

My First Shodha Yatra – Three Days of Learning, Unlearning and Living in Villages

This was my first Shodha Yatra. I came to know about it through my friend **Ganesh Chadaram**. When I saw the poster, a few words immediately caught my attention — **“Unlearning,” “Walking and interacting with villagers,” and “Innovations by common people.”** These ideas made me curious to experience the Yatra for myself.

After reading some reviews on Google, I shared the information with nearly 20 people. Finally, two people joined me from Visakhapatnam, Bapi Raju Garu and Jitender Acharya(Hyderabad)

What began as a three-day walk turned into a journey of observation, learning, questioning, and unlearning.

My First Guru – Nature

One of the first things I reflected upon was my relationship with nature and other living beings.

Generally, I/ we humans tend to feel superior or dominant over other living beings such as goats, cows and hens. But when I looked at human existence from a larger perspective, I started questioning this **sense of superiority**. Thousands of years ago, human beings were also part of the food chain and could be hunted or eaten like any other animal.

During the walk, I realised that I am also a part of nature. My body functions in many ways similar to other living beings. What **distinguishes** human beings is our particular form of intelligence and ability to think, reflect and create.

This was one of my first learnings from the Yatra.

The Hospitality of Villagers

Throughout the journey, villagers repeatedly showed concern for us.

They would ask:

“Shall we arrange tea or coffee for you?”

“Do you need water?”

“Where are you staying?”

“Why are you walking for so long? Please sit for some time.”

Some even suggested that we take a vehicle instead of walking such a long distance.

I was deeply touched by their hospitality and willingness to give.

I observed a sense of contentment, sharing and abundance in many of the people we interacted with. They were ready to offer whatever they had.

I particularly liked this quality of village life.

Seeing Village Life Differently

I also **interacted** with young people between the ages of 20 and 30 who had studied well and, in some cases, had worked in cities. Some had now chosen to return to their native villages and take up farming, cattle rearing or other livelihoods.

Several young people told us that they preferred village life because they could earn around ₹30,000–₹40,000 while living close to nature and their families.

One 21-year-old boy Balaji was aspiring to join the Army and, for the time being, was working as a natural farmer.

This made me think about how different people have different ideas about what constitutes a good life.

Laxmi – A Woman Managing a Family of Six

A woman named Laxmi, from Eswaramma Colony, made a strong impression on me.

She was taking care of a family of six by selling cooking utensils. She told us about her difficult circumstances, including having only one meal a day.

I was left wondering.

How does a single woman manage so many responsibilities with so little?

Her life made me reflect on the strength and resilience that exists in ordinary people, often without being noticed.

Bucha Reddy – Two Different Views of Village Life

We also met Bucha Reddy, an approximately 80-year-old farmer who had been involved in farming since childhood.

He was living with his wife and daughter-in-law on their own farm, a little away from the main village. Interestingly, he told us that he now wanted to move to the city. Earlier in his life, he had felt that living in the village was good, but his perspective had changed.

At the same time, many of us, as Yatris, were feeling that we would like to come and live in a village.

This was an interesting observation for me. We were looking at the advantages in someone else's life and wishing to live their

life, while they were looking at their own life and wishing for something different.

It made me question how easily we romanticise a life that we are not actually living.

Village Youth and Agriculture

Many of the young people we met were Literate and had previously worked in cities. Some had now returned to their native villages by personal choice.

I also noticed that many older men and women, between 60 and 80 years of age, were physically active and strong enough to carry out their daily activities and responsibilities.

The main crops we observed included ragi, flowers, chillies and tomatoes.

I also noticed that only a few indigenous/desi cows remained in the villages, while most of the cattle appeared to be Jersey breeds.

The villages we passed through generally had around 30–50 houses, and agriculture was the primary livelihood.

The villagers shared that some of these settlements had been established around 50–60 years ago, after forests were cleared for settlement and cultivation.

A Community Built Around Sharing

We met an entrepreneur and social worker who had studied up to the seventh standard. He shared the story of a small sangam community initiative developed in the village.

The idea was that villagers would keep what they produced for their own needs and

share or supply the remaining produce and milk to others.

He also explained how they created social awareness around cattle grazing. Earlier, cattle were not allowed to graze in the forest. The community worked through the issue and obtained the necessary acceptance from the Forest Department.

For me, this was another example of how local problems can be addressed through collective thinking and community participation.

Learning About Plants, Herbs and Innovations

From the first day, **Anji Reddy Garu** explained different plants and herbs, their identification and their traditional medicinal uses.

He also shared several stories about innovations identified through Shodha Yatra by Palle Srujana.

Akhila Nookala, one of the volunteers, shared the story of **Mallesha** and his Ashu machine innovation.

We also learned about a **natural mosquito-repellent** innovation made from plant extracts.

These interactions made me realise that innovation does not necessarily come only from laboratories, universities or large companies. Many useful ideas emerge from people who are simply trying to solve problems in their everyday lives.

The Motor Pump Innovation

During the walk, we came across a person who was using a motor pump that generated high pressure to wash vehicles.

