



Overview

It is uncontroversial to say that the world faces grave existential threats:

Poverty and rising inequality; Disenfranchisement of women and minority groups; Low literacy rates and dangerously high rates of dropout, crime and unemployment.

Alienation, separatism, and terrorism; Nuclear proliferation and homemade weapons of mass destruction.

Mass displacement due to rising sea levels, more frequent natural disasters, flooding, drought, food and drinking water shortages; Deforestation, loss of productive soil, ocean acidification, and mass extinction leading to loss of fish and overall biodiversity; Increasingly powerful germs and the constant threat of global pandemic. The list goes on.

These issues are especially pressing in India. High urban population densities in major cities, widespread poverty, and the constant spectre of

sectarian violence from hardliners in myriad religious and ethnic groups. These factors combine to further catalyse any social unrest caused by a terrorist attack, disease outbreak, or natural disaster.

Drastic measures are essential if we are to address these grave issues before they lead to catastrophe. And the only hope lies in the education of the youth.

Akshar Forum is an experimental school in Assam designed to help to address social ills with a holistic, interdisciplinary approach. It represents a paradigm shift in education, social work, and environmental activism. It is, thus far, a successful synthesis of the often opposing principles of social welfare and free market capitalism.

Akshar Forum is a low cost livelihood school that teaches poor children how to earn a living, run a sustainable business, and heal their environment.





Akshar Forum

There are six essential elements of our model school in Assam:

We teach children how to be independent learners. Our primary objective is to pinpoint each student's unique talents and teach them how to earn a living doing what they are passionate about. We allow them to move at their own pace, foster their natural curiosity, develop their individual talents, cultivate their ambition for fulfilling careers, and provide constant encouragement. We provide the

degree of mentoring that more privileged children receive at home and take for granted from an early age. When properly equipped and trained, motivated, confident students complete years of academics in a matter of months. The option of early graduation is a powerful motivator, especially for underprivileged children, who lack the stability needed to complete a traditional 12-year education.



We employ children as teachers. All of our students are trained in the craft of teaching, under the guidance of an adult teacher who provides instructions to the junior teachers and is always nearby. This way, students receive vocational training ideally suited for low-income communities, where there is always demand for more teachers. They are paid a small wage, commensurate with their academic grade level. We have observed major benefits with this approach:

- Children from low income communities are often driven away from schooling, forced into scavenging, begging, unskilled manual labour, and criminality. The opportunity to earn money keeps at-risk kids engaged in school.
- Since they can proceed through the curriculum at their own pace, and since their wages are determined by their grade level, students are

driven to learn more, so they can earn more, and teach more. Furthermore, students can be assessed for mastery of a topic based on their ability to teach it.

- By teaching, children become better learners. They gain confidence, valuable skills, real-life work and leadership experience that benefits them throughout their lives. They also learn about personal finance, civic duty, and the rewarding feeling of a good day's work. Children with behavioural problems quickly become model students after receiving this degree of respect and positive attention from younger students.
- Hiring students allows us to achieve optimally low teacher-student ratios affordably. Small classrooms allow for active discussion, focused collaboration, full engagement. Teachers can focus on teaching, rather than crowd control.



We teach children and their families how to earn a living and operate a business. In large part, Akshar Forum is an entrepreneurial school, which serves as an incubator for small business and social enterprise. We teach students business and financial

principles that will benefit them, regardless of the career they choose later in life. Through education and by helping to develop a series of businesses on our campus, we empower students and their families to lift themselves out of poverty.



We are currently developing a handicraft business that employs the mothers of our students to create crafts using recycled plastic. Next, we will help students and their families develop a profitable laundromat with an electric washer and dryer, saving countless hours of labour for the mothers in the community; then, an environmental cleanup and sanitation service that employs teens; a business for installation of solar panels, water filters, and other basic infrastructure that employs teens and adults; a

health clinic with family planning services that employs students interested in careers in healthcare, with oversight professional volunteers and university students; and, finally, a community bank that can offer financial services, access to insurance, and micro finance loans. These social enterprises will help students and their families earn a living, give them real-life business training, and help them contribute immensely to the development of their own community.



The mothers' handicraft cooperative started in December of 2015 with the goal of empowering the mothers of our students with essential English language and business administration skills. In the village of Pamohi, many girls become mothers in their teens. Our goal is to ensure these young mothers continue to seek an education to gain the skills to earn a living and to contribute to their children's education. First they learned to create marketable handicrafts during classes led by a professional artist. Next, they started to learn fundamentals essential to being an entrepreneur. The mothers use recycled plastic and sustainable local resources to create bags, table mats and more.



