

# The Lighthouse

Rotary  
Club of Madras



WE SERVE THE ROTARY CLUB OF MADRAS

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2026



Rotary  
Club of Madras



ROTARY  
CLUB OF MADRAS  
SERVICE ABOVE SELF

<b>BIRTHDAYS</b> 🎂	🎂
Rtn Raghu Kailas	11 <sup>th</sup> May
Rtn Gopalan Kannan	15 <sup>th</sup> May
Vijay Srinivas, Spouse of Rtn Dr Vani Vijay	12 <sup>th</sup> May
Suraiya Masud, Spouse of Rtn G.S.K. Masud	12 <sup>th</sup> May
S.Lalitha, Spouse of Rtn Avali Srinivasan	16 <sup>th</sup> May
Geetha Ravishankar, Spouse of Rtn Ravishankar R	18 <sup>th</sup> May
<b>ANNIVERSARY</b> 🎉	🎉
Rtn Balasubramanian M & Lalita	11 <sup>th</sup> May
Rtn Dr Rajan K & Selvi	11 <sup>th</sup> May
PP Rtn Satyan C. Bhatt & Parul Bhatt	11 <sup>th</sup> May
Rtn Sukumar N & Usha Sukumar	11 <sup>th</sup> May
Rtn Raghul Saraogi & Ruchita Saraogi	11 <sup>th</sup> May
Rtn Dr Supriya Dabir Gautam & Gautam Venkataramani	14 <sup>th</sup> May
Rtn Indrani Krishnaier & Paramesh Krishnaier	16 <sup>th</sup> May
Rtn Dr Gururaj Rao & Shreya Sujeer	16 <sup>th</sup> May
PP Rtn Rani Muralidharan & K.G. Muralidharan	18 <sup>th</sup> May



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### **YATRATECHS**

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**ROTARY CLUB OF MADRAS**  
MADRAS GREETS  
CHARTERED - 1929

**NO MEETING  
ON  
19 May 2026**

Send in your articles, news and stories for consideration in the Lighthouse bulletin to: [lighthouse@rotarymadras.in](mailto:lighthouse@rotarymadras.in)  
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# Rotary Club of Madras (RCM)

## Minutes of the 43rd Weekly Meeting held on 12.05.2026 at Hyatt Regency, Teynampet, Chennai at 7.00 pm

The 43rd weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Madras was called to order by the President at 7.00 PM at Hyatt Regency

Chennai. The meeting commenced with the Rotary song. The minutes of the 42nd weekly meeting was confirmed.

### President's Address:

The President welcomed the members and guests present, including members of the Probus Club, Mr. Annadurai and Mr. Sappani Pillai, Mr.K.Pandiarajan, Dr. S. Damodhar, Dr. Hossaini Kagalwal and the Chief Guest, Dr. Sridhar Vembu.

The President spoke about the recently launched HPV vaccination project at Tiruchengode in association with Vivekananda Educational Institutions, where vaccinations for approximately 2,000 children are planned and 712 vaccinations were completed on the first day itself. He informed members that the inauguration of the Senior Citizens' Home project, initiated during the tenure of PP Rtn Chella Krishna G, would take place on 18 May 2026. He also announced the upcoming inauguration of the Majestic Pond project sponsored by Sundaram Finance on 19 May and the inauguration of 100 homes sponsored by Sundaram Fasteners on 20 or 21 May 2026.

The President recalled the Rotary End Polio Flame project launched during the year 2014-15 under the leadership of PP Rtn Srikanth S.N. He informed the members that

the flame, which travelled across 35 countries, would ceremonially be received in Taipei during the upcoming Rotary International Convention by Past Rotary International President Gary C. K. Huang.

The President appreciated the continued public service initiatives undertaken by Rotarians including Rtn Amandeep Singh Kandhari's Chappal Seva activities and acknowledged the efforts of several members engaged in community service without seeking recognition.

