

Inside a Skill Training Centre Where Learning Continues

When I walked into the Vocational Skilling Centre run by Pratham in Vadodara, Gujarat, I met a batch of 13 trainees enrolled in the MOA and Tally course, 11 girls and 2 boys. It was a small group, but the energy in the room was anything but small.

The team shared that mobilisation in the area comes with its own realities. The eligibility criteria require students to be 12th pass, but many interested youths in the area are 10th pass or 12th fail. There is aspiration, but there are also barriers. For girls especially, there is another layer. Many want to work. Some even want to explore opportunities outside their immediate locality. However, families often insist that placements be “nearby.” Safety, familiarity, and social norms quietly shape career decisions.

Inside the classroom that day, what I saw was confidence. The trainees were engaged, responsive, and comfortable with the team. The rapport between the team and the batch was evident. There was trust, humour, and a sense of belonging. It felt less like a formal training centre and more like a shared space for growth. That kind of rapport cannot be measured easily, but it shapes how learning happens.

Two women in the batch stood out to me, not because they spoke the most, but because of the different worlds they carry with them into the classroom. One of them is 30 years old, married, and a mother of three. Her daughters are four and five years old, and her youngest child, a two-year-old boy, comes to the centre with her every day.

She wakes up at 3 a.m. From 3 to 6 in the morning, she does stitching work to earn extra income. Then she moves on to household chores, cooking, cleaning, and preparing her daughters for school. By 10 a.m., she reaches the centre, often with her toddler. She carries her uniform from home and changes there, switching from a sari into her uniform before class begins.

During the session, she listens carefully, takes notes, learns Excel formulas, and in between gently manages her son.

After class, she goes back home to resume her domestic responsibilities. When I asked her why she chose to enrol, she simply said she loves studying. There was no dramatic declaration, just a quiet, steady desire to learn. She also mentioned that her husband supports her decision, something she acknowledged with gratitude.

It is easy to frame this as resilience. But it is also a reflection of how skilling for women often rests on their ability to stretch themselves further. The programme does not reduce her unpaid work. It adds structured learning hours to it.

During my visit, I conducted a Privilege Walk with the trainees. The exercise surfaced differences in schooling backgrounds, financial stability, parental education, and freedom of movement. Some students stepped forward confidently. Others realised how many structural advantages they had not consciously recognised. The discussion that followed was thoughtful. They spoke about how confidence is shaped long before one enters a skill centre.



Privilege Walk with the trainees

At the end of the session, a few trainees came up to me and asked for book recommendations. Beyond Tally and MS Office, there was curiosity, a desire to read, to think, and to expand their horizons.

The visit reminded me that skill centres are not just about employability. They are about negotiation, between home and classroom, between aspiration and permission, and between responsibility and self-growth. In Vadodara, I saw young women stepping into that negotiation every single day.

The Vadodara centre is doing important work. The team's relationship with trainees is strong. The batch is engaged and motivated. But the visit also reminded me that skill development does not operate in isolation. It sits within education systems that exclude, labour markets that are gendered, and households where women's time is elastic.

The trainees show up every day. That matters.

But as development practitioners, we must also ask: What might skilling look like if it adapted more closely to the realities trainees navigate each day?

The Vocational Skilling Centre run by Pratham did not just show me aspiration. It showed me everyday negotiation and the quiet costs that accompany opportunity. Sometimes development is not loud. It is not a big milestone or a placement announcement. Sometimes it is a woman carrying her child into a classroom because she refuses to pause her ambition.

And sometimes, that is where change quietly begins.

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