

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear Fellow Rotarians.

Hope you enjoyed your Diwali break. Once again, I wish you and your dear ones, a Very Happy Samvat New Year 2076!!!

The Diwali Party on October 23<sup>rd</sup> was extremely well organised in every aspect. Thanks to Rtn. Ashok Jatia and the team for their efforts and taking care of minute details – we

had a fabulous evening.

I am delighted to see synergies between our various committees being used to leverage strengths. At the beginning of the Rotary Year, I had made mention of and laid emphasis on the need to synergise our efforts in our Club projects and committees. The Water Resources Committee and the Animal Welfare Committee put together their efforts and installed six Jal Jeevan Safe Drinking Water units at the Bombay SPCA Animal Hospital. It was also interesting to learn how children and elderly enrich each other's lives, when Ananda Yaan and Bhavishya Yaan came together and elders shared their knowledge and experience with young ones.

For those joining the upcoming fellowship trip to Uzbekistan, some historical facts may be of interest:

Relations between Uzbekistan and India have their roots deep in history. There are frequent references to Kamboja in Sanskrit and Pali literature, stated to include parts of present-day Uzbekistan. The Sakas are said to have participated in Mahabharat on the side of Kauravas. The ancient trade route Uttarpath passed through Uzbekistan. In later years, Fergana, Samarkand, Bukhara in Uzbekistan emerged as major towns on the trade routes linking India with Europe and China. Amir Timur (known in the west as 'Tamerlane') was born near Shahrisabz. Babur the founder of the Moghul Empire in India came from Fergana in Uzbekistan. Indian merchants based in Samarkand and Bukhara were an integral part of local economy. Interactions over thousands of years contributed to close cultural linkages in architecture, dance, music and cuisine. Mirza Ghalib and Amir Khusró are stated to be notable Indians of Uzbek parentage. Indian Bollywood movies have traditionally been popular in Uzbekistan and its songs sung by Uzbek people.

The family of Nizams in India is descended from Abid Khan, a Turkoman from Samarkand, whose lineage is traced to Sufi Shihab-ud-Din Suhrawardi (1154–91) of Central Asia. In the early 1650s, on his way to Hajj, Abid Khan stopped in Deccan, where the young prince Aurangzeb, then Governor of Deccan, cultivated him. For those who attended the very well organised (thanks to Chairperson Rtn. Zinia Lawyer, Co-Chairperson Rtn. Ritu Desai, and the very warm hospitality of Rtn. Ptn. Zarina and PE Rtn. Framroze Mehta), the In-camera Fellowship on the Hyderabad of the Nizams on October 16th, would recall this aspect.

India had close interaction with the Uzbek SSR during the Soviet times. Indian leaders often visited Tashkent and other places. Prime Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri sadly and in an untimely manner passed away in Tashkent on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1966 after signing the Tashkent Declaration with Pakistan. There is said to be an element of mystery about his sudden demise at Tashkent. In August 1991, as the events leading to the disintegration of the USSR unfolded, President Islam Karimov, then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan, was visiting India. Uzbekistan became independent on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1991.

Rotarians and Rotary Partners, have a great trip to Uzbekistan!

  
President Preeti Mehta



## THE INVISIBLE ONES

**Urvashi Butalia** shares real stories about real women spear-heading the change in India

I am going to share with you three stories of the kind of woman that we see everyday in our lives but don't take much note of.

Baby Halder: A domestic worker, she is the kind of woman who would work in our houses – sweeping, cooking, cleaning the house, etc. Baby comes from a poor family where the father was alcoholic as well as abusive and violent. This led to the mother leaving home very early with her only male child, leaving behind the two girls with their father. He, like many fathers when saddled with two girls, was keen to get rid of the daughters. He married Baby's sister to someone very early and at that ceremony Baby, who was 12 years old, was seen by a man 14 years her senior. He came the next day and asked her father if he could marry her. The father agreed, happy to have killed two birds with one stone. Married at 12, Baby became a mother at 13. This is a fate common to many women. She had three children. Her marriage was empty, violent and abusive. Her husband was poor. He had no work and she tried, time and again, to do something like tuitions



to earn from the neighbourhood but couldn't as the husband didn't want her to step out of the house.

One day, fed up, Baby picked up her three children and left. She boarded a train from Howrah to Delhi without a ticket, sitting outside the toilet with her three children. The TC saw something in this young woman and let her be. She arrived in Delhi, no money, three children and a scrap of paper with the incomplete address of her brother who was a car mechanic in Faridabad. Baby went to Faridabad and, at the station, she asked a rickshawala where she could find car

**TODAY'S SPEAKER: CRICKETER SUNIL GAVASKAR**





IPP Rtn. Vijay Kumar Jatia, President Preeti Mehta, Ptn. Malti Jain, Rtn. Sunita Mandelia and Rtn. Nanik Rupani



President Preeti Mehta and Speaker Urvashi Butalia



President Preeti Mehta exchanges banners with a visiting Rotarian



President Preeti Mehta wishes Rtn. Jimmy Pochkhanawalla for his birthday

mechanics. He took her there and lo and behold she found her brother. The brother was not happy to see her. Who wants four extra mouths to feed when you barely have enough to feed your family? And, he didn't like the fact that she had arrived without her husband. But families are strong things in India. He took her in and looked after her until she managed to find a job at the home of a retired professor of IIT, Delhi, who also happened to be the grandson of one of India's famous writers, Premchand.

