

## Mukti Coaching Center Site Visit: July 2016

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I went to Kolkata this summer. Before leaving for Kolkata I requested Sankar to plan a site visit to Mukti Coaching Center. Sankar is the founder of Mukti project and Coaching Center is just one part of what Mukti does now in Sundarban, Sankar's hometown.

My mother accompanied us too. We left for Sankar's house at 6:30 in the morning of July 9<sup>th</sup>. There after tea and breakfast we started for Sundarban in Sankar's car. It is about two hours from Narendrapur. We passed through a major vegetable supplier hub of West Bengal. Everything is so fresh. We crossed the bridge that is relatively new connecting the island of Sankar's home to the mainland (Raydighi).



**Figure 1. A visit to the Uttar-Kanondighi Coaching Center. I met the teachers and students at the center.**

The roads are narrow and most of the time are not drivable for a car. I got a ride in a motorbike from one teacher. Our first stop was Uttar Kanondighi Mukti Coaching Center which is built on a land own by Mukti. It was built in 2012 through a Afe WAH donation. It has six rooms made up of mud, furnished with benches and an almairah. The building has separate boys' and girls' bathroom. There is also a drinking water facility. Other coaching centers are held in government school buildings. As a result they enjoy drinking water from a nearby tube-well.



**Figure 2. Inside a room in the coaching center.**

Next we went to a government school Mukti rents to run a coaching center when the school is not open. A lot of teachers and students were waiting for us there. They greeted us with flowers. After everyone had been introduced, I asked the students to talk about the benefit of coaching center. They explained that in school, there are more than 100 students in each class because there is shortage of



**Figure 3. A second room at the same coaching center.**

teachers in villages. So without the help of dedicated teachers in coaching center, it is very hard for them to pass the exams. On our way to coaching centers we asked random people whether they heard of Mukti? Everyone knows someone who has either benefited by Mukti or is currently in a coaching center.

Now it was the teachers' turn to talk. More than half of the teachers are teaching in the coaching center for the past 10-11 years. I asked them for a wish list set according to priority. Their first priority was to have their own building. The facilities have been borrowed from the government for the duration of the coaching center program. After all these years the welcome has worn out a little, and they do not feel there is as much an openness to



**Figure 4. Another coaching center. This coaching center is held in a Government school.**

let the coaching center teachers' use of the buildings as coaching centers. Cleanliness and drinking water are becoming part of the problem. The next priority is to provide some snack for students in the middle of the morning. It is debatable, as some valuable time is

lost for the break and it will cost more than what can be afforded now. So, everyone agreed that it would be better to keep to bringing their own snack for the time being. The third priority was to increase the teachers' salary. Mukti / Sankar have been keeping up with inflation in that respect though.

We went to the end of the island where the water turns salty. Surrounded by mangrove trees and the spectacular view we had delicious lunch in a hut made by Sankar's father. Starting with rice, organic vegetables and fish, all products of the village, it shows how the whole village works as a close community in various Mukti projects and are proud of themselves and their accomplishments.

After lunch we visited the Book Bank. In the first year of operation the book bank experienced considerable damage due to Hurricane Aila. With the help of volunteers, the effort has since recovered. The books are well cared now.

We also visited organic farming grounds where we met around 50 farmers who are practicing organic farming method. Next we visited the vocational education center where Mukti is offering computer education. We also met around 70 women who are part of Mukti's MCDF project within Mukti's self-help group and micro-credit efforts.