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A Pot Full of Pride, Utility and More..

"The corner of the hut had nothing except some ash and a few dented, charred utensils..a common sight in millions of village huts.. That's when I noticed the egg shell...and then I realised that the family kept their salt in it !! It was a disturbing moment for me.. It broke another myth for me..that the poor eat roti with salt.. I still wonder how? Even if the salt is so little !!"

- Anshu Gupta, Founder Goonj shared this crude reality he witnessed in a village somewhere..

This story also became Goonj's inspiration to delve a little deeper into the role of utensils..

Many of us coming from smaller cities and towns would probably remember how our mothers kept certain utensils and crockery in cupboards called the crockery almirah. These were decoration items meant only for special occasions and people. It's still a distinct feature of many middle class homes, all across India. The truth is, utensils have always had a special place in our lives.

Back in 2015, in a small village of *Uttarakhand*, 21 years old *Rajnandni* was about to get married. Till 8 days before the D-day, her parents still hadn't been able to arrange *panchbhandi* (a set of 5 utensils) to give to the daughter at the time of her send-off as per their custom. *Rajnandni's* father, a daily wage labourer barely managed two square meals for the family. He somehow arranged to serve the basics to a few guests but his worry was around this costly tradition. Some utensils given to the family as part of Goonj's





'Wedding Kit' ultimately brought him relief.

Countless village families go into a vicious cycle of debt arranging for a marriage. Goonj's *Wedding & Pandal Kits* are aimed at saving people from such financial ruin. *Pandal Kit* (*pandal* means a tent or a canopy put up for big events) is a set of things needed for organising a big event.. It's an extension of the *Tent House Kit* started after the 2008 *Bihar* floods to save already distressed people from financial ruin during any event. *"Today, because we have enough utensils in our village we are able to manage our marriages and other functions very well."* says Sumitra Devi from Rajnandini's village. The village community owns the kit and forms a committee to independently sustain this model in the long run.

As soon as the immediate relief phase ends after a disaster, the world usually forgets about the long-term needs of the worst affected. As a result many get ration but there's no cookware, the water tanker brings water but there's no container to store it. Utensils are an integral part of Goonj's relief and rehabilitation efforts. After the

massive 2013 *Uttarakhand* floods when many families had lost their livelihood, Goonj's material inputs were a huge support for many in restarting their lives. At this time one big consignment of utensils from *Bhumika Trust*, a *Chennai* based organisation, helped immensely as a part of our relief efforts.

After the *Jammu & Kashmir (J&K)* floods we gave sorted crockery sets to set up tea stalls under '**Vaapsi**' initiative for men and women who had no source of income. When *Iftiqar Khan*, running a small tea stall in *Sher Bibi*, *Ramban* district of *J&K* received 24 cup sets and a stainless steel tea set, his happiness knew no end.

Similarly in 2015, when *Bihar* was hit by a cyclone followed by an earthquake, it wiped out everything in many villages. Apart from reaching essential relief material Goonj focused on evolving sustainable livelihood options for the disaster affected. *Bharatchand* from *Baluhat Bazaar*, *K. Nagar*, *Purnea* barely made a living, running a small tea stall with a kettle, some cups and jars. Under Goonj's rehabilitation initiative *Vaapsi* when he received a



tea-making kit with utensils like pots, pans, plates and containers etc. he started a small *dhaba* (roadside eatery) serving breakfast and other snacks. Over the years *Bharatchand's* daily income has jumped to about ₹600-700 a day and he is able to offer better sitting arrangements for his customers.

'Utensils Kit' was also one of the important kits (out of 30 other occupational kits mapped) under the *Vaapsi* initiative offering new opportunities to those who had lost everything. Thousands of utensils (new and old) have since been reached out to disaster-hit people across the country.

Vikra Bharati, Head Mistress of *Saraswati Shishu Mandir Malla*, on the banks of *Bhagirathi river*, (*Uttarkashi* in *Uttarakhand*) says her school was in a pitiable condition. Her school didn't even have utensils to serve refreshments to guests at events like Parent Teacher meetings, sports competitions etc. A small *Utensil Kit* changed the



scenario and now the school doesn't have to borrow it from the neighbours.

Closer home in *Delhi*, Goonj has been reaching basic needs material to a lot of local organisations/non-profits serving some neglected populations. From clothes, woollens & blankets (bedding) we also give required utensils for shelter homes and community kitchens for the homeless. In the words of a representative of one organisation *"When we want to start a community kitchen we don't usually have enough money but when you (Goonj) helped us with utensils, we could save 25 to 30 thousand rupees. With that money, we are able to buy groceries and many other things"* That is how utensils save meagre resources for the homeless in cities as well.

Four different aspects, four different stories..and that are just scratching the surface of what **impact utensils have**. It might seem

insignificant in the big development picture but for hundreds of schools and households, utensils mean a much needed confidence, comfort and less financial burden; things they suffer for endlessly. For us these gaps and neglected basic needs are important. Unlike me and you, for most village households even if their basic needs are met and their daily life becomes a little better and peaceful, they are satisfied. So how can we ensure this basic?

To begin with, simply take out your unused utensils and give it. It may sound like an unconventional idea for change but it sure is a practical, doable one.