He, Prabodh Kumar, noticed that Baby spent a lot of time in the library while cleaning the



**Domestic help Baby Halder wrote the story of her life and is now being published in 23 languages. Her children will get the education she wants for them**

house. He walked in one day and saw a book in her hand. He asked her to read it title. Nervously, she did. She had only studied till she turned 12. He asked her about her life and found that she had desperately wanted to study but could not because she had gotten married. He then loaned her books and gave her two hours off to read. A year later he gave her a notebook and a pen and asked her to write whatever she wanted, may be her about her life. She thought to herself, 'What is my life? What can I write?' But she did begin. This life went to being a best-selling book which is being published in

23 languages across the world in India and abroad and Baby is now a celebrated writer. She continues to do domestic work but her life has changed substantially and she has been able to give her children education.

The second story is of Salma, Tamil



**Rokkaiah is from a conservative community in Tamil Nadu. She wrote a book of erotic poetry under the pseudonym Salma. She threw off her veil and went on to become a successful literary and political figure**

Nadu. She comes from a very tight-knit, conservative Muslim community in Tamil Nadu where all the men are in the Gulf and all the households in the village are female-headed households. Here, the practice is, young girls are pulled out of school when they begin menstruating and kept at home in readiness for marriage. This happened with Salma too; she went to school till she was 12 and for the next eight years did not see the road outside the house. At 20, her marriage was arranged to a man from neighbouring village who had a political family which stood for village-level elections. During the time Salma was imprisoned in the house, her mother and her brother, the people who were actually implementing the practice of imprisoning girls were also deeply sympathetic towards her and understood her desire to study, read and write.

Her brother smuggled in books which she read and Salma wrote poetry – passionate, erotic poetry about the female body as she saw changes in her body. Her mother smuggled these out and had them published under the pseudonym Salma, her real name is Rokkaiah and the Tamil establishment, totally male, very caste-riddled was aflame by this woman who they did not know. Who was the secret woman writing all this revolutionary stuff? They had no idea until Salma revealed herself after publishing the novel and going to the launch in Chennai. That was the first time her husband got to know that his wife was a writer. After this, something happened that changed Salma's life radically.

The Indian state brought in the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution: the Panchayat Raj, which made it mandatory to keep 33 per cent elected posts at the village level reserved for women. The post Salma's husband stood for became reserved. He, like many other families, decided to let any family woman stand as a proxy while he would wield the power behind her. They asked every woman in the family except Salma. Every woman said no. They were not used to power and did know how to deal with it. Salma stepped up and said she would do it. Having no choice, the family agreed. The first thing that gave way was Salma's veil, which she took off, because you cannot campaign without a face. She went on to become both a successful writer and a successful political figure in Tamil Nadu.

My third story about IAS Rupan Deol Bajaj who was very high up in the Ministry of Finance in Punjab: at a party at the house of the Finance Secretary, she was slapped on the bottom publicly by KPS Gill, then the DG of Police in Punjab and the man credited with ending militancy in Punjab. She took him to court, fought the case for 17 years and she won. But it took a lot out of her. At the time when Rupan Deol Bajaj filed the case, the Indian state had no law in place to deal with what was obviously a case of sexual harassment at the workplace.



President Preeti Mehta wishes Rtn. Samir Mogul for his birthday



President Preeti Mehta wishes Rtn. (Dr.) Vandana Bulchandani for her birthday



President Preeti Mehta with speaker Urvashi Butalia



Rotarians Farhat Jamal, President Preeti, Manish Reshamwala and Tara Deshpande with the speaker



**IAS officer Rupan Deol Bajaj was slapped on the bottom publically by KPS Gill, then the DG of Police in Punjab and the man credited with ending militancy in Punjab, at a party at the house of the Finance Secretary. She took him to court, fought the case for 17 years and won**

Even though it was a party, she was working, in an official capacity. Later, this law came into place as a result of another incident that followed which was the case of a Dalit woman from Rajasthan, Bhanwari Devi. She was part of a large development programme called the Women's Development Programme.

