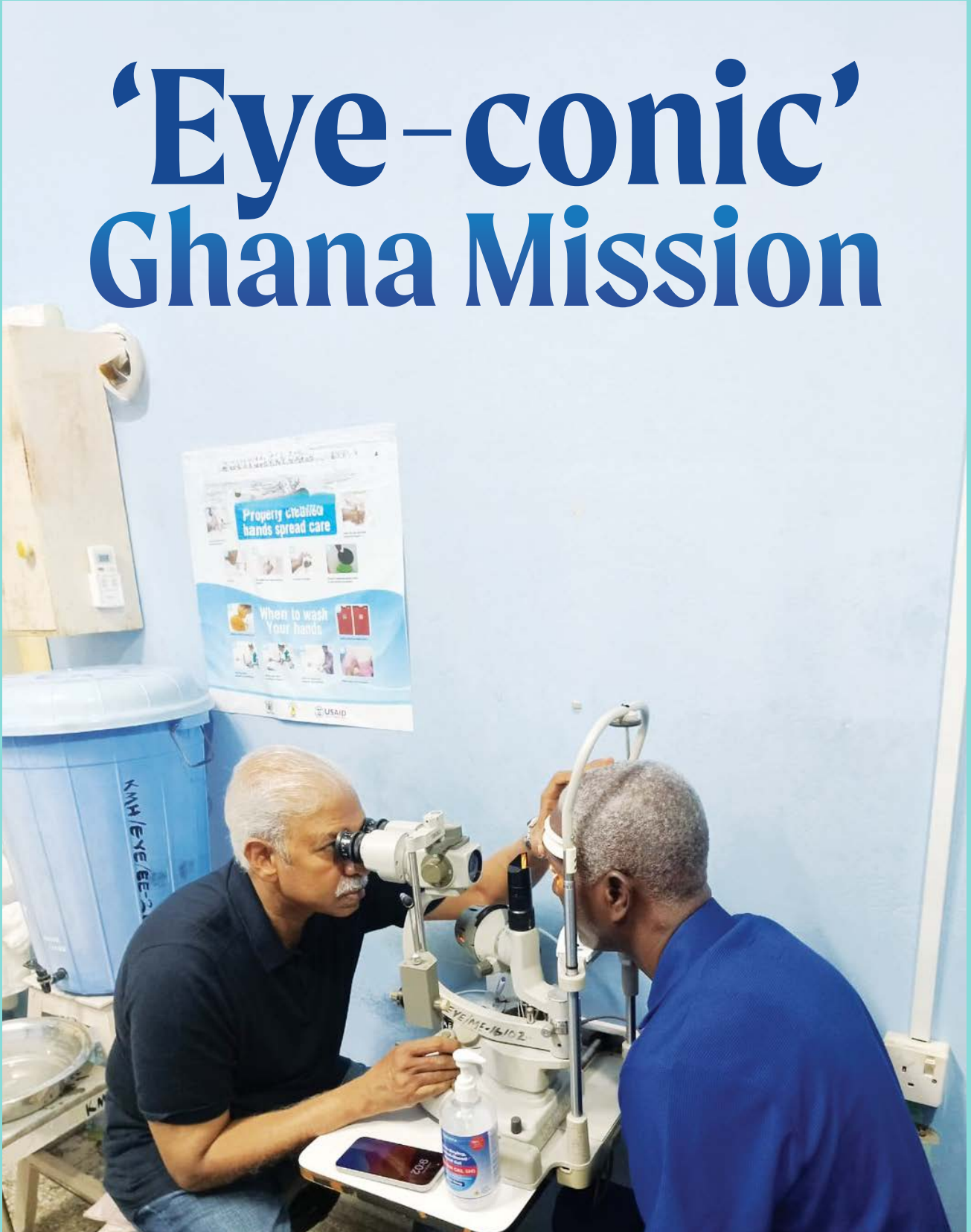


# THE LIGHTHOUSE

BOND | BUILD | BRING CHEER

WEEKLY BULLETIN OF THE ROTARY CLUB OF MADRAS | ISSUE 49 | June 08, 2025

## 'Eye-conic' Ghana Mission





Dear RCMers,

In a world often dimmed by despair, it is stories like RCM's Ghana Mission in this issue, that illuminate our purpose as Rotarians.

