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RAJAH SIR MUTHIAH CHETTIAR'S NOBLE SERVICE TO TAMIL MUSIC

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Abstract:-Tracing the history of Tamil Isai is indeed very interesting. It was greatly patronized even during the sangam age. During the dark period, it lost patronage and support. As a result, it received a serious setback. After the end of the Kalabhra rule, Pandian Kingdom established his rule in Madurai and founded an Isai Sangam in Madurai.¹

Keywords:history , Noble Service , patronized .

INTRODUCTION

In the Seventh century A.D., Thirugnana Sambandar and Thirunavukkarasar contributed to the growth of Tamil Isai. Mahendra Varma-I, the Pallava King, who ruled Tondainadu and Cholanadu was well versed in the Isai kalai (Art of Music) and his contribution towards Tamil Isai (Tamil Music) was indeed remarkable.

The patronage of Tamil Isai continued during the later period also under different rulers. As a result, Tamil Isai was very much developed. It may be inferred from Kalingathu Parani that Kulothunga Chola was the author of a work on music namely Isai Tamil Nool.²

However, this progress of Tamil Isai, received a set back during Muslim conquests and also due to the advent of the Telugu Kings of Vijayanagar. Telugu singers and Telugu music spread widely in Tamil Nadu.³ This position did not change till the first half of the twentieth century and hence its impact on the country was very pronounced to the extent that it was felt even after the end of the rule of Telugu kings. The impact of Telugu Music continued and grew in greater proportions. Sooner it so became that Tamil musicians themselves took pride in singing Telugu Kirthanas during Musci Festivals.⁴

It was at this stage Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar came forward to encourage Tamil Isai and Tamil Musicians. In 1929, he established a Music College in Chidambaram and later on in the year 1932, he affiliated the Institute to the Annamalai University. The contribution of the College to the field of music is thought provoking.

Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar showed keen interest in Tamil Isai right from his early days. When he was the Mayor of Madras he inaugurated the Madras Music Conference on 22nd December 1934 and spoke in the conference in faovur of Tamil Isai and said that importance was to be given to Tamil Isai. A conference for Tamil Isai was arranged in Madras for a week.⁵

During the tenure of office as Minister for Local Self Government and Hindu Religious Endowments, he passed a Bill regarding Tamil Isai in 1937. According to this Bill, it was expected that every temple in the Presidency should make arrangements for reciting Thevaram Hymns. It also insisted that a Thevara Padasalai should be established in every temple.

On 12th March 1939, Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar inaugurated the Nilakottai Tamil Conference and hoisted the Tamil Flag. On the occasion, he insisted unity among the Tamils. He wanted that Tamil Isai should be developed in every possible way⁶ Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar gave a sum of Rs. 16,000/- to be utilized for the growth of Tamil Isai, on 16th November 1940.⁷ For the first time, a conference for the growth of Tamil Isai was organized and it was conducted for four days from 14th August to 17th August 1941 in the Campus of Annamalai University. M.M. Dandapani Desigar, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Kumbakonam K.Rajamanickam Pillai, Tiger Varadhachariar, Muthiah Bhavather and several other distinguished musicians attended the Conference.⁸

The conference moved two important resolutions the first being, that in all Music Academic in Madras State

only Tamil songs should be sung and the second was that in all Dramas and Cinemas produced in Tamil Nadu, Tamil songs alone should be given priority over the compositions in other language.⁹

Further, in September 1941 a meeting was held under the Presidentship of Periyar E.V.Ramasamy at Trichy. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar attended the meeting and delivered a speech about the significance of Tamil Isai movement and also expressed his willingness to take part in the Movement. Periyar E.V. Ramasamy agreed while endorsing Muthiah Chettiar's speech.¹⁰ In the mean while, a conference was held at Victoria Hall in Madras on 16th September 1941 to encourage the Tamil Isai movement. C.N. Annadurai, M.M.Dhandapani Desigar and Several other eminent men attended the conference. On seeing the vast gathering, Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar was extremely pleased and expressed the hope that with such a patronage there should be no hindrance of any kind to the growth of Tamil Isai movement.¹¹ He appealed to the Tamil Musicians that they should sing in Tamil only. Annamalai Chettair gave another contribution of Rs. 15,000/- to encourage Tamil Isai on his Sixtieth Birth day¹² Then he organized a Tamil Isai Conference on 26th October 1941. Kigali Sir Muthiah Chettiar helped his father in all possible ways in the field of Tamil Isai. He delivered a scintillating speech in the conference. He further requested the musicians to sing only Tamil songs.¹³ Following this, there was another Tamil Isai conference held in Trichy on December 20, 1941 under the leadership of Ponniah Pillai and it was at this juncture another Music College was opened in Trichy.¹⁴

While Tamil Isai was witnessing a remarkable progress, the Madras and Trichy All India Radio stations were not providing ample coverage to Tamil Isai. Rajah Annamalai Chettair found this out at the right time by leading a movement with his son, Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar against this practice and succeeded in his efforts in popularizing Tamil Isai. Following this a number of Tamil Isai conference throughout the state.

