So that is one important aspect that we wanted to concentrate on for the mothers and also the children who have become orphans.

Another thing that the Prime Minister said is that this enthusiasm to help is just temporary and may well last a month and then people will get diverted to some other thing. But he foresees that more help will be needed over the whole year. So then I alerted all the people who said that they wanted to help - this included people from Canada, Europe and Asia - and said let us go in batches every two weeks. First we thought that it is only medical doctors that were necessary; but now we know we need to incorporate people that can build shelters and construct portable toilets; people who can distribute food, clothes and other materials.

We wanted them to meet the local Sathya Sai Organisation. So the central coordinator arranged a meeting and we met all the zonal leaders in Colombo in a three hour meeting.

GV: Did you visit any sites?

DR: Yes, we visited a site close to Colombo where we were shown how the people were housed in churches and what had happened to them. The doctors' teams will

INTERVIEW WITH DR. REDDY

be visiting different areas in Jaffna, Kandy and so on. The doctors formed an assessment task force to find out how we can help and how to plan the teams that will be coming, starting from January 29th. (Please see the 'Sri Lankan Medical Team Seva Report' to learn how this work has been carried out.)



Relief Distribution in Sri Lanka

GV: Can you tell us what the local people in the Sai organisation had accomplished before you arrived, in places like Galle and Jaffna?

DR: Their work started on December 27th ongoing. In total they served 20,000 people before we had arrived, with such a limited number of resources. It is not the quantity but the quality of service that they provided with such enthusiasm, love and compassion. Some of the youth were warned not to go into some of the dangerous areas, but they said that they wanted to go where there is a need. They said that they have Swami with them and they had such confidence, which was amazing to see.

GV: Can I put to you a point regarding water and chlorine treatment. I have heard many reports that after 2 or 3 days of drinking the treated water people become fed up with the chlorine taste and they would rather drink the polluted water. The ingress of the sea water would have contaminated the local water sources; but if there is a new community founded then you can dig a bore well and that would be a very useful long term solution.

DR: In fact this very point was raised in our meeting and one man who is in the water pump business said

that he could help in this way. But they are worried regarding all the bodies that have been buried and the possibility of them contaminating the subterranean water supply. Returning to the chlorine issue, health education becomes very important here to tell the people that it is a

question between 'taste' and 'life' - and they must be made aware of this.

GV: Are you planning to make the local Sevadals trained in dealing with these emergency situations because the doctors and counsellors cannot keep on coming. Then there are cost problems, language problems and cultural differences?

DR: That's a very good point and that's exactly what we are doing. We are telling each team, who will comprise of about 20 people from overseas countries, that there should be about 3 or 4 people who are Sri Lankans, because they can relate to the local people better; they know the local language and culture. Because being from Andhra Pradesh, when I go to the villages in Andhra, I can understand the villagers' cultural background and I know their language which is always helpful.

Another important issue that we have told our overseas teams is to be responsive to the needs of the local people and not say how things should be done. We have told the teams to coordinate with the local Sathya Sai coordinators and with the local people, so that people can work together and not create confusion in their zeal. This is the first time that the international Sri Sathya Sai Organisation has been involved in relief work and as we go on we will learn more on how to conduct such work. Swami is training us so that we can plan for the future.

Now onto the situation in Indonesia and Thailand. After I returned from Sri Lanka I went to see Swami. Dr. Goldstein went to Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia and some other areas like Sumatra and Band Aceh. He also met the Health Minister and the Secretary for Social Affairs and he said that they were as receptive as the Sri Lankan Prime Minister. They are willing to cooperate with the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation because they can see that we are very transparent in how we work.

We also want to help the fishermen who have been affected by buying them boats and fishing equipment. There was a medical task force from Singapore, Malaysia and Australia who went to assess their needs. We have already sent the funds to the local

organisation to start the relief work and it is already underway. I do not know the details yet but Dr. Goldstein said he is very happy with the work that they are doing.

The Sri Sathya Sai Organisation is also very active in Thailand. Phuk Ket is one of the worst affected areas which is a tourist area and our people have been going there for rehabilitation work.

So the Organisation is very active but this is just the beginning and we want to continue to provide these services in all the affected areas. We are also in touch regarding any help that the Overseas Organisation can do in Tamil Nadu. ■



Dr Goldstein with the Indonesian Minister for Health and Social Affairs

OVERSEAS SEVA REPORT

We now present Seva Reports from Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand, on how the nationally based Sai Organisations have been providing vital help for the tsunami victims.

SRI LANKA

The Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization of Sri Lanka (SSSSOSL) swung into action immediately after the tsunami struck the island. A Disaster Management Committee headed by the Central Coordinator M. Wanniyasekaram and comprising several senior officials of the Organization was set up to spearhead the relief and reconstruction activities.

Seva Work

Between December 26th 2004 and January 4th 2005, Sai volunteers from Western, Eastern, Northern and North Central Zones tirelessly engaged in a range of activities that included the following: a) procurement of rice, vegetables, dry rations b) cooking meals for the refugees c) collection of clothes and medicines d) packaging, transporting and distributing food, medicine and clothing to the refugees.

In the Western Zone nearly 300 Sai volunteers served approximately 10,000 people in the worst affected areas of Modera suburb, Galle town, Moratuwa town and Hikkaduwa town. In the Eastern zone 200 volunteers helped around 3,500 people in Kalmunai (south of Trincomalee) and Akkaraipattu (south of Batticaloa). In the North of Sri Lanka the coastal regions were severely damaged by the killer waves. 300 volunteers from North and North Central Zones served about 6,000 people. They also provided medical services in the refugee camps for over five days. In total, 818 volunteers served 19,500 people during the relief operations from December 26th to



Relief Supplies being made ready in Sri Lanka

January 4th.

Hundreds of young volunteers from the Sai Youth Wing visited the most severely affected areas of Sri Lanka taking with them several truckloads of essential goods, cooked meals, medicines, clothes and supplies

For setting up temporary shelters. With the Sai Mandir in Colombo serving as a hub for the relief efforts, volunteers worked round the clock to pack and dispatch supplies to affected areas in the north, east and south of Sri Lanka.

