

Dharmarajika Monastery in Dhaka:

Appeal for Assistance

Dharmarajika Buddhist Monastery

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Dharmarajika Buddhist Monastery Programs

A. OVERVIEW

A-1. Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world. With an estimated 125 million people, it ranks as the eighth largest country in terms of its population size. With the vast majority of the people living in absolute poverty, the country suffers from chronic health conditions and economic problems that make it difficult from the average family to survive without facing enormous hardships. Few countries in the world are subjected to a many adverse conditions as Bangladesh – from hunger and disease to devastating floods that blanket the country throughout the monsoon season.

A-2. Importance of Buddhism in Bangladesh

Buddhism is one of the three major religions in Bangladesh. Today there are over one million followers, most of which are concentrated in the southeastern region of the country.

By all accounts, Buddhism has had a strong influence on the development of what is now considered modern-day Bangladesh. When Buddha's teachings began to spread in this land, well before the time of Emperor Ashoke (273–232 BC), many magnificent monasteries, temples and stupas were erected throughout the country. Chinese pilgrims, who traveled throughout the region, recorded their impressions of Bangladesh between the 5th and 7th century AD, describing a flourishing religion and mighty monuments even in the most remote areas. Unfortunately, today only a handful of those stupas and monasteries still remain.

During this early period, the spread of Buddhism in Bangladesh owed much to the Kings of Bengal. Important royal dynasties like the Palas (8th–12th century AD), the Chandras (10th–11th century AD), the Devas and the minor ruling Chiefs and Pattikara (11th–13th century) offered their patronage and protected the religion. During its prime, a number of the larger monasteries were well known to the far ends of the Buddhist world, and mention was made of them in the writings of prominent Buddhist pilgrims who traveled throughout the region.

Today, the Viharas and a number of other Buddhist places continue to be carefully preserved within our country. For example, near Jaipurhat in Bogra, lies a small village named Paharpur where the remains of the largest known monastery south of the Himalayas were exposed. This ancient find covers an area of about 27 acres and consists of many structures enclosed by a continuous line of walls. The central one is so big that it is locally known as "Pahar" (hill). The locations present name is entirely due to the presence of the ruins of this lofty ancient temple, which still dominates the landscape since it is located on the flat alluvial plain of northern Bangladesh.

While only a relatively small percentage of Bangladesh is Buddhist, we believe that by acting as positive role models within our community, we can help the general public to better understand the important role Buddhism has played in the gradual development of Bangladesh as a country. Likewise, we also feel that irrespective of a persons religion, Buddhist philosophy and teachings have something important to offer to allow men and women to better understand their own personal suffering and what can be done to help reduce or eliminate it. In one of the most populous countries in the world, where poverty and strife seems to prevail on a massive scale, we feel that our presence in the community continues to have a very positive effect – and will continue to do so in the years to come.

A-3. **Dharmarajika Buddhist Monastery in Dhaka**

In 1962, the Dharmarajika Buddhist Monastery was established in Dhaka City, the capital of Bangladesh. The Monastery was set up to act as a focal point for Buddhist teachings and meditation and to provide much needed support to the community. Since opening our doors, our center has set up many social welfare programs and has been involved in coming to the assistance of the community whenever a disaster or any other problems arises.

A-4. **Why Provide Social Services from our Monastery**

Having our monastery located in a country where much of the population lives well below the poverty line, we have always felt that it is our responsibility to provide social services to the people who reside within our community. With this in mind, in the name of humanity, our monastery has done everything we can to implement useful, cost-effective programs that accommodate the many needs of those people who are living in dire conditions. This includes running an orphanage, a series of schools, and a daily health clinic that benefits those living in the urban slums surrounding the area.

Our reasons for following this path are simple – based on the timeless principles of Buddhist teachings, we have initiated our programs with a desire to nature a sense of compassion, goodwill, harmony, cooperation and wisdom in our community. Likewise, since dhamma teaches us to take responsibility for our own welfare as well as the welfare of others, by setting up these programs, we are realizing this goal through our deeds and our actions.

B. **OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS**

B-1. **Dharmarajika Orphanage and Schools**

Orphanage Program: In 1972, our Monastery established the Dharmarajika Orphanage, our first of many community oriented programs initiated to address the many needs of the country as well as the surrounding area. In an effort to provide support to displaced boys living on the street who had no where to go, we felt it was our responsibility to open our doors, thus providing food, shelter, and an education to these victims of poverty and neglect.

