

# The Probini Foundation Digest

In support of education for the needy and orphaned in Bangladesh and India

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## প্রবিনী ফাউন্ডেশানের টুকিটাকি

Fall 2002

### PROBINI'S NEWEST SPONSOR: DURGAPUR

Swami Vivekananda Bani Prachar Samiti-run Schools in Durgapur, India  
By Sachi Dastidar

In the "Steel City" of Durgapur, in the eastern state of West Bengal, India, the *Swami Vivekananda Bani Prachar Samiti* [Association to Propagate Swami Vivekananda's Message] runs three schools.

Two schools, *Sarada Bidya Mandir* [Sarada Temple of Education], are located in the poor, oppressed-caste Hindu *bustee* [slum] neighborhoods of Bagdipara and Bauripara. The Bagdipara and Bauripara schools provide elementary schooling and after-school programs for education, music and athletics.

Because of a lack of funds, Bani Prachar Samiti was unable to hire permanent teachers for the schools. Probini's funds will pay for teachers at these schools, which are co-ed and open to all.

Most parents of the enrolled children are either illiterate or have very little education. Most work in menial and low-paying manual jobs or, in the case of the women, as maids. Sadly, the dropout rate among the children is very high, unless properly nurtured. Most of the students do have high ambi-

tion, nevertheless. Bani Prachar Samiti is providing education to these boys and girls, and working with their parents through after-school programs to prevent the high attrition.

The third school is located at the Bani Prachar headquarters building, formerly the home of a Durgapur Steel Authority employee, on Vidyasagar *Sarani* [street]. This center provides vocational training programs for men and women, classes for children and adults.

(Continued on page 2)

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## Probini News

### New Students

The following students from the Arunachal Pradesh state of Indian Northeast bordering Tibet were recently admitted to at the Assam Buddhist International Brotherhood Mission Orphanage: *Sriman* [master] Tashi Tsering, Tenzin Therchin, Jambey Tenzin, Dondup Rinchin, Tenzin Choigey, Thutan Sambar, Thuptan Genden, Gtsewang Tashi and Tenzin Jambey, and *Kumari* [miss] Ngang Chosom, Drema Choizom, Sangey Wangmo, Tenzin Lhamu, Tashi Tsomo, Sonam Lhamu, Jamyang Drema Damo, Tsering Lhamu, Kesang Drema, Lham Jomba, Chorten Drema, Tashi Drema, Norb Lhamu and Lham Yoton.

### New Teacher

Venerable Acharya Bhikku Karuna Shastri, the Founder and General Secretary, has appointed Miss Namita Saha as the first teacher at the Assam Buddhist International Brotherhood Mission Vihar & Orphanage with the support of Probini funds. Miss Saha holds a B.A. degree in liberal arts. Congratulations to Miss Saha!

### Award

The Assam Buddhist International Brotherhood Mission has been presented the Rajiv Gandhi *Manab Seva* [Human Service] Award by the Assam State Government for their humanitarian work.

### Probini Thanks

Mr. Gerardo Espinal was the first intern to work with Probini. Gerardo is completing a B.A. degree at the State University of New York at Old Westbury. Probini thanks Gerardo for his diligence.

## Remember!

Probini has Tax Exempt status from the IRS.

All of your donations to Probini are fully tax deductible

## PROBINI'S NEWEST SPONSOR: DURGAPUR

(Continued from page 1)

It also houses a museum, a library and a souvenir store.

Swami Vivekananda, after whom the governing association is dedicated, was a turn of the century Hindu monk, possibly the most famous disciple of the 19th century Hindu sage Sri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda spread the message of self-awareness, tolerance and national revival during the British colonial rule of India. Swami Vivekananda came to America in 1893 to speak to the Parliament of Religions and spread the message of universal brother-

hood preached by Hinduism. [During his visit in 1893, Swami Vivekananda opened a number of Ramakrishna Missions and Vedanta Centers in the U.S.] Sarada Debi, a sage after whom the two schools in Bagdipara and Bauripara are named, was the wife of Sri Ramakrishna.

Durgapur, about 125 miles northwest of Calcutta, was once the place where India marched towards modernization after it gained independence from Britain. In its first five-year plan, India built its first steel plant in Durgapur, turning it from a sleepy village to a metro-

politan area of about 500,000 people currently.

Today most of the industries are closed or are running at huge deficits, and the area is in economic ruin. The West Bengal state government has been incapable in reviving its economy. The state government has not been able to help these grassroots, self-help social and educational movements.