Dr. Michael Goldstein, Chairman of the Prashanti Council and Dr. Narendranath Reddy, Member of the Prashanti Council and Chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Committee, visited Sri Lanka on January 8th to assess the ground situation in Sri Lanka and to discuss how the International Sri Sathya Sai Organization could assist Sri Lanka in this hour of need.

Accompanied by the Sri Lankan Central Coordinator, they paid a courtesy visit to the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Hon. Mahinda Rajapakse. They briefed the Hon. Prime Minister about the relief efforts of the Sai Organization to serve those in distress. The Hon. Prime Minister acknowledged the services provided by the Sai Organization and proposed a rehabilitation project comprising housing, sanitation, clothing and schools. After the meeting with the Prime Minister, Dr. Goldstein and Dr. Reddy met senior officials of the Sri Lankan Sai Organization at the Sai Mandir in Colombo and discussed the immediate action plan for relief work.

Housing Needs

The Sai Organization of Sri Lanka, following Swami's command "Good work should never be postponed", immediately authorized the procurement of 500 fabricated housing units to provide homes for the refugees in North and North Central Zones. In addition to the housing, the Sai Organization is also providing all basic necessities to the refugees who will settle in the 500 housing units. For this purpose, a container load of utensils, a container load of mineral water and 2000 cartons of chlorine tablets for the purification of drinking water are being imported from Chennai, India.



Bedsheets ready for distribution in Sri Lanka

Presentation on the Seva Needed

Mr. A. Pulendran, Chairman of the Central Council Sri Lanka, made a presentation on the extent of damage caused by the tsunami and what needs to be done immediately. Certain priority areas for relief work such as providing shelter, water purification, construction of houses, providing trauma counseling, providing medical assistance, and taking care of infants and mothers were identified in consultation with SSSO Zonal Presidents in Sri Lanka. Matters related to sending specialized medical doctors to conduct camps were also discussed.

Dr. Goldstein emphasized that the law of the land should be kept in mind when carrying out all Seva activities and requested the youth to continue their good work under the guidance of elders. He thanked the SSSOSL for the wonderful Seva done so far and assured all possible assistance in the near future.

Dr. Reddy briefed on the proposed visits of medical experts to Sri Lanka and assured all assistance by way of sending medical experts, medical equipment and medicine to affected areas. He also emphasized that we should always render service with love remembering God and closely follow the guidelines

of service given by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Then Dr. Goldstein and Dr. Reddy accompanied by the Sri Lankan central coordinator visited the affected areas in and around Colombo to see the damages caused by the tsunami.

Medical Taskforces

Dr. Upadhyay, Member of the Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Committee visited the affected areas to make a field assessment of the medical needs, and will be returning soon with a medical team from the United Kingdom. A taskforce of physicians and volunteers, headed by Dr. Brahma Sharma, President of the USA Sai Medical Committee, visited the affected areas. Following their recommendations two relief teams of Sai workers from Canada and USA are going to Sri Lanka on January 29th and February 10th.

INDONESIA

In Indonesia, the deadly tsunami on December 26th 2004, swamped the northern and western coastal areas of Sumatra, and the smaller outlying islands off Sumatra. The trauma faced by the victims and the trail of destruction left by the tsunami was devastating.

Nearly all the casualties and damage took place within the province of Aceh. As the largest city to receive the full fury of the tsunami, Banda Aceh is struggling to wake from a nightmare. Over-flights of the Aceh coast have reported a virtually destroyed coastline, with bodies floating at sea. In many towns and villages concrete pads are all that is left of substantial structures, while scattered corrugated iron roofs crumpled like paper are the only evidence of flimsier houses. A few intact mosques rise eerily from wasteland.

The first tasks of the government and humanitarian aid agencies were to bury the massive numbers of dead and prevent an epidemic of communicable diseases. Other

high priorities were delivery of medical supplies and personnel to overwhelmed hospitals and clinics; tent shelters; clothing to people who have lost their houses and belongings; and food, especially baby food.

The Relief Seva

Offers of aid poured in from Sai organizations across the globe. Chairman of the Prashanti Council, Dr. Michael Goldstein, along with the Regional Coordinator, Dr. V.K. Ravindran of Malaysia, empowered the chairman of the Indonesian council, Bro. Mohan Mirpuri to mobilize relief action instantly.

Two Taskforces

On the eve of 27th December 2004, members of the Sai Organization, sprang into action by formulating immediate relief and rehabilitation plans for the tsunami victims in the devastated regions of Aceh. Two taskforces were formed. One was based at Medan, the closest city to Aceh, and the other in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. Dr K.H. Yeoh of Singapore was appointed as the Medical Coordinator for the Aceh taskforce.

Emergency Relief Supplies

On the 30th December the first taskforce, comprising of 20 Sai devotees were deployed from Medan Center. They distributed emergency relief supplies such as food, water, medicine, clothes, blankets and other basic necessities. They visited Lhoksuemawe, one of the severely hit regions and did an initial assessment for upcoming reconstruction projects. They returned with horrifying reports of the catastrophe, accounts of large scale devastation and destruction, and tales of pain and despair. Aceh was in dire need of aid.

Medical Supplies

On the 31st December the second team from Jakarta swiftly arranged bulk medical supplies that were

urgently required by the only 2 hospitals in operation in Aceh. Since the influx of injured victims was overwhelming, medical supplies were quickly depleting. Replenishment was hampered due to obliterated roads and a damaged transport system. However, with unshaken faith in Bhagavan's bountiful compassion, the taskforce set out to undertake the difficult task of supplying the hospital with medicines on the day of its urgent requirement. Bhagavan Baba's Divine grace was witnessed as all preparations for the trip were arranged by HIM. Much needed antibiotic medicines were quickly availed, and air tickets were arranged, all in a matter of few hours.