As we turn these pages together, may we be inspired to seek out the neediest corners of the world, knowing we carry with us not just expertise or resources, but the boundless spirit of Rotary!



**Rtn.Shivkumar Eashwaran**  
Editor

**Rtn.A.R.Raghuandan**  
Chairperson

**Mr.Madhu Mathen**  
Co-Chairperson

**Rotary Club of Madras**

48<sup>th</sup> Weekly Meeting

**Mr. B Santhanam**  
Former CEO, Saint Gobain,  
Asia Pacific & India

on

**Leading with Purpose  
in a Changing India**  
A CEO's journey from IIT to  
global industry leadership

Moderated by  
**Rtn. Sudha Shivkumar**

**Tuesday, 10th June 2025 | 1.30 pm**  
**Lunch : 12:30 - 1:30 pm at Hyatt Regency, Chennai.**

*Please note that spouses are cordially invited for this meeting*

<b>Rtn. G. Chella Krishna</b> President	<b>Rtn. Rajesh Mani</b> Honorary Secretary
<b>Rtn. Shanno Ravi</b> Director - Club Service	<b>Rtn. PP. Rani Muralidharan</b> Chairperson - Programs Committee

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Rotary Club of Madras (RCM)  
**The 47th Weekly Meeting held on 03-06 2025**  
 at Hotel Hyatt Regency, Teynampet, Chennai

**Call to Order:**

President Rtn. G. Chella Krishna called the meeting to order and requested all members to rise for a silent invocation.

**Confirmation Minutes:**

The President sought confirmation for the 46th weekly meeting minutes, which were passed and adopted by the members.

**Welcome Address:**

President Rtn. G. Chella Krishna extended a warm welcome to the Chief Guest, Srimati Aruna Sairam. He also welcomed the visiting Rotarians, Probus Club Members, spouses and other guests present.

**Announcements:****Project Update – Ghana Eye Surgery Mission**

Rtn. Sabina Narayan shared an inspiring update on the Ghana Eye Surgery Project, a collaborative initiative with Rotary Club of Accra West. The project was initiated by Rtn. PP N.K. Gopinath and supported by President Rtn. Chella Krishna G., Rtn. PP. S. Gunashekar and Rtn. S. Nagarajan. A detailed article and photographs will be featured in the upcoming issue of The Lighthouse.

President Chella Krishna G. commended the team's outstanding work, especially highlighting the commitment and life-changing impact of Rtn. PP. Dr. N.V. Arulmozhi Varman's efforts.

**Fellowship Announcement – Green Rotarian Event**

Rtn. Hari Venkatesan announced the upcoming Full Club Fellowship titled **"Koothu,"** hosted by the Green Rotarians.

- **Date** : Saturday, 7th, June 2025
- **Time** : 7:00 PM onwards
- **Venue** : Origami Asian Bar, Green Meadows, Palavakkam
- **Theme** : Vibrant South Indian Attire
- **Dress Code:** Lungis, half-saris, jasmine flowers and other traditional elements encouraged
- **Logistics:** Rtn. Arunachalam Palaniappan will coordinate the arrangement of 50 lungis for members.

Members are encouraged to join in full spirit and celebrate the fellowship with color, culture and camaraderie.

Environment Committee Announcement – Environment Fair

An Environment Fair has been scheduled as part of the club's green initiatives.

- **Dates** : Saturday, 7th June & Sunday, 8th June 2025
- **Venue** : Ampa Sky One Mall
- **Theme** : Climate-Conscious Innovation & Eco-Learning

Members are encouraged to attend and participate actively and are welcome to bring their families along to support the cause and engage in the activities.

