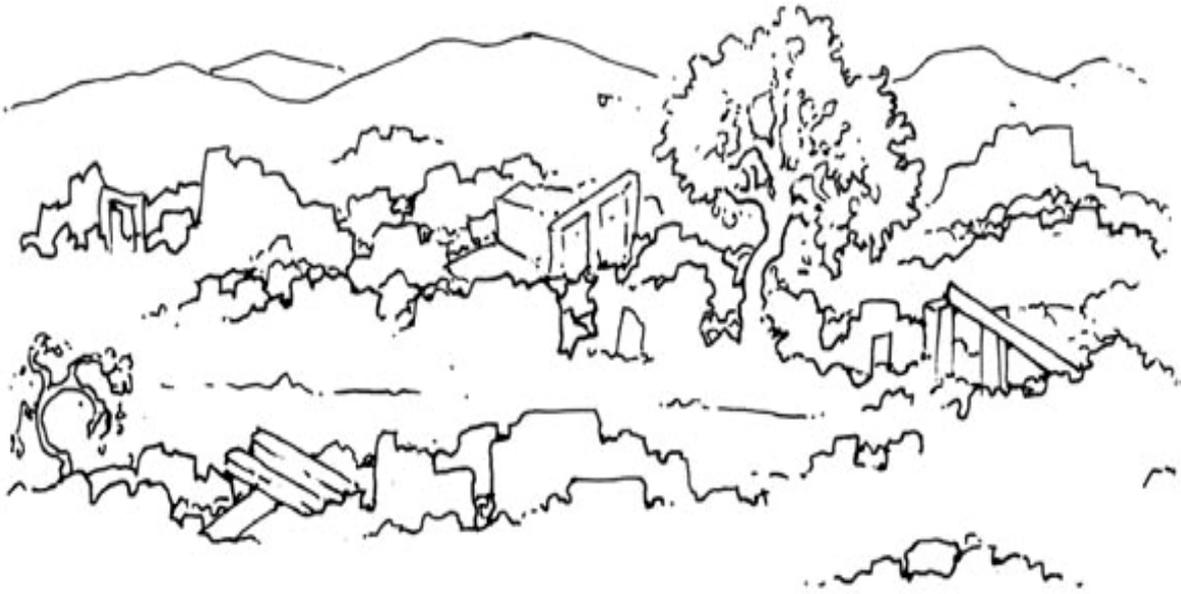


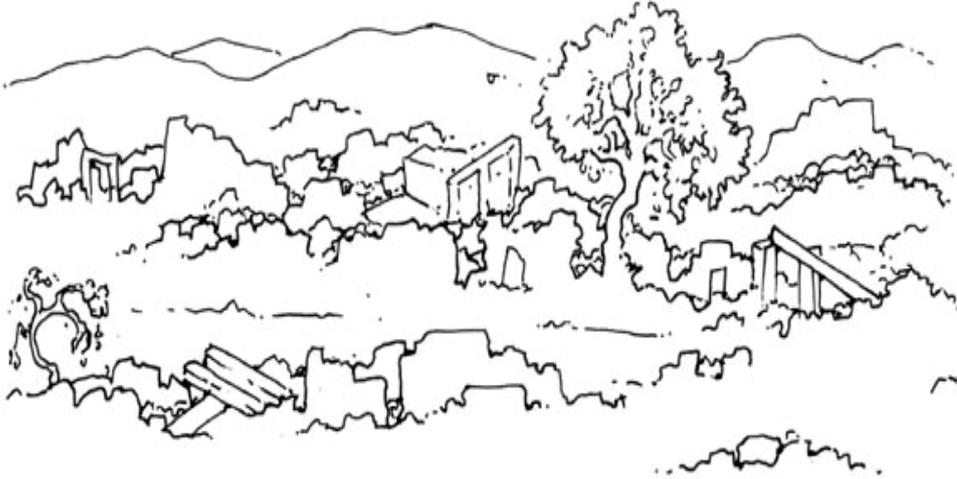
# THE DAY THE EARTH SHOOK



*And how the children helped each other and the whole community after it had happened*



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### Before the Disaster



Nilpar was a beautiful village in Gujarat State in India in the extreme desert region beyond the Rann of Kutch. It was January. After the dark night, the morning had just arrived graceful and cool. During the sunrise, each ray touched the ground of the village like blessings offered by God. As the beautiful sunrays touched the ground, the sands shone like silver. Birds sung as they flew up in the sky. The jingles of the temple bells and the prayers in the mosque in the village gave a feeling of the grace of God falling on each household of the village. The men and women would come out of their houses to worship the sun as it is

considered the God of life. The children greeted the morning rays looking at the sky with its different shades of blue, pink and purple. Who must have painted the sky so beautifully they wondered? Who could be the tallest painter in the village to reach the sky?