On the 1st of the New Year 2005, a team of 7 Sai devotees flew to Banda Aceh, personally carrying life-saving medical supplies for thousands of the injured victims. The Crisis Centre in the capital city of Aceh, informed that there were only 2 operational hospitals in the region with a capacity of housing 300 patients in total. They admitted that the hospitals were overwhelmed with the increasing rate of casualties, and lacked essential medicines and doctors and nurses, many of whom lost their lives in the tsunami.

On the 3rd of January 2005, Medan taskforce made their second trip bringing staple food and water. This time the team went further into North Aceh regency and surveyed 4 towns and surrounding villages. The result of the survey concluded that the most important aid required in the region, after medication and food was water. Thus the team, assisted by professionals, set about

making necessary arrangements for the installation of a water purification unit.

On 5th Jan, Jakarta taskforce with Dr. Yeoh and Dr. Victor Seah of Singapore along with Dr. Arul Jyoti of Malaysia made their second trip to Banda Aceh. They carried with them fresh supplies of broad based antibiotics, anti-depressants and



Hand over of medicines at Fakina, Indonesia

urgent medicines as advised by the Ministry of Health in Jakarta.

Water Purification Units

On 9th Jan, in Muara Baru village of North Aceh regency one water purification unit was installed by the Medan taskforce. Eight more are soon to be installed. During the two days that the taskforce was there in the area, doctors and Sai devotees from Medan also organized a 2 day medical relief camp serving 1,487 refugees in 6 villages of North Aceh regency.



Handing over medicines at Sultan Iskandar Muda Hospital, Indonesia

On 13th Jan, Jakarta taskforce managed to hand over another batch of antibiotics and much needed vaccines to the hospitals in Banda Aceh with the help of the Singapore Air Force stationed in Medan.

Action plans are also being formulated to provide further relief aid to other inaccessible areas in the Western Coast of Aceh.

THAILAND

On December 29th, 2004, a team of twenty-five Sai devotees left the capital for the South. They traveled in one of the Sathya Sai School buses and another vehicle. The group included Sister Loraine Burrows, Brother Suppachi, President of the Sai Organisation of Thailand, Sister Puntip Nitising, President of the Sai Centre of



Donated water purification unit, Muara Baru village, Indonesia

Bangkok, and other Sai devotees and parents and students from the Sai School in Thailand. The bus went straight to Krabi, one of the worst hit areas in Thailand, and preparations were made to open a kitchen for distribution. Medical supplies, clothing, blankets, water and food were taken to the site. All volunteers met together with the local

people and a plan of action was conceived. The plan included three areas in which Sai Service was very much needed.

Assisting Bereaved Relatives

The first was at the Pracha Santhi Suk Foundation, which had been converted into an area to receive the remains of hundreds of people who did not survive the tsunami. Sister Lorraine Burrows and other Sai devotees worked from morning until night assisting the people who were searching for their relatives. There was a desperate need for volunteers who could speak both English and Thai, as well as other European languages, in order to assist the thousands of foreign visitors who were looking for their loved ones.

Hospital Translation Work

The second area was at Krabi hospital. Here also there was a great need for translation and understanding of the patients and foreigners in the hospital. The hospital also served as one of the focal points

for the distribution of food, medical supplies and clothing.

Food Distribution

The third area was the preparation and distribution of food. Devotees worked from morning until evening preparing food. More than one thousand boxes of vegetarian food were distributed every day.

Medical Camp

On January 23, 2005 a medical camp was held in a school in Chengdau, a district 80 kms from Chengmai. 262 people were seen by the medical team

and medicines were given to patients. Bhajans were sung during the whole session. Clothes, quilts, slippers, eating utensils and toothbrushes were distributed to 300 people. Food was served to 720 people and all were uplifted.

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba says, "It is not so much that other people need our service, but rather we who need opportunities to serve." We, His children, are grateful for the opportunities He gives us to serve God in Man and help us realize and manifest our Divine nature. ■



More medicines being handed over in Indonesia



Food being distributed in Thailand



Tsunami Relief Camp in Thailand

MEDICAL TEAM SEVA REPORT FROM SRI LANKA

As mentioned by Dr Reddy in his interview the International Sai Organisation has organised medical teams to assist the victims of the tsunami. We present a report from Team 2 who visited Sri Lanka from February 11th - 19th 2005.

Team 2 worked in the remote village of Aliyavalai located on the North East Coast of Sri Lanka in a dangerous area due to the political situation. This village comprised of 396 families, with more than 500 children, who had moved to the refugee camp because of the tsunami.

The team consisted of ten members including medical doctors, nurses and engineers from Canada, USA and Argentina. Three devotees from Vavuniya Sri Lankan Sai Center worked as translators.

450 patients were assisted at the medical camp. Also, a pediatric camp was conducted giving iron and multi-vitamins to most children who were presenting with nutritional deficiencies.

Another area of importance addressed by the team was grief counseling. The counselors worked closely with many families and held community meetings encouraging the victims to find their own personal strength and confidence to face and rebuild their lives.

Much work was done in the school, where a Sathya Sai Education in Human Values approach was adopted, instilling into the children a sense of confidence, pride and responsibility. On the last day of the grief counseling programme a ceremony was held at the sea



