



Kumudini Women's Medical College, an institution par excellence



Study, work and fun make up the day for girls at Bharateswari Homes



Girls at Bharateswari Homes are taught to be self-reliant

PHOTO: STAR

A QUIET COURAGE

Language veteran, social worker, teacher and guide, Protiva Mutsuddy continues to enlighten and inspire

MD. GOLAM KIBRIA

Principal Protiva Mutsuddy, a great language movement veteran was born at a time while her motherland was under British rule. Heroes of her motherland were fighting for freedom. Her home city, Chittagong was one of the birthplaces of many revolutionary figures of the then undivided India and also noted for their heroic acts against the colonial rule. No doubt such the nationalistic fervor and political events influenced the young Protiva and imbibed within her a determination to do something for her motherland when the time would come.

Protiva was born at her ancestral house in Mohamuni Pahartali village, in Chittagong December 16, 1935. Her father, late Kiron Bikash Mutsuddy, was a lawyer and mother late Shaila Bala Mutsuddy was a homemaker and the epitome of simplicity, patience, truthfulness, and dignity. Protiva is the third of nine siblings.

She started her education at her village pathshala (primary school) and then studied at a school named "Mohamuni Anglo Pali Institution" up to class eight. At this stage her father felt it wise to give proper care and schooling to his children. He took his family with him to his working place in Chittagong. There, Protiva was admitted into Dr. Khastogir's Govt. Girls' High School, a well-reputed school in Chittagong from where she passed the matriculation examination with first division in 1951. She passed I.A also in first division from Chittagong College in 1953 and completed her first year of her undergraduate degree in Economics from the same college in 1954. Thereafter, she got admitted into Dhaka University for further

significant political events including World War II and all the national movements that divided nations and gave birth to new ones. As a student it was very natural for her to be involved in such peoples' movements. In 1947, when India was divided into two countries namely India and Pakistan, Chittagong became one of the cities of East Pakistan, a part of Pakistan; one thousand miles apart from another part namely West Pakistan with huge socio-cultural differences. Even though people thought that their long cherished freedom had materialised soon they realised that their motherland had become a new colony of West Pakistan. Their basic rights were ignored, even their mother tongue was disrespected. Outraged by such gross injustice, many students, including Protiva, joined the movement of protest that demanded that the language of the majority – Bengali – must be recognised as a state language. Protiva proved to be a good organiser. The movement, through the supreme sacrifices of the heroic sons of the soil on February 21, compelled the administration to accept Bengali as a state language and paved the way for Bengali nationalism that culminated into the Liberation struggle that gave us an independent country. Protiva saw socialist ideology as the only way for the common people to realise their fundamental rights. Thus she joined leftist politics as a student. But students of all political ideologies had their confidence in Protiva because of her progressive political consciousness, and this trust was reflected in Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) election. She was elected Common Room Secretary of DUCSU in the 1955-1956 session. At that time she was once arrested for taking part in a procession that violated Section 144, to demand self governance for her country. She was the first elected Vice-President of Rokeya Hall (the then Women's Hall, Dhaka University) in 1956-1957 session. Thus she had groomed herself academically and intellectually to serve her country.

Her calling, she realised, was to bring the light of education to her people, especially women because education was the first step to emancipation. This mind-set put her away from active politics. She decided to be a teacher (may be a premeditated decision as she did B. Ed. in her student life). In 1960 she joined Cox's Bazar Girls' High school as head mistress. Her firm stand against unfair means in public examination was not successful there. In protest, she left that school and joined another girls' high school at Joydevpur in greater Dhaka (Presently Joydevpur Govt. Girls' High School) as head mistress. Unfortunately here, local administration interfered with her official work. The interference was unjust and not in the interest of education and school

administration. The young educationist thought it wise to leave the institution when she realised that fighting against the powerful government officials and their associates would be futile. Thus her search for the right place where she could dedicate her talent and integrity, continued.

