

Nature's fury or God's 'leela'?

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TSUNAMI ! A minimum of the world's population knew this word's meaning till last Christmas. Once the tsunami unleashed a havoc on the South Asian countries' sea shores and beaches, most people around the globe got familiar with the terror called tsunami.

The maxim: "Nature's might no one can match" has been proved once again; with a qualification that man's frailty has been overexposed. Those who survived are the one's who could be called simply lucky. Those who have fled the tsunami-wrecked beaches would perhaps never venture back again. And the one's who have dared to remain in the affected areas would perhaps live with a stark fear the rest of their lives.

Isn't life uncertain the very moment one emerges from the womb of a mother? The tsunami which arose from the Indian Ocean has projected this fact of uncertainty of life so vividly that one can only be thankful to GOD for the breath that one inhales and exhales when one rises from sleep the next morning.

Guru Nanak says in Japji Sahib,

ਜੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਾਵੈ ਸੋਈ ਕਰਸੀ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਕਰਣਾ ਜਾਈ ॥

ਸੇ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹੁ ਸਾਹਾ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਹਣੁ ਰਜਾਈ ॥

Whatsoever God wills, so it happens; we are no one to question **His Command**. We only have to **live by acceptance** of God's will.

The above quote sounds more relevant in today's time, specially after the Tsunami tragedy which took its toll on more than 3,00,000 human lives spread across many countries in the south-eastern hemisphere.

In life whenever any problem or difficult situation arises, one has two options- either face it headlong and, through the experience, become wise, or simply avoid and run away from it.

In the case of a tsunami strike, what can one do? If one faces it, chances are that one may perish. This question can be answered with more conviction by someone who has come out unscathed from the jaws of the oceanic fury. The fact is that one cannot stop the tsunami or, for that matter, one cannot stop any Nature-related catastrophe, like an earthquake, floods, incessant rains, hurricanes or blizzards. Anything associated with Nature cannot be stopped, though it may be controlled mechanically in a few cases, like flow of the gushing rivers into dams. Man can, by sheer intelligence, develop means to signal or forewarn of such calamities not always with precision, but to change or stop its course is next to impossible !

Whenever any tragedy occurs, people become more alert and conscious. It is only in the face of physical danger to one's life that alertness and awareness are felt, more so than in times of passive everyday living. Hence going to war gives one this feeling, because in war there is no guarantee or certainty that one may survive. This vitality can be felt also when one is in love with someone. History is replete with

instances of war and love. Only those people have carved a niche in the pages of history who have made wars, like Alexandra and Napoleon, or like Noor Jehan and Cleopatra, to name a few who have loved in the face of all odds and challenges. It is only when one feels vital throbbing in one's heart that one actually lives.

This feeling of aliveness can be called bliss. Life is nothing but accepting challenges and the experiences which one gets while facing the challenges that make the person wise and knowing. Mind you, there is a difference between knowing and knowledge. Knowledge can be crammed into the brain through the books of learning or through the religious scriptures. Whereas knowing can take place only through experiencing. Societal living puts a lot of stress on the knowledge factor, but the knowing aspect is relegated to the background, which in fact is of utmost necessity in life for the all round growth of an individual. Internal growth of a person takes place only by experiencing and not by bookish knowledge alone. It is only through experience that one can attain true wisdom. All else is sham! Guru Granth Sahib is the only scripture in the world which has the recordings of the experiences of Gurus/prophets compiled within the tenure of their Guruships. What I want to put across is that because these recordings had been their actual Divine experience, they elevate the Guru Granth to a masterpiece of Divine wisdom which has to be actually walked upon, or experienced, to reach the stage of knowing and not just by becoming knowledgeable by memorizing, or constant repetitions, which our *granthis* (Gurdwara religious service providers) have not realized, and are hence unable to convey this import to the *sangat* (religious congregation).

We should be thankful to God for those who have survived the oceanic tragedy. Relief and succour to the survivors becomes the prime concern of all, be it the concerned government administration, N.G.O.'s or other social work organizations. Cross-country tragedies like the recent Tsunami has brought different nations together by helping each other in relief measures, but it is an enigma why the Indian government refused aid from others, but did not stop to provide relief to others though India too was not spared by the Tsunami-terror. Is it that the Indian government is afraid to expose the isolated territories to the foreigners who would land on the numerous, sparsely populated, tiny islands in the Bay of Bengal called the Andamans and Nicobars, in the name of relief and aid to those devastated by nature's fury?

