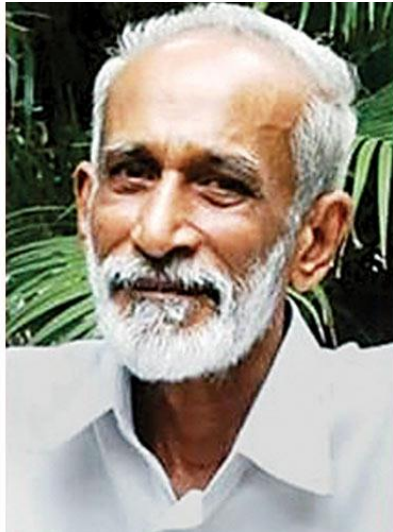


73-year-old Tamil Nadu librarian donated Rs 30 crore to the uneducated poor

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TN activist Palam Kalyanasundaram remained a bachelor so that he could dedicate his life to the poor.



Thin, frail, emaciated and sporting a shy smile, Palam Kalyanasundaram looks like your next-door neighbour's old, but affectionate grandpa. Once you get to talk to him, the fire and determination in him shines forth through his words. He speaks in a childlike manner, and his voice, too, is high-pitched, but as you listen, you are awestruck at the yeoman service he has done for humanity. He has received several awards and has donated Rs 30 crore of prize money he got from these honours.

Born at Melakarivelamkulam in Thirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, Kalyanasundaram lost his father at a very young age. It was his mother who inspired him to serve the poor.

A will to serve humanity has been 73-year-old Kalyanasundaram's guiding principle throughout his life. A gold medalist in library science, he also holds a masters degree in literature and history. During his 35-year-long career at Kumarkurupara Arts College at Srivaikuntam, he diligently and willingly donated his salary month after month towards charity and did odd jobs to meet his daily needs. Even after retirement, he worked as a waiter in a hotel in exchange for two meals a day and a meagre salary so that he could continue to donate to orphanages and to children's educational funds.

He was amply rewarded for his service to humanity. The Union government acclaimed him as the best librarian in India. The International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, has honoured him as one of the 'noblest of the world' and the United Nations adjudged him as one of the most outstanding people of the 20th century. He also received Man of the Millenium award and Life Time of Service Award from Rotary Club of India in 2011.

“People think that I started doing charity when I was young by donating clothes and helping people study, and they attribute it to a public cause, but I insist it was for a private one. The place where I lived was a tiny village with no provision for roads, buses, schools, electricity, and there was not even a shop to buy a matchbox from. I had to walk 10km to school and back and walking all that way alone can be a pretty lonesome experience. Hence, I had this thought that if I could motivate most of the children to come with me to school, it would be great fun as well.”

Kalyanasundaram says with a twinkle in his eye. “In those days, children could not afford to pay school fees which were around Rs5. I offered to pay their school fees, got them books and clothes as well.”

Kalyanasundaram says money does not impress him at all. “One can get money in three possible ways. First, through earnings; secondly, through parents’ earnings, and thirdly, through money donated by someone. But there’s nothing more fulfilling than being able to donate money for charity out of your own earnings.”

Palam Kalyanasundaram lives a simple life all on his own in a small house in Saidapet, Chennai. He never married for the simple reason that he did not want to spend all that he earned on charity. Even today, he comes to office at Adyar regularly and does whatever he can for the uplift of the underprivileged people.