MY EXPERIENCES OF THE NEPAL DISASTER

BY

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On May 3rd at 1 pm I got a call from the Government of Karnataka to leave to Nepal and assist the victims injured in the earthquake. I was told that my ticket has been booked for the next day morning flight. It was too sudden. I had no time to prepare and no time to arrange things back at home for a long absence the duration of which I was not sure. So my first thought was how to avoid this request and be with my family. Then something inside my heart said that it was a call from the suffering humanity and I should try to help rather than escape. Hurriedly I packed my suitcase and left my house at 3 am to catch a flight at 6 am. I reached Kathmandu via Delhi along with two of my fellow orthopedic surgeons Dr Seenappa T and Dr Vivek Dorai. When we reached Kathmandu we saw that the situation in the airport was of utter silence and things were moving at a quite pace. When we introduced ourselves there, the airport official greeted us with a smile and said “Welcome to Nepal”!
stay. But fortunately government had reserved a 2 star hold for our stay. Having no expectations this suddenly seemed a 5 star hotel to us and we thanked our stars that we had at least got a reasonable place to stay, where in we can take rest and have a decent bath!

**HOTEL KAMAL POKHRI WHERE WE STAYED**

**BEGINNING OF OUR DISASTER RESCUE MANAGEMENT**

Next morning we interacted with our team and were told that there was utter chaos here. They did not know what to do, where to go, how to serve as there was no one guide them. They had reported to the Indian Embassy and the Ministry of Health’s Disaster Management Team and they were given the permission to work but they had to find the work. Two of our orthopedic surgeons found some work to do at Police Hospital there and assist and do few surgeries by themselves. That was the situation when we reached there.

With the help of a NGO and with the support of the Federation of the Nepalese Chamber of Commerce we left for a camp in a min bus for a remote place 28 kms away from Kathmandu. Little did we know what awaited us?
THE AFFECTED DISTRICTS

MASSIVE AND WIDE SPREAD DESTRUCTIONS WE SAW

While on the way we saw widespread destruction. Nothing was spared. From tall buildings to remote houses everything had collapsed. There were collapsed buildings and buildings with significant cracks which were about to collapse any time. Shops were closed. People were scarce on the road and there was hardly any movement happening. The city wore a deserted look.
NARROW ROADS

As the bus moved from the main road to small and congested road to reach the place which was a hilly terrain, we noticed that there were mountain slides and the roads were treacherous. The roads were very narrow and only one vehicle could move at a time and when there was a vehicle coming from the opposite side, our driver used to stop the vehicle move to the side and make way for the opposite vehicle to pass through.
ROAD CRACKS

The roads showed huge cracks in some places and we took nearly two and a half hours to cover the distance of 28 kms.
CAMP AT KAPPAL DADDI

While on the way we noticed a huge gathering of people at a place called Kappal daddi and our team stopped there to find out. We came to know that they were earthquake victims standing with the hope of some relief to arrive. We quickly disembarked from the vehicle and moved to a tent there and set up our camp base.

We started examining the patients and found that there were majority of orthopedic related victims with shoulder, back, leg, hand and other bodily injuries. We examined them and dispensed medicines. But what we noticed was that more than the physical injuries, there were in a state of daze and shock over what had happened and it was all too sudden for them. Overnight they had lost everything they had, house, properties, and most importantly their family members. They did not know how to cope up with the situation and were emotionally and mentally distressed. We tried to counsel them but it appeared hollow words to them. We did what we could do best and after examining closely to 200 patients in over 2 hours time we moved to our next destination to a place called Chahera.
OUR SECOND CAMP AT CHAHERA

We thought it would be another backward village. But what we did not know was that we were to go to a village situated at the top of the mountains for the camp. Our bus could not move as we hit a very narrow and damaged road and the bus could not take us to the top. So we disembarked from the bus and were trying to figure out how to reach over the mountain tops. Most of us were middle aged and were not used to trekking and walking on the treacherous terrains.

While thinking what do to next whether to return back to our base camp without conducting the camp or advance further I witnessed something very interesting

A FATHER AND SON’S SCENARIO IN FRONT OF A COLLAPSED HOUSE.

