

WHAT IS
PROOF IN EDUCATION?





PROOF
Public Record of
Operations & Finance

Akshara Foundation 2005
www.aksharafoundation.org

Authors: Lalitha Banerjee & Roopa Pai
Illustrations & Design: Ashwin Mohan

Printed by Shubhodaya Printers
Bangalore 04 Ph. 2667 9508

WHAT IS PROOF IN EDUCATION?



INTRODUCTION

Namaskara! Tiffin aayitha? Good, good.

What's that? Who am I, did you say? *Ayyo*, I completely forgot to introduce myself. My name is Shankar, and I am an auto driver. I live in Malleswaram. My wife Parvati works as a cook in a house in our area. I have one daughter, Priya, who studies in the second standard.

What else? Oh yes, I am a Kannadiga like you and I am proud of it! Our city is wonderful! We have the most beautiful weather all through the year and we are surrounded by lush flowers, trees and lakes. Our beautiful city is also the one where all those big companies where everyone works on computers are (I think they call them IT companies). All our boys and girls are leaving America and coming to work and live here, and so many foreigners too. Really, I think our city is the best city in India!

THE STATE OF MY DAUGHTER'S SCHOOL

But at the same time, in spite of all the progress, we are still so backward in some ways. Take what my daughter Priya has to go through each day at her BMP school. This sweet girl, with her lovely flowing black hair and big eyes and beautiful smooth skin as brown as the best filter coffee, cannot get the type of education that I would like and that she deserves. But there's worse.

My Priya often comes home crying. She cries because she does not have a proper bathroom to use in school. The toilets smell, they are dirty and dark, and they are often clogged. Once she tried to use the toilet but the smell was so bad that she vomited! And when she vomited, there was no clean drinking water that she could rinse her mouth with.

Actually, the school does have a water drum full of drinking water, but the tank does not have a cover and the water is therefore littered with bird droppings, leaves, and dirt. Parvati and I give her a bottle of water to take to school, but once she finishes it,





she cannot get more from the school since there is no clean drinking water for her.

While in class she has a difficult time concentrating on her lessons. The teacher tries her best to explain things to the children but it is hard to hear her since there are so many children. Maybe the children would listen if the lessons were more interesting, but what can the teacher do? How can she make lessons interesting and fun when there are no teaching aids to work with - no maps, no science labs, no libraries with books that she can refer to, no computers?

I remember reading in the newspaper a few months ago that our Finance Minister, PC Chidambaram, said that a huge amount of money will be spent on education. Where is all of that money? Not even a paisa of all that money seems to have come anywhere near my Parvati's BMP school. That makes me angry.



GOOD EDUCATION IS THE RIGHT OF ALL PEOPLE

Tell me, shouldn't every single one of our children have the right to attend a school that can provide them with a good, solid education, so that they can also get jobs in big companies and improve their lives? Shouldn't they have the right to go to a school which has the most basic amenities, like clean toilets and water fit for drinking? Good education is everyone's right, rich and poor. Certainly the government provides free education to us; but does that mean that it has to be of a poor quality?

It is precisely for these reasons that I started talking with the headmistress of Priya's school. I visited her to understand what could be done to improve the situation. She told me some wonderful news that I want to share with you.

PROOF IN EDUCATION

The headmistress told me that in 2003, the BMP began to work on a programme called PROOF (Public Record of Operations and Finance). Janaagraha, VOICES, and the Akshara Foundation

are all partners of this campaign that aims to give citizens like you and me a chance to participate in the functioning of the BMP. The headmistress explained to me how the BMP, Akshara Foundation, and ordinary community members improve the state of BMP schools through PROOF in Education. Let me explain it to you.

Have you heard of the Akshara Foundation? They do good work; they help children like ours to have access to good quality elementary education. Every six months, the people at Akshara assess schools.

What does that mean? That means they try to find the answers to many questions. How does the building look? Does it look in good repair or has it become unsafe for the children? Does it have toilets? Does it have enough toilets? Is there running water in the toilets? Does the school have a good supply of clean, safe, drinking water for the children? Are there enough teaching aids in the school to help teachers teach well? How well do the children read? How well do the children do at maths? Have the children learnt what they are supposed to have learnt last year?



