

## Site Visit Report of Apna Skool

Project Name: Apna Skool  
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Sites visited: Tatiyaganj and Maharajpur  
Timing: 25/03/2023, 10:30 a.m. onwards

*“It is better to be born as an animal than work in a brick kiln.”*

-Anonymous student (12<sup>th</sup> student, Apna Skool)

I begin this report by an English translation of what was said to me by one Apna Skool student during my visits. This is the reality, however grim, facing many families and children. This report consists of my two-day visit to centres of Apna Skool followed by an interaction with Mr. Murari, Mr. Mahesh and Mrs. Vijaya about the project. On 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023, I visited three centres of Apna Skool at brick kiln sites in and around Tatiyaganj (namely, Kalra-3, Samrat, Tatiyaganj) and two schools in Maharajpur. Finally, I also visited Gangaganj centre. The classrooms in Tatiyaganj were well-furnished and were equipped with basic amenities such as washrooms. The classrooms around Tatiyaganj (namely, Kalra-3, Samrat, Gangaganj) were small kutcha-rooms and barely had any light-source (other than natural light). These classrooms had around 15-20 children each with approximately equal number of boys and girls. I was informed that mid-day meal prepared at Tatiyaganj is distributed in these centres. Children informed me that they are taught English, Mathematics and Hindi. Most students were able to identify, speak and write alphabets and count numbers (Level 0). Further levels (Level 2 and above) were also able to recite poetry, tell names of weeks and months, fruits and had rudimentary knowledge about the solar system. A few students (Class 5 and above) could also perform basic arithmetical operations. A quick interaction with teachers revealed that they face challenges in students being regular to the class and some kids drop out. Mr. Murari (co-ordinator) informed that they record each student's progress since admission, tested and updated monthly. I looked at the Progress Report in Tatiyaganj centre which had information about each student with a description of their level of comprehension and understanding in the aforementioned subjects. I also met a graduated student of Apna Skool, who is currently pursuing B.A. from Kanpur University. I was informed by the teacher at Tatiyaganj centre that after graduating, this student helps in classes. I had mid-day meal with the students of Tatiyaganj centre. The food was prepared by three women with hygiene measures (such as, they were all wearing headcaps while cooking). We had *roti*, *sabzi*, rice and salad (carrot, beetroot, tomato and onion). The quality of food was good.

Then I visited two schools at Maharajpur (around 30 km from Kanpur). These two centres run in premises of government schools and thus are far (~1-2 km) from children's homes (usually around brick kilns). Mr. Mukesh (co-ordinator) informed that these students get mid-day meal from the government school along with the additional edibles such as, fruits and *laddoos*, given by Apna Skool. In one of the two centres that were visited, there was no washroom. Here, in one centre, the class was divided into three groups of students. Younger students could speak and identify in English but were not able to write. The other two groups of students were able to do basic math and understood English. Only a few kids were able to comprehend one full sentence in English and write in Hindi. In the other centre, kids were able to draw and write their names. They were able to recite Hindi and English poetry as well. Mr. Mukesh (co-ordinator) also informed about a health coordinator who has conducted awareness sessions regarding menstrual hygiene amongst these children and their families. Children from all the visited centres actively participated in activities such as, singing, dancing, drawing and crafts.

The following day, 26/03/2023, I visited Apna Skool centre at IIT Housing Society to have an interaction with Mrs Vijaya to know more about functioning of and current challenges against the project. In this centre, senior students (enrolled in government schools in 10<sup>th</sup> and above) come every Sunday for studying. I met four Apna Skool girls; one of which has recently been selected in Navgurukul. She talked in-depth about how her life around brick kilns had been- the relationship with the owners, the reluctance of families to send children to school and lack of opportunities. I was also told that since these children are at a location for a few months (4-5 months) before going back to their villages, and then relocate anew, it is difficult for them to maintain continuity in their education. Often, their education discontinues when they go back to their villages. I was also informed that teachers have been sent to local government schools in villages of Bihar (where the children's families migrate during monsoons) in order to maintain continuity. They are also attempting to get these children avail 'migration' certificate so that they are included in schools. I was also told that teachers are being trained, too. Vijaya *didi* also informed me that post covid, there has been a lack of fund.

