

## Chiraag Mehta

Shekhar and Rashi's son

For as long as I can recall, Dad has lived and breathed Rotary. He and my mother have worked hard at both the service and fellowship aspects: planning and attending events, then staying afterward with Rotary friends into the wee hours of innumerable mornings. My sister, Chandni, and I would joke that we have an invisible elder sibling: Rotary. And Rotary has given back to our entire family. It gave Chandni and me our earliest friends, and it gave us the spirit of service, which Dad has always emphasized to us and in his countless Rotary speeches. Throughout his many leadership roles, he always made us part of his journey. We've been to eye hospitals and polio vaccination camps, participated in disaster relief kit work, discussed every aspect of his literacy mission, and attended many conferences. We learned and grew so much as a result.

Rotary has contributed hugely to my parents' growth as individuals. Traveling the world and meeting people from many countries has made them more knowledgeable, self-aware, humble, and compassionate. As their son, I feel very privileged to have been a part of it, and proud of who they are today.

One of my earliest childhood memories is of poring over Rotary directories and memorizing the names and themes of Rotary presidents. Now it is surreal, albeit thoroughly deserved, that my dad is Rotary president himself.

## Deepak Choudhury

Rotary Club of Calcutta-Mahanagar

*Main hoon na:* This Hindi phrase, meaning "Don't worry, I am there for you," embodies Shekhar's mindset.

He has been there not only for me, but for many people in Rotary and other parts of his life. He has been this way for as long as I've known him — first as his lawyer before he introduced me to Rotary in 2002, and ever since.

With his encyclopedic knowledge and his wit, he can have you laughing at any moment. But when he sees suffering, he has an unrelenting zeal to eliminate its cause. He dreams about a smiling world, and when he wakes up, he works to make it happen. He is a changemaker who aims to inspire an entire generation to *Serve to Change Lives*.

I read a few years back that good things happen when you engage in Rotary. Shekhar and Rashi have been instrumental in imbuing this belief in me and others.

## Ravi Vadlamani

Rotary Club of Guntur, India  
2001-02 governor of District 3150

When I met Shekhar almost 20 years ago, he was busily manning a booth at the Rotary International Convention. His enthusiasm and energy in showcasing his club's projects were infectious. A project man myself, I was inspired by the work exhibited at the booth. That casual encounter developed into a strong friendship.

Shekhar is a visionary leader. He always sees things others can't. He envisaged a way to eradicate illiteracy in India by 2025 and designed the TEACH program (which stands for Teacher support, E-learning, Adult literacy, Child development, Happy school). He started the Shelter Kit project that now is in the vanguard of disaster relief in India. His Saving Little Hearts project, which provides heart surgeries to thousands of children, along with the more than 15 eye hospitals he helped establish, which have served hundreds of thousands, speaks to the scope of his dreams.

He has an exceptional talent for building teams and driving them to achieve their goals. Shekhar's programs and ideas may seem larger than life, but he always walks the extra mile to make Rotarians feel at home.

His power of dreaming big is backed up by planning, perseverance, and patience. He's an excellent communicator who connects with his audience instantly and can motivate people to move mountains. He is also a family man, ably supported by his spouse, Rashi.

Shekhar's X factor as a leader? Nobody is able to say no to him when he asks for something.

## Sarla and Nisheeth Totla

Rotary Club of Calcutta-Mahanagar

We met Shekhar and Rashi about 32 years ago through a mutual friend. Today they are not just our friends, but our family. Shekhar is the first person there in all life's joys and sorrows. He was there for our daughter's marriage, taking on major responsibilities. He was there for the cremation of Sarla's mother. Shekhar also introduced us to the Rotary world, something that's been a gigantic part of our lives.

Shekhar has many extraordinary qualities. He is an unparalleled visionary, a great motivator, and an absolute optimist; he's super energetic, enthusiastic, unbelievably kind, and sensitive. He's a perfect family person and, above all, a fantastic human being.



