



Akshara Foundation

Every Child in School & Learning Well

This note has been prepared by the Preschool team at Akshara Foundation and is based on interviews with over 20 *anganwadi* workers in Bangalore and Dharwad districts.

An Anganwadi Worker – A Profile

Ganga Bhyramma

Ganga Bhyramma has been an *anganwadi* worker for the past twenty years. She first served in an *anganwadi* in the Kunigal Project for two years and then shifted her family to Bangalore and reported for work in the Byadarahalli *anganwadi* in the Yelahanka Project, where she has been for the last eighteen years.

The Distribution of Children in an Anganwadi

Ganga Bhyramma gives me, an Akshara team member, the details I am looking for about *anganwadis*. An *anganwadi* serves a population of one thousand people. Its working hours are from 9 in the morning to 4 in the evening on all working days. There are on an average 120 children within the ambit of an *anganwadi*, out of whom only 40 children are usually enrolled in the centre.

Ideally, the age-wise distribution of children is as follows:

- 0 to 6 months: 5 children
- 1 to 2 years: 15 children
- 2 to 3 years: 20 children

In actual fact, however, 40 children in the age group of 3-6 years are enrolled in the centre.

These 40 children are recorded so that a mid-day meal and snacks can be supplied to them by the Department.

Ganga Bhyramma's Anganwadi

I enter Ganga Bhyramma's *anganwadi* at 10.15 in the morning and find that she and the helper are there. I notice that Ganga Bhyramma is discussing the day's meeting with a member of the Stree Shakthi women's self-help group.

- The *anganwadi* functions in a government school. The centre is clean and the children are looking neat.
- There are 20 children in the *anganwadi* when I visit, though the admission register shows a strength of 40. Ganga Bhyramma tells me that the absenteeism is because the children going to the nearby school have finished their examinations, with many of them enjoying their holidays. The mood has caught on and the children of her *anganwadi* stay away from attending it.

Training

How is Ganga Bhyramma prepared for her work as an *anganwadi* worker? Are her capacities built in any way? Does the Department give her any training? Are her attributes and qualities discovered and honed for her job as purveyor of preschool education?

- She tells me that the Department trains every *anganwadi* worker and helper for a month at training centres in the state. It lasts for a month and is quite thorough. But, she says, such training happens only when a batch of 60 candidates is available for it.
- UDISHA, a non-governmental organization, also provides training to the *anganwadi* worker in handling children with special needs.

The topics that are covered during training are:

- How to conduct house-to-house surveys for collecting information
- The maintenance of registers
- Preschool education
- Action songs
- Community service
- Providing medicines to patients with tuberculosis

Ganga Bhyamma tells me that the helper in her *anganwadi* also underwent training, as is the normal practice. She was trained to bring children to the *anganwadi*, to prepare food for them, to keep the children neat and her centre clean and tidy and also to manage the children in Ganga Bhyamma's absence.

Duties and Responsibilities

Ganga Bhyamma does her work at the *anganwadi* with complete cognizance of her duties and responsibilities, she says. What are they?

- Ganga Bhyamma, like other *anganwadi* workers, is aware that she has to be available at the centre when her helper goes out to bring the children to the *anganwadi*.
- She knows she has to execute her responsibilities according to a fixed timetable.
- The Department has given her a preschool syllabus which covers a fresh topic every week, which she has to teach. She has to impart to the children preschool skills that will contribute to their all-round development.
- It is when the children are asleep that she goes out into the community to collect information as required or make home visits at the rate of three houses per day.
- The children are woken up after their nap at 3 in the afternoon and Ganga Bhyamma engages them in games and outdoor activities for half an hour. She then supervises their early evening snack and sees to it that the children are neat and clean before she sends them home.



- Within the purview of her job are the registers she has to regularly maintain and update – twenty four of them in all. I get to talk to her about the registers once she is free for some time in the afternoon.

The Timetable

Now, it is time for the day's activities. This is the timetable Ganga Bhyamma follows, though there are days when she finds it difficult to accommodate every aspect of her work in it. Sometimes the children arrive late and the morning gets off to a late start.

