"Three in the morning"

A narrative of Service personified..
A Biography of **Shree S Jayaraman**

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A narrative of service personified

A biography of ***Shri S Jayaraman***

- *Digitally penned in admiration and inspiration by Pooja Patil Joshi*

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Dedicated to my mentor and guide, my father and my husband, for your support and trust in me....

Foreword

Some lives do not arrive with noise.
They unfold quietly—steady, consistent, almost unnoticeable—until one day, you realise how much they have shaped the world around them.
This is one such life.
The story of Shree S. Jayaraman does not follow the familiar arc of ambition, struggle, and triumph. It moves differently. It is not driven by the desire to become something, but by the instinct to respond—to people, to need, to moments that ask, *"Can something be done?"*
And each time, the answer is action.
What makes this journey remarkable is not just what was done, but how it was done. Without announcement. Without ownership. Without the need to be seen. Ideas were set in motion, systems were built, lives were touched—and then, quietly, he stepped aside.
In a world that often celebrates visibility, this life reminds us of something deeper: that true impact does not seek attention. It seeks continuity.
There are no grand declarations here. Only small, consistent acts repeated over time—until they become a way of being.

Special thanks to Mr Sumuk Shanbog for creatively designing the cover page of the book.

Chapter 1: Roots of an Inherited Intelligence

He did not grow up with a sense of struggle. This was not because life was effortless, but because competence, curiosity, and learning formed the unspoken atmosphere of his home. Intellectual engagement was ordinary, not exceptional. Excellence was neither announced nor romanticised; it was assumed.

He was born into a Brahmin family where education was not treated as a privilege or an accomplishment, but as a baseline expectation. His father, educated in an era when degrees carried moral weight as much as professional value, chose a disciplined life in the defence services. His mother, formally educated only until the seventh or eighth standard—as was customary at the time—possessed an intuitive intelligence and deep cultural sensibility that far exceeded the limits of certification. She mastered Tamil with remarkable ease, wrote songs, absorbed ideas instinctively, and expressed herself with a quiet, assured confidence. Hers was a mind shaped by curiosity rather than credentials.

From her flowed his lifelong intimacy with language. Writing, composing, translating, lending his voice to radio and recordings—these were not skills acquired deliberately, but continuations of something already present. In later years, he would come to understand that what is often described as “talent” is frequently

inheritance: a continuity that moves silently through families that respect learning.
There was no dramatic narrative of ascent in his childhood. Academic success was ordinary. Ranking first or second in class was not celebrated as exceptional—it was expected. Not through pressure, but through an environment where the seriousness of effort made achievement feel natural.

His early years were spent in Aravangadu, near Ooty in Tamil Nadu and Coorg in Karnataka, within the quiet order of a factory township framed by abundant natural beauty. Yet what remained most vivid from that period was not the landscape, but the teachers. They were notable not for reputation, but for depth. Mathematics, science, and language were taught with clarity and seriousness. Syllabi were covered, but more importantly, understanding was cultivated.
Decades later, those relationships endured. He continued to remain in touch with some of his teachers, calling them unfailingly every year on September 5th, Teachers' Day. Among the three classmates who consistently occupied the top academic ranks, the connection remained intact. Two of those teachers had since passed away, but one remained. His wife once remarked, "Unless he speaks to you on Teachers' Day, he does not feel complete." It was a quiet testament to the lasting influence of teachers who teach with sincerity.

As a student, his interests extended beyond academics into expression. Debate, writing, and drama became natural

arenas where his voice took shape. He participated actively, won awards, and stood at the forefront of competitions. In college, theatre in particular became an identity. Even years later, former classmates remembered him less by profession than by presence— “Ah, Jayaraman? That drama fellow.”
After completing pre-university studies at Christian College and engineering thereafter, life progressed without dramatic inflexion. There was no deprivation to overcome, no rupture to define direction. Instead, there was a steady unfolding of opportunity, supported consistently by family strength.

The extended family reinforced this intellectual inheritance. Scholars, professors, administrators, and thinkers populated its branches. Education was deeply embedded. His grandfather had been a teacher and headmaster. One cousin would go on to occupy the highest levels of public service. His brother became a professor at the Indian Institute of Science. Within the family, none of this appeared extraordinary. It simply reaffirmed the belief that contributing meaningfully was normal.
This upbringing did not produce arrogance. It produced grounding. When brilliance surrounds you, it humbles rather than inflates. You do not feel singular; you feel responsible to live up to a standard quietly established long before you arrived.

In hindsight, his early life reveals itself not as a period of ambition, but of preparation. Preparation for

responsibility, for service, and for engagement with the world—driven not by hunger, but by inheritance.
Long before service became an articulated pursuit, it was woven into the routines of his life. Responsibility arrived not as an idea to be adopted, but as a condition to be inhabited.
He grew up in a large family, the youngest among three sons and three daughters. Conventionally, the youngest is protected. In practice, the youngest often becomes the most adaptable. In his case, adaptation was learned early and exercised often.

The family structure was complex, yet deeply rooted. One of his mother's children had passed away at a very young age, a loss that shaped her profoundly without ever requiring articulation. Each year, on the anniversary of that child's death, she cooked large quantities of food—especially idlis—and ensured they were distributed widely. There were no rituals, no ceremonies, no public expressions of grief. Feeding people became a remembrance. He was the one sent out to deliver the food.
That routine offered his earliest lesson in giving: generosity does not announce sorrow; it absorbs it.
Education was treated as a shared inheritance. His grandfather had been a teacher and headmaster, and learning was regarded as a collective responsibility rather than a personal achievement. His siblings took divergent paths—some settled in Chennai, one moved abroad, one was lost too early—but the sense of mutual obligation endured. One brother, though biologically part of the

household, was adopted by an aunt. Another remained largely distant from family life. These arrangements were accepted without drama. For them, family was not defined by symmetry, but by continuity.

As the youngest, he became the default problem-solver. Making tea. Running errands. Managing logistics in the absence of parents. Listening more than speaking. Observing how people behaved when they were tired, anxious, or grieving.

Without realising it at the time, he was developing emotional fluency.
Courage, he would later understand, is learned not through confrontation but through repetition. Constant exposure to adult conversations, responsibilities, and consequences slowly eroded fear. He did not become fearless; he became functional.

