

# The Probini Foundation Digest

In support of education for the needy and orphaned

## প্রবিনী ফাউন্ডেশানের টুকটাকি

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Spring 2002

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## NETROKONA ORPHANAGE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Students of the Netrokona Manab-Kalyan-kami Anathalaya, Bangladesh stood first and second in order of merit at the area combined public school exams in the grades 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6. They ranked second and third in merit in 4th grade exams.

Miss Anjana Pal, a 6th grade student, obtained the highest marks in the *Rabindra Sangeet* [songs of poet Rabindra Nath Tagore] competition at the Durgapur sub-district and Netrokona district-wide competitions. Congratulations to Monk [Swami] Nayan Sadhu and his students! Here is a list of students receiving help from the Probini Foundation residing at the Orphanage ashram: Sri [Sriman or Master] Anil Tripura, Km. [Kumari or Miss] Anjana Pal, Sri Bidyut Chakraborty, Sm. Bindu Chakraborty, Sri Chanchal Oraon, Sm. Chandana Tripura, Sri Dhariswar Tripura, Km. Dipa Das, Sri Emon Debnath, Sri Gopal Chakraborty, Sri Gopon Das, Sri Goutam Chandra Gour, Sri Harinaswar Tripura, Km. Iti Debnath, Sri Jhutan Das, Sri Khokhan Debnath, Sri Koklas Tripura, Km. Mamata Das, Sri Milan Tripura, Sm. Parul Rani Debnath, Sri Preyomoy Tripura, Sm Poly Rani Debi, Sm. Purnima Debi, Sri Ranik Tripura, Sri Ratan Baishnab, Sm Rekha Rani Tripura, Km. Ruby Rani Dey, Sri Rupamoy Tripura, Km. Rupina Tripura, Sri Sajal Debnath, Km. Sathi Debnath, Km. Sebika Tripura, Sri Shyamal Hajong, Sm. Shefali Tripura, Sri Sindhu Basak, Sri Snehamoy Tripura, Sri Srikanto Barol, Sri SriKrishna Hajong, Sri Sudarshan Tripura, Sri Sudwip Kumar Das, Sri Sujan BiswaSharma, Sri Suman Debnath, Km. Upasana Dey.

## PROBINI SPONSORS SAFE HOUSE TORTURED GIRLS

During the current 2001-2002 anti-Hindu pogrom in Bangladesh several girls, ages 7 through teen, were victims of gang rape by anti-Hindu terrorists. Many of the victims were temporarily housed at several of the Probini-supported institutions in Bangladesh. Probini feels gratified to know that their modest efforts have helped ease the sufferings of the victims. Probini has promised to take full responsibility of their education, should the parents of the girls choose to place them at the care of the orphanage dormitories supported by Probini.

## PROBINI TO SUPPORT BANGLADESH POGROM VICTIMS

During the current anti-Hindu pogrom in Bangladesh several families and their children have become victims of anti-Hindu atrocities. In a recent Committee meeting the Probini Foundation decided to support education of all the victim girls and boys, seeking help, through the eight Bangladeshi institutions receiving support from Probini. The institutions have agreed to the proposal. In the village of Mahilara, Bangladesh several of Probini members have built a Nihar Kana Bhaktabash school last year at the 300-year old Mahilara Mott temple. The Hindu monk headmaster of the school and all the Hindu members of the school committee were evicted before the October 2001 election. Friends of the school are trying to impress on the Bangladesh government to bring back normalcy for the minorities of the area.

## OUR RECENT BENEFACTORS: [SINCE DECEMBER 15, 2001]

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## Probini Family News

### Probini friends:

Bhavna Toor Ghoshal made a gift of \$108 to Probini in honor of her parents Azad Singh and Kamla Devi Toor who left New York for an assignment in Africa. Mr Toor then went on to Afghanistan as India's first Charge D'Affairs in November 2001.

Shuvo Dastidar gave two \$25 checks to Probini as a Christmas gift to his parents Shefali and Sachi. He wrote, "Dear [Ma/Baba], Rather than give you a gift you won't like or be able to use, here's some real good stuff...." Shuvo also donated Probini funds from the first check he received from his first full-time job.

