

History of Rotary in India

RI Presidents from India

[Nitish Laharry](#) 1962-63

[Rajendra K. Saboo](#) 1991-92

[Kalyan Banerjee](#) 2011-12

Calcutta was the home town for the first Rotary club in the mainland of Asia. R.J. Combes, the manager of a steel products company while on a business trip to U.S.A. was so impressed by the "Friendship, fellowship, and service" aspects of the movement called Rotary that he wanted to introduce the idea to his friends in Calcutta also. There was no difficulty for him to convince enough people and convene the first meeting on 26 September, 1919. The new club was chartered just after three months of the first meeting, on the new year day of 1920 to be exact. All the twenty charter members were non-Indians.

S.C. Rudra who was the first Indian member was inducted in 1921. In 1921 itself Sir Surendranath Banerjee was made an honorary member. The first Indian to become the club secretary was [Nitish C. Laharry](#) (1926) who climbed all steps to reach Rotary's top slot viz. RI presidency in 1962-'63. A.F.M. Abdul Ali was the first Indian to adorn the collar of a club president.

Except for the lone club chartered in Lahore (in Pakistan now) in 1927, for about a decade India had to be content with the only club, in Calcutta. Things changed when James Wheeler Davidson of Calgary, Canada arrived Indian shores with a firm determination to spread Rotary in India. In fact he was responsible for establishment of Rotary clubs in different countries including Australia, New Zealand, Southern Europe, Egypt, Siam and Japan and was known as 'Marco Polo of Rotary.' Jim Davidson planted Rotary in Bombay as well as Madras (now Chennai) in 1929.

Of the 38 charter members of the club in Bombay, 37 were non-Indians. The only Indian was Sir Phiroz Sethna, a legislative member, who later served as district governor (1937-'38).

F.C. James of United Planters Association of South India, who was a past president of R.C. of Calcutta helped Jim Davidson in the formation of the Madras Club. On 10 May 1929, thirty charter members, all non-Indians assembled and elected C.G. Armstrong, Chairman of Madras Port Trust as the charter president. A.A. Hayles, former editor of The Mail was also among the charter members. In 1929 itself Raja Sir. M.A. Muthaiah Chettiar was inducted into the club.

Even though [Davidson](#) organized a Rotary club in Delhi also in 1929, in a couple of years the club had to be closed down as the membership tapered off due to one or other reasons. In 1930 two clubs were formed- Etah and Meerut.

The growth of Rotary in India was rather very slow for many years, thanks to the predominance of foreigners in the clubs and other reasons such as agricultural nature of Indian economy. Mahatma Gandhi addressed Rotary Club of Calcutta which had only non-Indians on the rolls even then.

In 1933 Rotary branched out to Amritsar and to Bangalore in 1934. By 1936 Ahmedabad, Baroda, Jamshedpur, Poona and Sholapur had Rotary clubs. Three clubs were chartered in 1937, Lucknow, Surat and Cochin. R.C. Of Cochin had 22 charter members of whom 10 were non-Indians and Sir R.K. Shanmugam Chetty was the charter president. (chartered on 23 August 1937). This club had the unique privilege of meeting at an Island (Wellington Island) which was built by one of its own members (Sir Robert Bristo).

Asansol, Madurai and Rajkot clubs were formed in 1938. Another three clubs at Agra, Salem and Jabalpur came into existence the next year. The Delhi Club was also revived in 1939, thanks to the efforts of Sir. Frederick James, the first Rotary governor from India. Dehra Dun and Dharward welcomed Rotary in 1940. The next year Rotary moved to Bhopal, Mithapur, Belgaum and Nilgiris. Nilgiris club extended Rotary to Coimbatore in 1943. Visakhapatnam and Navasari clubs were already functioning. Patna club with 36 charter members was also formed the same year. Other clubs of 1943 origin were Kakinada, Vijayawada, Bhuj, Patiala, Kanpur, Allahabad, Guntur, Kolhapur.

