

# প্রবীণী ফাউন্ডেশনের টুকিটাকি

## The Probini Foundation Digest

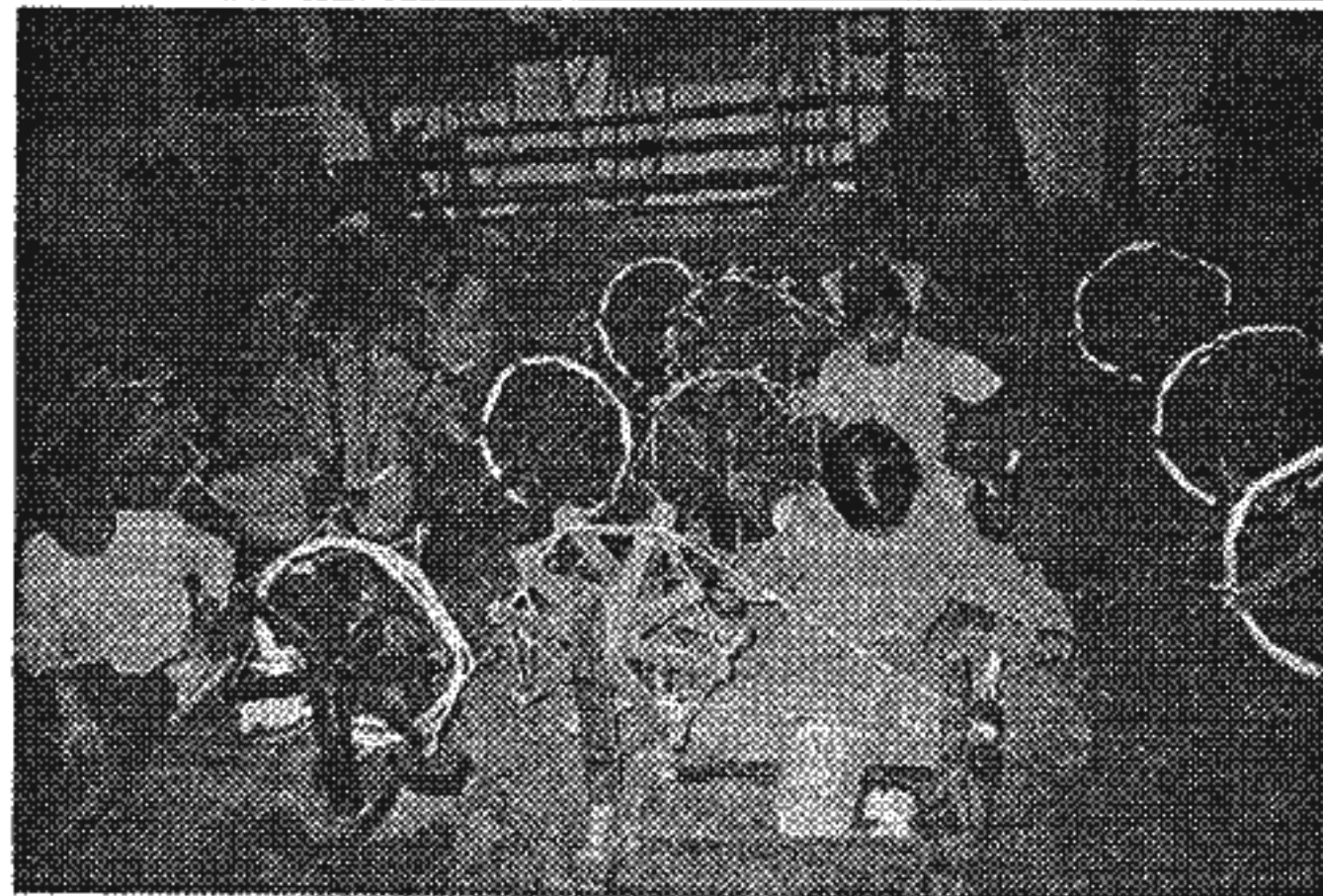
*In support of education for the needy & orphaned*