The President announced with pride that Rotary District 3234 had been ranked 10th worldwide in The Rotary Foundation, with contributions amounting to US\$1.63 million, and that the Rotary Club of Madras had been ranked 4th in Southeast Asia with contributions of US\$600,000 towards The Rotary Foundation. He also acknowledged contributions made by Treasurer Rtn Asha Mathen, who donated US\$3,000 to The Rotary Foundation, and Rtn Hemant P Chordia who contributed US\$2,000 and thereby became a Major Donor.

### Secretary's Remarks:

The Secretary, Rtn Prasanna Rajagopalan, announced birthdays and wedding anniversaries of members and spouses for the week. He also informed members that the next meeting would be the Club Assembly on Saturday, 16 May 2026 at 11.00

### Induction of new members:

Rtn G Ravindran introduced Mr Ranjit Punja, an international banker turned fintech entrepreneur and co-founder of CreditMantri FinServe Private Limited. He highlighted Mr Punja's distinguished global banking career with Citigroup, his involvement in agricultural and social initiatives, and his family background. Members were informed that he would represent the third generation of his family to join the club.

Rtn Vijay Balaji introduced Mr Madan Kumar, entrepreneur, investor and founder of Growth Mechanics and Smart CEO magazine. He highlighted Mr Madan Kumar's contributions to the entrepreneurial

ecosystem, his active involvement in Round Table community service initiatives and his interests in health, education and entrepreneurship.

The President formally inducted Rtn Ranjit Punja and Rtn Madan Kumar into membership of the Rotary Club of Madras and administered the Rotary charge based on the Four-Way Test. The Rotary pins were presented by PP Rtn Prof Capt Dr Biswakumar B and PP Rtn Vivek Harinarain respectively in the presence of their spouses and family members. The members of the club welcomed the newly inducted Rotarians with applause.

## Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr Sridhar Vembu:

The proceedings were then handed over to Rtn Samyuktha Bhaskar, who introduced the Chief Guest, Dr Sridhar Vembu, Co-founder and Chief Scientist of Zoho. She highlighted his educational qualifications from Indian Institute of Technology Madras and Princeton University, his entrepreneurial journey from AdventNet to Zoho, his philosophy of building globally competitive institutions from rural India, his commitment to rural empowerment through Zoho Schools and his focus on simplicity, self-reliance and long-term thinking. She also referred to his stepping down as CEO in 2025 to focus on deep research and development in the field of artificial intelligence and technology innovation.

Rtn Bikram Sivakumar read out the citation from the Rotary Club of Madras conferring the Lifetime Achievement Award on Dr Sridhar Vembu, recognizing his contributions to technology, rural empowerment, institution building and nation building. The citation praised his efforts in creating opportunities for talented youth from rural India and building globally respected institutions rooted in Indian values and inclusivity.

Dr Sridhar Vembu then addressed the gathering and shared his thoughts on technology, critical thinking, artificial intelligence, philosophy and the future of innovation, providing members with several valuable insights and perspectives. A question-and-answer session followed.

Mr Pandiarajan and the First Lady Laura Raj joined the President on stage to felicitate the Chief Guest. A copy of the club's legacy book was presented to Dr Sridhar Vembu.

Rtn Dr Sharon Krishna Rau proposed the vote of thanks.

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

## The Rebel Technologist: Dr Sridhar Vembu's Journey from Silicon Valley to Rural India



Dr Sridhar Vembu is not your typical technology billionaire. As the co-founder and Chief Scientist of Zoho, one of the world's most successful cloud-based software companies, he has completely rewritten the Silicon Valley playbook. Armed with a bachelor's degree from IIT Madras and a PhD from Princeton, he walked away from a comfortable engineering career at Qualcomm to build a global powerhouse from ground up. Today, he stands as a remarkable example of leadership rooted in deep philosophical simplicity, proving that world-class, globally competitive institutions can be successfully built from rural India.

