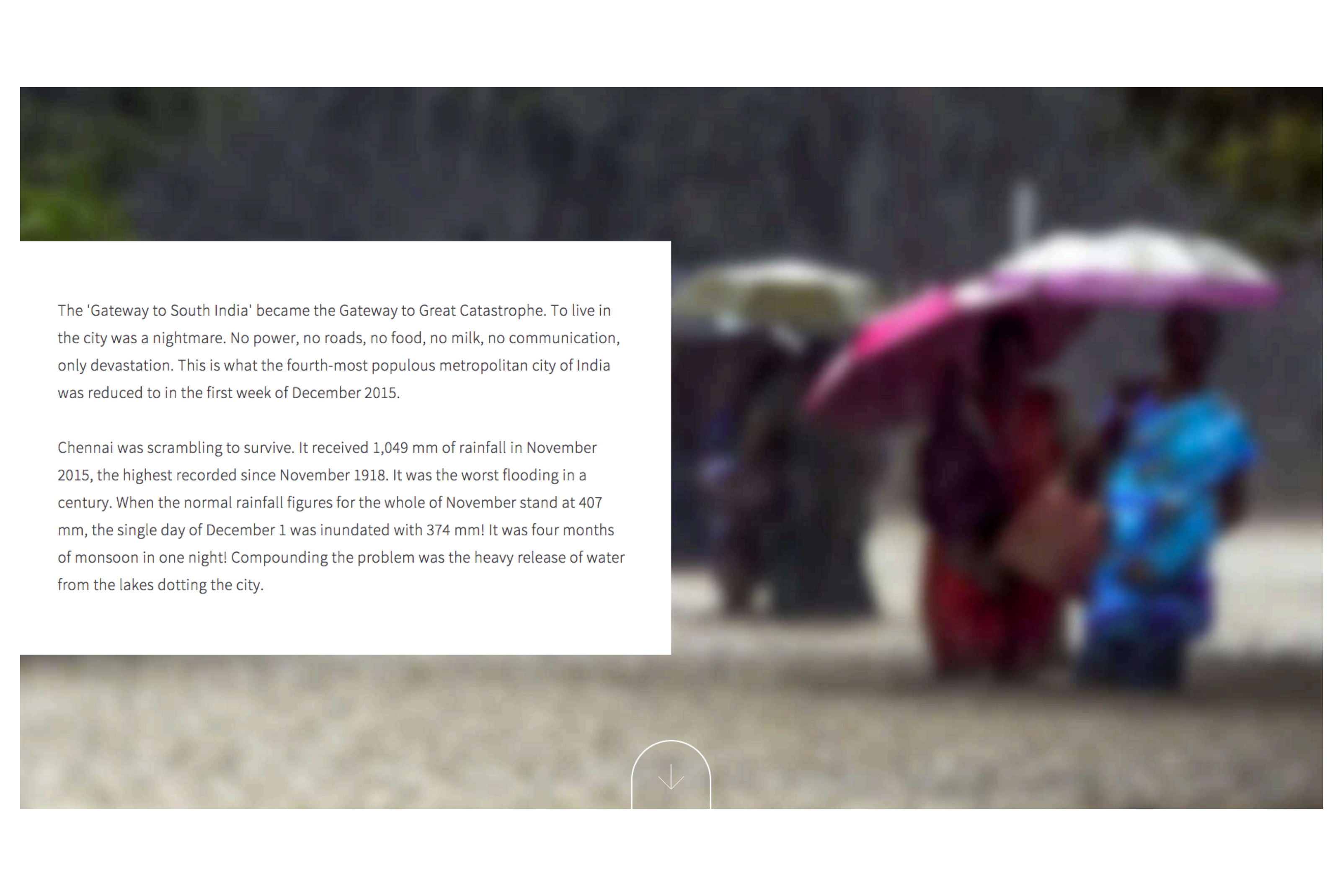


# Caring and Healing Chennai ... with Sai Love

**Chennai Flood Relief Service by Sri Sathya Sai Organisation, Tamilnadu**

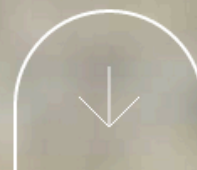




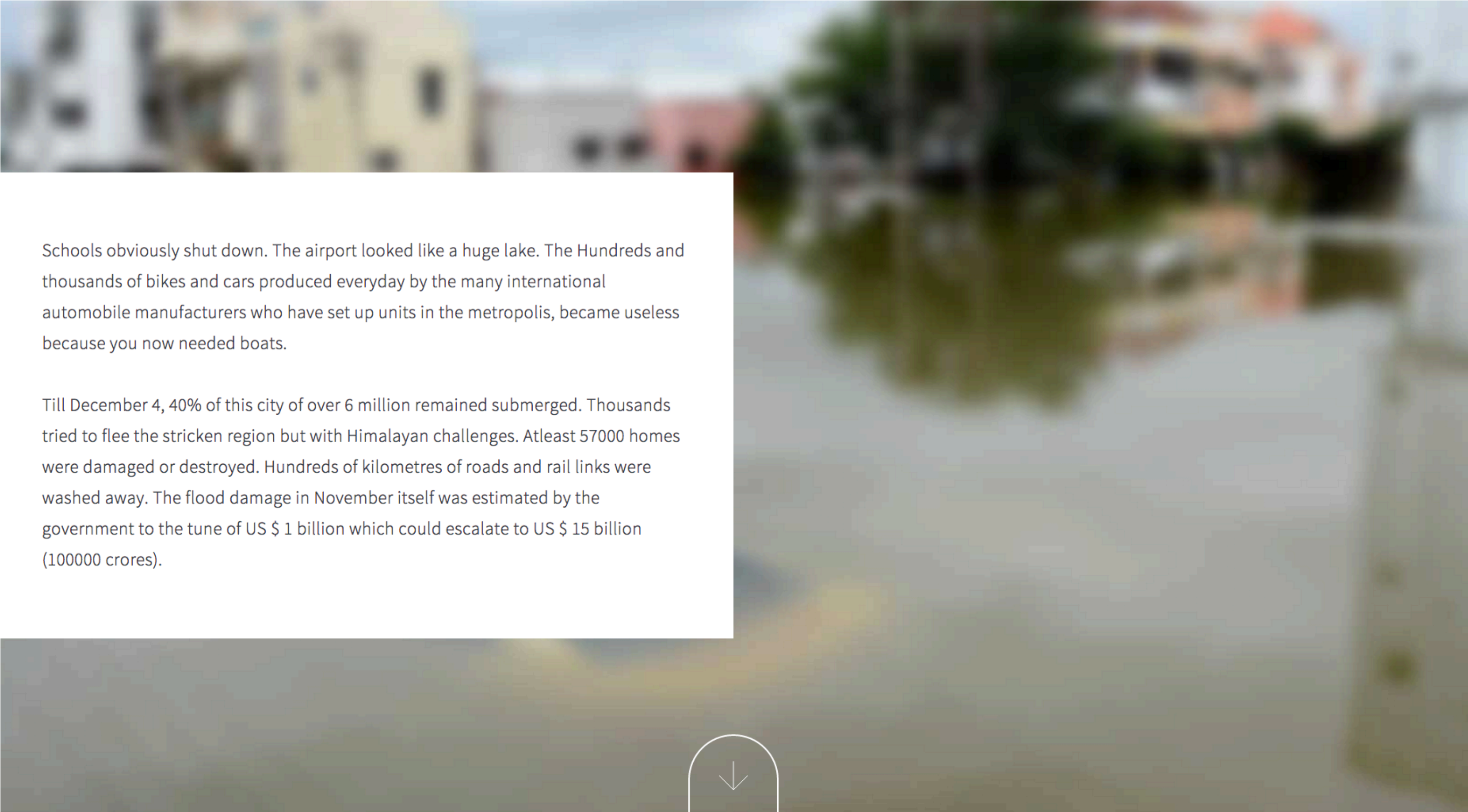


The 'Gateway to South India' became the Gateway to Great Catastrophe. To live in the city was a nightmare. No power, no roads, no food, no milk, no communication, only devastation. This is what the fourth-most populous metropolitan city of India was reduced to in the first week of December 2015.

