

HISTORY OF ROTARY CLUB OF SHILLONG

As on 2024

By Rtn. Sarad Bawri

The Rotary Club of Shillong completes its 67 years on 24th May 2024, thereby achieving a milestone which possibly only a handful of service organisations in this town have achieved. The Club has over the years made significant efforts to bring some positive changes in the lives of people living in and around Shillong, especially the economically challenged section of the society. This Club has defied the vicissitudes of time, and today, in many ways it stands at the pole position amongst the NGOs in town.

Established in 1957, Rotary Club of Shillong is easily one of the best-known voluntary service organizations of Meghalaya. This Club was sponsored by RC Gauhati, and is the second Rotary Club in the entire North-East India.

However, the early history of the Club is obscure and hard to trace. From all accounts available, it seems the idea of introducing Rotary to Shillong veered around a high-profile magnetic personality - “Rajya Ratna” Satya Vrata Mukerjea. This foreign educated erudite man received this honorific title of “Rajya Ratna” for his distinguished service to the Maharaja of Baroda. Mukerjea had already served as a District Governor of erstwhile District 89 way back in 1942-43. Having chosen to settle in the home state of his in-laws, Mukerjea was the perfect choice for steering the new Club.

In this quest, he found an able ally in Maharaja Gayendra of the princely state of Charkhari (who resided in a picturesque bungalow, known as “Charkari House”, in the wooded Upper Shillong 3rd Mile area), and the duo lent a “royal” aura towards heralding Rotary in the town.

Club meetings:

Those early days, the Club would meet on Fridays at Pine Wood Hotel, arguably the best in business east of Calcutta those days. Some of the sepia photographs tell us that the members were mandated to attend RWMs formally attired. As is the practice in the West, the members would be seated around a multiple of round tables where drinks and dinner would be served during the course of the meeting. Another distinguishing feature of this Club was that all members had to attend RWMs in company of their wives.

For some unknown reasons, the Club subsequently shifted its meeting venue to Shillong Club where it has been ensconced for decades. Currently we have our meetings in the “Rotary Corner”, a picturesque cottage in the Shillong Club estates.

Club Activities:

While it is not easy to elaborate on the myriad projects the club has undertaken over the years, some notable contributions are mentioned below. It would be better to follow the different avenues of services, that are Club Administration, Rotary Foundation, Membership, Public Relations, Youth Service, Vocational Services and Community Service to list these services.

➤ Membership:

Charter Members:

- The selection of the 22 Charter Members throws interesting sidelights. Care seems to have been gone into ensuring inclusivity and diversity. There was a healthy admixture of “royalty” and “hoi polloi”, established professionals and reputed businessmen.
- The list included five medical professionals---Dr. C.K.Hazarika of TB Hospital, Dr. R.Chanda who was a dentist, Dr. S.S.Guha, a well-known pathologist and Major G.S.Guha, an ophthalmologist. Then, there was the town’s best CA in U.C.Mazumdar; a couple of lawyers in Aroon Alley and G.S.Guha; one journalist in Hemanta Kumar Gupta of PTI, besides eight businessmen, one of which was the famous liquor distiller Capt H.D.Hunt of Mawphlang.
- The identities of other charter members are: Madhu Sudhan Mukherjee (owner of “Mukherjee Brothers” shop, opposite Kelvin Cinema, selling spectacles and watches), Bimal Kumar Chanda (a Building Materials dealer and owner of “B.I.S.Co” of G.S.Road), PC. Agarwala (hardware retailing of Bara Bazar), J.C.Doss (Ford car dealer), Utpal Mukherjee (clothing industry and shoes distribution), S.Sen (Wood industry- Lumber distribution), A.C. Sen (Power distribution; he was the Resident Director of “Shillong Hydro Electric Company” which supplied electric power to the town), S.C.Agarwala (Steel Pipes and Tubes distribution, Bara Bazar) and R.K.Ghosh an Engineer who retired as Deputy Secretary to Assam Government.
- An interesting aside is that at least two of these venerable gentlemen’s progenies later took to Rotary. Dr S.S.Guha’s eldest son, Soumitri Shankar Guha is an asset to RC Shillong. Similarly, a daughter of journalist Hemanta Kumar Gupta, Late Kaverri Gupta a is Past President of RC Orchid City, and served Rotary with great distinction.

Current Members:

- The present generation of “inheritors” do have the bragging right of belonging to a Club which has a hoary tradition of dignity in conduct and value in altruistic service, seeds of which were sown during those halcyon days.
- Currently, the Club’s membership consists of 44 dedicated members, of which a good number are members of 25 years standing or more, with one of them have completed 60 years in the club.

➤ Club Administration:

The activities under this service are purely of internal nature. The conduct of weekly meetings, guest speakers in the meetings, celebration of festivals and other occasions with family members etc. are some of the activities under this service. One of the significant contributions of this service is the development of leadership quality among the members, which ultimately benefits the society at large.