## The Philosophy of Absolute Simplicity

While most technology founders chase venture capital and valuation headlines, Dr Vembu chose to bootstrap Zoho, building it patiently, quietly, and profitably. He famously rejected an early venture capital term sheet that offered a \$200 million valuation because he refused to agree to a seven-year exit clause, ensuring the company maintained a profound foundational philosophy rather than



His personal life is equally stripped of excess. He lives in a village, eats one and a half simple vegetarian meals a day, and prefers to sleep out in the open under the stars without air conditioning or a fan. His entire set of personal possessions is worth a mere 30,000 to 40,000 rupees, and he happily

reporting to hedge fund managers. At Zoho, formal titles are deemed irrelevant, and the corporate culture mirrors a Japanese minimalist aesthetic that strips away unnecessary corporate baggage. Dr Vembu has no executive suite or reserved parking, and he sits side-by-side with his engineers, who simply address him by his first name.



gives away luxury gifts like expensive watches because he finds them useless. This radical simplicity gives him absolute resilience; he states that whether his company goes to a hundred billion dollars or falls to zero, it does not bother him in the slightest.

## Championing Rural Innovation

Dr Vembu boldly rejected the notion that innovation must be confined to large urban centres. Instead of hiring exclusively from elite colleges, he set up Zoho in rural hubs like Tenkasi in Tamil Nadu, and recently opened a training centre in Sambalpur, Odisha, to empower local youth. Through Zoho Schools, he actively recruits talented students from regional-language mediums,

arguing that a massive socio-economic divide has been created by the dominance of English. By nurturing this "diamond in the rough" talent, his rural teams are doing highly impressive work, exemplified by an 18-year-old Tamil-medium student in Tenkasi who independently built a computer prototype to rival global AI models.



## The New Battlefield: Code and National Self-Reliance

In 2025, Dr Vembu stepped down as CEO to become Chief Scientist, focusing heavily on deep tech and artificial intelligence research. He views modern software development as the new global battlefield, calling his software engineers the "freedom fighters" and soldiers of our time. Believing

that AI's true economic value lies solely in generating code, he is pushing his teams to build more powerful "machine looms" to revolutionize the software industry and drastically increase programmer productivity.



Dr Vembu is fiercely passionate about building Indian R&D capabilities, warning that paying massive markups for foreign

technology will unavoidably lead to a technological subjugation resembling the East India Company.



Awarded the Padma Shri in 2021, Dr Sridhar Vembu is far more than a brilliant entrepreneur; he is a teacher, a nation-builder, and a visionary. He has demonstrated that you can achieve

phenomenal global success without losing your roots, showing a generation of Indians that they can build with purpose, humility, and extraordinary social impact.

## A Fireside Feast of Warmth, Flavour, and Fellowship

A warm summer evening came alive at the elegant Grand by GRT Hotels as Rajesh and Jayashree Vummidi hosted a memorable fireside gathering at the charming Art Bistro. The ambience was magical with lively conversations creating the perfect setting for an unforgettable evening of warmth and camaraderie.

Guests were treated to a carefully curated spread of exotic delicacies that delighted every palate. The highlight of the evening was the rich and flavourful Exotic Soup

Exogaline Corbaze, whose unique blend of spices and textures set the tone for the culinary experience ahead. The aromatic Paya Curry, simmered to perfection, added a traditional touch and was relished by all present. The vegetarians enjoyed a kuzhi panniyaram fried in ghee with spicy tomato Thokku bringing the dinner to a delightful close with the much-loved Mukkani Ice Cream, a refreshing dessert inspired by a classic trio of mango, jackfruit, and banana flavours that beautifully celebrated South Indian tastes.



The evening became even more special with the arrival of surprise guests, the hosts' son and son-in-law whose presence added joy and excitement to the gathering. Their warm interactions and cheerful participation made the occasion feel even more intimate and family oriented.

Set against the artistic backdrop of Art Bistro, the fireside party was a wonderful blend of fine food, heartfelt hospitality, and cherished togetherness. Rajesh and Jayashree Vummidi ensured that every guest left with fond memories of an evening filled with laughter, warmth, and culinary indulgence.

**-Poornima (Spouse of Rtn A M Visvanathan)**



## Rtn Usha Umapathi

**Q1.** We love a good fireside. Great food, great company, great conversations about changing the world. But what percentage of ideas discussed at firesides actually make it past dessert?