Chennai was scrambling to survive. It received 1,049 mm of rainfall in November 2015, the highest recorded since November 1918. It was the worst flooding in a century. When the normal rainfall figures for the whole of November stand at 407 mm, the single day of December 1 was inundated with 374 mm! It was four months of monsoon in one night! Compounding the problem was the heavy release of water from the lakes dotting the city.







Schools obviously shut down. The airport looked like a huge lake. The Hundreds and thousands of bikes and cars produced everyday by the many international automobile manufacturers who have set up units in the metropolis, became useless because you now needed boats.

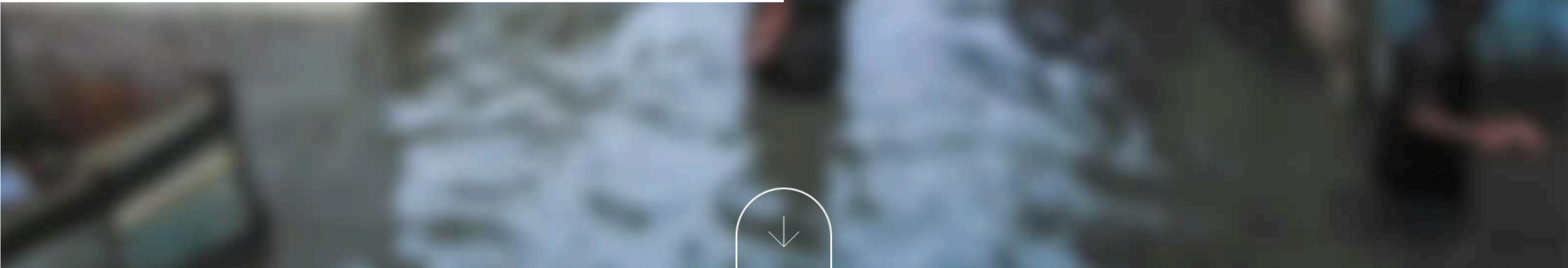
Till December 4, 40% of this city of over 6 million remained submerged. Thousands tried to flee the stricken region but with Himalayan challenges. Atleast 57000 homes were damaged or destroyed. Hundreds of kilometres of roads and rail links were washed away. The flood damage in November itself was estimated by the government to the tune of US \$ 1 billion which could escalate to US \$ 15 billion (100000 crores).





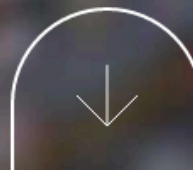


“On the morning of Tuesday, December 1, 2015, when it began raining, there was ankle-deep water in our street. As time went by, the rain intensified and by 10.30 am power went off. We thought power would be restored in a day or so when the rain stopped, because just last month on a couple of days this is what happened when we had water-logging in our street. But how wrong we were! Little did we know what a calamity lay ahead!” recalls Ms. Aarthi, a resident in Perambur, North Chennai.





“We had running water in our taps for the first day but on the second day, December 2, it stopped because there was no power to run the motor and fill the overhead tank. The rains kept lashing... Phone batteries went down. We had to use candles and torches. And now the water from the nearby water bodies had overflowed and had found its way to our streets. There was water everywhere. We felt helpless, hopeless, clueless.” This is not what Aarthi but every Chennaite went through. Nearly 400 people dead. Over 1.8 million displaced. The loss of the industry pegged at approx. 15000 crore; it is easily one of the most dreadful and costliest disasters of our times.