**SHEKHAR'S PROGRAMS AND IDEAS ARE LARGER THAN LIFE, BUT HE ALWAYS WALKS THE EXTRA MILE TO MAKE ROTARIANS FEEL AT HOME.**

### Clockwise from top:

Mehta's club has constructed some 7,000 toilets in villages where people don't have toilets in their homes; here, he and fellow members (from left) Pranay Agarwal and Sandeep Shah help build one. Meeting patients at an eye hospital founded by the Rotary Club of Calcutta-Mahanagar. Responding to massive flooding in the state of Andhra Pradesh in 2013 by bringing in Shelter Kits. Playing carrom with students at the Paresch Nath Vidyalaya school in Kolkata. "They always beat me," Mehta notes. Rashi and Shekhar Mehta with Anu Rampal Vidhawan visiting a child who received cardiac surgery through the Saving Little Hearts project. With Past RI Director and Trustee Ashok Mahajan; past District 3142 Governor Chandrashekar Kolvekar; and Rotary Club of Thane Hills, India, member Anindya Dasgupta, inaugurating a program to provide computer learning for students with visual impairments.



**SHEKHAR WILL ENSURE THAT ROTARY IS RECOGNIZED ALL OVER THE WORLD NOT ONLY FOR THE SERVICE THAT IT DOES, BUT FOR BRINGING PEOPLE EVERYWHERE TOGETHER.**



**Clockwise from top:** Shekhar and Rashi Mehta with 1999-2000 RI President Carlo Ravizza and his wife, Rossana, at the 1999 International Assembly. Members celebrate the start of the Rotary Club of Calcutta-Mahanagar's 25th-anniversary year in July 2015. In 2016, Rotary leaders from across India, including 2011-12 RI President Kalyan Banerjee and his wife, Binota (front row), lit candles pledging to prepare



tens of thousands of children to attend school through the Asha Kiran (Ray of Hope) program, which provides classes for children who have either dropped out or have never been to school to help them catch up with other students in their age group. Shekhar and Rashi Mehta doing their part to spread the message of End Polio Now. Enjoying pani puri, a popular street food in India, with Sangkoo Yun, the current Rotary Foundation vice chair.

**Nancy Barbee**

Rotary Club of Maysville, North Carolina  
2018-21 Regional Rotary Foundation  
Coordinator, Zone 33

In 2010, to honor then-Rotary President-elect Kalyan Banerjee, Shekhar stated his vision of opening 100 schools, 100 hospitals, 100 training centers for young women, and 100 eye hospitals in India. We were sitting in his home in Kolkata. As I listened, I realized I was in the presence of a visionary.

Since then he has had a profound influence around the world. Pediatric heart surgeries, eye surgeries, the TEACH program for literacy, and memorandums of understanding signed by governments, nonprofits, and foundations — all are the results of his vision.

Every time he speaks, he motivates us all to “dream big.” Shekhar inspires us to do better, be better, think better, and do grand things. No more small projects.

He was thinking big a decade ago, and I knew I wanted to be a part of his dream, which now has become reality. Shekhar has been leading Rotary in India and inspires others to create positive and sustainable change worldwide.

**Ananthanarayanan S. “Venky” Venkatesh**

Rotary Club of Chennai Mambalam, India  
2021-23 Rotary International director

Closest to Shekhar’s heart is humanitarian work, the very DNA of Rotary. Conversations with him invariably last late into the night. I have spent hours with him over the last several years and have yet to figure out when he eats or sleeps. He has unending energy, exquisite people skills, and inspiring thoughts. His enthusiasm is infectious. I am excited to be serving on the Board during his term as president.

**Rashmi Singh and Madhulika Jain**

Shekhar’s sisters

Shekhar, our elder brother, is a dreamer whose next dream is always bigger and more audacious than the previous one. He inherited a love of community service from our parents, and his optimism, meticulousness, and dedication are the secrets to his success.