Under this, she was charged with the responsibility of implementing government policy at the village level and one of these policies was to put an end to child marriages which are rampant in Rajasthan. Hearing of a child marriage in a Gujar, upper caste, household, Bhanwari had gone there to try and persuade to stop the children getting married. Angered that a Dalit woman could have the guts to tell the upper caste what to do, the Gujar took their revenge by gang-raping Bhanwari. The case went to court and is still in court. However, one of the interesting things that happened due to the case was that the women's movement in India started to ask the question: what does the workplace mean for women?

Does it mean just the four walls of an office? Does it mean the home where she is working as a domestic helper? Can it be a field in which she is farming? Can it be in transition from home to the field and so on? Who is responsible for women's safety, security and respect? It was that campaign that led to put in place what is known as the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the work place, the PoSH act, today, which is mandatory to all businesses and corporates, organisations, etc.

### IMPORTANT MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

1. A minute's silence was observed on the sudden death of ex-Rotarian Kahan C. Narang who served the Club as Honorary Treasurer for many years. He was a regular donor to the Trust project of Scholarships and Eye Care Centre (PRVEC).

2. The following Resolution was passed at the Extra Ordinary General Meeting held on October 22nd, 2019:

“RESOLVED by the Rotary Club of Bombay at its Extra-Ordinary General Meeting held on Tuesday, October 22nd, 2019 at the Taj Mahal Hotel at 1.45 pm that the name of PP Rtn. Sandip Agarwalla of the Rotary Club of Bombay be and is hereby suggested for consideration by the District Nominating Committee for nomination as District Governor for the Rotary year 2022-2023.”

Resolution is proposed by President Preeti Mehta and seconded by PP Rtn. Paul George. It was carried unanimously by the members present at the meeting.

3. Club Assembly on Monday, November 11th, 2019

Directors, Committee Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons are requested to note that the Club Assembly on Monday, November 11th, 2019 at the Babubhai Chinai Committee Room of the Indian Merchants Chamber at 6 pm. Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons are requested to send their Committee Reports to the Rotary Office by November 5th, 2019 and confirm their presence at the Rotary Office.

What do these stories of hardship and poverty have to do with all of you? My answer is – nothing and everything. Nothing because all those women are around us, but we hardly see them. Or, rather, we see them but not as human beings who have feelings, who have their ups and downs, who have their stories and dreams. And 'everything' because for me what these women represent is something that we never talk about in India. How every woman in this country, no matter from where and what caste she comes from, carries with her in her heart, the desire to change realities of life and live her dreams. Some of them manage to do it while others do not because they do not have enough opportunities.

To me, in India today, it is these women who are driving the change. I think it is time we turn our attention to them. It is time we hear what they want to say. They are saying that 'we are no longer content to stay within the four walls, we too want to be part of the productivity and change' and, despite the odds, they are living their dreams but we do not notice them.

A figure that strikes me as significant is when I said that Salma was benefited by the amendment of the Constitution, in the first-ever election after that amendment, about 8,000 women came out to stand for elections. Today, of the three million elected posts at the village level of India, 1.4 are occupied by women. No matter how we say some of them might be proxies for their husbands, but a majority of them are doing quite well at their work. By and large, they are not corrupt because they are not used to dealing with that kind of money. Men occupying those posts are deeply corrupt.

So what they are doing there is looking at sanitation, schools, community centres and health. On the ground, these women are creating a revolution to change the conditions that create poverty and as such their contribution should be complimented. Far-reaching changes in this are evident in the voting of women in India today. Women voters are increasing at a much





Rotarians Sanjay Desai, Pradeep Gupta, Ashok Jatia, Anand Dalal and Dilip Dalal



Rotarians Satyan Israni, Anuj Arenja and Sanjiv Saran Mehra



Rotarians Tara Deshpande, Ashok Jatia and Vrinda Rajgarhia



Speaker Urvashi Butalia

faster pace than men. Studies show that they are no longer voting at the behest of their male counterparts, community or Panchayat leader. Instead, they are choosing themselves.

So, just think, women are fighting for the things in our country that men take for granted. India got its first female doctor only towards the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. You can see only now see women becoming pilots. Let me ask this question: what is difference in the anatomy? Because, after all, that is all that differentiates between men and women, and what does that have to do with the capability of flying a plane? I have never found an answer to that question.

One of the things that I find tragic is that how much this country is using by not recognising the potential of a woman. It is not enough to offer gas cylinders and toilets; the first step is to recognise women as equal citizens. But our standard reaction is not that. Take a look at the recent campaign of #MeToo which has thrown the political and corporate world into confusion with women making allegations of sexual harassment against very powerful figures. The general assumption here is that the women are making unnecessary problems, that they are lying and that sexual harassment is a minor problem.

Before we got the PoSH act, it was called eve-teasing, but it is not teasing. But the reaction of the corporate world is not to understand that it is a serious problem and we need to address it but to say let's not employ women – they are nothing but trouble. I have always wondered why, for example, when we talked of reservations for women in Parliament, opposition from male politicians is about women being incapable of power, having short hair and not the intelligent reaction that actually we need a bigger house.