Baby called TSUNAMI who has born the same day december 26

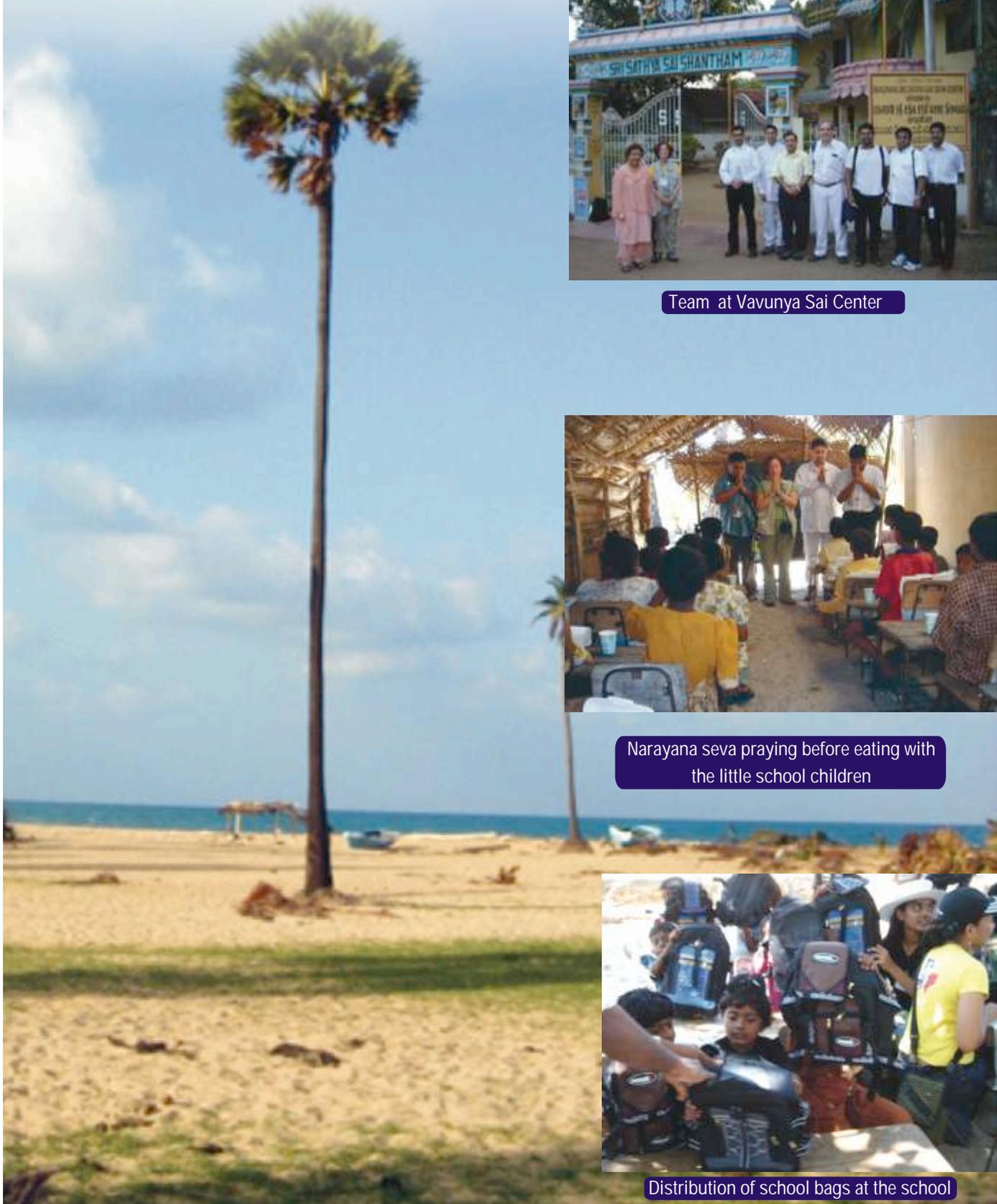
shore where all prayed for the souls taken by the tsunami and for the welfare of those who were presently affected. For many of the children taking part in the ceremony, this was the first time they had returned to the beach, signaling a new beginning without fear and full of hope.

In addition to the above, over 250 packets of food were given to the children at the school on a daily basis. All of them received books, school bags and toys. Sports equipment was donated to the school authorities. At the hospital, the team handed over a wide selection of medical supplies. Eleven nurses working at the hospital were given new bicycles to help them travel to the clinic.

Despite the language barriers, the group experienced the reality that "There is only one language, the language of the heart". All the members felt Bhagavan's guidance and energy around them, protecting the group from any problem while working in this high risk area. All the members of the Team 2 could feel Bhagavan's love in their hearts and were overjoyed to be His instruments of Seva to our brothers in their time of need. ■

Dr. Jorge Luis Berra
Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Committee

The wave reached up to the top of the palm tree



Team at Vavunya Sai Center



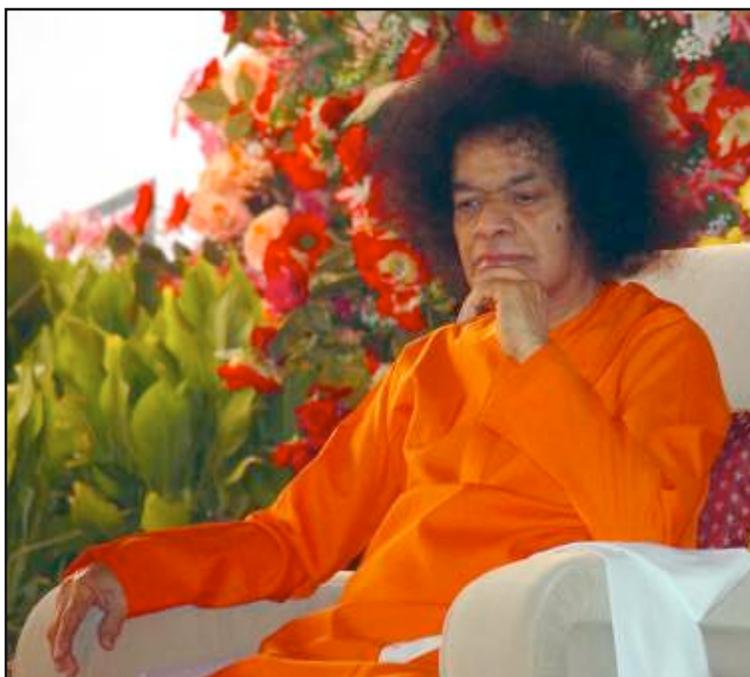
Narayana seva praying before eating with the little school children



Distribution of school bags at the school

SWAMI ON NATURAL DISASTERS

In times of despair, doubt and confusion man turns to God to understand his suffering. So it is that the Lord offers us solutions to our plight by enlightenment on the Law of Cause and Effect and how we shape our own destiny. Heart to Heart offers you extracts from Swami's Teachings relevant to the tsunami.