I saw a frail looking old man may be in is 80’s with a cigar pipe in his hand and by side was a young man who was his son. Both were sitting on a mat with few books spread all over. He was reading a book deeply. Curious we approached him and introduced ourselves and asked the boy what was he doing? He said that his exams were coming up and he was hence getting prepared for the exams. His father told us that they had lost their home and had no place to stay and hence were sitting outside their collapsed home. What appealed to us most was the commitment of this boy. Despite being in a worst scenario, here was a boy whose approach to the worst challenge in his life had made him strive harder than waste time in sulking. I wondered back home I have read of so many instances where our students commit suicide at a small hint of trouble, despite all the facilities, luxuries, best of reading materials, rooms colleges and
schools and coaching classes still are not satisfied and keep complaining. We were terribly impressed by what we saw and were feeling very motivated. We complimented them and wished the boy all the best for his exams and were pretty sure in our minds that this boy will certainly make a mark in life as he has learnt to ride over adversities and not succumb to them.
RIDE OVER THE NARROW AND TREACHOUS LANES

DANGEROUS RIDE TO THE MOUNTAIN TOP

With no possibility of our bus moving further due to the narrow and treacherous terrain, we were offered lifts over the bikes of few army men deployed there. We rode triple on a bike and were scared for life as the army man took us over to the top of the mountains. The thoughts running in my mind were what if he loses balance and skids. There was not more than 2-3 feet clear space available to ride. When I expressed my doubt, the army man confidently told me that nothing would happen to me and he would take me safely to the top but instructed me to just hold him tight. True to his words, he indeed rode very skillfully and took us to the village of the camp about 5 kms from the ground.
OUR BUS COULD NOT MOVE BEYOND THIS POINT

WE WERE ESCORTED ON BIKES TO THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAINS

OUR 2ND CAMP AT CHAHERA

When we reached there, we saw a huge gathering of people, there were very few houses intact, and most of them had collapsed. In such one home which was slightly better, we started seeing the patients. There were
over 500 patients and we encountered similar problems what we had seen in
the first camp. But what was striking here was that the patients were
tearful and smiling despite the tragedy. It was close to 3 pm and we
felt very hungry and thought that we will not get any food here and had
to make good with just a few pieces of bread and biscuits. I just
casually asked a person there will we get food here and I was extremely
surprised when he said that hot food is waiting for our team!! I could
not believe my ears.
Just a few steps away from the place of our camp, he took us to a broken house for lunch. While getting down the narrow hillock to reach that place, I twisted my left ankle and sprained it badly. Limping I reached the broken home. We were made to sit on a broken bench while the locals brought hot food for us. There was rice, dhal, vegetable and a pickle too. We found it be very tasty and palatable. We curiously enquired who had cooked this tasty food for us. We were told that it was cooked by a lady and we were sitting in her house that was totally destroyed. She was cooking at another place for us. Here was a lady who was feeding us in her broken home and she was cooking the food for about 40 people at a nearby place. We expressed our desire to see her and were dumbfounded at what we saw. Her name was Savitri, a frail looking woman and was very busy in cooking food for us. She was cheerful and completely involved in serving us food with the help of one of her relative. Though virtually homeless and having lost few of her family members, here was a lady who was feeding us all with such love and enthusiasm. When we tried to talk to her and express our gratitude she was extremely shy and did not want to take any credit for her service. She just said she is happy to serve us some food as we had come all the way from India to serve her countrymen. We felt she is a superstar and wanted to get our pictures with her, though she was very reluctant we cajoled her to pose with us for we felt that she was a real hero and celebrity. That lady's grit and determination made us very humble and we bowed down our heads to her magnanimity and hospitality and though poor and homeless she had the largeness of heart to feed us instead of sulking and feeling sorry for her. This was for me the best lunch ever and I felt she certainly is the best host ever in my life.
OUR DINING ROOM, SAVITRI’S BROKEN HOME

SAVITRI AND HER RELATIVE—OUR GENEROUS HOSTS
COUNSELLING SESSIONS FOR THE PATIENTS AT THE VILLAGE

CORPORATE HOSPITAL OR CHARITY HOSPITAL

The next day we visited the Grandie International Hospital, Nepal’s only corporate hospital.
There Dr Nagamani and Dr Pandey, who is the head of the Orthopedic Unit took us around the wards.