**A1.** Rotary was never meant to be just fellowship. It was meant to be a platform where fellowship translates into service. The truth is service may not always be born in the excitement of discussion, but it is often there, in those very conversations over fellowship, that the seeds of awareness are sown. Seeds that quietly take root in the minds of those who resonate with them. And from there begins the discipline that truly builds service. The phone calls, the follow-ups, the meetings for which only a few turn up, the slow and patient raising of funds, the projects completed without applause. Because behind every successful Rotary project are a handful of people who stayed long after the conversation ended. And perhaps that is the real test of commitment not merely who speaks passionately at the fireside but who shows up the morning after. And Rotary Club of Madras has a proud legacy of many such passionate and committed Rotarians.

**Q2.** If leadership titles disappeared tomorrow, who here would still be a leader and why?

**A2.** If leadership titles disappeared tomorrow many in Rotary Club of Madras would still remain leaders. Of course, there are many who enter Rotary with aspirations for titles, recognition, and influence along with the determination to do what it takes to get there. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. After all, it is through service, contribution, commitment, and consistent involvement that such positions are earned. But true leadership in Rotary was never meant to come merely from a designation. It comes from responsibility quietly embraced, year after year.

The real leaders would still be the ones who show up and follow through. The ones who take ownership when something needs to be done even when there is no spotlight, no recognition, and no title attached to it. They are the people who make the phone calls no one sees. The ones who stay back after meetings, who remember details that others forget, who keep projects moving when enthusiasm fades, who support, encourage, mentor, and steady the club simply through their presence and reliability.

They are the ones who do not work merely for titles that may create authority for a period of time, but for the kind of service and character that create influence lasting far longer. And that is perhaps the enduring strength of Rotary especially of the Rotary Club of Madras. It's legacy has certainly been built by Presidents, Secretaries, and Chairpersons, but equally by quiet, committed Rotarians whose sense of service neither begins with a title... nor ends with one.



If titles disappeared tomorrow, the true leaders would still be easy to identify. They would be the ones everyone instinctively turns to when something meaningful needs to be done. And I am certain that many such names come to mind when we reflect on the immense contribution Rotary has made and continues to make to society and to the welfare of the world.

Here I wish to share an excerpt from my maternal grandfather Mr. K Nanjundiah's speech, published in *The Rotarian*, Rotary's International Publication, in the year 1951.....

### *Give, Not Get*

K. NANJUNDIAH, *Rotarian*  
Lawyer  
Coimbatore, India

The challenge of our vocation is both subjective and objective. If we have come into Rotary purely for personal advancement, we have really missed the soul of Rotary. Have we joined it to advance our own interests by contacts with others better placed than ourselves? Have we not joined this great international order to learn *to give* and not merely *to get*? Rotary bids us to the pursuit of lofty ideals through our own vocations, and on our response to this challenge depends Rotary's mission of reshaping the world.—*From a Rotary District Conference address.*

**Q3.** Every year, there are a few people...who don't speak much... don't post much... don't perform much...but somehow, things just work around them. Who are the real "silent forces" in Rotary and what do they do differently?

**A3.** There are a few people in Rotary Club of Madras who do not speak much...do not post much...do not perform for attention.....and yet, somehow, things simply work around them. Projects move forward. They bring people together. Problems get resolved quietly before they become visible. And events somehow feel steadier, calmer, and more dependable in their presence. These are the real silent forces in Rotary. They may never dominate a stage or seek visibility, but they carry within them something far more valuable — consistency, responsibility, and quiet commitment.

What do they do differently? They understand that service is not performance. It is stewardship. They do not ask to be noticed; they look into what still needs to be done. They listen more than they speak and observe more than they announce. And while others may still be discussing possibilities, they have already moved ahead with the way forward.

They are the ones who are coordinating details, following up patiently, encouraging volunteers, calming anxieties, raising support quietly, and holding projects together whether or not they have large teams of support. They do not work for applause.

In fact, many of them are happiest remaining in the background. But their reliability creates a kind of trust that no title can command. Every strong Rotary Club has such people. And the enduring strength of the Rotary Club of Madras has been built not only by visible leaders, but equally by these quiet pillars of service, who we know that when they are involved, the job will get done.