Sl. No.	Activity	Timing	By
1.	Prayer, exercise	9.30 - 10.30 am	Ganga Bhyamma
2.	Games	10.30 - 11am	Ganga Bhyamma
3.	Teaching the alphabets	11- 11.30 am	Ganga Bhyamma
4.	Comprehensive skills	11.30 - 12 noon	Ganga Bhyamma
	Short break	12 - 12.15 pm	
5.	Action songs	12.15 - 12.30 pm	Ganga Bhyamma
6.	Storytelling	12.30 - 12.45 pm	Ganga Bhyamma
7.	Reading	12.45 - 1pm	Ganga Bhyamma
8	Providing medicines to new mothers and patients with tuberculosis	1- 1.30 pm	Ganga Bhyamma
9.	Break for lunch		Anganwadi helper
10.	Resting hour for the children	2 – 3 pm	-
11.	Games, snacks for the children	3 - 3.30 pm	Ganga Bhyamma and helper
11.	Register maintenance	3.30 – 4 pm	Ganga Bhyamma

The Day's Activities for Children

- It is 10.40 and Ganga Bhyamma says a prayer in which the children participate enthusiastically. She then engages them in a free and frank conversation about what they ate before coming to the *anganwadi*. Did they have a bath? Did they brush their teeth? The children are bright and active and answer readily, with no hesitation or inhibition.
- Then Ganga Bhyamma writes the theme of the week on the board. Monday was a holiday. She had her monthly meeting on Tuesday and today is Wednesday, in effect the first day of the week for the children of the *anganwadi*. She starts the week's curriculum – vehicles - with an informal introduction to it, in a conversational tone, asking the children a few questions like what they see on the road, the cars, the buses, the lorries and jeeps, how they would identify them and what purposes they serve.
- Then she gets the children involved in a train game and a bus game. She also gives the children the vehicle pegboard that Akshara has supplied to all the *anganwadis* as part of the teaching-learning material of its preschool programme. The children sit in a circle and Ganga Bhyamma asks who among them would do the activity. Many children come forward, and she gives everyone a chance. The other children watch like spectators as each child commences the activity, finishes the game and identifies the vehicle. Ganga Bhyamma sits with all of them as they are immersed in the activity, asking questions about the vehicles and requesting them to identify them on the Akshara charts.

- She is a good communicator; she builds rapport with the children and explains concepts in a way that they understand. She strikes a pleasant equation with the *anganwadi* helper and, together, they support the children in the activity and assess their capabilities.
- The next activity is action songs and the children sing nearly ten songs with accompanying actions. Then they play a few warm-up games before their leisure break when they go to the toilet, wash their hands and have their food. The children play by themselves the rest of the afternoon.

Ganga Bhyamma says she has prepared an album for all the themes of the syllabus, has a collection of English rhymes and an alphabet book which she has obtained from English medium schools, all of which she uses to teach her children. She says she is very happy with the Akshara kit. It is very useful when she teaches the children about vehicles, fruits, vegetables, colours and shapes. She can show them examples, pictorial representations, and the children understand better what she is talking about.



Time for Lunch

The *anganwadi* helper has prepared lunch and the children get a plate full of food to eat. The helper supervises the children and sees to it that they do not spill or eat in a disorderly manner.

- *Anganwadis* receive rations once a month from the Department, Ganga Bhyamma says. This is for the 40 children who are enrolled in the centre, for 10 pregnant women in the community, for 10 new mothers and for 2 girls in the 14-18 age group, even if they happen to have dropped out of school.

The mid-day meal usually consists of rice and lentils or a rice preparation at 1.30 in the afternoon, followed by a snack at 3.30 pm. The portions served per person are: Lentils – 22 grams; rice – two glasses; wheat flour enriched with vitamin A for the afternoon snack – one packet.