**A WARM WELCOME AWAITED ME FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ORTHOPEDICS**
AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ORTHOPEDICS

WARD ROUNDS

We saw a variety of cases ranging from paraplegia, quadriplegia, crush injuries, compound injuries, amputees, polytrauma, and fractures of almost all the bones. They were all treated well and were recuperating. The hospital had suffered major damages from the earthquake. Yet they were functioning. The OT’s were busy, the wards were shifted from the top floors to lower floors, and the staffs from the doctors to the paramedics were found working enthusiastically.
During the ward rounds they showed one couple, whose mother was badly injured. The father was sitting with a new born baby by her side. The team introduced us to them, and was told that when the quake hit their hut, this woman in a selfless action shielded her baby completely and took the brunt of the quake on her weak and frail body. She had thus defied the quake and saved her darling baby. She was being treated for multiple injuries but she looked cheerful and beamed with pride about her new born. This lady was interviewed by CNN and was hailed as one of the most courageous act of a mother who risked her life to save her baby. We saluted this brave mother and moved on wondering at how a mother can risk everything for her child!!

We went to the operation theatre and saw some complicated surgeries being performed by Dr Pandey and Dr Sandeep. They explained to us that they have done more than 80 free surgeries till date. Free means it was completely free from food, medicines, implants, hospital stay etc nothing was charged to the patients and their relatives. They lamented that nobody recognized their services. They pleaded the government top send cases to their hospital for free surgeries but they were skeptical about their claim of free services. Being a corporate they suspected how they could afford to give free service to the quake victims and shied away.

But in reality we saw and interviewed the patients and everyone said that they have not been charged single penny. The quality of care that was being given was of the highest standards, there was no compromise.

We complimented Dr Pandey and his team for their selfless service to the unfortunate victims though being corporate they had risen to the occasion
and offered selfless service to the victims. We promised them that we will carry this news to all parts and highlight their charity services.

I THE SUPER STAR

I was pleasantly surprised that the residents and the physiotherapists were waiting to meet me and get photographed with them. They said that they are reading my books on Orthopedics and Physiotherapy and found it to be very good and useful. They said I am a Star here and it would be an honor if I autographed and took photos with them. I felt overwhelmed by their warmth and love and felt proud that I am known in this neighboring country from a long time.
WITH THE TEAM OF SURGEONS

WATCHED AND ASSISTED SURGERIES AT GRANDIE HOSPITAL
This is a government hospital. When we visited this hospital we saw the orthopedic wards were full. There were all varieties of patients from quadriplegia to small injuries.

The wards were clean and well maintained. There was lot of discipline among the doctors and the staffs and the patients. No one was wailing or crying and there was commotion in the hospital.

WE INTERACTED WITH THE ADMITTED PATIENTS
THOUGH A GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL, THE WARDS WERE NEAR AND CLEAN

Our attention was drawn towards a one year child with both thigh bone fractures. The child was put up on a splint and the mother was sitting by the side. She was sad but not depressed.

A PATIENT WITH QUARDIPLEGIA
CHEERFUL AND GRATEFUL PATIENTS

We interviewed all the patients in the wards and found that most of them had lost everything in the earthquake and now were bedridden. There was a big question mark over their future but still their spirit was not destroyed and they greeted and thanked us with lot of respect. They were grateful that we had come all the way from India to see them. We appreciated the standards maintained in the hospital.
SHAKING OPERATION THEATRES BUT STABLE SURGEONS

My colleague Dr Manjunath recalled one of his experiences that while operating in the Police Hospital, there were tremors. Within no time everyone from the nurse, ward boys to the anesthetist ran away for their lives out of the OT. Only he and the patient were left behind in the OT! I asked him why he did not run away; he said how he could abandon the patient on the OT table all alone bleeding!! He said he was prepared for any eventuality. Hats off to the courage and sacrifice of the spirit of the doctors serving the humanity. We are abused and assaulted by people nowadays but no one recognizes the value of our services.

THE DESTRUCTION WHAT WE SAW

Everything was damaged from tall rising buildings, to small huts, from temples to commercial establishments, the roads, the bridges and the parks nothing was spared. We saw that many of the people had left the place. The apartments, the houses looked empty. The city was closed and the shops downed their shutters by 5 pm. The hotels and eateries were closed. We had to run around for food and finding most of the hotels closed we had to eat whatever was available in our hotel. The situation was grim everywhere. They were living in apprehensions when will this whole ordeal end. When will this earthquake stop? Will their country bounce back or be ravaged further? There were no easy answers. Everyone were kept guessing and hoping. There was aftershocks everyday for the 10 days we stayed there. Our hotel was shaking every day, yet we remained indoors with strong optimism that nothing would happen to us and nothing in fact happened!
DESTRUCTION POST OFFICES, SCHOOLS AND BANKS