As man's conduct is perverted, today we find natural calamities taking place. You are aware of the devastation caused by the earthquake in Gujarat. Thousands of people lost their lives. The reason for this is that man is entertaining excessive desires. God maintains perfect balance in His creation. In God's creation, the earth and the oceans are endowed with balance. But man is indiscriminately exploiting the earth for extracting oil.

Every day tonnes of fish are caught from the oceans. This indiscriminate exploitation of nature results in imbalance to Earth, which is playing havoc with human lives. Only when man is free from Kampam (unsteadiness) within, will he not be troubled by Bhukampam (earthquake). Not only the people of Bharat but also the people of the entire world should strive to maintain balance. The five elements are nothing but manifestations of the Divine. Man's life will be secure only when he realises this truth and acts accordingly.

A few days ago, I had sent lorry loads of rice, grams, etc., to the earthquake victims of Gujarat. Some people asked "Swami, why should you take the trouble of spending so much money for sending the relief material to Gujarat. You could

have as well averted the earthquake." I replied, "My dear, man has to blame himself for the earthquakes. Due to excessive greed for wealth, he is disturbing the balance of the earth. Hence the earthquake. That is the law of Nature.

....You should enjoy Nature according to your need. You should not rob Nature of its resources to satisfy your greed. Here is an example. Once a greedy person owned a duck, which used to lay a golden egg every day. One day, he ripped open the stomach of the duck thinking that he would get many golden eggs at a time. Today man also is indulging in such foolish and greedy acts. Instead of being satisfied with what Nature is giving him, he aspires for more and more, and in the process, creating imbalance in Nature.

Today scientists are interested in new inventions. The advancement in science and technology has also led to imbalance in Nature. As a result, there are earthquakes and no timely rains. Science should be utilised only to the extent needed. Science has its limitations, and crossing those limits leads to danger.

Sivarathri, 21.02.2001, Prashanti Nilayam.
Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 34 chap 3

Today in many parts of the world Nature is causing various disasters such as earthquakes, famines, floods and volcanic eruptions. What is the reason? The spiritual lapses of man account for these calamities. Disturbances in the heart (human heart) are reflected in earthquakes. Fill your minds with good thoughts and engage yourselves in good actions. Chant the Lord's Name. When the ether is surcharged with the vibrations of the Divine Name, the entire environment gets purified. Those who breathe this sanctified air will have pure thoughts. Purify the atmosphere, which is now polluted.

Discourse 7-10-1993. "Sathya Sai Speaks" Vol. XXVI, chapter - 31.

Just as a child is entitled to enjoy the milk from its mother and the bee is entitled to enjoy the honey from flowers, there can be no objection to man enjoying the resources of nature but, as a result of uncontrolled desires and reckless exploitation of natural resources nature is exhibiting frightening disorders in the form of natural calamities like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, droughts and floods. Man today behaves like a foolish woodcutter wielding the axe at the very branch of the tree on which he is sitting.

Thought for the day, 5/12/2003

By building gigantic dams and storing huge quantities of water in one place, the earth goes down in that area and consequently goes up in another area, like a see-saw. The indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources by the scientists and technologists such as various types of mines for extracting minerals, mica, coal, petrol and other oils results in imbalance and pollution of the five major elements, leading to catastrophes like earthquakes, and volcanoes, etc.

Discourse 26 May 1992

Today the world is losing its ecological balance, as man, out of utter selfishness, is robbing the mother

Earth of her resources like coal, petroleum, iron, etc. As a result, we find earthquakes, floods and such other devastating natural calamities. Human life will find fulfilment only when ecological balance is maintained.

25.09.2000

Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 33 chap 15

“ No global disaster to be apprehended ”

Sai will never do or suggest anything harmful to anyone. Some persons in overseas countries as well as some people within India have been distributing pamphlets in which they have published that Swami has stated that in a short while the world will be deluged by a great flood and that large areas will get submerged and that other disasters will overtake the world and many countries will suffer very much.

Such thoughts have never occurred to Swami and will never occur. These are the fancies of some idle minds. Do not give any credence to them. In some of these pamphlets, it is stated that parts of this country will get submerged and that Swami will send 12 students for rescuing people and listing a number of points in the pamphlets. Some devotees appear to have been taken in by these pamphlets which are being distributed by mischievous elements. In no circumstance should devotees believe in such stories. Nor should they give them currency by passing them on by word of mouth. You should not lend your ears to such ridiculous reports. It is a sign of weakness to listen to such stories or discuss them.

No disaster is imminent for the world. Over the vast globe, there may be some mishaps here and there, from time to time.

Message from Bhagavan Baba repudiating certain reports circulated in various countries attributing to Him predictions of various disasters facing the world in the following years. Discourse at the end of the Sivarathri Bhajans on the morning of 13-2-1991.

REFLECTIONS ON TSUNAMI

Prof. G. Venkataraman

In contract law, there occurs the phrase 'Act of God'. Basically, the 'Act of God' clause provides an escape route from what otherwise would be a hefty liability. In terms of widespread damage, the recent tsunami that swept across vast stretches of the Indian Ocean is certainly one of the biggest, fiercest, and hugely devastating 'Acts of God' witnessed in recent times. As pointed out elsewhere, the energy released in this tsunami equals the explosive power of 32,000 megaton bombs set off simultaneously.

If we think this to be a huge amount of energy, which in fact it is, let us remember that locked inside the Earth is energy that is billions of times greater. And the power that one encounters in the Cosmos would make the enormous power locked up in the Earth not even worth mentioning! What is even more astounding is that the powerful forces operating in the Cosmos, astronomical in magnitude though they might be are in fact infinitesimal compared to Divine Power, as Krishna reminds Arjuna.

Be that as it may, let us now turn to the questions that many have been asking recently: "Why do these disasters occur?" And secondly, "Why is it that in all such disasters, it is the poor, the meek and the humble who face Nature's fury while the evil doers seem to get away with it?" This is a poser to which we shall return later.

But for the moment, dealing with the first question, we do need to note that natural phenomena of extraordinary power and magnitude are a part of Nature. Little do we realise that such phenomena occur on Earth all the time and indeed have done so, long before humans appeared on Earth. For example, the collision of continents that led to the birth of the Himalayas was an event that must have been billions of times more powerful than the recent tsunami – no question about that.