Tirunelveli club was also chartered in 1943 with 45 charter members and District Collector Viswanatha Rao as the charter president. Rotary clubs of Nagpur, Baruch, Satara, Mysore and Bhavnagar were formed in 1944. In the two years that followed Cuttack, Dhanbad, Akola, Nasik, Ratlam, Moradabad, Faizabad, Gadag, Indore, Jaipur and Gorakhpur were added to the Rotary India map. Tirunelveli club took Rotary to Tuticorin also in 1946. As many as ten clubs were chartered in 1947. They were: Godhra, Gwalior, Palanpur, Nadiyad, Ambala, Mussoorie, Lucknow(2), Ahmednagar, Hubli, Vellore and Howrah.

By the time India became independent, there were 71 Rotary clubs (14 in Gujarat, 10 in Maharashtra, 10 in UP, seven in Tamil Nadu, seven in Karnataka and 23 in 10 other states) with a total membership of 3121 members.

Up to 1931-32, Rotary clubs in India were non-districted. From 1932 to 1935 clubs in India, Burma and Ceylon were grouped under provisional District A. On 1 July 1935 District 89 was formed with clubs in Afghanistan, Burma, Ceylon and undivided India. The first district governor was Sir Frederick E James (1935-36). Sir Phiroz Sethna followed him the next year. Sir F.E. James had to be once again at the saddle due to the sudden death of Phiroz Sethna.

The first conference of Provisional District "A" was held in 1932 at Calcutta with Sir. F.E. James as the first governor with a total registration of 39. The 1934 conference was held at Bombay and 1936 at [Bangalore](#). Up to 1936, RI president was not represented at the conferences and there was no conference in 1934-35.

The first conference of Rotary District was in Madras in 1936-'37 under the governorship of Sir F.E. James. Haji M. Eusoff represented the RI President at this conference which

had a registration of 63. The second conference was at Baroda which had a registration of 121. At the third conference which was held at Colombo the attendance further improved to 210.

In 1939 District 89 was bifurcated to create District 88 also which consisted of Afghanistan, Burmah and part of undivided India. B.T. Thakur, Col. Warren Boulton and again B.T.Thakur were the D.G.s between 1939 and 1942.

The district conferences of District 88 were held at Calcutta (regn.220), Bhopal and Agra (regn.82). District 88 was subsequently renumbered as District 90 which had one of its conferences at Jamshedpur with Nitish C. Laharry as District Governor. This conference had a registration of 154 and RI President's representative was Sir Frederick James.

In 1950, there were only 198 clubs with a Rotarian strength of 7,785 in the whole of Asia, the least numbers both in matter of clubs as well as total number of Rotarians, among the six Rotary regions then existed. With independence, growth began to pick up in India. In seven years (up to 1954) 54 clubs could be added.

By 1958, there were five Rotary districts in India, Ceylon, Burmah, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan with about 7,500 Rotarians. In another ten years, there were 430 clubs and 16,055 Rotarians in these countries.

In 1968-69, Pakistan became a separate district. The number of districts in India was 12 in 1970-71. From seventies the growth of Rotary in India picked up some momentum. The number of clubs which stood slightly above three hundred, more than doubled in the next ten years. The same tempo continued in the first half of eighties also. In 1980-81 there were 899 clubs in India in 14 RI districts with a membership of 35,172 Rotarians.

The first Asia regional conference was held in Delhi in 1958 with a registration figure of 2,913. The regional office established in Bombay in 1934 was shifted to Singapore in 1939, but the same was closed down in 1948. A full fledged regional office was opened in Delhi in 1984. Another Asia regional conference was held in Delhi in 1987 and this regional conference broke all previous registration records with its 10,501 registrations. Delhi again was fortunate to host the Council on Legislation in 1998.

The extension of Rotary in the second half of eighties broke all previous records. The number of clubs chartered between 1985 and 1989 (362 clubs) was more than double the number of clubs formed between 1975 and 1984.

In the first half of nineties also Rotary continued to grow well. 317 clubs were chartered during these years. District 3140 alone contributed 50 clubs during the period.