Prabir Roy sent a special gift of \$200 because of Probini's ability to house many of the tortured girls in the Probini-supported institutions in Bangladesh.

Thank you Bhavna, Shuvo and Prabir Roy.

Sachi G. Dastidar was presented with the *Samaj Sevak* [serving the society] award for his work by the Buddhist Vihar and Orphanage, Dibrugarh, Assam during the Kathin Chivara Danotsav festival held on November 4, 2001.

### Election:

In the November 2001 election, Bernice Siegal, Esq, was elected as a Judge to the Civil Court in Queens.

Andrew Bose has been elected Finance Director to the New York Cross-Island YMCA effective January 1, 2002.

*Congratulations!*

## Great News!

Probini has received Tax Exempt status from the IRS.

All of your donations to Probini are now fully tax deductible

## PROBINI'S HONOREES: THE JEWELS OF OUR SOCIETY

The following have received *Samaj Bandhu* [Friend of the Community] Award from Probini:

The Hon. Morshed Alam, NYC School Board 29; Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund Director Margaret Fung; Mr. Ratan Barua, Activist, NY; Dr. Aaron Friedman, NYC School Dist. 26 Superintendent; Dr. Sylvia Gaines, Director, International Child Creative Education Center, Long Island; Mrs. Chan Jamoona, Indian Senior

Center, Queens, NY; Mr. & Mrs. Moazzam and Rafiya Khan, Bone Marrow Registry SAMAR, NY; Mr. Walter Picardo, Nav-Nirman, Mumbai & NY; Sakhi for South Asian Women Director Prema Vora, NY; Dr. S. N. Sridhar, SUNY, Stony Brook; Mr. Chet Szarejko, Queens Democratic Leader; Mr. Syed Mohammed Ullah, Weekly Probashi; NY, Mr. Arvind Vora, Activist, Long Island.

The following are *Anath Bandhu* [Friend of the Orphans] Award recipients:

Bangladesh Puja Samiti [New York]; Dr. Shefali Sengupta Dastidar, New York; Mr. Pijush Dey, NY; Mr. Jay Hyman, NY; Drs. Sudhangshu & Ratna Karmakar, New Jersey; Dr. Abdul Momen, Massachusetts; Dr. Nuran Nabl, New Jersey; Mrs. Purabi Nandi, Long Island; Dr. Kusumita P. Pedersen, NY; Ms. Faith Willard, Rhode Island.

## PROBINI PROJECTS

**Ramakrishna Orphanage, Comilla** - Probini the free co-ed Bidod Bidya Niketan school. is providing scholarships for several **Manab Kalyan Kami Anathalaya** students. (Orphanage for the Improvement of Mankind), **Netrokona** - Probini's funds created an agricultural project making them self-sufficient in food.

**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, Baisal.

**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 of two teachers.

**Sishu Kalyan Parishad (Children's Welfare Association Orphanage), Calcutta** - Probini providing scholarships for several girls.

**Madaripur Pranab Ashram (1920s), Bangladesh** - Probini is providing teacher at



## NEW PROBINI SPONSOR

With a check sent on the auspicious Christmas Eve, Probini extended its support to the Binod Bidyaniketan School of Madaripur Ashram, located At Pathak-kandi, Madaripur City in Madaripur district of central Bangladesh.

The ashram was founded in the 1920s as the Bharat Sevasram Sangha, organization to serve India, by the Indian nationalist Hindu spiritual leader Swami Pranavananda, when Bangladesh was a part of India and her people the leaders of India's independence movement. Swamiji also founded a school at the ashram. During India's independence movement swamiji was arrested for his independence activism and imprisoned several times in the Madaripur district, his homeland, by the British rulers. During Bangladesh's independence war of 1971, the entire ashram and the school was destroyed by the Army of Islamic Pakistan and its Bengali Islamist supporters. The ashram property was confiscated by them. [Part of the ashram still remains occupied and unliberated.] After Bangladesh's independence in 1971 the ashram was renamed as Madaripur Ashram. In the 1990's the ashram and the school was brought back to life by the monk Jiban Maharaj.

