

# The Lighthouse

Rotary  
Club of Madras



WEEKLY BULLETIN OF THE ROTARY CLUB OF MADRAS

ISSUE 29  
JANUARY 18  
2026



SERVICE ABOVE SELF

## BIRTHDAYS



Rtn Sanjay Tulsyan	12 <sup>th</sup> January
Rtn Arunachalam Palaniappan	12 <sup>th</sup> January
Rtn Sheetal Bhat	12 <sup>th</sup> January
PP Rtn Ranjit Pratap	13 <sup>th</sup> January
Rtn Suresh Kumar S	13 <sup>th</sup> January
Rtn Yummidi Shailesh Raj	14 <sup>th</sup> January
Rtn Rajendra Mudaliar	18 <sup>th</sup> January
Rtn Sanjay Rao Chaganti	19 <sup>th</sup> January
Dr Sushama Kekre, Spouse of Rtn Dr Prashant Kekre	18 <sup>th</sup> January
Brinda, Spouse of Rtn Suniel U Lulla	18 <sup>th</sup> January
<b>ANNIVERSARY</b>	
Rtn Bharat B Mohindra & Rashmi	16 <sup>th</sup> January
Rtn Abhay Mehta S & Niyati	18 <sup>th</sup> January
Rtn Sarada Sriram & V Sriram	18 <sup>th</sup> January



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### Bulletin Design:

**YATRATECHS**

## Rotary Club of Madras

28<sup>th</sup> Weekly Meeting



**SPECIAL GUEST :**  
**Rtn. JOHN ARMSTRONG**

GRAND SON OF  
**SIR. GG. ARMSTRONG**  
FIRST PRESIDENT OF  
ROTARY CLUB OF MADRAS

**SPEAKER:**  
**JAFAR ISMAIL**  
EVEREST SUMMITEER

Moderated by  
**Rtn Suresh Amirapu**

Tuesday, 20th January 2026 | 1.30 pm

Lunch : 12:30 - 1:30 pm at Hyatt Regency, Chennai.

Spouses are invited for this meeting

**Rtn. Nikhil Raj**  
President

**Rtn. Prasanna Rajagopalan**  
Honorary Secretary

**Rtn. Rajesh Mani**  
Director - Club Service

**Rtn. Mohit Bajaj**  
Chairperson - Programs Committee

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# **Rotary Club of Madras (RCM)**

## **Minutes of the 27th Weekly Meeting held on 11th January 2026**

**at 6.30 pm at Hyatt Regency, Teynampet, Chennai**

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### **Call to Order**

The President called the 27th weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Madras to order at 6:30 pm and warmly welcomed all members, distinguished guests, friends, and attendees. A special welcome was extended to members of the FICCI Ladies' Organization (FLO) for the joint meeting.

### **Confirmation of Minutes**

The President sought confirmation of the 25th Weekly Meeting minutes and the AGM minutes. Both were confirmed by the House.

### **Welcome Address**

The President highlighted the significance of collaboration between institutions and emphasized Rotary's commitment over its nine-decade legacy to fostering meaningful dialogue that informs, inspires, and contributes to a more thoughtful and compassionate society. He expressed the Club's pleasure in hosting an evening

dedicated to literature and ideas, featuring Mr. Amitav Ghosh, one of India's most celebrated global writers, in conversation with Ms. Tishani Doshi, an accomplished poet, writer, and performer. Members and guests were invited to look forward to an evening of stimulating discussion, reflection, and inspiration.

### **Address by Ms Niyati Mehta, Chairperson, FICCI FLO**

The Chairperson of FICCI FLO, Ms Niyati Mehta addressed the gathering and welcomed all Rotarians, FLO members, past chairs, and guests on behalf of the organization. She provided an overview of FLO as the women's

wing of FICCI, noting that the Chennai Chapter is 32 years old with over 1,300 members, functioning through 18 diverse verticals, each delivering impactful quarterly initiatives.

### **Key initiatives highlighted included**

**Education:** Empowering over 1,200 students every quarter through access to STEM education.

**Skill Development:** Project Bloom – training over 200 women in fresh flower decoration.

**Basket Project** – enabling women in livelihood creation and export-oriented employment.

Technical skilling programs benefit over 2,000 students.

