

Pre yaatra:

When I told my parents that I was going to Shodh Yaatra, they asked what was the yaatra about? What is the plan, how many friends, sight seeing places, ..all that kind of questions.. I replied this is different from what you are thinking, it is a kind of yaatra intended to serve society...I could only give such a vague explanation because I too know only that much about yaatra! After a discussion they agreed to sent me but with a few precautions to carry medicines and giving a few advices.

After going through agenda of yaatra, I understood that I have to pack many items as the route map of it goes via AGENCY area! I packed almost everything mentioned in the required list which was sent through e-mail. This type of yaatra is new to me as everytime I travelled with only known persons but this time only one friend of mine is coming and all others are strangers. I only had a little conversation with unknown yaatris over phone and net and most of that was about my journey plan to reach srikakulam. While travelling to Srikakulam, I was thinking what kind of persons I am going to meet in the yaatra. I gave funny answers to my co passengers who asked about the reason for my trip! After listening to my explanation they asked me am I going for survey in villages! Unable to give better explanation I told yes!

Yaatra Starts:

After getting down at station all the yaatris were asked to take bath in railway bathrooms which was unexpected, my mind kept on thinking how the bathrooms are going to be! When I went to bathroom they were clean which was unexpected again. I saw insects which looked like earthworms and I kept moving in bathroom to avoid collision with them! I came out of bathroom and joined orientation which was already started!

It was orienatation time, which was the first time I saw almost all my fellow yaatris and yaatra organisers. I had a little interaction with brigadier sir before everyone introduced themselves during the orientation. I listened keenly to them chanting the names of people so that I could remember better. As a part of introduction everyone has to tell why they want to come to yaatra? Everyone's answer seemed interesting to me. I understood the essence of yaatra when brigadier sir explained about PALLE SRUJANA and CHINNA SHODH YAATRA 's history, how they were started. I figured out a nice solution for the question, what the yaatra is about? Sir explained what should we shodh and what is the way to shodh in the yaatra. After the instructions and rules of the yaatra by brigadier sir the yaatra started.

All of us unknown strangers started introducing ourselves while having the breakfast and in the journey to Palakonda, the starting point. During the journey, we played a game to remember our names, and the rule was whoever name came last we had to pinch that one. It was fun. Our walking started here from Palakonda, while travelling I met the first villager. He was around 75

years of age and was walking at a pace almost equal or more than mine. I went and asked about his work, he told that he lives by chopping sticks and selling them. He said that he used to have hefty shoulders, good body(kandalu in telugu) when he was young after looking at my body. He asked about my purpose in the village. I tried to explain my prepared answer and it was good that he understood something about our purpose. I gave a palmpate to him which were given during orientation to distribute to villagers which contains the details of yaatra and its purpose. The next villagers I met, I was successful in explaining about the yaatra and in return they were asking questions of how many we were and where do we come from.

During the way to next village Singanavalasa we went to a rice mill which I saw for first time. The people there invited us whole heartedly and explained the whole process. I saw two varieties of rice - brown rice and the normal one. The person who was working there told they still produce brown rice in some small quantities as some people expecially ask for it. He said this was more energetic than the normal one as it contains some husk still in it. We took some snaps of the mill where the mill people showed interest in asking us to take photos of that machine, this machine!

In Palakonda we visited a govt. school and it was lunch time and the children were having lunch. I helped the children in hitting the hand pump for some time so they can clean the plates before and after having lunch. The lunch menu was small which contained egg, rasam and curd. I felt it was very small menu. I observed many good things among them, they washed their plates, they served the food themselves and cleaned the place where they have lunch before and after lunch. They are very helping in nature that one or other child comes near the hand pump when they see anyone walking to it, in order to help in hitting the pump. I interacted with children about the school, their studies. Our Brigadier sir had a knowledge session with children where sir shared the stories of children who are innovative and made real models of things that have the potential to solve many of the day to day problems that they encountered. Sir asked a few questions to which children are sharp enough to give answers quickly, honestly I don't know answer to any of the questions! I thought how sharp they are and how good their thinking is, they are brilliant. Later we yaatris had a delicious lunch, thanks to organizers Raj, Anil, Chinna who are part of the organization team. Then we played with the children, I was amazed to see the way they were playing, they were running fast, aiming correctly, I thought there was so much of potential in them that if we send them to Olympics or any world games by giving coaching, guidance India will surely get many medals! I remembered myself when I played with them, they were playing the same game that I used to play during my school days. I became one among them and happily played with them. The yaatra continued from the school after distributing pens, pencils etc., to children for their active participation.