### A Distinguished Honour, A Proud Rotary Moment

Shri Komal Krishnamurthy Raman, from the 1972 batch of IIT Madras, was conferred the Distinguished Alumni Service Award on the occasion of the 67th Institute Day of IIT Madras.

It was a proud and memorable moment, celebrating a life of service, achievement, and enduring contribution to one of India's premier institutions. The ceremony was attended by

President Nikhil Raj along with Rotarians Dr. Anuradha Ganesan, Ravishankar, Shanno Ravi, Gowrishankar, and Govind Parikh, who joined in applauding this well-deserved recognition.

A fine honour for a distinguished alumnus and a moment of pride for all who value service, excellence, and legacy.



**2025-26 Top 5 districts in Total Giving from South Asia – April 2026 (interim Update)**

In Total TRF Contribution				In Annual Fund Contribution			
Zone	District	Total Contribution (in USD)	Worldwide Rank	Zone	District	Total Contribution (in USD)	Worldwide Rank
4	3141	\$5,971,955	1	7	3131	\$540,960	36
4	3011	\$1,890,554	7	4	3141	\$480,363	42
5	3203	\$1,663,664	9	4	3142	\$303,246	110
5	3234	\$1,633,932	10	4	3080	\$189,199	185
7	3131	\$1,630,584	11	7	3181	\$180,627	195

**2025-26 Top 5 Giving Clubs from South Asia – April 2026 (interim update)**

Zone	District	Club Name	2025-26 Total TRF Contribution
4	3141	Bombay, MH, India	\$1,230,333
4	3141	Bombay Pier, MH, India	\$1,199,749
7	3150	Lake District Moinabad, TS, India	\$611,679
5	3234	Madras, TN, India	\$601,819
4	3141	Bombay Queen City, MH, India	\$573,595

Congratulations to the members of District 3234!

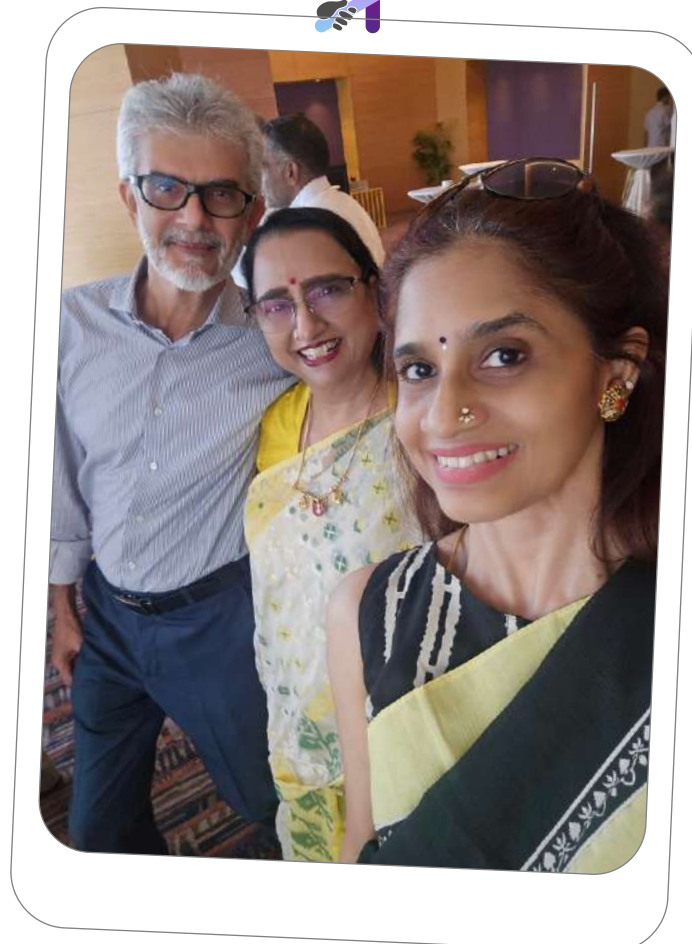
We've achieved Worldwide Rank #10 in TRF Giving with \$1.63M in the April 2026 interim update!

Special applause to Rotary Club of Madras for ranking among the Top 5 Clubs in South East Asia with \$601K+ to TRF.