At our peak in 1995, our orphanage had over 1,200 boys living and attending school on our complex, thus helping them to become successful as self-reliant men. As a result of this program, we have been able to assist hundreds of boys in becoming good, contributing citizens of our country. In fact, today many of these same boys have gone on to become successful doctors, teachers, engineers, and government officials. Because of our present funding constraints, however, we are only able to take in a few boys a year

when an opening arises. As a result, the number of boys remaining at the orphanage had dropped significantly to 600 in recent years.

While the cost of providing food, shelter and medicine for these orphans in Bangladesh is relatively low, with 600 boys in residence, these expenses begin to add up. For example, the amount of funds needed per boy, per day is approximately 20 Taka (US\$.40). With 600 boys each requiring this amount for an entire year, the Monastery must provide 4,380,000 Taka per year for just food alone (US\$ 87,600). With much of our funding coming from private donations, this is a large sum of money for us to raise on an annual basis.

In addition to the above mentioned recurrent costs, over the past five years, we have been unable to upgrade our dormitory complex which requires paint and some structural repair following the flood of 1998. Likewise, we are presently in need of new mattresses, blankets, beds and mosquito nets to replace a percentage of those that are no longer in adequate condition.

Dharmarajika School Systems: In addition to the orphanage, the Dharmarajika complex runs a primary school, a secondary/high school and a technical school. The secondary/high school is operated with some financial support from the Government of Bangladesh.

While our schools were initially set up to provide an education for our orphans, in recent years, the doors have been opened to the local community, thus allowing both boy and girl students to attend. With the status of the female child being so low in Bangladesh, we felt that it was our responsibility to see that they also benefited from the fruits of a good, sound education.

At present, 150 boys from the orphanage attend the primary school. The five teachers that run the classes are entirely paid for by the Monastery. For the secondary/high school, a total of 450 boys presently attend. To cover the cost of the 16 teachers needed to run this school, the Government of Bangladesh graciously provides 80 percent of their salaries. The Monastery covers the remaining amount.

Along with the 600 orphan boys, additional 100 girls and 100 boys attend the school from the outside (please note that students from all religions are welcomed within our schools). At present, the tuition fees for all of the girls students are being covered by a grant from an international non-government organization (INGO). The boys from the outside pay 50 Taka per month, which is used to help cover some of the teacher's salaries. Over the years, we have found these various funding mechanisms to be of great help to us. In the future, we will explore other options to assist us in becoming even more self-reliant.

In addition to salaries of the teachers, the Monastery is also responsible for providing funds to cover the cost of books, educational materials, and upkeep for the school. This represents a great burden for our Monastery.

Although our Monastery has a technical school that provides on-the-job training in printing and metal works, these classes have had to be significantly reduced in recent years due to our present financial constraints. It is our hope that with a small amount of funding, we will be able to once again utilize our fully equipped classrooms on a full-time

basis. In a culture where a skill is essential to getting a good job, providing this type of training is very important.

Future plans : In an effort to reduce the financial burden of running the orphanage and schools, the Monastery is looking at different options, including:

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- Seeking annual sponsorships for individual students. For example, for as little as 8,500 Taka (US\$ 170) much of what an orphan needs can be covered for an entire year;
- Seeking small grants to cover the cost of our teacher's salaries. For example, for only US\$ 7,200 a year, the salaries for all of our teachers can be covered. Receiving this support would be a great help to us;
- Seeking funds for an endowment that would allow the Monastery to fund students using the interest only from a sum of money set-aside for this purpose. In other words, the capital for this fund would remain untouched- the Monastery would only draw down on the interest;
- Upgrading our printing and metalwork facilities to provide contract services to the local community. In other words, the older students would be trained to carry out simple printing and metal tasks that could allow them to earn money for both themselves as well as helping us to subsidize our various programs. There are a number of advantages to this approach. First, this would give the students hands-on work experience. Second, it would help the Monastery to subsidize the operations of the technical school in the long run. Third, it would teach the students how to acquire business skills, thus preparing them for a profession in the outside world. In addition to this training, we are considering sending some of our students for two-month non-paid internships located at more extensive printing and metal shop facilities to give them a chance to apply what they have learned. Once again, this would help them to gain the experience needed to compete for a job on the outside.
- Continuing to seek donor support from organizations that feel that the work we are doing is important and worth investing in. In this case, we would welcome either large or small grants from interested groups - any amount would be greatly appreciated.

Contributions may kindly be addressed to our Bank Account:-

“Dharmarajika Orphanage
Standard Chartered Bank
A/C. No. 0 1 - 6 0 0 0 6 5 7 - 0 1
2 Dilkusha C/A
Dhaka-1000
Bangladesh.”