Shaka Dickerson September 30, 2013

 The yatra was a beautiful experience - a wake up call. Many of us get used to the daily life of urban work. We wake up, check our phone, review our email, go to work, return home, eat and then sleep just to wake and do it again. We sit at our desks or cubicles; we eat lunch with the same people, we complain about the pollution of the cars and motorcycles and use our horns entirely too much to let go of some frustration. We are caught in a race and to win we must make it to our goal as quickly as we can. There is little time for meditation, introspection, exercise, or even conversations with people who desire nothing more than a conversation. Cities teach us to think about ourselves too often and like all things that are routine we need a jolt to wake us up. The yatra, I feel, is that experience.

When I first heard of the Chinna Shodha Yatra I had no idea what to expect. My colleague told me about a weekend walk in the village. The walk sounded informative and at the very least would be an opportunity to see a new section of India. Then he added we’d walk more than 30km (in our case it was 50km). I admit I had to give the opportunity extra thought to that. In spite of this I decided to go through with the process. My plan was to experience firsthand what many books have termed “the real India”. I figured I would see some sights and have a new story to tell. I am blessed to write I received much more.

Walking amidst the valleys of the mountains, the crops of the farmers, sitting under the shade of a tree, even feeling the heat of the sun we or rather I could not help but be amazed at the majesty of the Almighty’s creation. Nature appeared like artwork. I could only breathe and feel connected with everything around me. In fact the walk revealed concepts for me. For example: As I noticed the curves and formations of the mountains it dawned on me that, many a time, we, like the mountains originate in one form and over time we receive marks and scars just like the large stone formations, yet when we see the marks and imperfections of the mountain we consider them even more beautiful because the mark has created a new color or new formation that makes it stand out from the rest. We should look at each other the same. We are beautiful, not in spite of, but because of our imperfections.

 I was also fortunate to travel with a genuinely good hearted and good natured group of people. In addition to the people I traveled with, the hospitality of the communities we visited were amazing. Citizens opened their homes, shared their food and welcomed us with open arms. When does that happen in the city? Not as much as it can happen indeed. People discussed how happy they were without the horns and constant cell phone ringing. This confirms it’s the little things in life that change things.

I and the others were inspired by the many stories of village citizens, of various ages with little education, creating and innovating products that will help countless individuals. Seeing the fascination on school children’s faces was priceless. The stories and inventions in combination with the knowledge and resources of my colleagues reaffirmed the belief that we can change the world. We are the present and the future. We have seen what people in the countryside and the city go through and have the power to change it.

 Overall the Chinna Shohda Yatra was and is a very memorable and perspective changing event. Community building is just as important as cell phone coverage. Enjoying the experience of life is just as important as getting to your destination. The yatra provides urban dwellers the opportunity to see, first hand, that the village is not as backward as we are told it is and the city has a lot it can learn from the countryside.