**Sustainability:** Planting over 5,000 trees, reinforcing environmental responsibility.

She thanked FLO's past chairs, executive committee, volunteers and sponsors, and placed on record special appreciation for Ms. Hemu Ramaiah, Harper Collins, RCM's President, Rtn Nikhil Raj, Hon. Secretary Rtn Prasanna Rajagopalan, Club Service Director, Rtn Rajesh Mani and for their support in making the event possible.

The audience was then invited to settle in for an evening of thought-provoking conversation with Mr. Amitav Ghosh, in conversation with Ms. Tishani Doshi.

### **Introduction of the Author and Book**

Ms Naiyya Singh from HarperCollins introduced the session and the author. She spoke about "Ghost Eye", Mr. Ghosh's latest work, describing it as a haunting and evocative novel spanning 1960s Kolkata and present-day Brooklyn, exploring themes of memory, reincarnation, family, and environmental fragility. She briefly outlined the storyline and highlighted Mr. Ghosh's illustrious career, noting that his works have been

translated into over 30 languages and that he was the first English-language writer to receive the Jnanpith Award (2019).

His global recognitions, including the Erasmus Prize, were also acknowledged. Ms Naiyya Singh introduced Ms. Tishani Doshi, poet, writer, dancer, Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and author of acclaimed works such as Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods and Small Days and Nights.

Gratitude was expressed to Ms. Hemu Ramaiah, FLO, Rotary Club of Madras, and the Club leadership for hosting the evening.

### Book Unveiling and Conversation:

Ms. Hemu Ramaiah was invited to the stage for the unveiling of the book "Ghost Eye", following which Mr. Amitav Ghosh and Ms. Tishani Doshi engaged in an insightful and engaging conversation with the audience along with Q and A Session.

### Vote of Thanks and Announcements

The Vote of Thanks was proposed by RCM's Hon. Secretary Rtn Prasanna Rajagopalan, who expressed gratitude to all speakers, collaborators, and attendees.

### Felicitations

The Rotary Club of Madras presented the dignitaries with "Timeless Legacy", a publication chronicling 97 years of the Club's history, as a token of appreciation.

### Secretary's Announcements

No weekly meeting on 13 Jan 2026. Next weekly meeting on 20 Jan 2026. Full Club Fellowship & Pongal Celebrations on 18 Jan 2026.

### Adjournment

There being no further business, the President adjourned the meeting.

## AMITAV GHOSH ON CLIMATE, FICTION, AND THE HUMAN CRISIS



In the cultural heart of Chennai, a city celebrated by Amitav Ghosh as a wonderful reading city, two distinguished institutions, the Rotary Club of Madras and the FICCI Ladies Organization, convened for a landmark joint meeting. This evening was a celebration of literature, memory, and the urgent questions of our time, brought to life through a dialogue between the globally renowned writer Amitav Ghosh and the multi-talented Tishani Doshi. The event served as Chennai launch for Ghosh's latest novel, *Ghost Eye*, a work that traverses decades between the nineteen-sixties and the present day to explore the fragile state of our planet.

The evening was steered by the insightful presence of Tishani Doshi, an accomplished poet, writer, dancer, and performer. As a

Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a winner of the Forward Prize, Doshi brought a unique artistic depth to the conversation, described by the organizers as possessing an intellectual grace and sensitivity to language. Her engagement was not merely that of a facilitator but of a fellow creator grappling with similar global anxieties. Doshi opened the discussion with a candid reflection on her own crisis in fiction since the pandemic, admitting that she had found it difficult to escape into novels because the alarming rate of global change felt beyond the reach of traditional storytelling. She pointed to Ghosh's earlier work, *The Great Derangement*, as a challenge that had long haunted her, asking where serious literary fiction was that truly confronted planetary grief and climate change.



The central narrative of *Ghost Eye* begins with a three-year-old girl named Vasha Gupta, born into a strict vegetarian family in Kolkata, who suddenly insists on eating fish. This demand is revealed to be a memory from a past life, a revelation that eventually draws psychiatrists and environmental activists into a search for hidden histories. Doshi connected this fictional premise to her own family history, recalling a cousin who, at the age of three, insisted that her real parents

lived in a different city. For Ghosh, using reincarnation as a narrative engine was a deliberate attempt to dismantle the linear idea of time, which he identifies as an essential component of the modernity-driven catastrophe we now face. He argued that the traditional novel, which relies on a unitary character with a clear beginning and end, struggles to represent the reality of beings who might embody multiple lives and voices.