We connect children to the vast knowledge resources of the Internet. Advances in information technology can deliver the sum total of human knowledge to every child in the world. Efforts are already underway to provide blanket internet coverage to large swathes of the globe, and, projecting current rates of market penetration of cellphones, we can expect widespread availability of

internet devices in the coming decades. To be competitive in the modern economy, computer literacy is becoming nearly as important as language literacy. Disadvantaged children can easily be left behind. It is imperative that greater effort is made to bridge the technological divide, to give all children the knowledge and tools they need to shape better lives.



The Internet contains the sum total of human knowledge.

We connect our students to the limitless learning resources available online so they can build better lives.

We teach children to be guardians of their local environment. At Akshar Forum, children learn that the world is in danger, and they can be the heroes that help save the world. Planting trees, cleaning rivers and streams, collecting litter, recycling and reusing. Through small acts like these, our students develop a sense of responsibility for their own environment from an early age.

They learn to collect and tests soil samples, share sustainable farming practices, and learn how to treat drinking water. Our long-term vision is a mass movement of children, teens, and youths empowered with the knowledge and skills they need to restore their local ecosystems, develop and support sustainable businesses, and become advocates for environmental conservation.



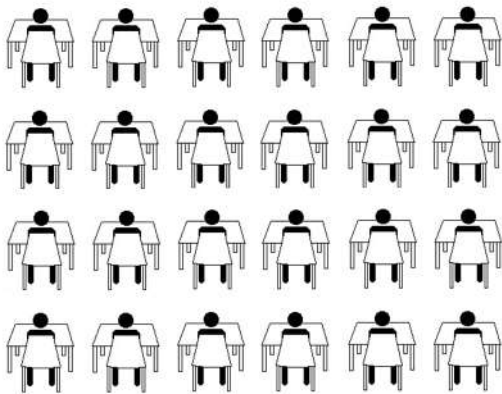
We teach children how to save their world.

Students at Akshar Forum learn to be guardians of the environment.

Design

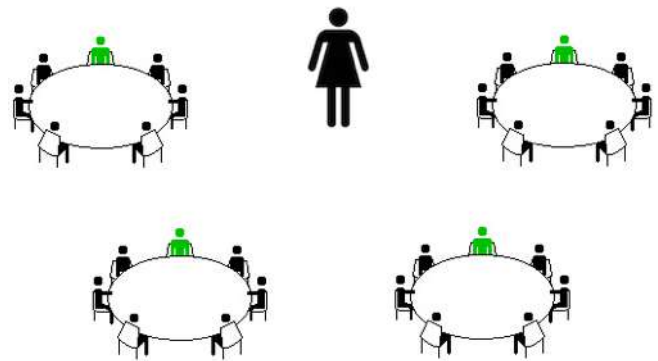
Akshar Forum eschews the traditional classroom and school design for a revolutionary new organisational structure. We follow a model inspired by the military chain of command, **with all students expected to assist in the education of children younger than them.** A junior teacher's rank and salary are determined by their academic level, maturity, and teaching skill, not necessarily age.

A qualified adult teacher oversees the junior teachers, guides the lessons, and provides support wherever needed. The senior teacher appoints junior teachers and groups students by ability and interest in the topic. The senior teacher gives short lectures to each group, or to each junior teacher, who is then responsible for conveying that knowledge to her or his students and overseeing classroom assignments.



Traditional Classroom Structure

One qualified, senior teacher overseeing junior teachers



New Classroom Structure





Students proceed through the curriculum at their own pace, mastering each step before moving on. They take examinations, but on an individual basis and on their own time, to remove the negative associations testing can create in children. The senior teacher groups students in classes based on academic ability—rather than age—in fluid groups that may vary on a weekly basis.

Rather than being held back by classmates in their age group, academically gifted students are encouraged to speed through the curriculum to early graduation and online university courses.

Half of the school day consists of traditional, structured learning—discussions, lectures,

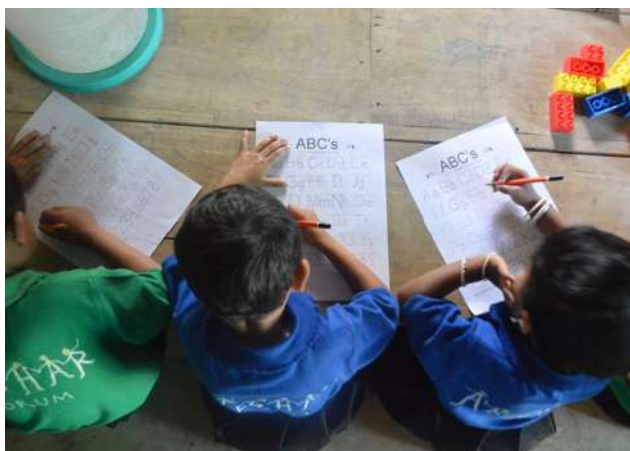
assignments, and groups projects—in small classes of up to seven students. The benefits of small classes are immense and immediately apparent. **Students in small classes are engaged, with everyone getting involved to some degree, and no one feeling left out.** Less social anxiety, less stress, and a calmer environment leads to better quality learning.

