

Rotary's Early Growth In India

The Rotary Club of Calcutta became the first Rotary club chartered in India on 1st January 1920. Today, more than 4,000 clubs operate throughout the country. R.J. Coombes is credited with starting India's first club. But Canadian James Wheeler Davidson is largely responsible for Rotary's growth in the country.

As a member of the Rotary International committee that explored extending the organization into other countries, Davidson departed in August 1928 to help establish clubs in Asia and the Middle East. His trip turned into a two-and-a-half-year odyssey that resulted in the chartering of 23 clubs in 12 countries. Arriving in Bombay in February 1929 with his wife and daughter, he was intent to start a club there.

Three attempts had failed prior to his arrival. But in March of that year, Davidson successfully formed a club in Bombay that received its charter on 8 May. He organized a club in Delhi next, before visiting Rotarians in Calcutta, where Nitish C. Laharry was serving as club secretary. Laharry later became the first RI president from India in 1962-63. Later he visited Madras to organise a Rotary Club there and succeeded in organising a club in Madras on 10 May which received its charter on 19 July.

Today, Rotary has grown to include 1,57,232 Indian Rotarians belonging to 4300 clubs in 39 districts (as of 2nd July 2021). In addition to Nitish Laharry, many Rotary leaders have called the country home, including 1991-92 RI President Rajendra K. Saboo, 2011-12 RI President Kalyan Banerjee, 2021-22 RI President Shekhar Mehta and more than 24 RI directors.