

From Where I Am



A View of Rotary

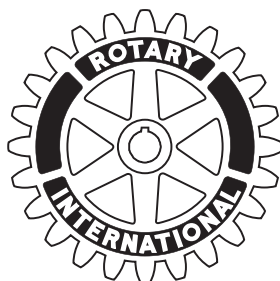
Rtn. Ashok Mahajan

Director

Rotary International, 2007–09

From Where I Am

A View of Rotary



by
Rtn. ASHOK MAHAJAN
Director, Rotary International 2007–09.

From Where I Am - A View of Rotary

By

Rtn. Ashok Mulkraj Mahajan

RI Director, 2007-09

1001, Marathon Galaxy

LBS Marg, Mulund

Mumbai 400 080

Ph: 022 25668929

e-mail: nayan729@yahoo.com

Published by

Rtn. Ashok Mulkraj Mahajan

RI Director, 2007-09

1001, Marathon Galaxy

LBS Marg, Mulund

Mumbai 400 080

Ph: 022 25668929

e-mail: nayan729@yahoo.com

First Edition, July 2007

All part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or any information retrieval system without prior permission of the author, in writing.

Preface



It is a pleasure for me to express my appreciation of the articles written by our Director for 2007-2009 Ashok Mahajan. Ashok writes extremely well on issues that are important to Rotary and which have great value for both new and experienced Rotarians. We all need to be reminded of the important principles that make Rotary, the very special organization that it is. Ashok talks of programmes, emphases and importantly of the standards of Rotary.

I commend these articles to all Rotarians and I thank Ashok for the quality and value of his work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'W.B. Boyd'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

*William B. Boyd
President
Rotary International, 2006–2007*

In My Defence



Over the years, I have enjoyed the privilege of sharing my thoughts with Rotarians through the club bulletin and recently through the columns in the Rotary News magazine. I have found that these short messages have been an invaluable means of connecting with the Rotarians of all the districts in India and also in the areas where the magazine is being subscribed. I am honoured to have got the opportunity to share my thoughts periodically with individual club members.

My messages have taken a variety of styles from formal essay to conversation. But despite the difference in style, the messages have shared the common concern for the growth of Rotary. My aim was to reflect the credibility of our great organisation, its leadership and the essence of Rotary.

I am indebted to all the Rotarians who have proposed the idea of this book. We agreed that this would be a useful way of promoting the core ideals of Rotary.

Effective clubs requires members who value the importance of Rotary's humanitarian projects and support its activities. Today as we progress in all our endeavors, I hope the messages published in this book will reflect the qualities of Rotarians that remain vital. I invite you to use the messages to highlight current concerns of your club and motivate every member to revisit the glorious period of Rotary and take the thoughts to heart.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Ashok'. The signature is fluid and includes a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ashok Mahajan
RI Director, 2007–2009

Smile - Serve - Sacrifice - Satisfy

Lead the Way

We are starting our time together this July 2006. I hope the journey will be filled with information and inspiration. I hope all of you are filled with resolve because the task ahead of us is not easy nor will it be always fun. Service is serious business and we have to start a new chapter now. We cannot expect to see the full results of our service activity in all the spheres within one year. But I believe that we can feel them in our hearts.

What I expect from all of you is simple – but also very complex. I hope at the end of this year each of you will say that as a result of our work during the year 2006–2007, you have changed your attitudes; that we have all become more humble, more generous and more tolerant.

If each one of us personally achieve this goal, it will reveal itself in the work of your club. I expect each of you to lead by example. Already a change has begun. The demands on Rotary for the past few years has been enormous, but we have learned to be more patient and solve one issue at a time.

Your club's future depends in large part on the collective actions of the members this year. The expectation of RI from you is great – perhaps greater than ever before. I am not asking you to promote a programme, which I know that all of you can do. I am asking you to promote a change of attitude, which will play a determining role in your club's future. I am asking you to be generous.

What can you expect from me? You can expect me to lead the way with humility and with full support from each of you. You can expect me to set an example. You can expect me to have an open-door and an open mind to new ideas from each of you to strengthen your club.

As we prepare to begin our new year I ask you to consider our club's welfare and what footprints you would like to leave. The footprints will constantly show the new paths our club has taken to serve the people and also make all of us a better Rotarian.

