Impressions of Omkar Nath

Dear Brig,

Like every other yatra I attended so far Csy 35 was a unique one. My experience in every yatra depends greatly on how I perceive things and what I choose to look at. The first mistake I did in this yatra is to get my car for convenience to reach the place, breaking the rule of living frugally with minimum resources. And, I am responsible for taking away the experience from those who travelled with me too.

Our yatra started with briefing at a school. On the first day as we walked we met a lady who had thick cloth rolled around her neck. She said she has a lot of health issues and consumes medicines all the time. I asked her about their livelihood and she responded that she has no work she is completely dependent on the government to meet their ends. I asked her what would they do previously? She responded that her husband went to tap toddy and she would sell it. It sounded like a perfect livelihood. I asked her why have they stopped doing it to which she said that the men have started to tap toddy and sell it themselves leaving the women at home with no work.

Some other women around her also tried to talk and I asked them what do they do? They all said that they grow paddy. I asked them if they have enough water to grow and they said that there are issues with accessing water. They have conflicts everyday to get water into their fields.(I guess I chose to look at all the problems this time). Then we walked further and listened to Brigadier stories. I have always heard Brigadier tell us how things that are imported from outside and requires constant imports for inputs can become a liability. He showed us cement that is not native to the villages and the people face difficulties handling the technology.

We saw a banyan tree as a parasite growing on a palm tree on the way. Anjireddy garu, an old volunteer of Pallesrujana and a person with immense knowledge of plants told us that it was an indication for people in olden days to predict the presence of underground water to dig wells.

The best part is food. We eat the simplest meal after a long walk and it gives immense satisfaction. We slept in the school veranda that night at reddy tanda and it was very cold. Some of the people had to put newspapers under them to sleep. But sleep seemed more important after a long walk than the conditions so the roof seemed like a luxury and everybody slept well.

I woke up at 4 AM and saw someone bathing in the dark. I walked towards the person and it was volunteer Srikant who woke up early to get to work so that the yatries don't face difficulties. I got ready too and by the time I was ready Srikant had made fire and slowly people started gathering around the fire.

Purushotam a first-time coyatri and a brilliant boy along with our volunteer Sai Kumar had found an innovator the other day and wanted to go meet him. I gave my car to Purushotam and asked him to park it at the place of stay after finishing the work.

We then walked towards the village where all the volunteers were putting up the posters of all the innovations and knowledge gathered from grassroots by Pallesrujana for so many years. Villagers gathered around the place and Brigadier started explaining about various innovations and demonstrated a few relevant innovations to them.

Raju who is one of the oldest volunteers also the organizer of chinna shodha yatras asked me if I can come with him for some work. He rode the bike all the way to the end point of the yatra to find someone who could cook lunch for us. We finally went to the sarpanch of next village and he agreed to get our food made for the next two days. By the time we came back the yatries had walked a long distance. I joined the group and started walking. We went into a house where people were making big baskets with bamboo. We asked them their use and they said that the villagers use them for storing grains. The baskets are made on demand and the maker gets paid in bag of grains. We walked further and took a halt under the shade of trees.

Brigadier started telling us our all time favourite innovators stories. It was so good to sit under the tree shade that I dozed off and took a nap. We were waiting for lunch to come but it took a long time. Brig was standing all the time and telling us stories(During yatra he doesn't rest until everybody sleeps in the night). As it was getting late for lunch Durga Prasad one of the volunteers got snacks for all the yatris. Snacks were great but some people littered the place. Some of us picked up the wrappers and put them inside our bags. By this time lunch arrived and there were less plates available for some reason. We all decided to share plates and eat food with each other(I was a person with a lot of heigine issues and would never eat in the same plate). Meanwhile Raju brought some leaves and I knit a few small leaves together to make a plate.

In the night we did our most important part of yatra "the silent walk". I experience the silent walk differently in every yatra. This time I was thinking about an idea that came to my mind. I was thinking about how a village itself can be seen as an enterprise with the people working together towards prosperity. Just as in an enterprise the people work towards the same goal and everyone bears the losses as well as enjoy the fruits.

We reached our destination for the night and it was a nice place to spend the night. It was almost like a luxury to find such a place. Next morning I woke up late and found people around fire along with Brig. We got ready and I went to the nearby village along with a few more volunteers to setup the village meeting. Farmers gathered around the place and Brigadier addressed the crowd. Meanwhile I along with few others went to a man making baskets and started asking him about his work. He was so excited to share his knowledge that he got a new bamboo stick and showed us the whole process from the beginning. After a while others along with Brigadier came to him and he explained all of them the process again. Brigadier felicitated him for sharing his knowledge with us.

This was the last day and the yatra was about to end by lunch time. We walked to a nice place for lunch. We had lunch and shared our impressions sitting in a big circle. One of the coyatri wrote a song on yatra during the yatra. It was a lovely song that he sang to everyone.

We planned to disperse and a lot of people left the place. Our biggest experience of yatra happened then. Akhila , Durga Prasad, Rohit and I went back to the place of night stay on the second night. We went there to get my car. In the dark we couldn't spot the place for a very long time. When we finally found the place I couldn't find my keys for sometime. I dropped them inside Durga Prasad's car. I found it after searching for a while. We went inside to take the car and found the battery discharged completely. Akhila, Durga Prasad and I pushed the car and Rohit tried to start it. We did it several times and failed. We pushed the car outside the place and took it on a slope so the car could get enough momentum to start. After several failed attempts we went to a nearby house and asked them for help. Durga Prasad told us that if we have two thick wires we can charge the battery with his car battery. We found the wire and charged my car's battery for sometime. The car started successfully and we were so happy after so much of struggle. We drove back to the end point of yatra where Brig and few others were waiting for us in extreme cold. We finally left the place with all the beautiful memories.

Regards,

Omkar