

ATOMIC ENERGY EDUCATION SOCIETY, MUMBAI

Sub: English

Handout: 1

Module: 1/2

Lesson: 6

Weathering the storm in Ersama

Class: IX

Introduction

Weathering the Storm in Ersama by Harsh Mander is based on a true story of the adventures of a teenager Prashant. Prashant showed extraordinary courage in the face of the great natural calamity. He saved his own life and came in the forefront to lead the disaster management in his village.

In October, 1999, a cyclone hit Orissa. It killed thousands of people and destroyed hundreds of houses. Prashant a young man, had gone to Ersama, a small town, to visit one of his friends. The place was just eighteen kilometers from his own village. Towards the evening, the town was hit by a devastating cyclone. Prashant and the family of his friend were marooned on the roof of the house for two dreadful nights. On the third day, Prashant decided to go to his village. He reached there with great difficulty. He found destruction everywhere in his village. He at once gathered some young people of his village and started helping the poor and the needy. This is the story of Prashant's courage in the face of a great calamity.

About the Author

Harsh Mander born on 17 April 1955 is a social activist, columnist, researcher, teacher and author of several books including, *Fractured Freedom: Chronicles from India's Margins*. He is the Director of the Centre for Equity Studies, a research organisation based in New Delhi. He is a social activist who works with survivors of mass violence and hunger, as well as homeless persons and street children.

Fact File

Profile: Ersama in coastal Orissa was once a land of lush paddy fields and coconut groves where 1.2 lakh farmers and fishermen made a living.

- 35 of the 200 villages have been wiped out.
- 80 per cent of Orissa's 10,000 dead lived here.
- No more than 20 boats are distributing food

Theme of courage

Weathering the storm in Erasma is the story of our main protagonist, Prashant who displayed great courage at the time of the super cyclone. The story teaches us about the importance of being patient when a cyclone hits us. Teamwork and co-operation are the qualities displayed by the group of young volunteers who led the rescue operations under the leadership of Prashant.

Lesson Explanation

Prashant visits his friend

Prashant was a native of a village, Kalikuda. On 27 October 1999, he was on a visit to a friend in Ersama which is a small town in the coastal state of Odisha. His village was at a distance of eighteen kilometers from Ersama.

That day, a strong storm gathered in the evening. Furious wind accompanied by continuous rain lashed the place. People were screaming as trees got uprooted and destroyed the houses. The water flowed with gush and swept away houses that came in its way. There was neck deep water in his friend's house. As the house was a pucca house, it was able to withstand the strong winds which blew at a speed of 350 kilometers per hour. His friend's family was terrorised because in the middle of the night, trees fell on the house, damaged the roof and walls of the building.

Storm and devastation continued

The storm continued for the next one and a half day. Prashant, along with his friend and his family, took shelter on the roof of the house to escape the rising level of water. As the day dawned, Prashant saw the destruction caused by the super cyclone.

A foaming, muddy brown sheet of water covered everything as far as the eye could see; only broken cement houses stood in a few places. Swollen animal carcasses and human corpses floated in every direction. Even huge old trees had fallen and were floating around. Two coconut trees had fallen on the roof of his friend's house. This was a blessing in disguise, because the tender coconuts from the trees was the only source of food for the trapped family for next few days.

Prashant worried about his family

They spent the next two days on the rooftop. Everyone was so scared that they sat together in a group. Prashant was worried about his family members. He had

already lost his mother before seven years. Maybe he could have lost another family member and would have to be in grief over the loss of a loved one once again. This thought worried Prashant.

The rain stopped after two days. It seemed to Prashant that the two days' time was as long as two years. The water was receding gradually. Although it was dangerous to go out, he did not wait any more and left to find his family. His friend's family requested Prashant not to go but he left.

Prashant starts his journey

With the help of a long stick, Prashant started the eighteen kilometer long journey back home. He had to use the stick to guide him and find the path where the water was shallower. At some places the water was waist deep and his pace slowed down. At some places, he lost track of the road and had to swim to save himself from drowning. On the way he met two friends of his uncle who were returning to their village. All of them proceeded together.

Macabre scene of journey

As the group proceeded, they got to see horrible scenes. They had to push dead bodies of human beings and animals which were being swept around with the current of the water. As they crossed villages, not even a single house was seen intact. As Prashant's fear grew, he wept loudly. He was afraid that his family members would not have survived the disaster.

When Prashant reached his village, Kalikuda, he was terrified to see the remains of his house. Their belongings were scattered in the water and some things were hanging on the branches of the trees, just above the flood water. He decided to look for his family at the shelter set up by the Red Cross society.

Prashant meets his family

At the Red Cross shelter Prashant saw his maternal grandmother. She rushed to him with her arms open and her eyes full of tears. It was a miracle for her as the family had thought that Prashant would not have survived the storm.

As Prashant's extended family came to know that he had come, they gathered around him and hugged him in relief. He met his siblings, uncles and aunts. Prashant marked that everyone looked worried and was injured

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