When his parents passed away, those early habits matured into leadership. Decisions had to be made. Family members looked to him because he was present, reliable, and steady.

Chapter 2: When Comfort Meets Conscience

Engineering entered his life not as a dramatic departure, but as a continuation. By the time he reached professional education, he was already at ease with learning, engaging people, and speaking with confidence. What engineering offered was not merely technical training, but access to institutions, to ideas, and eventually, to choice.

In his fourth year, he appeared for the selection process of the Indian Navy. The interview was rigorous, demanding both intellectual clarity and physical readiness. He cleared it. The appointment letter followed. He was to join as a Sub-Lieutenant, a prospect that, for most young men, would have marked the beginning of a life defined by uniform, structure, and prestige.

Yet the most influential lessons of that period did not emerge from his success, but alongside it.

During the same interview process, a fellow candidate from another college suffered a catastrophic accident. A fall resulted in a severe spinal injury, leaving him immobile. His name was Ramakrishnan. In a single moment, promise gave way to paralysis. What followed was not only a medical struggle, but a profound confrontation with purpose.

For nearly four years, Ramakrishnan lived with extreme physical limitations. From that confinement emerged an uncommon clarity. Encouraged by his doctor, Dr Amar Singh, he returned to his native place and founded an

organisation that would later become Amar Seva Sangh—one of India's pioneering institutions for persons with disabilities. While Ramakrishnan would eventually receive the Padma Shri, his true achievement lay elsewhere: in restoring dignity.

Ramakrishnan could move little beyond his neck. Yet he built an institution that moved thousands. Observing this transformation altered something fundamental within Jayaraman.

Until then, his own life had progressed smoothly—marked by education, opportunity, and recognition. Ramakrishnan's life, shaped by restriction, produced an impact that far exceeded that of many who moved freely. Comfort alone could no longer serve as justification for existence. Ability, he began to understand, was not measured by physical freedom, but by the courage to act within limitation.

Observing individuals like Ramakrishnan—physically immobile yet profoundly productive—reframed every complaint he might have made. Witnessing families who gave despite scarcity dissolved any residual argument against generosity. Over time, giving ceased to feel like a sacrifice. It became the natural response to capacity.

It was at this point that service stopped feeling like a choice.

It became temperament.

He moved to Bengaluru and began working across organisations. His first formal role was with the Indian

Institute of Science, where he served as a senior scientific assistant. There, he encountered another quiet lesson in humility. A young woman who had once worked under him would, years later, become his superior, his wife.

Marriage, for him, was not simply companionship; it was equilibrium. Where he was impulsive, she was measured. Where he was expressive, she was steady. He often acknowledged, without hesitation, that she managed the world he neglected—finances, structure, long-term planning—so that he could function with freedom.

When family responsibilities demanded attention, particularly during his sister's marriage, she stood beside him with quiet resolve. His mother's generosity had long set the example: what was meant for her own son was willingly given away to her daughter. Such models left little room for self-interest.

Marriage reinforced this rhythm rather than disrupting it. His wife brought strength without spectacle. She did not replace responsibility; she complemented it. While he operated externally—across projects, people, and movement—she maintained the internal order. Finances, structure, and long-term clarity were held firmly by her. He never obscured this truth. Strength, he learned, was not independence; it was alignment.

Over time, he became known less for ambition than for reliability. Within Bengaluru's creative circles, especially Tamil translation, song writing, in voice work and radio, his presence grew familiar. He translated into Tamil 12 books by Swami Sukbodhananda, over 150 children's

books for Pratham, and hundreds of advertisements, including scripts for dubbing a few episodes of the American TV Series *Dexter.*

Studios recognised his voice. Advertisers sought it. All India Radio became a second home, where he conducted interviews and programmes for nearly three decades.

One of his most meaningful moments came not from recognition, but from inclusion. He once took his mother to the radio station and gave her space to speak on air. She arrived as though stepping onto a grand stage, radiant with pride. For someone who had nurtured creativity quietly all her life, the moment required no larger audience.

By his late forties and early fifties, a shift became unmistakable. Professional life had delivered comfort, stability, and recognition. Yet comfort, when left unquestioned, began to feel insufficient. The desire to accumulate faded. In its place grew a compulsion to contribute.

It was then that work, gradually and without declaration, began to give way to service.

Chapter 3: Learning the Currency of Relationships

At a certain stage in professional life, an unspoken realisation begins to take shape: technical competence alone does not move systems. People do. For him, this understanding did not arrive through abstraction, but through movement—across roles, industries, and responsibilities.

Early in his career, he recognised something fundamental about himself. While he could understand systems and structures, he was far more effective in communication than in tolerating routine. Where others found reassurance in predictability, he found energy in conversation, negotiation, and persuasion. That self-awareness guided him naturally away from purely technical roles and toward marketing.

Marketing, as he came to understand it, was not primarily about selling products. It was about understanding people—how they think, decide, hesitate, and trust. His professional path moved through computer marketing, media, and communications, and with each transition, his circle of relationships widened. Employers noticed. In an era when organisations retained talent by investing in exposure, he was sent to the United States for professional training—a gesture meant both to educate and to secure his future.

He returned with more than credentials. He returned with perspective.

Soon after, he became involved in initiatives that lay at the intersection of learning, media, and public engagement. When the Azim Premji Foundation launched the Community Learning Centre project, he joined it during its formative phase. From there, his work expanded into editorial responsibilities, management of large video operations, and eventually leadership roles within creative and technological enterprises.

Each position offered its own lessons, but one understanding endured above all others: influence grows only when trust is sustained over time.

One incident illustrated this more clearly than any line on a résumé. Decades earlier, he had helped organise a large-scale quiz competition to mark Rajiv Gandhi's birthday. Over a thousand students had participated. The work required meticulous planning—designing questions, coordinating evaluation, and managing logistics. The event left a strong impression on K. K. Murthy, a senior public figure associated with Chowdiah Hall.

At the conclusion of the event, Murthy remarked casually, almost in passing, "Anytime you come to T. Chowdiah Hall, it is open to you."