The dialogue took a provocative turn as Ghosh discussed the apocalyptic thinking prevalent in Western Protestant societies, particularly among tech billionaires. He described a disturbing phenomenon where the ultra-rich are building apocalypse shelters on private islands, preparing for a catastrophic collapse that they refer to as the event. These individuals, Ghosh contended, often view the planetary crisis through a Malthusian lens, essentially hoping for a

mega death event that would eliminate the "expendable" populations of the global south while allowing them to emerge and recreate a world of absolute power. However, Ghosh offered a counter-narrative of resilience. He suggested that subsistence farmers and fishermen in Bengal or Tamil Nadu who possess practical knowledge to plant rice or catch fish are far better equipped to survive a systemic collapse than a Western middle class that has spent its life staring at screens.





The conversation further explored the non-human world, with Doshi asking how literature can give voice to trees, rivers, and spirits. Ghosh cited Rabindranath Tagore as a literary ancestor who viewed the supernatural not as something separate from reality, but as part of a natural spectrum of life. This connection to the living world is most tangibly felt through food, which Ghosh described as the primary medium for human relationship with environment. He lamented the loss of biodiversity, noting that hundreds of varieties of drought-resistant and flood-resistant rice that he saw in his youth have been replaced by industrial grains. He also warned against the ecological disaster of saltwater shrimp farming, which destroys coastal livelihoods and landscapes in pursuit of export profits.

The evening concluded with a reflection on the

role of the writer in an era of geopolitical turbulence and crumbling global institutions. While Ghosh modestly resisted the idea that a writer can have a direct impact on activism, he acknowledged that many readers have been moved to action by his work. The event, which included a symbolic book unveiling and a vote of thanks, left the audience with a profound reminder that literature is a way to understand the present and imagine a future that is not merely a grave.

To understand Ghosh's vision of our world, one might imagine history not as a series of pages turned and left behind, but as the water in a great bay at high tide; everything we thought was buried eventually drifts back to the shore, reminding us that the past is a living presence that shapes the ground beneath our feet.

## PONGAL, PROGRESS & PROUD CERTIFICATES @ ROTARY NAGAR



At Rotary Nagar, our Pongal celebrations doubled as a proud moment of progress—certificates were awarded to the learners of our MS Office and Tally classes, alongside our tuition support for young children. The atmosphere was truly vibrant and inspiring, creating a space where confidence grows and futures take shape.

A heartfelt thank you to the Director, Chair, and every committee member for making this possible. And special gratitude to DGE Dr Vijay Bharathi Rangarajan and Rtn Archana Shri Sanjay for joining us and elevating the occasion with their presence.





# ROTARY RADAR

RI President Elect Olayinka H. Babalola urges members of Rotary to 'Create Lasting Impact at the International Assembly in Orlando, Florida, USA'

Rotary International President-elect Olayinka H. Babalola called on members to Create Lasting Impact by making their clubs more welcoming, carrying out impactful projects, and allowing their Rotary experiences to transform them personally.

"Rotary has changed us. It has shaped who we are and made us better people," Babalola said at Rotary's International Assembly in Orlando, Florida, USA, on 12 January. "We often talk about changing the world. We talk about ending polio, about building peace. We do not think enough about how Rotary transforms us."

Babalola, a member of the Rotary Club of Trans Amadi, Nigeria, described how joining a

Rotaract club as a teenager enlarged his perspective beyond the limited, privileged outlook he'd once had. That change in awareness came from observing the lasting impact his club had in the community, particularly from teaching people to read and write.

"As members of Rotary, we share a vision of a better future," he said. "To make this vision a reality, we must acknowledge and unleash the change within ourselves. We must focus not only on outcomes, but on impact."

Change and impact are not the same, he added: "Change is only the beginning. Impact is what endures."

## Understanding impact

Rotary members have made an impact by expanding early childhood education in Knysna, South Africa, and increasing access to prenatal care in Nigeria, Babalola said. The Rotary Club of Knysna empowered local women to open and manage early childhood education centers.