594 seats is not enough for 1.4 billion people. We had 300 and something at Independence. We are 70 years down the

line, surely we need 700 plus seats. Let's get them and give them to women. You are not going to lose power. But, instead, the reaction is a hostile one saying *aurton ko nikal do unka koi farak nahi padta*.

Gender sensitive change can make a difference. I was talking to the CEO of a large industrial company employing both men and women in its unit. He was saying that they were quite mystified by the inefficiency of women's behaviour when it comes to using machinery. When they started talking to the women, the women said that the overalls that were made were for men and the women found it difficult to move in them. The gloves they made were for male hands and they could not be nimble fingered in them; the helmets are for male heads and the shape of their heads was smaller. The company then changed and took the female body into account and created overalls, gloves and helmets according to size and productivity increased exponentially.

Similarly, there are many things which go unnoticed but are discriminatory to women, things like the cockpit in the airplane, the passenger seats, lapel mics, I don't wear a suit so while interviewing I have to hold that mic in my hand – these are everyday things.

An example from my own life, for about five-six years, I was heading the publishing committee at the FICCI and every year we organised a large event called the CEO Speak for the publishing community, at the time of the World Book Fair in Delhi. As head of the community, it was my job to open the proceedings after opening speeches by the Director General and other luminaries. Year on year, the DG of FICCI was unable to you remember my name. He would get up and take everyone's name, and he would say Ms Urmila or Ms Bhatia. It is not a difficult name Butalia is a different surname but it is a Punjabi surname. He could have got it if he had written it on a piece of paper.

Two years running, the head of the National Book Trust, Bhai Baldev Sharma opened his

remarks by mentioning every name at the table but me. I could see no other reason behind this except that I am a woman. If you would have been in my place you would know that helplessness in public situations, you know that you are being insulted. As a professional, do you get on stage and raise that or do you get on stage and take responsibility and take the event forward as it should be. It is a tough thing but women face it.

What can we, as relatively privileged members of society, do to fulfil the dreams of poor and marginalised women? Is there a way to look at our daily lives and see how we unthinkingly exercise discrimination which is harmless for us but can be very hurtful for the person at the receiving end?

When I came here, I was introduced to a few of you and I was asked what I was going to speak about. I said I would speak about women. And, in almost every instance, there was a slightly uncomfortable, gentle laugh. I am sure no one intended an insult but I am also sure that if I had said that I was going to speak about solar power you would have not laughed. You might have said that is interesting, I don't know much about it, I would like to hear about it. But with women there was a slight hmm... *kya bole usko*.

So, as I am looking for change, one of the positive things is that if 20 years ago I, as a feminist, had come to speak to you as industry leaders, you would have not given me the time of day. But today, we are talking. I think that is the beginning of the conversation that we should be having, to start a dialogue that assumes that we cannot move ahead as a progressive country if one half of our population has to beg, fight or demand for all the things that you take for granted. Have you ever thought that for you, you did not really have to ask for your education but for your sister, they had to ask because for them marriage was the horizon. For you education, job and career were the horizon. It is time to shift that horizon so everybody can share it.

## BY ALUMNI GIRLS AT IDGC EVENT

October 11th is observed as the International Day of the Girl Child (IDGC). This year Population First, in association with SBI Foundation, organised a seminar on Saturday, October 19th, 2019 to mark the occasion of the IDGC. The event featured two panel discussions on education, health and empowerment issues followed by a scintillating performance by Suneeta Rao. The programme was held at the State Bank Bhavan Auditorium.

The event aimed at giving both the programme managers and government representatives an opportunity to understand

the girls' perspective. 14 BY alumni of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar School and five BY alumni of Colaba School – 19 girls in all – attended the event.

One of the girls wrote about the event: "The event was mind-blowing and informative. The event was for International Day of Girl Child and its theme was 'Girl Force : Unscripted and Unstoppable'. The event included a panel discussion on the intersection between quality education, health and social development. I liked it when the girls participated in the panel discussion and expressed their thoughts and opinions. It helped me to



understand how I should take a stand for myself."

Thank you, PP Rtn. Ramesh Narayan for giving our girls

the opportunity to speak out and show the world what BY has made of them. We are proud of our BY alumni girls!

## NSC & BY DO GOOD TOGETHER



IN A great example of our Club's committees working together to make a difference, we are able to provide an entire year's supply of sanitary napkins to 66 girl students of our Night Study Centres. A big thank you to the Bhavishya Yaan Committee for directing their surplus stock to the Night Study Centre Committee. This initiative is important to us and we aim to make sure all the remaining girl students are also provided with sanitary napkins. In the pictures here, Worli, Sewri, Korba Mithagar and Nadkarni Park students receive their sanitary napkins.