Once they have the answers to these and many other questions, they create a report and send it to the BMP. An Akshara report is like a marks card for the school, something like what Priya gets at the end of each term. Priya hates exams, so she loves the idea of her school also sitting for an exam and getting a report card! Schools that have good buildings, proper toilets, clean drinking water, and adequate number of teachers get good marks.

The results are also announced in public discussions that BMP officials and other citizens attend. The good part about the public discussion is that this way, even those whose children are not in the BMP school come to know just how bad the state of the school is. Usually, they are shocked, and then they immediately feel like doing something about it. Then the BMP, Akshara, parents of BMP children, teachers and headmasters, and people of the community make sure that, schools which have 'failed' get better marks next time. They all work together to improve the school, by putting in whatever is missing, like doors for toilets, a tank for drinking water, maybe a better roof for the building, or more chairs in the teachers' room.





Six months later, the people from Akshara come back, take a fresh look at the schools, see what has improved and what still needs improving, and give the school a new report card. The report is sent to the BMP, and the cycle repeats itself. “This is like making *bisibelebhath*,” smiles Parvati. “Put some salt in, then taste it, add a little more tamarind juice, taste it, add just a little more chilli powder, taste it, and keep going until it is just right.”

My face must have shown that I didn’t understand what she was talking about. “Isn’t that what Akshara does?” she continues. “Look at schools, suggest improvements, look at them again, suggest other improvements, and so on until the school becomes a good place for children to go.” Of course! She’s perfectly right.

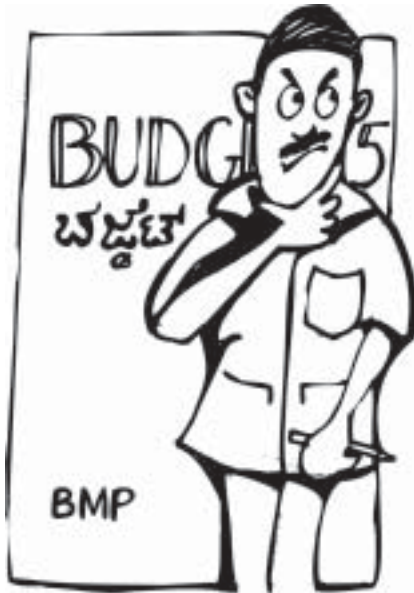
The best part of the whole thing is that the government is working alongside us to improve education. The BMP is keen on making this project work and making the goal of improving education a reality. What is also truly wonderful is that the child is the center of this whole project! Everything is done to ensure that the child gets a better standard of education and that the child can study in comfortable surroundings. The entire community - parents, teachers, headmasters, NGOs, local government, and other citizens - are coming together to improve education for our children!

So that is the exciting thing that is happening. Yes, things will not change overnight: we understand that. But maybe in five years, my Priya will go to a school which is as good as the ones that the children of Parvati's employers attend. That is good enough for me.

GET INVOLVED IN PROOF IN EDUCATION

When the headmistress finished, my first thought was: This sounds great! Without wasting a minute, I asked her how I could be part of it. She smiled at my enthusiasm, and told me that I could join the School Support Group at my Priya's school. A School Support Group, also known as the SSG, is made up of parents, alumni of BMP schools and local community leaders who are all interested in making the school a better place for children.

Being a part of the SSG has taught me a lot. I learned that when the BMP spends money on anything for the city - like water, sewage, education, roads - it puts down exactly how much it spent on each of these things in something called a Budget. This Budget comes out once a year and shows just where the BMP spent its money that year.





It is important for all of us to read the Budget. When we do, we may find that the BMP did not spend enough on our childrens' schools. This is probably because they simply do not know how much needs to be done. It is our duty to let them know the problems in the schools before they decide where to spend their money next year, so that they can put enough money aside to solve these problems.

