

Asha Silicon Valley

Apna Skool Site Visit

School Location: Kanpur, U.P.

Date of Visit: January 21-22, 2026

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Apna Skool is a project of Jagriti Bal Vikas Samiti. The project consists of supplemental education centers for children of migrant laborers at brick kilns and construction sites around Kanpur. In January 2026, 21 such centers were operational. Thirteen centers operate for 6 hours a day and 8 centers are run for 3 hours a day. I visited five of the centers, **Samrat, Kalra-2, Kalra-3, Dedupur, and Tatiyaganj.**

My first stop, on the afternoon of January 21st, was at the **Samrat** center. After a brief welcome, lunch was served, and I joined in with the children. Lunch is a simple meal of rice, daal, and sabzi, supplemented by a couple of small bananas at the end.



Left: Samrat brick kiln

Right: Being welcomed by the students. Tent behind the children serves as a schoolroom



Left: lunch time



Right: some of the children try to find San Francisco on a world map

After lunch, the children gave introductions in English (they are taught a few basic sentences). When they interacted with me, they were curious to know about where I live, and we used a world map to locate the SF bay area. Generally the pre-teen girls were bolder and more curious, while the younger children were shy.

After a couple of hours, we headed over to the center called **Kalra-2**. At this brick kiln, the center consists of a small patio-like area for a room and a cemented floor that extends from the room. As at the other centers, children sit on mats on the floor.



Kalra-2 center

Despite the bare minimum facilities, the center felt like a welcoming place. Various posters and a world map adorned the walls. The kids are being taught basic reading and writing, including English vocabulary.



Left: Hema Manjhi (standing), currently studying for a diploma in elementary education

Right: Pooja Manjhi (standing), currently studying for a bachelor's degree in mathematics

At this center, I met two remarkable young women, Hema and Pooja, both of whom are the children of brick kiln workers and studied at Apna Skool centers. They both finished school and are now studying further, while assisting at Apna Skool centers. Pooja, who is very fond of mathematics, was very disappointed at not qualifying at the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) in the past year. I tried to encourage her to try again, telling her stories of similar disappointments. Her story is nothing short of amazing, coming as she does from very difficult circumstances.

The children were all very curious to interact with me and learn about where I had come from. In addition, they demonstrated their knowledge either through recitation or by explaining the thermocol projects on display.

On the afternoon of January 22, I visited the center at **Kalra-3**. This center is basically a single room, barely six feet high, with walls of mud-plastered bricks and a corrugated metal roof. Again, despite the very basic facilities, the room is well-lit, the walls are bright and adorned with posters, the children sit on mats.



Kalra-3 center



Inside the Kalra-3 center

The children introduced themselves one by one. Some of the younger children had trouble remembering their lines in English, but made it through with some prompting from the teachers. The children were shy initially, but as they got comfortable, they asked me details about my life - how old I was, where I lived, if I had kids, etc.

The teachers teach math concepts with puzzles and play pieces and we saw some of the puzzles. We had some matchsticks, and I asked the kids to form all the digits with seven matchsticks. That brought several of them crowding around and got them excited.



After the Kalra-3 visit I went to the **Dedupur** center, where I had lunch with the kids and the staff. We spent maybe an hour over there, and during conversations with the health worker Sunita ji, I learnt that all the children typically come from large families of typically six to seven children. This was a striking bit of information, since family sizes have been declining continuously all over India for decades, and even rural families mostly have two children. It turns out that most of these families belong to the Musahar community in Bihar, which happens to be a community of landless laborers. They live in remote areas and have no employment opportunities in the districts in which they live, which is why they migrate seasonally. They have large families, because of the simple calculation that more kids means more hands to make bricks, and thus, more income. There seems to be virtually no escape for generations of children from the vicious cycle of poverty, migration for labor, and general deprivation. Education provides them with the only chance, although it still remains a slim one.

My final visit was to the **Tatiyaganj** center, which is a set of rooms in a small cluster of well-constructed buildings. Adjacent to the center, there is a facility for food preparation, which is where the lunches for all the centers are prepared each day. The buildings are part of a campus which also houses Apna Ghar, a residential facility for boys (a project of Asha Trust, Kanpur). The facilities at this center are excellent and include a library and a computer room. This is much more like a full-fledged school as opposed to the makeshift structures at the brick kiln sites.



Children of several different ages and grades were assembled in the same classroom, and I got to interact with each one of them individually.

I found the wall posters in the room very interesting. One wall had 3 posters detailing the overall Apna Skool project - its motives, accomplishments, and challenges. Jostling for space alongside was a diagram of the human brain depicting areas of sense perception. Below this row were other posters, discussing acids and bases, the construction of a pinhole camera, and the workings of a periscope. Another wall listed the main crops of the three Indian cropping seasons (*Kharif, Rabi, and Zaid*), two monthly calendars, and the fundamental rights of Indian citizens. I think that if the kids absorb even half of what is being taught in these centers, they will turn out to be well-informed individuals.



Wall posters at Tatiyaganj center

My overall impression from these visits is that Apna Skool is an extraordinary project. It fulfils an unmet need - the children of migrant laborers are neglected both by their home state as well as the state that their parents migrate to. The teachers at each of the centers I visited are dedicated individuals, doing the best they can with extremely limited facilities. The children are bright and inquisitive, and seem happy to be at the centers. This is a project that Asha SV should definitely continue to support, to the maximum extent possible.