We are active on social media with over 6,500 followers. Find us on facebook, twitter and instagram with the handle @rcb1929. Find us on linkedin and youtube with the handle rotary club of bombay. Please follow us and like/share the posts.

Statistics of the meeting held on October 22, 2019

Members: 69, Rotarian Partners: 01, Visiting Rotarians: 01, Guests: 00, Rotaractors: 01, Total = 72, Service Box Collection = Rs. 1900

# DIWALI NIGHT FOR RCB MEMBERS



Rtn. S V Prasad and Rtn. Ptn. Jaya Prasad, Rtn. Vineet and Rtn. Ptn. Rinku Suchanti and Rtn. Ptn. Poonam Surana



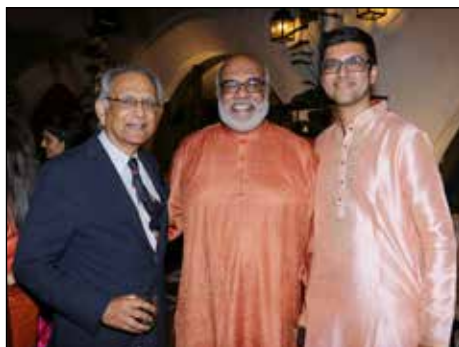
PP Rtn. Harry Singh Arora and Rtn. Ptn. Malti Jain



Rotarian Partners Gulrez Contractor, Shailaja Mogul, Miloni Sampat and Bijal Kara



Rotarian Partners Poonam Surana, Shailaja Mogul and Rachna Agarwal



Rotarians PP Pradeep Saxena, PP Paul George and Satyan Israni



Rotarians Ritu Desai, Anar Shah, Sudha Motwane, Rtn. Ptn. Malti Jain and Rtn. Sunita Mandelia



Rtn. Ptn. Jaya Prasad, PP Rtn. Paul George, Rtn. Bimal and Rtn. Ptn. Aradhana Mehta and Rtn. Ptn. Bijal Kara



Rtn. Dilnavaz and Rtn. Ptn. Sam Variava with PP Harry Singh Arora



Rtn. Jairaj Purandare, Rtn. Mudit Jain, Rtn. Gautam and Rtn. Ptn. Ushma Doshi



Rtn. Vandan Shah, Rtn. Ptn. Vatsala Jatia, Rtn. Ptn. Ekta Shah, Rtn. Ptn. Malti Jain, Rtn. Tara Deshpande and Rtn. Ashok Jatia



Rtn. Ptn. Biba Arora, Rtn. Ptn. Shakuntala Lulla, Rtn. Ptn. Ekta and Rtn. Vandan Shah and Rtn. Mohsin Contractor



Rtn. Ptn. Binaifar and Rtn. Hoshang Nazir and Rtn. Ptn. Navaz Pochkhanawalla



Rtn. Ptn. Meher, Rtn. Khurshed and Shernaz Poonawala



President Preeti Mehta



Rtn. Ashok Jatia, Chairman of the Fellowship Committee



Rtn. Sameer and Rtn. Ptn. Arwa Tapia



Rtn. Ptn. Vatsala Jatia, President Preeti Mehta, Rtn. Jimmy Pochkhanawalla, Rtn. Ptn. Malti Jain and Rtn. Sunita Mandelia



Rtn. Ptn. Rohit and Rtn. Prakriti Poddar, Rtn. Ptn. Sunita and PP Rtn. Pradeep Saxena



Rtn. Ptn. Rajul Parekh, Rtn. Ptn. Vandana Daga, Rtn. Manoj Patodia, Rtn. Ptn. Mayuri Sekhsaria and Rtn. Ptn. Asha Shah



Rtn. Mudit Jain, Rtn. Bimal Mehta, Rtn. Sherebanu Baldiwal, Rtn. Ptn. Aradhana Mehta, Rtn. Ptn. Gulrez and Rtn. Ishraq Contractor, Rtn. Ptn. Reshma and Rtn. Sohail Shikari, Rtn. Ptn. Bijal and Rtn. Hiren Kara



Rtn. Sameer and Rtn. Ptn. Arwa Tapia, Rtn. Samir and Rtn. Ptn. Shailaja Mogul, Rtn. Ptn. Ummeahani Bagasrawala, Rtn. Ptn. Dhwanika and Rtn. Ashwin Thakkar



Rtn. Ptn. Malini and PP Rtn. Sandip Agarwalla, PE Rtn. Framroze Mehta, Rtn. Ptn. Meher Poonawala, Rtn. Ptn. Arnaz and Rtn. Phiroze Soonawalla



Rtn. Sunita Mandelia, Rtn. Rekha Tanna, Rtn. Ptn. Sweta Vakil and Rtn. Ptn. Malti Jain



Rtn. Sherebanu Baldiwal, Rtn. Ptn. Miloni and Rtn. Mehul Sampat



Rtn. Sherebanu Baldiwal with Rotarian Partners Yasmin Divecha and Zarina Mehta



# THE MOVER AND SHEKHAR OF ROTARY!

**PP Rtn. SANDIP AGARWALLA speaks with RIPN SHEKHAR MEHTA about his Rotary and personal journey from the Calcutta Mahanagar Club to the 18<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Rotary World office in Evanston, USA and even dares to ask, which of the two he finds more exhilarating!**



**Sandip Agarwalla:** Thank you for doing the interview with me Shekhar, I really appreciate it. When did you join Rotary?