DESTRUCTION OF THEIR HISTORIC HERITAGE SITES

This earthquake had reduced Nepal to rubbles. Everything was in ruins particularly their 10 cultural heritage sites. All their historical sites and temples were under ruins. The famous Basantpur Darbar, Baktapur Durbar, Pattan Durbar, the palaces, the Durhara were all ruined. They lamented the destruction which would take years for them to rebuild.
They feared that there will be a severe drop in the number of tourists coming to their country and their economy will be badly hit.

THE TOTAL COLLAPSE OF THE 9 STOREYED FAMOUS DARAHARA SIMILAR TO OUR QUTAB MINAR

BASANTAPUR DURBAR SQUARE
BASANTPUR DURBAR PALACE
THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PATAN DURBAR SQUARE (LALITPUR)
THE DESTRUCTION OF BHAKTAPUR DURBAR SQUARE
PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR HOUSES AND LIVING IN TENTS
CREMATION AND POOJA TOGETHER

We visited the famous Pashupathinath temple and found lots of activities there. On one side there was pooja going on and special aarthis being performed and on the other side there were mass cremations being done and the army was bringing the dead bodies continuously. The atmosphere was sobre, sad but there was no over the top reactions.

THE ARMY BRINGING THE DEAD BODIES FOR CREMATION

CREMATION BEING PERFORMED
THE SELF RESPECTING CITIZENS OF NEPAL

GRITTY PEOPLE

I asked one of the managers of the hotel what he did when there was earthquake, did he run away? He said no. He was serving his customers when his hotel shook but he never deserted them and the hotel. When I asked what would have happened if the building had collapsed he said whatever is in my fate would happen and hence never felt like abandoning.

SELF RESPECTED SALES GIRL

We visited few shops to see if the business has restarted. We made some purchases in the purse shop and the sales girl who was showing us the goods was very cheerful and sporting. The owner of the shop said that this lady had just reported for work today and she had lost everything in the earthquake her home, family members and had suffered huge losses. Seeing her plight, one of my doctor friends offered her a tip of Rs. 1000 Indian rupees which in Nepalese is Rs.1600/- She sternly refused to take it and said that our good wishes are enough for her. Her owner also told us there is no need for any tips for her as they will take care of her and he also expressed gratitude for coming and helping their country mates. We were dumbfounded by the dignity and self respect of the people even in these extremely difficult days.

THE GESTURE OF OUR TAXI DRIVER

Shashi, our taxi driver, took us around Kathmandu and neighboring places showing us the wide spread destructions and was very helpful to us in an
unknown place. When he dropped us to the airport we asked how much we have to pay him for his taxi services. He refused to state the amount despite repeated requests and told us to give whatever we feel. He expressed deep gratitude and said that we South Indians are very kind and generous and he has developed lots of liking for us. When we got down from his taxi and were getting inside the airport, he came to us running and gave a small ganesh idol as a token of his appreciation for our effort and service to his country. We wondered from where he brought this all of a sudden and questioned him. He was reluctant to answer and then we realized that it was the small idol that was kept in his car and not having anything to give us, he plucked it from the dashboard and offered it to us as his gift. We were moved by his gesture and found him to be extremely grateful to our efforts.

CANDLE LIGHT HOMAGE

People had lost their loved ones, relatives, and friends. They were in agony and pain. Their loss was irreparable. We could see people lighting candles in all public places in the memories of the lost ones. There was silence, dignity, and respect for the departed souls. Candles were being lit in their memories. We also joined the locals in lighting candles and prayed for the souls who departed and for the people to overcome the grief and the loss. It was a very moving sight.
THESE MESSAGES TO THE WORLD SAYS IT ALL

We Survived
So We Will Help

Don't wait for an Angel
Be an Angel
AND THE MESSAGE WHICH EXUDES SELF CONFIDENCE

We are
shaken
but not
broken
WHAT I LEARNT FROM MY EXPERIENCES IN NEPAL

That life is very fragile. Every second we are living is a gift from God.

We need to enjoy each and every moment God has given to us in this world.

Everything can be over in seconds
Nature does not discriminate between the rich and the poor, the powerful and influential.
Life deals everyone with the same yardstick.