In villages, there may not always be dedicated **car or bike washing centres**. He had found a practical way of using an available tool for another purpose.

The pressure from the pump helped remove strongly attached dirt from vehicles.

We interacted with him and asked:

“How did you get this idea?”

He explained how he was using it and also showed curiosity about the tools that we were carrying for the exhibition.

It was a small example, but it made me think about how innovation often begins simply by observing a problem and finding a practical use for something that is already available.

Co-Yatris-Meeting People From Different Backgrounds

One of the biggest gifts of this Yatra was the opportunity to meet extraordinary people from different walks of life.

I met innovators, government officials, data engineers, farmers, travellers, lecturers from different fields such as extension, civil engineering and computer science, entrepreneurs, social workers, philosophers, educators and students.

For three continuous days, I was learning not only from the villages but also from my fellow Yatris.

Every person had a different experience, profession and way of looking at life.

Experiencing Simple Living

During the Yatra, I also **tried to reduce some of my usual comforts.**

I tried my best to:

1. Walk barefoot.
2. Use neem sticks for brushing.
3. Bathe without soap and shampoo.
4. Live with minimum resources.

These small experiments gave me a direct experience of what it means to temporarily step away from some of the conveniences that I normally take for granted.

Interaction With School Children

One of the most interesting experiences happened on the first morning when we interacted with school children.

For about an hour, the students shared their ideas about how everyday tools and equipment could be improved.

What impressed me was how quickly they started feeling comfortable and connected with us. Once they felt that they were being listened to equally, they began sharing

many ideas, questions, problems and possible solutions related to their school and family life.

One particular boy caught my attention. He was very curious and genuinely wanted to do meaningful things, but he seemed to be ignored by some of his friends and appeared to feel alone within his group.

During the classroom discussion, however, he was serious, attentive and confident in expressing what he wanted to share.

This made me reflect on how many children's ideas may remain unnoticed simply because nobody takes the time to listen to them.

A Different Perspective on Education

On the third morning, Prasad Garu and his wife Padma, who are associated with education, J Krishnamurthi

Philosophy,introduced us to the topic of real education.

Prasad Garu spoke about how they brought up their two children and the work they are now doing for society. He also shared information about alternative schools in different parts of Andhra Pradesh, India and around the world.

The discussion lasted for nearly an hour and was very insightful.

One idea that stayed with me was that education and work should not be viewed only through the lens of earning money. Relationships, contribution and supporting the work of others are also important dimensions of life.

They also offered us peanut laddus made from naturally grown produce, which was made naturally without use of chemicals.

Trekking Through the Hills

In between the Yatra, we also had a trekking experience of around 3 kilometres through the hills.

The path itself was beautiful — mud roads, different types of stones, plants, shrubs, herbs and medicinal plants.

Walking through that landscape while observing the surroundings made the journey even more meaningful.

Samanya Sastram and Other Learnings

Naga Mohan, a volunteer who has been associated with Palle Srujana for a long time, shared about **Samanya Sastram**.

Every interaction during the Yatra seemed to open another door to explore.

We were not simply walking from one village to another. We were continuously

observing, questioning, discussing and learning.

Village Exhibition

On the third morning, an exhibition was organised in the village centre.

Different agricultural and industrial equipment were displayed. Villagers gathered, interacted with the participants and gained knowledge about various tools and technologies.

I also collected some Palle Srujana magazines.

It was interesting to see knowledge moving in both directions — we were learning from villagers, while villagers were also getting an opportunity to learn about different ideas, tools and innovations.

What I Unlearned

For me, the word “unlearning” was not just a word on the Shodha Yatra poster.

I began questioning some of my assumptions:

That knowledge exists only in formal institutions.

That innovation belongs only to highly educated people.

That city life is necessarily better than village life.

That human beings are separate from nature.

That earning money is the only measure of a successful life.

That children need to be taught before they can teach us something.

That simple living and innovation means having less, rather than experiencing more , affordable and workable .

A Personal Experiment

For three days, I tried to observe myself as much as I observed the villages.

Walking barefoot, using a neem stick, bathing without my usual products, walking long distances, interacting with strangers, listening to villagers and living with minimum resources — all these experiences helped me step outside my normal routine.

I realised that sometimes we need to change our environment and experiences to notice our own assumptions.

My Gratitude

I feel fortunate to have met so many people during these three days.

The biggest learning for me was not from one particular lecture or one particular village. It came from the combination of people, nature, walking, conversations, innovations, children, farmers, volunteers and fellow Yatris.

Every person I met had something to teach.

The Yatra reminded me that knowledge is not limited to classrooms, books or degrees. People, villages, nature and everyday life themselves can become teachers if we are willing to observe and listen.

Finally, the Yatra concluded with all the Yatris sharing their impressions and observations.

I had an amazing three days with great people and many new experiences.

Books suggested during the Yatra

The One-Star Revolution – Masanobu Fukuoka

Freedom from the Known – J. Krishnamurti

Three days of walking, observing, interacting, questioning, learning and Unlearning