"The project has reached thousands of children and families, and it will continue to provide education in those communities for generations," Babalola said. "We can recreate this kind of impact in other parts of the world, and in doing so we can earn the trust and recognition of our neighbors in the communities we serve. And when more communities trust Rotary, more people want to

join."

Babalola also described the wide-ranging impact of Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria. The initiative to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality rates received a US\$2 million Rotary Programs of Scale grant in 2022.

"Before Rotary's intervention, many women avoided prenatal care, which is essential to ensuring a safe birth for both mother and child," he said. "After working with Rotary, systems were put in place to help expecting mothers receive prenatal care. The community was involved. Attendance went up. Mortality went down. That project [will] transform lives across Nigeria for decades."

## Extending welcome

Babalola urged members to take a more open, welcoming attitude toward newcomers to their clubs. He described how, when he was a Rotaract club member eager to join a Rotary club, the president of the Rotary club treated him with scorn.

"He said, 'What audacity! You cannot just join. You need an invitation,'" Babalola recalled. "I could have walked away. Instead, I said, 'I didn't know a child needed an invitation to enter his parents' home.'"

While things have changed since that time, Babalola said that they haven't changed enough. Some clubs close themselves off instead of "embracing the world with open arms," he said. Young people aren't necessarily treated with respect, he added, and people with different ideas and backgrounds aren't always made to feel welcome. He urged members to think about how they could better welcome others.

"You never know whose Rotary story might begin—or end—based on the way you make them feel at a meeting or service project," he said.

Another way members can focus on personal change, he said, is to aim to do better than their best. He urged district leaders to examine their past successes in raising funds, planning projects, and recruiting members. Then, he

said, they should challenge themselves to surpass their past triumphs.

"When we change ourselves, we change our clubs and districts," he concluded. "When we change our districts, we change the communities we serve. And when we change our communities, we create lasting impact across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves."

Source: eFlash\_Rotary



## Rtn M Balasubramanian



**Q1.** Behind every great leader is an unspoken influence. Can you share a lesser-known individual—perhaps not even a Rotarian—who significantly shaped your approach to leadership or service? What specific trait or moment of theirs still echoes in your decisions?

**A1.** Among the many people who have influenced and shaped me, I can clearly remember just one above all—my father, lovingly called APPICHI (meaning "father" in the Chettinad slang) by everyone. His first three movies failed, and his partners walked away. But he never gave up on his dream to make films and succeed in the industry. That tenacity is the trait that has inspired me the most.

He never said "impossible." Once, after a technical snag—after shooting in Calcutta and returning—he refused to quit. Instead, he attempted playback singing for the first time and succeeded. He showed the same bold spirit when he dubbed a Kannada film into Tamil. He was truly an innovator.

He never accepted compromise in quality. Many times, he asked the Director to re-shoot portions, even when it meant extra expense. He was a perfectionist, and his mantra was simple and powerful: "Efforts never fail."

His heart was just as big as his ambition. He bought acres of land and built a school for workers' children. He gave interest-free loans for house construction and even built a small kalyana mantapam for them. Even today, many staff, workers, and their families continue to live in the homes he built in AVM Colony. Long before CSR became a popular term, he even took insurance policies for studio workers. From him, I learned the real meaning of caring and sharing.

He also had the song rights for priceless Bhartiar

songs, which he later gifted to the state when the then CM requested him. Because of that generous gesture, those songs are now in the public domain, available to everyone.

Despite all he achieved, he lived simply—wearing only a khadi dhoti and shirt—and he was always approachable. He was available for discussions even if the person was not well-known or recognized.

I may have inherited only a small percentage of his qualities, but I always try to keep my feet firmly on the ground. I follow his discipline: never take a loan, never deviate from the business we are doing—stick to sound and light.

**Q2.** We often focus on visible achievements. But is there a silent initiative, a behind-the-scenes effort you led or supported in RCM that you feel deserves recognition today? What made it meaningful, even if it wasn't publicly celebrated?

**A2.** Now, coming to my quiet initiatives behind the scenes—when I was inducted into a district post (which is normally given only to past presidents), I made full use of that position in meaningful ways.

I also want our young Rotarians to know that our club is the first club in South India and the 3rd oldest in India. Today, there are 180 and odd clubs in Chennai, divided into two districts. Our Club RCM is part of District 3234.

