

**Our homage to Guruji**  
**On his 83rd Birth Anniversary**



**Guru GYAN PRAKASH SHARMAN**

**(The late Fr. George Proksch S.V.D.)**

9th of Feb. 1904 — 30th of May 1986

You enlightened our path Loud and clear was your sing

"Jaga ke kone kone me Aao jyoti jala de...."

## GLIMPSES INTO GURUJIS' LIFE :

"Son you will make the land of the Ganges the venue of your work." This prophecy of a mother came true when Fr. George Proksch, born in 1904 in Sylvania, travelled from Vienna to India in 1933, after he was ordained a priest on the 5th of May 1932.

Since childhood, Father Proksch had been deeply interested in the fine arts and literature and had excelled himself as an actor, singer and director in Vienna before receiving the holy orders in 1932.

When he came to India he was wonderstruck by its rich cultural heritage and immense potentialities of Indian Music and dance. He had witnessed the country's sages and saints conveying the truth of religion through song and dramatic representation in form of Kathas, Ramlilas and Raslilas.

Fr. Proksch perceived intensely the potentialities of combining the riches of the Gospel and the wealth of Indian art to portray and project Christ to India in a medium that would be both attractive and appealing. And so 50 years ago Fr. Proksch set out on the quest to introduce Indian Music and Dance to the Church and to incorporate them, if possible into the texture of the Church's life in the country. It was a solitary quest indeed, encountering stiff and determined opposition, misjudged, misinterpreted, yet among the clouds of opposition there was a ray of hope in a staunch and consistent supporter Cardinal Valerian Gracias. And so the visionary pressed on studying, reflecting, seeking light.

The first real break came on the occasion of the National Marian Congress in 1956. The Marian dance-drama proved to be a real revelation. "Tera Noor", took Bombay and Catholic India by storm. Cardinal Gracias voiced the feelings of thousands when he declared: "One of the proudest moments of my episcopate is this experience that we Catholics can present the christian mysteries so impressively in an Indian style."

In 1960 Fr. Proksch created history, when at the International Eucharistic Congress at Munich, for the first time in liturgy, the dancers performed in the presence of the Holy Eucharist.

And then of course in 1964 there was that spectacular dance-drama 'Parmottam Prem', "No Greater Love", during the Bombay Eucharistic Congress. Critics vied with each other to sing its praises. But a non-christian columnist brought out the lesson of it all simply and categorically: "Fr. Proksch has for long insisted that the story of Christ should and could be interpreted in a purely Indian idiom and setting. In the ballet "No Greater Love," he has proved his contention" (Sunday Standard Dec. 6, 1964).

A scholar of Hindi, Sanskrit, and Hindustani Music Fr. Proksch has written novels, essays, plays, hymns, devotional songs, patriotic songs and dance-dramas. His literary and musical works number about forty and include a life of Christ "Kristayan" — which he wrote during his internment

Marian Congress  
Bombay  
1956

1964  
Bombay Eucharistic  
Congress -  
"Parmottam Prem"

## MESHPAL BHAGWAN

(Synopsis)

This is the story of God's LOVE for man.

### I

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All that came to be had life in Him and the life was the light of man.

In His love God created man. Unto his own image and likeness He created him. The new creation sings the praises of the Lord.

In this happy world entered the tempter, the spirit of darkness, the enemy of the Father of light; and he knowing that mankind was free to do what it would, tempted our first parents to rebel against God. And they did rebel. They sinned against the light and all was lost. Sin entered the world and along with sin, sorrow and death.

But God is great and good. His love has no limit, moved with pity for his children, now enslaved in sin and incapable of delivering themselves. He sent his latest and greatest gift, salvation in fulfilment of his promise of old: I shall send a Redeemer who will crush the head of Satan.

### II

In the precise year of God's choosing salvation came to the human race in the form of an avatar, Jesus Christ. He came through a spotless virgin in spite of the wild shouts of Satan and his followers. The virgin conceived a child and the child she bore was God made man. He will be known as the Messiah-Shepherd.

His mother sings a song of praise and thanks in honour of the Lord who has showered such great love upon us.

### III

The Shepherd Redeemer was born. Shepherds danced their way to greet the Redeemer.

But again arrives the Spirit of darkness who offers his own plan of redemption. In the midst of the devilish exhibition the Lord appears as the simple Shepherd-Redeemer! doing good wherever he goes.

He heals the sick, preaching good tidings of love to the poor, forgives sinners and helps where help is needed.

After the mission of love is done the very people who have received the love of the shepherd God, crucify him:

But he rises to life again to prove his divine mission, his mission of love to men.

