

MAKE OF YOURSELF A LIGHT FOR OTHERS

(श्री. निलेश व सौ. सोनल काविया हे कॅनडातील एक सुखी दांपत्य. श्री. निलेश हे संगणक अभियंता म्हणून तर सौ. सोनल या शिक्षिका म्हणून सुस्थिर नोकरी करित होत्या. महाराष्ट्र सेवा समिती या संस्थेमार्फत त्यांना 'स्व'-रूपवर्धिनीच्या कामाची ओळख झाली. वर्धिनीच्या कामाचे मोल त्यांना अधिक वाटले व दोघांनी वर्धिनीच्या कामात काही काळ प्रत्यक्ष काम करायचे ठरविले. ऑक्टोबर ते डिसेंबर, १९९९ या कालावधीत दोघेही वर्धिनीच्या कामात सहभागी होते. या कालावधीत वर्धिनीच्या कामांसंबंधी त्यांची जी प्रतिक्रिया उमटली ती त्यांच्याच शब्दात देत आहोत.)

We have been honoured beyond words to be a small part of the 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee experience. We heard about 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee through Dr. J.K. Wani of MSSO in Canada and came to Pune with an open mind. Our visit was motivated by the need to better understand the role of social organisations serving people in the lower social economic sector. We have been with Wardhinee for the past six weeks. Our limited involvement has included interacting with children in an Ajole program, observing camps and Shakhas (daily programs) and developing friendships with volunteers at the centre. We have been touched by 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee's holistic approach toward the development of children

The centre's philosophy not only has a deep sense of humanity, it portrays a way of being and exemplifies a way of life. We have been inspired by every conversation we have had with the founder, Mr. K. L. Patwardhan. It has been more than an honour to learn from him and many others like him. Mr. Patwardhan firmly believes that one should give in a way that does not create dependency. This

principle is certainly present at 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee where future compassionate leaders are continually nurtured. In this way, the founder has created a social organization that will continue in action spirit and philosophy for many generations.

In the words of K.L. Patwardhan, *"Swa'-Roop Wardhinee is a concentrated effort on the selected few, with the intention of creating selfless social workers and examples for others to follow."* Part of the concentrated effort involves knowing and understanding the child's background and family situation as well as possible. This is accomplished through personal interviews and frequent home visits. An effort that enables the centre to know the children as individuals. The selected few come from underprivileged backgrounds. Almost all of them live in single room dwellings often with several other family members. Such conditions are not conducive to the development of the child. Often the children do not even have a place to study. For these young boys and girls, the 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee centre is a haven, a place for them to be a part of a

larger community; a place for them to study, to have purpose, to give and to receive. 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee has been built in the face of reality, filling its rooms and playground with those who need it most.

Living by example, spirituality, selfless-ness, and respect and compassion for others are common threads ever present in all aspects of the centre. The vision of a caring community is continually being fostered and lived out here. The children are surrounded by examples of selfless and compassionate mentors. We have met countless volunteers illuminating goodness and dedication to serve at the centre. Many of them have made incredible personal sacrifices to devote their time and efforts to a cause they believe in. The importance of compassion before individual achievement is exemplified through such role models. This certainly has the effect of children wanting to become 'givers' and not just 'receivers' of society.

Care for others is abundant in the young men and women at the centre.

When asked about his after school hobbies, one boy remarked that working with and helping younger children was his hobby. A very enthusiastic young woman also expressed passion for social work by telling us of the joy she feels in

seeing children begin to nurture and care for each other. Success to her meant making a difference for the children.

While 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee started out as a centre for slum children, its programs and volunteers now serve the community in many ways. Programs such as children's shakhas, vocational training for women, medical health and awareness programs, and family counselling, each have their own touching stories. Upon hearing some of these stories, it is apparent that 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee could not have developed into what it is today without the selfless effort and service of people like Shireesh Patwardhan, Jayant Kavathekar, Pushpatai Nade, and Dynanesh Purandare, to name just a few.

There is a Buddhist teaching which says "*Make of yourself a light for others*". 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee is a light in which many have found hope, care and loving-kindness. We are deeply grateful for the light the founder, the members and children of the centre have brought into our own lives. Our humble efforts have just begun. Thanks to 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee, they will continue through our work in Canada and through our friendship with the centre here in Pune. We have been honoured to have started a lasting relationship with the kind spirits of all at 'Swa'-Roop Wardhinee.