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**Issue 2**

**Spring 2000**



Picture of the resident girls weaving with their spinning wheels at the Calcutta Children's Welfare Association Orphanage [Dec 24, 1999]

Picture: Sachi G. Dastidar

### From the desk of the Executive Secretary:

As I reflect on the accomplishments of the Probini Foundation this past year, I am pleased to report that we have reached several milestones. We were successful in raising funds to support students and teachers at five orphanages in Bangladesh and India. During the period of 1999-2000, substantial donations went to Barisal Poor College Students' Scholarship; Jagatpur Ashram Orphanage,

Chittagong; Children's Welfare Association, Calcutta; Mathor O Dome Palli Ramakrishna Bidyalaya (Free School of the Sweeper's Colony), Dinajpur; and Gandhi Ashram Trust, Noakhali. We are amply rewarded by the joy and heartfelt gratitude that the youngsters express for their sponsors in letters received by the Probini Foundation.

- Lakshmi Malroutu

Probini thanks its most recent contributors:

Debajyoti & Kabari  
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## Newsbits

### Marriage:

Barun Mukhopadhyay was married to Uma Gupta in February 5, 2000. Best wishes to the newlyweds.

### Award:

Srimati Jharna Dhara Chowdhury, Director of Gandhi Ashram Trust of Noakhali, and director of the orphanage at Gandhi Ashram received the prestigious Gandhi International Award of Raman Lal Bajaj Foundation in 1999. Probini supports the orphanage and a Loan Scholarship Program at the Gandhi Ashram. Congratulation to Jharnadi for a job well done! We wish her continued success.

### A Deep Loss:

Sabyasachi [Ghosh Dastidar] of Probini lost his mother, Srimati Nihar Kana Ghosh Dastidar on December 14, 1999. She was 94. Mother inspired Sabyasachi and Shefali to start the Foundation, earlier known as Probini Trust, to help educate the needy. Mrs. Ghosh Dastidar was born in 1905 at her maternal grand-father's home in Barisal and grew up in Faridpur, her parent's home, and Dhaka. While at Faridpur she received a Gold Medal for standing first at the Chatrabritti Examination and later a Silver Medal while at Dhaka for receiving the highest mark in Bengali at the School Final examination. She is survived by all of her five children, and many grand children and great-grand children. Probini grieves for her loss. May her soul rest in peace.

### New Homes:

We have several new home owners in Probini family. Ajit & Tripti Datta, Lakshmi Malrouth and Kusumita Pedersen have all become new home owners. We are anxiously waiting for their *Griha Prabesh* festivities. Good luck!

One late October evening I got a call from someone that I recently met. On the other end of the phone was a social pillar of the Indian community in Almaty, Mr. Hira Lal Wangnoo. Mr. Wangnoo is the head of the international SOS - Kinderdorf organization in Central Asia. SOS builds villages around the world for orphaned children. "Namaskar," he said. "Sachibabu, please save Thursday evening for us. I would like to take Shefali and you to the left 20-storey tall building at the Republic Square. I want you to meet some people who are involved in helping the needy." Republic, Respublik as it is said in Russian, Square is the wide-open space in front of the former Parliament Building of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan. After Kazakhstan emerged from the Soviet breakup as the Republic of Kazakhstan, its capital was removed from Almaty, earlier known as Alma-Ata, to the north in Astana. Other government offices now use the beautiful Parliament Building, with the majestic snow-capped Chimbulak mountain, a part of the Tien-shan range, on the background. The square is used for various public fairs and gatherings throughout the year.

