



IT'S A SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

By Jayanthi Madhukar | Oct 15, 2013, 01.00 AM IST



Shukla Bose says reforming the lives of underprivileged kids won't be successful unless their families are involved

Shukla's end-to-end model offers education, health, jobs and nutrition to Bangalore's poor

Initiative: **Parikrma Humanity Foundation**

Face behind it: **Shukla Bose, 57**

Nominated for: **Imparting holistic quality education in English to Bangalore's poorest of poor children**

Shukla Bose owes Mother Teresa the art of empowering the underprivileged, and the mole that sits on her nose. Back in the 1970s, when Bose was a teenage volunteer with Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata, she found herself in Mother's chamber requesting a day off. It was to carry out a minor surgery that would clear her face of the

"unsightly" blot. But the Mother, calling it "the gift of God", suggested that Bose leave it be, and instead, donate the surgery's cost to charity. "I quietly handed Mother Teresa the cash," she remembers.

The episode taught Bose the importance of priority; separating the important from the trivial. It's also what helped her take the decision to quit a high-flying 26-year-long career in the hospitality industry (she quit as MD of Resort Condominiums International, one of the largest timeshare vacation exchange networks) to launch a project that's synonymous with changing lives by giving kids an equal chance at education.

"I was earning good money," Bose admits when we meet her at her school in Jayanagar. "But I wanted to do something while I had the energy, not when I retired." And she did.

After pooling in her savings — then worth close to `80 lakh — and with some generous help from her husband, she set up Parikrma in 2003. The first of four schools was run from a rented property in a Koramangala slum that housed over 75,000 residents living below the poverty line. It accommodated 165 kids. Parikrma's 360-degree model meant that the poorest of poor received high quality English-medium education (affiliated to the ICSE board), three nutritious meals a day and the right to primary healthcare. "It is about involving parents in their success," says Bose, referring to the de-addiction programme they run for alcoholic fathers, soft loans offered to homemakers to launch food services, and embroidery and sewing training for maids who wish to supplement their income. On popular demand, an afterschool adult literacy programme was also launched.

And so, with the child, the family too enjoyed an opportunity to brighten its future.

It's why Parikrma schools have 96 per cent attendance, the highest in the country Bose claims, and a less than 1 per cent dropout.

Ninety eight per cent of its students go on to pursue a college education; sometimes in the country's finest institutions. The son of a worker from Manipur has made it to the roster of the prestigious National Law School. Bose tells the story of the son of a construction worker from Bihar, who is now an executive chef at Hilton International.

It's an instance of Parikrma's end-to-end model, where the school acts as caretaker from age five to 25, until the student bags a job. To ensure this, Parikrma spends Rs 27,000 annually per child.

All four schools have maintained the requisite student-teacher ratio; a tough decision given the overwhelming number of applications they now receive. With no textbooks till class eight, the model is an example for 'mainstream' schools to follow.

"Life's circle, or parikrma, will be complete when these students begin their own Parikrma," smiles Bose.