

SURVIVING DISASTERS

Chika and the Angry Ocean

Tsunami • Folklore • Miraculous Survival

Suroopa Mukherjee



From the Desk of Dr R K Pachauri

Human society has moved along rapidly on the path of industrialization. We now have a range of mechanized transport, widespread communications infrastructure and devices powered by fossil fuel based energy for a variety of applications. However, all these developments have led to rapid environmental degradation across the globe and an increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere. The result is that the climate of this planet is changing rapidly.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has recently brought out two major reports which show that the average rise in surface temperature between 1901 and 2010 has been 0.85°C. In the same period, sea level rise has been 19cm. In addition, certain extreme events have grown in frequency and intensity. The acidification of the oceans, on account of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases being absorbed, is likely to cause serious impacts on marine ecosystems and various forms of marine life.

There is a need for us to mitigate the emissions of greenhouse gases and at the same time to adapt to the impacts of climate change. We need to look at development in a larger ecological context and not merely as a measurement of growth in GDP. Mahatma Gandhi was right when he said that "Speed is irrelevant if you are going in the wrong direction".

"Surviving disasters" aims to re-examine and change the course of our actions in order to save our planet. This series of four books sensitizes young readers towards the impacts and consequences of disasters in a very expressive and thought-provoking manner. The aim is not only to entertain the readers with thrilling stories, but to also inspire them to become responsible soldiers of the Earth.



R K Pachauri

Director-General, TERI

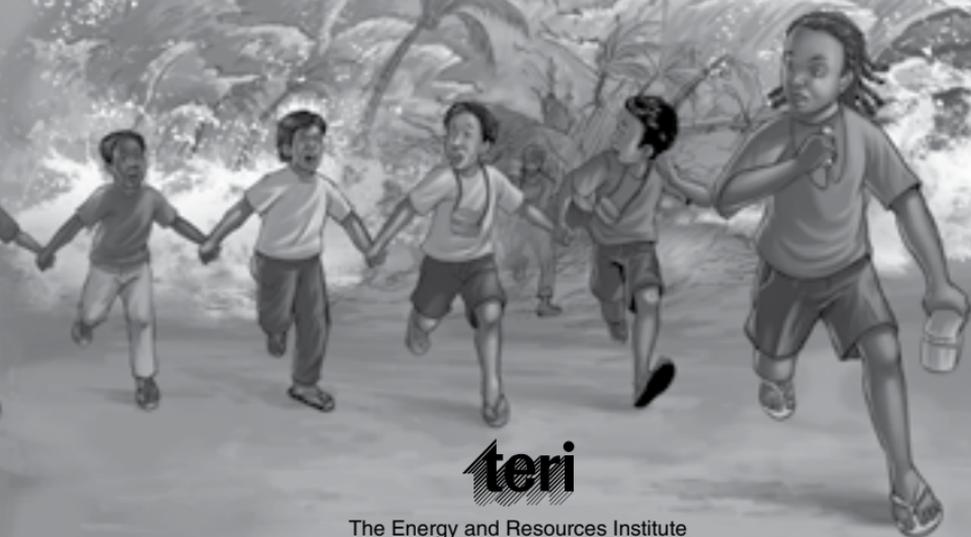
Chairman, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

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Dear Readers,

I am Father Rodrigues. I am a teacher, a missionary. I grew up in Ranchi and later taught in a missionary school in this city. My life was perfect there, as I loved both – my job and this city. But my destiny had other plans for me. I moved to the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in August 2004. And the rest is, as they say, history!

I would now like to talk about Chika, the wonder boy. Indeed, this is his story, not mine. His story highlights sacrifice, courage, and survival. And it also depicts unconditional love between a teacher and the taught.

Chika belonged to the fast vanishing Onge tribe in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. He was a student in my school and all his classmates loved him. But one day, he ran away to earn the wrath of the school authorities and teachers. But who could predict he was indeed striving to save us all from the wrath of the Almighty?

