

Lessons for life

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The resilience of these people is inspirational. Their grit gives them courage to rebuild their lives. "When the earthquake struck, I never thought we would be able to stand on our feet and rebuild our lost homes. But with help it is possible. "

PHOTO: NISSAR AHMAD



IN THE FACE OF CALAMITY: Courage to face the challenge.

I want to tell you a story of real people. It is an account of a calamity they faced not so long back, and the strength they have gathered to pull their lives together. These are humans who have truly touched my heart and their vigour has lessons for all of us.

In early December, I had the opportunity to travel to Jammu and Kashmir. If you remember, on October 8, 2005, a very strong earthquake struck the state and devastated homes, schools and many other buildings. Many people living in Uri and Tangdhar regions of the State lost their family members and friends in this calamity. During my visit to these areas, I had an opportunity to interact with some of them.

Imagine, one fine morning, we get up like we always do, go about our routines and head out of home. But within a few hours, the earth shakes and we see houses just crumble in front of us. I am not sure how I would have reacted in a situation like this, and I do hope none of us need to. But for those who were victims of this disaster they needed to respond.

Grit and courage

I can clearly understand the anxiety of the people of Uri and Tangdhar. Mohd. Nazir of Chakra village says, "When the earthquake struck, I never thought we would be able to stand on our own feet and rebuild our lost homes. Now, with God's grace, help has come and it is possible." A woman from Urusa village says with a smile, "The night the earthquake struck, we spent the night under a tree in the middle of the village."

Their pain and suffering did affect me, but what inspired me most was the resilience of the people to rebuild their lives. Though international agencies like Oxfam (India) Trust and local organisations distributed relief material in the affected regions, it is truly the grit of the people that is helping them revive their lives. Families have got together and are building shelters to help them get through the harsh winter. The people in these areas are not used to living in small spaces, so they are pooling in their relief material to build homes. Once the winter is over, they will build proper homes.

For me, the visit to these areas in Kashmir was inspirational. We often get so bogged down with small problems in life, whether it is at school, at work or with friends.

There are bigger problems too. But what is the key to find solutions? Should we just sit down and feel horrible at what has happened to us? Or do we gather our courage to overcome the challenges that faces us? I always knew theoretically that it should be the latter, but this visit to Kashmir, has reinstated it for a lifetime.

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A devastating earthquake occurred in the western Himalayas on the morning of October 8, 2005, at approximately 09.20 hrs IST. The epicentre was 125km WNW of Srinagar near Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The earthquake was widely felt in different parts of Northern India, including Delhi. The earthquake also flattened concrete multi-story buildings some 100 kilometres away in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad. The region has a long history of seismic activity because it is located on the Indian plate, a piece of the earth's crust moving north at the rate of some 40 millimetres per year. As the plate collides into and slips under the massive Eurasian plate to the north, it lifts the world's highest mountain ranges, the Himalayas, even

higher. But major fault lines exist at the plate's edge, where sudden jolts have wreaked massive devastation.

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