

Bridging Tradition, Identity, and Social Boundaries in Sri Lanka: The Renaissance of Isai Nadakam Performance by V. V. Vairamuthu (1924-1989)

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This research examines V. V. Vairamuthu's contributions to Isai Nadakam, emphasizing his role as an *Annami*, actor, editor, choreographer, and designer in revitalizing this traditional Tamil performance art in Sri Lanka. Isai Nadakam, a dynamic fusion of music and drama, has deep roots in Tamil cultural traditions and has historically drawn from mythology, folklore, and social themes. Though once integral to religious and cultural events, modernization and socio-political changes posed significant challenges to its survival. Born into a traditional performing arts (kuthu) family, Vairamuthu inherited a rich artistic legacy that connected him to South Indian theatrical traditions. Originating as Isai Natakam in Tamil Nadu, this art form evolved uniquely in the late 19th century across different South Asian regions, adapting to local cultural contexts. As professional theatre troupes traveled between cities and villages, the Sri Lankan Tamil theatre scene was significantly influenced by South Indian performers, shaping Isai Nadakam's growth in the region. This study examines V. V. Vairamuthu's pivotal role in preserving and transforming Isai Nadakam by integrating innovative vocal techniques, expressive acting, and refined staging aesthetics. His contributions allowed the art form to transcend caste and class barriers, making it accessible to diverse audiences. Through this research, Vairamuthu's impact on Tamil theatre and his role in revitalizing Isai Nadakam within Sri Lanka's socio-cultural landscape are critically analyzed. Vairamuthu's signature play, *Arichandra Mayana Kandam* ("Arichandra's Graveyard"), is the only play available in video format and is considered for this research. It was performed over 3,000 times across Sri Lanka. Through his legacy, Isai Nadakam remains a vital cultural expression in the modern era.

Keywords: Isai Nadakam, Cultural Performance, Theatrical Music, Theatrical Innovation