



## Winters and evidence on why we do what we do?



If you are living in Delhi or in any other city of north India, we hope you are nicely tucked in or at least wrapped up in two layers of woolens cause its really cold out there right now.. Not to be cruel or anything but that's how some people die on the roads.. not having any woolen on their body as they struggle through the really chilly and windy nights out in the open..

That's probably how 6 years old Bano felt when she hugged a dead body to deal with the cold, outside the LNJP hospital in Delhi. Her story dates back to the origin of Goonj. It's her statement that makes us realize that winter is an annual disaster for people who don't have enough cloth. Some of you may have heard or read about Bano and her father Habib Bhai. So why are we telling you her story again after over 2 decades of the incident? Probably, because winter still isn't considered a disaster in our country and because Habib's story is still relevant...



Anshu Gupta, Founder Goonj met Habib Bhai when he had just finished his journalism studies. Like any enthusiastic young journo Anshu roamed around the Delhi roads looking for a story.. That's when he saw a rickshaw with a strange line written on its back "lawaris laash uthane wala". That rickshaw belonged to Habib Bhai who lived on a pavement outside LNJP hospital in Delhi. He picked up abandoned dead bodies for the Delhi police. Anshu spent a week with Habib Bhai trying to understand the intricacies of this strange profession.. That's when Bano innocently told Anshu that, "when I feel cold, I hug the dead body and sleep. It does not trouble me, it does not turn around."

Facts; Government statistics reveal that winters are the second major reason for deaths in India after lightening. Surprisingly floods come third on this list. Statistics show that till 2007, 826 people died every year due to harsh winters in India. The death toll started to increase after 2007 due to a drop in winter temperatures. Between 2002 and 2012, as many as 10,740 people died from exposure to cold and avalanche. (<http://goo.gl/9W2BeO>) and the fact remains that hundreds of deaths in winters are considered normal deaths only and there is hardly any effort to find the exact reason..

Habib Bhai said to Anshu "In winters my work goes up. Sometimes there is so much work that I find it difficult to handle." Anshu found that in a radius of 5-6 km where Habib Bhai could take his Rickshaw, in winters he would pick up 11-12 dead bodies daily (on an average) whereas in summers the number dwindled to almost half. When you really think about it, 'it's not the Cold that kills people it is the lack of clothing that does.' Apart from being the first visible sign of poverty, lack of clothing is also the reason people succumb to the cold wave..

Back in 2009-2010 our partner organization Prayas Shiksha Samiti (Mandla, MP) mentioned to us about frequent accidents happening in their area due to fire in winters. Mandla is a poverty stricken tribal land where people didn't even have enough to eat. Clothing was therefore a secondary need they were struggling with. Typically households would fill a sack with dried grass/husk and sleep in it, lighting a fire right next to them.. Just sometime back in winters, Hare Singh, a local villager went off to sleep in the open courtyard of his home, with a fire lit next to him. At around mid-night the fire caught on the entire hut. The villagers managed to save his life but the burns left him disabled for life. In the harsh winters of 2010, Narbad Das (village Sinjhora, district Mandla) died while sleeping outside his hut to oversee his crop.. There are many Hare Singh's and Narbad Das's in rural India who put their lives in danger or remain awake the whole night next to 'Alaav' (community fireplace) and go to sleep only in the morning, at the cost of their income and livelihood. These deaths are rarely reported and accounted for.. People aren't just struggling in Madhya Pradesh, the same is true for many in Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand as well.



Goonj Winter Kits, comprising of clothes, woolens, sujnis/blankets among other things, for the entire family, are not only helping initiate large scale development work its also making thousands of families' cloth rich. Charan Parte, (a resident of Keolari Kala village, from Block Mawai, Mandla, MP where Goonj has been working) says "Every year we had to spend 2000-3000 rupees on clothing for all my family members and given our financial condition, we used to take it on high interest loans.. but from the last many years I do not remember having spent anything on clothing.. Now we have enough."



Uttara Padwar, from Prayas Shiksha Samiti's (MP) informs that from the time they have partnered with Goonj the incidences of people dying in cold have dropped significantly. Similarly Winter Kits were reached out in big numbers to Uttarakhand and J&K when winters turned out to be the second disaster for the people of flood hit states.



Among many different dimensions of the role cloth and woollens play in the lives of people some surprise us as well. On an impact assessment visit to Khandwa region (MP), we found that woollens provided by Goonj were turning to be a big boon to the mal-nourished children admitted in the hospital. When woollens and blankets reached

many villages in the region, the villagers were able to save Rs 1000-1200 per family. Earlier they

had to pay heavy interest on the loan they would take to buy woolens and clothes. And the saving helped them in spending more on food. In many villages, since electricity usually comes only at night, the farmers were forced to stay in the fields to water their crop through the chilly winter nights. Without enough clothes this was a daily struggle where woolens (provided by Goonj) turned into a life saver. In many villages like Booti, located around 80 kms from Khandwa in the middle of a jungle, woolens aren't even available. Providing woolens to these villagers has afforded them the possibility of wearing warm clothing during winters. For over 15 years Goonj has highlighted winters as an annual preventable disaster and constantly worked on it under 'Rahat Winters' campaign. This is why we are asking people like us living in the warm comforts of city homes to contribute their woolens and blankets under our pan India campaign 'Odha Do Zindagi'.

Sujni is one element of our winter Kit that we are especially proud of.. not only because of its round the year utility as blanket in winters and mattress in summers, but also because its creating sustained income generation for hundreds of women. In the last few months women at Goonj's Rishikesh and Uttarkashi centers have created over 37,000 Sujni's out of absolute waste, which are now an integral part of Goonj's



Winter Kit, Labor Kit, Relief kit and Family kit. This winter, more than 5000 Winter Kits have been reached out to Guptakashi (Uttarakhand) covering every single family of over 100 villages apart from 1400 labor kits for the migrant laborers and over 3500 kits to Uttarkashi. Our target is to reach a million woolens and blankets this year and we are on track.. We are trying our best to fulfill our commitment of reaching the woolens and clothes of the cities to the most far flung parts of rural India while villagers are doing their bit by working hard on difficult issues in their areas to earn these. We just hope you, living in the cities, the critical link in this chain, extend the life of your woolen by reaching it out to save someone's life. This in the true sense exemplifies collective responsibility for addressing an issue..

We must have noticed that winters are not the issues of a particular region or geography.. These days even Mumbai goes down to 11 degree centigrade and Ahmadabad to 13.. Bangalore needs blankets and a few km away from other metros also people look for proper woolens.. Let's not just say- Its because of climate change etc.. The fact remains that it has been there.. For decades or may be from much earlier, just that most of us never took clothing and winters so seriously!!



To join our efforts in spreading warmth to more people write us to [odz@goonj.org](mailto:odz@goonj.org).

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