The Anganwadi Registers

I have a lengthy talk with Ganga Bhyamma after she finishes her preschool activities about the registers an *anganwadi* worker maintains. She gives me a list of administrative records *anganwadis* must keep:

Sl. No.	Registers	To be Maintained		
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly
1	Children's attendance register		-	-
2	Staff attendance register		-	-
3	Pregnant women's record		-	-
4	Food distribution register		-	-
5	Bal Vikas Samithi ration register	-	-	
6	"Graded" children's register	-	-	
7	Beneficiaries' register	-	-	
8	Household survey register	Before work on an <i>anganwadi</i> starts		
9	Birth register	When births take place		
10	Death register	When deaths take place		
11	Survey register of pregnant women, new mothers, births and deaths		-	-
12	Parents' meeting register	-		-
13	Inoculation register	-		-
14	Household visits' register		-	-
15	Register of work done		-	-
16	Visitors' Book	As and when visitors come		
17	Contingency bills' register			
18	Adult girls' register	-	-	
19	Stock register	-	-	
20	Medicine register	-	-	
21	Monthly register of the programme	-	-	
22	Bhagyalakshmi Bonds Scheme register	-	-	
23	Empty gunny bags' register	-	-	
24	Ration distribution register		-	-
		8	2	10

I ask her about the preschool register and she says she does not maintain one. All that she has in place of the preschool register is the manual Akshara has given her and the "Chili pelli" activity book supplied by

the Department. She also mentions that she shares child assessments with mothers, Bal Vikas Samithi members and schoolteachers.

The Health of the Children, the Community

I get to know from Ganga Bhyamma about an *anganwadi* worker's activities. A large part of her work is to do with the community, it is public service, and she talks about it.

- To begin with, every child in the centre is weighed every month. Those who weigh less than their age-appropriate weight are recorded as “graded” and get a monthly sum of Rs. 700 from the Department for medicines and tonics. They are purchased by Ganga Bhyamma and given to the parents, usually the mothers, and she is reimbursed by the office of the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO).

An Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife (ANM) visits her centre between 9.30 am and 1.30 pm every second and third Thursday of the month and conducts an inoculation programme for the children. Ganga Bhyamma has a supportive role to play here. She has the injections ready, keeping them separately for the children, pregnant women and new mothers. It is the helper's responsibility to bring the women to the centre on the day when the ANM visits. The ANM also visits the centre every week to collect information from Ganga Bhyamma about the births in the community. Once a year a specialist from a government hospital conducts a health check-up for the children and the community women at her centre.

Parents' Meetings

Like other *anganwadi* workers, Ganga Bhyamma holds separate meetings every month for the parents of 0-3 year old children and for the parents of 3-5 year old children, usually between 3 and 4 pm.

The discussions focus on three main issues.

- Send the children regularly and on time to the centre.
- Ensure that cleanliness and hygiene are maintained.
- The health of pregnant women and new mothers is a matter of concern and Ganga Bhyamma advises them.

Ganga Bhyamma uses this opportunity to provide medicines to patients with tuberculosis. In fact, she often sets apart a day to take patients with tuberculosis to the health centre. Most of the time the patients seek her support and request her to accompany them.

The Support of Community Groups

- As an *anganwadi* worker, Ganga Bhyamma facilitates and supports women's self-help groups called Stree Shakthi groups. She says there are two such groups attached to each centre. The members assemble once a month, make an assessment of each one's loan requirement and entrust the reports and accounts of the group with the *anganwadi* worker who, in turn, submits them to the CDPO's office.

Ganga Bhyamma runs her *anganwadi* in a government school. She enjoys the support of the community and the school's Headmistress. Her centre is large enough to accommodate 40 children. Most of the children get admitted to the same government school every year when they pass out of the *anganwadi*.

- Ganga Bhyamma has excellent networking abilities. She has built strong associations with local leaders and Bal Vikas Samithi members and they oblige her readily when she comes up with a request. Ganga Bhyamma's centre has a functioning Bal Vikas Samithi.

- She recently asked for an electricity connection for her centre. Bal Vikas Samithi members organized it for her in three days and a local leader donated a fan and Stree Shakthi members provided mats for the children.
- Ganga Bhyamma also utilizes the Bhagyalakshmi Bonds to her advantage. Stree Shakthi members are sometimes willing to spend a portion of their Bonds for utilities and conveniences for the *anganwadi* and add a little more to make up the cost of major items, like the big wardrobe they purchased recently for the centre.

Ganga Bhyamma says she is fortunate to have a full-fledged Bal Vikas Samithi. Each Samithi is mandated by government to have 13 community members in its committee. There are several *anganwadis* where the Samithis are largely defunct and serve no purpose, existing only on paper, in the records the *anganwadi* worker maintains.