The statement was not dramatic, yet it carried a deeper meaning. Access, he learned, is not granted by authority, but by reliability. For years thereafter, he could enter programmes, cultural events, and productions without formality. Even security personnel, once familiar with his name, would step aside without question.

This pattern repeated itself throughout his life.

Opportunities emerged not because he pursued them aggressively, but because someone remembered how he had handled a responsibility years earlier. Relationships, he understood, were long-term investments. They could not be activated only when needed; they had to be nurtured without expectation.

His work soon extended into documentary and corporate videos. He was involved in producing episodes for Sun TV in Singapore, focusing on Hindu temples.

By his late forties, he had occupied enough roles to understand the contours of his professional self. Titles no longer interested him. Outcomes did. At fifty, he stepped away from full-time corporate responsibility. What remained was clarity.

From that point onward, his energy shifted decisively toward social work.

Not impulsively.
Not sentimentally.
But strategically.

He had joined Rotary in 1991. Over the decades, it evolved into a platform—not for visibility, but for execution. Projects ranged from modest interventions to large-scale undertakings. Some dissolved quietly. Others matured into lasting systems.

One project stood apart for its scale and complexity: the donation of more than 27,500 computers to 503 government institutions across Karnataka, along with Rtn. Mohan Ramanathan, a good friend and a well-wisher.

The effort required coordination across corporations, government departments, logistics providers, and local administrators. Infosys played a critical role. Yet what mattered most was not the number of computers distributed, but the model itself—it demonstrated that dormant resources could be reactivated if someone was willing to navigate complexity patiently.

Another initiative emerged through the radio. For three years, every Friday from 7 pm to 8 pm, he hosted a Rotary programme—166 episodes in all—where clubs from different regions spoke about their work. The format was simple, consistent, and effective. Visibility, when sustained, gradually became credibility.

Yet the work that would ultimately shape his understanding most deeply was neither infrastructure nor media.

It was the reform of eye donation.

That work would mark the point where relationships, systems, and service converged—and where intent gave way permanently to execution.

Chapter 4: When Good Intentions Fail Without Systems

For many years, he shared a belief common to most people: that eye donation was primarily a matter of willingness. If enough individuals pledged their eyes, blindness could be reduced. The logic appeared sound. It was compassionate, humane—and deeply flawed.

His engagement with avoidable blindness began through Rotary, largely in the context of cataract surgeries and eye-care awareness. During one such interaction, a remark by an ophthalmologist unsettled him. Almost casually, the doctor said, "We don't get enough eyes."

The statement lingered.

Each year, thousands of people die. If even a small fraction of them donated their eyes, corneal blindness should have declined significantly. The shortfall, therefore, could not be attributed to numbers. It had to be systemic.

As he examined the process more closely, the flaw became evident. Eye donation had been communicated to the public in entirely the wrong way.

Eye donation, he realised, was not comparable to blood donation. Blood donation allows for planning: one pledges, receives a call, visits a centre, and donates. Eye donation functions very differently. It is time-bound, emotionally charged, and wholly dependent on the actions of the deceased person's family. A pledge made years—or even decades—earlier has no practical value if no one acts within the six hours following death.

Despite this reality, public campaigns focused almost exclusively on pledges. Certificates were distributed. Names were recorded. Participants felt virtuous. Yet when death occurred, families were left without guidance. They did not know whom to contact, where the nearest eye bank was, or whether donation was even feasible.

It became clear to him that most eye-donation initiatives were symbolic rather than functional.

The first correction he introduced was conceptual. He began urging people not to take pride in pledging their own eyes, but instead to pledge to help procure eyes. The shift was subtle but decisive. Responsibility moved from an abstract future moment to an immediate, actionable commitment.

Under this model, if a neighbour passed away, the individual who had taken such a pledge would act. They would make the call, connect the family to the eye bank, and ensure the process moved forward.

To support this approach, he helped design a simple and efficient system. An SMS-based mechanism was created to enable rapid information flow without confusion. The emphasis was not on documentation, but on response time.

A second, more practical challenge soon emerged. In moments of grief, families need to search for eye banks.

Recognising this, he approached emergency services—specifically the 108 system—with a proposal that seemed unconventional at the time: integrate eye donation into

emergency response. If a single number like 108 also provides the nearest eye bank numbers, he argued, the service could also help to reach the nearest eye bank. Given the six-hour window for eye donation, time was the critical constraint.

The proposal was accepted.

With the support of the governments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and technical assistance from Tata Consultancy Services, a coordinated system was built. When a call was received—from anywhere in the State—the operator could immediately identify the nearest eye bank. The eye bank would be alerted, and its team dispatched without delay.

The system worked.

For the first time, eye donation shifted from an emotional burden borne by grieving families to a logistical process handled by a responsive structure. Dignity followed efficiency.

As with all systems, it did not remain intact indefinitely. Governments changed. Priorities shifted. Over time, parts of the framework weakened. In more recent years, institutions such as Narayana Nethralaya revived elements of the model. Yet the larger lesson endured.

Charity without process, he concluded, is theatre.

True service remains largely invisible. It does not seek recognition. It builds quietly and allows others to benefit without knowing who initiated the effort.

This insight fundamentally reshaped his approach to all subsequent work. He stopped asking how many people he could help and began asking which systems could prevent problems from recurring.

That question led him next into education, energy access, and community-scale interventions—projects less visible to the public eye, but far more durable in their impact.

Chapter 5: Choosing Difficult Problems Over Easy Praise

By the time he moved fully into social work, his interest in projects that produced quick appreciation had largely faded. Applause, he had come to understand, was easy to earn. Impact was not. What began to draw his attention instead were problems that resisted simple solutions—those that demanded patience, coordination, and a willingness to remain largely invisible.

One such engagement involved energy access.

Across many parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, particularly in tribal and remote regions, darkness arrived early and lingered. Electricity, where available at all, was unreliable. Children studied under dim kerosene lamps. Women cooked and moved cautiously. Productive activity ended with sunset.

He approached this not as an abstract social concern, but as a logistical challenge. In collaboration with Schneider Electric, he helped initiate a project that distributed nearly six thousand solar lamps across underserved communities. Distribution, however, was only the beginning. Without continuity, it would mean little. To ensure sustainability, the work was carried out through a network of nearly 20 NGOs, coordinated by a central organisation with deep knowledge of the local terrain and community trust.