During the journey I spoke to my fellow yaatris, everyone is special in their occupation, their ideas, everything is interesting. I met Santhosh who is pursuing his passion of photography, he had a big camera carrying all the time, taking photos with his eye. His dream is to work with National Geography! After my interaction, I am sure that he is going to achieve it with his passion. Most of the time I was little slow than other yaatris in walking as I was walking slowly and looking at the different varieties of plants and biodiversity which I never saw in Hyderabad, Kadapa my previous places of stay. I felt excited that I saw this many varieties.

Another yaatri who also organizes the yaatra plan is Kranthi. I always saw a note book in his hands taking some notes. I asked what he was writing, he said he was in the plan to release a book that describes the yaatra. I asked what his profession is, he is an social worker, his organization works for people who have an idea that can be transformed into a working product which can impact the society, but they do not have any funds. It guides the people in getting funds- giving contacts of organizations, other needs to be done to get fund after collecting a nominal fee of 10k. To me who always has doctor and engineer in my mind as professions, felt thrilled, surprised and finally excited after meeting him. When I interacted with other shodha yaatris I came to know different professions they are doing which I never thought would be existing like Raj Kumar and Sanaullah's organization 'Unlimited Hyderabad' which is also kind of org what Karanthi has but it shows the way to those who wanted to become entrepreneurs after innovation whom they called as Social Entrepreneurs. Other B.Pharm, M.Pharm yaatris their goals everything are nice. This yaatra is so special that it contained yaatris from different age groups. From the eldest Medha to youngest Yamini it spanned a huge age gap. Medha is an architect, she has an organization named 'Facelift' which undertakes all works related to design of building. Yamini is studying. We had a lawyer with us Jaya. We had an IITian Spruthi who is in fifth year of her dual degree course. My friend Saketh BITSian is doing MTech and other yaatris contained students, IT Professionals, Full time volunteers, research scholars and IT engineers like me. It has got yaatris from various fields too. There is a lot of knowledge exchange happened not only between shodha yaatris and villagers but also among shodha yaatris as many of us are pursuing different professions. I thought I don't want to lose contact with any of them such a nice people they are.

The walk continued, after the school we went to cashew nut factory which processes the raw Kaju. we saw Kaju workers who breaks the outer cover to get the Kaju inside, they hit itwith a stick that breaks the cover and the inside kaju can be restored which is interesting. Some of us tried the same and felt excited. In the whole yaatra, I drank water from hand pumps, bore wells and Konda Vaagus which tasted sweet that my throat accepted well otherwise I used to get pain like I get when I drink cool water normally. The night halts are pretty interesting which I give after a while.

After the factory, we visited a village where for the first time I saw an old couple - the husband age is more than 100 years and the wife's age is about 90 years. Their village is a small one containing around 20-30 houses. Their names are Sannayi and Boodhamma, Sannayi's work is to break sticks and sell them. The whole village is a happy village. I thought all villages will be gloomy having one or other problems that they will share with us when we speak to them, but it is contrary many times, they are happy, they are welcoming us whole heartedly. We all took snaps of the couple which are unforgettable.

The night halt was at a school in a village. Some of us slept on the floor and some inside the govt. school. We had a meeting with the villagers at night around 9-10 pm the time they are ready to sleep, but they accepted our invitation and came forward to interact with us, they listened to real inspirational stories of villagers like them by Brigadier sir and asked questions. Organizers of the yaatra left a contact of Palle Srujana like they do at every stop so that if in future they wanted to share any idea or in need of help they can get back.

In the morning we took bath at the common well, which is the drinking water source to the village. This is also my first time experience! The specialty about the location of village is it is surrounded by hills in all directions. The day two started from this village.

The day two is different from day one in terms of villages and distance, we walked a lot but met only two villages, this is pure agency area and the villages are so remote. The bio diversity is so much as the path is through the forest. We saw fire flies many time during the journey, this is the first time I am seeing them. As there is a lot of distance to be covered we had long conversations. On the way, we ate fruits - mangoes, pineapples, jack fruits. I had a chance to eat Jack fruit it was so sweet. During the walk I had a chat with Shyam, after that chat I started feeling great about him. He worked around 14 years and later joined Palle Srujana as a full time volunteer, when I asked him why he did like this, he replied that it was his passion that made him to join as full time volunteer. He appeared so great to me.

