



Two award winning young artists - above and below.

The Tsunami Inspires Child Art

The trauma of the tsunami has inspired some remarkable child art. Some 230 children from 70 schools of coastal Tamil Nadu and Maldives took part in five on-the-spot art contests organised by BOBP-IGO on the theme "Life after the tsunami". This photo essay describes the contests in words and pictures. The best paintings won certificates and cash awards and will also figure in a 2006 BOBP-IGO calendar.

How do children react to a catastrophe like the tsunami? What is its impact on youngsters with artistic sensibilities? How do they view their immediate environment and the world after the tsunami?

To find out, the BOBP-IGO organised on-the-spot art contests in August 2005 for school children in four cities of coastal Tamil Nadu — Chennai, Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and Kanniyakumari – and another in Malé, Maldives during early September 2005. The theme: Life after the tsunami.

Each of the schools (12 in Chennai, nine in Cuddalore, 17 in Nagapattinam, 16 in Kanniyakumari, 15 in Malé) deputed their 3-4 best art students to take part in the contest. Here's some basic who-when-where data about the contests.



- Chennai Contest held on August 20, 2005, at the Chettinad Vidyashram, R A Puram, Chennai 600 028. 43 children from 12 schools took part – 21 children aged 11 to 13, 22 children aged 14-17.
- Cuddalore Contest held on August 27, 2005. 39 children from nine schools took part. 21 children aged 11 to 13, 18 children aged 14 to 17. Contest held at the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Cuddalore Port.
- Nagapattinam Contest held on August 27, 2005. Sixty children from 17 schools took part. 28 children aged 11 to 13, 32 children aged 14 to 17. Held at the Adarsh Matric Higher Secondary School, Nagapattinam.
- Kanniyakumari Contest held on August 28, 2005. 48 children from 16 schools took part. 25 children aged 11 to 13, 23 children aged 14 to 17. Venue: Government Higher Secondary School, Vadasery.
- Malé Contest held on September 3, 2005, at the Malé English School. 32 Children from 15 schools took part. Three age categories here (12 children aged 11 to 12, 12 children aged 13 to 15, 8 children aged 16 to 17.)

Each on-the-spot art contest took about two hours. BOBP made available to every artist a drawing sheet and either a crayon pencil box (for the smaller age group) or a box of water-colour paintings (for the larger age group). The kids were free to bring their own equipment as well.

When the BOBP-IGO invited select schools to take part in the contest, they responded with alacrity. Parents of Tamil Nadu schools visited the BOBP to collect information about drawing sheets and art materials. Others browsed the BOBP-IGO website and asked about fishery resources.

Right: Snapshots of the young artists and the judges at work.

- 1 & 2. Maldives
3. Chennai
4. Judges and BOBP-IGO officials in the Maldives
5. Judges in Chennai.
6. Young artists with officials from Maldives and BOBP-IGO.
7. Chennai
8. Cuddalore
9. Kanniyakumari



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The contest had the artists engrossed for 120 minutes – heads down, eyes afire with concentration, painting tools racing away. “A tsunami would not have disturbed me,” one of them wisecracked later.

BOBP’s artist S Jayaraj vetted the paintings and selected 15 from each center for final scrutiny by a panel of judges. For Tamil Nadu schools, the panel consisted of Dr George Conway (Chief of the Alaska Field Station of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, USA), Principal of Chennai’s College of Arts K Swamikannu, and art critic Chitra Mahesh from Chennai.

For the Maldives contest, the three judges were Mr Hussain Afeef (Senior Illustrator, Centre for Continuing Education), Mr Ahmed Naeem (Project Officer Trainee, National Art Gallery, Malé) and artist S Jayaraj.

Cash prizes were awarded to winners in all the three categories. Prize-winners also received a printed certificate with a citation on one side and (to their surprise) their painting on the reverse, beautifully laminated.