Shefali and I were not prepared for the next event. Hirabau and his Kazakh friend Timur led us to a basement computer office where a group of Kazakhstani - Kazakh, Russian, Kyrgyz, Korean, Uighur, Uzbek, Ukrainian and many other nationalities, all speaking

## Probini in Kazakhstan

By Sabyasachi Ghosh Dastidar

Russian - were engaged in singing bhajan, chanting Sanskrit mantras in front of Sai Baba's picture. They were all followers of Sri Sai Baba. Except for one, no one spoke English. The entire service was conducted in Russian. At the end of the service and prasad distribution Mrs. Bayan Orumbaeva invited us to another small office in the same long basement of that huge office building. Bayan is a slim, soft-spoken lady who wore a dark dress and a picture of Sai Baba in her necklace locket. This is the new office of Diana Fond [Foundation] of Kazakhstan. The Spartan office had only one table, two chairs, and several boxes as filing cabinets and a telephone-cum-fax-cum answering machine. Mrs. Orumbaeva explained how some of them came up with the idea of setting up a foundation to help the needy as economic situation was deteriorating in her homeland, and as wars were raging on in Chechniya, in southwestern Russia. There were other wars in the former Soviet Union as ethnic tension rose with the break up of the nation. She said, "People need help immediately. In the name of Princess Diana we started the foundation. Diana is known around the world for her involvement in eliminating land mine and hunger. American Ambassador's wife has given us lots of relief for distribution to the poor." In August of 1999 Diana Fond received government registration. By December 1999 the Fond was able to collect money, thousands of pieces of clothing and tons of food especially for distribution to Chechniya refugees. "We have heard about your Probini project," Bayan confided, "and we

wanted to discuss our projects with you." Krishna devotees in Kazakhstan had also approached us for their humanitarian projects. They have major feeding and relief programs in Chechniya and at large numbers of cities throughout the former Soviet Union. One of the Vaishnav followers said, "we have this food program because Prabhupada asked us to get rid of hunger from the world, beginning with a 3 km radius of our ashrams and temples. Anyone who is hungry we provide food to them."

Since that first meeting we met Bayan Orumbaeva several times, always in connection with her charitable work. On behalf of Probini I, a non-vegetarian, became their unofficial arbiter when a difference surfaced whether or not to provide only vegetarian food and groceries - as followers of Sai Baba tend to be - or to provide meat, poultry and fish for their food relief program. The other debate revolved around the wisdom of providing cash or kind to the elderly. The day I was leaving Almaty for good Bayan came to visit me again. She was very upbeat. "Please tell your wife that the day I took the beautiful flower-printed sweater it was taken by Dr. Ludmila Petrova who is now in a hospital. Ludmila, a physician, lost her medical job after the break up of Soviet Union. She's now in a desperate situation. We have placed her daughter in an orphanage. Probini's cash donation has been used for that. Please thank Probini for us." It was wonderful to know that amidst one's own difficulty there are people like Bayan Orumbaeva who finds time to help others.

## Probini Establishes Scholarships In Memory Of Bangladesh Martyrs

In one of the darkest days in Indian history a terrible riot was organized in 1946. In order to create a permanent division among Muslims and Hindus in support of the partition of India, a rein of terror was let loose against the minority Hindus of Noakhali district in East Bengal, now Bangladesh. This was known as the Noakhali Killing. A "one man unarmed army" of Mahatma Gandhi went to Noakhali to stop the killing. A large number of nationalists joined Gandhiji for relief and rehabilitation of the innocent victims. Nine of them remained to work for social upliftment in the Gandhi Ashram of Bangladesh. The ashram has been providing food, shelter, education and rehabilitation to poor and abandoned women, orphans and needy children.

During the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, the Pakistani Army and

its Islamic Fundamentalist Bengali collaborators attacked the Ashram. They executed three of the elderly pacifists - Debendra Narayan Sarker, Madan Mohon Chattopadhyaya and Jiban Saha. A fourth, Ajit Kumar Dey was murdered in 1972, in newly independent Bangladesh. Two others fled to India and died there.

During its March 2000 meeting, the Probini Foundation decided to establish scholarships in the name of each of the martyred individuals.

