

প্রবীণী ফাউন্ডেশনের টুকটাকি

The Probini Foundation Digest

In support of education for the needy & orphaned

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Fall 2000

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Mr. Subhas Mazumdar of Probini (NY) with Probini sponsor Sumi, center, and Bangladesh Gandhi Ashram Director Jharna Dhara Chowdhury

Probini in the News:

Probini appeared in the following publications:

- News-India Times*, March 24, 2000; p 53.
- India Abroad*, April 7, 2000; p II.
- Little Neck Times-Ledger*, April 27, 2000; p 3.
- Eastern Queens Democratic Club Newsletter*, May 2000; p 4.
- India Abroad*, June 2, 2000; p II.
- Visit <http://www.hollisny.com/probini.html> – the work of Dr. Michael Kurtz

On May 4, 2000 a five-member delegation of Gandhi Ashram Trust of Noakhali, Bangladesh [a

Probini-supported organization] met with President Sahabuddin Ahmed of Bangladesh at the Presidential Palace, Bangavaban in Dhaka. They discussed issues related to the Ashram and for the upcoming celebration of Gandhiji's birthday on October, 2, 2000. The delegation included Justice Debesh Chandra Bhattacharya, Mrs. Chitra Bhattacharya, Member of Parliament and a Probini Advisor, Ms. Jharna Dhara Chowdhury, Ashram Director, Mr. Rakhil Mazumdar and Rabindra Nath Datta-Gupta

Probini thanks its most recent contributors:

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ANNUAL LUNCHEON HONORS LOCAL ACTIVISTS

By Dr. Kusumita P. Pedersen
Chair of Religious Studies
St. Francis College, Brooklyn

At the annual Probini Foundation luncheon three individuals were honored. Probini supports orphanages in Bangladesh and India. The awardees are: Mrs. Chan Jamoona, born in West Indies and the founder of the Indian Senior Citizen Center in Richmond Hill, Queens; Mr. Jay Hyman a social worker with a Jewish senior center in New York City and active in helping the poor in the Subcontinent, and Bangladesh-born Ratan Barua, a Buddhist scholar and a human rights advocate. The festive program coincided with the observation of the Indian and Bangladeshi New Year or Nababarsha which was held at Santoor Restaurant in Queens.

At the celebration Mrs. Chan Jamoona told the story of how the Richmond Hill Center had started from just an idea about a real need, but with no funds or facilities. She convinced a colleague for allowing Jamoona to use a building. She requested her own brother to staff the center for it to get off the ground. Now it has grown into a thriving service with aspirations to become a national organization. Jamoona is active with the [West Indian] United Hindu Council.

Ms. Claire McIntee, Superintendent of NYC School District 26, presented the "Samaj Bandhu" or Friend of the Community Award to Jamoona. District 26 in Eastern Queens is the best school district in NY City and one of the best of NY State has a large concentration of students of South Asian origin. In her speech Ms. McIntee expressed her views on local public schools, and welcomed all parents and residents to take great pride in public schools of NYC. She also invited parents to get involved with local schools and PTAs.

Jay Hyman is presently working in conflict management but has had a long career in Jewish senior services, accepted his award saying the Probini Foundation "feels like family" and that he is known to many younger Indians as "Uncle Jay." He has worked tirelessly with Probini since its inception.

Morshed Alam, Vice President of NYC School Board 29 in Queens was a recent candidate for the New York State Senate, presented the *Anath Bandhu* [Friend of the Orphan] Award to Jay Hyman. Mr. Alam in his speech invited all the New Americans to get involved in local affairs of their adopted country. He indicated that United States provides opportunities to all newcomers, however, the newcomers have to play their role along with the native-born.

Ratan Barua was honored for his Buddhist scholarship as well as his social work and advocacy of religious freedom and human rights for religious minorities in Bangladesh. He has worked to build the Bangladesh Buddhist community in the U.S. and provided service to the Buddhist Council of New York. Mr. Barua is active in NGO programs at the United Nations.

Professor Basabi M. Ratnam, a former President of Faculty Staff Council at the State University of New York at Old Westbury, presented *Samaj Bandhu* or "Friend of the Community" Award to Mr. Barua. Dr. Ratnam spoke of imparting Indian values to the next generation of Indian-Americans. In her speech she spoke of importance of academics, extra-curricular activities, tradition, family and heritage in balance with the Americanization of new generations.