Rotary in India took up the Calgary Challenge in the right earnest. During 1996 a record number (133 To be exact) of new clubs were chartered in India. As a result of this unprecedented growth, the number of clubs in the beginning of 1997-98 was 1791 with a membership of 68,043. During 1997-98, however, there was slight dip in membership. Though the number of clubs increased to 1817, the Rotarian count came down to 67,759. During 1998-'99 again both the club count as well as membership in the clubs increased and reached the figures 1947 and 69,859 respectively.

During 1999-00 India lead the Rotary world in the formation of new clubs. Out of 570 new clubs added worldwide during the year, India's contribution was 102 clubs with 3049 charter members. Indian district 3200 chartered the highest number of clubs - 17. As of 1 July 2000, India had a Rotarian strength of 71,531 in 2077 clubs.

Growth of Rotary in India between 1980 and 2000 outstripped the growth of Rotary elsewhere in the world. When the world membership which stood 853,000 in 1980 gradually climbed to 1,188,000 in 2000-01, Rotary's strength in India showed a growth from 35,000 to 79,000. In other words when the world growth was about 40 percent, India recorded an astonishing 125 percent.

India does it again

In meeting the '21st Century Membership Challenge' during 2000-01 also, Rotary in India repeated its performance. Rotary district 3160 in India was world winner with a 52.38 percent increase in membership. (14 New clubs and Net gain 703 members). District Governor P. Bhaskar Reddy received the award at the San Antonio, Texas, USA, convention on June 27, 2001. District 3050 could add 1217 members to claim the number one position in net growth despite the trying situation in Gujarat due to the earth quake devastation . A noteworthy feature of the membership development in district 3050 was that the growth was mostly in the existing clubs. During the period of '21st Century Challenge' (from 1 July 2000 to 15 May 2001) Rotary membership grew from 1,162,581 to 1,187,112, posting a gain of 24,531 and India's contribution to this figure was a very significant 7,000. When the final tally for the year was taken at the RI head quarters on 30 June 2001, the total Rotarian count in India was 79,316 in 2186 clubs. (Net gain of 7,738 members. The number of clubs increased by 110).

The year 2001-02 (the year of 'Global Quest') was no different. Leading the Rotary world, India registered a growth of 18% with a net gain of 14,209 members. Out of the top five districts in membership growth, two were in India. (Dists. 3150 with 118 percent growth & 3260 with 67 percent growth). Out of the top ten clubs with highest membership growth as many as six were from India. (Bareilly North, Cuddalore Central, Green Woods-Yellandu, Jaggayyapet, Mangalore East, Murwara). Out of the six RI membership coordinators who were recognized on stage at Barcelona Convention, two were from India: Past Governor Hemant Ahuja and Past Governor C.S. Ramachandran.

During 2007 - 08, it was the turn of District 3230 of India to be the world number one in membership growth.

Mirroring the global trend, after the Global Quest for the next five years the membership showed a see-saw trend. After 2007 the growth momentum once again picked up. The number 93,029 as of June 2007 jumped to 107,962 as of July 2010. The club count which was 2186 in 2001 increased to 2,896 as of July 2010.

Zone boundaries change

In the beginning of 1995-96, when the system of regions in the Rotary world was abolished and the new zone system was introduced, India had 1,654 Rotary clubs in 28

districts and the number of Rotarians was 58,777. The 28 districts in India were under zone five and six.

The main criteria in demarcating the 34 zones in 1995 was to have almost equal number of Rotarians in all the zones so that each director will represent equal number of Rotarians. Also, the RI Bylaws stipulated a 'comprehensive' review of the composition of the zones every 12 years (now eight years) so as to maintain an approximately equal number of Rotarians in each zone.

Accordingly, The Board adopted new zone boundaries at its June 2008 meeting, effective 1 July 2009 and the selection of members of director nominating committees from 2008-09 was based on realigned zone boundaries. With the district bifurcations of 2008-09 and 2009-10, there are 31 Rotary Districts in India and they come under zones 4 (A & B), 5 (A & B) and 6A.