Chika came back. He had changed. He seemed extraordinary and enlightened! And he seemed to be on a secret mission! Well, he had come back to save us.

I still have vivid memories of him riding a tidal wave. There was something heroic about this thirteen-year-old boy! But where is Chika?

Read on to know more...

Prologue

26 December 2004

A day after Christmas, the world woke up to a series of natural calamities that sent shockwaves across the globe.

An earthquake, measuring 9.2 on the Richter scale, hit the west coast of Sumatra in Indonesia. Called the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake, it was the third-largest earthquake since 1900.

Nobody was quite prepared for what was to follow.

The earthquake was followed by several aftershocks. The first was felt by countries, whose shoreline faced the Indian Ocean. The second aftershock hit like the death knell. As the earthquake struck under sea, it caused a vertical rise in the sea bed. The displaced water reached heights of around 128 feet before lashing on to the coastal regions.

Thus, the world got to know about a natural calamity called tsunami, which had the potential to destroy our planet.

This is a story of the tsunami that changed the lives many people and their future forever.

It is also a story of Chika and his tribe, and the science they have perfected from generations.

And, it is a story of the forest and the ocean.

But more than anything else, it is a story of trust, love, and courage.







Father Rodrigues' diary entries

23 August 2004

I stood on the beach, and watched a brilliant orange-and-red sun slowly climb up the sky. The sky changed its colour, and so did the ocean. I could see the fishermen with their boats at a distance in the ocean. It seemed to be yet another day with a regular start, but there was something new, something different that I was unable to comprehend...

As always, I was the only one present on the beach of Dugong Creek settlement, situated in the north-east coast of Little Andaman, to greet the new day with a "Good morning!"

The beach overlooked the Indian Ocean, and what I could see for miles around me was the sheer beauty of the Little Andaman Island – one of the 570+ islands that form the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

While soaking in the beauty of that lovely morning, I couldn't imagine that in a matter of few months, my life would take an entirely new direction.



22 July 2004

It all began in July with a phone call from the Missionary School Headquarters in Kolkata. I was called to meet the Board members on a matter of great urgency.

Imagine my surprise, when I was asked to pack all my belongings and leave Ranchi forever! I was getting transferred from a school where I had taught all my life to a school in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

I was born and brought up in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand. My father, Samuel Rodrigues, was a household name. He was a school teacher and the best part of my childhood was spent exploring nature with him. He had shown me the seven colours of the rainbow, taught me to dance in the rain, and, more than anything else, he had instilled the love of poetry in my soul. No wonder, I grew up thinking there was nothing more magical in the world than a poem!

On my twelfth birthday, he had given me a book. It was Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*. I still remember what he had said to me as I unwrapped the gift.

"Whenever you face a problem that seems to have no solution, open a book of poetry and read the lines softly and slowly. You will see how the problem will vanish!"

Father was right.

On the day the Indian Ocean tsunami struck, it was the healing power of poetry that saved Little Andaman!



10 August 2004

For the umpteenth time, I found myself staring at the letter from the Missionary School Headquarters. I was asked to join Saint Joseph's Senior Secondary School as the Principal. It was a big honour, and my father would have been proud. But, I did not feel at peace with myself.

I knew why I was being asked to take over as the Principal of Saint Joseph's School.

My father had spent the better part of his life spreading education among the Santhal children of Jharkhand. After retirement, he lived in the Santhal village for the major part of the year. And gradually, he picked up their language.

Later, he began to collect tribal songs, stories, legends, and their history. I used to eagerly wait for father to return home and sing those songs to me. He would also tell me many stories about the lives Santhals led deep inside the forest.

When I grew up and joined the Christian Missionary, I decided to follow my father's footsteps.

I was aware of the fact that it was my knowledge of the Santhal culture, especially my voluntary act of teaching the tribal children that made me the ideal candidate for the position of the Principal of Saint Joseph's School.

I was also aware of the enormous responsibility the Reverend Fathers were putting on me. It made me very, very nervous! I was going to a new place. I had



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