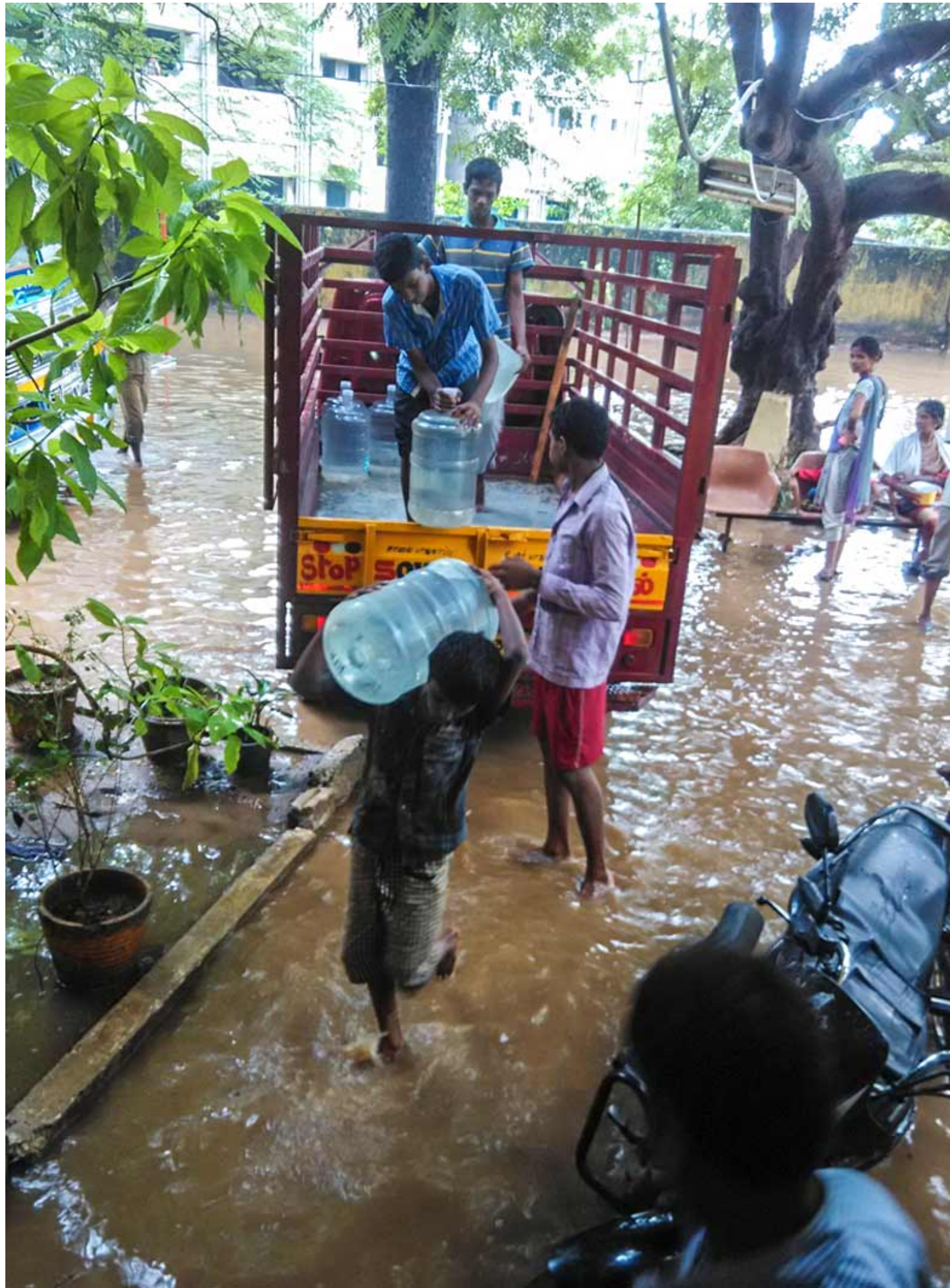




The armed forces did their job of evacuating thousands of stranded residents from rooftops and outlying villages. They set up temporary shelters and community kitchens too. But Chennai had collapsed. A lot of Chennai now has to be rebuilt. Even as the government is gearing up to restore this mammoth metropolis, several non-governmental organizations too are lending their best support.

“Amidst all this chaos, there were a few Good Samaritans who braved all the deep and dirty waters and came into our street with cooked food. There were also a few brothers from the nearby Sai centre (Sri Sathya Sai Nivas) who brought lunch on December 4. Our hearts go out in gratitude to all the noble souls who came, bringing food and other essentials,” says Ms. Aarthi.







In fact the Sai Youth of Chennai flung into action within hours after the calamity struck. A core team quickly surveyed the affected areas and a backend team started a kitchen which began by serving nearly 2000 food packets every session. The challenge was to somehow reach out to the people who were living almost in an island now; so the youth waded through knee-deep and sometimes neck-deep water to serve wherever there is utmost need.

The Sai Youth gave out not only food but also mosquito coils, mosquito repellent creams, water, biscuits, milk, candles, etc. A team of doctors and paramedics too made their way through the deluge to the deep and interior areas and administered medicines.