The Bani Prachar Samiti has selected *Srimati* [Ms.] Jharna Bauri, recipient of a B.A. degree in liberal arts, as the first teacher receiving support from the Probini funds.

## PROBINI PROJECTS



Where We Are Trying To Help

**Assam Buddhist Vihar Orphanage, Dibrugarh, India** - Probini is providing funds for teachers' salaries.

**Ramakrishna Orphanage, Comilla, Bangladesh** - Probini is providing scholarships for several students.

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

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

**Sri Sarada Bagdipara Schools, Durgapur, India** - Probini is providing funds for teachers' salaries.

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

**Jagatpur Ashram Orphanage (1898), Chittagong, Bangladesh** - Probini is supporting several boys & girls until they

complete their school education.

**Madaripur Pranab Ashram (1920s), Bangladesh** - Probini is providing funds for teachers' salaries at the free co-ed Binod Bidya Niketan school.

**Mahilara Ashram School, Barisal, Bangladesh** - Probini is providing funds for teachers' salaries.

**Manab Kalyan Kami Anathalaya** [Orphanage for the Improvement of Mankind], **Netrokona, Bangladesh** - Probini's funds created an agricultural project making them self-sufficient in food.

**Harijan Palli Sri Rama-krishna Bidyalya** [Free School of the Sweeper's Colony], **Dinajpur, Bangladesh** - Probini is providing funds for the salaries of two teachers.

**Sishu Kalyan Parishad** [Children's Welfare Association Orphanage], **Calcutta, India** - Probini is providing scholarships for several girls.

## PROBINI'S BAISAKH (NEW YEAR) CELEBRATION ATTRACTS A LARGE CROWD

By Ms. Joy B. Karim

Probin Foundation's 8th Annual Baisakh (New Year's) celebration was held on April 27, 2002 at Five Star Indian Cuisine in Bellerose, Queens. Close to 70 people attended, including many prominent members of the community, who pledged their support to Probin and its cause.

Probin's honored guests included the Provost of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Dr. Warren Mazek, who spoke about the importance of education for economic and social liberation. Also attending was The Hon. Upendra Chivukula, the first person of Indian origin to be elected to the New Jersey Assembly, who encouraged all new Americans and native-born people to work together for the betterment of the nation. Mr. Chikuvula was presented a *Samaj Sevak* [Community Leadership] award for his wonderful accomplishments.

Among the community dignitaries who spoke include, Morshed Alam, of the NYC District 29 School Board, Mr. John Albert, a candidate for NY State Assembly from Queens, Mr. Ratan Barua, a community rights activist, Dr. Ratna Karmakar, a Professor of Economics at Rutgers University, Mrs. Jugraj Kaur of Navnirman, Mr. Ramen Nandi, an activist from New Jersey, The Hon. Frank Padavan, NY State Senator, Mr. Mohammad Sadiq, of the Queens Village Civic Association, Mr. Tito Sinha, a social activist in the South Asian community, Chet Szarejko, Democratic leader of Queens, Mr. J. D. Thakral, a former candidate for NYC Council, Mr. Somu Thomas, of Iota Nu Indian Fraternity, and NY State Assemblyman Mark Weprin.

NYC School District 26 Superintendent Claire McIntee took the time to send a message to the gathering, while newly elected NYC Councilman David Weprin sent special citations for the award recipients. NYC Councilman John Liu, the first Asian-American on the

Council, called Probin while attending a conference at Philadelphia to convey Happy New Year's wishes.

Gerry Weber, a Probin Co-Secretary, presented the annual report, noting to the crowd that, during the last year, Probin had begun helping 5 new institutions to educate orphans and the poor. Probin helped the Assam Buddhist Vihar & Orphanage School, the Calcutta Children's Orphanage, the Dinajpur Harijan Palli Sri Ramakrishna School, the Durgapur Bagdipara and Bauripara Schools, and the Gandhi Ashram of Bangladesh.

Co-Secretary Joy Karim spoke on Probin's goals and objectives and invited everyone to join with Probin's efforts. Others who briefly spoke at the occasion include Mr. Jay Hyman, Mr. Srikant Mookherjee, Mr. Tayeb Poonawala, Mr. Sevananda Padilla, Mrs. Anna Levine, and Mrs. Malini Kumar.