The lamps were not distributed symbolically. They reached households where light altered daily life—children studying longer hours, families functioning safely

after dusk, and communities regaining small but essential freedoms.

Education, however, remained the most persistent thread running through his work.

At various points, he became involved in initiatives aimed at addressing gaps within formal schooling—not by replacing existing systems, but by reinforcing them. Way back in 2012, he introduced e-learning to government schools through Rotary support and represented his Rotary District in the South Asia Literacy Summit.

The other significant recent effort emerged through Sankalp Learning Solutions, founded by Prasanna Karthik, prompted by a simple observation: outcomes did not reflect potential. Students were capable. Teachers were present. Yet results lagged.

He approached the problem without romanticism. His initial instinct was to mobilise institutional funding through Rotary. When that proved unsuccessful, he turned instead to relationships cultivated over decades. What structure could not deliver, trust made possible.

The work demanded persistence. Funds had to be raised. Accountability had to be ensured. Progress had to be tracked. There was little glamour in the process, but there was steady momentum.

This pattern repeated itself across projects.

A bus stop in one place. A public utility in another. Government collaborations that required persistence rather than persuasion. In one instance, a large-scale

infrastructure initiative was facilitated through long-standing relationships with senior administrators. Formal proposals were unnecessary. A message sent in the morning received an acknowledgement by evening. Such responsiveness did not arise from authority; it was the product of credibility accumulated over time.

He often reflected on why these relationships endured.

The answer was straightforward: he never asked for anything that benefited him personally.

By his fifties, material ambition had largely receded. He lived comfortably. His daughter had completed her education—through scholarships—up to her doctorate. There was no looming financial anxiety. Beyond a certain point, money lost its centrality.

What replaced it was a desire to be useful.

Usefulness, as he understood it, was a quiet measure. It did not announce itself. It was felt when systems functioned more smoothly because of one's presence. When people trusted a process because someone had once stood behind it. When solutions continued long after direct involvement ended.

Even within Rotary, the projects that mattered most to him were not necessarily the largest, but the most sustainable—radio programmes that ran for years, systems that survived leadership changes, processes that others could replicate without his participation.

Gradually, he came to recognise that the most satisfying form of work was not creation, but continuity.

That understanding would deepen further as his reflections expanded to include family, loss, and the subtle, enduring ways in which generosity shapes a life.

When a system functions independently, the ego has been removed from its design. When people continue a process without invoking the originator's name, ownership has truly transferred. That, he believed, was the highest form of contribution.

He also came to understand that meaningful service is rarely dramatic. It is repetitive. It demands follow-up, reminders, uncomfortable conversations, and patience with slow progress. While the world celebrates breakthroughs, it is sustained by maintenance.

This perspective protected him from frustration.

One conclusion became increasingly evident: money is a poor motivator for service. It attracts attention, but not endurance. Once personal needs are met, surplus wealth rarely expands purpose; more often, it distracts from it. Time, relationships, and credibility emerged as his real currencies.

He felt no desire to build institutions bearing his name. Legacy, he came to realise, was not a structure but a pattern. If others behaved differently because of a process he had helped introduce, that influence persisted even in his absence.

In retrospect, he did not view his life as a sequence of achievements, but as an alignment of temperament and opportunity. He was never driven by conquest. He was

driven by curiosity, connection, and a quiet intolerance for inefficiency that caused unnecessary harm.

If there was a philosophy underlying his choices, it was simple.

Do not ask how large a problem is.
Ask whether it is solvable.

Do not ask who will receive credit.
Ask who will benefit.

As ambition softened, purpose sharpened. And perhaps that was the true reward of growing older—not certainty, but clarity.

Chapter 6: When Opportunity Knocks, You Open the Door

If his life could be summarised in a single sentence, it would be this: opportunities arose, and he responded to them.

Not strategically. Not according to a master plan. But instinctively.

He never confined himself to a single field or identity. When a need appeared, and he was able to help—even marginally—he stepped in. At different moments, this meant working with governments, corporations, farmers, artists, or community groups. Once, it meant selling turmeric powder.

During the COVID years, farmers in Sittilingi, a remote ecologically conscious tribal valley in Tamil Nadu, faced a crisis that would never make it to headlines. They had produced tonnes of organic turmeric powder intended for export. With ports closed and shipments stalled, cash flow collapsed. The produce was good. The market had vanished.

He recognised the problem not as an agricultural failure, but as a visibility gap. Crowdfunding, he understood, was not merely about money; it was about reach. He reached out to Ranga from Fuel A Dream and proposed a simple intervention: package the turmeric carefully, tell the farmers' story honestly, price it affordably, and allow people to decide.

Fuel A Dream did what it was designed to do. The story travelled. Six tonnes of turmeric were sold. More importantly, attention followed. Even those who did not contribute financially amplified the narrative. Local buyers stepped in and cleared the remaining stock.

The episode reinforced a lesson he had long suspected: money is rarely the most powerful resource. Attention is.

The pandemic, however, demanded far more than innovation. It demanded presence.

For nearly three years, he functioned in continuous response mode. Ambulances. ICU beds, oxygen, ventilators, food, ration kits, medicines... Requests arrived at all hours—often from strangers, often through fragile chains of connection. Fear was pervasive, but paralysis was not an option.

It began with a single midnight call.

A woman from Jharkhand, living in Sarjapur, Bengaluru, had delivered a stillborn child. She was bleeding heavily. No hospital would admit her. No ambulance was responding. Without immediate medical care, she would not survive.

Despite fear, action followed. Calls were made. An ambulance finally agreed. A Rotarian living nearby reached the location. The woman was taken to a hospital. Her life was saved.

That moment altered the tempo of everything that followed.

Requests multiplied. ICU beds were arranged at Baptist Hospital. Ambulances were mobilised. Rations arrived—from Hindustan Lever, from individual donors, from organisations that simply said, "We have material. Can you move it?"

Atta, soap, toothpaste, sanitary supplies… Thousands of packets. Solutions emerged as unpredictably as the requests themselves. He did not always know where the next call would come from or where the next response would originate. Yet somehow, they did.