We will all perish one day and it is important that we make a difference in this world.
If we delay we may not get another second chance
We need to contribute to the world and to the society.

We need to cherish life and make the best use of the opportunity God has given us.

**PEACE BRINGS WAR AND DESTRUCTION BRINGS PEACE**

The Nepal disaster had brought nearly 84 countries to their doorstep. Everyone was trying to contribute and help in some way or the other. They had set up a disaster camp and there was great unity among all. Their one point agenda was how to help the fellow Nepalese. This set me thinking. We create wars; we destroy lives and properties on this earth. The same people forget all their differences and unite when there is a calamity. Why not show the same friendship and camaraderie with each other even during normal times. This would have made the world a peaceful place and there would be no wars and destructions! How foolish we are, we do not know we are fighting for what? God created one world and we created several countries and war. When will we learn?
WHAT DOES FUTURE HOLD FOR NBPAL?

Left over Heritage Sites of Nepal

They were happy that the Pashupathinath temple was not damaged much. Only few structures outside the main temple were damaged. They said that it is divine intervention that had saved this temple. They said they have at least this temple to show the visitors.
The 143 feet World’s Tallest Shiva Statue

The Famous Pashupatinath Temple
TRYING TO REBUILD THEIR NATION

With all the devastation and suffering yet they were optimistic. We witnessed that the army and the people were trying to clean up the area and were picking each and every brick that had fallen and lining it on the sides. They were also picking up all the valuables, idols etc and storing it carefully. They said that they were not depending on the
government to set rights things all on their own. They said that it is a national calamity and each and every citizen will be involved in rebuilding their nation from scratch again. Their sense of patriotism and responsibility left us dumb founded.

CITIZENS PRESERVING EACH AND EVERY BRICK

ARMY TAKING ACTIVE PART BOTH IN PROTECTION AND REBUILDING
THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HERITAGE SITES HAS ALREADY BEGUN

THE LOCALS ARE SOARING EACH AND EVERY BRICK
SUPPORTS ARE BEING GIVEN TO THE STRUCTURES FROM COLLAPSING FURTHER

THERE IS WIDESPREAD FEAR OF BREAK OF LARGE SCALE EPIDEMICS

I SUFFERED AN ANKLE FRACTURE

While getting down the hillocks on 5th May I twisted my ankle and thought I sprained it. My orthopedic colleagues told that we will get an X-ray done on returning back. I refused and thought it was just a sprain. I
limped around during my entire stay at Nepal and thought that it will go away. Even after returning home I neglected it but continued to limp. But the pain got worse and today on 14th Morning I got an X-ray done. And it revealed an avulsion fracture of the left malleoli. I promptly put an elastocrepe bandage around. I am now happy that I did not take an X-ray there as that would have curtailed my rescue activities there. Now having seen such massive destruction and injuries, mine is the most insignificant injury!

APPECIATIONS RECEIVED, THE MOST MEMORABLE ONE

For all our efforts and services, there were lots of compliments and good wishes from our friends, relatives, and public back home. Our services were recognized and valued by the following:

- Government of Nepal
- The Indian Embassy
- The Federation of the Nepalese Chamber of Commerce
- Grandie International Hospital
- Government of Karnataka

But the best appreciation and award I received was from the Taxi Driver who gave us a very precious Ganesh idol in recognition of our services for his suffering countrymen! But the biggest of all was the self satisfaction of having been of some use to the cause of humanity. This gave lots of happiness which money or wealth cannot give me.
FELICITATED BY DR ANAND THAKUR, MEDICAL OFFICER OF THE INDIAN EMBASSY AT NEPAL

AT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, NEPAL
FELICITATED BY DR KHEM BAHADUR, HEAD OF THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, NEPAL

OUR ACTIVITIES PUBLISHED IN THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER
FELICITATED BY UT KHADER, HEALTH MINISTER GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA ON 12TH MAY 2015
Felicitated by Mr Tiwari, Principal Secretary to the Health, Government of Karnataka
THE TEAM OF DOCTORS FROM KARNATAKA

Total Number of patients treated: 2000
Total Number of Surgeries Conducted - 52
Total Number of Districts Covered – 5
Total Number of Camps Conducted – 9
Total quantity of free Medicines distributed – 1140 kgs

And another quake happens on 12th May, barely 24 hours after our return!!
What Awaits Nepal, What awaits this world in general?