Overall, this was an insightful experience for me. It is commendable how Apna Skool is trying to make education reach the marginalized section of society and help children realize their fundamental right to education. The classrooms were decorated with charts (some drawn by students) related to their subjects. In the Gangaganj centre, some students had made craft out of the waste materials around them. Most children seem to have a basic literacy. Their curiosity and creativity is being served well by teachers working with them. One thing that I particularly liked about Apna Skool functioning is the wide range of experiments that are made to achieve their motive of educating students- such as, collaborating with government schools or expanding their reach to children's villages (as informed). I think this can not only be informative regarding what works on-the-field but also help in creating context-based solutions. I was also informed that students are taught using stories and other engaging ways. However, there are some key concerns that arose and one can ponder over for the improvement in functioning of these schools. It is commendable that everyone is making the most out of available limited resources but it does not mean that they should be devoid of the fundamentals.

1. The classrooms in some centres (as mentioned above) lacked basic amenities. One of the two classrooms in the Samrat centre, had almost no visibility (picture attached below). It is suggested to look that the classrooms are equipped with basic amenities such as, sufficient light.
2. In one of the centres in Maharajpur, there was no washroom. A washroom, a first-aid box and availability of sanitary napkins must be ensured.
3. I was informed that the centres at Maharajpur are at a distant from their home, not many students can attend the classes. Particularly, a lot adolescent girls drop out due to this distance. Would providing a conveyance help these children? I invite everyone to brainstorm ways to withhold dropouts owing to these reasons.
4. In one of the visited centres, the teacher was seen to leave right after my visit. I suggest the people involved to probe further into this. Is it a rare event? Is there any system to supervise teachers if they are diligent? As a suggestion, I can think of regular surprise visits by supervisors to centres.
5. In continuation with the concern related to teachers, some teachers lacked basic understanding of the subject themselves (for instance, spelling errors in the progress report). The quality of the training of these teachers must be looked into.
6. I was told about a number of problems that restrain families from sending their children to school, such as, involvement of children in brick-making and other household

activities. I suggest continuing the awareness sessions with families as is undertaken in regular intervals. Additionally, people working on field can collaborate with decision-makers and generate more ideas on how to combat these issues.

7. One reason that students mentioned as their inability to come to school was that they had to take care of their younger siblings when parents go for work. Can there be any possible way of managing this?
8. Lastly, I observed academic diversity in the Apna Skool classrooms. Can there be ways of training students at similar levels of understanding together?
9. Finally, if students are encouraged and prepared well to take examinations- that offer hostel facilities like Navgurukul- it can be helpful.

Please find below some pictures\* taken from the site visit.

Pic 1: A student matching answers (Kalra-3)

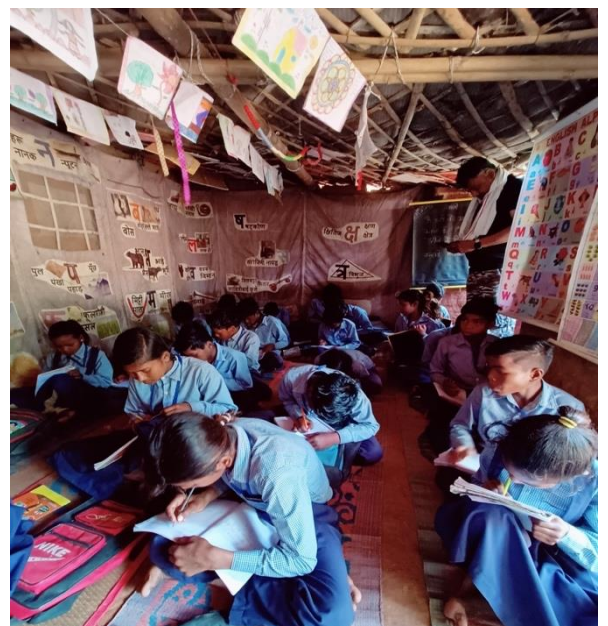


Pic 2: Students raising hands



Pic 4: One classroom in Samrat centre (notice the darkness)

Pic 3: Student reciting poem in Samrat centre







Pic 5: Photo with Apna Skool kids outside the room in Samrat centre. Pic 4 is the inside image of the same classroom.

Pic 6: Apna Skool Tatiyaganj



Pic 7: Mid-day meal preparation



Pic 8: Mid-day meal being distributed



Pic 9: Children ready for lunch





Pic 10: One centre at Maharajpur



Pic 11: Cards made by students



Pic 12: Student showing her drawing from second centre at Maharajpur



Pic 13: Student making flower



Pic 14: Three students singing, from 2<sup>nd</sup> day visit



\*Picture credits: Mr. Mahesh Pandey and Mr. Anubhav Jain.