



Grade IX

Lesson 6

Weathering the Storm in Ersama

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Supplementary Reader

Soul of the Chapter

This story is a true account of the devastation brought about in Orissa (now Odisha) in 1999 by a super cyclone. On 27th October 1999, Prashant, a young boy of 19, went to Ersama to his friend's house. Ersama is a small town in coastal Orissa which is eighteen kilometres from village.

When the cyclone hit the coastal Orissa, Prashant was in Ersama. The cyclone continued for 36 hours. It brought down all the houses and huge old trees. Prashant had to spend two days at Ersama.

He was worried about his family. He started for his village. He covered eighteen kilometres. Distance to his village through the waist-deep water. On his way, he had to push away many human bodies and carcasses of animals.

Eventually Prashant reached his village. His heart went cold. He thought his family could not have survived the catastrophe. He was happy to see his family safe in the Red Cross camp.

Prashant decided to come forward and arrange food and medicine for the victims. He formed a group of youth and elders. They pressurised the local merchant to give them some rice. They cleaned the shelter of filth, urine, etc. The volunteers tended to the wounds of the injured.

On the fifth day, some government help reached their village but it was scanty. Prashant made the children lie on the sand with utensils on their stomachs. The passing helicopters got the message and they returned with more help.

Prashant decided to bring the orphaned children together. He made a shelter for them. He encouraged the women to work for 'food for work' programme started by an NGO. He arranged social events. He set up new foster families. He made the childless





windows to look after the orphaned children. He did not let anybody suffer. The widows and the orphaned children took Prashant as their saviour.

NCERT Questions

Think About It

1. What havoc has the super cyclone wreaked in the life of the people of Orissa?

The cyclone brought heavy rains and strong winds. As a result, majority of the houses had blown away and only the strong cement houses were spared. Dirty water covered the land as far as the eye could see. Many people lost their lives. There were floating human bodies and bloated animal carcasses all around. Even the strongest of the trees had been uprooted. The scenes were gruesome. Many people lost their relatives and many children had become orphans. There was shortage of food. People were sad and helpless and a pall of gloom had descended on the people all around.

2. How has Prashant, a teenager, been able to help the people of his village?

The cyclone in the village left many children orphaned. There were many destitute women. Prashant brought them together. He put up a polythene sheet for them. Women were requested to look after the children. He organised a cricket match for the cricket loving people. The government started a movement to set up institutions for orphans and destitute women. But Prashant and his group opposed the move. They insisted that orphans should be resettled in their own community itself. Prashant is a role model.

3. How have the people of the community helped one another? What role do the women of Kalikuda play during these days?

In the hour of grief, the people of the community joined their heads and hands under the leadership of Prashant. They came forward to help one another. Prashant brought the survivors together and formed a youth task force. The youth took the charge and volunteered themselves for cleaning the shelters of filth, urine, vomit and floating carcasses. They tended to the wounds of the injured people. The women of Kalikuda played a very important role during the hour of grief. They took care of the orphaned children. They also worked in an NGO-run programme. As an educated youth, we must volunteer in relief work. I would have been an active member of the





youth task force and helped the victims. The incident reflects the value of universal brotherhood and compassion.

4. Why do Prashant and other volunteers resist the plan to set up institution for orphans and widows? What alternatives do they consider?

The plan to set up institutions for orphans and widows was resisted by Prashant and other volunteers. It was felt that in such an institution, children would grow up without love and the widows would suffer from stigma and loneliness. They considered an alternative plan. They decided to resettle the orphans in their own community. New foster families of childless widows and orphaned children were made up. I support Prashant and his team. Setting up a rehab centre or any institution does not serve the purpose. The children and women in such institutions are alienated from the mainstream. They grow up without love and care. The victims of any natural calamity must be resettled among their own people. It also brings harmony among them.

5. Do you think Prashant is a good leader? Do you think young people can get together to help people during natural calamities?

