

Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar

(Speech delivered on the occasion of Platinum Jubilee Celebrations of Annamalai University at Annamalai Nagar on 27.08.2004)

Time cannot erase the fragrant memory of Men and Women who had by their immense service to society left footprints in the sands of Time. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar was one such immortal being.

Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar's illustrious father Rajah Annamalai Chettiar was one of the brightest stars in the firmament of India. He excelled not only in his business but in generosity, philanthropy, kindness and compassion. In the early part of the last century when institutions of higher education were few and far between and institutions of technical education were fewer still, Rajah Annamalai Chettiar started a residential university and opened up the gates of knowledge for the young and stifled youth of India. Chettiars of Tamil Nadu were famous for building temples choultries and tanks. It was however given to Rajah Annamalai Chettiar to build a much greater temple, the Temple of Learning at Annamalainagar.

Meenakshi College changed into Annamalai University not merely in name but in substance also. After doing the first year of my honours course in Loyola College Madras, I joined the college at Chidambaram. We, the last batch of Honours students taking degree from the Madras University were however afforded all the facilities of the new born University without any discrimination. New faculty members with high academic qualifications were inducted.

Professor K Swaminathan who had returned to Meenakshi College with a degree from Oxford was an enthusiastic reformer and wanted to change the outlook of the alumni. He started a Social Reform Club and encouraged young men with modern and progressive outlook to meet once a week and discuss issues like equality of all human beings, among men and women, caste tyranny, dowry system and other archaic practices.

The Meenakshi College students union became the Annamalai University Students Union. Prof K Swaminathan used to tell us that we should emulate the Oxford University Union and have a debate between rival candidates before the election of the President of the Annamalai University Union.

He used to tell us that the Presidents of the Oxford University union invariably became Prime Ministers of England.

We are not far behind. At least one President of Annamalai University Union became the President of India. I have every confidence that many more will follow suit and bring credit to the University.

If Rajah Annamalai Chettiar was the Architect of the University, Rajah Sir Muthiah was the Chief Engineer who constructed, expanded and embellished it. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar as pro-chancellor of Annamalai University truly fulfilled the aspirations of the founder. He started new departments, new centres for Advanced Studies in Marine biology, Computer Technology, Medical and dental Sciences. Rajah Sir Muthiah was a multi-faceted and multi-splendoured personality. He was the first to be designated as the Mayor of the City of Madras. He became Minister for Education, Health etc., of the Madras Presidency in 1936 during the British Rule. When in 1957, I became the Minister for Industries, in the then Madras State he was a member of the Madras Legislative Council.

A close association developed between us, which continued till the end of his life. He was a model legislator. He maintained the decorum and dignity of the House. His speeches always contained some valuable suggestions for improvement. His criticism of the programme or policy of Government was trimmed with a lace of elegant expression.

There was no major activity in Madras State with which he was not associated. He built –up the Indian Bank as its Chairman into one of the major banks of India. He was the President of South India Chamber of Commerce, with which he was associated for over half a century. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries at Delhi recognized his contribution to Industry and Commerce and elected him as its President.

Art and Life are not two separate compartments of human beings. Culture ennobled and elevated humans from the beast that they were initially to the level we are in today. Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar has done yeoman service by organizing and fostering the *Tamil Isai Sangam*. He helped revive the pride of place to the millennia old Tamil compositions. He nurtured Art and Culture generously.

Above all, Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar was a gentleman to the core. He was the pink of courtesy, kindness and compassion. He led a noble life full of services to the nation and the people.

I am happy that his worthy son Shri MAM Ramaswami, the current Pro Chancellor of the Annamalai University has picked up the threads and continuing the great traditions of the family. The University is leaping forward in every direction under his fostering care. I wish all success in life.

The Birth Centenary Memorial Arch which, I have the privilege of opening, will stand as a memorial to succeeding generations of students of the invaluable services that Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar rendered to the University, the state and the nation. It will inspire young minds to lead a fruitful life of service to the society and to the country.

Lives of great men remind us
We can make our life sublime
Departing leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.