You have to pursue the goals President Bill Boyd has set. The requirements for the citation for the club is published in the July issue of Rotary News and would have been told to your club office bearers by the District Governor during the PETS and District Assembly. I request all of you to read it carefully. Ask the club President to talk about the goals in the club meetings. These guidelines and more projects in the field of literacy will be the thrust areas during this year.

Dear Rotarians, the New Year must see our rejuvenated spirit of Rotary service and fellowship. I wish you joy in your journey this year and you must be constantly reminded about the promises to keep. You have to Lead the Way and show the world that Rotary cares.

Retention - Best Bet for Membership Growth

A chronic problem that plagues Rotary is its inability to fortify its membership strength. We are not static, we are decreasing in existing clubs. In such an environment, it becomes necessary to devote more attention to our growth than is being devoted today. If we have to LEAD THE WAY in serving the needy in so many areas of distress, we must grow.

We fail, perhaps, in our inability to keep Rotarians interested. We probably fail to offer that milieu which is conducive to generate interest, offer challenges and keep them happy. Membership retention and assimilation, therefore, offers us a challenge that we must accept with determination and alacrity.

We must have an "exit committee" at the club level to evaluate and assess the reasons offered for leaving Rotary because what is given as an explanation is often an excuse. We realise that most of those who leave Rotary do so within three to five years of membership and senior Rotarians have failed to absorb new members who are always very enthusiastic when they are inducted. What has happened to their enthusiasm? What has happened to their proud feeling when they entered Rotary? We must find answers and put into motion the machinery that will rectify the deficiency. Let all Rotarians LEAD THE WAY and reverse the trend of membership attrition, which is alarming.

I will not insult your imaginative minds and your intelligence by narrating the various steps you can take to ensure retention.

Fellowship, involvement in club activities, service areas and regular club meetings, involvement of the entire family in projects, delegation of responsibilities in various projects, continued Rotary information and above all an atmosphere of happiness and oneness — these can charm any Rotarian to stick to Rotary and serve with pleasure.

When we add new members in our club, we sometimes tend to be hasty. We tend to take too many in too short a period of time. Let us grow at a steady and slow pace. If you speed up the process of growth, you will abort the purpose.

The path to success is not necessarily a straight one. Maybe it doesn't matter which road we embark on, what matters is that we do embark. We take a step and show our determination and seriousness. The ingenuity of Rotarians is being challenged and endangered. Let our resources battle it out. I am sure we can do it. Nothing is impossible for Rotarians. Let all Rotarians LEAD THE WAY and make the word "possible" fashionable again.

Youth - An Asset to Rotary

Everybody talks of long-term investment when it comes to increasing your assets. Youth is our most important asset and Rotary must therefore invest in Youth. The tasks unfinished, the challenges yet unmet, the battles yet to be won and leadership in the docks, Rotary MUST reward the world by providing committed men and women who can meet most of the challenges that hover on the horizon. We have no option but to provide the kind of mature men and women we need – and today's youth is tomorrow's asset.

Rotary has always laid stress on developing the youth, guiding the youth, supporting the youth and training the youth. With multiple programmes for garnering a vital task force to fulfil our obligations, Rotary has successfully promoted Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA), Model United Nations Assembly (MUNA), Model Indian Parliamentary System (MIPS), Rotaract, Interact, Youth Exchanges and other programmes aimed at providing a future leadership that the world desires and deserves.

There are many ways in which the ingenuity of Rotary brings newer programmes with a breath of fresh ideas. Vocational Training for the youth, Functional Literacy for the dropouts, elevating the rural and urban poor and promoting the ideal of service to all those who are touched by Rotary produces a fertile of future adults who will be in the driver's seat in the next decade or two.

Rotary, however, will have to do new things, bring new ideas, promote new ways of service and make "Honesty" a fashionable word again. In today's world where corruption, dishonesty, untruth and communalism have raised a spectre of an ogre, Rotarians must strive utmost in guiding the youth to devise ways and means of making the world a better, safer and livelier place to exist.

Rotarians must reach high for the stars hidden in our souls. We must dream deep because every dream precedes the goal. We must try to grab every opportunity we have to guide the youth who, tomorrow, will rule the world. How they will rule depends on what we can do for them today. Herein lies a challenge that we must expect. We must Lead the Way to charter these paths that will bring us better leaders than what we have today. Accept this Challenge. It will surely reward you with long-term gains from what we invest today.