**Induction of New Member:**

Proposed by: Rtn. Suman Voora

Introduction by: Rtn. PP George B.Chерian (on behalf of the proposer)

Rtn. PP George B. Cherian introduced Rtn. R. Rajasekaran. President Rtn. Chella Krishna G. formally inducted him into the club and Rtn. PP Rajendran Sabanayagam facilitated the induction ceremony.

**Asst. Secretary's Announcements:**

Rtn. Shivkumar Eashwaran announced birthdays and anniversaries for the week.

The upcoming meeting will be held on Tuesday, 10th, June 2025, in the afternoon at the Hyatt Regency.

**Remarks by Rtn. PP Rajendran Sabanayagam:**

Rtn. PP Rajendran Sabanayagam shared an anecdote about the late Rtn. PP V.K. Chandrakumar, who had a tradition of collecting ₹8,000 annually to support Boys Town Society. In continuation of this legacy, Rtn. Rajendran donated a cheque of ₹12,000 to sponsor one boy this year and handed it over to President Rtn. Chella Krishna G. as a symbolic gesture to launch the initiative.

He proposed the revival of a meaningful program where 75 Rotarians adopt 75 boys, urging the club to make this a signature initiative for 2025–26, thereby renewing a strong personal connection with the cause.

**Guest Speaker Session – Smt. Aruna Sairam**

Smt. Aruna Sairam, renowned Carnatic vocalist, composer, humanitarian and recipient of the Padma Shri and Sangita Kalanidhi awardee, was the guest speaker for the afternoon. The interactive session, titled "In Tune With Time – A Life in Music", was moderated by Ann. Swetha Krishna and served as a heartfelt tribute to Smt. Aruna Sairam's inspiring musical journey. Community Services Director Rtn. Dr. Anuradha Ganesan presented a memento to the chief guest as a token of appreciation.

**Flag Exchange:**

Rtn. Dr. Mahima Mohit from the Rotary Club of Vallabh Vidyanagar exchanged flags with RCM's President Rtn. G. Chella Krishna.

**Vote of Thanks:**

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks by Rtn. PP. Rani Muralidharan.

**Adjournment:**

The President Rtn. G. Chella Krishna adjourned the meeting.





<b>Birthdays</b>		9th to 15th June 2025
Rtn. Ranjeeth D. Rathod		10/6
Rtn. Dr. Sangeetha Viswanathan		11/6
Rtn. M. Balakrishna Rao		12/6
Rtn. Mohankumar Subramanyam		12/6
Rtn. Hiren Bhasker Shah		13/6
Rtn. Karthik Mathivanan Dr.		14/6
Rtn. Sudha Shivkumar		15/6
<b>Spouses' Birthdays</b>		
Ann. G.Lakshminarayanan, Spouse of Rtn. Dr. Sharon Krishna Rau		10/6
Ann. Asha, Spouse of Rtn. Girdhar Hemdev		15/6
<b>Wedding Anniversary</b>		
Rtn. T.G. Thyagarajan & Selvi Thyagarajan		9/6
Rtn. Reji Joseph & Sherral		9/6
Rtn. N. Prakash & Rukmani		10/6
Rtn. Arjun Ananth & Sowmya		11/6
Rtn. Akur Raman Raghunandan & Jeyasri Raghunandan		13/6
Rtn. Rajesh Vummidi & V. Jayasree		13/6
Rtn. Gopalan Kannan & Sujata		14/6



Suggest the most quirky, whacky or creative caption/blurb for this photo (Maximum 15 words). The best entries will be reproduced in the next week's edition of Lighthouse.

Mail your captions to [editor@rcmlighthouse.com](mailto:editor@rcmlighthouse.com) on or before 10th June.