His favorite response to us is *Main hoon na*, which translates as, “Don’t worry, I am there for you.” In our more than 50 years together, he has always been true to his word.

**Bryn Styles**

Rotary Club of Barrie-Huron, Ontario  
Aide to the president

I first met Shekhar when we sat on Rotary’s Board for 2012-13. Our relationship was cordial, but not close. When Shekhar was nominated as 2021-22 Rotary International president, he asked my wife, Randy, and me to be aides to Rashi and him. Since then we have developed a close friendship.

What I have learned to appreciate about Shekhar is that he listens to advice. He realizes that he is not an expert in all things. Since becoming president-nominee, for example, he has developed a greater understanding and appreciation of Rotary’s peace efforts. He has spoken with staff, Rotarians, and our peace partners to learn how we can enhance our efforts with the United Nations, our Rotary Peace Centers, and our peace fellows, among others.

I would be remiss in not mentioning that Shekhar has a wonderful sense of humor, which allows him to engage with people and put them at ease. He’s an excellent speaker and ensures that everyone feels welcome. Although I know he regrets not being able to attend presidents-elect training seminars where he would have met Rotary club presidents face to face, his passion comes through even in a virtual setting.

**Ritu Kedia**

Shekhar’s Rotary assistant

Shekhar’s guiding mantra is: “Service is the rent I pay for the space I occupy on this earth, and I want to be a good tenant.” He envisions goals that might seem impossible to others. He can transform his dreams into realistic goals. He is at his best when he works with a team, figuring out a strategy and a timeline. Shekhar excels because of his passion for what he does. He is an amazing orator, persuading others to join his efforts. He is a great planner and digs deep to the grassroots level to ensure that his plan of action will be successful. His involvement is hands-on throughout the process.

Shekhar is a man of his word; if he says he will do something, he will. He helps those in need and teaches them to help others. He is a patient listener and a great mentor — I am lucky to have experienced that firsthand. He has taught me how to be comfortable juggling multiple priorities, as he does. He is very kind to the people around him.

## Kamal Sanghvi

Rotary Club of Dhanbad, India  
2019-21 Rotary International director

People are so accustomed to thinking like everybody else that they are afraid to explore the possibilities of their mind. Shekhar, on the other hand, has an uncanny ability to picture something that isn't yet there. He sees possibilities where others find dead ends.

He constantly questions the status quo and thinks of improving the Rotary experience, product, or service. Shekhar is one of the most innovative people I have known. He has a solution for every problem.

Shekhar has a tremendous capacity to overcome obstacles with sheer steadfastness and grit. He will not sleep until he achieves his goals, no matter how hard that may be. His team members do not rest either, and Shekhar ensures that each one follows a mantra of excellence.

For him, everything has to be larger than life. Thinking big is not unique, but thinking big and achieving the audacious is. Shekhar believes that a dream is not what you see while sleeping; a dream is what won't let you sleep. He believes that "love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries; humanity cannot survive without them." He also believes that if you cannot keep your family happy, you cannot keep anybody else happy.

## Anand Sureka

Rotary Club of Calcutta-Mahanagar

I've known Shekhar since 2001 and had the privilege of working closely with him during the year of Rotary's centennial in 2005. Here's what I've learned: He is highly focused, he never says no to anything, he is witty and has a great sense of humor, he always delights his audience when he speaks, and, more than anything, he is a very good human being and a great friend. At the base of all of his activities is the philosophy that mankind is his business.

In 2008, Shekhar dreamed of setting up another eye hospital, in Kolkata. He established a partnership with the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, one of the best eye care hospitals in the country. He helped raise funds and gave his time, resources, and energy to make it self-sustaining.

He always leads from the front. Whenever a disaster struck the nation, I saw Shekhar present. When there were floods in Guntur and Begusarai or earthquakes near the Pakistan border or in Nepal, Shekhar was there, lending his hand for Service Above Self.

