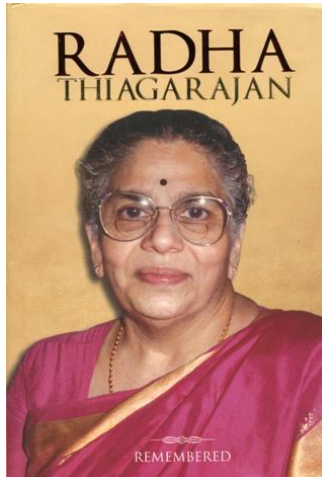


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Notes from Radha Thiagarajan's life



Special Arrangement
Radha Thiagarajan: Remembered.

Radha Thiagarajan: Remembered is a tribute of love from her family and friends

In the 87 years of her life, Radha Thiagarajan has been many things — educationist, industrialist, scholar — but it is as a matriarch and a friend to all that she is portrayed in *Radha Thiagarajan: Remembered*. Released on the occasion of her first death anniversary this year, the book has been written by her daughter-in-law, Uma Kannan, “a rare event” as Prof. V.C. Kulandaiswamy, former Vice-Chancellor, IGNOU, writes in his foreword.

The 310-page volume, filled with glossy pages and photographs from across the decades, begins with loving notes on Radha from her son, Karumuttu T. Kannan, daughter Lakshmi Murugesan, grandchildren M. Thiagarajan and Sala Kannan (who fondly called her ‘mummy’) and old friend, Princess Gouri Parvathi Bayi of the Travancore royal family, among others.

Travancore is where it all began for Radha. Born on April 12, 1926 in Kizhuvilam, a village of lush green paddy fields, into a prosperous family, Radha’s childhood was rooted in tradition and festivity. It also prepared her for all the laurels that followed her through life.

Her father trained her in oratory, she attended panchayat meetings with him and once the school years were over, she went on to graduate with distinction in Zoology from the Maharaja College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram. In 1951, the ‘Attingal beauty’ as she was known married eminent industrialist ‘Kalaithanthai’ Karumuttu Thiagarajan Chettiar at a Murugan temple near

Courtrallam. This was a rare marriage given that Chettiar came from an affluent Tamil family in the textile business while Radha came from the land across the ghats. The book, however, barely mentions what first brought together these two extraordinary individuals.

Chettiar brought to the marriage his wide experiences as a trailblazing industrialist, journalist, nationalist and educationist with refined tastes in the fine arts. Radha learnt so much from her husband and her move from sleepy Attingal to busy Madurai led her to master the Tamil language and literature under the renowned Tamil scholar, Avvai Duraisamy Pillai. She completed her Masters in English Literature at the family-run Thiagarajar College but it was her doctorate in 'A Study of Mysticism in Tiruvacakam' that truly established her rapport with the land of her marriage. Interestingly, her son Kannan received his BBA degree at the same convocation his mother was awarded her Ph.D. It didn't, however, mark the end of her love for education. Her life-long interest in Saiva Siddhanta led to her establishing the Arul Gnana Sabai in 2001, to promote Tamil spiritual literature.

Chettiar's death in 1974 saw Radha gradually involving herself in the running of the Thiagarajar Group of Colleges and the mills. She also went on to head the Temple Trust Board of the Palani Devasthanam for two terms. Until then, panchamirtham was made "manually using the hands and legs". Radha would have none of it and mechanised the process. It was very much similar to the way she ran her home — with a gentle but firm hand.

In 1985, she was named the first vice-chancellor of the Alagappa University and she served the institution for two terms. During this time, she travelled widely meeting educationists abroad and legislators at home to make education more accessible and meaningful to many. Radha went on to write books in Tamil and in English, including the biography of her husband, *The Textile King*.

When it came to family and friends, Radha was made of softer clay. Her home was always open to guests and her heart to anyone who needed help. She started the tradition of a family meet that now brings together members of the Karumuttu clan from across the globe. That she reached out to so many is evident in the outpouring of condolence messages, featured in the last section of the book.

Lyricaly written in some pages and telling the story as it is in others, Uma Kannan's book is more than just a chronicle of a woman who was an inspiration to many. It is more than just the tale of a person who made another culture her own. It is the story of an extraordinary woman's extraordinary calling.

For another story on Radha Thiagarajan look up

<http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/the-power-to-transform/article5681092.ece>