

In 19 yrs since husband's death, she donated ₹17 cr for charity. At his will

GEORGE POIKAYIL @ Kasaragod

ON January 31, a Friday, when the bustling Bengaluru was getting ready for the weekend with pay-cheques in hand, Sudha Janardhan, an unassuming 66-year-old woman boarded a train to Kasaragod, 12 hours away, in the north-eastern tip of Kerala.

By 10am the next day, she was sitting in a small low-ceiling seminar hall, crammed with cushioned chairs. She was the only audience in the hall of the Institute of Applied Dermatology (IAD).

A team of seven officials and doctors was waiting for her, ready with a PowerPoint presentation on how her sponsorship was spent.

Sudha donated ₹16 lakh to IAD



Sudha Janardhan

in 2019-2020. "She has been our donor for the past 10 years, contributing ₹80 lakh to the institute," said Dr Saravu R Narahari, the dermatologist who set up IAD in Madhur gram panchayat in 1999.

In 2018-2019, Sudha's donation of ₹15 lakh helped treat 236 patients free of cost in IAD. In the 10 months in 2019-2020, 193 patients were treated from her donation of ₹16 lakh.

"I'm curious to know why did the number of beneficiaries fall this year," asked Sudha on seeing the sponsorship analysis. "Must be the inflation and difference in the type of treatment protocols,"

she answered herself.

At the end of the presentation, Sudha announced an endowment fund of ₹20 lakh in memory of her late husband and ace chartered accountant Sadhu Janardhan. It was his ideals that drew Sudha all the way to IAD in Kasaragod.

The IAD put Madhur -- otherwise famous for the Madanandeswara Sidhivinayaka Temple -- on the world map of medicine by developing an integrated treatment protocol for elephantiasis or lymphatic filariasis by combining Ayurveda, yoga and allopathic drugs. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has termed lymphatic filariasis as a neglected disease of the poor.

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I've done only what Sadhu (Janardhan) asked me to do before he died. He used to invest the bulk of his earnings in charity, keeping for the family just enough to lead a middle-class life — Sudha Janardhan

I have done only what Sadhu asked me to do before he died'

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BUT it can affect anybody as Sudha found out. A close family member was living with the debilitating disease for two and a half decades. Her leg had become a burden for her, when she discovered IAD. In the first 15 days of the treatment, she shed a substantial weight. "Today she is 55 years and leading a normal life," said Sudha.

So started her long association with IAD. "Giving money is the easiest part. What they do with the money is the incredible story," she said.

Her sponsorship to IAD has also helped patients with diseases such as vitiligo, psoriasis, lichen planus, warts, and nonhealing ulcers.

The legacy of the Janardhans

Sadhu, an accomplished and much sought after chartered accountant, died at the peak of his career on 16 April 2001. He was 53. In the 19 years since his death, Sudha Janardhan had given away ₹17 crore in philanthropy.

That does not include the independent house and plot she donated to the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), the national professional accounting body. ICAI valued the property in the business hub of Rajajinagar in west Bengaluru at ₹10

crore. The organisation razed the old house and is now building the ICAI Bhavan on the plot. The building will be named after S Janardhan.

Sudha, who is moving to a rented house at Vijayanagar in Bengaluru, says Sadhu had bought the plot and the house in 1982.

Why did you give up your house? "I've done only what Sadhu (Janardhan) asked me to do before he died. He wanted the house to be put to the service of the students of ICAI," she says. "Moreover, I'm ageing and won't need such a big house," she said.

Ageing? When told it was hard to guess her age, she guffawed at the comment. "I dye my hair because I don't want youngsters to pull a chair for me and ask me to sit every time they see me," she says. She wants to be a doer not sympathy seeker with.



Sudha Janardhan

Never in the limelight

Who are the Janardhans? Even Google has very little information on the low-profile but large-hearted couple. One of the entries on Sadhu is a tweet by ICAI on 1 July 2019, when the association received the bungalow from his wife.

