



ADVENTURE FIRST: Sudha parasailing with her daughter, snorkelling at Great Barrier Reef and trekking in Grand Canyon

Beyond RAAGA

● Sudha Ragunathan is a three-time recipient of the outstanding student award from Ethiraj College For Women

● Before every performance, she downs a glass of home-made kashayam — a mix of dried medicinal herbs, pana kalkand, thipili, val molagu (smaller form of pepper) boiled in water

● At the Big Islands in Hawaii, Sudha ended up walking along a mile-long stretch of cooled lava. Her dream destinations include Lake Manasarovar and Alaska

she's a part of, Sudha has her work cut out for her. The multiple commitments at hand must mean very little time to compose.

"Yes, especially during season time. You want to come up with a new composition or experiment with a raga. But there is little time left and you postpone the exercise for a whole year," she says.

This is what pushes Sudha to drain her creative juices on a 'sangadhi' (the technical innovation that an artist brings to the song) or hold that note a second longer ('karvei') every time she performs. "As an artiste, it's important to push one's individuality. But one must possess the desire to create. Originality cannot be an outcome of pressure," she says.

What little time she has on hands, this economics major likes to spend reading. Stress-busting and motivational books like Stuart Wilde's 'Miracles', apart from Sidney Sheldon are among my favourites, says this celebrity singer who also loves strolling down the aisles of Barnes & Noble when she is in the UK. Poking around the kitchen to whip up lip-smacking 'avial' and 'vatha kuzhambu' for her family is another way Sudha likes to de-stress. "On one occasion though, badam burfi turned out to be badam halwa," she says, bursting out laughing.

Her cell phone purrs in the background and a date for a concert gets confirmed. For most Carnatic music lovers, attending concerts are a way to get closer to artistes and therefore, almost a spiritual experience. But for Sudha, concerts, especially international, can be mired in banalities. "The recent baggage restriction has meant packing fewer pattu pudavais for concert tours. So I am found ironing these saris in hotel rooms," she says with mock seriousness.

But this does not mean that Sudha doesn't hit the malls when she is touring. She is a regular at Macy's, J.C. Penney and Dillard's, picking up bags, clothes and watches for her family and friends. "But I am careful about my money. This is what restrains me from going berserk on New York's Fifth Avenue," she says with a grin.

Every year, the Ragunathans, including Sudha's children, Kaushik and Malavika, make it a point to take off on an annual vacation. And it is during these times that one gets to see this mother cum celebrity singer in her element.

From para-sailing and snorkelling at the Great Barrier Reef to swimming with dolphins in the Bahamas and trekking in Grand Canyon National Park, she's done it all. "When I tried para-sailing for the first time, my entire body went rigid. I was paranoid and kept wondering when I would touch ground again," she says. "I am not great with water but the fear and excitement that accompanies these sports are addictive," she says.

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When THE Singer GETS Sporty

Sudha Ragunathan
Chats About Her
Love For Snorkelling,
Shopping And
Sidney Sheldon

Lakshmy Ramanathan | TNN

A rustling Kancheepuram silk sari shed for a pair of cotton capris. A bunch of jasmine flowers for snorkelling gear. And a rock-solid stage traded for a bumpy ride on a dolphin's back. This is what Sudha Ragunathan does when she decides to let her hair down. Away from the spotlight, it's refreshing to find that this Padma Shri recipient is

more than just one of the leading exponents of Carnatic music today.

The strumming of a tambura and the clearing of a voice before launching into a raga are the sounds that one expects to hear before entering a musician's house but at Sudha's, all forms of music are muted by tranquil silence. "To my ears, the most pleasing sound is that of a child's

laugh," says the singer who sits curled up on a sofa, gazing out of the window.

"I have my foot in a number of things and just staring into nothingness helps me take my mind off them," she explains. From concerts to welfare organisations that she supports to forums such as the All India Music Group (where issues concerning classical music are raised) that



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