There are six districts of North Western India in Section A of Zone 4 while Section B consists of six districts of Western India. Six South- Indian districts and the only district in Sri Lanka are in Section A of Zone 5, while Section B of the same Zone consists of seven districts of Central and Southern India. The districts in North eastern India (six) and Nepal are in Section A of Zone 6 while the remaining eight districts of the Zone are in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore and Thailand.

The Rotary population in India is now more than the number required to fill three zones and hence India can request for three independent zones for better representation. With this growth story, India has reached the forefront of Rotary countries in the matter of Rotarian count, next only to USA.

Now every 12th Rotarian is in India.

The Rotarian population which was 58,777 in the 28 districts in India in 1995-96 shot up to 107,962 as of July, 2010 in 31 districts, a whopping 84% growth in 15 years.

Men only banner goes

With the opening up of Rotary to women in 1989, clubs in India began to invite the fair sex also to join the clubs. In 1991-92 three clubs in India had women presidents. (R.Cs. of Thuckalay (Dist.3210), Palladam (Dist. 3200) and Mudagod (Dist. 3170), apart from a charter president in Thiruvananthapuram (Dist.3210). District 3200 also had a woman charter president in 1992, Elsamma Thomas of Nilgiris West, wife of past RI director P.C.Thomas.

.A few clubs were formed in India with exclusive membership of women Rotarians, though RI preferred mixed gender clubs.

In 1998-'99 Rotary year India had her first woman district governor. She was none other than the well informed Madhura M. Chathrapathy of Dist. 3190. Next year it was the turn of the neighboring district, District 3230 to present a woman district governor, Rtn. Rekha Shetty.

As of August 2010, the women population in Rotary in India was 6576.

Rotary Leaders from India

During the nine decades of existence of Rotary in India, several world leaders emerged from this region. The first Rotarian to become RI President from Asia was Nitish Laharry (1962-63) from Calcutta. India had to wait for another 29 years for another Indian to be nominated to the position of RI President. In 1991 - 92 Rajendra K. Saboo (Raja Saboo) from Chandigarh had the rare opportunity of leading the world's leading service organization. Raja Saboo also served as the Chairman of The Rotary Foundation (1996-97), the only Indian to hold the position in Rotary's history. Kalyan Banerjee (Rotary Club of Vapi, Gujarat) is going to be the third Indian to lead Rotary from the International presidential chair. His presidential term begins on July 1, 2011.

Sir Frederick E. James was the first RI director from India (1933-34). Sir. Shapoorjee B. Billimoria was RI Director in 1943-44 and was second vice-president during 1949-50. Before becoming RI President, Nitish C. Laharry also held the office of vice - president in 1953-54 and director in 1954-55. B.T. Thakur of Calcutta Club also became second vice-president in 1946-47.

RI Presidents from India

They all hail from Kolkata and Kolkata hails them all!

So far in Rotary's ninety year history in India only three Rotarians were elected for RI presidency. [Nitish Laharry](#), [Rajendra Saboo](#) and [Kalyan Banerjee](#). Nitish Laharry was the first Indian to become a Rotary club secretary in India, Rotary Club of Calcutta (the earlier name of Kolkata), the first Rotary club in India. Raja Saboo was born not far from Kolkata and his father was a member of RC of Calcutta. Kalyan was born in Calcutta. Later Raja Saboo and Kalyan moved to the west, to Chandigarh and Vapi in Gujarat to be exact and joined the Rotary clubs of the respective places. The Kolkata connections of all the RI presidents is an unique coincidence!

The full list of distinguished Rotarians who held top positions in RI is given below.

1.	Sir. Frederick James	Chenna	Director	1933-34
2.	Shapoorjee B. Billimoria	Mumbai	Director	1942-43
3.	B.T.Thakur	Kolkatta	Vice President	1946-47
4.	Shapoorjee B Billimoria	Mumbai	Vice President	1949-50
5.	Nitish C. Laharry	Kolkatta	Vice President	1953-54
6.	Nitish C. Laharry	Kolkatta	Director	1954-55
7.	Krishna Prasad	Delhi	Director	1961-63
8.	Nitish C. Laharry	Kolcatta	President	1962-63
9.	Edul C. Eduljee	Nagpur	Director & Trusr.	1973-75
10.	Soli S. Pavri	Mumbai	Director	1977-79