Issue 49



Issue 48 : Best Captions

1. This is in true Rotary spirit 'Service on the "shelf"....ha, ha - *Rtn. PP. Vivek Harinarain*
2. Diagnosis: Advanced Philanthropy Syndrome. Prognosis: Lifelong Rotary giving. - *Rtn. Asha Mathen*
3. "He thought it was a 'mock drill'... didn't know it involved an actual drill"—Jokes Rtn Kapil as he 'toothfully' points out the 'cavity' in Rtn Kamdar's judgement! - *Rtn. N.K Bhatia*

# CLASSICAL STAR SHINES UNDER SPOTLIGHT



If you were lucky enough to be seated in the room for the 47th weekly meeting of the RCM, you already know Smt. Aruna Sairam is not just a celebrated Carnatic vocalist; she's an experience. With her singing, storytelling, charm and insight, she held the audience in rapt attention, not just with her voice but with her vibrant spirit.

Moderated by the First Lady, Swetha Krishna, the session was pure gold. Swetha didn't just ask questions she asked the right ones.

Coming to the point, there are some voices you remember because they are powerful. Some you remember because they are perfect and then, there are voices like Smt. Aruna Sairam's, you remember them because they feel real. Her voice is unique, just like her. Her singing invites, reaches and believes, and in that belief, we begin to believe too.

**"I am not Lata Mangeshkar. I am not Parveen Sultana. I am Aruna."**

In her own words, Smt. Aruna never thought her voice was special. "It was a contralto," she says, "a heavy female voice that wasn't very malleable." But she worked on it. Sat with it. Respected it. Until one day, it became her. That is the kind of attitude everyone should have to look in the mirror and say, This is me. To carry your so-called imperfections with tenderness and say, Even this belongs to me. Smt. Aruna's voice never chased applause. It chased the truth and that's what we hear when she sings.

One can never read her voice on paper or hear her sing in print. One can only try and capture her infinite charm and spirit through words.

Let's rewind.

This story begins in a simple, almost cinematic way: with a childhood friend named Mr. Sai. "We were just family friends. Never imagined we'd get married," she says. But they did, when Smt. Aruna was just 18. She says, "Much of who I am took shape after that." While that sounds romantic, it also sounds like Sai deserves a Lifetime Achievement Award for Supporting Exceptional Talent. Because let's face it, Smt. Aruna wasn't the 'sit-still-and-smile-sweetly' type. "Sai has put up with a woman like me, someone who's completely self-expressed, with no demure bone in her body!"

He didn't just put up with her, he stood behind her. In a male-dominated world, many women don't get that kind of chance or support. She is deeply grateful for her husband.

She says her in-laws didn't always understand the music but they never stopped her. "Someone once asked her mother-in-law, 'Ennadi, un maatu ponnu ennamo izhuthu izhuthu paadrалаe?'" (Translation: "Why is your daughter-in-law wailing and singing like that?") But the family didn't flinch. She was thoughtful. She had a great support system. She says she takes advice from her close friends and discusses everything as a family, but there is no grand plan. She just followed her heart.

If she goes to France, she might sing in French. In Israel, she sang in Hebrew. In Gujarat, it might be Vaishnava Jana To. She wants to connect. For her, it's about communication.

Like the time she performed a concert right after MS Amma passed away in 2004. She was scheduled to perform the next morning. Most sabhas had cancelled programs. But this one left the choice to her. She turned to Sai and asked, "Should I sing in her memory or stay silent in her honour?" He said, "Go for it." That performance, something beyond happened. That day, she didn't sing. Something sang through her.

Then there was the French opera. When they came down and asked her to join, she hesitated, she had never acted before! But they insisted. She took the leap of faith. She always believed that if life brings you something new, embrace it. It's a case-by-case decision. But yes, courage and openness help.

Smt. Aruna Sairam is not like her guru, who would say, "Whether there are 200 or 20,000 people, I sing the same." She describes herself as a people person. She likes to understand where she is singing, the native language, the venue layout, the acoustics and even the lighting. She often visits the venue a day before, just to take in the atmosphere. "I plant my vibrations there and receive something back," she says. "That's important to me."

So yes, if she goes to France, she might sing in French. In Israel, she sang in Hebrew. In Gujarat, it might be Vaishnav Jan To. She wants to connect. For her, it's about communication.

She believes everyone has that moment, whether you're working with numbers or music, where the individual and the work merge. One stops being separate from what they're doing.