Three families in this village lived close to each other. In the first home, Raghu and Madho lived with their parents. They studied in class V and VI while their elder sister Kumud was in class VII. Kabir studying in class V and his sister Roshni studying in class IV lived in another family. Lastly Sona and Rupa, who were twins, studied in class IV and stayed with their uncle and aunt. Their parents stayed in the nearby village.

Their school was situated in their village. The older ones used to take the younger ones to the school and back. After coming back from the school they would play together. In the evening they would follow the cowman and the herd of cows up on the hillock where some grass was available for the animals. The children liked each other's company so much that they never could imagine a single day without each other.

That day the children had seen small puppies while playing near Raghu and Madho's house. All the children decided to make a little kennel for the puppies.

"Tomorrow is a holiday," said Roshni happily: "We are going to school for flag hoisting. We can make the puppy's house in the afternoon. We will have fun."

Yes we'll all have fun," chorused the children happily.

## **The Disaster**

26<sup>th</sup> January 2001, Republic Day of India, was a holiday. However the

school was opened for two hours in the morning for the flag hoisting ceremony. Ghu, Roshni and Madho had gone to school. Kumud remained at home for she was not feeling well. Sona and Rupa were playing with the goat's kids outside their house.

Suddenly the kids started bleating and running here and there. The houses started moving as if a great hand was pushing the earth from side to side. Kumud who was resting on the bed experienced a terrible shaking. The walls and ceiling cracked and began to crumble. Kumud's parents grabbed her and ran out of the house as the house collapsed around them. Kumud ill, terrified and speechless was injured in the head.

Kabir and Roshni's family who were stuck in the debris when their house collapsed shouted wildly for help.

"What is happening?" thought the children in their fear. "Is this the end of the world?" They did not know at the time but a massive earthquake had devastated their village and many others in their State. It was the second largest recorded earthquake in India.

### **After the disaster**

After the earth shook, the morning was no longer graceful and cool. Houses lay shattered on the ground. The sun's rays only lit up the destruction. The birds flew this way and that, frightened, confused and silent. Only the sounds of panic and the cries of the people in the village were heard. People were running here and there amid the dust and destruction of their houses. There was a deadly feeling of nature's curse on each household of the village. The men, women and children were in

a state of mental shock. All the children were scared and confused. They did not understand what to do. Most were speechless, some in tears. There was huge debris. There were children who had lost their parents or elders and parents who had lost their children.

Roshni, seeing everybody except her grandfather asked: "Where is grandpa?"

Her father went to search for him. Suddenly he shouted: "Someone come. Help here... Grandpa is stuck in the debris."

They all ran towards what was left of the house. Roshni's parents pulled out grandpa from debris but he could not be saved. Kabir and Roshni were so very sad. The grandpa they had loved so much had left them forever...

Kabir and Roshni were very brave children. Despite losing their grandfather, they made up their mind to go and help their friends and other families staying in the neighbourhood. At first their parents would not agree, but seeing their confidence and kindness they allowed them. They found Sona and Rupa alone and in tears. "Our uncle and aunt got buried under the huge stones of our house." they cried. "They have died".

Kabir and Roshni hugged the friends: "Come with us. We are there with you." They took them to their own parents and told them the sad news.

Kabir and Roshni's mother said: "Yes my little ones, of course your friends can be with us." This gave some hope to the children. But at the same time, at some distance they saw Raghu lying on the stretcher with

a bandage round his leg. A doctor and his family members were with him. All four children went to them.

Roshni asked Kumud: "What happened to Raghu?"

Kumud weak from her head injury whispered in her feeble voice: "I have lost my beloved brother ... Madho. He had gone to school".

Hearing this, Raghu just said: "Sister, don't cry". As his friends turned towards him all including Roshni, saw what the bandage was covering. Their friend had lost a leg. Unable to utter a single word, all the children sat beside Raghu.

For the whole day, the children had neither eaten anything nor did they get any water to drink. They were very tired, shocked and in grief. The elders were so much in trauma that they could not think of children's needs.

