

The Probini Foundation

In support of education for the needy and orphaned

The Probini Foundation
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PROBINI FOUNDATION 2001 FUNDRAISER A HUGE SUCCESS

By Joy B. Karim

On April 28, 2001 Probini Foundation held its Seventh Annual New Year Celebration luncheon and Award Presentation at Santoor Restaurant in Glen Oaks, Queens. It was a huge success. Close to 75 people attended, including many prominent members of the community.

Probini was founded to support social, cultural and education needs for the immigrants and to support education for the needy and orphans in the Indian Subcontinent. To date, more than one million local currency has been saved in fixed-deposit accounts in banks in India and Bangladesh. Interest from these funds is used to provide educational scholarships and teacher salaries in eight orphanages and ashrams. In the New York area, Probini holds meetings and seminars to bridge any gaps between immigrant and native-born communities.

Mr. Angan Halder, a Committee Member, opened the celebration by wishing everyone a Shuvo Naba-barsha [Happy New Year.] The New Year fell this year on April 14. Treasurer Joy Karim presented the annual report highlighting accomplishments including recent support of four orphanages and one school. Those are: Calcutta Children's Welfare Association [Shisu Kalyan Kendra] Orphanage of India; the Chittagong Jagatpur Ashram, the Dhaka Girls and the Noakhali Gandhi Ashram Orphanages, all of Bangladesh; and the Harijan Palli Sri Ramakrishna School of Dinajpur, Bangladesh. It is noteworthy that in localities where Probini offers support, social transformation has come about because villagers and others have collaborated to effect change.

Several individuals were honored for their outstanding service to the community. Drs. Sudhangshu & Ratna Karmakar of New Jersey were honored with *Samaj Bandhu* [Friend of the Orphan] awards for their dedicated work to help educate the poor in the U.S. as well in the subcontinent. Mr. Walter Picardo and Mr. & Mrs. Moazzam & Rafiya Khan were each honored with *Ananth Bandhu* [Friend of the Community] award for their dedication to improve the lives of the native-born and immigrant communities. Mr. Picardo is the founder of Nav-Nirman of New York as well as several other social-service

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Probini Family News

Probini friends:

Muhammad Mamun Chowdhury, a Probini scholarship recipient through Gandhi Ashram at Noakhali, Bangladesh edited *Jayag Katha* journal 1999. *Congratulations!*

Visit:

In June 2001 Sachi G. Dastidar visited several of ashrams and orphanages that Probini supports. Those are Ramakrishna Orphanage, Comilla, Gandhi Ashram of Noakhali, Dhaka Girls Orphanage, Calcutta Children Welfare Association Orphanage. In addition he also visited four new applicants: Durgapur Vivekananda Bani Prachar Samiti-run slum schools, International Brotherhood Mission Buddhist Orphanage of Dibrugarh, Assam, Mahilara Ashram-run adult school and Madaripur Ashram-run Binod school for the poor.

Election:

Two of our members, Biswajit Chakrabarty and Shrikant Mookherji, have been elected to the New York Puja Association.

Congratulations!

Great News!

Probini has received Tax Exempt status from the IRS.

All of your donations to Probini are now fully tax deductible

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PROBINI FOUNDATION FUNDRAISER

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organizations in India. The Khans are the founders of SAMAR, an organization that recruits and registers potential South Asian bone marrow donors. To date, they have registered over 35,000 individuals under the program.

Presenting the citations were special guests Dr. Meena Alexander, a poet, author and Distinguished Professor of the City University of New York; Mr. Rajeswar Prasad, a long-time activist and founder of several Indian-American organizations; and Dr. Dipak Haldar, a Professor of St. Johns University and a former President of the Bengali Association of North America and other organizations.

A number of other individuals spoke at the celebration. Those were New York City Council Candidates Bernice Siegal, Jairam

D. Thakral, and Morshed Alam; Ms. Nahar Alam and Ms. Afroza of the activist organization Andolan; Mrs. Rokeya Haidar an organizer for raising funds for a hospital in Bangladesh; and Mrs. Tulsi Sengupta, Editor of the Bengali paper Sangbad Bichitra. Mrs. Banashree Ghosh read a short story reminiscing how a New Year is observed back home.

