



THE HINDU CENTRE

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Interview

"We believe in the philosophy that our work should speak": Sudha Murthy



S. RAJENDRAN



Infosys Foundation Chairperson Sudha Murthy, Minor Irrigation Minister C.S. Puttaraju, Tourism Minister S.R. Mahesh, Deputy Commissioner N. Manjushri, and others inspecting the historical monuments at Melkote near Pandavapura of Mandya district on December 02, 2018.

Photo: B_Mahadeva.

Sudha Murty, Chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, is well-known for her work in the field of social welfare. She is a technocrat devoted to the cause of the upliftment of the poor and providing relief to the needy persons.

Sixty-eight year old Sudha Murty, a recipient of the Padma Shri, began her professional career as a computer scientist and engineer. She has participated in rural development efforts, healthcare and educational initiatives, and supported the movement to provide all Karnataka government schools with computer and library facilities.

In this interview to S. Rajendran, Senior Fellow, The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, she speaks on the various initiatives of the Infosys Foundation with primary focus on the welfare of the people at large.

The contribution of Infosys Foundation and particularly your personal contribution for social betterment in various walks of life is well known. Is your endeavour a part of corporate social responsibility or personal philanthropy?

My endeavour is both of corporate social responsibility, with funds provided by the Infosys company and of personal philanthropy. “We normally do not like to talk about our personal contributions—funds drawn from of our personal resources. We believe in the philosophy that our work should speak and normally we stay away from talking about our work for the welfare of the people in specific and the State at large”.

The Infosys Foundation spends around Rs 350 crores a year on a variety of activities and so far over Rs 1,120 crores has been spent since 2014.

After working across Karnataka, the Foundation has extended its activities to other States. For effective intervention, it requires the support of the Governments in the States and at the Centre. What has been the response of the Governments thus far?

There has been a positive response to our work by the authorities concerned, in several States, but then we do not work with the State Governments directly. The Infosys Foundation is working in almost all the States of the country such as Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan,

West Bengal and even in some remotest parts of Arunachal Pradesh. Employees of the Infosys double-up as volunteers during their free time and out of passion.

Infosys has an employee strength of nearly 2.20 lakhs and many of them volunteer



to work during holidays and weekends. As a matter of fact the employee strength of the Infosys Foundation is just five and yet we are present across the country thanks to the support extended by the employees and others from various walks of life. Given their passion for welfare of the others, there are many employees on a sabbatical –to render service--ranging between a month and two years. There

Sudha Murthy. Photo: V Sreenivasa Murthy are also a number of non-Governmental organisations with whom the Infosys Foundation has a tie-up. By and large, it is the enthusiasm of the employees of the Infosys and all others including the NGO's connected with the Foundation who have helped in reaching such high levels.

How does the Foundation raise the requisite funds for all its activities since you do not seek external contributions or donations?

Yes, we do not seek external financial contributions or donations and the resources that we have is enough for our work. Infosys sets apart two per cent of its profit towards corporate social responsibility and “this is enough for our work. We do not require money from anybody or any authority. There are over 10,000 volunteers across the country working with the Foundation and that is our source of strength”.

An important social intervention is in the healthcare sector. How do you to monitor the appropriate usage of the facilities provided for the welfare of the people in such an important sector?

The Infosys Foundation works with established organisations both in the private and the Government sector and is not connected with the management or monitoring the health care facilities that have been provided or will be provided in

the future. For instance, the Foundation works with the Ramakrishna and the Chinmaya Missions in various parts of the country and the buildings and medical equipment provided to such organisations are appropriately utilised for the welfare of the people, at large. Normally, we either construct the requisite buildings or provide the medical equipment depending on the requirements.

“We have built a *dharmashala* for the benefit of attendants of cancer patients who are admitted at the Kidwai Memorial Institute of Technology in Bangalore. The *dharmashala* was built nearly 17 years ago and recently we renovated the structure. The building is under the care of the cancer hospital and has been well utilised. The Foundation is not involved in the administration or management of buildings which it constructs for the people although it is in discussion with such managements”.

Malnutrition is a persistent problem in India, and NGOs have been working in this important area. Where, in your view, are things going wrong, and how can corporate-Government collaboration correct this?

No, we are not specifically working in the field of malnutrition. Our focus is on hunger eradication and towards this end we are participating in mid-day meals for school children in a big way, across the country. The Foundation has constructed a massive kitchen for the Akashaya Patra Foundation near Hyderabad at a cost of Rs. 18 crores. The equipment is used to cook food to serve over one lakh children a day.

The Foundation is collaborating with multiple organisations and agencies in providing meals to school children in the rural areas. Providing food to children will go a long way in preventing school dropouts.

We aim to assist in hunger eradication in the country before delving into malnutrition.

Does Infosys Foundation have plans for expanding or broadening its activities in India?

The activities of the foundation are already spread across most parts of the country—from Jammu and Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Arunachal Pradesh

to Maharashtra. We are driven by a strong passion to work for the benefit of the people and will continue to expand our activities based on the need and our capacity.

The foundation has a special programme for the kith and kin of martyrs who have laid down their lives for the country and under this we provide Rs. 10 lakhs to each family. So far, we have spent Rs. 45 crores and continue to provide financial assistance to the families of martyrs. We have also built 14,000 toilets in the villages and around 3,000 houses for the victims of floods and natural calamities. In Kerala, which recently witnessed floods and at Kodagu we have undertaken special relief programmes. To over 70,000 libraries in schools and colleges, particularly in the rural areas we have provided books and other reading material.

You also have a presence in the US. How would you compare the work and the priorities of the Foundation in these two countries? Are there any similarities and dissimilarities in the Foundation's activities in the world's two largest democracies?

The Infosys Foundation here is independent of the Infosys Foundation in the United States. Our jurisdiction is restricted to India while the foundation in the US has another team in operation with resources drawn from that unit.

Are there any plans to open branches of the Foundation in other countries?

No, there are no plans to open branches in other countries. We have enough work to be done in India

Though there are many NGOs known for their notable work there are also those reportedly involved in money laundering activities by some of them. What is your assessment of this criticism?

It is highly unfortunate that NGOs indulge in money laundering activities and such things happen owing to lack of accountability and a lack of passion to work for the benefit of the people. We can achieve success and goodwill only when we are sincere in our work. The Infosys Foundation is associated with several NGOs and we carry out due diligence before we provide funds to some of the programmes evolved by the NGOs.

What are your views on the relationship between governments and NGOs?

It is not my area of expertise so I cannot comment on the relationship between Government's and NGO's.

[**S. Rajendran** is Senior Fellow, The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, based in Bengaluru. He was formerly Resident Editor/ Associate Editor, The Hindu, Karnataka.

In a journalistic career of nearly 40 years with The Hindu in Karnataka, he has extensively reported on and analysed various facets of life in the State. He holds a Master's degree from the Bangalore University. The Government of Karnataka, in recognition of his services, presented him the Rajyotsava Award - the highest honour in the State - in 2010.

He can be contacted at srajendran.thehindu@gmail.com].