King of the Rotarians
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Hindu Elected'91-'92 Head Of International Service Club

His first passion in life? His lovely spouse Usha demurely interjects, "I'm surely his wife, but Rotary is more dear to him." Raja Saboo meekly acknowledges the candid assessment of the person who knows him best. "Yes, Rotary has become a part of my daily living," he answers simply, revealing some of the diplomatic grace that helped him rise in Rotary ranks for over 30 years. Though neither convinced me that this fatherly and gentle man is not a family man first. Raja Saboo. 57, is decidedly a Rotarion thoroughbred. His elite peers in this prestigious international civilian service organization easily recognized this and elected him their 1991-1992 president. Famous for their generous scholarship programs that annually juggle over 1,000 meritorious students between 60 countries to enhance global friendship and cooperation, the "Club" also does much, much more. In India it saves Himalayan forests, retards pollution of the Ganges and fights drug abuse. Worldwide it funds hundreds of humanitarian self-help programs. Of the 165 nation members - comprised of 24,000 community clubs-India has turned out to be one of its most enthusiastic participants.

Cosmopolitian but Frugal

Raja Saboo and his wife live frugally. Their home feels more like a temple than a house. The pious atmosphere and fragrance of burning sandalwood incense strikes anyone approaching the house. Both Raja and his wife are strict vegetarians and teetotallers. For years they didn't even allow the use of wine or liquor in the house even when they had Western guests. They have since relaxed this prohibition and now offer their regular flow of international guests whatever their alcoholic

preference. Swami Sansbharanand of the Ramakrishna Mission visits their home often, blessing them and sharing spiritual discourse.

Their village is Chandigrag near New Delhi. This area has now become known for two things - the Rock Garden of Nek Chand and Raja Saboo of the Rotary Club. There is hardly any sphere of life in this magnificent creation of French architect Le Corbusier which has not been influenced by this man. It is an indication of Mr. Saboo's quality to impart love and affection to whosoever he meets that he is popularly called Raja, "king," Saboo.

He was born in 1934 into a middle-class Hindu family in Calcutta. His father had become an important officer in a Birla firm through hard work and sincerity. Raja studied his father closely and learned the discipline and dedication that remains with him today. His mother taught him basic Hindu beliefs, especially to approach work as worship. The family made him use the bus and not the family car to instill ideals of simplicity.

Raja remembers when he was only 12 years old, he learned that Mahatma Gandhi was visiting Calcutta. He heard that the Mahatma charged five rupees each for his autographs, later donating it to the poor. Young Saboo met the Mahatma at a meeting, with three copies of his photographs. He gave him fifteen rupees, but because of the great crowd, the Mahatma signed only one of them and moved ahead. Raja wasn't ready to lose his ten rupees. He searched out the Mahatma after some time and asked him for his autographs on the remaining two photographs. The Mahatma smiled at the child's insistence and wrote. "With Bapu's blessings," on the photos. That early tenacity of purpose and demand to see a deal fairly transacted has remained throughout his business life.

After graduating in science from Xavier College in Calcutta. Raja married the petite daughter of a senior official in the Birla firm where he later joined on. But wanting to be more independent, he joined a new firm producing hosiery needles and eventually rose to top manager. He had become successful.

But not as successful as he could have become if he hadn't given so much time to his Rotary projects, his friends still taunt him. "Had I acted on the advice of my friends, I would have surely become very rich, but not a contented person. Also, not

as knowledgeable as I am today," he flatly counters. Being content and service-minded is important to the new Rotary president and he carefully traces his sublimation of the greed instinct back to the life and teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

Raja Saboo has already held all the important positions in the Rotary movement which typically preludes presidency, past local and district president. He has also been a key player in international meets and helped implement many welfare projects in India and abroad. How does he assess the impact of the Rotary on his own thinking, "There was a time when I wanted my ideas and thought to be accepted and acted upon by others. But I realize today that others too have the right to follow their own ideas and thinking. Even my children have this right."

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