Yes, natural phenomena associated with unbelievable power and energy that literally changed the face of the Earth did occur many times in the past and may occur in the future also. If that be the case, why then do some people try to read extra meaning into floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and now the recent tsunami - meaning associated with righteous living, etc.? That is the central question, which I shall be addressing later, but first let me get a few things out of the way.

To start with, I would like to note that the tsunami is quite unlike many of the other natural disasters we are used to, like cyclones, hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, drought, etc. Most of these occur over extended periods of time. Moreover, they do not hit all places in such a rapid succession. In recent months there have been four major hurricanes in the Atlantic. Every one of them formed near the Caribbean region and then travelled slowly towards America, devastating in stages the islands that lay on the way, before finally becoming dissipated, in the process causing extensive damage to large parts of Florida. In other words, the disaster did not strike all countries at more or less the same time, which is what the recent tsunami did. Also, the reach of the tsunami was much, much longer than that of the Atlantic hurricanes.

My next point concerns the role of the media. As readers must be aware, I am generally very critical of the role played by modern media, with, what I hold, are good and valid reasons. In this case, however, it must be said to the credit of the media that it uniformly stirred the collective Conscience of humanity, moving it to rapid response and massive support in an incredibly short period of time. With the heart-rending stories filed by correspondents and the graphic video images projected, even the hardest Heart was forced to bleed, at least for a while.

It is pertinent to pause and recall that in the seventies of the twentieth century, a massive earthquake struck China resulting in the death of half a million people, and that

the disastrous floods which swept across Bangladesh around the same period took an equally large toll. However, instant television news providing almost real-time coverage as happens now was not available at that time, and that probably is one of the reasons why the world at large did not take notice of those huge calamities.

Thanks to the media, the global response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami has been stunningly good. I certainly cannot think of any crisis associated with natural disasters or, for that matter, even man-made disasters that moved so many to respond so massively, in such a short time. Dropping prejudices and forgetting differences, people and governments came together in an amazing manner and in such a short time too.

Several billions of dollars worth of aid have been pledged, but already fears are being expressed that these promises may not be translated into practice. Pretty soon the media would turn to other stories and the current tsunami disaster would be forgotten by everyone, including those who made the pledges. Quite possibly, [heaven forbid!] some other disaster might strike somewhere else, and the donor countries may pledge the same amounts promised now for tsunami relief!

This is not a figment of my imagination. No less a person than the UN Secretary General has expressed this very fear; that shows how short-lived "compassion" can be! Actually, such feelings do not represent compassion, which, being a Divine quality does not get switched on and off; rather, these feelings so much in evidence recently mostly represent, though not always, transient emotions. This is a point well worth bearing in mind.

Let me now move on to the spiritual overtones, if I might call it, starting with the question that many have asked: "How can God silently watch all this terrifying devastation and destruction? Why did He not do anything to stop it?" This kind of question has been asked through the ages - and also been answered. But who wants to remember this? Swept by emotions and shallow perception, people are quick to blame God

for events like this, though they hardly ever remember Him when there are good times. For example, when there is a good monsoon here in India, how many people really take a minute off to sincerely thank the Lord? But let the monsoon fail, and instantly people begin to wail and complain about God.

In this context it is pertinent to recall a nice little story that Bhagavan used to narrate in the old days. The story goes something like this: one day, young Krishna was playing along with His friends near the spot where the Gopis were drawing water and filling their pots. Yasoda was one among these ladies. Spotting Krishna, she said, "Hey Krishna, come here and help me to place these pots on my head." Krishna just smiled and ran away. Yasoda grumbled, managed to put the pots on her head by herself, and started walking. As she neared her home, she found that Krishna was waiting there; and without her asking, He spontaneously helped Yasoda to unload the pots. Yasoda was quite surprised and asked, "Krishna, this is very strange. I asked You before to place the pots on my head but you did not do so. On the other hand I did not ask You for any help now and yet You are helping me. What is the meaning of all this?" Krishna smiled and replied, "I do not place burdens on people's heads; I only remove them!" What a profound remark and does that not convey what role God actually plays?

Recently someone asked: "Why do people blame God when mankind is silent about the death of about 30,000 children every single day, due to causes entirely preventable? Why is humanity so quiet about this? Under these circumstances, what right do people have to point an accusing finger at God?" Very good point I must say! Don't you agree?

Turning to something different, the Earth which many often take to be a purely inanimate object is not quite what we imagine it to be. True technically speaking the Earth might be classified as inanimate, but those who have followed Swami's Discourses carefully would realise that even so-called inanimate objects in Creation are suffused with Divine Consciousness, though it might be present in a passive form, as opposed to the active form in which Consciousness manifests in living beings.

Be that as it may, the real point is this: consciousness pervades the universe as one integral fabric. It is rather like the atmosphere that surrounds the Earth. There is air everywhere, in the Arctic, in the Antarctic, over land and sea, and in all lungs too! There is thus an organic continuity of atmosphere though we might not be able to see that with our eyes. The practical consequence of this is that air can and does get mixed up. For example, depending on the direction of the wind, one day we might breathe cold air from the Arctic and the next day warm air from the Indian Ocean. Likewise, the air we breathe out may be swept out from one continent to another. But what does all this have to do with God, punishment, and the tsunami? That is what I am coming to!

You see, our actions generate subtle vibrations in the higher dimensions of thought and Consciousness. And these vibrations spread out reaching everywhere, pervading entities they encounter. For example, when a person speaks, that person generates sound vibrations in the air. These vibrations propagate and can travel even through solid matter like walls and liquid materials like water. Speaking about Bhajans in one of His Discourses, Swami mentioned that along with sound vibrations, which occur in gross matter, subtle vibrations are also set up that propagate forever without any attenuation. In this respect, the subtle vibrations are quite different from sound waves, which get attenuated with distance. These subtle vibrations interact with subtle matter. Thus it is, Swami said that when a large number of people sing Bhajans with all their Heart, the sacred vibrations so generated help to calm the turbulence in the world that is otherwise so full of agitations.