Yes, Prashant is a good leader. The super cyclone had wreaked havoc in the village. Prashant proved himself the leader. He organised the people and motivated them to help one another. He encouraged the women to take care of the orphans and work in an NGO-run programme. He is, indeed, a role model of youth.

I think the young people can get together to help people during the natural calamities. They can contact and coordinate the civic agencies in the resettlement programme. With their cooperation, the relief work can get speeded up.

Solved Question Bank

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Where had Prashant gone on 27th October 1999? Why?

Ersama is small town in coastal Odisha. Prashant had gone to block headquarters of Ersama on 27th October 1999. He went there to spend the day with a friend, seven years after his mother's death.





2. Why was falling of two coconut trees on the roof of Prashant's friend's house a blessing in disguise?

The falling of two coconut trees on the roof was a blessing in disguise because the tender coconuts from the trees kept the trapped family from starving during the fateful days that followed.

3. What was the effect of cyclone on Prashant's village?

Prashant was shocked after he reached his village. Where their house once stood, there were only remnants. All the ninety-six houses in his village were washed away. Children were left orphaned. There was devastation all around. Eighty-six lives were lost in his village.

4. What did Prashant do for the orphans?

Prashant decided to help the orphans. He brought them together and put up a polythene sheet shelter for them. Women were requested to look after them properly. He also arranged food for them.

5. What did Prashant do to divert the attention of the women?

Prashant wanted to divert the attention of the women who had lost their family member. He persuaded them to start working in the food-for-work programme started by an NGO. He organised sports activities for children.

6. Narrate the storm in Ersama in your own words.

The storm in Ersama was so fierce that it brought destruction and wreaked havoc everywhere. It brought a devastating flood that took many lives and left people homeless.

Long Answer Type Questions

1. How was Prashant's village affected by the cyclone? How did he take a lead to help the people?

Prashant saw that 2,500 people were crowded in a shelter. All the houses in his village were washed away. Eighty-six lives were lost in the village. There was not enough to eat. They had survived on green coconuts which were not adequate. Prashant organised a group of youths and elders. They pressurised the merchant to





part with rice. After that the youth task force gathered empty utensils from the shelter. They succeeded in sending the message to helicopters who threw food packets. As a responsible youth, I would have acted the same way as Prashant. I would lead the movement. I would have organised relief camps and help in arranging food and medicines. I would be an active member of the youth task force.

2. The true traits of an individual come to the fore in times of emergency. What traits come to one's notice on Prashant, during the calamity that struck Ersama in coastal Orissa?

The storm at Ersama, left a deep impact on the observant Prashant, who realised that he had never before seen such a destruction. His self-determination made him turn a deaf ear to all warnings and set out in search of his family, wading through water across 18 miles. Prashant, a born leader, soon organized the youth and elders of the village for pressurizing the local merchant to release rice stocks. The innovative youngster made children lie on the sand with utensils on them so as to attract helicopter sorties to drop food for them. An optimist by nature, he got the children playing games of cricket to uplift spirits, and mobilized women for child care activities and men to secure food and materials. A highly cooperative individual he soon joined hands with volunteer NGOs to mend broken lives, and share other's pains instead of wallowing in his own grief.

3. In adversity, people like Prashant get extraordinary determination and power to fight. Do you agree that adversity or crisis brings people closer?

Yes, it is true that some people, like Prashant, get extraordinary powers in adverse conditions. They become heroes. In the story, it was extraordinary courage and strong determination that made Prashant go to his house to seek his family. He covered his eighteen-kilometre long journey with great difficulty. There was a leader in him, although he was a teenager. He had a special quality of taking initiatives. He helped all and one during the disaster. He organized a team of volunteers to help the victims of super cyclone in Orissa.

Adversity or crisis also brings people together. There is a bond of humanity. The victims of cyclone in Ersama helped one another. They worked together during their resettlement. They took care of orphans and widows. Prashant managed to unite them and work for one another.