The second is a word file listing out the rank holders of Company Secretaryship examination since 1970. Sadhu was the national first rank holder in April 1974; the fourth degree under his belt. He was 27 years old then.

In 1970, at 22, he became a CA, again a national topper. He had a BSc degree and was a qualified lawyer too. He started practising at 23 and the following year founded his own firm S Janardhan and Associates in Bengaluru in 1971 with three partners.

His career hit the cruise mode almost immediately and his firm became one of the most sought-after. By 1990, the Income-Tax Department feted him for the payment of highest professional taxes in Karnataka.

But his heart was always in philanthropy. In 1975, at the age of 28



Sadhu Janardhan

years, even before he married Sudha, Sadhu set up two trusts - Sadhu Foundation Trust and Sree Venkatesh wara Trust.

His pet causes were students and education; persons with disabilities and hospitals; and temples and their renovations.

In the trust deed, he wrote if the trusis were to be wound up, the money should go to his alma mater Sri Venkatesh-wara University, a state university in Tirupati.

Sadhu and Sudha got married later in the same year. He was from Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh and she was from Madurai, and both made Bengaluru their home. "He used to invest the bulk of his earnings in charity keeping for the family just enough to lead a middle-class life," says Sadha.

But the happy family had a rude shock when their first child was born with epider-



Sudha Janardhan built toilets for boys and girls in more than 50 schools in Hosur taluk of Krishnagiri district of Tamil Nadu

molysis bullosa, a rare genetic condition that causes easy blistering of the skin and mucous membranes. He died in hospital on the 45th day.

Their second child, a daughter, was also diagnosed with the same condition. But she survived longer. "Lalitha was a bright child, but her childhood was painful," said Sudha. The blisters on the skin caused severe pain. Epidermolysis bullosa cannot be cured but treated. "We had to constantly watch out to prevent friction to her skin to reduce new blistering. It was not easy," she says. But she did go on to become a graduate.

Sadhu built a beautiful library at Sri Aurobindo College in Rajaji Nagar, where Lalitha did her pre-university course.

The family was smoothly chugging along when on April 16, 2001, Sadhu suffered a massive heart attack and died. He was 53 years.

Three years later, Lalitha too succumbed to her condition at the age of 25 years.

Her skin condition was the major reason for Sudha to associate herself with IAD, a skincare research centre and hospital.

By then, life had steered Sudha. But she also realised nothing is more fragile than life. She took the plunge into her husband's world of philanthropy.

A graduate of history, she joined her husband's partners in S Janardhan & Associate as the administrative head, taking care of the backend.

The bulk of the income she got from the firm went into charity. "I've an outgo of around ₹5 lakh to ₹6 lakh only for charity work," says Sudha. "That is what he would've wanted. And that is what I also want now," she says.

Every month she used to donate ₹2 lakh to Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology

(KMIO) in Bengaluru; ₹ 1.5 lakh to Mobility India, an NGO providing rehabilitation aids and services to persons with disabilities.

Sudha has been donating to Kidwai Cancer Hospital (₹2 lakh every month) and Mobility India (₹1.5 lakh every month), Sri Shankara Cancer Foundation, Sri Venkateswara University in Tirupati, and St John's Medical College Hospital in Bengaluru are all beneficiaries of the Janardhans.

Recently, Sudha built toilets for boys and girls in 50 schools at Tamil Nadu's Thorapalli, where leader of Freedom Struggle C Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) was born.

Sudha says 'giving' also makes her realise how fortunate she had been.

Recalling an incident, she says in 1996, Sadhu wanted to buy a cottage in a gated community in Tirupati. It was only ₹1 lakh. But he could not buy it because the scheme was closed.

Fourteen years later in 2010, Sudha donated ₹3.5 crore to build a part of a rest house at Tirupati.

She also built a hostel for students with disabilities at a cost of ₹80 lakh in Sri Venkateswara University, the alma mater of Sadhu. She also built two thulabharam counters in Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple. "I'm only passing on what god has given me," he says. After the meeting in IAD, she returned to Bengaluru in the evening train the same day.