The other half of the school day consists of independent learning periods, where students are free to work, alone or in groups, on projects and activities of their own choosing. Teachers use this time for one-on-one interactions with students to address individual curriculum goals and tackle any academic weaknesses.



Akshar Forum is designed for a capacity of approximately one hundred students, divided into three house-sized structures, each directed by a qualified

teacher. Any student can participate in activities in one or more sections, based on their interests, maturity level, and the discretion of the principal.



Primary School: Playhouse

Students learn to read and write, play learning games, watch educational cartoons and nature documentaries. The focus is on conditioning children to develop positive associations with learning. Passing on facts to the children is secondary.

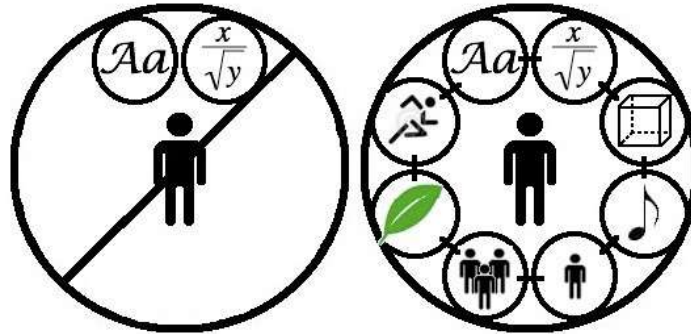
The primary goal is to develop a passion for learning and personal growth in each individual child. Free learning periods are interspersed with structured learning activities, arts and crafts, logical and spatial puzzles, and writing drills.



Middle School: **Library**

Students delve deeper into academics in small group seminars. The seminars consist primarily of discussion and debate, in addition to lectures, presentations, and projects. Students train in groups for the University of Cambridge International Examinations (O and A Levels), the most widely recognised provider of international educational

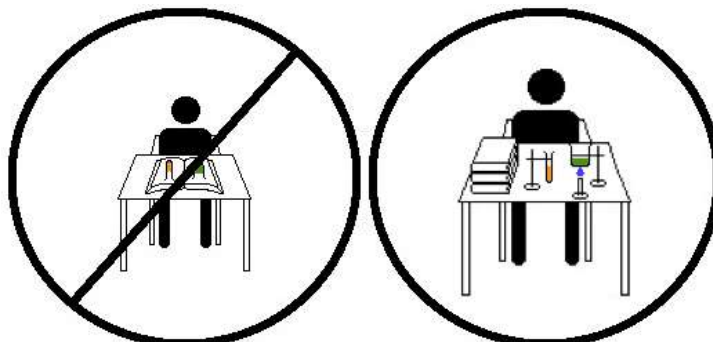
qualifications. Traditional schools focus nearly exclusively on subjects centred on mathematics and language arts. However, whole child education at Akshar Forum addresses all of the interconnected domains of knowledge including, but not limited to, music, visual arts, athletics, dance, self-knowledge, and interpersonal knowledge.



High School: **Market**

Students begin to plan for their professional careers by actively engaging in real-life community development, partnering and apprenticing with teachers, professionals, and university students. Students interested in a career in medicine work in the Akshar Forum health clinic; those interested in engineering work on solar panels, water filtration,

and other community infrastructure projects; arts students put on plays, dance, and musical productions for profit; business students create real enterprises, online or otherwise; those interested in leadership participate in local government. They learn to reconcile their ambitions and passions with the financial demands of the real world.



Forum Principles

Academic Independence

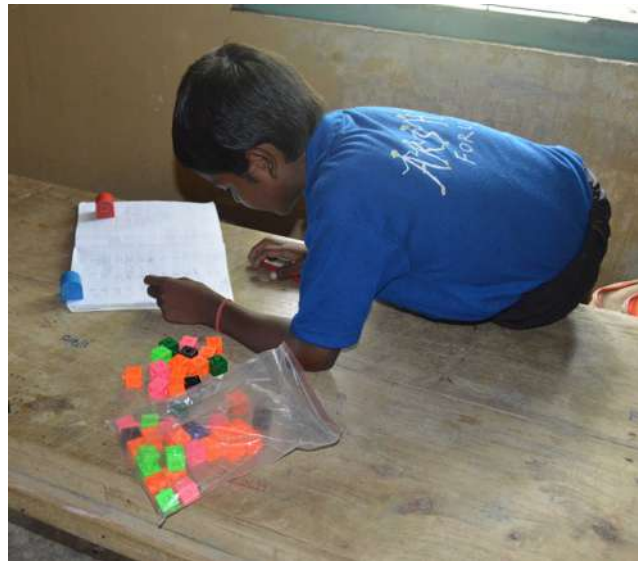
Each student is her or his own best teacher.