Many individuals read poems written for the occasion. They included Ms. Prema Prasad, Dr. Dipak Haldar, Ms. Vanitha Venugopal, Dr. Meena Alexander and Dr. Sudhangshu Karmakar. Ms. Sudha Acharya, an activist with the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, spoke for the need of attending the needs of the growing number of Indian-American senior citizens, while Professor Jerry Arthus spoke on the need to register to vote and for po-

litical empowerment. Ms. Jugraj Kaur spoke on the needs to attend to the social demands of the immigrant communities. Others spoke about the many good works being carried out by Probini in the Indian/South Asian/Bangladeshi/American community.

Funds raised at the luncheon will go to support students at the Noakhali [Bangladesh] Gandhi Ashram Orphanage and to Calcutta Children's Welfare Association Orphanage.

During the celebration, Editor Neiladri Ghoshal released a new issue of the Probini Digest newsletter, while Srikant Mookherjee announced the launching of Probini's new website, www.Probini.com.

Dr. Sachi G. Dastidar, Chair of the Trustees and a Founding Member of Probini, conducted the program. Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, a Committee Member, assisted him.

PROBINI PROJECTS

Ramakrishna Orphanage, Comilla - Probini boys & girls until they complete their school is providing scholarships for several education.

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

Barisal Poor College Student Scholarship - at the Ramakrishna Mission, Barisal.

Gandhi Ashram Trust, Noakhali - Probini is providing scholarships for schoolchildren and loan scholarships to college students

Jagatpur Ashram Orphanage (1898), Chittagong - Probini is supporting several

Manab Kalyan Kami Anathalaya

(Orphanage for the Improvement of Mankind), **Netrokona** - Probini's funds created an agricultural project making them self-sufficient in food.

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 providing scholarships for several girls.



NEW PROBINI SPONSORS

With a check sent to the **International Brotherhood Mission (IBM) Buddhist Vihar and Orphanage** on August 15, 2001, India's Independence Day, Probini from now on will be supporting the Vihar and Orphanage school. The Vihar and Orphanage is located at picturesque Dibrugarh City, in the northeastern Indian state of Assam. It is the largest Buddhist-run vihar and orphanage in that part of the world. Currently IBM has about 500 poor and orphan boys and girls belonging to over 15 different tribal, linguistic and ethnic groups of India, Bangladesh and Tibet. It is headed by the monk Venerable Acharya Bhikkhu Karuna Shastri. Probini is providing funds for teachers at the orphanage school.

PROBINI IN THE NEWS

Indian Reporter, May 25, 2001, p 35

Desi Talk, June 1, 2001, p 22.

GANDHI ASHRAM [NOAKHALI] NAMED SCHOLARSHIPS

Shahid [Martyr] Madan Mohan Chattopadhyay Britti [Scholarship]: Murdered on September 4, 1971 by the Pakistan Army & Bengali Islamists while meditating on the Gandhi Ashram roof.

Recipient: Miss Sushama Sarkar, age 13, mother Srimati Chandana Sarkar, father missing.

Shahid Debendra Narayan Sarkar Britti: Murdered on September 4, 1971 by the Pakistan Army while meditating on the Gandhi Ashram roof.

Recipient: Muhammad Mamun Chowdhury [a loan scholarship for poor college students], father Mohammad Belayet Chowdhury, mother deceased.

Shahid Ajit Kumar Dey Britti: Murdered in February 1972 by the Bengali Islamic terrorists at Baroitona village of Lakshmipur district.

Recipient: Miss Hashina Begum, age 15, mother Srimati Kanaktara Tuni, father deceased.

Shahid Jiban Krishna Saha Britti: Murdered in 1971 through Pakistan Army's torture while in the Sylhet district.

Recipient: Miss Subarna Barman, first grade, mother Srimati Putul Barman, father deceased.