Our Salvation Lies in Vocational Service

Vocational service mainly deals with individual Rotarians and their resolve to be honest and trustworthy. It is Vocational Service that dares you to be good whilst doing good. It is, therefore one of the most difficult services a Rotarian can offer.

Human beings want to be treated fairly. A dishonest act or a harmful lie is always hated. If you expect this from others, why can you not offer your trustworthiness to others? There cannot be two rules for two sets of interacting persons.

We need to expose our youth to all the data about various vocations and groom them to the vocation of their choice. It is important to teach the youth skills and expertise that will help them earn a livelihood. There are millions of young men and women who are literate but unable to use their skills to earn a living. We need to convert Literacy to Functional literacy so that the future becomes secure and safe. Rotary Clubs are aware of the problem and are engaged in useful activities to promote training and employment. We need to do more in this sphere.

In Rotary we respect all vocations. There is no “small” job. It is those men and women who work in the job that makes it important. These men and women will glorify the work and will set an example to others who are their colleagues. This excellence must be rewarded, recognized and respected. Rotary’s Vocational Excellence Award is recognition of the inputs. Men and women who put in some “extra” into their work — extra efforts, extra care, extra involvement, extra dedication and extra honesty such recognition gives that extra stimulus for many to emulate the feat and give that little extra which means excellence. These awards are often meant for those who excel in their humdrum vocation but we must not forget those who are at the height of their vocations and businesses who show that spark of compassion, honesty and fair play. Together they form a strong army of ethical, honest, fair, compassionate and worthy men and women who can definitely make the community a better place to grow in.

Rotary’s romance with vocational service also includes better employer, employee relations, better atmosphere at work place and a better rapport with colleagues, customers and competitors. Rotary can do much more than what it is doing. Rotary can reintroduce the word “Honesty” in our dictionary. Rotary can be a torchbearer in this dark world of scams, briberies and lies.

“Lead Kindly Light” is the need of Rotary in its journey through the second century of our existence. Rotary will be remembered not as much for the good work it has been doing but for the good men and women it has produced. Our salvation lies in our “Vocational Service.”

The Rotary Foundation

The Rotary Foundation is the helping hand of Rotary. Most of the programmes and projects aimed at helping the needy, the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant and the health – compromised are sponsored and supported and managed by The Rotary Foundation.

The primary aim of international Service of Rotary is to promote better understanding amongst the world communities and ensure Peace. This aim is planned to be achieved by reaching the needy in a very big way. Polio Eradication Drive is an excellent illustration of Rotary's concern for the world community and to date has been the most outstanding achievement to promote Peace and protect millions of children against a preventable disease. Efforts are being promoted to tackle many other problems, which will, ultimately, promote goodwill and understanding.

The purpose of the Foundation is to assure us of Rotary in perpetuity, by providing for contingencies and unforeseen emergencies that we may continue to serve all humanity. The Rotary Foundation is not to build monuments of brick and stone. By working on human minds, if we inject the spirit of Rotary with love for fellowmen, we are building monuments of love tolerance and understanding that will illuminate the world.

The world today needs abundant service activities especially in those nations that are plagued heavily with poverty, ill health, illiteracy and many such ills that must be re-dressed to ensure world peace. There are no limits to their needs and Rotary, at best, can be a modest agent to meet some of the needs. Rotary fortunately has unique machinery for co-operation, understanding and usefulness. Through over 32000 clubs and more than 1.2 million Rotarian we have a secure understanding that our assistance will reach its objects whether, it is goods, health care programs, professional advice or friendship.

Today The Rotary Foundation is poised to take a big leap towards a more solid achievement of promotion of peace. Better person-to-person contacts, more exchanges, more efforts to understand people around the world and major drives to tackle global conflicts are sure to result in a more peaceful world, a more tolerant community, a more understanding humanity and a better place to live. Rotary may not be able to prevent bullets flying or a terrorist mania or a fanatic behaviour but Rotary will bring a degree of harmony, a little less bitterness amongst people and a more rational and understanding behaviour, Governments, religious leaders or politicians will not succeed where Rotary has a chance to succeed. Lets ensure that The Rotary Foundation will usher in an era of peaceful co-existence.