There were a number of other individuals who spoke at the celebration. They include Dr. Shefali Dastidar who spoke of her recent visit to Sishu Kalyan Parishad orphanage in India, Pijush Dey presented the Annual Report of Probini, Mr. Angan Halder spoke of a new

immigrant's experience, Mr. Larry Greenburg, a Democratic leader, Mr. Subhas Mazumdar spoke of his recent visit to Bangladesh Gandhi Ashram, Dr. Thomas Dulu Roy, Ms. Bernice Siegal, assistant to NYC Councilman Leffler, Mr. Chet Szarejko, a Democratic leader who reported on the trip [with Alam] to Bangladesh with President Clinton, and Ms.

Vanitha Venugopal. A new *Probini Digest* newsletter was released on that occasion.

With the funds raised at the luncheon Probini will set up additional scholarships at the Bangladesh Gandhi Ashram,

Sishu Kalyan Parishad [Children's Welfare Association] Orphanage, India, Harijan Palli Sri Ramakrishna School and at Jagatpur Ashram Orphanage, both of Bangladesh.

At the beginning of the celebration Mrs. Nandita Bagchi reminisced about the joyous Nababarsha tradition in India and Bangladesh, normally celebrated with gift giving and offering of sweets. An original poem for the occasion was read out by Mrs. Purabi Nandi, while a Tagore poem was recited by Gautam Bagchi. Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, served as Master of Ceremonies who read a poem of Sri Chinmoy welcoming the new millenium. Dr. Pedersen was assisted by Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar, Chair of the Trustees.

New Sponsors:

The following girls will be receiving our scholarships at Dhaka Girls Orphanage till their high school graduation: Shilpi Mondal [age 6], Jyoshna Das [age 6], Suchitra Rani Sutradhar [age 7] & Mukta Rani Sarkar [age 5]



Probini Projects

Ramakrishna Orphanage, Comilla – Probini is providing scholarships for 8 children.

Dhaka Girls Orphanage Society of 1908 – Probini is supporting 6 girls until they complete their school education.

Barisal Poor College Student Scholarship – Probini has established funds to provide for loan scholarships to 4



college students.

Gandhi Ashram Trust, Noakhali – Probini is supporting the education of Susharma Sarkar and Mohammad Mamun Chowdhury

Jagatpur Ashram Orphanage, Chittagong – Probini is supporting 2 tribal boys until they complete their school education

Manab Kalyan Kami Anathalaya (Orphanage for the Improvement of Mankind), **Netrokona** – Probini is supporting 2 boys until they complete their school education.

Harijan Palli Sri Ramakrishna Bidyalaya (Free School of the Sweeper's Colony), **Dinajpur** – Probini is providing funds for the salaries of two teachers.

Sishu Kalyan Parishad (Children's Welfare Association Orphanage), **Calcutta** – Probini has donated funds for 2 scholarships.

New Year, Nababarsha, Poila Baisakh

by Nandita Bagchi
Teacher and Businesswoman

The first day of a new year is a point in continuing time, which both connects and disconnects. It disconnects us from the past, provides a pause to take an account of the errors and achievements of the past and connects us to a coming time, which may benefit from the experiences of the past.

The Bengali *nababarsho*, literally translated new year, is no different from the 1st January new year celebrated all over the world: a time to rejoice and anticipate the happiness and thrill of the days to come. But is it really the same? If so, what's the point in celebrating two New Year's? Or, can there be two New Year's at all? A more pertinent question would be why celebrate something, which hardly has any relevance in the practical day to day existence of ours, particularly for us who live in the USA?

The answer to all these questions could be provided by two further questions. Ask any Bengali what's the date of the Bengali calendar today, very few or none perhaps would be able to answer. It's nothing to find fault with; after all it's not the working calendar for us. But ask her our famous poet Rabindranath Tagore's birthday, she won't be able to remember the English calendar date, the answer invariably will be *panchishe* [25th] *Baisakh*. The celebration of the Bengali new year is not particularly the celebration of a

practical/official calendar. It is a celebration of a cultural and ritual calendar - an emotional charting of time.