Over those three years, the details blurred. Numbers became indistinct. Nights merged into mornings. What remained clear was this: he did not go looking for work. Work came to him. And he responded.

When asked where such connections came from, the answer was unremarkable. They had been built quietly, over decades, without urgency or expectation. WhatsApp groups. Old colleagues. Former collaborators. Government officers who trusted that access would not be misused. Corporate leaders are confident that resources will reach their intended destination.

At one point, Titan offered a crore of rupees for COVID relief. The funds could not be routed through his Rotary chapter, so an alternative structure was created. A COVID-19 hospital was established in the Basaveshwara Satellite Bus Terminal.

At no point did the work feel dramatic. It felt necessary.

Even after the crisis receded, he continued to serve as advisor, trustee, or informal anchor to multiple organisations—not because he sought such roles, but because once people knew he would act, they returned.

And he continued to act.

When an opportunity crossed his path—no matter how small—he asked only one question: could it help someone?

If the answer was yes, he moved.

Chapter 7: Ideas That Become Institutions

He believed that ideas mattered most when they outgrew their originator. A sound idea, in his view, should not remain dependent on the person who conceived it. It should find allies, develop structure, and eventually move forward on its own.

Many of the initiatives he became associated with began in precisely this way—not as grand visions, but as responses to a moment.

One such moment arose through his association with Akshaya Patra. He had been reflecting on disparities within education—how children studying in well-resourced schools lived alongside children whose learning was undermined by basic nutritional insecurity. The idea that emerged was simple: children supporting children. Students from privileged schools contribute to meals for those who were not.

Timing proved critical. The then President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam was scheduled to visit Akshaya Patra, ensuring media attention. He approached two school principals with a straightforward proposal: if the entire school participated, the cheque would be presented publicly—not by an administrator, but by a student, alongside the principal.

What followed revealed the quiet power of leadership at the grassroots.

One principal addressed her students during the morning assembly and requested that each child contribute a fixed

amount—sufficient to feed one child for a year. By the very next day, over a thousand cheques had been collected. When corporate partners observed both the scale and sincerity of the effort, they amplified it. The final amount exceeded fourteen lakhs.

He did not appear in the photographs. Protocol ensured that. Yet the idea endured. The school carried pride. The children carried empathy. That outcome, for him, was sufficient.

This pattern repeated itself in other contexts.

Over time, education, food security, and healthcare converged into more structured efforts.

One of the most enduring examples began almost accidentally. Every Sunday, nearly a thousand patients travelled long distances to consult Dr Ramana Rao at his Sunday Village Clinic, who offered his services without charge. They arrived early, waited patiently, and left hungry. There were no food facilities nearby.

When he observed this, acceptance did not follow.

The response began modestly—providing simple, nourishing meals. What was intended as a one-time effort became a weekly commitment. Funding was arranged not through short-term appeals, but through sustained sponsorship. One year was extended into five. Five became 10. Nearly two decades later, the programme continued uninterrupted.

To him, that continuity defined success.

The same principle guided work with government schools. What began as a small kitchen at IPDP Trust gradually evolved into a centralised midday meal system serving more than twelve thousand children daily. He did not manage operations or seek visibility. His role remained confined to connecting the right individuals, securing early support, and stepping back.

Institutions, he believed, did not require constant supervision. They required strong beginnings.

Challenges, however, were never absent. Working with NGOs demanded discernment. Good intentions alone proved insufficient; capacity mattered. Some organisations delivered exceptional work but struggled with documentation. Others presented convincingly but underperformed in execution. Learning to distinguish between the two required time and mistakes.

Over time, he became more selective. This was not due to diminished compassion, but heightened accountability. Donors deserved transparency. Beneficiaries deserved reliability. He learned that declining some projects made it possible to engage meaningfully with others.

Chapter 8: Staying Light While Carrying Much

Throughout his life, he was careful to avoid one particular trap: the idea of being indispensable.

Consistency, he observed, was often mistaken for centrality. Presence across many efforts led some to assume that outcomes depended on a single individual. He never accepted that premise. If anything, he worked deliberately in the opposite direction—designing systems and relationships that could function without him.

This inclination explained his indifference to dates, numbers, and even detailed recollections of much of what he had been involved in. Memory, he believed, was not a reliable measure of meaning. Impact continued even when personal recollection faded.

People often asked whether there had been a defining moment when he decided to dedicate himself to service. There was none. Service did not arrive as a revelation or turning point. It developed a habit. Small responses, repeated consistently, hardened into temperament.

At times, the intervention required little more than words.

Over the years, individuals described him as a mentor, insisting that something he once said altered their direction. He often could not recall the conversation itself. Yet experience had taught him that those words, spoken with clarity at the right moment, could accomplish more than elaborate planning. When someone struggled internally, even a brief orientation could be catalytic.

He saw this principle repeatedly in medical settings, where doctors saw hundreds—sometimes thousands—of patients a day. Treatment mattered, but reassurance mattered just as much. Human beings did not always require solutions; they required bearings.

This understanding shaped how he approached relationships.

He did not view connections as ladders to be climbed, but as bridges to be maintained. One did not preserve them for immediate use, but for the moment someone else might need passage. This was why he was careful never to exploit access. When he reached out to administrators, corporate leaders, or colleagues from decades past, it was never for personal benefit. That clarity preserved trust.

And trust, once established, moved faster than authority.

His relationship with faith followed a similar pattern.

He believed—but not in exemption. Belief, to him, did not shield one from consequence. Wrong action carried a cost. There were no shortcuts. Faith, as he understood it, demanded accountability rather than protection.

Do the work. Correct the mistakes. Accept outcomes. Continue.

That philosophy brought a steady sense of comfort—not because everything unfolded smoothly, but because nothing felt arbitrary. Events were not random; they were responses.

At this stage of life, he did not worry excessively about the future. Not out of carelessness, but preparedness. Experience had shown him that effort mattered more than anticipation. When opportunities arose, he engaged. When challenges appeared, he responded. When nothing demanded attention, he remained still.

This balance owed much to his wife.

She understood his world as well as—sometimes better than—he did. She knew his commitments, his friendships, his rhythms. She grounded him without constraining him. From her, he learned that strength was not loud agreement, but quiet alignment.