He is always looking for ways to do more and explore new areas of service. Whether constructing toilets or setting up a library, he is never short of energy and vision.

## Kishore Kumar Cherukumalli

Rotary Club of Vizag Elite, India  
2009-10 governor of District 3020

I first encountered Shekhar when he spoke at a club in Kolkata in 2008. I was moved by his speech, which was laced with candid and bold ideas. In 2010, I invited him to our district conference; it turned out to be the beginning of a strong friendship. I have also had the privilege of working with him on events and committees and have witnessed his exceptional work ethic. His mission in Rotary is service, service, service.

He has big dreams, but he is also a keen listener who observes, analyzes, and then implements a plan in order to achieve his objective. He believes strongly in Rotary, and he practices what he preaches. He respects democracy and carefully weighs every opinion in group decisions. This encourages everyone he works with to give their best. He can precisely identify the strengths of his team members and match them with the Rotary responsibilities best suited to them. In meetings he often breaks the monotony with anecdotes and humor.

Shekhar once had to address a conference with just a couple of hours to prepare. One of his former employees lived in the town where the event was being held and had invited him to visit. Although he was on an impossible timetable, Shekhar obliged. He has demonstrated the importance of sustaining relationships — as well as a mysterious supply of constant energy, a capacity for 18-hour workdays, and an ability to provide instant solutions for any problem.

## Anirudha Roychowdhury

Rotary Club of Calcutta Mega City  
2007-08 governor of District 3291

Shekhar is a charismatic leader who always exudes positive energy. He's a great motivator and an out-of-the-box thinker. He fosters friendships, generates goodwill, and is easily approachable. His never-say-die attitude is one of his greatest assets. He is a down-to-earth person; he enjoys simple food from ordinary places and often visits roadside joints to eat spicy Indian snacks.

He and Rashi complement each other: Rashi is calm and rooted to the ground, providing strength for Shekhar to fly high.