The first scholarship is called **Bangladesh Independence Martyr Debendra Narayan Sarker Memorial Scholarship** [Bangladesh Swadhinata Shahid Debendra Narayan Sarker Smriti Chatrabritti]. The first recipient of this scholarship is Miss Sushama Sarkar [no relation to martyr D. N. Sarker], a student at the Gandhi Ashram's primary school

who has lost her father. Probini's scholarship will support Sushama till her high school graduation.

The second scholarship is **Bangladesh Independence Martyr Madan Mohan Chattopadhyaya Memorial Scholarship** [Bangladesh Swadhinata Shahid Madan Mohon Chattopadhyaya Smriti Chatrabritti]. The recipient of this scholarship is Mohamunad Mamun Chowdhury, who will be starting college in Noakhali

Ms. Jharna Dhara Chowdhury, director of the Gandhi Ashram in Bangladesh, supervises Probini's scholarships at Noakhali. In 1999, Ms. Chowdhury received the prestigious International Gandhi Award of the Ramanlal Bajaj Foundation.

## Jewels Of Our Society: The Honorees

During our 1999 New Year [Baisakh] celebration the following were honored with Samaj Bandhu [Friend of the Community] award for their dedicated effort to improve our quality of life. They are Margaret Fung, Esq., Executive Director of Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund [AALDEF; 212-966-5932] and Prema Vora, Executive Director of Sakhi for South Asian Women [212-868-6741], both of New York. AALDEF has been working hard for over quarter of a century to defend the rights of Asian minorities and towards ending discrimination, while Sakhi has been active for over a decade in protecting South Asian women in the US.

Probini also honored Dr. Priscilla Kusumita Pedersen, Professor of St. Francis College, Brooklyn, NY with Anath Bandhu [Friend of the Orphan] award. Dr. Pedersen is devoted to improve the lives of orphans.

Previous recipients of Samaj Bandhu are [in alphabetical order]: The Hon. Morshad Alam, Member, NYC School Board 29; Dr. Aaron Friedman, NYC School Dist. 26 Superintendent; Dr. Sylvia Gaines, Director, International Child Creative Education Center; Dr. S. N. Sridhar, Professor, SUNY, Stony Brook; Mr. Chet Szarejko, Democratic Leader; Mr. Syed Mohammed Ullah,

Editor, Probashi, NYC; and Mr. Arvind Vora, Activist, Long Island.

Anath Bandhu was awarded to Bangladesh Puja Samiti, NYC; Dr. Shefali Sengupta Dastidar, Probini Co-founder; Mr. Pijush Dey, activist; Dr. Abdul Momen, social activist, Boston; Dr. Nuran Nabi, social activist; Ms. Purabi Nandi, writer; Ms. Faith Willard of Rhode Island, organizer of homes for destitute in Bangladesh.

The year 1407/2000 award recipients are Ms. Chan Jamoona, Founder, Indian Senior Center, NYC; Mr. Ratan Barua, social activist and Buddhist scholar, and Mr. Jay Hyman, social worker, Jewish senior organization.

## Probini Projects

**Ramakrishna Orphanage, Comilla** - Probini is supporting 8 children for the school education:

Anath, Subhas, Chandan, Prafulla, Asutosh, Bikash, Suman and Dilip.

**Dhaka Girls Orphanage Society of 1908** - Probini is supporting 5 girls until they complete their school education.

**Barisal Poor College Student Scholarship** - Probini has established

funds to provide for loan scholarships to college students: Samir, Goutam, Suman, Najmin and Milton

**Gandhi Ashram Trust, Noakhali** - Probini is supporting the education of Sushama 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.

**Mathor O Dome Palli Sri Ramakrishna Bidyalaya** (Free School of the Sweeper's Colony), **Dinajpur** - Probini is providing funds for one teacher's salary.

**Sishu Kalyan Parishad** (Children's Welfare Association Orphanage), **Calcutta** - Probini has donated funds for Rokeya Khatun's education.



