

## **Silver Jubilee of Society for the Visually Handicapped (SVH)** **Ashoke Chowdhury (Former Principal, Calcutta Blind School, Behala)**

I had a long association with Mr. Shyamal Dutta, founder President of SVH since the decade of 80's. Being a Rotarian representing the Rotary Club of Behala, he and his wife Mrs. Anuradha Dutta, would often visit our School and extend their support to various empowerment projects involving our students with vision impairment. He was so generous and compassionate that besides organizing financial support for various events and project, both individually and by his Club, he hosted a Rotary District Conference, attended by dignitaries from various parts of the country and abroad, in the premises of the School.

In 1983 I along with several other visually impaired citizens attended a small informal meeting in his the then residence at 34 Ritchie Road and learnt that he and some other likeminded individuals have come forward to form a Society to support Equal Opportunity Education. I met Ms. Hena Basu, the Hon. Secretary of the Society and in due course they began conducting small projects where two alumni of my School namely Arup Chakraborty and Ranabir Dutta took an active part.

Logo of SVH is Braille A Page-Light A Mind. To make this vision a reality, gradually this Society trained sighted Brailleists, developed self-learning material, and volunteers transcribed page after page to serve needs for reading material in Braille format. And all these they served free of charge. They developed a bank for aids and appliances for the Blind and spread out their activities touching lives of Persons with Vision Impairment and total loss of vision, facilitating an improvement in the quality of their lives.

The empowerment project for which this Society's name will remain ever-memorable in the history of developing self-reliance and body-confidence of Blind and visually impaired their mountain adventure training for the Blind. Adult Blind young men and women from all over the country would participate in this annual adventure course, with sighted escorts, conducted by the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling under the Ministry of Defence, Government of India and organized by SVH from 1989 to 2001. This course generated a spirit of self-confidence, body-confidence and socializing skill among persons with loss of vision and at a national level they learnt the skill of camping, group living and mainstreaming. Back home, the visually impaired trainee became a hero in his/her own locality where hardly any sighted youth had climbed 14000 ft. Dzongri Pass in Western Sikkim, the route of basic course of HMI.

I wish this Society managed by dedicated volunteers all success and serve persons with loss of vision in larger numbers.