The Late Barrister Hemanta Kumar Bose Britti: Sri Bose donated all his property to create the ashram.

Recipient: Miss Paapi Barman, age 18 months, mother Srimati Putul Barman, father deceased.

The Late Charu Chowdhury Britti: A Gandhi associate and founder of the ashram.

Recipient: Master Shufal Sutradhar [age 4], mother Srimati Tulshi Sutradhar, father deceased.

The Late Biswa Ranjan Sen Britti: Sri Biswa Ranjan Sen was a Gandhi associate and spent all his life serving the poor of Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.

Recipient: Miss Sabitri Barman, 7th grade, mother Srimati Putul Barman, father deceased.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PROBINI LANDSCAPE: SUMMER OF 2001

By Dr. Sabyasachi Ghosh Dastidar

In the summer of 2001 I was heading home to Calcutta with much apprehension. It was the first time that I returned home when none of my parents were there to anxiously await my arrival. Ma had passed away in December 1999, and Baba years before that. It was assuring though that Satyo Mashi [Aunt] was still there.

As friends from India and Bangladesh learned of my visit, they extended invitations for me to visit the ashrams, orphanages and schools that Probini has been supporting: Barisal, Calcutta, Chittagong, Comilla, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Netrokona and Noakhali. Invitations also came from several new applicants to visit: Dibrugarh, Durgapur, Madaripur and Mahilara. They had sought Probini's help educating the poor and orphaned. Since Probini can not help anyone unless one of its Executive Committee Members makes a visit, some had to visit them and submit an evaluation.

Ma had always encouraged me to help orphanages; once in Calcutta I felt

her blessing and profound energy urging me to travel to some of these far flung places. Travel in India and Bangladesh needs lots of advance planning and luck. Moreover, I was traveling first in 110° F summer heat, then through the monsoon downpour. I certainly needed blessings not only from my parents but also from Mother Nature.

Within 48 hours of my arrival I headed off to Durgapur, 158 kilometers away. My niece Mithoo was able to secure a ticket in the fast one-stop Satabdi Express. My host there was the Vivekananda Bani Prachar Samiti [association for the propagation of Swami Vivekananda's message]. They run two schools in the slums of Bagdipara and Baroripara, an area of poor and oppressed groups, and another vocational school at their headquarters. I met with students and teachers of all the schools and took part in presenting certificates to students completing vocational training.

By the time I returned back to Calcutta my travel agent handed me plane

tickets to Dibrugarh, Assam, in north-east India. A two-hour flight took me to the picturesque Brahmaputra valley, close to Burma and Tibet borders. The International Brotherhood Mission Buddhist Vihar and Orphanage had written to Probini seeking help for their orphanage school. The Director, Venerable Bhikku Karuna Shastri, welcomed me with a traditional Assamese *gamcha shawl*. The ashram and orphanage consists of a large three story complex in a residential area of Dibrugarh. Meetings took me to the class rooms, teachers and staff of the Vihar. The Vihar has close to 500 boys and girls of various ethnicity, religion, race and language. It is a bit overcrowded, still every day there are requests for new applicants. It was wonderful to see their work in the midst of hardship.

From Dibrugarh I took a short pleasure trip to Arunachal Pradesh, a lush green and mountainous state bordering Tibet and Burma. Monsoon rain had turned it even greener. At the

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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PROBINI LANDSCAPE: SUMMER OF 2001

(Continued from page 3)

Noading river crossing the ferry had difficulty carrying the automobiles as the river had widened overnight to a kilometer from a few hundred meters.

On my way to the next Probini site in Bangladesh I took a detour through Tripura, flying over the flooded areas of Bangladesh and Assam; I traveled from Dibrugarh to Agartala, Tripura state via Guwahati in Assam state. From the air the area looked more like a lake than the paddy fields that it is, until our plane hit the Agartala runway. In Tripura I met with several top officials, including some of the separatist tribal leaders. When one of the anti-Bengali and secessionist tribal leaders heard of Probini he suggested that it may be a good idea to be associated with Probini for their social upliftment.

