**My Experience with Chinna Shodha Yatra – A Journey of Heart, Mind, and Feet**

Recently, I got the incredible opportunity to volunteer with **Palle Srujana**, a 20-year-old grassroots NGO working across **Telangana and Andhra Pradesh**. Their mission is simple yet powerful: to **promote rural knowledge**, support **grassroots innovations**, and give a platform to **village inventors**.

With more than **1000 active volunteers** working year-round, this organization has helped many rural innovators secure **patents**, scale their inventions, and even receive **national and international recognition**. To date, **three innovators have received the Padma Shri**, several have been awarded by the **President of India**, and **four** have exported their innovations to **foreign governments**.

** What is Chinna Shodha Yatra?**

The **Chinna Shodha Yatra (CSY)**, or “Small Search Walk,” is a **three-day walk** through rural villages that happens every **three months**. It’s designed thoughtfully — Friday to Sunday — so that even **working professionals** from cities like Hyderabad can participate.

In each yatra, the group walks **30–40 km** and covers around **13 villages**, engaging directly with villagers, farmers, artisans, and innovators.

Even though I’m from **Maharashtra** and don’t know **Telugu**, I never felt like an outsider. Fellow yatries and especially **Brigadier Sir (the founder)** helped translate everything into English. The environment was **safe, inclusive, and welcoming**, even for first-timers like me.

** The People and the Spirit**

We were a group of **28 yatries**, aged from **10 to 70+**, each carrying their own unique knowledge. We had engineers, NGO founders, and passionate changemakers walking together and exchanging thoughts.

On reaching the villages, we were **welcomed with warmth and openness**. One encounter that deeply touched me was with a **75-year-old grandmother**. Though physically frail and retired with a small pension, she still farmed in her backyard to support herself. Despite her struggles, she spoke to us with affection, as if we were her own children. Her spirit was **ageless**, and her positivity made a lasting impression on me.

This yatra changed my perception: rural people may face hardships, but they carry **unmatched resilience and joy** — something we, living in cities with all our comforts, often lack.

** Stories of Rural Innovation**

We met **Praveen**, an innovator who created a **mulberry leaf-cutting machine** for the silk industry. The machine attaches to a **tractor’s PTO** and reduces labor drastically — what once needed 10 people now requires just 3, and one acre can be harvested in 3–4 hours instead of a full day.

We also met **Siva Kumar Modha Garu**, a grassroots innovator for the **handloom industry**. Traditionally, weaving a saree requires artisans to tap their legs 5000–6000 times using a pedal system. Over time, this takes a huge toll on their bodies, causing pain by their 40s or 50s.

Seeing their suffering, **Siva Kumar ji built a machine** that replaces the leg movement with a **hand-operated switch**. It allows even **differently-abled weavers** (without legs) to operate the loom and create sarees. Because it’s designed by a rural innovator, the machine is **mechanically simple, affordable, and maintenance-free**. Now, artisans who used to weave 2 sarees a day can weave 4–5, doubling their productivity and income.

** Reflections and Personal Growth**

**Brigadier Sir** would often challenge us with **thought-provoking questions** during meal breaks:

* What does your inner voice say?
* What is good health (mental and physical)?
* What are the parameters to measure it?

At the end of each day, we were required to **share our learnings and expressions**. No one was allowed to skip — and surprisingly, that’s what helped me **overcome my fear of public speaking**. In a supportive environment, surrounded by people who didn’t judge, I found the **confidence to speak and express myself**.

** A Taste of Rural Life**

The living conditions were **raw and real** — we stayed in the **"My Village Show" office** and later in a **Zilla Parishad school**. Baths were in a **3-walled setup with no roof**, and we used **traditional Indian toilets**.

We ate **rice three times a day**, while I usually have rice just twice or thrice a month at home. Still, everything felt completely fine. In fact, I was surprised to walk continuously for **three days without feeling any pain** — whereas earlier, even a 4–5 km walk would cause stomach aches. These small achievements meant a lot to me.

** Villagers with Hearts Bigger Than Their Homes**

In every village we entered, the people welcomed us with **genuine, unfiltered concern**:

“Water kavala?”
“Bhojanam tinnava?”
(*Do you want water? Have you eaten?*)

They weren’t just asking — they were **caring**, as if they had known us forever. Whether we were under **tiled rooftops**, in **open verandas**, or **beside backyard fields**, **each place felt like home**.

And the food? That was a story in itself.

We sat **under mango trees**, in the **shade of ancient banyans**, or sometimes in **school compounds**, eating the most **soul-satisfying meals**.

It wasn’t about what was on the plate.
It was about **where we sat**, **who we sat with**, and **how light and happy we felt** after every step of the walk.

That food — **simple, warm, and full of love** — tasted better than any restaurant buffet.

**Nature + hunger + happy feet = a feeling you can’t recreate in city life.**

** Final Thoughts**

This was my **first Shodha Yatra**, and I can confidently say it won’t be my last. The experience reshaped how I see **rural India**, **grassroots innovation**, and even **myself**.

If you're someone who wants to:

* Explore **grassroots innovation**
* Connect with **real India**
* Learn from **diverse minds**
* Push your **physical and mental boundaries**

…then **Chinna Shodha Yatra is for you**.

**Innovation should be accessible and affordable to all — and Palle Srujana is proving that it truly can be.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

**Kush Jain**

**Aurangabad**