

# Ilaiyaraaja

**Ilaiyaraaja** (born **Gnanathesigan**) is an Indian musician, composer, arranger, conductor, orchestrator, multi-instrumentalist, lyricist and playback singer popular for his works in Indian cinema, predominately in Tamil, in addition to Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Hindi films. Regarded as one of the most prolific composers, in a career spanning over forty-eight years, he has composed over 7,000 songs and provided film scores for over 1,500+ films,<sup>[1]</sup> apart from performing in over 20,000 concerts.<sup>[2]</sup> He is nicknamed "Isaignani" (the musical sage) and is often referred to as "Maestro", the title conferred to him by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London.<sup>[3]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja was also one of the first Indian film composers to use Western classical music harmonies and string arrangements in Indian film music,<sup>[4]</sup> and the first South Asian to compose a full symphony.<sup>[5]</sup> In 1986, he became the first Indian composer to record a soundtrack with computer for the film *Vikram*.<sup>[6]</sup> He also composed *Thiruvvasagam in Symphony* (2006), the first Indian oratorio.<sup>[7]</sup>

In 2013, when CNN-IBN conducted a poll to commemorate 100 years of Indian cinema, he secured 49% of the vote and was adjudged the country's greatest music composer.<sup>[8]</sup> In 2014, the American world cinema portal "Taste of Cinema" placed him at 9th position in its list of 25 greatest film composers in the history of cinema. He is the only Indian on the list, appearing alongside Ennio Morricone, John Williams, and Jerry Goldsmith.<sup>[9][10]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja received several awards for his works throughout his career. In 2012, for his creative and experimental works in the field of music, he received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the highest Indian recognition given to people in the field of performing arts. In 2010 he was awarded the Padma Bhushan, the third-highest civilian honour in India, and in 2018 the Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award by the

## Ilaiyaraaja



Ilaiyaraaja in 2017

## Background information

<b>Birth name</b>	Gnanathesigan
<b>Also known as</b>	Ilaiyaraja
	Maestro
	Isaignani
<b>Born</b>	3 June 1943
	<u>Pannaipuram, Madras</u>
	<u>Presidency, British India</u>
<b>Genres</b>	<u>Film score</u> · <u>world music</u> · <u>classical</u> · <u>oratorio</u> · <u>folk</u> · <u>rock</u> · <u>jazz</u>

government of India. He is a nominated Member of Parliament in the Indian upper house Rajya Sabha since July 2022.<sup>[11]</sup> A biographical film about his life titled "Ilaiyaraaja" was announced on 20 March 2024.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Early life

Ilaiyaraaja was born as Gnanathesigan in a Dalit family in Pannaipuram in present-day Theni district, Tamil Nadu, India, on 3 June 1943.<sup>[13][14]</sup> At the time of joining school, his father, Daniel Ramasamy<sup>[15]</sup> changed his name from Gnanathesigan<sup>[16]</sup> to "Rajaiya", and the people in his village called him "Raasayya".<sup>[17]</sup> When he joined Dhanraj Master as a student to learn musical instruments, the master changed his name to "Raaja".<sup>[18]</sup> While working for his first film *Annakili* (1976), Tamil film producer Panchu Arunachalam added the prefix "Ilaiya" (meaning 'younger' in Tamil) to the name "Raaja", and renamed him as "Ilaiyaraaja", because in the 1970s there was another popular music director with the same suffix, namely A. M. Rajah.<sup>[19]</sup>

As the birthdays of both Ilaiyaraaja and the politician M. Karunanidhi fall on the same date (3 June), Ilaiyaraaja decided to celebrate his on 2 June so that people of Tamil Nadu can celebrate only that of Karunanidhi on 3 June. This was done in honour of Karunanidhi who gave Ilaiyaraaja the title "Isaignani".<sup>[14]</sup>

## Initial exposure to music

Ilaiyaraaja grew up in a rural area and was exposed to a range of Tamil folk music in his formative years.<sup>[20]</sup> At the age of 14, he joined a travelling musical troupe named as "Pavalar Brothers", headed by his elder brother Pavalar Varadharajan, and spent the next decade performing across South India.<sup>[21]</sup> While working with the troupe, he penned his first composition, a musical adaptation of an elegy written by the Tamil poet laureate, Kannadasan, for India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>[22][23]</sup>

In 1968, he began a music course with Professor Dhanraj in Madras (now Chennai).<sup>[18]</sup> The course included an overview of Western classical music, compositional training in techniques such as counterpoint, and study in instrumental performance. Ilaiyaraaja was a gold medalist in classical guitar after completing the course through a distance-learning channel from Trinity College of Music, London.<sup>[24][25]</sup> He learnt Carnatic music from T. V. Gopalakrishnan.<sup>[21][26][27]</sup>

