

CSY 55 – My journey from clarity to confusion - Srivalli Eduri

This is my second Chinna Shodha Yatra, and this time again, the journey began with a sense of profound introspection, unlike the clarity I found before. This time, I was confronted with new questions, prompting me to delve deep into 'why' and 'for whom' in my life, a truly transformative exploration. Coming back to the dusty trails of the Chinna Shodha Yatra for the second time felt different before I even took my first step. My first yatra was a discovery of myself. I found joy in the strangers who became friends and a newfound clarity in the simplicity of village life. But this time, arriving from the high-pressure environment, I didn't come looking for answers; I came carrying a heavy bag of questions. While my first journey gave me a mirror to see myself clearly, this second journey felt like a lens that deconstructed everything I thought I knew. Walking with my 'Fourth Guru', myself, I moved away from the noise of 'what' I am doing and began the unsettling, yet necessary, process of questioning 'why.' I truly started at zero this time, realising that while the villagers' warmth remains constant, my own perspective has shifted from observing the world to deeply interrogating my place within it.

Before the yatra even officially began, we met an elderly man collecting plastic trash along the road. He gathers nearly 60 kg of waste every month from just that one area. When he was honoured with a shawl for his service to the environment, he seemed deeply uncomfortable, almost shrinking away as if to say, "Who am I? I am nothing." It was a jarring realisation. Here is a man contributing more to the health of our planet than most of us ever will, yet society has made him feel so small that he cannot even accept dignity when it is offered. Seeing that huge pile from just one spot filled me with shame. I have always believed in and followed "Swachh Bharat" and reducing plastic, but witnessing the sheer scale of what we throw away made me realise how thoughtless our consumption has become. It made me question: how much are we destroying while people like him quietly try to save it?

As I moved through the villages, I noticed a troubling pattern in the aspirations of the people. It felt like the "dream" has been reduced to only two paths: becoming a Doctor or a Collector. There is no room for other professions or for the imagination to wander. These children need a chance to explore, to innovate, and to see value in different ways of life, but the pressure to choose a "safe" or "high-status" path stifles their potential before they even begin to discover it.

This narrowness was confirmed during my visit to the cotton factory. When I spoke to a man working as a middleman, he admitted the solution to the farmers' struggles was for them to sell directly to the customers. But when I asked about the next generation leading that change, his answer was a firm 'No'. He didn't want his children anywhere near that life.

It made me realise that we are raising generations to be dependents. Dependent on middlemen, dependent on specific degrees, and dependent on a system that doesn't allow them to solve their own problems. We are moving toward a world where children aren't allowed to explore their potential because the risks of their parents' lives are too high. It made me ask myself: Am I also just going with a "flow" that someone else created, or am I building something that actually breaks these cycles of dependency?

As I walked, the landscape of the villages provided more than just scenery; it provided mirrors. A recurring paradox struck me: the people I met were incredibly 'giving'; their affection was immediate, asking if we had eaten with a genuine warmth. Yet, beneath this kindness, I encountered a jarring sense of self-limitation.

I met a young woman, a pharmacy graduate and a mother of two, whose response to my questions left me speechless. When I asked why she wasn't pursuing her field, she didn't just cite her responsibilities; she questioned her very right to choose, asking, *'Am I even allowed to think that way?'* It was a moment that shook me, realising how privilege isn't just about money but the freedom even to imagine a different life.

Similarly, the elderly villagers I spoke with seemed puzzled by our presence. *'What is there to learn from us? Why waste your time here?'* they asked. Their inability to see the value in their own lived wisdom was a sharp contrast to the 'growth' I was seeking. These conversations stripped away my old beliefs. They forced me to stop looking at 'progress' through a corporate or academic lens and instead look at the human condition with more empathy and many more questions.

I have always identified as a curious person. For a long time, my method for self-discovery was simple: meet new people, engage in new activities, or spend time in solitary reflection. I believed that by constantly moving and exploring, I was getting closer to the truth of who I am. But this second Shodha Yatra has completely dismantled that belief. I arrived with what I thought was clarity, only to realise that my entire process of 'knowing myself' was fundamentally flawed.

The beauty of the Shodha Yatra lies in the shared rhythm of the walk. Surrounded by strangers who slowly became confidants, I realised that we weren't just walking through villages; we were walking through each other's lives. This collective energy pushed me deeper into my introspection.

I met two interesting co-yatris on this path who didn't just offer new ideas; they challenged the fundamental way I see my own existence. Before this, I thought I had a certain grip on my identity. But talking to them made me realise that many of the 'truths' I held about myself were actually just comfortable habits. They pushed me to look at my life not as a series of achievements, but as a series of choices.

Through conversations with two specific individuals on this journey, I was confronted with a hard truth: we cannot see our own flaws in isolation. When I am alone with my thoughts, or even when I am seeking out 'newness' on my own terms, I am still the one in control of the narrative. My ego naturally hides what it doesn't want to accept. I realised that true self-reflection isn't something that can happen just by being alone or by doing things I 'like'; it requires the friction of another person's perspective to see what I have been choosing to ignore.

I was asked questions that stopped me in my tracks, questions not about what I am doing, but *why* I feel the need to do it. I realised I didn't have a real answer for why I 'liked' certain paths or why I felt the need to go to great lengths to find meaning. I have been operating on a surface level of 'liking' things without understanding the root of that desire. This time, I didn't return with a sense of fun or easy clarity; I returned to zero. I am now questioning the very source of my motivations, realising that if I cannot understand myself where I currently stand, no amount of distance or exploration will ever truly show me the person I am trying to find.

But this also made me question if I am truly utilising my potential and time in the right way to be useful or helpful to the people who need it. Am I just going with the flow or living life with a purpose? This is something I am planning to work on currently. Thanks to this yatra, I feel I'm back on the right track.