Joy of attending the District Conference

No event in a Rotary Calendar is so exhilarating, so joyful, and so worthwhile than the annual district conference. There are many things for everybody and it exposes the Rotarian and the family to many wonders that await one and all.

Besides the motivating speeches by learned invitees that stir us emotionally, physically and spiritually we are exposed to a fund house of knowledge, latest as well as vital information and motivation. Entertainment comes to us in many ways and we feel refreshed and re-energised.

The most important gain is the chance to renew our friendships, make new friends and find people who are on the same wavelength as ours. This inter-exchange of love and friendship is a lifelong gain and nobody has too many friends. We need all the friends that we can get in our journey of service.

Rotary succeeds only if Rotarians act and Rotarians will act only when they know where to act and they will act only when informed about the need.

“Many of you will be travelling within India and abroad for business or pleasure. Use the opportunity to meet the wonderful Rotarians of other districts by registering for their District Conference. The dates and venue of all the District Conferences in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is published in this issue of Rotary News. Contact the District Governor or the Chair of the Conference Committee of the District. They will be only willing to have you with them.

Going to a District Conference other than your District will make you an even better Rotarian, as it broadens your perspective. You will meet people from other Districts who believe in serving others as you do. What better use of your time could there be?

Don't miss the opportunity to participate in all the plenary sessions and interactive discussion groups as well as seeing the club and district projects exhibition, all of which will inspire, educate, and engage you in the great service work that Rotary does so well. Bring these ideas home to your club or district and encourage your fellow Rotarians to implement them, as good projects foster more commitment and fellowship on all levels.”

Many Rotarians consider the attendance at a district conference to be superfluous. They are wrong. If you fail to derive the benefits of the gathering, the fault lies with you. Your vision is faulty and your expectations are meagre. I urge you to derive total benefits of a district conference by continued participation and with a receptive frame of mind. The price that you pay for the conference is too small to bother about. It is the conference that will elevate you and turn you into a more motivated Rotarian.

Polio Eradication Rotary's Highest Priority

So near and yet so far. We were just rejoicing from the success of reducing the number of Polio cases all around us when we were hit by a tsunami. More cases of Polio have been reported this year from India and even communities that reported Zero incidence have lost this status. Over 400 Polio cases have been reported and this is our major concern.

Pundits have doubted the efficacy of Polio Immunisation drive and have projected a gloomy forecast for the future but there is one fact that nobody can escape from, it is only because of a very concentrated drive of immunisation that the number of Polio cases have dropped so dramatically in the last ten years. The figures are so emphatic in favour of immunisation that we have to adhere to our efforts in this direction and even enhance our immunisation drive. Whatever be the drawbacks our experts will have to overcome these and prepare a blue print of effective strategy.

If Rotary has to achieve a "Polio Free" status, we will have to show extra commitment, put in extra enthusiasm. If we want to reach a satisfactory status on Polio in the next two years, we have no time to lose. It is true that multiple Polio immunisation "days" over the last five years have reduced the vim and vigour of Rotarians but if we have to succeed we must regenerate that vim and vigour and put in some extra efforts to see the last of Polio. What is needed is our continued commitment and continued efforts. Let us not let Rotary down. India has one of the largest numbers of Polio victims. Let this turn into the smallest number before it touches zero.

Please remember that Polio Must Go. India still is high on the list of countries that report polio cases. We must therefore, not fail. If polio control fails, Rotary fails, Rotarians fail, our prestige fails and our determination fails. Polio Eradication is a pledge given by Rotary. No other service organisation has committed so much for so important a project. Let's all resolve to do All and a little more to ensure that in the next couple of years Polio is a word of the past. Let Rotary not fail — it should not — it will not.

Rotary Makes a difference

Peace is a positive expression of love, tolerance, adaptability and sincerity. Peace, therefore, needs continued inputs from all of us who value service. It needs our commitment, our determination and our dedication.

Conflicts have been in existence since ages. Conflicts will remain for ages. In the midst of these conflicts Rotary should pave the way towards resolution of these conflicts through continued efforts tinged with sincerity and compassion. The world is facing so many challenges that conflicts are bound to arise. Poverty, illiteracy and other diminishing resources such as clean water, clean air and food are some of the precursors of conflicts. Rotary cannot do everything for every problem but surely can do enough for enough problems to make a difference-and difference we must make.