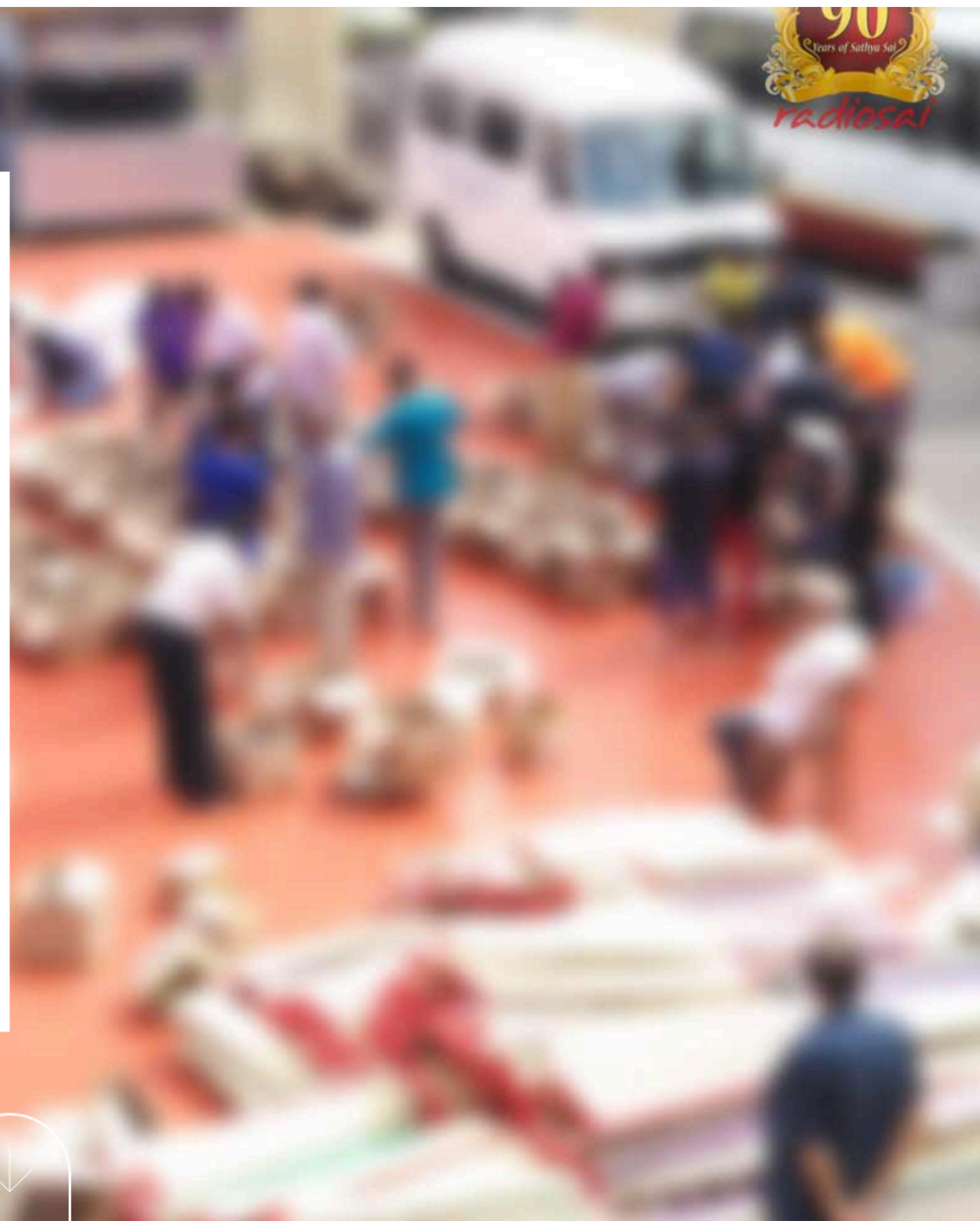






This initial and immediate relief soon spiralled into mammoth proportions. By the time the rains abated on December 4-5, the Tamil Nadu Sai Organisation had laid down elaborate plans to prepare 21000 gift packets to be distributed. Each packet was to contain a total of 32 essential items which include rice, dhal, oil, drinking water, tamarind, clothes, match boxes, candle, women's hygiene products, and so on. This is the list that Bhagawan personally had given when the Sai Organisation undertook relief activities in the aftermath of Tsunami in 2004.