Meanwhile, the country's great philanthropist Shaheed Ranada Prasad Shaha started his great humanitarian works through establishing Kumudini Hospital (a 750 bed general hospital) and a unique residential school for girls namely Bharateswari Homes with a philosophy to stand behind ailing people and empower women at his village Mirzapur in Tangail so that they would be skilled, self reliant and live with their heads held high. The founder Rai Bahadur Ranada Prasad Shaha (R.P. Shaha) established Kumudini Welfare Trust

referred to by everyone, in the chair. So, Protiva became Principal of Bharateswari Homes in 1965. She has been the principal of the institution for the longest tenure.

In 1998 Protiva Mutsuddy retired. During her tenure as the Principal of Bharateswari Homes, she was made one of the members of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) for several times.

As we know, the Founder R. P. Shaha and his only son Bhabani Prasad Shaha (B.P. Shaha) were abducted and murdered on May 7, 1971 during the war of liberation. Protiva had to shoulder the extra responsibilities of the trust (K.W.T). During this period Mrs. Joya Pati was in Mirzapur to see her parents. She could not go back to join her family in London but had to take the full responsibility of her father's establishments of excellence to serve humanity. Since then these two women, along with some devoted followers of the Founder had to run these remarkable institutions to fulfill the dreams they inherited. Joya Pati became Managing Director of K.W.T in absence of her father and brother since May 1971. Protiva Mutsuddy was nominated as one of the directors of Kumuduni Welfare Trust (K.W.T). She was also assigned as the administrator of Kumuduni Complex along with her normal duties as principal of Bharateswari Homes. Thus she again involved herself directly in social work. She retired from the post of principal but the Trust has refused to be deprived of her incredible support. She is still there as the vanguard of founder's philosophy to act for humanity and to educate the common people.

This Language Movement Veteran was never a hard liner. She is a pious woman with a cosmopolitan mind. She has always endeavoured to influence society so that people respect each other irrespective of caste, creed, colour and will always be willing to help those in need. She has stood for honesty and justice. Her colleagues and students love her for her affection and commitment to humanity.

Even now, Protiva cannot stay away from the complex even for a day, leaving her pupils, colleagues and patients in Mirzapur. So for her visiting abroad is not frequent.

Her dedication to work for the welfare of her people has not been ignored. In 2002 she was conferred the Ekushey Padak in recognition for her contribution to education. She has also been acknowledged for her pioneering work by many national and international organisations.

Principal Protiva Mutsuddy at 82, continues to be a friend, mentor, philosopher and guide to her students and co-workers. Her consistent effort to help people and empower them with education for so many decades, makes her a source of inspiration for the present and future generations.

The writer is Senior Vice-principal of Bharateswari Homes

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(K.W.T) in the 1930's using all his wealth to run these institutions along with Kumudini Women's College (another degree College established in Tangail town) under his direct supervision and guidance. In 1962, the college section was added to Bharateswari Homes. Principal Joya Pati (Youngest daughter of R.P. Shaha) was searching for capable teachers for his school and College. In the process Protiva Mutsuddy was invited to join Bharateswari Homes as a lecturer of Economics. Protiva took the opportunity to leave Joydevpur and join Bharateswari Homes as lecturer in Economics in 1963. She found the Bharateswari Homes, a residential school and college from Nursery to form XII ('A' level).

She got her students from all corners and cross sections of the country. Thus, at last her long cherished dream became a reality. She devoted herself completely to materialise the dream of the founder which coincided with her own. R. P. Shaha used to address Protiva Mutsuddy as mother, which demonstrated his deep respect and affection for her. In a very short time she was asked to manage Bharateswari Homes. Meanwhile, the then Principal Joya Pati had to go abroad to join her family leaving 'Ms. Mutsuddy' as she is



Principal Protiva Mutsuddy

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studies. She did her B.A (Hon's) and Masters in Economics from Dhaka University in 1957 and 1959 respectively. She obtained a Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) in 1960 from Mymensingh Teachers' Training College for women.

It is interesting to note that throughout her academic life she was witness to many



Protiva Mutsuddy has always stood up against injustice in a quiet and dignified manner



At 82, she continues to spread the message of love for humanity



The dream of creating a knowledge-based society lives on