Let me now link all this to the recent tsunami. The tsunami is one example of a natural disaster - cyclones, typhoons, earthquakes, etc., being other examples. True every one of these can occur due to natural causes; but man also can trigger them. Imagine a rock perched near the edge of a hill. Over a period of time, due to erosion and such factors, one fine day the rock may roll down; this roll down would be due to natural causes. On the other hand someone may come, put a lever under the rock and give it a shove; if that is done then the rock would roll down for sure. So you see the

same kind of phenomenon can be triggered both by Nature as well as man. In this example, man intervenes via a direct physical act.

But man can trigger Nature's reaction via subtle vibrations also. If through widespread evil man generates mental turbulence, then that turbulence can trigger turbulence in the subtle state of the Earth. In turn, this can set in motion natural calamities. The point simply is that whether we like it or not, whether we believe in it or not, everything in the Universe is connected. This connection is subtle and can and does produce reactions.

The Bible talks about fire raining down and floods caused by people's sins. There is every reason to believe in these statements. And it could jolly well be that the frequency of natural disasters including droughts and floods have lately increased because fear of sin has vanished on a massive scale. This prompts humans to act in ways they are not supposed to on account of their Divine nature, which in turn can disturb the equilibrium amongst the subtle forces operating, all of which can lead to natural disasters. I don't know how you feel but I am strongly of the opinion that there is a cause and effect phenomenon here (please refer to Swami's quotes in the previous chapter). This is what the Law of Reflection, Reaction and Resound is really all about.

Most of us may agree that lately morals have taken a sharp nosedive, but we seldom realise how much each of us is to blame. What exactly is sin? Once upon a time, sin was what Moses forbade. Most of these related to physical acts, like killing, for example. With the passage of time, in "advanced" societies, many forbidden acts have been dropped from the original list. Also, new twists have been introduced. For instance, there is a lot of uproar among the rich countries about the huge corruption that prevails in the under-developed countries. Yes, such corruption does exist. But you know, when a rich multi-national corporation comes into a poor country and tries to get a toehold, it spends a lot of money – this is called 'promotional expense' but the fact of the matter is that this is nothing but grease money. This is how double standards have been sanctified.

I shall not go into all that here. But let me ask a basic question: "What exactly is sin?" I would say sin is any act that would not make God happy, any act that would bring pain to Swami. Once it is defined this way, we just cannot take shelter under what so and so says and so forth. The arbiter is our own Conscience. If our Conscience says, "Sorry, but Swami is not going to like what you want to do," then that is a sinful act for sure. Any act that is intended to promote our selfishness, hurt others and so on is a sinful act, however much we might argue to the contrary.

It is pertinent at this juncture to draw specific attention to a quartet of words that Swami used again and again, a couple of years ago. These words are: Vyashti, Samashti, Srishti, and Parameshti, meaning respectively, individual, Society, Nature and God. Swami has pointed out that man is a limb of Society; Society is a limb of Nature and Nature in turn is a limb of God. What it all means is that when man acts, he must take special care to see that his actions in no way harm Society or disturb Nature. It is actions of this kind alone that are pleasing to God and would help one to earn His Grace.

Keeping in mind the above, let us look at what is happening in the world today. Why does a person have to spend a lot of money to produce a film or a TV programme that projects a lot of negativity? Why do people have to create a huge industry that caters in various ways to the baser instincts and desires of people, such as gambling? Why do people have to recklessly cut down forests in the name of lumbering? Why do people have to create the ozone hole? The list goes on.

In one Discourse, Swami gave an allegorical interpretation of the Ramayana. Bhagavan said that Rama represents Paramatma the Omnipresent God, while Sita, the consort of Rama, represents Prakriti or Nature. Ravana symbolises man who tries to appropriate Nature, thinking it belongs to him. Not true! Prakriti, as Swami emphatically declared, belongs to Paramatma, and Nature is man's Universal Mother. Man must respectfully bow to Nature and pray to Her for bounties. When man does this, Nature would respond with Love, giving man everything that he

asks for, within limits of course.

On another occasion, Swami said that after creating everything including man, God said to man, "Son, all this is for you to benefit from and enjoy. But you must draw upon these bounties within limits and with humility. If you fail to do that, then there can be serious consequences." And that precisely is what is happening. Have we not heard time and again people talking of exploiting resources under the sea, in Antarctica and the moon?

Getting back to the question of what exactly 'sin' is, the point is that sin is not merely what people usually understood it to be, say a thousand years ago. In this day when the world is described as a global village and news can travel in a second round the world, the implications of the word 'sin' are much more. We really must take some moments off to reflect deeply on our actions.

This takes me quite naturally to something else that Bhagavan often says: "Love for God and fear of sin alone can promote Morality in Society." Love is a powerful force that can help people to overcome desires. Let us say there is a poor man who is addicted to liquor – a very common thing in India. He drinks away all his earnings, leaving very little for the family. Often men beat their wives to snatch away whatever little these women might have earned by manual labour. OK, one fine day, one such drunkard's child becomes very ill. The child urgently needs medical attention and such attention cannot be found without paying the doctor's fees. So what does the man do? His feeling of love overpowers him, makes him forget alcohol, and use that money for medical attention for his dear child; and the child is saved. By the way, this is something that happens often in India. So this man is a slave to liquor; but his love for his child helps him to get out of the clutches of the desire for alcohol. In other words, desires that we normally regard as impossible to overcome can be overcome if we make that habit an offering to Swami. Have we not heard Swami say so many times, "I don't want your gifts. Just offer Me your bad habits!" God really means that! It would do us a lot of good to take Him seriously!

One point that some people tend to raise is the

following: "Every action has a consequence. If thousands perished and millions are suffering, they are just paying for their past. We should not interfere with the Law of Karma and must allow it to play out."