"That's bliss," she reflects. "But it's rare and elusive. Yet, we keep searching for it. That's the artist's eternal journey."

And yes, not every day is perfect. But years of training ensure that the audience never feels it. That, she says, is the role of discipline: even on your bad days, the audience

Later in life, when the voice or body isn't what it once was, Aruna believes one must compensate with emotional depth. "MS Amma is the best example. Her voice in her 70s couldn't match her 30s, but her bhava that feeling was unmatched. She made people weep with just a phrase."

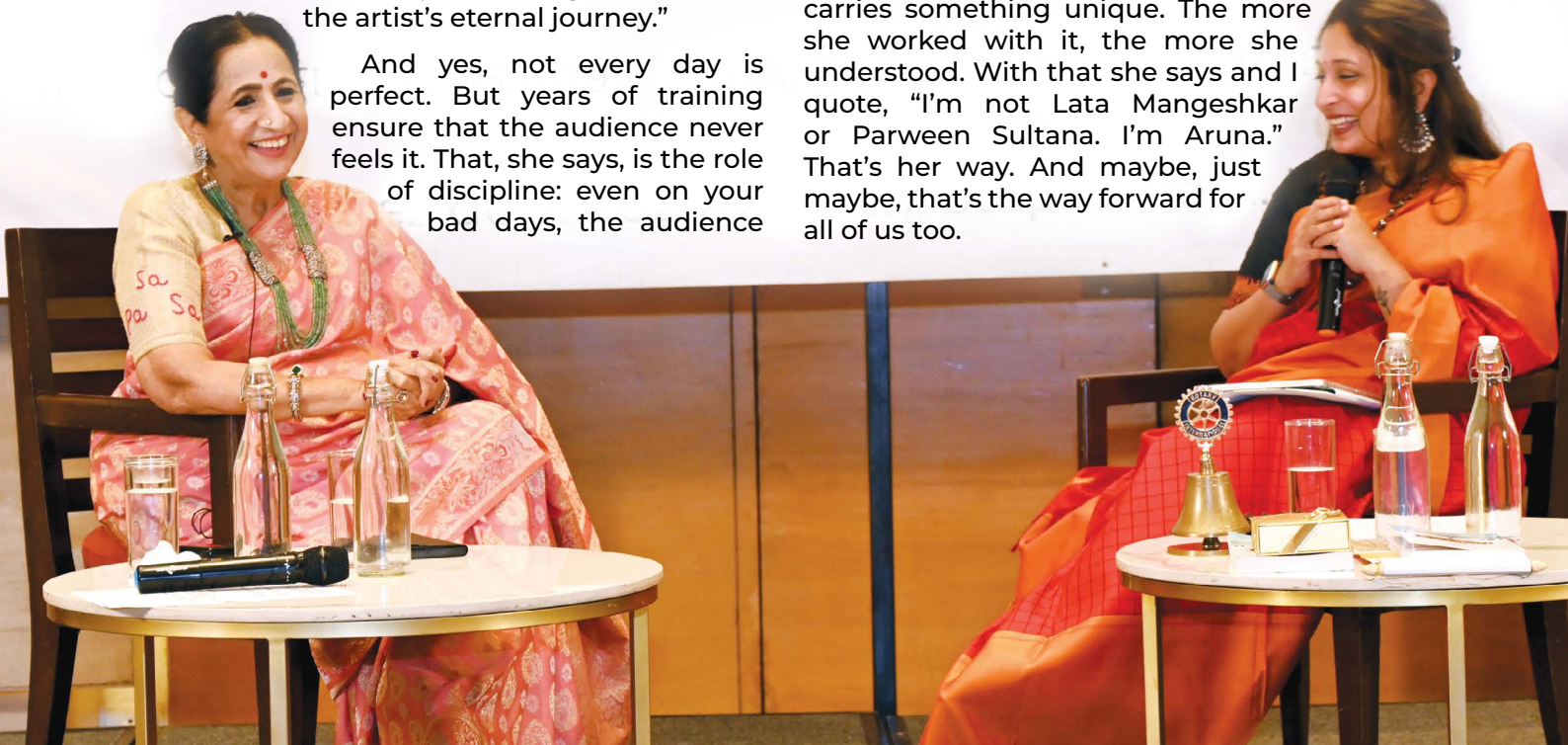
must feel something meaningful. "Everything matters at different stages," she says. "When you're a student, discipline is 90% of the game. You wake up, do your akaarasadhagam and follow your teacher.