Rotary has travelled a long way since 1905 and the journey through the next 100 years is going to be much more challenging, arduous and difficult. We must rise to meet these challenges with a resolve to do our best to bring rays of sunshine into the dark world we are living in. The future generation will judge Rotary by not what it has done but by what it could have done but didn't. Our success stories would not be as important as our failure stories. Our achievements will be overshadowed by our inability to tackle those problems that we should have. Herein lies the challenge that we face. Can we do it? We can and we must. If Rotary has to journey through another century, Rotary will have to play a more active role in promoting love, tolerance, adaptability and mutual understanding with the communities.

Rotary's many programmes to increase world understanding and thus promote peace may need to be updated from time to time and re-invented with a fresh outlook. Rotary's assets are its dedicated Rotarians who can be challenged to make impossible things happen. We have not yet tapped the potential of our Rotarians. We must expose them to the difficult task of promoting peace and we must challenge them to do the almost impossible. Let us give this opportunity to those Rotarians who love Rotary and are ready to accept the challenge. Together we can definitely make this world more peaceful than what it is to day. Will you do it? Will you accept the challenge?

Each one Teach one

Literacy is the tonic that can transform a sluggish community with sadness and poverty to a vibrant force. Literacy does not mean only the three Rs – Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic. Of course these are essential to promote Literacy but the buck does not stop here. Unless this Literacy is laced with learning an ability which provides you an occupation that ensures financial returns, no gain will come to the community. The stress is, therefore on literacy programmes that ensure a gainful occupation. We name it “Functional” Literacy but by whatever name we call it, we must promote the teaching of a trade to the multitude.

Personally we do not have the time and the expertise to teach such Literacy to the needy. We can, however, promote such projects that offer vocational courses to the youth. We can sponsor, subsidise, promote or propagate the value-based educational efforts. There are a large number of institutions that cater to this need. We can establish our own institution or assist the existing institutions that can impart the skills to the needy through financial assistance, candidate sponsorship or special workshops.

If we can help people become what they are capable of becoming is truly a great service we can render.

We can train the unskilled and raise their level of competence which will be Rotary’s reward in the finest sense.

Rotary Shares

Rotary is an organization of men and women concerned with the welfare of the needy. In this war against poverty, illiteracy, ill-health and a multitude of concerns, it cannot make any lasting impression if it were to work in loneliness. Rotary, therefore, shares its concerns, its goals, its thrust areas and above all its philosophy with like minded men and women.

Rotary has promoted partnership with many agencies that have a common goal – welfare. Rotary has shared its concern with organization such as U.N, WHO, Red Cross and others. Rotary has shared its resources, its man power and its global network with them to promote Peace and Happiness. Rotary has also shared its commitments with the Youth not only through its partners in Service — Interact and Rotaract — but also through RYLA, I.Y.E, G.S.E, Ambassadorial scholars and such other programs targeting the leaders of tomorrow. Rotary has shared Rotary with the community it serves. Rotary also shares its programs with the senior citizens, business colleagues, professionals and other welfare associations. Rotary has joined hands with governments too for a more effective and concentrated action.

Above all, Rotary shares with its families. We are not just 1.2 million Rotarians that work for Peace and welfare. We have our spouses, our children and grand children and our other family members to generate a workforce of over 5 times our numerical strength to produce a better and happier society. It goes without saying that by sharing Rotary we are strengthening Rotary and strengthening our commitment and our resolve. Even one man or woman can make a difference. Most of the world's great success stories started with dream of one person. When we compute the effects of the commitments of our entire Rotary workforce it is crystal clear that Rotary will be stronger, more effective, more viable, more visible and more relevant in the second century of our existence. Let us, therefore, commit to share Rotary with many more and produce a gigantic task force that will effectively solve problems that, today, appear unsolvable. Let us strengthen Rotary and propagate the dictum — Rotary Shares.

Importance of District Assembly

The district assembly is a forum that not only educates the club leaders but also the district leaders.

Many ideas germinate in the minds of the Rotarians who may not be important office holders but have a fertile and imaginative mind. Most of the success stories in Rotary, developed in the minds of individual Rotarians. We should, therefore, have many more interactive sessions at the assembly to help generate viable and topical ideas for service to the community.

