



***Ananda Foundation***

***Field Notes: India***

***Nagapattinam: The birth of Ananda Pushpavanam and our babies have no milk.***

The next afternoon we drove several hours through small towns, past bullock carts and coconuts, engineering colleges, women herding goats, and men perched on Brahman bulls with piles of hay that seemed to reach the sky. From the city of Trichy with the famed Ganapathi temple on the hill to the white gates of Thanjavur, there were villages dotted by palm trees and children playing. We arrived at our destination Nagapattinam. This district was hardest hit by the tsunami. In the morning we drove along the Velaganni-Vedaraniyam road to reach the small village of Pushpavanam, Upon hearing that this village had been abandoned , no longer receiving aid and stripped of an economy because all its boats had been destroyed, we brought with us four sewing machines, cricket bats, board games, and hope.

I placed my feet in the sand. A woman in her sixties, Mrs. R. Pattamal, showed me where her house once stood. She lost everything. A younger woman in a red sari shared with me that her husband had gone fishing the day of the tsunami. Thankfully, her husband came back but his boat was washed out to sea. She showed me what was left of her house, half of the structure, a fractured roof and a hole in the floor that looked like a boulder had landed in it. She told me she had been taking a bath in a nearby pond and when she came back her house was devastated.

The men showed me their boats. They were split in half, split in pieces of six long pieces of wood torn apart. As I scanned the area, I was overwhelmed. Even in the aftermath.

While the teachers and director Mr. Kailaselvan of our collaborating NGO AWAKES, were setting up the sewing machines, I stood in the doorway staring at the sea. Someone

whispered in my ear that they were afraid that I was there in case of another tsunami struck. I empathized by telling them I grew up on an island close to the beach and after seeing this, I could imagine the fear in which they live. A young girl came to me and was pointing at her chest. She had a baby in her arms. Even though I didn't speak Tamil—I understood her gestures. She was telling me that she had no breast milk to feed her baby girl Arthi. Arthi was six months but looked about three months/. When I asked how she coped, she told me that the aid agencies had given her a supply of milk powder, but she was almost finished with the supply. When I asked what else she fed her baby, she shrugged. That mother was only twenty years old and her husband was not working, like all the men in the village.

It was our hope that by donating the sewing machines that these women could work in shifts, tailoring and sewing clothes to earn a living. We calculated that with four sewing machines, at least 16 women could be helped if they worked in shifts.

In the one little house that remained standing, we faced the ocean with the light of a single flame and the blessing of the village head—we inaugurated Ananda Pushpavanam—a sewing school for young women.

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*\*Notes by Levani March 2005*  
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