Community Service

Ganga Bhyamma, like most other *anganwadi* workers, gets a window of time between 1.30 and 3 pm when community service dominates.

- They distribute medicines to patients in the community who have tuberculosis. They undertake the surveys necessary for ration cards for people of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and identification cards. They are prepared to handle an outbreak of cholera, going from door to door ensuring that cleanliness is maintained, that patients are appropriately treated and counseling the family. It is part of their job to identify eligible and interested women who want contraception, or a family planning operation.

Visitors to the Centre

- *Anganwadi* workers are always prepared for surprise visits by top officials of the Department, like the Deputy Director, Women and Child Welfare. Ganga Bhyamma says she looks forward to them. The visits usually last for half an hour and the interaction focuses on the smooth running of the centres.
- The CDPO makes flying visits to 15-20 randomly chosen *anganwadis* in all Project Circles once a month. The Supervisor visits all the centres under his jurisdiction once a month. They guide, support and mentor *anganwadi* workers in the effective execution of their duties and responsibilities and in the orderly maintenance of the registers. Problems the Supervisors cannot solve are attended to by the CDPO.
- Ganga Bhyamma's relationship with her Supervisor is cordial, she says, and that is more the norm than the exception. Most *anganwadi* workers maintain a pleasant association with Department officials.
- The Supervisors visit those centres more frequently where the *anganwadi* worker is found to be irregular and delinquent in her responsibilities or where children are lagging behind in learning.

Meetings and Discussions

Like other *anganwadi* workers, Ganga Bhyamma has once-a-month meetings at the CDPO's office, between 2.30 and 6 pm, where various aspects of her work, including her salary, are discussed. The Bhagyalakshmi Bonds Scheme comes up for special mention. *Anganwadi* workers also attend two meetings that last from 10.30 am to 6 pm at the Project Circle office, where they submit their reports on population, number of pregnancies, births and deaths.

Voices of Grievances

My team members and I spoke to a cross-section of *anganwadi* workers and this is what they had to collectively say:

- “Most of our time goes in updating community-based information for our various records. Besides, women of the community do not come on time to collect their medicines or their rations.
- We are pressurized, sometimes harassed, by the community and the Health Department if anything goes wrong with pregnant women, newborn babies and “graded” children.
- We are exclusively responsible for maintaining the accounts of the Stree Shakthi groups.
- Some of our centres have no proper structure, no building. Sometimes we run a centre in a temple, but the people who visit it create a disturbance.
- The onus is on us to rent a place if there is no proper building for our centre. We make the arrangements at our own expense and are never reimbursed despite the Department’s assurances.
- The time we spend on preschool education is hardly half an hour a day. There is a fixed schedule for it, but it is hard to maintain when there are so many other commitments and so many programmes assigned to an *anganwadi* worker.
- It is the helper who manages preschool education when we are busy convincing people in the community.”

I present this list of practical grievances to Ganga Bhyramma. She readily concurs, saying that a very committed *anganwadi* worker will get roughly twelve days in a month for teaching the children and doing some activities for them. She says her work is hectic, more than she can manage on some occasions.

Ganga Bhyramma’s Day

I have had an enjoyable experience at the *anganwadi* observing Ganga Bhyramma as she goes through her day, teaching the children and watching them learn. I have learnt so much about her work and routine by talking to her. I have learnt what it is to be an *anganwadi* worker.

- At day’s end Ganga Bhyramma tells me that she would not have concentrated on preschool education had I not visited the centre. She had to postpone some urgent work to another day in view of my visit. She had to inform the 2009-2010 Bhagyalakshmi Bond beneficiaries that they have to submit a few additional documents the Department has asked for. She has 70 mothers to inform and she had planned to meet them in their homes that morning.

This is Ganga Bhyramma’s day. This is her work. There is a lot that is expected of her, and a lot that she does. For Ganga Bhyramma, the children in her centre come first. But, often, they take second place when there is so much else that she has to do. Often, they get crowded out by the multitudinous demands on her role and her time. I did not hear her complain, though, not once, and that to me is a true test of her character.