

GOLDEN JUBILEE YEAR
1992-93

RF/DM-3/LAT-16/SUDHA

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THE CATHOLIC HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

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CHAI/Sanghi Relief Camp
Nandurga Village
Latur District.

Dear Friends,

I am writing this letter sitting in the hospital tent of our base camp at Nandurga village in Latur district. It is a beautiful large triangular Belgian tent, with strong plastic sheet for the floor and built in windows. One feels relaxed, forgetting the anxieties of the earlier days, when we had to struggle with water leaking from above and floor getting water logged.

I was part of the first team that pitched camp here, under the banner of the Catholic Hospital Association of India and Sanghi group of industries on October 10th. Though we had been readying to come here, there were restrictions. It made one wonder whether one needed influence even to volunteer for relief work! By the time we reached, the army had been withdrawn and police contingents were everywhere. The original village of Nandurga was completely flattened except for 2 concrete structures. The village had lost about 300 lives. Opposite the village, crowds of people were queueing up in front of various relief distribution points.

It takes some time to get to know the people and their sense of loss. First contact was at the clinic, which as soon as it opened had a hundred people lining up. They came to get relief from pains and aches; others came with infected wounds, some deep. A small number had bone injuries, by now infected, malunited or non-united. In the first few days we were relieved not to see signs of serious epidemic.

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FIFTY YEARS OF DEDICATED SERVICE TO THE NATION

Visiting them in their houses reveal more of their tragedy - a daughter and son-in-law had come home to parents' house that day for confinement, when nature snatched them away; a son had rushed back from Bombay only to see half his family wiped out; there is one young man, who has suddenly found himself alone, his entire family has passed away. We found an old woman with an untreated fracture of the upper limb who was unwilling to move out for treatment, because she had to care for her widowed daughter who had gone into depression. Another lady spontaneously hugged one of our sisters, who had put a plastic cover on the remains of her precious but tattered family card.

Some have not received relief because they are so deeply in their sorrow that they do not come out and stand in the queues. For some of the richer folk, this quake has been a leveller in more ways than one. A lady who was well off earlier found it so humiliating to stand in line for the first time in her life!

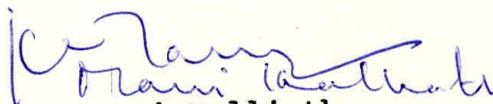
The rows and rows temporary tin shelters are not the best of housing. It is black cotton soil land and in low lying areas; this is also the season of torrential rain. When the downpour is heavy the family spends the night sitting up on cots or planks. Without garbage pits and latrines, it is a wonder that there has been no outbreak of water-borne epidemics yet.

Children are happy to come around us, especially so if photographs are being taken. They collect around if some one starts singing; perhaps they need to forget the trauma quickly and get into a joyous mode.

What we are offering is small compared to their need. Our service is appreciated and they have faith in it as they are getting better. We need to help them get referral services and to make the government hospitals more responsive.

We have to take the lead for immunization. We need to search out quickly those villages more inaccessible by road and hence underserved. We need to distribute relief - blankets, cloting, food, even if there has been an abundance of relief already, as all the deserving may not have got. Winter is just round the corner. Most relief agencies will be packing up and leaving by the end of the month. Can we also do something about the drainage, in collaborating with the government's work so that the temporary houses are more livable? This requires greater resources both personnel and material and it is required immediately.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Mani Kalliath
Sanghi/CHAI camp - Nandurga village