11.	Rajendra K. Saboo	Chandigarh	Director	1981-83
12.	L. Manchanda	Faridabad	Director	1984-86
13.	Sudarshan Aggarwal	Delhi	Director	1987-89
14.	Rajendra K. Saboo	Chandigarh	President	1991-92
15.	M.K. Panduranga Setty	Bangaluru	Director	1991-93
16.	O.P. Vaish	Delhi	TRF Trustee	1991-94
17.	T. Ramesh U. Pai	Manipal	Director	1992-94
18.	Rajendra K. Saboo	Chandigarh	Chairman, TRF	1996-97
19.	Kalyan Banerjee	Vapi	Director	1995-97
20.	O.P. Vaish	Delhi	Director	1999-01
21.	P. C. Thomas	Ootacamund	Director	2001-03
22.	Kalyan Banerjee	Vapi	TRF Trustee	2001-05
23.	Sushil Gupta	Delhi	Director	2003-05
24.	Ashok M Mahajan	Mumbai	Director	2007-09
25.	Ashok M Mahajan	Mumbai	TRF Trustee	2009-
26.	Kalyan Banerjee	Vapi	President	2011-12

The nation has recognized the services of Rajendra K. Saboo as well as of Sushil Gupta with 'Padma Sree' awards.

The following are the Rotary districts in India with the relevant zones, number of clubs and the Rotarians as of January 2011.

Dist.	Zone	Area	Clubs	Members.
2980	5	Part of Tamil Nadu	152	5,695
3000	5	Part of Tamil Nadu	79	3,188
3010	4	Delhi, Parts of Hariyana and Utter Pradesh	123	4,930
3020	5	Part of Andhra Pradesh	70	2,906
3030	4	Part of Maharashtra	84	3,819
3040	4	Parts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh	81	1,822
3050	4	Parts of Gujarat, Madhya-Pradesh and Rajasthan	160	6,813
3060	4	U.T. of Daman & Diu, parts of Gujarat and Maharashtra	84	3,252
3070	4	Parts of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir and Punjab	111	3,323
3080	4	Chandigarh, Parts of Hariyana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Utter Pradesh and Uttaranchal	75	3,009
3090	4	Parts of Hariyana, Punjab and Rajasthan	69	1,897
3100	4	Part of Utter Pradesh	96	2,295
3110	6	Parts of Madhya Pradesh and Utter Pradesh	104	3,222
3120	6	Parts of Madhya Pradesh and Utter Pradesh	70	2,356
3131	4	Part of Maharashtra	89	3,782

Dist.	Zone	Area	Clubs	Members.
3132	4	Part of Maharashtra	68	2,846
3140	4	Part of Maharastra	123	6,524
3150	5	Part of Andra Pradesh	91	3,172
3160	5	Parts of Andra Pradesh & Karnataka	65	2,021
3170	5	Goa, Parts of Karnataka and Maharastra	131	4,639
3180	5	Part of Karnataka	132	4,929
3190	5	Parts of Andra Pradesh and Karnataka	87	3,598
3201	5	Parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu	109	3,972
3202	5	Parts of Kerala & Tamil Nadu	97	3,581
3211	5	Part of Kerala	127	3,591
3212	5	Part of Tamil Nadu	69	2,793
3230	5	Part of Tamil Nadu	108	4,483
3240	6	Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya Naga- land, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Tripura & North Bengal	72	2,315
3250	6	Bihar and Jharkand	79	2,675
3260	6	Parts of Madhya Pradesh, Orrisa & Chattisgargh	128	3,875
3291	6	Andaman & Nicobar islands, and part of West Bengal	129	4,056
Total			3062	<u>111,379</u>

(The above figures are from RI South Asia Office and are as of 18 January 2011.)

Note: 'History of Rotary in India' is researched and written by RGHF member Rtn. N. Bhaskaran Pillai of Rotary Club of Fort Cochin (District 3201) in India. First published in 1998 and updated in Feb. 2011