Family, too, continued to be both responsibility and teacher. Caring for elders, witnessing decline, and navigating uncertainty, these experiences stripped life of illusion. Dementia, in particular, proved humbling. It revealed how fragile identity could be, and how dignity must be protected even when recognition disappeared.

Perhaps this was why usefulness mattered more to him than recognition.

Recognition relies on memory. Usefulness does not.

Looking back, he did not see a straight or intentional path. He saw a sequence of responses, some deliberate, some instinctive, all sincere. He had never attempted to change the world. He had only tried to reduce the difficulty where he encountered it.

That, he believed, was sufficient.

If anything endured from his life, he hoped it would not be his name, but the ease with which someone else was able to act because a path already existed.

And if another opportunity arrived—large or small—he would do what he had always done.

He would open the door.

A fistful of rice collected monthly from schoolchildren accumulated into tonnes of grain distributed to orphanages and old-age homes. A pilot project on distributing solar lamps expanded into thousands across tribal regions. Medicines nearing expiry were redirected efficiently to free clinics.

None of these ideas were revolutionary. Their strength lay in execution and persistence.

What unified these experiences was not scale, but continuity. When an initiative functioned for seventeen or eighteen years without interruption, it ceased to feel like charity. It became part of the social fabric.

In retrospect, his role was rarely to lead from the front. It was to observe, to connect, and to remain engaged long enough for others to assume ownership.

Ideas, he understood, were fragile in their early stages. They required protection rather than praise. Once they matured, they required distance.

That, he believed, was how institutions were born.

Chapter 9: The Long Arc of Commitment

Over the years, his work in social service taught him an enduring truth: certainty is an illusion. A “yes” at the beginning does not guarantee a “yes” at the end, just as a “no” is rarely permanent. Projects evolve, people change, and outcomes often refuse to align with original intentions. What sustained him through this unpredictability was not assurance of success, but the depth of his commitment. He came to believe that commitment itself possessed a quiet intelligence, one that carried effort forward even when logic suggested withdrawal, and one that returned value in ways never imagined at the outset.

This understanding crystallised during his engagement with Rotary’s involvement in the Pulse Polio campaign. Across the country, Rotary clubs worked closely with Primary health centres (PHC’s) during national immunisation days. Watching this collaboration, he began to question its limitations. Why, he wondered, should such a powerful partnership exist only on a few designated days each year? PHCs already had doctors, infrastructure, and access to communities. Rotary brought flexibility, resources, and an army of committed volunteers. If the relationship could be extended beyond immunisation drives, even small Rotary interventions, specialist consultations, additional medicines, diagnostic equipment, or mobile screening units, could significantly strengthen grassroots healthcare.

Driven by this conviction, he proposed an ambitious idea: a Statewide memorandum of understanding that would

allow every Rotary Club in Karnataka to work with any Primary Health Centre without seeking repeated permissions. One comprehensive agreement with the government, he believed, could remove bureaucratic barriers and unleash collective action. What followed was nearly six months of relentless effort. He walked the corridors of Arogya Soudha so frequently that officials there recognised him instinctively. Files moved slowly, looping through legal departments, returning with questions, and moving again. Political leadership changed, governments fell and rose, and Rotary itself underwent structural division into separate districts. Yet, through sheer persistence rather than positional authority, the MOUs were finally signed. On paper, Rotary Karnataka now had unprecedented access to partner with PHCs across the State.

He believed the most difficult part of the journey was complete. He was mistaken.

The signing ceremony was celebratory—photographs, speeches, and formalities marked what appeared to be a landmark achievement. But once the applause subsided, momentum failed to follow. The Rotary structure, which needed to translate policy into practice, remained largely inactive. Projects did not take shape at scale. The promise he had worked so tirelessly to secure remained mostly unrealised. For the first time in many years, he felt not anger, but a quiet and heavy sadness—an ache born of seeing genuine effort fail to become living action.

Then, unexpectedly, another door opened.

A letter arrived from the Deputy Director of Health and Family Welfare. During the COVID-19 pandemic, four large 'Lab on Wheels' vehicles—fully equipped mobile medical units donated by Infosys—had been deployed across Karnataka. After the crisis period, they were parked and left unused. The department was now seeking a government-approved organisation that could put them back into service. The letter reached him simply because, over time, he had become a familiar and trusted face—someone who showed up, followed through, and did not disappear.

Senior Rotarians were invited to participate, but few showed interest. The proposal appeared risky, laden with responsibility and potential liability. He attended the meeting alone. Representatives from major institutions like Ambedkar Medical College, St. John's Medical College, and Kidwai Memorial Institute sat around the table, each cautiously negotiating limited access to a vehicle. When his turn came, he made no demands. He said only, "Whatever you offer, we will try to take."

Fifteen days later, another letter arrived. The government proposed handing over all four vehicles to Rotary.

The scale of the offer was daunting. Each vehicle was valued at over a crore rupees. They had been unused for years—what if they no longer functioned? What if Rotary inherited an unmanageable burden? Doubt surfaced, as it often does at moments of opportunity. Yet once again, an unplanned conversation altered the course. A Rotarian from Cubbon Park mentioned that his associated hospital was already budgeting close to eighty lakhs for a similar

mobile unit. One vehicle, he was told, was not enough—there were four. That single possibility set off a chain reaction. Within weeks, four Rotary Clubs and four medical institutions committed to adopting the vehicles.

When they finally visited the yard where the vehicles were parked, apprehension peaked. Leaves covered the roofs; the vehicles looked abandoned. Someone joked that a problem had been quietly transferred onto Rotary's shoulders. Then the engines were tested. One by one, all four vehicles started. Inside, they were clean, intact, and remarkably well-preserved—protected by shade and untouched by misuse. The moment felt almost unreal.

Today, those four mobile laboratories are active on the ground, serving communities through gastroenterology hospitals, medical colleges, and multispecialty institutions. They conduct free screenings, structured outreach programs, and extend care to those who otherwise could not afford it. What once appeared to be a failed initiative—the stalled PHC collaboration—had transformed into something else entirely: healthcare on wheels, worth several crores, reaching people directly.