For us here, the nababarsho celebration brings some amount of nostalgia. The feeling of the new year was in the air almost a month before the actual day. The annual year-ending sale of saris and garments would begin in all pomp in Gariahat and Shyambazar shopping areas of Calcutta. We didn't spare any pains to walk from one shop to another choosing our new dress for the occasion. We also started planning the menu for the feast on the new year day. I remember the festive mood in the houses, in the neighborhood. To mark an auspicious beginning there would be special pujas or worship of the household deities, new fruits and flowers of the season would be offered. Our house, like any other house in the neighborhood, would be full of guests. Youngsters would pay their respects (*pronam*) to the elders and the elders would bless them in return and of course treat them to a feast, or at least offer them sweets. The feasts would be lavish. The sweetmeat shops would do brisk business. 1st Januarys were for picnics, *poila baishakhs* for family and social gatherings. Sometimes local clubs would arrange for cultural functions in which children of the neighborhood would gladly display their talents. It was a day to share and

minge with others, a day to strengthen bonds of love and fellow-feelings.

Poila baisakh was also a special day for the traders and shopkeepers. They would go the temples with their offerings to worship the gods of success and prosperity, or arrange for a puja in the shop. A new account book would be used from that day. In our childhood our special attraction was the *halkhata* or the opening of new accounts. Customarily, one had to clear all dues, if one had any, and start a new account with the business. We enjoyed the sight of the gaily-decorated shops, but most of all the free bottle of coke and the box of sweets each shop presented. It was an atmosphere of a get-together in which commercial relationships mattered little. In this multicultural county we are constantly moving through a process of forgetting some practices, not in use, and learning new ones for practical purposes. We are on our way to become global citizens and 1st January in all intent and purpose is the new year day. But when on a *poila baisakh* day I call or e-mail my friends and relatives to convey my regards of love, or participate in a gathering arranged on the occasion, I become conscious of my cultural roots. I remember the days I have left behind and may be just for a while try to ponder over my identity.

Letters to Probini

Dear Probini:

We are glad to learn that Probini has decided to name a scholarship at the Bangladesh Ramakrishna Orphanage in Comilla in honor of Freedom Fighter Lokendra Kumar Sengupta. The scholarship will help needy students pursue their studies and also commemorate a selfless patriot of Comilla in undivided Bengal. We convey our thanks to you all for such a decision.

Probini's endeavor to spread education among the needy and the orphans is praiseworthy. We shall let you know if someone will be available to render you active cooperation in this matter.

Bibhas Roy, Working President
Lokendra Kumar Sengupta Smirti [Memorial]
Raksha [Preservation] Committee
8D Ekdalia Place, Calcutta 19

Dear Probini:

We are renovating the old building of Gandhi Ashram. Once completed, it will be made into a museum of the anti-British independence movement. On Gandhiji's death anniversary [January 30, 2000] the Indian Deputy High Commissioner, Sri Chakraborty, visited us with his wife. District Administration officials were there too.

Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, Rajmohon Gandhi visited us recently with his wife. He also visited Srirampur village [where Gandhiji visited in 1946 to stop an anti-Hindu pogrom that was taking place in Noakhali district] where a large number of old villagers, Hindu and Muslim, who still remember Gandhi's visit, came to see him.

We are extremely thankful to you for setting up scholarships in honor of 1971 martyrs. Even before we had received your letter, we had selected the names of the first scholarships which exactly matches your order. This is really surprising.

[Bangladesh] Gandhi Ashram, Noakhali

Dear Probini:

You might have received the name of the teacher for whom we pay salary from Probini's fund. This fund not only helps us to run our educational projects among Harijans - the downtroddens - but also helps us to support poor teachers. Srimati Sarbamangala Haldar comes from a poor Brahmin family, mother of three sons. She works for the school, but teachers' salary are so meagre! Moreover, her husband has left her to take another wife. So her condition is precarious.

We are pleased to send you pictures of Harijan Palli School. Swami Prameyanandaji, a Trustee of Belur Mott, came to see us on March 29, 2000. The number of students at the school is increasing steadily. Now we have 142 boys and girls attending the school.

With thanks and namaskars to all of the Probini members.

Swami Amritatwananda
Head, Ramakrishna Mission, Dinajpur, Bangladesh

Dear Probini:

With your new funds we will be supporting Anik Kumar Dey, a ten year old boy, who is attending Class III.

Milan Kanti Chowdhury, Superintendent, Jagatpur
Ashram Orphanage, Chittagong.

Probini Family News

Visit:

In April 2000 Mr. Shyamal Sarma visited two of our sponsors: Barisal and Dhaka.

Birth:

Ancesha on May 6, daughter of Shobha and Angan Halder, and a sister for Maitri and Priyanka. Best wishes.

New Home:

Dipa and Dilip Nath are proud new home owners. We anxiously await their Griha Prabhesh festivities. Congratulations!