- The club has the distinction of inviting quite a few luminaries to its meetings. To name a few: Mr. John Galbraith of USA, Former Lok Sabha Speakers, the late GS Dhillon and PA Sangma, Chief Election Commissioner TN Sesan, internationally- acclaimed writer and columnist Kushwant Singh, eminent journalist MJ Akbar and late BK Nehru, Mr. K.P.S.Gill, and others.
- Organised talks by eminent personalities like late Vishnu Sahay, late Bhisma Narayan Singh, Madhukar Dighe, late Harideo Joshi, and MM Jacob, all being the Governors of the state. etc.

➤ Rotary Foundation:

- We have 21 Rotary Foundation Sustaining Members, 81 Paul Harris Fellows, 21 Multiple Paul Harris Fellows, 5 Major Donors and 1 Arch Klumph Society member, totalling over US\$ 5,00,000.00
- There is a frequent fellowship exchange between the Rotary Club of Shillong and other clubs worldwide. Amongst them, Goodwill Visit to Four Clubs in Bangladesh in 1997, wherein our 15-member delegation, including families, visited them.
- Various Clubs in Bangladesh in December '05 when 310 Rotarians and their family members visited Shillong for a 'Cross Border Friendship' programme.
- In 2019, a large group of Rotarians visited Bangladesh and participated in the International Multi District Conference “Setubandhan”.

- Under Group Study Exchange programme, the club members had providing home hospitality to team members coming from various countries every year.
- The Club had the distinction of sending the 4 members as GSE leaders and had sponsored several non-Rotarians as GSE members to other countries. The idea behind such programmes is to promote peace and international understanding through people to people contact.

➤ **International Service:**

- A Matching Grant Project was completed with Rotary Club of Jalalabad, Sylhet, with a component of US\$ 3600 to which we contributed US\$ 1,000 for creating an oxygen supply facility at Sylhet Children's Hospital.
- Another Matching Grant Project was initiated by the Club in which a sophisticated Ultra Sound Scanner was given to the Ramkrishna Mission Dispensary at Shillong. The cost of US\$ 13,400 was met through sponsorship of six Rotary Clubs from Bangladesh. Our contribution was US\$ 3,200.

➤ **Public Relations:**

- During Kargil war, we joined hands with other organizations to raise over Rs. 6.00 lakh and handed over to Armed Forces Welfare Fund.
- "Run for Cyclone Relief" for the people of West Khasi Hills in collaboration with HTCWO. The Club collected Rs. 1.50 lakh as aid for cyclone affected twice.
- The Club also donated Rs. 1 lakh towards the Food Relief Fund for flood-affected people of Meghalaya.
- The first ever Mortuary Van of Shillong was introduced by the Club. So far three such vans have been donated to different organisations
- Improvement of traffic triangle at Fire Brigade (Opp. Kiddies Corner)
- Relief to the victims of fire, landslide and other natural calamities on different occasions.
- The club has constructed five bus stands in and around Shillong
- One pay toilet was constructed at Umsohsun, and one at Jhalupara.
- During Republic Day & Independence Day food packets & fruits and other specifically required items are distributed to inmates/patients of Old Age Home, Mercy Home, Civil Hospital, or any other such institution.
- Distribution of ration and essential items to about 500 families in Bholaganj.

- Campaign for Awareness & Sensitization Camp for Crime & Violence against Women.

➤ **Youth Service:**

- Youth Programmes were celebrated by way of inter-college and inter school debates,
- Conducting talks on career guidance in collaboration with the USEFI, and other organisations.
- A Rotary Career Information Cell was started at the Youth Centre to help career minded youths to get the latest information on their vocation.
- Holding workshops on training teachers, drawn from various programme.
- Sending youth to attend various RYLA Camps.
- We have sponsored 3 Rotaract Clubs, and 3 Interact Clubs

➤ **Vocational Service:**

- The club has been imparting as well as sponsoring various vocational trainings/courses in different trades to unemployed youth of Shillong year after year.
- Individuals and organisations are honoured with Teachers Awards every year for their contribution in the field of education.
- Under Vocational Service, we honour selected Persons from various non-glamorous walks of life who render important service to the society, be it as traffic constables, sweepers, nurses, drivers, telephone operators or postmen. This promotes dignity of labour.

➤ **Community Service:**

The first ever community service activity was way back in 1957 to donate water filter to Pomlum village. In 1993, the club visited this village again and donated desks, benches, blackboards water filters etc. to Pomlum High School.

The Club has carried out several projects to address the needs of the community, especially the needs of the deprived section of the Society. Following are some of them:

➤ **Literacy:**

- Financial aids being given to promising students from poor families.
- Felicitation of three toppers of SSLC examination of MBOSE every year.
- Sponsoring the computer education of poor students in Don Bosco Youth Centre.
- Inter School and Inter College debates every year.