I have a simple answer to this kind of argument. Just recall what happened after the Gujarat earthquake. Swami sent a huge convoy of trucks carrying tents, stoves, kerosene, provisions, cooking oil, blankets, clothes, etc. Much earlier to that when some of the coastal districts of Andhra were devastated by a terrifying cyclone, Swami sent volunteers for relief work and provided all possible assistance to the cyclone victims. Kasturi has given a moving and inspiring account of this, and this is a must reading for all of us at the present time. The Lord's Message is loud and clear: "You have no business to judge other's Karma. When someone is suffering and is in distress, it is your bounden duty to render assistance." I hope that settles it.

Now to the question about why the poor are seemingly singled out for punishment, and how come the rich who sin more get away with it. In raising such questions, we should be extremely careful. How do we know who has sinned and to what extent? Also, is it not said that the Law of Reflection, Reaction, Resound has its own time constant, meaning that retribution will come when it has to and not when we think it should. Some people sin and instantly face the consequences, while some face the music in later births. That's the way it is and we all know it.

That being the case, I fail to understand how devotees who keep telling Swami that He is God and the Embodiment of Compassion, etc., also make these accusations. Does it mean that they think that God and Swami are distinct entities? I mention this not to find fault with anyone but just to remind ourselves that most of us seem to spend more time in judging God than in seriously studying what He has said and has been saying.

If people study the Teachings of Swami seriously,

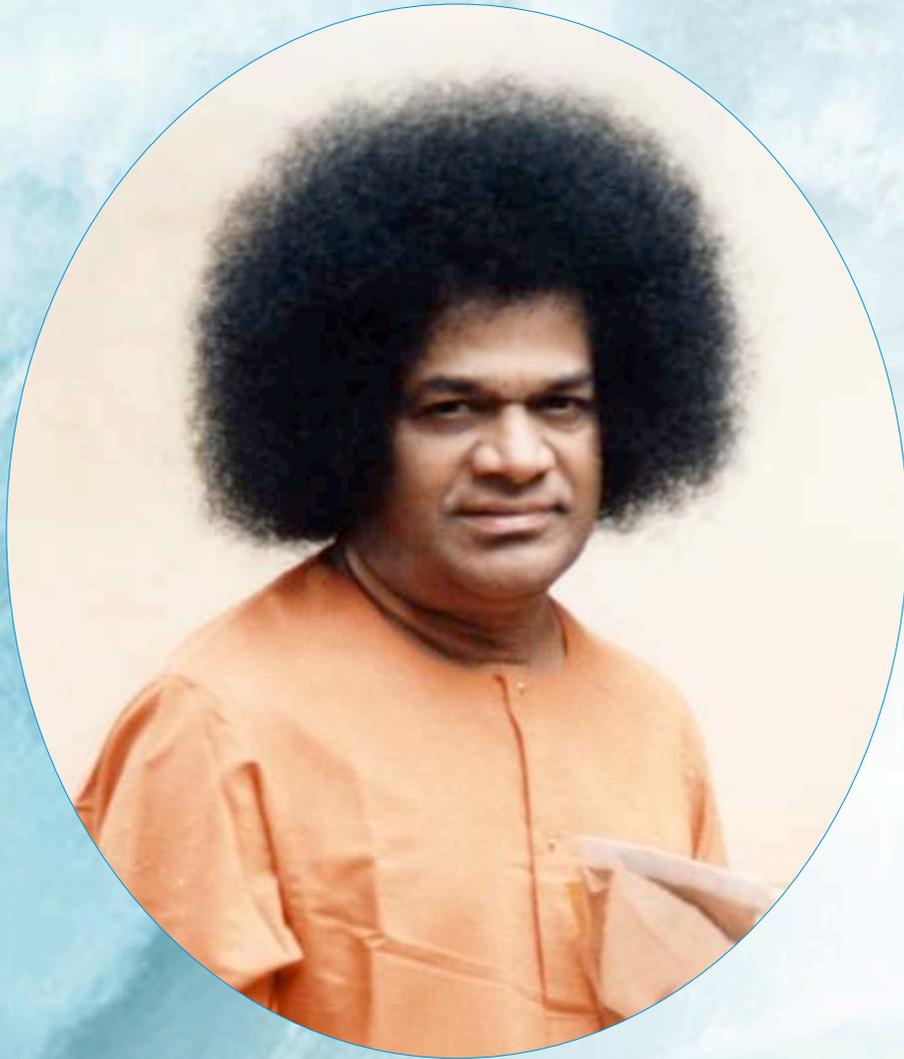
there should be no room for such doubts and questions. I find it amazing how people meticulously copy the 'Thought for the Day', using them to make greeting cards, and so on but fail to absorb the contents of these messages from Bhagavan! My submission is that it is about time we take God more seriously and go beyond the trivial and demonstrative aspects of devotion that we seem to be content with. Let us not forget what Swami says about suffering; even suffering is for our good. Remember it is anguish that made Arjuna finally see Krishna as the Lord and surrender to Him. Misery is a good friend though we might not think so. I did not make this up! It is Swami Himself who says so! Look it up in Gitavahini. In a nutshell, let us stop blaming God when there are innumerable faults in us.

As an aside, I must also narrate a small but most important incident that happened recently. A small group of people sent a message to Swami, seeking His blessings to go to Tamil Nadu and do service in the tsunami affected regions. Swami told the person who conveyed the request something simple but profound. In effect what He said was the following: "There is no need for these people to go there. Already, hundreds of volunteers trained in disaster management are at the site. If inexperienced people go, they might even come in the way. It is better for these people to silently pray to God to PREVENT such disasters in the future. Not many pray in that manner, and offering such prayers to the Almighty would therefore be the best service they can render."

That says a lot, doesn't it? We all routinely chant Loka Samasthaa Sukhino Bhavantu after Bhajans. But do we really feel that way in our Hearts? Kabir once said:

"Everyone prays when in distress, But none pray when they are happy. If people pray when they have no problems, Would sorrow and misery have a chance?"

Yes, of course, we must have tsunami warning systems and so on. But in the ultimate analysis, is not, as Kabir says so beautifully, prevention better than cure? Think about it!



As people have lost respect and reverence
for mother Earth, we experience
earthquakes and such other natural
calamities causing untold destruction.

-BABA



LOVE ALL SERVE ALL