As you become a performer, it's about how you present, communicate and connect. That's 50-50." Later in life, when the voice or body isn't what it once was, Aruna believes one must compensate with emotional depth. "MS Amma is the best example. Her voice in her 70s couldn't match her 30s, but her bhava that feeling was unmatched. She made people weep with just a phrase."

When First Lady Swetha Krishna asked her, while AI revived legends like SPB and Malaysia Vasudevan, would living artists be replaced? How does she view AI in the arts?

In her words, "AI is powerful and helpful, it brings access, restoration, and tools we didn't have. But as the name says, it is artificial. The greatest intelligence is the supreme intelligence, the divine spark in each of us." According to her, a machine can never replicate a living Chaitanya, a soul. "We are divine miracles, each with our own light. Even if 100 SPBs appeared, only SPB was SPB. But even Aruna has a voice and a place in this world."

She never thought her voice was anything special. But over time, she realized she carries something unique. The more she worked with it, the more she understood. With that she says and I quote, "I'm not Lata Mangeshkar or Parveen Sultana. I'm Aruna." That's her way. And maybe, just maybe, that's the way forward for all of us too.





# The Ghana Diaries

This is a story of compassion in action, a story of how unwavering commitment, selfless service and the courage to look beyond oneself restored vision and brought light to some of the most underserved communities in Ghana.

Between 2004 and 2006, the Rotary Club of Madras (RCM) undertook tireless efforts, Rtn. PP. Dr. N.V. Arulmozhi Varman conducted a series of transformative eye camps across Ghana. These missions touched hundreds of lives, offering not only restored sight but also renewed hope, dignity and independence.

Now, nearly two decades later, that legacy has come alive once again. Earlier this year, the Rotary Club of Accra West (RCAW), through Rtn. PP N.K. Gopinath reached out to RCM with a heartfelt request: to revive the eye camps that had once made such a profound difference. The response was immediate and inspiring. With the support of President Rtn. G. Chella Krishna, the strategic guidance of Rtn. S. Nagarajan and the dedicated leadership of Rtn. PP. S. Gunashekar, the RCM International Service team sprang into action.



At the heart of it all was Dr. Arul, who embraced the opportunity with purpose and passion. He assembled a skilled volunteer medical team, four doctors and three paramedics to perform cataract surgeries and conduct comprehensive eye screenings for a wide range of vision disorders.

Thanks to Rtn. PP Gunashekar's meticulous planning and coordination, the team departed for Accra on May 25, 2025, via Addis Ababa. They carried with them not only medical supplies and surgical equipment but also a shared vision: to serve the underprivileged communities of Ghana's Volta Region, where access to eye care remains severely limited.

In Ghana, RCAW launched a widespread outreach campaign, identifying patients and registering them for upcoming

Dear esteemed partners and collaborators,

On behalf of Keta Municipal Hospital, I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to:

- Rotary Club of Accra-West and Rotary Club of Madras, Chennai, India, for partnering with us to bring this life-changing initiative to our community.
- The Surgical Team members for their expertise, dedication and compassion in delivering exceptional care to our patients.
- All contributors who played a role in making this exercise a success.

The free Eye Surgeries have been a resounding success, transforming lives and restoring sight to many residents of Keta Municipality and beyond. Your selfless efforts have made a significant impact. We are truly grateful.

Thank you for your kindness, generosity, and commitment to improving healthcare in Ghana.

We look forward to even bigger and better collaborations in the future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kofi Karikari Bonsu  
Medical Superintendent, Keta  
Municipal Hospital





surgeries in Aflao, Keta and surrounding districts. Volunteers went door-to-door, ensuring that even those in the remotest corners had the chance to receive care.