Teachers motivate students to independently pursue their intellectual curiosity, interests, and passions. The most vital duty of a teacher is to train students in self-instruction: teach them how to teach themselves.

Livelihood Training

Learn how to make a living doing what you love.

Students are paid to teach and are encouraged to earn money through small business initiatives that use their natural abilities. They learn about marketing, banking, saving, fiscal responsibility, and develop a strong entrepreneurial spirit.



Dialectic Methodology

Students become scholars. Students engage in the process of academic discussion and debate, presenting their own arguments and theories. Students become aware of how their own brains function (metacognition), generating hypotheses, evidence, and experiments (scientific method), and effective communication (rhetorical analysis).

Information Abundance

If you don't know it, look it up. For the first time, the entire breadth of human knowledge is at our fingertips. Students are impelled to explore the Internet reliably for books, articles, and video lessons on virtually any subject.



Personalised Curricula

One size does not fit all. Students need some degree of control over their education to develop into independent scholars. Curricula are supplemented based on their aptitudes, passions, and career aspirations.

Multiple Intelligences

Every student is a potential genius in some way. Supplemental curricula address various aptitudes and types of intelligence: linguistic and mathematical intelligence, of course, but also Spatial, Musical, Intrapersonal (self-knowledge), Interpersonal, Naturalistic, and Bodily-Kinesthetic.





Interconnectivity of Knowledge

A bad student is a bored student. An academic lens can be applied to anything a student wants to learn. Attentive students are more productive, more focused, and achieve higher retention rates. Teachers use the students' interests as a starting point for lessons. Use football to teach physics, use music to teach spelling, use theatre and role-playing to teach history, and so on.

Students as Teachers

Students who know how to teach, know how to learn. The best measure of a student's mastery of a subject is their ability to teach it. Students are encouraged to teach and gauged on their ability to effectively convey knowledge to peers, teachers, family and community.

Round-table Seminars

Class size matters. Classrooms are structured to facilitate discussion of learning topics, ensuring each student has the chance to express her or his knowledge, work, and theories. This is the format of instruction usually reserved for elite students in honors programs; the same right should be given to all students.

Project-based Learning

Students learn best by doing. To as great an extent as possible, schoolwork consists of individual and group projects with real-life applications. Students play the role of adults performing valuable tasks for the community, utilizing creative problem-solving skills with tangible, rewarding results.



Financial Information

AKSHAR FOUNDATION

18, Basisthapur Bye lane -3, Beltola Road, Guwahati-781028
Guwahati (Assam)

Receipts & Payment Account for the year ended 31st March, 2016					
RECEIPTS	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)	PAYMENT	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)
To, Opening Balance			By, Teacher Salaries		1,29,000.00
Cash in Hand	2,245.00		By, Purchases		
Cash at Bank	55,061.00	57,306.00	Books & Games	5,509.00	
			Printing & Stationery	28,007.00	
To, Donation Received	51,84,150.00	51,84,150.00	Uniform	9,679.00	43,195.00
			By, Administration expenses		
			Advertisement	1,020.00	
			Bank Charges	2,384.00	
			Cleaning	500.00	
			Environmental Education	1,400.00	
			Medical Expenses	700.00	
			Postage and Courier	270.00	
			Professional Fees	5,500.00	
			Refreshment Expenses	2,731.00	
			Repairs & Maintenance	500.00	
			Saraswati Puja Expenses	3,800.00	
			Staff Welfare Expenses	2,200.00	
			Student Allowance	5,300.00	
			Teacher's Day Expenses	1,000.00	
			Telephone Expenses	1,300.00	
			Training Expenses	3,255.00	
			Travelling Expenses	30,657.00	
			Website Designing	39,300.00	1,01,817.00
			By, Work in Progress		5,88,620.00
			By, Closing Balance		
			Cash in Hand	24,842.00	
			Cash at Bank	43,53,982.00	43,78,824.00
		<u>52,41,456.00</u>			<u>52,41,456.00</u>