- The Club routinely carries out a number of activities in the Sweepers' Colony at Mawlonghat including an Adult Literacy Centre has been started, with about 110 persons attending classes every evening.
- Distribution of raincoats and other school equipment to children of underprivileged schools,
- Donation of computers to several schools.
- We had the biggest ever Rotary program when we helped in establishing the Bellefonte Community College, an institute which brings to the mainstream the school dropouts, by a Global Grant of over Rs. 24 lakhs.

➤ **Health Care:**

- The much-needed Mother Teresa Leper Colony was set up at Nongpoh with funds raised by our Club. Organised a Walkathon in 1975 and raised funds for Mother Teresa's Home for Leprosy patients at Nongpoh. This Home is being given support of different nature even now.
- The Rotary Club of Shillong had set up a Mobile Blood Bank in which the Blood Group and Rh factor of all Rotarians had been recorded and a copy sent to all hospitals. This had proved a life-saving move by the club.
- Regular free health camps/eye camps/dental camps in and around Shillong and sometimes even to far flung areas like Tynring, Kyrdemkulai, Mawlynnong, Laichand Basti, Baghmara in Garo Hills, etc.
- Donated oxygen implements to Rilbong Sports and Cultural Club for the Oxygen Bank.
- Executed under the Matching Grants Project, during 1995-96, wherein three Rotary Clubs in Wales (UK), jointly with the Rotary Club of Shillong and the Rotary Foundation, donated a Gastroscope and Operation Theatre lights to the local KJP Synod Hospital.
- Rs. 1 lakh was collected and given to the Nazareth Hospital in Shillong for setting up an Intensive Care Unit (ICU).
- Donated an Ultrasound equipment to Ramakrishna Mission dispensary at Laitumkhrah, Shillong.
- It also donated Rs. 1 lakh to the State Government towards the establishment of a Cancer Detection Centre.
- Donated an X-Ray Machine to the Bharat Sewashram Sangh.
- Two Children's wards were set up at the KJP Synod and Nazareth Hospitals by raising funds through 'Walkathons'.
- The club also had an Oxygen Bank with two oxygen cylinders, which was of great help to the ailing who need oxygen at odd hours.
- The Rotary Club of Shillong has the rare distinction of participating in the early stages of the Polio immunization project, which had started in the early part of the Seventies.

- The flagship program of Polio Plus immunization camps have been organized on two occasions every year.
- To top it all, the Diamond Jubilee has been crowned by starting a Dialysis Machine for the general public at the Roberts Hospital.
- A Mother's Milk Bank was started at Roberts Hospital to cater to new-born babies, who are deprived of their mother's milk for any reason.
- Under 'Gift of Life' Scheme of Rotary, got the heart surgery done of 50 children from poor families at different hospitals across the county. The entire cost, including the traveling expenses, are totally free to the patients' families.
- A Specialist's Clinic was started at the JRG Hospital to help the down-trodden section of the society to get Specialist's Care.

➤ **Care for the orphans:**

- The Club been supplying basic amenities to the inmates of the Hindu Anath Ashram.
- Durga Puja and Diwali Celebrations with the children from Hindu Mission Orphanage every year.
- Christmas Celebration with the Children from orphanage at Mawphlang and Jaiaw, year after year.
- Visits to SOS children's village at Umiam occasionally.

➤ **Drinking Water:**

- Pursuant to its aim of providing healthy drinking water to areas of scarcity, the Club completed the Sweet Water Project as well as providing drinking Water at Laitkor Village, Pynthorumkhrah and the Hindu Mission.
- Dug Tube Wells at five different localities of Shillong including one at Wahthapbru, the last one being at Naspati Ghari.
- We are also having the regular program of providing Clean Drinking Water to underprivileged schools, and have completed 28 such projects, and which is still an on-going project.

➤ **Environment:**

- Every July the club carries out tree plantation at different locations.
- This is an annual program, and till date we must have planted over 10,000 trees.

➤ **Achievements**

- One distinct feature of our club has been that the Governor of the state of Meghalaya have always been our Honorary Member.

- The Club is honoured to have elected 3 District Governors in Rtn. Manas Chaudhuri (2003-2004), Rtn. Debasish Das (2019-20) and Rtn. K.S.Elangbam (2025-26).
- The Rotary Club of Shillong had the privilege of hosting the District Conference of District 3240 during February 25-27 1994, and during March 2004, besides a number of District related meets and programs.
- The Rotary Club of Shillong have sponsored four Rotary Clubs at Jorhat, Jowai, Tura and Orchid City, Shillong,
- All these activities call for funds which are raised by the Club in various ways, including Raffle Draws, PC Sorcar Magic Shows, Marathon at Sohra, Contributions from Members and Matching Grants or Global Grants.
- Organised a Walkathon in 1975 for raising funds for Mother Teresa's Home for Leprosy patients at Nongpoh, in which Mother Teresa herself participated in the walkathon.

The above activities indicates that the members of Rotary Club of Shillong, who are otherwise busy in their respective vocations, somehow manage to take out time and contribute their resources and energy for the benefit of the less privileged section of the society - and while doing so they don't look for their personal benefits and comforts. On the other hand, society's expectations from Rotary Club have also increased manifold.