Several individuals were honored with awards for their selfless work to better improve the quality of life of needy children here and abroad. Among those receiving awards were Mr. Om Prakash Sharma, a NY taxi driver who donates half of his salary to build and run two all-girls schools in India, was honored with an *Anaath Bandhu* [Friend of the Orphan] award. Dr. Shamita Das Dasgupta, a social activist, professor at Rutgers University and the founder of MANAVI, an organization dedicated to helping the women of the Indian subcontinent in the US, received the *Samaj Bandhu* [Friend of the Community] Award. Also receiving the *Samaj Bandhu* was SAYA [South Asians for Youth Action] of New York. Ms. Anetta Secharan, Director, along with a delegation from SAYA, came to receive the award.

To commemorate the centenary of the Indian freedom fighter Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, a Shyama Prasad Centenary Lecture of his life and contributions was presented by Mrs. Purabi

Nandi, a poet. The occasion was illuminated by the presence of Shyama Prasad's daughter Arati and her husband Paresh.

The Late Priscilla B. Pedersen Memorial Scholarship was established by Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, a long-time Probin supporter, author and Professor of Theology at St. Francis College of Brooklyn, and her sister Ms. Anne Pedersen, a writer living in New Mexico. During the celebration Dr. Pedersen presented a \$1,000 check to Probin to be placed in perpetual deposit, the interest of which is to be used to support a poor or orphaned girl's long-term education. The *Swargiyo Priscilla B Pedersen Smrity Britti* scholarship has been set up at the Orphanage for the Improvement of the Mankind [*Manab Kalyankami Anaathaloy*] in Bangladesh run by Nayan Sadhu.\* To mark the occasion, Kusumita Pedersen read a short poem from Sri Chinmoy.

During the celebration, a raffle was held giving handloom prizes made by the students and residents of the Probin-supported schools.

Probin was founded over a decade ago to support social, cultural and education needs for immigrants and to support education for the needy and orphans in the Indian Subcontinent. Interest from fixed-deposit bank accounts is used to provide educational scholarships, teacher salaries and for economic self-sufficiency projects in 12 orphanage and ashram schools in India and Bangladesh.

\*Recently, through Probin's efforts, the Orphanage for the Improvement of the Mankind in Bangladesh was able to buy 1.56 decimals of land, adjacent to the Netrokona ashram, to expand its orphanage and create a self-supporting agricultural project. Congratulations to Monk Nayan Sadhu. - Editor

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## MADARIPUR SEVASRAM, PATHAK-KANDI: MADARIPUR, BANGLADESH

A Brief History by Jibon Maharaj

The founder of Pranab Mott, or Bharat Sevasram Sangha, Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj was born in Bajitpur, a village in the district of Madaripur, on January 29, 1896. This date, falling on a Wednesday, was an auspicious *tithi* [moment] on the Maghi Purnima, the full moon of the month of Magh.

His father, Bishnu Charan, and mother, Sarada Debi, named him Binod. Even from early on in his childhood, the boy was quite meditative and a lover of Lord Shiva. Some say it was because the blessed child was born after a boon from Lord Shiva to his parents.

In 1913, at the age of only 17, Binod received his initiation from Baba Gambhirnath of Gorakhpur [in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India]. In 1916, at 20, Binod achieved *siddhi* [god-head] for his *sadhana* [meditation and contemplation]. Afterwards, he came to

Madaripur in 1919 to provide relief to the residents devastated by the tornado that struck the area. Being pleased with his relief work, the residents of the area requested Swamiji to establish a permanent ashram in the area. For this *seva* [relief], the institution is named Madaripur Sevasram.

Later on, to continue relief work, a *sanyasi* [monk] order was established by Swami Pravananda and he got involved with many types of service work throughout India. However, this Madaripur Sevashram was the incubator of the larger *Bharat Sevasram Sangha* [Organization to Serve India].

In 1923, at Madaripur, a *Brahmacharya Bidyaloy* [school for training of Hindu monks] was established. In 1924, Swami Pranavananda accepted puja offerings himself at the Madaripur ashram. To develop the character of youth, he built a college dormitory here. In 1934 once he accepted puja offering

with 100,000 marigolds.

He then left for other places in India, including Bengal. Before Indian independence, and the partition of Bengal, the ashram was bustling with activity. Sadly, during the Bangladeshi independence war, the ashram was completely destroyed, by the Army of Islamic Pakistan and its Bengali Islamic allies.

The author, Jibon Maharaj, is the monk who resurrected the Madaripur Ashram and reopened the free Binod Bidyaniketan school after its destruction in 1971. Probini is providing funds to hire teachers for the school. - *Editor*

The Pranabananda Service Centre has selected *Srimati* [Ms.] Sushama Baidya, a high school graduate, as the first teacher hired with the funds provided by Probini. Congratulations to Ms. Baidya.

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