As a member of the SSG at Priya's school, I can actually do this. By talking to the teachers and the headmistress at the school, talking with staff at Akshara, and writing letters to the BMP along with community leaders, parents of Priya's schoolmates, and other citizens, I have the power to make the BMP spend some of their money where it needs to be spent - at my daughter's school. I have a VOICE and I can make it HEARD. I can actually make my child's world a better place. I cannot tell you how good that feels.

RESULTS

How has the program worked so far? Quite well. In fact, we have made good progress:

1. We attended a public discussion with other citizens and BMP officials recently and saw something of how the BMP wants to spend its money. We also talked about what we thought of education.

2. Interested citizens donated money for a new water drum for the school. This new drum is clean and has a lid on it so that there is no dirt or droppings in the tank. Now my Priya and all of her classmates can have clean water to drink.

3. Our SSG worked with the BMP to have the toilets built. Now my Priya does not mind going to the toilets since they are clean and have running water. All the children are so happy to have proper toilets and their parents are also relieved that their children can go to the bathroom while in school.

4. The PROOF campaign has got so much support that the PROOF Foundation has now been set up to continue the work with the BMP and spread PROOF to other parts of the country. The BMP has even won an award for promoting transparency and accountability through PROOF!





How YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

Of course we want to achieve more results. We want the BMP to not just put in toilets and taps but also improve schools in a really big way. We know that something like this will take time, effort and patience. It will also take more people like you and your friends to get involved. We need you to join the SSG in your area, attend public discussions that happen twice a year, and support this effort.

What is in it for you? The chance to be heard. The chance to build a better school and a better life for our children. The chance to help our children dream.

Parvati and I are now totally committed to the SSG, and are very excited about the possibilities. Do you feel that way too?

If you do, and are interested in joining the SSG of a BMP school in your area, please contact:

Arathi Ramesh

Akshara Foundation

9, Charles Campbell Road, Cox Town, Bangalore-560 005

Ph: 25801462 / 25801463

Email: info@aksharafoundation.org

DID YOU KNOW?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child lays down the rights of all children and young people under the age of 18 years. Some of these are:

- All organisations concerned with children, for example, schools and the health service, should work towards what is best for each child. (Article 3)
- All children have the right to an education. (Article 28)
- The purpose of education is to develop every child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities. (Article 29)
- Education should teach children to respect their parents, their own and other cultures. (Article 29)
- Education should prepare children to live responsibly and peacefully in a free society. (Article 29)
- Education should teach children to respect the natural environment. (Article 29)
- All children have the right to relax and play, and to join a wide range of activities. (Article 31)
- All children have a right to good health and good quality health care. All children should have clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so they stay healthy. (Article 24)
- All children should be protected from violence, abuse and neglect, and governments should protect them. (Article 19)
- No child should be punished in a way that humiliates or hurts them. (Article 37)
- All children have a right to be able to give their opinion when adults are making a decision that will affect them, and adults should take it seriously. (Article 12)
- All children have a right to find out things, and say what they think through speaking, writing, drawing etc. unless it breaks the rights of others. (Article 13)
- Children should not be allowed to do work that is dangerous or might make them ill, or stops them going to school. (Article 32)

(Source: *Convention on the Rights of the Child, Full text of the Convention:*
<http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm>)

DID YOU KNOW?

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is Government of India's flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner, as mandated by 86th amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory Education to the Children of 6-14 years age group, a Fundamental Right. SSA is being implemented in partnership with State Governments to cover the entire country and address the needs of 192 million children in 1.1 million habitations. The programme seeks to open new schools in those habitations which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. Existing schools with inadequate teacher strength are provided with additional teachers, while the capacity of existing teachers is being strengthened by extensive training, grants for developing teaching-learning materials and strengthening of the academic support structure at a cluster, block and district level. SSA seeks to provide quality elementary education including life skills. SSA has a special focus on girl's education and children with special needs. SSA also seeks to provide computer education to bridge the digital divide.

(Source: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission Statement. <http://ssa.nic.in/>)





PROOF
Public Record of
Operations & Finance

Issued in the public interest
by Akshara Foundation