The district assembly is also a platform to stress the concerns of Rotary International as outlined by the incoming President's message and the concerns of the District Governor Elect who understands the dire needs of the community that are within the reach of Rotary. Together they offer a blue print for the stress areas in the coming year. The district governor elect is fresh from his or her training session at the International Assembly and is armed with all the weapons that are available for combating the problems.

The district assembly also produces new leaders who shine out as communicators, thinkers, planners and motivators. Many a leader of yesterday learnt the science of leadership through discussion and interactions at the district assembly.

Another important asset of a district assembly is rejuvenation of past leaders, past presidents of clubs and even Past Governors. Each year brings new ideas and challenges and these past leaders who have already borne the responsibilities of leadership are re-energized to offer more for the benefit of Rotary.

And finally, the district assembly is a precursor of success next year. Success is guaranteed when the participants understand the role they have to play and the resources available not only at club level but also at the district level.

Learning is never complete. It is a continuous process and it is this opportunity of continuous learning that spells success. That's the charm of Rotary.

Fellowship

The most enjoyable facet of Rotary is Fellowship. Participation in service activities may send shivers up your spine, sacrifice of your time may force you to give excuses, presence at regular weekly meetings can be sacrificed without batting an eyelid and financial contribution for sponsoring projects or for the Foundation or for service activities often generates lethargy, negligence and even apathy. But bring a good fellowship meet to any Rotarians' notice and Rotary is remembered with gusto.

No doubt, fellowship is a vehicle that brings so many Rotarians and family members in cosy proximity. No doubt, fellowship promotes pleasures, smiles and joy. It, therefore, becomes a vital tool to unite Rotarians and family members and thus lays a foundation stone for cooperation in the field of service. Excellent fellowship blunts the pain of sacrifices expected from a Rotarian — sacrifice of time, talent and treasury.

A Fellowship meet at a district level brings Rotarians from far and wide much closer. It unearths talents, it generates smiles, and it offers opportunities to come nearer. Fellowship also promotes understanding, thus paving a way for joint projects, joint adventures, joint programmes and joint ventures.

Fellowship is like perfume. It pervades the atmosphere and brings about a pleasant aroma and fragrant friendship. When we look back, it reminds us of those pleasant experiences and thus motivates us to try the stick of fellowship again and to walk towards the goal of service.

Fellowship is not only a "Hello" ship.

Fellowship is not only a warm handshake.

Fellowship is not only a rewarding smile.

Fellowship is the integration of Rotary families all around so that we can recognise Rotary as a "Family" and not as a limited heterogeneous group. Because of diverse classification and limitation of membership we are "heterogeneous" but once this heterogeneous group starts functioning in a club it is fellowship that converts it into a homogenous entity. That's the great achievement of Rotarians.

So — Long Live Fellowship — better fellowship, effective fellowship and appropriate fellowship.

About the author



Rtn. Ashok Mahajan
RI Director 2007–2009

Rtn. Ashok Mulkraj Mahajan, member of Rotary Club of Mulund, RI District 3140, Mumbai, India has been involved in Rotary since 1973 and has risen from an ordinary member to the coveted position of RI Director 2007–2009 by his commitment to the Rotary movement. He was the President of RC Mulund in 1982–83 and District Governor, RI District 3140 in 1993–94.

Born 59 years ago, he graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering degree from the Bombay University with distinction and then took a Diploma in Operations Management and Business Management from the Bombay University. He now runs an industry for manufacturing electrical and electronic components.

He has been RI President's representative to District Conferences and was also appointed as the Zonal Coordinator for Membership Task Force in 1995–96 and again in 1998–99.

He is associated with the National Polio Plus Committee for 9 years and also served as the Zonal coordinator for Avoidable Blindness Task Force during 2000–02 and was a member in the India Presidential Polio Plus Summit 2001–02. He represented RI District 3140 at the 2001 Council on Legislation, Chicago.

Rtn. Ashok Mahajan was conferred with the Distinguished Service Award, Service above Self Award, Regional Service Award for a Polio free world and the Golden Century Award. He is a major donor to TRF, benefactor and a member of the Paul Harris Society.

Rtn. Ashok Mahajan enjoys reading, cricket and social service.