To lave his perpetual memory among men, Jesus Christ demonstrates his lesson of love by washing the feet of his disciples: This is my command, my last Guru mantra to you and to all:

Serve. Love through service!

at Devlali Camp. One of his crowning works is the 'Mangal Gaan' — a poetic translation of the Psalms in Hindi. The pioneering effort of Fr. Proksch, his indomitable will to succeed, coupled with zealous pursuit of and honest commitment to whatever is good and beautiful in Indian Culture, brought him to the notice of the leading exponents of Indian art and literary luminaries who looked with wonder at the brave new world of art that he was creating — Indian Christian Art — They applauded his effort and presented him with a 'Book of Tribute', "Abhinandan Granth".

Fr. Proksch travelled east, west, north and south, in India and abroad, with the Gyan Ashram Group which he founded in order to spread the truths of the Gospel in a way which was his own.

In 1982, the German Government conferred on him the award — "Bundes Verdienst Kreuz erste klasse", — for bridging the gulf between East and West.

A Zealons Missionary who never knew rest, rested on the 30th of May 1986. When on 6th of June 1986 his mortal remains were taken to the tomb, his immortal tunes resounded 'Tera Noor' and 'Dildar Pyare Jesu'. Someone has rightly said "such a great soul comes only once in a few centuries and the world is influenced them for many decades.



## PROGRAMME

- (1) PRAYER
- (2) SWARANJALI
- (3) SURYA STUTI — The canticle of sun which St. Francis sang in praise of God's creation.
- (4) WELCOME SPEECH BY FR. FRANCIS — BARBOZA S.V.D.
- (5) DR. LOUIS D'SILVA
- (6) REV FR. JOSEPH PANTHALATI, S.V.D.
- (7) CHIEF GUEST — RT. REV. DR. FERDINAND FONSECA
- (8) VOTE OF THANKS BY MISS SOPHIE D'SOUZA.

## INTERVAL

- (9) THE DANCE — DRAMA 'MESHIPAL BHAGWAN'.

1904-1986

FR. GEORGE PROKSCH S.V.D.



### A MAN OF VISION

Born in 1904 in Silesia, a small town in Germany, young George grew in a picturesque surrounding filled with music and poetry. His father was a high ranking forest officer. George Proksch also got trained as a forest officer. This atmosphere was very conducive to develop his inborn talent in music, poetry and arts.

But his life took a different turn, as he felt the inner calling of God to dedicate his life totally to his service. So he pursued his studies in philosophy and theology, at the end of which he was ordained a priest in 1932. He was assigned to work in India, a country totally alien to him, neither was he familiar with its rich ancient culture nor was he aware of the multiplicity of its languages. To familiarise himself with at least one of its languages he spent one year studying Urdu at the Oriental Institute of Languages in London.

When he arrived in India in 1933, together with his priestly duties, he plunged himself in the learning of Hindi and Sanskrit. He was so impressed with the beauty of Indian culture, music, dance and art forms, that he totally identified himself with India and became a vocal exponent of Indian music, dance and literature. His love for Hindi was so great that he once said "An Indian who does not know Hindi has no right to stay in India". He must have made this statement in his over enthusiasm to stress the importance of Hindi. But it reveals his love for Hindi.

He has written over thirty books and booklets in Hindi. He wrote a few dramas and poetry. His novel "Uske liye" was well received. He was in personal contact with the leading literary figures of those days, including the great poet Maithilisanan Gupta, Sumitranandan Pant and others. He wrote many plays for children which were successfully staged in several places. Among them, "Garibon ka Mahal", "Andhkar me Prakash", "Chum Chanan Chumantar" "Kusum Kali",

"Himani" etc. were outstanding. Perhaps his greatest literary work was "Kristayan", which he wrote while he was interned in prison during the second world war.

He was a trained musician in western music. After his arrival in India, he mastered Hindustani Classical music, dance and stage arts. He composed both religious and secular songs in various classical ragas. His collections of songs in "Rag Parag", "Shraddanjali", "Bharat Geet", "Mangal Gaan" etc. have become very popular in the Hindi speaking areas.

In 1935, when he met Mahatma Gandhi at a Hindi Prachar meeting in Indore, he was so impressed with Gandhiji that he wrote in his diary-" Today I met a man who is able to hypnotize, because his is the image of a man of God. His life bore the seal of the ancient Ashram Ideal. He seems to move between 'tapasya' and 'swadhyaya' (meditation). This seems to be the secret of his successful proclamation". This impression had a lasting effect on his thought and activity, which unfolded in due course of time.