Sikhs in the South East Asian countries have been actively involved in providing relief measures through various N.G.O.'s spearheaded by them, namely, KHALSA AID (U.K.), UNITED SIKHS (U.S.A.) and SIKH NAUJAWAN SABHA (Malaysia). In India, Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council (Delhi Regd.) has selected a village in Cuddalore District in Tamil Nadu in South India to provide relief to the Tsunami victims. Except the former three organizations which are not very old, the Delhi based body is in existence since 1984 after Operation Bluestar. Thanks to the internet technology all relevant information is readily available, which the Indian media, surprisingly, has not highlighted. Kudos to the Sikhs who are keeping the spirit of selfless service alive in the footsteps of Bhai Ghanaia. The daily *ardas* of the Sikhs praying for, "*Sarbat da bhala*" is actually conceptualized for practice in real life.

With the Tsunami striking the Andamans, the tribal culture of those inhabiting the various small islands has been highlighted through the media. Still in the 21st. century

there are people who are totally cut off from the rest of the world. The technological revolution has not touched their lives yet. They must be living each day as it comes, moment by moment, drenched in the awareness of life's uncertainty. But isn't this the way that one should live – moment by moment?

When any tragedy triggered by nature's fury strikes, man rationalizes: "because of our misdeeds God unleashes such calamities on us humans. The Tsunami is nothing but *God's leela*". For any effect to take place there has to be a cause. Life is nothing but a series of causes and effects. Is it that the various underground nuclear tests which have taken place in Pakistan and India, in the not so distant past, the cause of the rising Tsunamis? A very likely probability, which only God knows! Perhaps research will reveal the truth someday. Life itself is so uncertain that one never knows when the angel of death shall knock at one's door. Arrogance of power, including nuclear weapons, continues to drive many nations. But can peace be attained by showing one's might and intimidating others?

Large scale tragedies emotionally weaken the societies even as they cripple economies, and it is easy to exploit them in such an emotional turmoil in the name of collecting donations for a noble cause. Various newspapers, like the ABP Group., The Statesman, and others by creating funds for Tsunami victims have collected millions of rupees. Such efforts can only be rewarded or worthwhile if the victims are handsomely compensated and rehabilitated. As time passes, however, man returns to normalcy and such events retreat to the back-lanes of memory and slowly fade away into oblivion. With every tragedy of an enormous scale, an assessment is done as to the extent of damage in terms of property, human lives, environmental and ecological imbalances as well as the relief measures provided in the shape of monetary and emotional aid, and, lastly, the precautionary measures to be taken to prevent the repetition of such events. Tsunamis of Nature cannot be avoided, but the Tsunamis of arrogant humans can perhaps be averted or aborted.

Was the 1984 *Pogrom* of the Sikhs any less tragic than the December 2004 Tsunami? Why did not the any media magnates all over India think on similar lines of aid those Sikh children and women who survived the diabolical slaughter of fellow Indians propelled by hate and jealousy, against an enterprising progressive community who had already suffered a lot in the name of the gory partition of 1947, followed by the break-up of Punjab into three states and a Union Territory?

It took over 20 years for someone to produce a film and that also by a person who is a non-Sikh emigrants to Europe, to rekindle the tragic wounds inflicted upon Sikhs. The film we mean is none other than AMU at present being screened all over India. We need more such poignant depiction, which can be possible if Bollywood becomes bold enough to muster the courage needed to produce films revolving around the 1984 massacre. Tragedies enacted by fellow humans should be remembered from time to time if we want to avoid repetition of such heinous crimes. The Gujarat, or Godhra, tragedy is an example which erupted not many years later.

History books all over India should include these man-made Tsunamis which should be compulsory reading for all in order to create awareness amongst the younger generation who shall ultimately take charge of the affairs of the country. It is the younger generation who in the long run shall be taking our country forward. And it is most imperative to impart such lessons in the classrooms to create an

awareness of the wrong doings of the so called politicians, in connivance with the law enforcing agencies and fanatical goons. It is only through such measures that our country, can provide an environment of peace and goodwill for its diverse communities.

