



A road connecting with the rest of the world..



A long drive road trip is a dream we all dream.. Add some big potholes, speed breakers and traffic jams to the imagery and before you know the dream turns into a nightmare we live every day in the cities.. For sure bad roads are a genuine gripe.. But what if we told you there's still some good news in there.. That we still have roads because the fact is many villages don't even have a semblance of a road.. In many places the one kachcha village road is the only connect they have with the outside world.. This heartwarming story has two different scenarios from two different states to share.. It will hopefully make you cope better with your morning struggle of getting to work.. This story is about village India which not only copes with the never ending adversity but

has come up with viable solutions by getting their own hands dirty.. Their roads are not about exploring destinations & luxury; their roads are about survival and basic needs.. Material has played the role of a positive instigator for change while the village communities have taken the ownership to help themselves..

Uttarakhand-

If you trek in the hills of Uttarkashi, you wouldn't want to miss a visit to Dodital. It's a scenic spot and a place of holy significance for the locals. Reaching it is literally an uphill task though – you take a 15 km jeep ride uphill to Sangamchatti followed by an 8 km trek down a narrow kachcha path to Agoda village which has around 200 households. It takes a trek of another 15 kms to reach Dodital the next day. Apart from the many Indian and foreign trekking tourists Dodital also attracts a lot of locals who come to the local shrine of Lord Ganesha. Villagers are mainly engaged in tourism related activities like rearing mules and horses, the only means of commuting and transporting people and material.



The Uttarakhand floods in 2013 ruined everything for the people of this area. The 8 kms stretch to Agoda village was also completely destroyed. Now people had to walk 4 extra kms to reach their village. The slump in tourism meant feeding the cattle stock also became a challenge. Many people had to throw away their crops since there was no way to carry it down to the market. When people got tired of making pleas to the officials for repairing their road, they decided to take the matter in their own hands.



Agora was one of the villages where Goonj reached the essentials relief supplies in initial days after the floods. People walked all the way down to Sangamchatti to get the relief material and returned home via the same risky way. Their troubles had only just begun even as the initial relief phase came to an end.. The loss of connectivity was their biggest unresolved challenge. In October, 2013,

88 men and women from the area worked for 3 days to repair and restore the 5km long stretch of road to make it walk able for people and mules.



One parent from the village shared “The day of my daughter’s marriage was nearing and I was getting really anxious about what to do? The road was damaged so I had to make alternate arrangements in the nearby town of Uttarkashi. The road mending work began just in time. I could save a lot of money and I could send away my daughter from my home.. That thought gives me immense pleasure.”

Goonj team members Mohit & Durga say about going to Agora in the initial days, “We remember the trek to Agoda as one of the riskiest venture of our lives. A big rock had slid down making a huge abyss of 50 meters in the middle of the road. We knew the danger but we still went on jumping and swinging like monkeys by catching hold of the roots of the uprooted trees. Our personal experience strengthened our resolve to work extensively in these completely cut off villages”.



This was also our first Cloth for Work (CFW) activity in Uttarakhand..In 2014 monsoons when heavy rains broke this road again, people from the area got together and repaired it on their own. They received winter kits, a much needed input for the severe winters at this height.

Odisha-

While the rest of the world has moved on to metro, malls and flyovers a small cluster of 36 households of Koi tribal community in the village Kudigunja (Daringbadi block, District Kandhamal, Odisha) still struggle for basics like roads, water and electricity. Their road isn't fit for traveling, going from bad to worse in the rainy season. Lives are lost because of the inability in reaching medical care in time with pregnant women being especially at risk. Private vehicles charged exorbitant fares, the cost of wear & tear on such a dilapidated road being their justification. The bad road condition also posed a challenge to the students who were forced to use it to reach their school.



72 people from the community got together to mend approx 5 km of this road stretch up to another village Dalagadu in Danekbadi panchayat; including patch work, leveling, bush cutting and mud filling. Now the auto rickshaws have reduced their fares to ply on this road bringing a bit of relief for the locals. Over the years Goonj has initiated hundreds of such road making and repair related activities in the deep interiors of rural India. While we in the cities may have endless discussions on the names of our roads, for people in the villages, a road still is a crucial connect with the rest of the world. Whether that makes you feel good or bad as you navigate the next pothole on the road tomorrow morning.. That we'll leave for you to decide..





The story will continue in the second part sharing more interesting anecdotes from other parts of the country too, where communities have taken up genuine efforts; right from donating their farm land for road purpose to building pressure on authorities to make them pakka..