Another person I got to know during the yaatra was Bharat, his idea to work for volunteer made him interesting. I spend lot of time with him during the second day walk as he and me are the lazy persons who always walk last. He had very good knowledge on plants and animals, that he shared with me whenever we saw plants or insects during walk. He also had idea to have idols of youth who sacrificed their lives for Indian independence like Bhagath Singh in his town, which appeared so great to me that how could he think of such great things. He also have a plan to implement it by rising fund from people. On the way here and then Brigadier sir's lectures are so inspiring that I used to forget the tiredness that I got by walking long distances. One story about the weaver Malleshham has love towards his mother, intelligence and his hard work which fetched him success.

During the walk, I met a woman who was carrying a bag on her head and walking. I asked her what was there in that, she told there were grains in the bag then I asked why should she carry and how many

times she has to carry them? She replied that she carries the bag many times a month and that she has to walk a long distance to get the grains. I suddenly felt surprised how many miles she has to walk and what a hard worker she is. If there is some kind of help from govt. to supply grains it would help them a lot. We had a halt at school and we had same program that we had at Palakonda school. Children are always Children that they are sharp enough to answer the questions by Brigadier. But it took long time to cope up with them as they are little hesitant to open up. I understood the children in interior are little hesitant and they need more motivation just to give them a little push. Unlike Palakonda school, it is a residential school.

The second day walk passed through agency area, I asked one or two about the area they said that it was forest area and naxals lived there earlier, I am little thrilled and feared after listening to their words but forgot all that during the walk as mother nature's feel is above all that. Its feel is so good that I walked without water bottle for long distances, of course I drank water here and then in villages, but the courage that I got to walk without water bottle is from nature itself. During the walk I felt so sad after seeing many insects were dead due to the movement of vehicles, I remebered stats related to this, how many animals got killed during road accidents, I could not recollect the number but I know it is too big. I thought of organized construction of roads which could take care of this problem. To list the varieties of insects, I saw snails, snakes, butterflies, fireflies and many others which I don't know the names. I thought when it becomes dark I had to switch on torches, but I kept my torch in the bag as the day is full moon day and the lighting is good. There I saw many fireflies like small bulbs glowing on the top of trees, they are so many. In one village, when I interacted with villager he said after one month their number multiplies so fast as it is their breeding season and the trees will be decorated with this small creatures of nature. I thought I missed that but I imagined it and felt it. In the night some of us slept under a tree on floor built around the tree, usually used by villagers to sit. I slept happily , kind of sleep you get after feeling satisfied.

The third day walk continued and this day was Sunday, we started our walk to Veeraghattam, the end point of yaatra. During the journey, brigadier asked interesting questions for which I gave interesting answers! At Veeraghattam, we all sat and discussed about various common things of yaatra, about the organization and about the length of walk and number of villages we covered. Everyone gave their views. For me it appeared that we could be interacting with more villages so that more gyan can be collected as well as given to them.

'Chinna Shodh Yaatra' which is aimed to collect Gyaan from villages in order to redistribute it among themselves for the sole purpose of their betterment and for the betterment of people across the world is a great idea and that I got a chance to participate in it is my luck. It is for atleast in search of one idea that can makes the lives of many better or for giving atleast one idea to them so that their lives can become better. The whole yaatra is very memorable one, thoroughly enjoyed working as a volunteer, meeting people who are strangers and knowing them is new and exciting, the essence of yaatra to acknowledge the knowledge of villagers and if possible document and patent is great. I feel happy that I got involved in CSY-7.

After completing the yaatra, my mind is filled with many debatable questions.

1. What is meant by development? Are people in cities developed or the people in villages developed?
2. Why should environment gets affected by man in the name of development in some cases?
3. Whose food habits are correct? Villagers or city people?

I would like to end my impressions by thanking Palle Srujana which gave memorable yaatra and invaluable gyaan and I would thank all yaatris who made the yaatra alive and made forget all the strain caused by walking long distances and I would thank organizers without whom I can say Yaatra could not be possible.