

Friday, October 7, 2016 Village of Panrangi

We drove away from the city and made our way through small towns and crowded streets before we reached the hills and began the winding drive up and over into the Araku Valley. Our job today was to oversee a new bore-well being dug. This was my first experience seeing this happen, so when I was asked to go, I had no idea what to prepare myself for.

When we arrived at the village the equipment was already set up and waiting to do its job. There was an air of expectancy hanging around the villagers as everyone stood around waiting. More people gathered after our arrival, feeling the time drawing near that drilling would begin. The drill itself was not what I expected, it was not bulky or even as enormous as my imagination had created it to be. The drill-rig stood on three legs which were balanced on bags of dirt to create level ground. It was tall, certainly, and covered in muddied, peeling orange paint.

I still had no idea what to expect, and I kept thinking, "How will this contraption dig down over a hundred feet into the earth and find clean water?" I was soon to find the answer to my question. However, first was a small ceremony to thank God and dedicate the drilling in the name of "the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." A bucket of water was brought out and a small hole was scooped out right where the drill would begin. After these preparations we all gathered around as a sophisticated looking man wearing a white linen suit prayed in Telugu. After the prayer was finished, he, Sam, Rachel and then me, all took a small cup of water and poured it into the hole under the drill. As we did this we each said a quiet prayer and blessed the construction that was about to start.

The workers gathered around, the drill bit was attached and adjusted, pulled this way, wedged forward by a metal bar and then, finally, began its descent. The noise was deafening with the hydraulics system constantly releasing air pressure as the operator controlled the three filthy levers. This man controlling the drill worked with a fluidity that only comes from perpetual practice. He shouted orders and all the men rushed here and there, they moved quickly and with a sort of gracefulness - no one ever ran into anyone, no one tripped or accidentally dropped anything. Two men pulled dirt away from the hole being dug and another dumped water before the drill shaft was lengthened. One group worked just to unscrew and attach new pieces to lengthen the drill as it dug deeper into the soil. Everyone had a job and when it wasn't needed they waited to move into action again.

The noise never stopped or quieted, and only two of my companions wore earplugs. I was fully enjoying the action and drama of it. Mud sprayed into the air as the drill bit into the damp top soil, Rachel got too close and was given a nice splash of red mud that stained her light skin. The soil became dry at a certain depth, too deep for rain, too shallow for ground water. It's a peculiar sight when you see all that dry red dirt coming up to the surface.

After a couple hours the earth began to turn to mud again and its lighter color stained the ground around the dig site. The workers were flecked with mud that contrasted with their dark skin and created a painted look that I really enjoyed seeing. All the men working were barefooted, something that would never be allowed in the U.S.. Their feet sunk into the mud as more water began to come to the top. I was impressed they weren't slipping and sliding all over the place as they hurried to complete tasks.

Soon enough water began to spray out from the well, it shot into the air at least a dozen feet and everyone cheered. It was muddy, but it was water! Whenever it sprayed the drill would pause and let the water stream out before resuming its labor. The light brown mud flowed down the small rise that the well sat on, it made its way down into the road, the promise of fresh water far beneath our feet.

After another hour the job of bringing the drill back up was begun. Women from the village had been carrying water from somewhere far away, they brought it in shiny silver pots balanced on their heads and dumped it into a giant blue drum before heading back out for another fill. Now this water was being used to wash the pieces of the drill as it was slowly dismantled and stored in the back of the truck. While this was happening one boy carried large pipes, dozens of feet long, and played them down near the newly dug hole. Once the drill was disassembled these pipes started being fed down into the well shaft. They used the already situated drill mounting to center these pipes on their journey down. I couldn't see what was happening below the surface so my imagination could only guess at what was happening.

The men hammered and twisted the pipes till they slid down and fit into the piping below. These enormous pipes were again and again hoisted high into the air, nearly hitting the branches of the mango tree high overhead. It was breathtaking to watch how high it went with the appearance of such little effort. They may look anything but professional, but these men knew what they were doing. Watching them dig the well was like watching a choreographed dance, and only the performers know every step.

We didn't stay for the rest of the process, so I'm not sure what happens after the piping is placed in the bore-well, but this was an incredible experience. Seeing the reality of how it's done, and knowing what the finished result will yield was a blessing to watch. It took so little time compared to what I had imagined the digging of a well would. I had mistakenly believed that because it was something so desperately needed that it would also be something very difficult to achieve, however, this is not the case. It took a day for this well to be put in, and it helps this village for a lifetime if properly cared for and maintained.