**Shekhar Mehta:** I joined Rotary in 1985, when I was just 25 years old. I joined the Rotary Club of Central Calcutta but for the last 23 years I have been a member of the Rotary Club of Calcutta Mahanagar.

**Sandip Agarwalla:** What did you expect from Rotary when you joined?

**Shekhar Mehta:** I just joined Rotary to make friends! At 25, service was the last thing on my mind. I just wanted to make friends. Friendship then led me to service activities and today both give me equal joy. Today, the friendships remain as strong as ever and service has become an integral part of me.

**Sandip Agarwalla:** What about Rotary inspires you the most?

**Shekhar Mehta:** The networking ability and that leads to everything! If you have a network you can move mountains. Individually, I can go and give two drops of polio to some children but look at what the network has done! Rotary is an outstanding network group.

**Sandip Agarwalla:** At what stage did you think that you may be asked to lead Rotary International one day?

**Shekhar Mehta:** Well, I have always believed that in voluntary organisations, one should move to a leadership position when others perceive that you are ready for the role.

A few years after my directorship, colleagues and seniors started suggesting that I put in my name and that is what led me to do so.

**Sandip Agarwalla:** How do you see Rotary remaining relevant to the community in the next 10 years?



**Shekhar Mehta:** I feel Rotary will remain relevant not just for 10 years but for the next hundred years. I hope and wish that we see the end of the problems of water, sanitation, health, hygiene. Till the day all these problems are solved, Rotary will remain relevant. Even then, after the service activities are completed, Rotary will still be relevant for fostering friendship.

**Sandip Agarwalla:** Membership in western countries is a huge challenge – how does Rotary plan to

overcome this?

**Shekhar Mehta:** So, there is no easy answer to this. If there were, then this problem would not persist for so long. At the same time, I think it is important that we get out of this jinx around us of 1.2 million... we need to break that jinx. It will have to be with countries where the membership is growing like Korea, India, Bangladesh, South Asia. We have to grow but at the same time western countries will also have to increase their membership. So, different things will have to be tried at different

**“FOR ME, THIS IS NOT A PROJECT OR A PROGRAMME, IT IS A MISSION FOR EVERY ROTARIAN, EVERY INDIAN. WE CANNOT HAVE THE SCOURGE OF BEING AN ILLITERATE COUNTRY. OUR COUNTRY IS PROGRESSING SO WELL, BUT WE ARE STILL MAJORLY ILLITERATE? WE CAN TURN THIS AROUND, IT IS POSSIBLE.” - RIPN SHEKHAR MEHTA**

places. One size will not fit all. I think regional plans, if not country plans, are important. What is good for Germany may not be good for Switzerland which is just next door! I think brain-storming needs to be done and we need to put far more effort towards membership drives than we have.

**Sandip Agarwalla:** What is your Rotary dream?

**Shekhar Mehta:** I have Rotary *dreams* not a Rotary dream. The first dream I have now, and it's becoming more and more crystallised to me, is that Rotary should get nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. We deserve it for the work we are doing in eradicating Polio. We may not have totally eradicated Polio yet but look at the work that has gone into what we have achieved so far!

Add to that, our achievements in the peace centres, the 1100 people army of conflict resolution experts we have produced. I mean, what better way to have directly and actively worked for peace?

If the Nobel Prize happens, many other dreams will follow. Our membership will get a spike! I can assure you our public image will be at its highest ever!

This single dream will result in more work in the six areas of focus, more contribution to the Foundation.

**Sandip Agarwalla:** Any other dream?

**Shekhar Mehta:** Definitely! I dream of a totally literate India. Absolutely a possibility! The way we are going at it, if the effort continues unhindered and resolutely, with everybody having faith in making this possible, we can achieve it. I have drawn up a plan for how we can catapult India into the countries considered 'literate' by 2025. Our literacy rate would be above 95 per cent. It is possible, it is doable!

**Sandip Agarwalla:** What have you gained from Rotary?

**Shekhar Mehta:** A lot! I have given 35 years to Rotary but I have gained a lifetime of learning from it! The friendships gained are for a lifetime. In my times of joy or sorrow, if there are 10 people standing next to me, nine of them are definitely Rotarians.

