

RAJA SIR. ANNAMALAI CHETTIYAR (THE KING OF CHETTINAD) THE FOUNDER OF ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

One Single Community, outside the Marava of Sivagangai, responsible for the brand value of Sivagangai is the community of Nattukottai Chettiyar alias Nagarathar. Like the Banyas of the North, the community of Chettiyar are in the banking business. During the period of the pre-independent India, these merchant families consistently advanced loans to the Zamindar of Sivagangai and helped them to meet their financial obligations to British East India Company. No wonder it was the same Chettiyar Community which distinguished themselves in the promotion of educational Institutions, maintenance of temples etc. Annamalai Chettiyar would belonging to the same chettiyar community would rank as the out standing example who deviating from the traditional business of finance and emerging as the captain of Industry and Philanthro Educationalist and turned Chidambaram into the abode of Saraswathi¹.

Keywords: Nagarathar, Zamindar, Chettiyar Community, Annamalai Chettiyar, The Chettinadu, Nattukottai Nagarathar Sangam

Birth

Annamalai Chettiyar was born on 30th September 1881 to S.R.M.Mutthiah Chettiyar at Kanadukathan in the former Sivagangai Estate in the Madras Presidency of British India. He was born into a distinguished family of bankers and Industrialists. His full name is Raja Sir Sathappa Ramanatha Muthaiah Annamalai Chettiyar² known simply as Rajah Annamalai Chettiyar was an Indian, Industrialist, Banker, Educationist and Philanthropist. He is largely remembered for his social work and endowments in Tamil Nadu. His brother S.R.M.M Ramaswamy Chettiyar was one of the founder of the Indian Bank. M.A.Muthiah Chettiyar was his eldest son was a Provincial Minister in Madras presidency (1936-37), M.A Chidambaram (1918-2000), the youngest son of S.R.M. Annamalai Chettiyar was an Industrialist and Founder of Spic and also the president of BCCI. Annamalai Chettiyar was also the maternal grand father of the former Finance Minister P.Chidambaram.

After School Life

After Schooling, he pursued his family business of finance. During this period of learning the family business, he visited many countries in South East Asia and England.

He witnessed the celebration in connection with the coronation of king George V³. The British conferred him the title "Rao Bahadur" in 1911. By these visits, he learnt the politics; the power of labour and education and by his untiring labour and justified services had done many a good thing and served.

Then he became the Chairman of the Municipality of Karaikudi from 1910-13⁴. He was a Member of Legislative Council of Chennai from 1916-1919. In 1919, he was successfully elected from the General Constituency which was the whole of the Madras Presidency.

In 1916, he transferred from local affairs to the Legislative Council of Madras Presidency where he sat for 3 years. In 1920, he stood for the election to the Council of States, established under the Montague-Chemsford reforms. He held his seat in the council for three consecutive terms always by election.

He was one of the key person responsible for the creation of the Indian Bank and also appointed as a Governor of the Imperial Bank 1921. (Now, State bank of India).

Creation of Chettinadu Town

He is also known for the creation of a town called "The Chettinadu", in a 1000 acre piece of land. He also built a huge palace in his native place of Kanadukathan in 1915. This Mansion is called especially as "Chettinadu Mansion". He created landing facilities for aero planes in Chettinadu⁵.

Other Works

He was cause for the establishing Nattukottai Nagarathar Sangam in Chennai in 1917⁶. He tried for a member seat for Nagarathar in Chennai Assembly and succeeded. The Govt allotted a seat for Nagarathar. He went to France as an Ambassador for Saigon Dana Vanigars⁷. By this, he learnt the politics, and the power of Labour and education and by his untiring Labour and by justified servings had done many a good thing and served. He constructed a hospital in his home town of Kanadukathan and named it after Lady Badland⁸. In 1924, he gave two lakhs Rupees for purchasing a building to accommodate the Ladies club at Madras. This Building was named 'The Willington' and it is very popular centre of Social activity.

Educationist

Annamalai Chettiyar was of the firm view that education was the primary needs for the country, he made his mind to found and endow a college at Chidambaram. Sri Meenakshi College was formally opened on 24.06.1920⁹. Sanskrit and Tamil College were added to the Arts College in 1927¹⁰. Soon an Oriental Training College followed by a College of Music was established. Mahatma Gandhi visited Meenakshi College in 1927. All these Institutions formed a splendid Nucleus for Annamalai University.

Annamalai University

The Crown of his achievement in the field of education, was the creation of Annamalai University. He donated 670 acres of land and rupees 20 Lakhs for formation of a University in Chidambaram. It came into existence on 1st January 1929¹¹ with the passing of the bill and started functioning from July 1929. Annamalai University was the first University which was contributed by a single person's effort in Asia at that time¹². In recognition of this unique service to the cause of learning, a "Knighthood" in 1923 and the distinction of a hereditary 'Rajah of Chettinad'¹³ Was conferred on him in 1929 by the British Government. He also earned the titles from the British King for the valuable services rendered to the crown "Diwan Bahadur" in 1922 and "Sir" in 1923¹⁴. He also financially supported the school run by John Miller and also the colleges like Madurai College and American College. He was also financially supported educational Institutions outside Madras Presidency like Public School in Dehradun and Irwin School in Delhi.

Love for Tamil

Annamalai Chettiyar's love for the Tamil Language was boundless. He popularized the Study of Tamil Pulavar and also responsible for the Introduction of B.A. Honors and M.O.L. in Tamil¹⁵. He donated 2000 Tamil Books to Shanthi Niketan Library at Calcutta¹⁶.

Love for Music

He organised the first conference on Tamil Music in Annamalai Nagar. He also helped to the translation of 21 books on music into Tamil language. He also created Tamil Isai Sangam in Madras in the year 1943¹⁷ with his eldest son Muthaiah Chettiyar. By this, he had proved that Saivam and Tamil are two eyes of Nagarathar. The noted playback singer Chidambaram was brought to light by Annamalai Chettiyar¹⁸. Every year, a Tamil music artist selects by Annamalai Chettiyar charitable Trust and giving the Price of Rupees 1 Lakh on Sep 30. Annamalai University celebrated their silver Jubilee in the year 1955, Golden Jubilee in the year 1979 and Diamond Jubilee in the year 2004. His statue was created in the University in the year 1955. 'Nobler love and Nobler cares'. These words appear at the base of the Statue¹⁹ of Annamalai Chettiyar.

Death of the Immortal

He passed away on 15.06.1948 Former chief Minister M.G.R Praised him as "The person who taught is god. Annamalai Arasar who did service to education and other services can be called as god"²⁰. Government honoured him by publishing stamp in 30.09.1980²¹.

Conclusion

Annamalai Chettiyar was the First person to creation of the University by the single man's effort in Asia. By these activities, he raised the pride of chettinadu and Nagarathar. Annamalai Arasarmade Chidambaram as the "abode of Saraswathi"

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