With extraordinary support from the Ghana Health Service, logistical barriers melted away. Ghana Customs expedited the clearance of all medical supplies, while Ketu South Municipal Hospital and RCAW extended warm hospitality, ensuring the Indian team was well accommodated and ready to work.



There was no time to waste. Dr. Arul and his team began surgeries almost immediately upon arrival. These compassionate professionals had set aside their personal and professional obligations back home, not for accolades but to serve those in need.

At their first camp in Aflao, the team performed over 250 cataract surgeries. Their work then continued at Ketu South Municipal Hospital, where a second round of procedures brought the total number of surgeries to 366 in just five days, a staggering testament to their efficiency and dedication.

Behind every restored eye was a human story: of grandparents seeing their grandchildren clearly for the first time in years, of breadwinners returning to work and of dignity restored. These moments of



healing were made possible by the generosity, technical expertise and deep humanity of the Indian medical team amplified by the organizational strength of Rotary.

A special acknowledgement goes to Rtn. President Victoria Esinam Assah Offei of RCAW, whose leadership ensured that the visiting team had everything they needed from facilities to emotional support.

To the members of RCM, whose generosity and goodwill fueled this mission—thank you. Your commitment has brought not just sight but a new sense of life and purpose to those you've helped.

This mission truly embodies the Rotary motto: "Service Above Self." Dr. Arul and his team have become global ambassadors of Rotary's values, crossing borders and boundaries to serve where the need is greatest.

The team returned to India on June 3, leaving behind not just healed eyes but a lasting legacy of compassion, solidarity and hope.

We invite you to celebrate the incredible contributions of:

- Dr. Arul and the Vision Foundation
- Dr. R. Ravikumar of MN Eye Hospital
- The outstanding team from Arasan Eye Hospital: Dr. Suraj Kumar H. Sreenivas, Ms. Akila, Ms. Shami Ramesh and Ms. Mythili
- RC Acra West and their extended team.

Their selfless service and commitment have changed lives forever. The journey does not end here. The story of service continues with more chapters yet to be written.

To every member of RCM who helped bring this vision to life, take a bow. You have helped light the way forward.

**- Rtn. Sabina Narayan**



# Blurring Borders, Binding Hearts

An Exclusive Interview with  
Rtn. PP. Dr. N.V. Arulmozhi Varman

**1. Dr. Arul, you first led eye camps in Ghana nearly 20 years ago. What was it like returning to the same mission after so many years?**

Having conducted four eye camps in Ghana over 15 years ago, returning was a deeply nostalgic experience. Back then, we had proven that high-quality, low-cost cataract surgeries could be performed in large numbers, even with modest infrastructure. We trained local ophthalmologists and paramedical staff in critical techniques.

However, it was disheartening to see that the problem of cataract blindness still persists. There had been no significant systemic intervention. The momentum we created had not been sustained. Even more troubling, some of the facilities we visited this time had no eye surgeons on site. It felt like stepping into a vacuum of care. This isn't just unfortunate, it's a serious public health gap.

**2. What inspired you to accept the request from RCAW and lead the mission once again?**

India has made significant progress in tackling preventable blindness. Our healthcare models are scalable, affordable and proven. So, when our old partners from the Rotary Club of Accra West reached out, I immediately said yes. I saw it as an opportunity to serve again and more importantly, to spark another wave of change.

Our goal was simple: to demonstrate what's possible with the right team, tools and training, even under the toughest conditions.

**3. How did you go about assembling your medical team for this mission? What qualities were you looking for in your fellow volunteers?**

Thankfully, assembling the team was the easiest part. Veterans like Dr. Panneerselvam from Arasan Eye Hospital in Erode and Dr. Ravikumar from MN

Eye Hospitals in Chennai joined without hesitation. They brought along their best nurses. Dr. Suraj, four highly skilled surgical nurses and I rounded out the team.

We're used to high-pressure environments, quick turnarounds and together, we perform thousands of free surgeries every month in India.