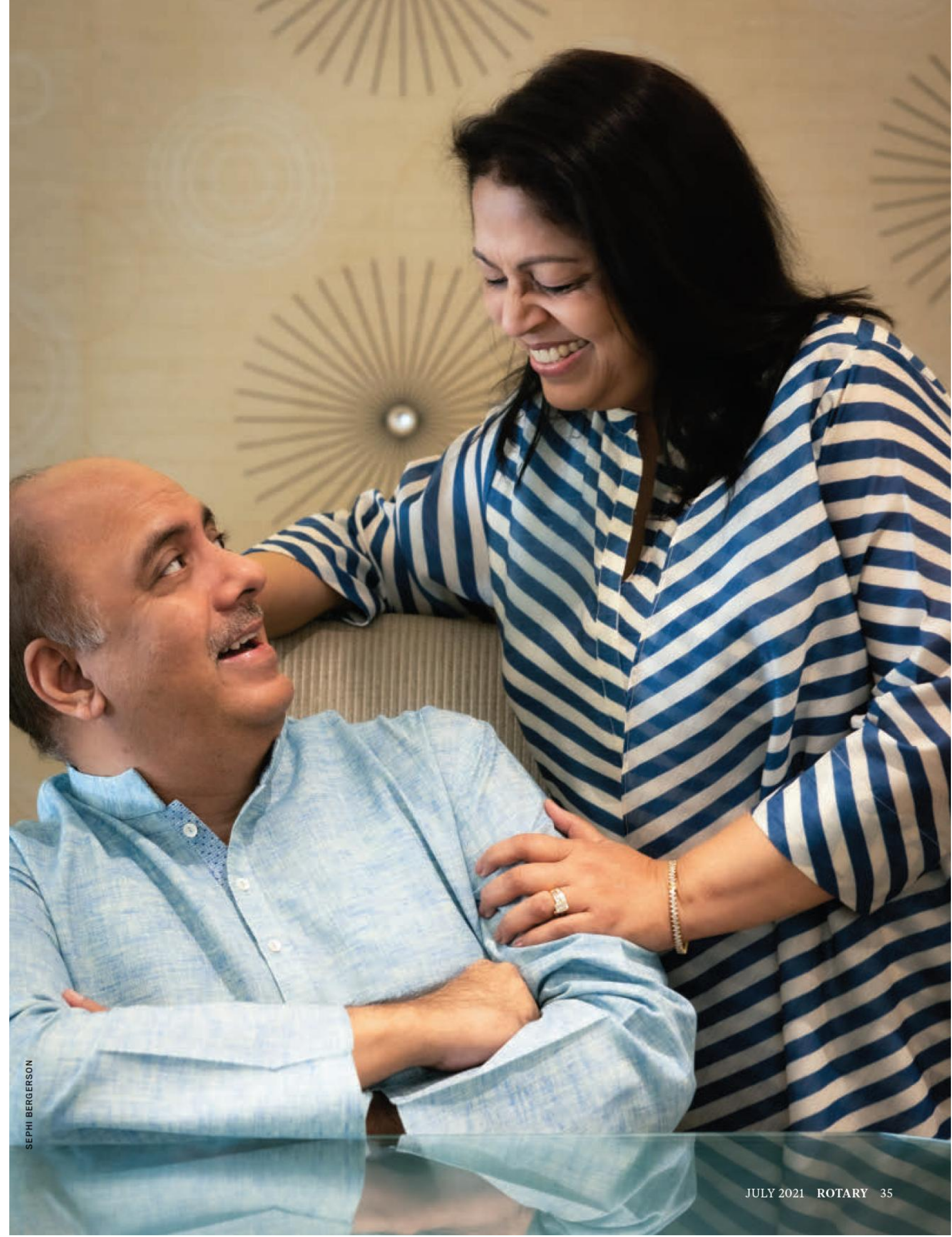


**ROTARY HAS CONTRIBUTED HUGELY TO MY PARENTS' GROWTH AS INDIVIDUALS. TRAVELING THE WORLD AND MEETING PEOPLE FROM HUNDREDS OF COUNTRIES HAS MADE THEM SO MUCH MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE, SELF-AWARE, HUMBLE, AND COMPASSIONATE.**

## Chandni Mehta

Shekhar and Rashi's daughter

Dad has tremendous zeal and enthusiasm for life. He exudes energy and warmth and wins people over with his sense of humor and thoughtfulness. He has an intuitive awareness of inequities, and his commitment to service springs from his commitment to fairness and fellowship among people. He ignites enthusiasm in others. He is, most important, a free soul with an undying spirit for life and action.



SEPHI BERGERSON



**SHEKHAR HAS TREMENDOUS ZEAL AND ENTHUSIASM FOR LIFE. HE EXUDES ENERGY AND WARMTH AND WINS PEOPLE OVER WITH HIS SENSE OF HUMOR AND THOUGHTFULNESS.**



**Clockwise from top:** The Mehta family: children Chandni and Chiraag; Rashi and Shekhar; and daughter-in-law Geeta. Mehta's parents, Sumer Chand and Vallabh Mehta, surrounded by their children and grandchildren: (back row) Chirag and Madhulika Jain, Rashi and Shekhar Mehta, and Rashmi and K.K. Singh, (middle row) Geeta and Chiraag Mehta with Shekhar's parents, and (front row) Ishita and



Roshni Jain; Shekhar's daughter, Chandni Mehta; and Sejal and Sanjana Singh. Partners in life and Rotary Shekhar and Rashi Mehta. Chiraag and Geeta Mehta's son, Veer. "He's our only grandchild so far," Mehta says. "He's the sunshine of our life." This apartment complex, which Mehta developed through his company, Skyline Group, is the largest in the state of Rajasthan. At his desk: "This is where I put all my dreams into action," Mehta says.

