

# 6

## BUILDING UP THE EMPIRE

---

*Add more feathers to our wings*

SHAKESPEARE, Henry V

By 1939, Sree Meenakshi Mills had tided over all its crises and established itself. After that kalaithanthai never looked back. He expended his business, starting new mills and buying old ones, in Tamilnadu and kerala. Gradually, he built up a textile empire.

### 1

Sree Meenakshi Mills' growth was phenomenal during the Second World War. Its yarn and cloth entered the international market and it netted huge profits. With a share capital of Rs 15, 00000 and 40000 spindles, it had become a premier mill in the State, and Kalaithanthai set his mind on expansion.

Kalaithanthai put up two mills as units of Sree Meenakshi Mills — the Thiagesar Mills at Manapparai in 1942 and the Sree Meenakshi Mills at Paravai near Madurai in 1956. The Sree Meenakshi group of Mills together had 110000 spindles and the Madurai unit had 400 powerlooms.

Kalaithanthai also started new mills on the outskirts of Madurai in three directions - East, South and North- Rukmini Mills in Silaiman on the Madurai-Ramanathapuram Road, Thiagarajar Mills at Kappalur on the Madurai - Tirumangalam highway and Sivakami Mills at Thenur on the Madurai- Dindigul highway.

### 2

Kalaithanthai also acquired some old mills.

When the Saroja Mills came up for sale in 1935, Kalaithanthai bought its shares in

partnership with A.M. Muthappa Chettiar of Pudukkottai. They jointly started Muthappa and Co to manage the mill. But there were problems in carrying on the business jointly as Muthappa Chettiar interfered in the day-to-day working of the mills. The problem was solved when the Board of Directors made Thiagaraja Chetty & Co., a company floated by Kalaithanthai, the managing agents.

Sri Rajendra Mills, Salem had an unduly large number Directors, and each directors' meeting was like a shareholders' meeting. It was running at a loss and the share price went down. The directors requested Kalaithanthai to buy the shares and take over the Mills. When he went to Salem to formalize the agreement, they had second thoughts and went back on their request. Kalaithanthai was not offended; instead he offered to help them in running the mill. But within a month, they changed their mind again and handed the mills over to Kalaithanthai. Within a year, Kalaithanthai cleared all the outstanding debts of the mills.

Virudunagar Textiles was originally with A.V. Thomas, who planned it as a spinning mill but it had to turn to weaving, as the State government had surrendered the spindles allotted to the Mills by the Centre, in order to support Khadder. Kalaithanthai bought the Mills from A.V. Thomas and soon its production increased and it turned out new kinds of fabrics.

Loyal Textiles, situated on the high ground of Kovilpatti, belonged to the distinguished E.T. Sasoon group, the then uncrowned monarchs of the industry. A.V. Thomas bought it from them and, unable to run it, sold it to Kalaithanthai. The Mill prospered under Kalaithanthai's management.

People who had started new mills and were unable to manage them always turned to Kalaithanthai for help. Several small textile units had been started around Pudukkottai when it was a separate state. At the request of the owners, Kalaithanthai managed the

Pudukkottai Mills at Namanasamudram, Mahalakshmi Mills at Pudukkottai and Kaveri Mills at Kaveri Nagar for several years.

3

Kalaithanthai extended his business into Kerala also. Seetharam Mills at Trissur was a private mill taken over by the Kerala government. Unable to run it efficiently, the government entrusted it to Kalaithanthai for two years. Dr Rm. Alagappa Chettiar had a mill, Alagappa Textiles, at Trissur. After his death, the trustees of Alagappa College sold it to Kalaithanthai. At that time, plenty of land was available cheap near the mill. Kalaithanthai seized the opportunity. He acquired the land, got new machinery and started the Kerala Lakshmi Mill. He bought shares of Vijayamohini Mills at Trivandrum and became the managing agent. He also bought A.D.Cotton Mills at Quilon and renamed it as Parvathi Mills.

4

The textile empire built up by Kalaithanthai consisted of the following sixteen mills:

Sree Meenakshi Mills, Madurai.

Sree Meenakshi Mills, Paravai.

Thiagesar Mills, Manapparai.

Thiagarajar Mills, Kappalur.

Rukmini Mills, Silaiman.

Sivakami Mills, Thenur.

Saroja Mills, Coimbatore.

Kamala Mills, Coimbatore.

Sarada Mills, Poddanur.

Rajendra Mills, Salem.

Loyal Mills, Kovilpatti.

Virudhunagar Textiles, Sulakkarai.

Alagappa Textiles, Trissur.

Parvathi Mills, Quilon.

Vijayamohini Mills, Trivandrum.

Kerala Lakshmi Mills, Trissur.