For, Akshar Foundation

For, N C Karnany & Co
Chartered Accountants
FRN: 305103E

Sd/-
Managing Trustee

Sd/-
CA Himanshu Agarwal
Partner
M No: 305050

AKSHAR FOUNDATION

18, Basisthapur Bye lane -3, Beltola Road, Guwahati-781028
Guwahati (Assam)

Income & Expenditure Account for the year ended 31st March, 2016					
Expenditure	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)	Income	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)
To, Teacher Salaries		1,29,000.00	By, Donation and Contributions		51,84,150.00
To, Purchases					
Books & Games	5,509.00				
Printing & Stationery	28,007.00				
Uniform	9,679.00	43,195.00			
To, Administration expenses					
Advertisement	1,020.00				
Bank Charges	2,384.00				
Cleaning	500.00				
Depreciation	20,375.00				
Environmental Education	1,400.00				
Medical Expenses	700.00				
Postage and Courier	270.00				
Professional Fees	5,500.00				
Refreshment Expenses	2,731.00				
Repairs & Maintenance	500.00				
Saraswati Puja Expenses	3,800.00				
Staff Welfare Expenses	2,200.00				
Student Allowance	5,300.00				
Teacher's Day Expenses	1,000.00				
Telephone Expenses	1,300.00				
Training Expenses	3,255.00				
Travelling Expenses	30,657.00				
Website Designing	39,300.00	1,22,192.00			
To, Excess of Income over Expenditure		48,89,763.00			
		51,84,150.00			51,84,150.00

For, Akshar Foundation

For, N C Karnany & Co
Chartered Accountants
FRN: 305103E

Sd/-
Managing Trustee

Sd/-
CA Himanshu Agarwal
Partner
M No: 305050

AKSHAR FOUNDATION

18, Basisthapur Bye lane -3, Beltola Road, Guwahati-781028
Guwahati (Assam)

Balance Sheet as at 31st March, 2016					
LIABILITIES	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)	ASSETS	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)
Capital Fund			Fixed Assets		
Opening Balance	1,09,056.00		Work-in-Progress	5,88,620.00	
Add: Net Surplus	48,89,763.00	49,98,819.00	Computer & Printer	12,160.00	
			Furniture	19,215.00	6,19,995.00
			Current Assets		
			Cash at Bank		
			ICICI Bank 198905000217		43,53,982.00
			Cash in hand		24,842.00
		49,98,819.00			49,98,819.00

For, Akshar Foundation

Sd/-
Managing Trustee

For, N C Karnany & Co
Chartered Accountants
FRN: 305103E

Sd/-

CA Himanshu Agarwal
Partner
M No: 305050



Board of Directors

Dr Alaka Sarma

Executive Director

Alaka is an accomplished educator, columnist, activist, social leader, and law maker. She currently serves as the Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Student Welfare at the University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya. Formerly, she was elected to two terms as a member of the State Legislative Assembly, representing the district of Nalbari. She completed her doctoral dissertation on the economy of Nagaland at the University of Bombay, and has taught at several colleges in Maharashtra and North East India. She has been involved in people's movements in Bihar and Assam and has been a champion of social causes for decades, serving with many charitable organisations over the years.

Parmita Sarma

Associate Director, Operations

Parmita is a humanitarian and social activist with experience leading projects aimed at helping underprivileged children. She completed her master's dissertation on the challenges of educating children in low income communities at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. When she was barely out of her teens, she was already organising and managing educational programs for children in underprivileged communities, as well as working in disaster relief programs. As the Principal of Akshar Forum, she has led the establishment of the school and continues to oversee daily operation.

Mazin Mukhtar

Associate Director, Academic Coordinator

Mazin is an education reformer with extensive experience as a professional tutor and private teacher. He has worked on implementing education programs for at-risk and neglected youth, both in the United States and India. He completed high school and junior college at age fourteen after attending schools in New York, Washington, Egypt, Sudan and South Africa. By fifteen, he was a research assistant in the field of space systems engineering at the University of Maryland, College Park in the United States. Subsequently, he has developed a set of educational and mentoring techniques designed to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds attain outstanding academic outcomes.

Miguel Galaz

Associate Director, Global Strategy

Miguel is a social reformer and political activist with a special interest in science and technology, currently working in the telecommunications private sector in Portugal. He worked for several years as a research assistant studying neuroscience at the Aphasia Research Centre at the University of Maryland, as well as with the Portuguese American Citizenship Project, a campaign for civil rights centred in Washington, D.C. He holds a master's degree in International Relations from IE Business School in Spain, as well as a degree in Philosophy from the University of Maryland.





Akshar Foundation

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