**Rajendra "Raja" Saboo**  
Rotary Club of Chandigarh, India  
1991-92 Rotary International president

I got to know Shekhar through Vijay Bhandari, a past district governor who spoke highly of Shekhar, saying that he had potential to rise within Rotary. My friend Vinay Nevatia, a member of the Rotary Club of Calcutta, told me that if I were to go to Shekhar's apartment I would find that it was full of materials for disaster relief kits, and that both Shekhar and his wife, Rashi, would themselves be busy packing the boxes. I realized Shekhar was a hands-on, service-oriented Rotarian.

When the Boxing Day tsunami hit in 2004, Shekhar's club put together hundreds of kits for people on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which had been devastated. Shekhar traveled thousands of miles, many times, to and from those islands in the Bay of Bengal to deliver kits and help set up shelters. And in 2015, Shekhar packed and organized the kits that were destined for Nepal after a catastrophic earthquake there.

**Rashi Mehta**  
Shekhar's wife

Shekhar has a deep soul and a large heart. He is not only genuinely kind but also sees kindness in others, and never shies from praising and encouraging others for the smallest acts of goodness. He loves to work with people; he is a team guy as much as a leader. His joy, energy, and capabilities double up when he works with a team. He is an exceptionally positive and enthusiastic person. I have not seen the thought of failure bogging him down. If anything, he emerges stronger and smarter out of challenging situations. He has trained his mind to see the silver lining in difficult situations and firmly holds on to the faith that we will overcome.

**Kalyan Banerjee**  
Rotary Club of Vapi, India  
2011-12 Rotary International president

I first met Shekhar 25 years ago. I was a Rotary International director, and then-RI President Herb Brown had asked me to convene a South Asia conference in Kathmandu, Nepal, which then was in the same district as Kolkata. The district governor had assigned a team of young Rotarians to help me organize the event,

and one particularly bright, smart, and often outspoken young man engaged my attention. He was full of ideas, enthusiasm, and innovations and was always willing to learn. That's how I first got to know Shekhar.

Following the success of the Nepal event, Shekhar and I stayed connected. I followed his Rotary career with interest, first as he was elected governor of his district and then, a few years later, as a director. I was always amazed by his ability to get people to support him enthusiastically in whatever task he gave them. He was irreplaceable and bustling with new ideas.

After the Boxing Day tsunami, he traveled to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands — which, though a part of his district, are 1,000 miles away in the Indian Ocean. And he later devised an amazing kit, which included a tent, bedding, toiletries, candles, clothing, and basic tools. Rotarians from all Indian districts helped with funds, and if there was an earthquake in Nepal, as there often are, or a tsunami in Chennai or a cyclone in Odisha or a disaster in Maharashtra, the kits would be there in 24 hours flat. Shekhar himself would be there just a bit later.

The UK-based ShelterBox, which was started by Rotarians, is internationally known for providing relief after disasters anywhere in the world. Around 2015, the Rotary Board asked Shekhar to meet with ShelterBox to negotiate a long-term arrangement. Not only was he successful in that, he served as a ShelterBox trustee as well.

Over the years, with his obvious sincerity and commitment to Rotary, Shekhar has elicited amazing trust and devotion from almost every Rotarian he meets, everywhere. I have watched with admiration as he became somewhat of a pied piper in Rotary and was not surprised when he took on the assignment to help make India fully literate. No one was sure how this could be done. India has a population of 1.3 billion people, about a quarter of whom are not literate. Shekhar connected with the Indian government, joined with all the appropriate NGOs, and got Rotary's efforts and sincerity recognized.

This literacy task is as big as making India polio-free. Now, with Shekhar leading Rotary, I'm confident that it will be achieved. And Shekhar will ensure that Rotary is recognized all over the world not only for the service that it does, but for bringing people everywhere together. ■