Becoming a better human being: the idea of thinking about other people before I think about myself has become an integral part of my life. All of this is absolutely because of Rotary.

**Sandip Agarwalla:** Walk us through your family and how they have assisted you in achieving your goals, especially in Rotary.

**Shekhar Mehta:** My father told me to go ahead and join Rotary. He was a Lions Club member. I immediately became very active.

When I was taking on the mantle of governorship, my entire family said go ahead! My mother absolutely loved the fact that I was helping other people, so I got her total support.

Rashi, my wife, my partner, has been rock solid with her support. Over the years as I took up bigger and bigger programmes there would be lots of planning that went into days and nights. Rashi has stood by my side through all that, never complained but became a part of it. She has accompanied me as I have gone on disaster management programmes, when I went to Kashmir, Bihar, Bhubaneswar, Karnataka etc. She does major fund-raising for our club.

My children Chiraag (34) and Chandini (32) have silently admired the work of Rotary, never grudging that it took away some of their time because now I realise they too strongly believe in helping other people before they want to help themselves.

The other family I have is Rotary Club of Calcutta Mahanagar – my club. Oh! What an outstanding club! If, at all, I have achieved anything in the arena of service, my test ground has been my club. Neither in failure nor in success have they questioned me. They have helped me through everything.

Of course, I am blessed to have the rest of my Rotary family around India. In the literacy programme itself, I have seen more than a hundred past Governors working and thousands of Rotarians working together on a single project. Where else but in Rotary will you get this kind of family!

**Sandip Agarwalla:** Your name is synonymous with RILM? Will it have even more emphasis in the future and what are your goals and plans for it?

**Shekhar Mehta:** For me, this is not a project or a programme, it is a mission for every Rotarian, every Indian. We cannot have the scourge of being an illiterate country. Our country is progressing so well, but we are still majorly illiterate? We can turn this around, it is possible. With the Rotary India Literacy Mission, we have hit bull's eye.

The hard work we have put in, research that we have done, the think tank meetings that we have had, have led us to the situation where the government is seeking our partnership, corporates are inviting us in. Every fortnight we get a call from one government organisation or state government to work with us. This means we are on the right programme! If we put in all our energy and our focus in the next six years, we can turn things around and make India a totally literate country.

**Part II of this interview to be continued in the next edition of The Gateway.**



# BUMPER DIWALI FOR KIDS!



**OVER** a hundred, 130 to be exact, children were included in the largest Diwali Party for 1500 underprivileged children at the Race Course. We are grateful to Ms. Sumangali and Mr. Nitai Mehta (whose organisation Praja was a recipient of our prestigious RCB citizen award from four

years ago) for extending the invitation through the Madhu Mehta Foundation. They have organised this party for the last 43 years. Unfortunately, the unpredictable nature of Mumbai rains this year spoilt the fun and celebrations had

to be cancelled on the day of the party on October 19<sup>th</sup>, keeping the safety of the children in mind. Not only do we thank the Madhu Mehta Foundation for inviting 130 children but also for sending their return gifts even though the party could not take place.

Logistics were handled effortlessly by the Salaam Bombay Foundation. A special mention of Ms. Jyoti Gangawane for taking special care of all the details; children were thrilled to receive bags full of surprises as Diwali gifts.

## RCB DOWN UNDER

**OCTOBER 17TH**, 2019, India –PP Rtn. (Dr.) Mukesh Batra was honoured and invited by the tourism department of Western Australia to photograph the Wild Flowers of Western Australia and conduct a charitable photo-exhibition in India and later in Perth, Australia. As part of his visit, Mukesh was also invited to present an address during the Gandhi Jayanti celebrations in Perth. The audience included the Deputy Premier and Health Minister of Australia, the Counsel General of India amongst others. Mukesh was commended for his thoughts and speech on the relevance of Gandhiji's values in today's world in his speech on Borderless Gandhi. During his visit, Mukesh



**PP Rtn. (Dr.) Mukesh Batra presents the Gateway bulletin and his book to Minister for Education and Training Ms Sue Ellery**

was also invited to meet with distinguished dignitaries including the Counsel General of India – Ms Charandasi, the Minister of Education and Training – Ms. Sue Ellery and the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Racing and Gaming, Small Business, Defense, Citizenship and Multicultural Interests – Mr Paul Papalia. Mukesh presented them with a copy of the Rotary Club of Bombay Gateway bulletin and appraised them of the good work done by the Club.

## AY AND BY TOGETHER

**CHILDREN** and the elderly enrich each other's lives when Ananda Yaan and Bhavishya Yaan come together. Daan Utsav is a time of giving. Giving can be in kind, which most people do, but one can also provide one's service or knowledge and time. That is what our senior citizens of the Ananda Yaan, Byculla, did: they shared their knowledge with the younger generation.

