



Ladakh Chale Rickshawala

An incident that took place in 1993, when he was unable to go to Puri due to a shortage of funds, and he had to reach the destination on his cycle, motivated him further to go to places. This experience instilled an insatiable love for wanderlust and adventure, endurance and courage to complete all trips, and the capability to record his experiences through his video on a Handycam. He has undertaken magnificent trips to Puri and many other trips across North India, but Ladakh as his ultimate journey. He had always dreamt of reaching Ladakh on his rickshaw and create history.

The journey started when his cycle rickshaw was hailed by Indrani Chakraborty, a TV producer from the Naktala neighborhood. While having a conversation with her, Satyen Das, the rickshaw puller, confessed about his dream to visit Ladakh crossing various states, cities, and rivers and he even showed her pictures of his previously visited places.

Indrani saw an opportunity in his story and decided to make a documentary movie on his experience of going to Ladakh on his three-wheeler rickshaw. She offered her assistance and even helped him throughout his journey.

When Satyen Das reached Banaras, his camera broke and she had to send someone to help him repair it. Then when he reached Ladakh, Indrani was there with her team members to witness his accomplished



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journey. He was also with provided maps, food, clothing, and other accessories to start his 68-day journey, which concluded when crossing the famous Khardung-La Pass in Ladakh on August 17, 2014.

All this was possible for her after monetary and logistical assistance from the neighborhood club the Naktala.

Many hurdles were faced by Satyen Das, the rickshaw puller, like availability of food, lack of oxygen as a result of high-altitude since Leh is at 11,500 feet above sea level, and inclement weather. He carried basic food items like potatoes and rice and survived on items like aloo chokha-bhaat or instant noodles.

Satyen Das, the rickshaw puller, also recalled how he faced three ordeals, which were crucial and threatening during the trip. The first experience was when he reached the Zoji La Pass, perched at an altitude of over 11,500 feet above sea level, which is the high mountain pass between Srinagar and Leh. There was an 8 km stretch which was extremely difficult because of the road conditions wherein he had to offload his belongings and carry them on his shoulder to pull his vehicle through. His muscles got tired faster as the level of oxygen was low, and he was out of breath while covering the ordeal. He was lucky no to go through any medical emergencies.

Displaying a remarkable show of endurance, the second ordeal during the journey was the ascent to Khardung-La from Leh, perched at an altitude of over 17,500 feet above sea level, which was indisputably taken over by Satyen Das. This road was once considered the highest motorable road in the world and to get through this unforgiving mountain terrain, Das was compelled to get off his rickshaw and pull the vehicle up with his hands.

The third ordeal was when he came across a snow leopard at the wee hours of the late evening when he was pulling his rickshaw on a high slope. The best part was that it just jumped to the other side without showing any interest in Satyen Das, the rickshaw puller.

His wife Munnii was not very happy with the trip as she complained about being along with her daughter Priyanka. She was upset seeing how Satyen Das is busy in his sweet world.

There were many unforgettable and beautiful experiences also. Satyen's brief affair with a Belgian cyclist in the grim mountains of Kashmir; was a substantial fling between two adventurers, contributing some spice to a very dangerous journey.

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