When I took up the district post, my first priority was clear: I insisted that RCM should produce a District Governor, something we had not had for over a decade. We all worked hard, and we succeeded—we got late PDG M. Balaji [vijai balaji's dad] in 2002–2003. I'm genuinely happy to have played a part in that.

Later, I served as District international chairman for over four years and took many Rotarians from different clubs—including RCM—to Thailand, Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Turkey and Sri Lanka.

I also served as district awards committee chairman and ensured that RCM received proper recognition. I was made district conference chairman too—a role usually given to past presidents aspiring for higher posts in the district.

I did all these assignments not for publicity, but only to serve as a true Rotarian, representing our premier Rotary club—RCM.

**Q3.** If Rotary's values were to be taught to a child through a single story from your life, what story would you choose—and what core value does it embody?

**A3.** My advice to youngsters—whether you are a Rotarian or anyone else—is this: do whatever you can with all your heart and full capability, without expecting big returns. You will be rewarded—one day or another. And I repeat my father's mantra: "Efforts never fail."

Finally, I strongly believe in the power of fellowship and networking, but never at the cost of community service.

## Two Lifelines, One Powerful CSR Promise

At Omandur Government Multi Super Speciality Hospital, we witnessed a moment of real impact with the inauguration of two dialysis machines—made possible through a CSR initiative by TVS Next.

These aren't just machines; they're hope in action for patients who need timely, consistent care. Our heartfelt thanks to Mr. Vinod Krishnan, CEO & Managing Director, for his generous support and the commitment TVS Next has shown towards strengthening public healthcare.



## SUCCESS STORIES @ SELAIYUR – PONGAL SPECIAL



**S. Vinotha, 22**, lost her parents at a young age and was supported by her sister's family during her college studies. Determined to stand on her own, she completed the Tally Prime course at RCM Selaiyur, where she gained essential computer skills. Her training helped her secure a job as an Operator at Foxconn Hon Hai Technology India Mega Development Pvt. Ltd. Today, with a monthly income of Rs.15,000, Vinotha is confidently self-reliant. Her journey reflects the power of skill training in creating independent and empowered lives.



**Sunitha A. is a 45-year-old** single mother with two children. She completed Basic Computer Course at RCM Selaiyur Campus. She is working as a shop clerk and supports her children and mother-in-law through her salary of Rs 15000/- With computer knowledge, her livelihood has improved, and she is now a successful and self-reliant woman.



**Jayashree D (24)** comes from a family of tailors and supported her parents during her college days. Determined to build a better future, she completed computer training at RCM Selaiyur Campus. This skill opened the door to employment, and today she works in HR at IITM Pravartak Technology Foundation, earning 30,000 per month. With her income, Jayashree confidently supports her family and stands as an example of self-reliance and empowerment.



**Ms. Vijayaprabha (43)** lives with her husband, who is differently abled and with their two daughters. Struggling to manage the family income, she joined the tailoring training at RCM. After completing the course, she started doing home-based tailoring work and now earns Rs.12,000 per month. Her steady income has strengthened the family and enabled her daughters to continue their college education, bringing hope and stability to their lives.



**Seethalakshmi (36)** has two children, and her family was managing on a single income to support their education. To strengthen her family's livelihood, she completed Tailoring and Aari Embroidery training at RCM. Today, she runs home-based tailoring and Aari embroidery work, earning an additional Rs.15,000 per month, helping her family achieve better financial stability.

**S. Shakila (25)** lost her father at a young age. With her mother's support, she completed her school education. She learned tailoring at RCM. Now she is doing home-based tailoring and earns Rs.16,000 per month. With her income, she supports her mother and takes care of her family independently.



**Ms. S. Uma Maheshwari**, aged 46, is a single mother of two children. She earlier earned her livelihood by selling flowers door to door. After completing the tailoring course at RCM, she started home-based tailoring work. Today, she earns 12,000 per month and confidently looks after her family. Her journey reflects strength, skill, and self-reliance.



Rtn. Dr. Geeta Iyer had the delightful privilege of attending a meeting of the Rotary Club of Tokyo and marked the occasion with a warm exchange of flags. A truly fabulous moment of Rotary fellowship, this gesture beautifully celebrated international camaraderie, shared values, and the spirit of service that connects us across borders.





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