Elections:

Several of Probini's friends are contesting elections in New York. Current NYC Councilman, the Hon. Sheldon Leffler for Queens Borough President; Current NYC School Board 29 V.P., the Hon. Morshad Alam for NY City Council; and Ms. Bernice Siegal, Esq., for NY City Council. Best Wishes. [Probini does not endorse candidates.]

College:

The following members of the Probini family have just graduated: *Arnab Karmakar* [Rutgers University]; *Sujata Sinha* [Boston University], *Dipa Nath* [Monroe College], *Soma Ghosh* [Polytechnic University, Brooklyn]; *Shuvo Ghosh Dastidar* [Vassar College]. Also, *Shubhagata Sharma* has just started at the State University of NY at Stony Brook. Good luck to everyone!

Mono Sen Plaza!!!

Through a Proclamation of the City of Jersey City, Liberty Avenue between Newark Avenue and Van Winkle Avenue will also be known as Mono Sen Plaza. Mr. Mono Ranjan Sen is a friend of Probini. On June 2, 2000 an official ceremony was held at Newark and Liberty avenue corner of that great city. Keep up the good work. We are all proud of Monoda. Congratulations!

Great Losses:

Sri Kripal Singh lost her mother, Sita Devi, in April 2000 at her home in India. Ms. Jugraj Kaur, Mr. Singh's wife, is a supporter of Probini. Probini expresses its deepest sympathy.

Sri Kalipada Bhowmik, father of Roop Kumar, passed away on April 28, 2000 at his home in Nayapur village, in Sonargaon Police Station of Narayanganj District of Bangladesh. Kalipadababu served Azad Hind Fouz [Indian National Army] of Subhas Chandra Bose before India's independence in 1947. During Bangladesh Liberation Mr. Bhowmik with his two sons served with the Mukti Bahini [Liberation Force] of Bangladesh fighting Pakistan Army and Bengali collaborators. Probini expresses its deepest sympathy to the Bhowmik family.

Mr. Bagchi, father of Gautam Bagchi, passed away in Calcutta in May 2000. Probini expresses its deepest sympathy to the Bagchi family.

Sri Sushen Mitra lost her mother Srimati Rajlakshmi Mitra in Barisal, Bangladesh. Probini expresses its deepest sympathy to the Mitra family.

On June 12, 2000 Probini lost a dear friend, Mrs. Papri Datta of New York, wife of Dr. Samir Datta, a noted surgeon and activist, and mother of two children. Probini mourns her untimely death.

New Accountant:

Mr. Gopal Patel, CPA, has volunteered to look after our books. He has already gone through our paperwork for the past several years and has put those on proper order. We thank Patel for his generous help.

Visit:

Mr. Chitta Ranjan Mazumder, a Probini Trustee and a Joint Secretary of the Dhaka Girls Orphanage paid a brief visit to New York and met with Probini friends on the evening of

June 20, 2000. There was a lively question-and-answer session after his presentation. Mr. Mazumder invited everybody to visit Probini projects in Bangladesh.

Meetings:

All of you are most welcome to join with us in our Executive Committee meetings. Please call us for specifics on date, time and location.

Correspondence:

Please send new items directly to our editorial address.

Bangladesh Celebration

On January 9, 2001, a holy full-moon day, a Nihar Kana Bhaktabash [Pilgrim Center] will be opened at the historic 18th century Mahilara Mott [temple] in the Barisal district of Bangladesh.

This Mott, listed as a historic site of Bangladesh, was falling down. After a letter writing campaign by Sachi G. Dastidar the temple was repaired by the Bangladesh Govt. The locals then turned it into an ashram inviting a swami and a brahmachari to stay, after it started to attract thousands of pilgrims to the renovated structure. Incidentally, Sachi's wife Shefali was born in that village which she left as a child after an anti-Hindu pogrom following India's partition in 1947.

When Sachi's mother passed away in December 1999, local villagers requested Dastidars that a memorial Pilgrim Center be built named after Sachi and Shefali's mothers who have same first and middle names. [Following partition Shefali lost her mother.]

Several of Probini's friends have joined Dastidar's Nihar Kana Bhaktabash project. They are Halder, Mitra, Pedersen, and Gita Sangha of NY; Sengupta & Som of NJ; Saha and Mazumder of Dhaka. Probini is not connected with the project.

Mahilara Welcomes You All.



Girls at the Harijan Palli Ramakrishna School, Dinajpur, Bangladesh

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Yes, I/We/Our organization would like to help

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