## Sishu Kalyan Parishad, Kolkata

[Children's Welfare Organization, Calcutta]: One of Probini's Sponsors

By Shefali S. Dastidar

Sishu Kalyan Parishad, was founded by Mrs. Protima Roy in 1952 at Sarsuna, then a remote area south of Calcutta. The center started as an orphanage with four Hindu refugee girls who lost their parents in Bangladesh [East Bengal] following India's Partition. In December of 1999 when I visited the orphanage with Sachi, a member of Probini Foundation, there were 475 girls living in the Parishad center. Most of the girls have



lost either one or both of their parents. On occasion, Parishad also takes children when both parents are extremely poor and they can not afford to take care of their children. Girls stay at Shishu Kalyan until they graduate from high school. All of their living costs are borne by Parishad. The girls share in a number of chores while living at the center. They are taught weaving, pottery, knitting, sewing, music, and painting among other things. They make handkerchiefs, cloth napkins, dusters, towels, bed covers, and bed spreads. Parishad

markets these items to different organizations to raise funds for the center. A floor mother called *mashi* [aunt] who lives there supervises each floor of each of the buildings. The girls grow up in a family environment with love, discipline, and extracurricular activities.

Probini Foundation is proud to take the full responsibility for Rokeya Khatun, a 6-year-old girl [pictured]. A fund has been set up in Calcutta for her education. Rokeya is currently a second grade student. The workers at Parishad are extremely diligent. All the managers are volunteers. Probini Foundation wishes those individuals success in their noteworthy endeavors.

## Sri Chinmoy Honors Probini Members

By Kusumita P. Pedersen

On August 10, 1999 Sachi and Shefali Dastidar along with their daughter Joyeeta and son Shuvo paid a long-awaited personal visit to Sri Chinmoy at "Aspiration-Ground" on 164th Street in Jamaica Hills, opposite Annam Brahma Restaurant. This outdoor meeting place, more usually known as "the tennis court," is the venue of most of the functions held by Sri Chinmoy and his students during all but the coldest times of year. Sri Chinmoy welcomed Sachi and Shefali with a special program in their honor.

Sri Chinmoy needs no introduction. The occasion on August 10 happened to be the meditation session, open to the public, which Sri Chinmoy holds each month. After the formal meditation Sri Chinmoy asked the whole Dastidar family to come and sit in front in the place of honor. I introduced each of them and

then read aloud Sri Chinmoy's illumining answer to a question Sachi had asked, published in a book of questions asked by university professors. The question was, "I am told that God is an all-powerful and merciful Mother. How can She allow the deliberate killing of small children by men in times of war?"

This was followed by singing of "Amar Sonar Bangla," the national anthem of Bangladesh, Sri Chinmoy's song "Janani Chatrala" and then a special song just written that very day in honor of his guests by Sri Chinmoy - the song called "Sabyasachi Shefali." Shefali commented later, "We were so surprised, and I can't describe the feeling!" We look forward to many more joyful meetings in the years to come.

Sri Chinmoy's own English translation of the original Bengali:

Peace, Peace,  
Peace within my heart reigns  
supreme.  
The soul-stirring flute of Lord  
Krishna is being played  
In my heaven and on my earth.  
The destruction-shadows of dark  
demons  
And the ignorance-delusion of  
sombre night  
Lie long-buried in the depths of  
my body, mind, heart and life.  
My aspiration-flames ever swim  
across  
The expanse of Your  
Compassion-Waters.

## A Letter to Probini

Dear Probini,

I am pleased to inform you that I will sponsor \$10 per month to pay the salary of one teacher of the Methor O Dome Palli School in Dinajpur. I have enclosed a \$120 check for one year for this purpose.

I would like to mention that I grew up and got my education up to intermediate level in Dinajpur. My late father, Fahim Uddin Ahmed, was a teacher in the Mission School and my older sister Shamsun Nahar was the Headmistress of Dinajpur Zila School.

Sincerely,  
Zeenat Nabi

### I'd like to help!

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

- Sponsor \$1,000    Patron \$250    Donor \$100  
 Contributor (any amount) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check(s) payable to Probini

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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