In the evening, the village families cooked in the community kitchens and shared the food and water that was available. That day, the children got closer to each other. Staying and eating together they felt like one family. During the night it was terribly cold. Sona and Rupa got some bed sheets and quilts that they used to keep in the cupboard in the courtyard of their house. They shared them with their friends and other children in the neighbourhood. The village people were eagerly waiting for somebody who could provide them with immediate services like water, cooked food, clothes, and medicines.



## **Relief Operations in the village**

As it was a very remote village, relief operations could not start until the next day. Very gradually workers from some organisations started arriving in the village. In the beginning, the services were few and slow. Smaller movements called after shocks continue to be felt and the children still felt lost and unhappy. They used to pray and believed that God would definitely listen to them.

But on the fourth day of the earthquake, someone whom they would always remember came into their village and into their lives. She was a young lady named Mamta, dedicated and committed to her work. She stayed in the village among the people she wanted to help. She went around the whole village, met men, women and children and provided some immediate services to them. Mamta talked to the community people so as to know their problems and provided guidance on how they could support each other in this time of crisis.

She also talked to the children, the first person who had done so after the earthquake. Here was the friend they had needed so much. That day the children felt that their prayer had been answered. Mamta and the children discussed on how the children could help themselves as well as others during this crisis situation. Mamta listened carefully to the children and gave advice in her quiet voice.

Roshni who was shocked with the curse of nature began in a whisper: *“I am very scared. We still experience the earth shaking. Will such earthquake happen again?”*

Mamta: “Now the tremors/aftershocks will be minor ones hence, there is no need to panic. You must not run here and there. Instead, everyone must move to the open space where there is no risk.”

A girl asked: *“After the earthquake, children especially girls have problems of space for going to the toilet. We feel insecure and are ashamed of going in open.”*

Kumud said my mother told me “Older children can escort younger ones or can also ask their parents to escort them (e.g. mother can escort daughter) while going to toilet especially during dark.”

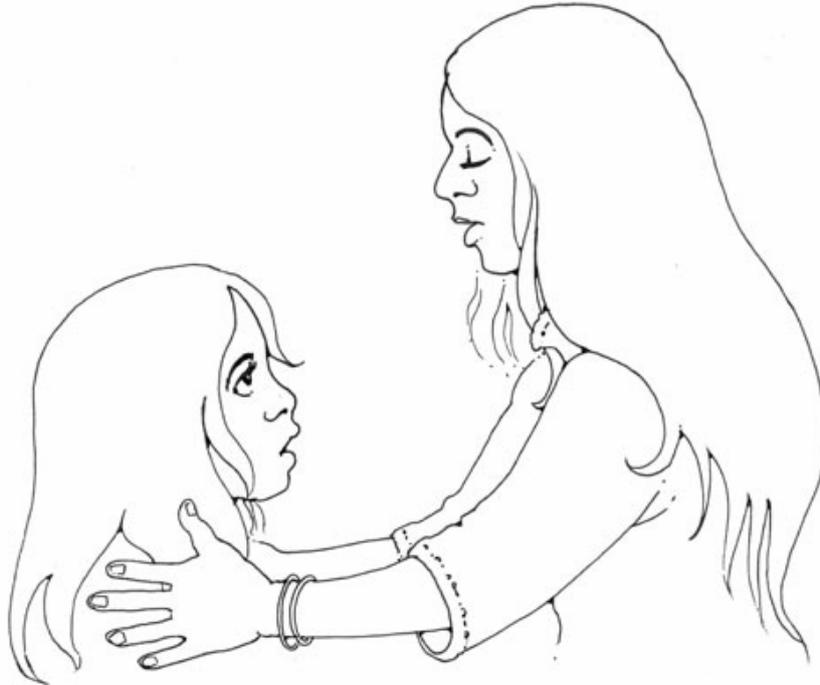
Kumud worriedly asked: *“How can I help my brother Raghu? He has lost his leg.”*

Mamta: “You and your friends are already helping him. You talk, listen and play (according to his abilities) with him and other injured children.”

One boy said: *“My young brother has become very quiet. I do not*

*know how to make him happy.”*

Mamta: “We must help our younger brothers and sisters by looking after them. We must talk, play with the small children and make them happy. We can share our toys and belongings with them.”



Kabir came in: “We can also feed our younger sisters or brothers at mealtimes or even between meals if they are hungry”.

Responding to Kabir’s answer one child asked: *“I have a two year old sister. She needs to be given milk, baby food, biscuits but the food services given by the relief workers does not include such food items. From where can I get food for her?”*

Mamta: “All you children can form a group and must tell your parents and your younger siblings needs to the workers or volunteers so that supplies of the basic necessities for children e.g. products like milk, milk powder, baby foods, clothes for small children etc. can be ensured.”