From Tripura I went to Comilla Ramakrishna Orphanage in Bangladesh. Comilla was one of Probini's earliest sponsor sites, and I have stayed at the orphanage guest house many times. All 75 boys and their staff waited for me to take a late lunch together.

From there I ventured to the Gandhi Ashram in the Jayag village of Noakhali district. The Director, Jhama Dhara Chowdhury, or Jhamadi, and her assistant Naba had already made many plans. Two days later, June 13, 2001, there was to be a big gathering, and I would have to speak about Probini and on Noakhali's importance to the world. But before that there will be tours of Ashram

projects, the schools, training areas, the agricultural projects, the newly created National Gandhi Memorial Museum.

The Ashram covers hundreds of acres, several ponds and Jayag Lake. This lake was liberated from illegal occupiers through my appeals to the Bangladesh Government. I visited the District Commissioner who was instrumental in removing the illegal occupiers, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer administrator of the local area, the historic Choumuhuni aera where Gandhiji came in 1946 after a ghastly anti-Hindu pogrom created by Islamists to prove that Muslims and Hindus could not live together. This riot sealed the fate of 1947 partition of India. Gandhiji stayed at what is now the ashram during his peace march in 1946.

On the morning of the 15th, I was off to Mahilara village in the Barisal district of south-central Bangladesh to visit an adult school that the local people are running at the 300-year-old Historic Mahilara Mott and the Nihar Kana Bhaktabash pilgrim center-cum-school.

As in Arunachal, the monsoon rain created havoc at one of many river ferries that I had to cross. There was a large gathering of hundreds of rural folks at the Mott and Bhaktabash meeting. At the bus stop about 100 individuals waited for over four hours to welcome the Probini delegation. [Other Probini supporters from Dhaka had joined me for this trip.] Although poor, the villagers have organized started a school to eliminate illiteracy from their adult population. [Elementary education is free in Bangladesh.] It was great to witness such a level of self-awareness. They have sought Probini's assistance to pay for a teacher at the school.

Monk Jiban Maharaj has restored an old ashram and school in Madaripur, in central Bangladesh. Originally established in the 1920s, the ashram and school were destroyed by the Pakistan Army and its Islamist Bengali collabora-

tors. Jiban Maharaj went to Dhaka to bring me to his ashram. He had explored with Probini the possibility of providing for teachers at his free school.

Since that area of Bangladesh is quite depressed, it's difficult for him to raise the salary through donations. I visited his Madaripur Ashram on my way back from Mahilara to Dhaka. His hospitality was overwhelming. I was given a tour of their ashram; it was nice to be reminded how hard work can bring life back to something that was dead.

Back in Dhaka, a tour of the Dhaka Girls Orphanage was waiting for me. As soon as I entered the Orphanage little Basanti, Probini's first sponsor, now a pre-teen, came running to me welcoming "Baba, [Dad] is here!" She then asked about my wife, Shefali, and son, Shuvo, both of whom had visited the orphanage. She then introduced me to several of her friends. I was pleased to meet the new live-in Superintendent, Mrs. Rani Mitra. *Mashi*, as she is known, was originally from Dhaka, but left for India after an anti-Hindu rioting in Dhaka in the 1960s. She is a widow now, and in 2000 came to visit Dhaka. Once she learned that the orphanage needed a Superintendent, she decided to stay. In Dhaka, Monk Nayan Sadhu and Nun Nisha Devi came to take me to another Probini sponsor at Netrokana.

From Dhaka, I went back to Calcutta. In Calcutta Probini supports Shishu Kalyan Parishad [Children's Welfare Association] Orphanage. On June 27, they organized a memorial program when I was to meet the Committee Members, teachers, staff and most importantly, the girls. There are close to 500 girls now residing at the Shishu Kalyan. I enjoyed very much listening to their music, poetry as well as the speeches. The music, laughs, smiles, and bright eyes of all those kids made my journey joyous, tireless and uplifting.

And so, 10 hours after departing Shishu Kalyan, I was off to New York.

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