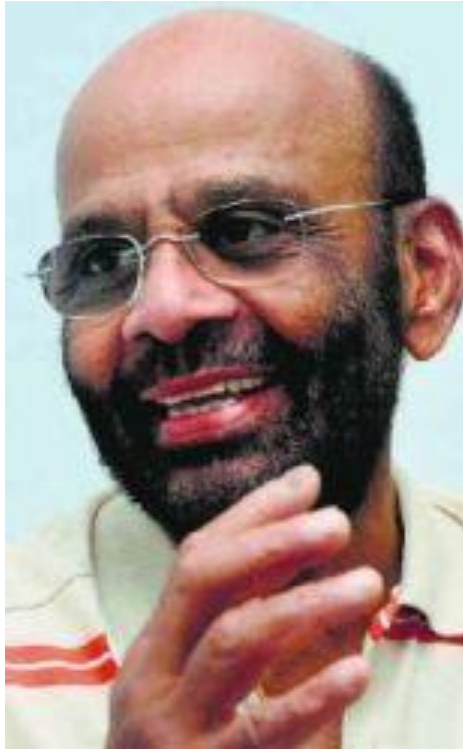


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I do anything to help the needy



Shivadas S. Pattanath. Photo: M. Vedhan

"After I retired, I decided to give something back to the nation that took care of me"

*He is known as a 'helping angel' or fundraiser in Germany. Every time **Shivadas S. Pattanath** visits India, he carries along a big suitcase brimming with goodies and stationary for disabled children in Chennai. This time, a crew from Germany was in town, to do a documentary film on this philanthropist of Indian origin. He tells **K. Lakshmi** about his commitment to social service and the documentary.*

"Newspapers in Germany call me the most successful beggar," guffaws Mr. Pattanath, who has raised 40,000 euro (Rs. 22 lakh) as funds in a decade of welfare work.

This 73-year old bundle of energy has donated blood 88 times and is a popular name in Langen, Germany. Mr. Pattanath started his life in Germany as a customer service agent in Transworld Airlines and later moved on to work in flight operation and public relations departments at the Frankfurt airport.

"After I retired in 1996, I decided to give something back to the nation that took care of me for several years," says Mr. Pattanath, who is a member of at least a dozen social service organisations in Germany.

Apart from helping senior citizens monetarily, he has often kept them company by playing indoor games and talking to them for long hours. "I do anything to help the needy, be it collecting money, motivating youth football teams by sponsoring jerseys or even decorating organisations for functions like anniversaries."

In recognition of his service, the German Red Cross has conferred on him the title 'Helping Angel'. Mr. Pattanath says he was recently honoured during the Applewine festival, a wine harvest celebration in Germany. "I am glad I was the only Indian chosen by the Hessen state social ministry for a model project that aimed at motivating people into social service."

Impressed by his work, Inga Bremer, a student of the Film Academy in Ludwigsburg, decided to document his services in Germany and Chennai. "Besides focussing on my work here, the students are also capturing a glimpse of Chennai and its culture on their camera," he says.

"In Germany, an individual has enough social security. But the elderly yearn for human relationships. In contrast, our society in India is compassionate, but badly needs monetary support," Mr. Pattanath says.

He has been supporting the disabled children at Guild of Service, Anna Nagar, for over a decade. He, along with wife, Sabita, donated about Rs.1.5 lakh towards tsunami rehabilitation in Cuddalore. "Nothing is more joyful than taking these children for an outing or a treat in a restaurant," says Mr. Pattanath, who plans to visit Chennai again soon of course, with a suitcase full of goodies and heartfelt warmth.