One often hears the young doing something for the old but in the Daan Utsav this year, the old came forward and did their bit for the young. Our senior citizens have been practicing yoga for some time now and greatly benefited from it. They decided to share this knowledge and inculcate a passion for it in the young.

Six senior citizens visited the BY municipal school in Byculla and did an intensive session on yoga for over 50 fourth graders. The seniors first



explained to the children how yoga not only helps the body but also the mind. They went on to demonstrate different techniques which help the arms, legs, stomach and back. The children were awestruck when one 85-year-old gentleman bent and stretched his back.

The children noticed how he maintained a very straight back while they themselves slouched while walking. Finally, the senior citizens shared their own school experiences and explained to the children the importance of both studies and physical fitness and how it is important to maintain a healthy balance.

# MUSIC WITH DIGNITY



At the Dignity Senior Citizen's Centre at Jogeshwari, Inner Wheel Club of Bombay arranged a soul-stirring Music Therapy Session on October 15th, 2019. Conducted by Manasi Kelkar, daughter of the famous playback singer Uttara Kelkar, Manasi transformed 60 men and women of the Day Care Centre, encouraging them to shedding their

inhibition, sing along, laugh and even dance along with her. Manasi's easy-going, charming manner and positive energy radiated through the room, endearing her readily to a group of elders whose lives in their slum habitats are mostly short on joy. For that brief while, she helped their spirits soar!

# RCB'S GUMBADPADA PROJECT GETS GREAT PRESS

Women trudged over a kilometre for water and men did not have water for their fields. Children did not have e-learning. All that has changed with RCB's Intergrated Village Development Programme for Gumbadpada which has received very favourable press response since its launch. Solar energy powers a floating pump, pipes bring water up 1000 metre, and a filtration plant ensures safe drinking water. Storage tanks ensure water for agriculture. The Integrated Rural Development Plan will has initiated development in the village for solar power, sanitation, education, livelihood and planting of 450 mango and cashew trees. Lives have been transformed.



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## TODAY'S SPEAKER: SUNIL GAVASKAR

Widely regarded as one of the greatest Test batsmen and best opening batsmen in Test cricket history, Sunil Gavaskar set world records during his career for the most Test runs and most Test centuries scored by any batsman. He held the record of 34 Test centuries for almost two decades before it was broken by Sachin Tendulkar in December 2005. He was the first person



to score centuries in both innings of a Test match three times. He was the first Test batsman to score 10,000 Test Runs in a career.

Gavaskar is a recipient of the Indian civilian honours of the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan. He was inducted into the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame in 2009. In 2012, he was awarded the Col CK Nayudu Lifetime achievement Award for Cricket in India.

Sunil Gavaskar continues to command the respect of the cricket fraternity with his insightful views on the game. He is much appreciative of the changing trends and the approach and skills of modern-day batsmen.

Gavaskar maintains a busy schedule, traversing across different continents to watch and promote cricket, and creating awareness on different social causes. Despite a hectic schedule, Gavaskar, found time to address the Rotary Club of Bombay for which we remain deeply grateful.

**Gavaskar will be conferred the Citizen of Mumbai Award.**

## Forthcoming events

**November 9 & 10:** Model UN for Rotarians at the Bombay Stock Exchange.

**November 12:** Bank holiday

**November 19:** Speaker Rakesh Jhunjunwala

**November 26:** Award for Excellence in Public Service for Mr M K Sanghi, also the Speaker

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Scholarships	Rtn. Roda Billimoria

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NOVEMBER 5  
RTN. PRAVIN BHANSALI



NOVEMBER 5  
PP RTN. (DR.) SONYA MEHTA



NOVEMBER 7  
RTN. KASTUR SHETH



NOVEMBER 8  
RTN. SHREEPAL DALAL



NOVEMBER 8  
RTN. MANISH KEJRIWAL



NOVEMBER 9  
RTN. JAGDISH VORA



NOVEMBER 10  
RTN. NATASHA TREASURYWALA



NOVEMBER 11  
RTN. MOHIT JAIN

## ROTARIAN PARTNER BIRTHDAYS

NOVEMBER 7

RTN. PTN. NAYNA CHINAI

NOVEMBER 8

RTN. PTN. SWAPAN BHARMA

RTN. PTN. SAM VARIYA

NOVEMBER 9

RTN. PTN. SUDHA JAVERI

## ANNIVERSARIES

NOVEMBER 5

RTN. PTN. NEELIMA & RTN. PANKAJ BALIGA

NOVEMBER 7

RTN. PTN. KAMAL & RTN. DINSHAW PANDOLE

NOVEMBER 10

RTN. PTN. SHAFALI & RTN. APURVA DIWANJI

NOVEMBER 11

RTN. PTN. SUSHMITA & RTN. CHRISTOPHER BLUEMEL

RTN. PTN. AYESHA & RTN. (DR.) DARIUS SOONAWALLA