For the lack of funds ashram was not able to hire full-time teachers for its free school, open to all. Probini will be providing a teacher at the Binod Bidyaniketan school.

## THE OTHER GANDHI ASHRAM: NOAKHALI, BANGLADESH

By Dr. Sabyasachi Ghosh Dastidar

For the casual readers of the modern Indian history, Mahatma Gandhi's association with what is today's Bangladesh is hardly known. Noakhali is a well known name to most in the Subcontinent: possibly a notorious one at that.

It is often said that a 1946 ghastly anti-Hindu pogrom there sealed the fate of 1947 partition of India. It created the extreme polarization of Indian Muslim and non-Muslim minds believing that they won't be able to live together.

In 1946 India's Bengal Province was ruled by the Muslim League Party and was headed by the Premier Huseyn Saheed Suhrawardy, and its capital city Calcutta was headed by Mayor S. M. Usman [Osman]. Bangladesh and the West Bengal state of India roughly corresponds to the pre-partition Bengal Province. Responding to the Muslim League call for Direct Action in support of partition of India a large public meeting was held at the Calcutta Maidan on August 16, 1946 which was declared a holiday by Suhrawardy.

As the Muslim League supporters dispersed after the meeting a communal riot broke out which ran unabated for two days. In British Indian history this came to be known as the "Great Calcutta Killing." A large number of Hindus and Muslims were killed. As Calcutta was a Hindu-majority city and the Islamic communalists chose Noakhali where Hindus constituted a minority, in a remote area of Muslim-majority Bengal, for rioting.

On October 10, 1946, at the end of Durga Puja and on the Bengali Hindu Lakshmi Puja full moon day, an organized anti-Hindu pogrom began lasting for about three weeks. The pogrom was led by Mr. Maulana Golam Sarwar Hossini, a pir and a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Mr. Akbar, Mr. Rashid Ahmed, and Mr. Kasem. A Noakhali meeting on September 7, 1946 led by Sarwar demanded revenge against local Hindus

for Calcutta riots.

Estimate of number of killed varies between 5,000 to a lower figure of 220. During my conversation with historian Hashmi on June 12, 1998 at his office in Singapore National University he suggested that the number of kidnappings and forced conversions to be many times that of the people killed. On June 27, 2001 Mrs. Ashoka Gupta narrated to me her effort to rescue many of those girls. Her book documents some of her group's rescue work. A large number of girls and wives were kidnaped.

At the beginning the middle class, the educated and the landed Hindu families were singled out for attack. The very first casualty on October 10, 1946 was Mr. Surendranath Basu, a landed Hindu of Narayanpur village, followed by Mr. Rajendralal Roy Chowdhury, the President of the District Bar Association, and 20 members of his family, of Karpara village. This was followed by Chitta Datta Roy, a learned man of Shayesta Nagar village, and his family, 19 men of the extended families of Mr. Ramram, Mr. Kalikamal and Mr. Sashi Patowari of Gopairbag village.

Soon the attack turned on the vast majority of Hindus who were poor and belonged to the oppressed castes. Women took the lead in organizing relief work and for recovering kidnaped girls. The first meeting was held in nearby Chittagong led by Mrs. Nellie Sengupta, an Irish-Indian and a former Congress President. From October 26, groups of women took seven-day turns for relief and recovery. Some of the volunteers included Sucheta Kripalani, Ashoka Gupta, Renuka Roy, Bina Bhowmik, Kalyani Datta, Kamala Dasgupta, Bokul Guha Roy, Bela Mitra, Fulla Rani Das. Sucheta Kripalani's work provided so much moral support to the victims that a large number of new born girls were named Sucheta and boys Kripalani.

On November 7, 1946 Gandhiji went to Choumuhuni in Noakhali to be with the Hindus, and to bridge the Muslim-Hindu communal divide, and to give moral support to the volunteers. He was not welcomed by local Muslims though. Gandhiji camped in Shrirampur village from November 20, 1946 through December 31, 1946. From January 6, 1947 through February 1, 1947 he traveled on foot from village to village to be with the persecuted victims. Gandhiji started his tour at Chandipur village and ended at Aamishpara village. He stayed at Jayag village on the 29th of January, 1947. Jayag is the place where a Gandhi Ashram stands now.