The most important aspect of this development was the personal involvement of 'Jamil Isaivanar M.M. Dhandapani Desigar. During the Theagaraja Festival at Thiruvaiyaru, he sung only Tamil songs in the Musical conference. This incident provoked another singer who insisted according to him, clean the stage which was polluted as a result of such recitals.¹⁵

The social insult affected many of the Tamil people and Tamil singers. This incident led to form the Tamil Isai Sangam. All the Tamil scholars and Tamil Isai Vanars realized the necessity of a permanent Tamil Isai Sangam for the growth of Tamil Music. All Tamil scholars and Tamil Musician came under the presidentship of Rajah Annamalai Chettair and urged him to start Tamil Isai Sangam. With the great efforts of Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar and R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar Tamil Isai Sangam was started in Madras Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar gave a generous contribution of Rs.20,000/- in May 1943. He came its President and R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar was nominated the Vice-President. The Tamil Isai Sangam conducted the Tamil Isai vizha (Music Festival at St. Mary's Mandapam in Madras from 23rd December 1943 to 4th January 1944.¹⁶ It was the greatest occasion in the history of the growth of Tamil Isai. Even today the Tamil Isai Vizha (Tamil Music Festival) is being conducted every December.

At the end of this first Isai vizha, Annamalai Chettair brought to notice several decisions that were taken by the Tamil Isai Sangam. To further the growth of Tamil Isai, Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar started a Music College on 23rd January 1944 in Madras.¹⁷

In those days, All India Radio, Trichy, did not allot enough time for broadcasting Tamil Programmes. So Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar started a peaceful struggle against the Trichy Radio Station in order to get more time allotted for broadcasting Tamil songs. He sent a warning notice to the All India Radio, Trichy. As a result of the programmes Advisory Committee and fulfilled his cherished ambitions.¹⁸ He also urged the Radio Station to broadcast Thevaram songs.¹⁹

After the death of Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar, the Tamil Isai Sangam was patronized by his illustrious son Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar. He became its Vice-President and continued in this post till his last day. Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar always wished to have a permanent building for the Tamil Isai Sangam. The whole credit for constructing a building, goes to his illustrious son Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar. With the help of Sir R.K.Shanmugam Chettiar and M.A. Chidambaram Chettiar, he began the construction of a building in 1950 at Esplanade in Madras. The building was completed in 1952. This was opened on 31st October 1952, by the then Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachariar. This building is now called Rajah Annamalai Mandaram.

MADURAI TAMIL ISAI SANGAM

Madurai Tamil Isai Sangam was started by Shanmugavel Rajan in 1944. But in later stages, it slowly declined due to various reasons. But the necessity of the Tamil Sangam in Madurai was felt by Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar. He wanted to extend Tamil Isai to Madurai also. For that purpose, he founded a Tamil Isai Sangam with the help of L. Alagu Sundaram Chettair, T.M. Narayanasamy Pillai and Rama AR. Subramaniam Chettair in Madurai on 21st January 1974. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar contributed Rs.3 lakhs to purchase a site for Tamil Isai Sangam.²⁰ Madurai Tamil Isai Sangam was constructed in 1974, named after Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar and called "Rajah Muthiah Mandram".

RESEARCH ON TAMIL ISAI PAN

Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar was a staunch lover of Tamil Isai. He wanted to find out many facts about Tamil Isai. One of the aims of the Tamil Isai Sangam is to conduct research on Tamil Isai and bring out its salient features so as to enable people to appreciate it in the proper perspective. For this purpose, he organized a Pan research Committee under the presidentship of Sir. R.K. Shnamugam Chettiar on 25th November 1949. They insisted that Thevaram song should be sung in the traditional methods throughout the country.²¹

The minute details and facts about Pan and Kattalai have been brought out because of intense research activities.²² Upto 1981, the pan research committee discovered 23 new pans.²³ All these researchers would not have been possible but for the encouragement given by Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar.

CHAMBER FOR MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: (Isai Karuvi Nilayam)

As a result of the initiative taken by Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar several Musical Instruments were collected and exhibited at Rajah Annamalai Mandram. This house for Musical Instruments was opened on 1st January 1956 and a demonstration regarding the performance of instruments was shown to the public. The Musical instrument Chamber has 44 kinds of Instruments. This shows the keen interest of Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar in Tamil Isai. He also wanted to give importance to one of the oldest instruments which is in vogue to-day that is Sarangi yazh.²⁴

The talents of the Tamil scholars and musicians went unnoticed for long. As a result Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar insistence, for the first time Somasundara Bharathiar was given the Doctorate Degree at the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Annamalai University in 1954. 25 Annual Music Festivals at Rajah Annamalai Mandram in Madras and Rajah Muthiah Mandram in Madurai were Rajah Muthiah Chettiar's special interest. He would not accept any other engagement during the ten days in December for the Madras Festival and ten days in April for the Madurai Festival. He would attend the programmes on all these days, even the last programme from 9.30 p.m. to 12 midnight. His policy was to encourage and enthuse the Vidwans by his presence. This amply illustrates the deep interest of Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar in the field of Tamil Isai.

Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar's contribution to the field of Tamil Isai is really noteworthy. In appreciation of his contribution to Tamil Isai he was given the title of Tamil Isai Kavalalar (patron of Tamil Music) by the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Hon'ble M.G. Ramachandran on 29th April 1979.

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