'Sundaram', Bhagawan's abode in Chennai, transformed into a spectacle of selfless service. Every inch of its space, right up to the door of Swami's room in the first floor, was filled with relief material. Atleast 500 youth were busy making these 'Sri Sathya Sai Prasadam' kits. In fact when the news of this work spread fast in social media many youngsters who had never stepped into Sundaram before, landed up there. At one point there were 600 volunteers, many of whom had no earlier association with the Sai Organisation but had come inspired by the sincere work going on in Swami's temple.









Gautham, a final year undergraduate student, had travelled 13 kms to participate in this service activity. “I came to know about the work through my friends in WhatsApp group. It moved me. I am happy doing this,” he said, enthusiasm sparkling in his eyes.

Even as the gift packets were distributed, many local Samithis were cooking and serving hundreds who were displaced and yet to return to their marooned homes. Food also had to be served to the doctors, paramedical staff and the hundreds of volunteers who worked right from 4 in the morning at Sundaram. The day the activities began in Sundaram, the owner of one of the famous hotels in the city came by and expressed his desire to contribute in the seva too. He wanted to offer some food to all those working in the Sundaram mandir. So apart from the food prepared this too was served. The number grew from the initial 60 to more than 500 on some days, but he continued to send a few dishes for all, twice a day, till the last day of the seva.

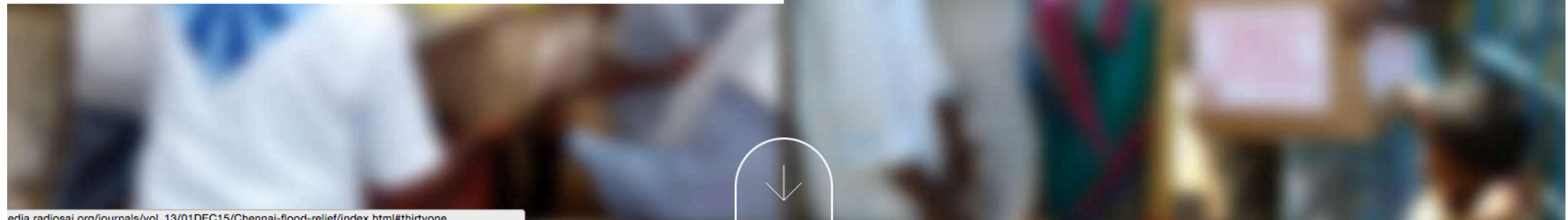






Indeed the commitment of some of the volunteers is truly commendable. For instance, a volunteer's own house was still submerged but he gave all his energy and time to help others who were in distress. The love energy that permeated Sundaram was so powerful that all differences just melted away. There were volunteers aged 15 to 75, most affluent to most downtrodden, most accomplished to most ordinary, but their love for Bhagawan and their spirit to serve superseded everything else. The very backbone of the activities at Sundaram were the many women volunteers, especially homemakers who worked all through the day.

What also merits a special mention is the spirited work done by scores of little children and youth. With their schools and colleges closed, they spent their every hour jubilantly lending their time and energy to the enormous task.





What was also seen is many other organisations came forward with relief materials, in cash and kind, and offered it to Sathya Sai Organisation because they felt confident that their contribution will be judiciously and diligently disbursed to the needy. Their trust in the Sai Organisation's quality and quantum of work made one smile. Also resources and materials came from the different state trusts of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisations like Bihar & Jharkand, Manipur, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh & Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh & Telangana.

Rescue and relief efforts still go on as it is going to take months for Chennai to undo all the damage. One member of the Sai Disaster Management Team saved 21 people using innovative techniques. Another rescued a pregnant lady with the support of a boat. In parallel Sai volunteers are active in creating awareness about the need for proper sanitation in schools and community centres.







Some of the good works of the organisation have been covered by the mainstream media too. “Sathya Sai Volunteers rescue Adambakkam residents” says the headline of one of the newspapers and goes on to state: “The members of Sri Sathya Sai Disaster Management Team formed a human chain and saved more than 20 people at Adambakkam. The team also distributed flood relief material in and around Pallikaranai and provided relief services in affected areas, Mudichur, Venkatamangalam....”