Gandhiji came to address the riot-torn residents many of whom were staying in the other landmark of Ram Thakurer Ashram.

### *Making of the Gandhi Ashram:*

In 1946/1947 when Gandhiji visited Noakhali for his peace march, he stayed at various homes. When he visited the devastated village of Jayag he stayed at the residence of Barrister Hemata Kumar Ghose, a local landed family. They were involved with the development of their district. The family was highly educated, Mr. Ghose being the first Barrister from the Noakhali district. He received his Bar-at-Law degree from London. When Gandhiji stayed at his home Ghose was practicing law in Lucknow in central India. Once he learned about Gandhi's visit, he donated all his property, 2,500 acres of land with buildings and ponds, for the cause of Gandhiji. [Currently Gandhi Ashram has only 25 acres of land.] He formed the Ambika Kaliganga Charitable Trust in 1947, named after his parents, which was registered in 1949 in Pakistan. However, Pakistan did not allow it to function. In 1965, during an India-Pakistan war, the ashram was looted and destroyed and all of its

*(Continued on page 4)*

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## THE OTHER GANDHI ASHRAM: NOAKHALI, BANGLADESH

(Continued from page 3)

workers were arrested and were kept behind bars.

Many of the Gandhi associates stayed back at the ashram and worked for Muslim-Hindu understanding. Young Charu Chandra Chowdhury stayed back. Because of his involvement with Gandhi Ashram Charubabu was imprisoned by Pakistan in 1963 and was finally released after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. He died in June 13, 1990. Not only Charubabu, but several other young pacifists stayed back as well. They were Debendra Narayan Sarkar, Madan Mohan Chattopadhyaya, Viswa Ranjan Sen, Reddi Palli Sathyanarayan, Ranjan Kumar Dutta, Ajit Kumar Dey, Jiban K. Saha and Sadhendra Nath Mitra.

In 1971 pacifist Sarkar was killed in cold blood by the Pakistan Army within the Ashram confines, and Mr. Saha at Kularian village of Sylhet district where he had sought shelter. Mr. Chattopadhyaya was murdered by Islamist Bengali col-

laborators of the Pakistan Army. In 1972, the year after Bangladeshi independence, Mr. Dey was murdered by Bengali Islamists. Mr. Ranjan Dutta and his wife Kaipana narrowly escaped death by fleeing from a Pakistan Army camp where they were taken for killing for no reason other than their religion.

By 1971, all of the Gandhi associates were of advanced age but that did not deter the killers. After Bangladesh's independence the ashram was reorganized and appeared as the Gandhi Ashram Trust in 1975. The Bangladesh Government appointed a seven member Board of Trustees with Justice Debesh Bhattacharya as Chairman, along with Mr. Reddi Palli Sathyanarayan, Mr. Viswa Ranjan Sen, Mr. Charu Chowdhury, Director of State Bank of India in Dhaka, Deputy Commissioner of Noakhali and Principal of Noakhali Government College. Ashram's Director is Srimati Jharna Dhara Chowdhury. In 1999 Jamanlal Bajaj Foundation of India honored Jharnadi, as she is locally known, with their Award for her work of uplifting the poor

and the downtrodden.

Now Gandhi Ashram is one of the major NGOs in eastern Bangladesh. It has been helping over 16,000 families. They are involved in education, institution building, credit programs, rural and urban water and sanitation, vocational training, fishery, agriculture, human resource development, and more. To educate the poor and the orphans Prohini Foundation has been helping Gandhi Ashram. To preserve the memory of the martyred pacifists, at the request of Gandhi Ashram Prohini Foundation has established several named scholarships.

### *The Ashram Today:*

In honor of Gandhiji's 131st birthday Bangladesh Government opened a Gandhi Memorial Museum in Jayag. It was opened on October 12, 2000 by the Bangladesh President Justice Sahabuddin Ahmed. The old residence of Ambika & Kaliganga Ghose was renovated as the national museum. [Address: Gandhi Ashram, Village: Jayag, Police Station: Begumganj, District: Noakhali.]

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প্রবীণী **THE PROBINI FOUNDATION INC.** ফাউন্ডেশন

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