

## This Chennai museum houses rare and vintage musical instruments from across India

Tol Isai Kalanjiam, a museum of musical instruments at Raja Annamalai Mandram, has a collection of 80 instruments and portraits of dancers and musicians.



Folding veena, folding tambura, jalatharangam, Japanese instrument ensemble and panchamukha vadyam  
Chennai:

Here is a great opportunity for music connoisseurs to see rare musical instruments that were once used in concerts and temples. The newly opened Tol Isai Kalanjiam, a museum of musical instruments at the Raja Annamalai Mandram, houses rare and vintage musical instruments from across India.

MA Chidambaram Chettiar, son of Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar, had collected many musical instruments, which were kept in the Sangam in glass cases for the past 60 years. When Valli Arun, the great-granddaughter of Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar and granddaughter of MA Chidambaram Chettiar, became a member of the board of trustees, she came up with an idea of a museum of rare musical instruments. “We worked on the concept and it took us about 1.5 years to set up the museum that has a collection of 80 instruments. Many of them are obsolete — they are not used in any concert platforms. A few of them are used only during temple rituals. Apart from that, a collection of portraits of great dancers and musicians is also displayed in the museum,” says Dr Lakshmi Poduval, curator of the museum.

She took us around the museum that is aesthetically designed like a typical Chettiar household. Some of the rare instruments include panchamukha vadyam, nagara, gethu vadyam, pradارشana veena, mayil naga veena, folding veena and folding tambura.

“There is also an ensemble containing only Japanese musical instruments. We have not added anything except for a few instruments that have been donated by stalwarts,” adds Lakshmi, who is also the coordinator of skype classes at Tamil Isai Sangam.

Instruments are arranged in such a way that folk instruments are displayed on one side, temple instruments on the other, a separate space for foreign instruments and north Indian instruments. Lakshmi says that panchamukha vadyam, ivory nadaswaram and square flute are the three iconic instruments at Tol Isai Kalanjiyam. “Panchamukha vadyam has five faces (mukhas) and each is named after the face of Siva — Sadyojata, Tatpurlusa, Isana, Aghora and Vamadeva. Only two panchamukha vadyams are available in India now — one is with us and the other is played in Tiruvarur temple. The museum is open to the public and we wanted more students to come over and understand the importance of these instruments. We are planning to bring out some CDs that could help the visitors to listen to the music of each instrument when they strike on it. This is our ambitious project and we have started working on it. We are also planning a show by folk instrument artistes who could play and demonstrate on such similar instruments,” she tells us.