Kumud: *“As soon as the truck comes with the food items the adults*

*gather around and there is a huge crowd. There is no space for children. We can't reach the supplies."*

A school teacher's son suggested a solution: "I think together we can do something for that. We can form a group and approach parents, teachers, relief workers and the panchayat people and talk to them about this. We must make them realise that they should make some system for distributing services equally among adults and children."

Another child: "We can volunteer with the service providers in making queues during the distribution of food items and other essentials especially to the children."

Mamta was very pleased with these responses. "Well done," she told them. "Some people tell me that my job is to just give help to children, but I know that children like you can help themselves and show a good example to older people."

"You older children," she went on, "must also form groups to find out the sources of some of the help which you are receiving. For instance, you have told me, Kabir, that when the trucks filled with clothes come but none of the clothes fit you. They are all for adults. You must tell the people who come *"Nobody thinks of us when they send such things"*; You must write letters and give it to them to give to those who collect the clothes and load the trucks. When the children themselves ask, the people who send help **must** listen."

One child had a new question: *"My parents have taken out some valuables that got buried during the earthquake. I want my toys that I used to play in my house before the earthquake. I like them very much. Can some one get those from my destroyed house?"*

Mamta: “You can talk to your parents or together you can approach the panchayat authorities. I will also talk to them about this and remind them how important the toys you love are to you. When they are taking out things for adults they also can help in taking out some of your things”.

*“How will we play now? Will the school start again?”* one child asked.

The teacher’s son said “We all must talk to our parents. My father being a teacher can help us.”

“My father is a member of panchayat. He can also help us find a place to start a temporary school.” suggested one girl.

Mamta supported them. “Getting back to normal school life is extremely important for you children. I will do what I can but you too can help. Both girls and boys must persuade their parents to send them to the temporary school just as you used to go before and to play, too, as you used to.”

The children still had other concerns but already, instead of referring all the time to Mamta, they were beginning to find their own answers

Roopa: *“I want to meet my parents in the other village. Who would take us to them?”*

Roshni: “My parents have talked to some workers. We along with them will find out information about your parents and we would take you to your parents.”

Sona also asked, *“What would happen to those children whose parents have died in the earthquake in our village?”*

Kabir: “We must take care of those children in our village who have lost their parents.”

“Yes” said Mamta, “that will be your most important task, not only in

the weeks to come but for many, many years.”

Still not all the children were able to talk with Mamta. Some of the children could not express anything as they were still frightened and in shock. They were unable to speak. The hurt and the fear and the grief would take a long time to pass.

But most children soon started doing what they discussed. They helped their young brothers and sisters and friends. They formed a group and approached the parents, teacher, workers and panchayat members. Initially they faced problems in making them understand but things got better gradually. Mamta also supported them in this process. The leaders in the panchayat gave space to run a temporary school. Both girls and boys went to the school and played with each other. The children also ensured that the special children who had been most affected by the earthquake could easily reach the temporary school. They used to talk and play with them. Kumud, Kabir, Roshni with the help of their parents and panchayat people also helped Sona and Rupa and other children like them to visit to their parents in the other village where they lived. The parents and the children were joyful to see each other.

After some days, Mamta had to visit other villages. She decided to leave Nilpar. But she was confident about the strength of the children. Mamta’s guidance and the efforts of children built hope and were the first steps in the long road of bringing health and happiness back to the people.

## **A NOTE FOR TEACHERS**

### **About this story**

The author of this story lives herself in Gujarat and the information in it has been gathered by those who experienced the earthquake.

It is suitable for nearly all children between the ages of 9 and 12 but especially in areas which are prone to disaster. As this story shows children are shown to be among the most effective community members to offer help to others and can also be the conscience of a community who may forget their needs in times of crisis. In addition it has been shown that if children are taught disaster preparedness (see *Facts for Life*) their knowledge can help adults to act quickly. In one case a British schoolgirl who had learnt about the signs of a Tsunami managed to convince her parents, other holiday makers and local people to run inland from a beach in Thailand when the sea was sucked away before the big wave struck. Many lives were probably saved.

### **Activities**

This story gives a great opportunity for reading practice, especially in developing both children's skills of reading for information and their ability to understand how other people feel in time of crisis.

Retelling the story from the point of view of other people and drawing activities also develop these vital life skills and attitudes.

*Source: CHETNA (Centre for education and Nutrition Awareness) India.*

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