This recurring pattern of unintended outcomes surfaced again through a meeting he had nearly resented. A former CEO, a classmate of his brother from the Indian Institute of Science, asked to see him. Expecting discussions around corporate social responsibility, he travelled across the city. Instead, the man said simply, "I am retiring. I want to teach." For a fleeting moment, irritation arose. Had he made this journey merely to help someone find a teaching role? But instinct prevailed over impatience.

He connected the retired executive to a modest school in Hazaribagh that he had been supporting quietly for years—repairing classrooms after storms, building toilets, and setting up laboratories through small donations and personal networks. When the man and his wife began teaching ninth and tenth standards, the transformation was immediate and profound. Academic results soared. Students crossed thresholds that made them eligible for scholarships. Confidence replaced uncertainty. Teaching became a mission rather than an occupation. The teacher's credibility drew his former company into the story, resulting in the construction of a new school building and facilities funded to the tune of a crore. A decade later, the school continues to produce outstanding results, sustained by discipline, punctuality, and an unwavering love for education.

There were lessons, too, born from disappointment. A close friend once withdrew promised funding because a condition—however minor—had been violated. He accepted the setback without resentment, learning patience, restraint, and respect for donor intent. Years later, the same friend returned, this time supporting a project 20 times larger than the one he had once declined. Trust, he learned, matures silently.

Looking back, the pattern became impossible to ignore. Work done with sincerity does not disappear. It may not reward effort immediately, nor in the form one expects. It may wander, change shape, or return years later bearing little resemblance to its origin. But it returns—often multiplied in value and impact.

This, he came to understand, is the quiet law of service: do not overdesign outcomes. Commit to the work. Respect people and processes. Remain present even when progress stalls. Somewhere beyond immediate sight, effort is gathering strength—waiting patiently for the moment it returns, transformed, to surprise those who never gave up.

Chapter 10: Impact Without Arithmetic

He was often asked how he measured impact. The question itself revealed an expectation he did not share. He did not search for numbers, graphs, or detailed reports—not because such tools were irrelevant, but because they could be misleading. Impact, he believed, was among the easiest things to exaggerate, particularly when affirmation was desired.

For him, impact began much earlier—at the point where trust was established.

When a need appeared genuine, and the people involved seemed reasonably trustworthy, he acted. He did not wait for outcomes to present themselves neatly. He did not insist on visibility. Nor did he expect every effort to conclude with a clear narrative of success. Sincerity itself, he believed, generated impact. Even a small act carried significance for the person who received it, and that was justification enough.

One such moment occurred in Sirsi, Karnataka, where he travelled with the NGO that was connected to a funding source, the endosulfan victims. He encountered families affected by endosulfan poisoning. Until then, endosulfan had been an abstraction—a pesticide, a policy issue. Confronted with children whose lives were permanently altered, whose futures were limited to physiotherapy, nutrition, and lifelong care, abstraction vanished. This was not the consequence of a single event or a single generation. It repeated itself, relentlessly.

Mothers who hoped their second child would be spared watched the same fate unfold again and again. In such moments, comparison became meaningless. Complaints lost relevance. Questions like whether an effort was "enough" ceased to matter. Action became the only ethical response.

That experience reaffirmed a distinction he had long recognised. There were those meant to study impact, to document it, to analyse it rigorously. He was not among them.

His role was simpler: to listen, to connect, and to enable.

He trusted people—perhaps more readily than some advised—but never blindly. He understood that some degree of leakage was inevitable. Perfection was neither realistic nor required. Waiting for absolute purity would ensure stagnation. Yet trust itself remained non-negotiable.

Mistakes, he accepted. Silence, he did not.

When errors occurred, he expected them to be acknowledged plainly. He could be sharp, even angry. He made no claims to detachment. But resolution, he believed, was possible only when truth was placed openly on the table. What he could not tolerate was evasion—exaggerated stories, endlessly deferred promises, or credibility borrowed without substance.

Once trust was compromised, disengagement followed quietly.

Over the years, he observed shifts in education, particularly within government systems. Teaching quality, in his view, had declined—not due to a single cause, but systemic erosion. Ownership weakened. Accountability thinned. Dedicated teachers remained, but often as exceptions resisting a heavy current.

The deeper tragedy, he felt, lay not in infrastructure but in indifference.

Yet alongside this, he also encountered extraordinary individuals—teachers willing to work anywhere, administrators who still believed service mattered, officers who supported initiatives quietly without seeking favour. Systems were slow, he knew, but sincerity cut through them more effectively than confrontation ever could.

His experience with government reinforced a consistent lesson: approach without expectation of personal gain, return persistently, speak plainly—and doors would open. Not always immediately. Not always predictably. But over time, they did.

The same principle applied to the private sector. Corporate arrogance existed. CSR politics existed. Yet clarity mattered. When requests were reasonable and intent was visible, collaboration became possible.

Most of his work began with information. He heard something, examined it from a different angle, and asked whether it could become a structured intervention. He did not pursue funding first. He pursued form. Money, he found, followed structure far more readily than emotion.

This was how thousands of computers eventually reached schools—through an unplanned conversation, a temporary storage request, a casual introduction. There was no strategy document or pitch deck. Only attentiveness and follow-through.

When asked how one might enter social service, he offered no formula. He did not believe in prescribed paths or motivational instruction. He could only describe his own pattern: when a problem appeared before him, he attempted to solve it. Repeated over time, that habit became a service.

If the mindset arose naturally, service followed. If it did not, forcing it led only to frustration.

What sustained him was not motivation, but acceptance.

He accepted that life was fluid. Plans collapsed. Opportunities shifted. Affirmations were provisional. Rejections were not always final. Reading between those uncertainties was where experience proved its value.

He had failed. He had misjudged people. He had trusted wrongly. He had also witnessed outcomes that bordered on the miraculous, emerging from decisions that seemed casual at the time.

Through all of it, one conviction remained intact: humanity mattered.

As long as that belief persisted—deeply and instinctively—movement continued. Response followed. Doors opened for others, without any need to pass through them personally.

If his work was remembered at all, he believed it would not be because he had sought remembrance. It would surface only when it mattered to someone else.

That, to him, was the only remembrance worth having. He was content with that.

Chapter 11: A Life That Begins at 3 am

His days begin early—at three in the morning.