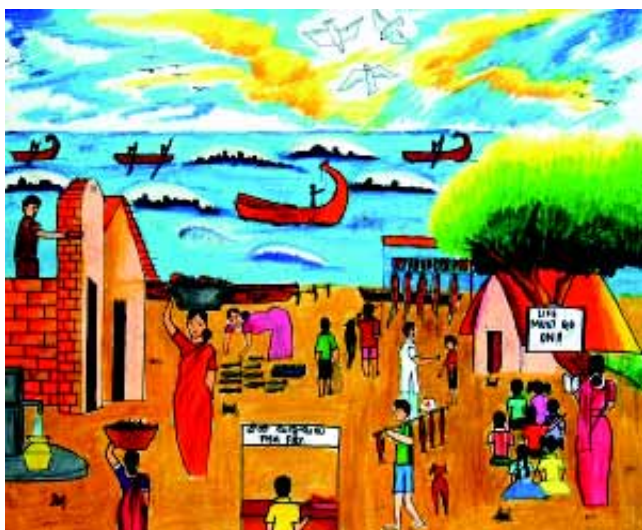


The paintings

Under the theme “Life after the tsunami,” the young artists came up with a slew of subjects, used ideas and symbols from nature, history and literature, and came up with poignant captions. Creativity unleashed!

One painting showed a child looking at the sea through the openings of a broken slate. Caption: “An affected mind is looking through a broken slate at the place where she lost her papa, mama, Barbie doll and school bag.” One painting of a mass of corpses says “All it took was a few minutes. But it took all.” Another painting depicted a vulture as the tsunami. It threatens “I’ll come

*Painting by Anjali Chandrashekar, Padma Seshadri
Bala Bhavan School, Chennai.*

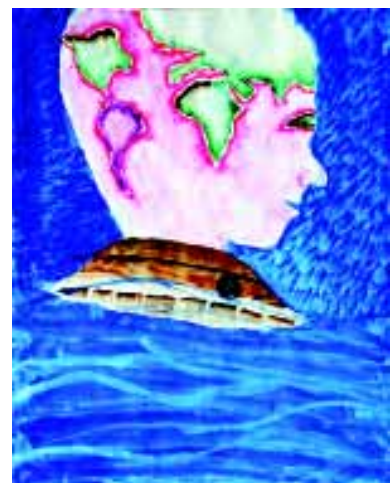


again.” Caption: “A warning to marine resource poachers and exploiters”.

Some other telling captions: “With courage in their minds and smiles on their faces”.

“Tsunami, a destroyer and creator”, “He lost everything but didn’t lose heart,” “People at sea can see the light, people on land are yet to see the light,” “An

earthquake not only at sea, but also in my life.” One intriguing painting showed a fisherman’s head. His neck is an inverted boat. The transparent head shows maps of Africa and Asia! Caption: “The world of hope.”



*Painting by S Janani, Chettinad
Vidyashram, Chennai.*

Hope is also held out in a painting of rehabilitation — fishing activity, kids studying, houses being built. Caption: “With the tsunami past, our net’s cast, let our joy last.” Another positive portrayal “Arise and awake to make a new world.”

Several artists referred to the mother, either literally or metaphorically. “After the tsunami – he got everything except his lovable mummy.”

“A thousand helping hands – but who will give back my mother?” and “Mother sea! It’s injustice!”

The feedback

The art contests truly captured the imagination of the young artists, also of the school principals and staff. Sample comment from an artist’s mother “I have accompanied my daughter to some 100 art contests in different parts of India, but there was nothing more exciting than this one, none so well organised.” A drawing master from Nagercoil requested the BOBP to conduct an art contest for drawing masters of Nagercoil and Kannyakumari during the tsunami’s anniversary day, December 26. Several principals urged repeat contests.



Most heartening was the imagination, the creative energy and the artistic talent displayed by the young artists. The BOBP-IGO’s calendar of 2006 will reproduce the best of these paintings. Demand for it is zooming!

*– Text by S R Madhu
Photographs by S Jayaraj*