Another newspaper reported, “The Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation has been offering food everyday to 3000-4000 people since December 2... the distribution is being done at 61 locations and will reach more than 20000 families.”



## Satya Sai volunteers rescue Adambakkam residents



The members of Sri Sathya Sai Disaster Management Team, formed a human chain and saved more than 20 people at Adambakkam. The team also distributed flood relief material in and around Pallikaranai and provided relief

services in affected areas, Mudichur, Venkatamangalam, Medavakkam, Arasankani, Saidapet Bridge, Pozhichalur, Sozhinganallur and other districts including Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur and Cuddalore.

## Helping to rebuild lives

Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation helped the flood-affected by distributing food to around 4000 people in various neighbourhoods and Government shelters. To rehabilitate them, the organisation has been giving rehabilitation kits consisting of 30 essentials including rice, dhal, sugar, groceries, dresses tooth paste, brush and more to 25,000 families.



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பாதிக்கப்பட்ட குடும்பங்களுக்கு, இரண்டு வாரத்திற்கு தேவையான அத்தியாவசியப் பொருட்களை வழங்க, சத்யசாயி சேவா நிறுவனம் திட்டமிட்டு உள்ளது.

இது குறித்து அந்த அமைப்பின் துணைத் தலைவர் சுரேஷ் கூறியதாவது:சென்னை, கடலூர் மாவட்டங்களை சேர்ந்தவர்களுக்கு, இரண்டு வார காலத்திற்கு தேவையான, அரிசி, பருப்பு, எண்ணெய், உடை, பாய் உள்ளிட்ட பொருட்கள் வழங்க உள்ளோம்.

இப்பொருட்களை தானமாக வழங்க முன்வருபவர்கள், நாடு முழுவதும் உள்ள, சத்யசாயி நிறுவன கிளைகளில் வழங்கலாம். எங்களிடம் நேரடியாக நிவாரணப் பொருட்கள் வழங்க விரும்புவோர், சென்னை, அடையாறு, கிரீன்வேஸ் சாலையில் உள்ள, தமிழ்நாடு சத்யசாயி சேவா நிறுவன தலைமை இடமான, 'சுந்தரத்தில்' வழங்கலாம். இவ்வாறு அவர் தெரிவித்தார். நிவாரணப் பொருட்கள் கொடுக்க விரும்புவோர் சுரேஷ் - 98427 21715; சந்திரன் - 94444 61236; சுந்தரம் - 044 243462 மெயில்: tnvsuresh@gmail.com மூலமும் தொடர்பு கொள்ளலாம்.



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**THE SRI SATHYA SAI SEVA ORGANISATION**, with the help of its volunteers and devotees, has been offering food every day to 3000 to 4000 people since December 2, as part of the Chennai flood relief initiative. They have also undertaken distribution of relief material to people in Chennai, Kancheepuram, Cuddalore and Tiruvallur districts which were badly affected by the recent floods. The distribution is being done at 61 locations in the districts mentioned above and will reach more than 20,000 families.

**FOOD FOR THOUSANDS**

One of the worst affected area is Mallikaipoo Nagar which is on the banks of River Adyar. Even after two weeks of the flooding, this area is still logged with drainage water. On December 18, 2015 Sai volunteers not only provided them relief material but also much needed purified drinking water.

To augment the relief efforts, a Water Purification Plant was installed in the Sundaram premises itself on December 17, 2015. This will make it convenient to supply fresh water along with the Prasadam kit to the sick and needy.







The distribution of the relief gift-boxes that started on 8 Dec, concluded on the 22nd. The initial number of 21,000 grew to 27,550. Also 3000 boxes more were sent to the areas in and around Cuddalore and Pondichery. Interestingly, the relief work in these areas began much before the situation worsened in Chennai and still continues unabated. Having completed the distribution in the city, the office bearers head to these areas for seva even as this article was being prepared.

The Sai Organisation is still constantly engaged trying to comfort and rehabilitate the disadvantaged. Sundaram, where bhajans were held every Sunday to packed halls, was packed with relief material which were being sorted, packaged and given out. Now it is sweet bhajans on the lips, swift work on the hands, and smiling seva on the streets. Sundaram glows in the halo of selflessness and sacrifice.



