

Unlocking Kangra's Learning Experience at ASER

There are moments in life that become cherished memories, and when you are right in the midst of them, you can feel that they will be forever etched in your heart. The ASER survey in Kangra was one of those exceptional moments. During the survey, I knew that this experience was something I would carry with me for a lifetime.

My connection with Pratham had begun long before I officially joined the organization, all thanks to the renowned ASER report. Becoming a part of such a prestigious survey had been part of my check-list. The icing on the cake was when I learned that my home state, and even more thrillingly, my hometown, Kangra in Himachal Pradesh, had been chosen as the survey district.



My excitement was palpable as I embarked on my journey from New Delhi to Kangra on the 25th of September '23, with a suitcase full of expectations and a smile that could rival the Cheshire cat's. On the morning of the 26th, I arrived in my hometown, and that's when the enchanting chapter of my ASER journey began. I made my way straight to Minerva College of Education in Indora, our partner institute for ASER's district-level training (DLT) and survey conduct. There, I encountered the remarkable individuals from the ASER Himachal team and the Minerva College students who had generously volunteered for the survey. To my pleasant surprise, the training was not just informative but also unexpectedly enjoyable, contrary to my initial expectations of it being onerous and intense. Unbeknownst to me, the ASER team imparted invaluable knowledge that one couldn't acquire through any other means. After three days of training, the entire team was divided into groups for the pilot survey in the vicinity of Indora. I was assigned a village in Indora block as my pilot survey location. The picturesque landscape, stretching out in all directions, was a soothing sight to behold. People in the village were somewhat skeptical about our questions directed at their young children, but some were elated to see their children engaging with questions and reading in English. The pilot survey provided numerous insights into what the actual survey would entail. We had many questions and experiences to share during that one briefing session before the formal survey began.



During the actual survey monitoring, I was entrusted with three villages, all in different directions from one another. Each village had its unique characteristics yet shared similarities in various aspects. What remained constant was the warm hospitality extended to us in these villages. From sipping gallons of tea in multiple households to having conversations about the future of these young minds, it became clear how active and vigilant parents were about their children's education. They held great aspirations for their children, and the children were no less. I vividly remember meeting a sweet, innocent young lady with sleek hair, large spectacles, and a dream of becoming a doctor. Her father worked as a lab assistant, and her interest in science was sparked by her father's regular tales of experiments. She wanted to follow in his footsteps and become a

doctor. She was witty and naive in our conversations, a true inspiration. In all the villages, I cherished how the sense of community remained intact and untouched. I tried conversing with the young ones in Himachali (Dogri) language. Some loved it, some found it amusing (I admit, I'm not too fluent, so it did sound funny). They'd often ask me, "*Tuha kuthu te n?*" (Where are you from) and I'd reply, "*Te me bhi ithu te aa.*" (I am also from here). The smiles on their faces were heartwarming, and it made them comfortable speaking to someone closely associated with this geography.

Every village had its own unique charm, and in each of them, I encountered brilliant young minds who, I believed, held the potential to achieve great things in life. I met students who were brimming with enthusiasm for the survey, and others who were apprehensive, seeing it as just another Parent-Teacher Meeting conducted within the confines of their homes. Some of these young minds served as a profound source of inspiration, while others prompted me to reflect on my role in the social sector and the necessity to continue working in it.

My journey in the ASER survey was nothing short of a long-awaited desire come true, and I couldn't have asked for a better way to fulfil it.



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