At first, his field of work was Indore in Madhya Pradesh. Then he shifted to Bombay where he began lecturing in Hindi and Indian music. In 1949, he set up a registered Trust, Hindi Sanskrit Sangam, to propagate and promote Indian culture, and provide facilities for the study of Indian languages, literature, music and dance. At the same time, he was also actively pursuing his long standing desire of establishing an ashram. It was not easy as this venture was not easily understood and supported by his higher superiors. He did not give up the idea but was gradually able to get the necessary approval and he founded the ashram on a hillock on the Mahakali Road, Andheri, Bombay.

In 1956, he got the first big opportunity to present Christian themes in Indian art forms. On the occasion of the Marian Congress, he used folk as well as temple dances and Hindustani classical ragas to express Marian concepts. Cardinal Gracias had this to say about the impact of the Performance - 'Perhaps India will lend a readier ear to the message of Christ if it is presented in the form that has for ages been the favorite means of expressing religious thought and sentiment'. With the next cultural presentation at the 37th International Eucharistic Congress at Munich in 1960, Fr. Proksch created history when his ballet 'Eucharist and Charity', employing Indian dancers and music was performed in the presence of the Holy Eucharist.

1956  
Marian  
Congress

1960  
Munich

In 1964 the Eucharistic Congress held in Bombay marked a climax in the life of Fr. Proksch when 300 dancers and 1000 singers trained by him, presented 'Anant Prem'- the manifestation of God's love for mankind as seen in the Old and New Testament. Reviewing the show, 'The Sunday Standard', Bombay wrote - "It needed a remarkable German priest to introduce so forcefully Indian culture to Indian catholics. Quite a few of them were genuinely and pleasantly surprised that Indian dance and ballet could not only be so entrancing, but so naturally adopted to Christian religious themes".

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Besides these major presentations, the Ashram inmates led by Fr. Proksch have toured extensively India and abroad. They have presented shows in Banaras, Allahabad, Lucknow, Agra, Gwalior, New Delhi, Ajmer, Udaipur and other cities bringing Christianity to mostly non-catholics.

The themes of these presentations have been love of God, redemption, God as a shepherd and so on. The performers have portrayed these themes as well as the story of Christ who came from the Father to redem all mankind without exception. Fr. Proksch prepared a programme called 'The Life of Christ', excerpts from which were broadcast by All India Radio, Bombay, during 1962 Christmas.

Fr. Proksch's achievements were recognized here and abroad. He was often invited to lectures and presented his shows at international gatherings. When he attended the International Music Conference at Cologne in 1961, he expounded the richness of Indian music to an august audience of world-renowned musicians. He said the Indian classical music was nearer to the Church music than even the music of Beethoven and Mozart. He remarked that the western music had nothing to match the aesthetic and spiritual qualities of ragas like Bhairavi and Jogia.

On his 60th birthday, his friends and admirers organized a public function and presented him with a 'Abhinandan Granth'. Mrs. Vijayalaxmi Pandit, the then Governor of Maharashtra, presided over the function.

The picneer, who made India his home, who fell in love with Indian culture, music, literature and art, breathed his last on May 30, 1986.

ESSAR

# Remembering Fr. George Proksch

The professors and students of the Gyan Ashram, Bombay celebrated the 92nd anniversary of the birth of Fr. Georg Proksch on 10 February. Fr. Proksch, founder of the ashram, died in St. Gabriel in 1986.

Fr. Stephen Fuchs (88), who has since retired to St. Gabriel opened the celebration by unveiling a bust of the lately deceased Guru Gyan Prakash Sharman, as Fr. Proksch was called in Hindi. This was followed by a performance of the

He then began to observe more closely the methods used by the Hindu preachers. They spread their religious teaching primarily through dramas performed in dance and song. People, who had worked all day long under the burning sun, could watch and listen to these sermons late into the night, without falling asleep! Would it not be possible to preach the truths of the Christian faith in a similar way? Fr. Proksch found little response to such questions among his

songs.

An Indian secular priest, who got to know his work, became his particular friend and supporter: Valerian Gracias, later Archbishop of Bombay and Cardinal. He called Fr. Proksch to Bombay. There he was able to open Gyan Ashram in the vicinity of Andheri in 1949. He gathered around him a group of like-minded Indian teachers who promoted his work. With their help he became the first European ever to study Sanskrit and Hindi at the University, Mysore. He completed his music studies in Bombay, and at the Music Academy in Lucknow. He thus built his work on a solid foundation.



In the foot steps!