Thank you to every donor and every club in D3234. Your generosity and commitment to The Rotary Foundation make us proud.

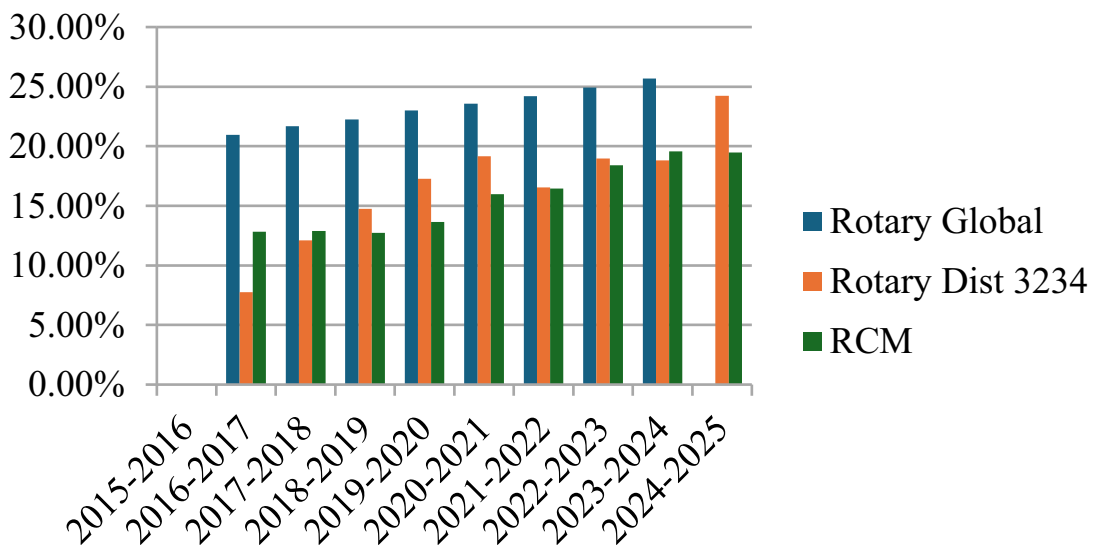
Let's keep the momentum going!

Yours in Rotary  
**BS Purshotham**  
**DRFC**



## % Female Rotarians Members

Years	Rotary Global	Rotary Dist 3234	RCM
2015-2016			
2016-2017	20.95%	7.76%	12.83%
2017-2018	21.69%	12.10%	12.89%
2018-2019	22.24%	14.74%	12.73%
2019-2020	22.99%	17.27%	13.64%
2020-2021	23.58%	19.16%	15.98%
2021-2022	24.19%	16.56%	16.44%
2022-2023	24.94%	18.98%	18.39%
2023-2024	25.67%	18.82%	19.56%
2024-2025		<b>24.23%</b>	<b>19.49%</b>



## Women in Rotary: From Presence to Power

The story of women in Rotary is no longer a footnote. It is fast becoming one of the finest chapters of our movement. The figures say it with quiet confidence: Rotary Global has grown steadily to 25.67% women members in 2023–24, while District 3234 has surged to 24.23% in 2024–25. The Rotary Club of Madras too has risen beautifully, reaching 19.49% women membership in 2024–25, which is a strong sign of progress, participation, and

promise. These numbers are not merely percentages on a chart; they are voices in meetings, hands in service, minds in leadership, and hearts in action. Every woman who joins Rotary adds not just strength, but sensitivity; not just numbers, but nuance; not just presence, but purpose.

The road ahead is clear: more inclusion, more encouragement, more leadership and a Rotary that reflects the world it serves.

### Poem: She Rises in Service

She walks in not to fill a chair,  
 But to lift a cause with grace and care.  
 With vision bright and spirit strong,  
 She turns compassion into song.  
 From boardrooms bold to village lanes,  
 She serves through sunshine, storms, and rains.

Not asking space, she builds the way,  
 And makes tomorrow brighter than today.  
 In Rotary's wheel, her light is spun,  
 A thousand hopes becoming one.  
 For when she rises, worlds renew —  
 And service wears a deeper hue.



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