

From London to Delhi, for a noble cause

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Kanpur: Have you ever heard of an expedition commencing from far off London in Europe to Delhi in Asian sub-continent that too on the wheels? You might have heard a lot about such thrilling expeditions but the one which we are mentioning here is really a different one as this long voyage was planned with an objective of raising money for animals by seeking monetary donations through a website (www.londondelhibyroad.com) of the travellers.

Meet Tushar and Pooja Agarwal, a UK-based couple who is presently on a voyage to India to pursue their dream of travelling on a longer route, a route which made them to cross over international borders of 15 countries which included England, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Nepal and India. Interestingly, the two covered their entire journey by a Jeep except that they reached France from UK via English Channel in a ship.

The two enthusiasts started their journey from London on April 17 after being flagged off by Jitendra Kumar, cultural secretary at the Indian Embassy in UK, and entered India from Sunauli border (at India-Nepal border) and finally drove from Gorakhpur to Kanpur. So far, the two have travelled for almost 11,500 kms in the past 49 days. They now plan to reach Delhi via Agra on the 51st day of their journey on June 6 to mark the end of their trip which began with two aims - to explore those parts of the world that are less travelled and less known and to raise awareness among people in countries on route as to how they can look after their animals better.

Tushar, a software programmer, happens to be a son of a businessman in Russia, and Pooja, an insurance broker whose mother is a teacher in New Delhi, hails from Delhi. It was in January 2009 when Tushar expressed his wish of driving from London to Delhi a road route to which his wife Pooja agreed in one go. But it was also decided that the trip should serve two purposes - that along with travelling, money for animals should also be raised by spreading awareness in all



BRAVEHEARTS: Tushar and Pooja Agarwal, London-based Indian couple who drove more than 11,500 kms from London to reach Delhi. The duo were in the city on Saturday. (Left) The couple during their expedition



way.

"It was in January 2009 that we planned to travel from London to Delhi. After working out the cost of the journey and making necessary research as to which route to follow and what essential items need to be carried along, we purchased a vehicle in UK. We also made a checklist of other necessary items like medicines, a water tank, chargers, a camping gear, sleeping bags, cameras etc before making a final move", said Tushar while narrating about the basic purchases they had made before leaving London.

"We took a break from work for this trip which was the biggest sacrifice made on our part," the couple said. When asked how close they were from the realisation of their dreams, Tushar said, "We are very close now. We just have to cover 500 kms more to mark the end of the journey which started amid a lot of apprehensions. On reaching Delhi at Qutub Minar on June 6, it would be like a dream coming true for me in which Pooja made a lot of contributions." He was quick to add about

such an expedition, "In my childhood days, my father who was fond of travelling used to take me along on long distances via road route. Those were good experiences on my side. The other experience that came little handy was travelling from southern end of UK to the northern end. We made three such successful attempts which was enough for us to understand that something of this kind (expedition) is quite possible."

When asked what hardships they faced during the journey, Tushar said, "We faced difficulties in China because of high altitudes and rough terrains. One late night, we had to drive downwards from 16,000 feet as Pooja was finding it tough to breathe. Further problems poured in when the jeep stopped in the way. I got nervous for a moment but in the meanwhile, the vehicle re-started and we reached a place where it was comparatively easy to breathe and relax. Last but not least, we could not take bath in China during the eight days of drive due to absence of water at great heights. Rest, God was kind to us on our entire journey."

The two had something even better to narrate. They told TOI that people of Uzbekistan gave them a very warm

with great respect and dignity in Uzbekistan. People were very helpful and cooperative. This can be gauged from the fact that we were not fined for over speeding there. The police officials, on knowing that we were Indians, gave us a word of advice for not over speeding and allowed us to go. This was something very heart touching." The two used to start journey at 9 am and end it before the sunset. Pooja who acted as a navigator on the entire journey was a driver in emergency.

When asked what their future plans are, the Agarwals said, "Now we are more confident, so we will leave for a bigger voyage in the next trip. We plan to go on a tour of all the seven continents in the similar manner. We also plan to write a book on the experiences we had on our journey. The book will also consist of valuable tips as to what are essential arrangements one should make before embarking on a tour of this type." Interestingly, the tour by Agarwals has a Kanpur connection too. Vinit Jain, (director of a company which manufactures anti-explosive fuel tanks) and a friend of Agarwals gifted them with a set of special tanks in which the two carried petrol for meeting emergency in case of fuel cri-