Not out of discipline, but disposition. His mind wakes naturally at that hour and refuses rest. By the time most of the world is still asleep, he is already attending to messages, unfinished threads, and quiet obligations waiting for response.

The hours between three and four are reserved for work done without interruption. Tea follows at four. One hour of brisk walking. Porridge at five. At six, a call from his daughter—unfailingly. Coffee comes next. Somewhere within this rhythm, work continues. Someone requires an introduction. Someone needs words shaped carefully. Someone seeks clarity.

Breakfast is at seven-thirty. The morning fills with meetings, writing, thinking, and responding. Lunch is taken in fragments. Tea punctuates the afternoon at regular intervals. Dinner arrives early, at six-thirty. By seven-thirty, he sleeps.

The structure remains consistent.
The content never does.

Some mornings are absorbed by trust meetings. On others, a visitor from abroad arrives with an idea that requires shaping. Occasionally, he is asked to accompany someone—not because they lack knowledge, but because they trust his ability to translate intent into expression.

People rely on him to say what they mean.

That trust fills his days more than formal appointments ever could.

He lives without television. Newspapers left his home years ago. He does not follow daily news cycles. What reaches him does so through people, not screens.

And people continue to arrive.

He and his wife entertain infrequently - not always physically - but through calls, messages, and chance encounters. One introduction leads to another. A breakfast conversation evolves into collaboration. A casual exchange becomes an invitation to Japan.

Life moves that way—quietly busy, never static.
Through all of it, one presence remains constant.
His wife.

When asked about their love story, he often smiles. It does not conform to conventional expectations. She was quiet, reserved—a project assistant in a laboratory, not directly connected to his work. He, by contrast, was restless, sociable, and present everywhere.

She was steady where he was restless, practical where he was impulsive. She managed what he overlooked. She gave away what others might preserve. Silk sarees became wedding gifts for others. Money moved without anxiety. Credit was never claimed.

She never asked why they were doing what they did.
She never asked what they would gain.

That silence was not absence. It was strength.

He acknowledged this without reservation: without her, his life would not have taken this shape. The acknowledgement did not diminish him. It completed him.

They did not occupy each other's territories. She did not attend Rotary meetings. He did not intrude into her spaces. Their balance was defined by respect, not control.

Even now, people from her past entered quietly and left behind generosity without announcement—a cheque, a gesture, no explanation required.

That was how their life had been built—without noise, without display.

He moved through the world without fanfare. If he was recognised, it mattered little. If he was not, it mattered even less. Dignity, he believed, did not depend on recognition. Respect followed conduct.

This life—structured yet fluid, demanding yet peaceful—had not been designed. It had evolved.

And every morning, at three, it began again.

Chapter 12: The Quiet Agreement

Some relationships are built on promises. Others are built on understanding. He belonged firmly to the latter.

Nothing about their life together followed the dramatic arc often expected of personal narratives. There were no public declarations, no sacrifices announced for recognition. What existed instead was agreement—steady, unspoken, and enduring. It was not an agreement that required periodic affirmation. It held without renewal.

She never asked for a different life. He never asked her to justify his. That silence between expectations became their greatest strength.

There was a common assumption that a life devoted to service required the abandonment of personal comfort. He never accepted that premise. Comfort, as he understood it, had little to do with excess and everything to do with alignment. When two people desired the same things without needing constant articulation, life moved efficiently.

They never set out to live minimally. It occurred naturally. Possessions arrived and departed. Recognition surfaced briefly and dissolved. None of it lingered long enough to occupy the mind.

This was not detachment.
It was clarity.

Their daughter grew up within this atmosphere, without instruction or lecture. She observed generosity as practice rather than principle. She saw decisions made without

fear, disagreements resolved without spectacle. That education, they believed, mattered more than any formal provision.

Years later, when he saw the same steadiness reflected in her child, he recognised continuity—not of wealth, but of temperament.

To him, that was a legacy.

People occasionally asked why he continued to remain active, why he did not slow down. The answer, for him, was uncomplicated: nothing felt heavy.

When life was lived without bargaining—without the internal question of return—work ceased to feel like effort. It became a movement, as natural as breathing or walking.

He does not wake up at three in the morning with ambition in mind. He wakes up because something requires a response. The distinction mattered. Response did not exhaust. Ambition did.

If a day arrived without demand, he would remain still. If a day arrived with everything at once, he would sort through it patiently.

Both outcomes were acceptable.

This was not discipline.
It was peace.

And peace, he had learned, did not come from withdrawing from the world, but from engaging with it without possession.

That was the agreement he had made long ago.

With life.
And with her.

A showcase of some of the many awards that Shri S Jayaraman has been honoured for his exceptional contributions as a philanthropist.

Scodwes Karnataka Seva Ratna

Rotary Recognition for Avoidable Blindness Support

Recognition for Efforts in Eye Donation by Minister Harshavardhan

Vidyasakthi Vidhyabharana Award at IIT Madras

Support to Eye Donation Award

Honour by the Rotary Lakeside

Recognition for Service to Society at Lakshmi Narasimha Kshetra

Rotary Award for Key Role in getting 4 Wellness on Wheels Vehicles

Ni-Kshaya Mitra Award from State Governer

Advisor Arogya City Initiative Award

Avenue of Services Award from Rotary

Award doe Carl Zeiss Support through Rotary

Manav Ratna Award from Manav Charities

District Award from Rotary

Future of India Award-Humanitarian of the Year.

Award for Social Service and Community Impact

EFFATHA Award

The most prestigious Sanatana Dharma Sevaka Award








"Three in the morning"

A narrative of Service personified..
A Biography of **Shree S Jayaraman**

A life of service does not begin with grand intent, nor does it require heroic sacrifice. It begins with attention, with noticing where systems fail, where dignity is strained, where effort can reduce difficulty. When response becomes habit, and habit becomes temperament, service stops feeling like work. It becomes a way of moving through the world.

What endures is not how much one does, but how lightly one carries it—leaving behind not dependence, but direction.

Pooja Joshi
Author

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276/D, 37th cross, 8th block, Jayanagar
Bengaluru - 560072.
Cover page Design - Sumuk Shanbog S
Printed @ Omkar Offset Printers

"Three in the morning" A narrative of Service personified.. A Biography of **Shree S Jayaraman**