Aradhana ceremony by seven students of Fr. Francis Barboza, who has followed the footsteps of Fr. Proksch and studied Indian dance. Fr. John Paul Hermann, who is writing his doctoral thesis on Fr. Proksch, summed up his life and work, while Fr. Norbert Hermann sang two of the Indian bhajans (songs) composed by Fr. Proksch. The tenth anniversary of Fr. Proksch's death was on 30th May.

Fr. Proksch (1904-1986) came to India shortly after his ordination (1932). He began his work among the Bhils in what is now the diocese of Indore, using the then normal methods of evangelization which took very little account of the thought and the culture of India. But the uselessness and lack of results of this form of evangelization soon became clear to Fr. Proksch.

Fr. Proksch (Left) and Fr. Carlo confres. But he did not give up. He began to prepare himself systematically for this form of apostolate. He undertook the necessary studies in Hindi, Sanskrit, etc., studied the forms and rules of the native dances and songs, and learnt how to play traditional Indian instruments.

Interned by the British, during World War II, the German-born Fr. Proksch made good use of the time by improving his knowledge of Indian languages. In the following years he wrote a life of Jesus in Hindi, gathered Indian melodies and set them to Christian texts. He also composed melodies himself, inspired by Indian music. Some of them were received so well that they later become popular

His first attempt to express religious themes in dance, dates way back to 1935. But it was not until twenty years later that this attempt won recognition on a country-wide scale. This was when he staged a religious play in honour of the Mother of God at the National Marian Congress in Bombay in 1954. The attention of the whole Christian world was drawn to his work when he performed a religious play called The Fruit of Death and the Bread of Life at the Eucharistic World Congress in Munich in 1960.

He wrote another religious play for the Eucharistic World Congress in Bombay in 1964: 1500 people attended its first performance. Christian faith was given an Indian garb. The ashram he founded was intended not only as a place of creative work, but also as an opportunity to give the necessary spiritual depth



to his action.

When he personally experienced Mahatma Gandhi in Indore in 1935, he sensed that Gandhi's influence did not rest just on the use of certain cultural elements of Indian culture, but on his ascetic personality. Fr. Proksch never forgot this lesson.

A number of his closest followers practised a serious religious life in the ashram he had founded, but he never succeeded in finding an appropriate structure in which to express it. His attempts to connect the ashram-idea with that of a secular institute proved fruitless. The result was that after his death this group quickly dissolved. Nor did Fr. Proksch succeed in founding a school which would develop the work he had initiated.

The confreres who work in the Ashram Gyan Prakash today are inspired by Fr. Proksch, but go their own separate ways:

- Fr. Dr. Francis Barboza studied classical Indian dance and tries to express Christian doctrines and beliefs through it.

- Fr. Charles Vas is more specialized in the ethnic elements of Indian song-culture. His compositions have been widely diffused among the people through many cassettes.

- Fr. Gilbert Carlo tries to make Christian spirituality accessible to Indians with the help of yoga and Indian methods of meditation.

(Arnoldus Nota)



### New SVD minor seminary in Steel City.

Fr. Baptist D'Sousa the Provincial Superior led the "Bhoomi Pooja" (ground breaking ceremony) for new SVD minor seminary at Lungai, the outskirts of the Steel city of Rourkela. Presently the SVD minor seminarians are having the formation along with diocesan seminarians at Jyothi Bhavan, Sambalpur, which will be handed over to the bishop for the formation exclusively of the diocesan seminarians. This necessitated the SVDs to have their own minor seminary in Orissa.

Named *Vidya Jyothi*, the seminary can accommodate about sixty students. The first face of the seminary is expected to be ready by the beginning of the next academic year.

### After the SVD Blood!

*Having heard that the SVDs are setting up a minor seminary at Lungai, the Sisters at the nearby Nuagaon Hospital were very happy. The reason: With many healthy young people in the new SVD seminary they would be able to get some good blood in case of emergency. Talk about the AIDS scare and other contaminations of blood especially caused by professional blood donors...!*

### Goes International As!

#### Elected to IAMS Panel



Fr. Joy Thomas SVD, the mission procurator and programme co-ordinator of Ishvani Kendra, has been elected to be a Board member to represent Asia at the International Association of the Mission Studies (IAMS). This is an ecumenical Association of both Catholics and Protestants to monitor and facilitate studies and planning for Mission world-wide.

#### Area Secretary for Formation.



Fr. Jose P.A., presently the Rector of Divine Word Seminary Pune, has been elected the Area Secretary for Formation in the Asia-Pacific Zone of the Society of the Divine Word. This Zone consists of fifteen SVD Provinces of India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, HongKong, S. Korea, Australia and Papua New Guinea.