The real challenge was the preparation. Even getting visas for the nurses proved difficult. Their vaccination certificates were linked to outdated mobile numbers, which caused delays. The visas finally came through just before our flight.

**4. The team performed an incredible 366 surgeries in just five days. What was the secret to such efficiency without compromising quality?**

Flawless teamwork and relentless discipline.

We carried all our essential equipment with us, including 20 sets of surgical instruments and sterilization supplies. Since customs delayed our main shipment by two weeks, we hand-carried the essentials. We converted a basic room into an OT, scrubbing tables, cleaning ceilings and floors and sterilizing every surface. By Monday 8AM, surgeries had begun.

We had very limited resources: no stools, makeshift tables and only one working microscope. Even the hospital's autoclaves didn't work. On Day 1, we had no functioning autoclave. Day 2 was slightly better. By Day 3, things stabilized and by Day 5, the autoclave finally functioned properly. At one point, an electrical wire even caught fire during sterilization! Still, we persisted. Had everything worked smoothly, we could have easily completed 500–600 surgeries.



**5. Can you share a specific patient story or moment that stayed with you from this camp?**

There were many unforgettable moments, but one man stood out. He had lost vision in one eye due to injury and the other eye had a cataract. After the surgery, he looked at me and said, “Doctor, I can see your face.” He refused to let us bandage him, he was too excited to go home and finally see his grandchildren.

He literally danced out of the hospital. The next morning, he told us he had walked along the beach all night, taking in the world he hadn’t seen in years.

Moments like that remind us why we do this.

**6. What were some of the logistical or emotional challenges the team faced during the mission? How did you overcome them?**

The logistics were incredibly difficult. We had no real operation room, just bare spaces which we had to convert ourselves. Supplies weren’t cleared on time. We didn’t even have stools to sit on, in between surgeries. We had to personally request the local medical superintendent for it. The broken autoclaves, the supply delays, the constant crisis-solving, the Ghana government should take some care, for example in India, back in the 1970s we were also figuring things out. It took vision and government support to scale up. Ghana needs that same kind of systemic commitment.



**7. Working in partnership with RCAW and the Ghana Health Service, how important was local collaboration in making this effort successful?**

It was absolutely crucial.

The support from Rotarians in Ghana, especially those running pharmaceutical businesses was a lifeline. They helped us source local anesthetics overnight when nothing was available. The Indian

High Commissioner to Ghana was also extremely helpful. But the bigger issue is that the local government participation remains minimal. Unless authorities institutionalize these efforts, they’ll remain one-off events. Our polio eradication program worked because Rotary partnered with the government at every level. That same model is needed here.

**8. How did it feel to see the legacy of your earlier work in Ghana still alive in the hearts of the people and the Rotary Club of Accra West?**

It was deeply touching.

Despite the broken systems, people remembered us. The earlier camps had clearly left a lasting impression. The warmth with which we were received said it all.

Rotary’s legacy of service lives on.

**9. How do you see the role of Indian medical professionals and Rotary clubs in contributing to global healthcare equity?**

India has a unique edge - we deliver high-quality care at low cost, even under pressure.

From cataract surgeries to cardiac care and transplants, our professionals know how to scale, how to train, and how to build systems.

**10. Finally, do you see more such missions on the horizon—whether in Ghana or elsewhere? What’s your vision for the future?**

Yes, but we must evolve beyond short-term camps.

Even if we stayed a month and did 1,000 surgeries, it would still be a drop in the ocean. The real mission is to help countries build their own systems: train local teams, equip hospitals and work in partnership with governments.

About 50 years ago, India’s situation was akin to Ghana’s current status of cataract blindness. A presentation made by an ophthalmologist to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi led to the creation of the “National Programme for Control of Blindness”, which revolutionized the eye care infrastructure in the country. If given an opportunity, I would like to make a presentation to the Ghana government.

We institutionalized it. Ghana could do the same.

True productivity begins with self-reliance. When a person is blind and unable to care for themselves, how can they be expected to care for others? This is a solvable crisis if we choose to solve it.



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