<b>Occupations</b>	Composer · Arranger · Conductor · Orchestrator · Instrumentalist · Lyricist · Playback singer · Film producer
<b>Instruments</b>	Vocals (Playback singing) · <u>Guitar</u> · <u>keyboard</u> · <u>harmonium</u> · <u>Flute</u> · <u>organ</u> · <u>Piano</u> · <u>Violin</u> · <u>Cello</u> · <u>Mridangam</u> · <u>Jal tarang</u> · <u>Drums</u>
<b>Years active</b>	1976–present
<b>Website</b>	<u>ilaiyaraajalive.com</u> ( <u>https://ilaiyaraajalive.com/</u> )
<b>Member of parliament, Rajya Sabha</b>	
<b>Incumbent</b>	
<b>Assumed office</b>	
7 July 2022	
<b>Nominated by</b>	<u>Ram Nath Kovind</u>
<b>Constituency</b>	<u>Nominated</u> (Arts)

# Career

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## Session musician and orchestrator

During the 1970s in Chennai, Ilaiyaraaja played guitar in a band-for-hire, and worked as a session guitarist, keyboardist, and organist for film music composers and directors such as Salil Chowdhury from West Bengal.<sup>[28][29][30][31]</sup> Chowdhury once remarked that "[Ilaiyaraaja] is going to become the best composer in India".<sup>[32]</sup> "Our main guitarist in Madras is the best composer in India", he said.<sup>[33]</sup> After being hired as the musical assistant to Kannada film composer G. K. Venkatesh, he worked on 200 film projects, mostly in Kannada cinema.<sup>[34]</sup> As Venkatesh's assistant, Ilaiyaraaja would orchestrate the melodic outlines developed by Venkatesh, learning about composing under Venkatesh's guidance. During this period, Ilaiyaraaja also began writing his own scores. To listen to his compositions, he used to persuade Venkatesh's session musicians to play excerpts from his scores during their leisure times.<sup>[35]</sup>

## Film score composer



Ilaiyaraaja at the TFPC Press Meet

At the start of his career, the music sensibility of Ilaiyaraaja was very different to the film music being composed in those days, so although he spent a lot of his time learning, he "wasn't able to grasp how music was being made for films." However, in 1975, film producer Panchu Arunachalam, impressed by a song casually sung by Ilaiyaraaja, commissioned him to compose the songs and film score for a Tamil film titled *Annakili* (1976).<sup>[36]</sup> For the soundtrack, Ilaiyaraaja applied techniques of modern popular film music orchestration to Tamil folk poetry and folk song melodies, which resulted in creation of a fusion of Western and Tamil idioms. Initially he was little apprehensive about how his work would be received, thinking musicians in the industry may write him off. When *Annakili* released in 1976, the music became a huge hit. For his following 12 films, Ilaiyaraaja based his compositions on the contemporary film music. Later, when a new wave of films started to come, they opened the space for the kind of music he wanted to explore.<sup>[37][38][39]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja's use of Tamil folk music in his film scores injected new life in the Indian film score milieu.<sup>[40]</sup> By the mid-1980s, he started gaining increasing stature as a composer and music director in the South Indian film industries.<sup>[41]</sup> He worked with Indian poets and lyricists such as Kannadasan, Vaali, Vairamuthu, O. N. V. Kurup, Sreekumaran Thampi, Veturi, Acharya Aatreya, Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry, Chi. Udayashankar and Gulzar. Most of his compositions were sung by S. P. Balasubrahmanyam, S. Janaki and K. S. Chithra.<sup>[42]</sup>

Director R. K. Selvamani claimed that for his film Chembaruthi (1992), Ilaiyaraaja had composed nine songs in just 45 minutes, which is a record.<sup>[43]</sup>

Cinematographer Santosh Sivan said that Ilaiyaraaja finished composing for the entire soundtrack of the film Thalapathi in less than "half a day".<sup>[44]</sup>

During the recording for the song "Sundari" from the movie Thalapathi in Mumbai with R.D. Burman's orchestra, when Ilaiyaraaja gave them the notes, they were so moved and taken in by the composition that all the musicians put their hands together in awe and gave a standing ovation as a mark of respect for Ilaiyaraaja.<sup>[45]</sup>

The score and soundtrack of the 1984 Malayalam-language film My Dear Kuttichathan, the first stereoscopic 3D film made in India, was composed by him.<sup>[46]</sup>

He composed the soundtrack for the movie Nayakan (1987), an Indian film ranked by Time magazine as one of the all-time 100 best movies.<sup>[47]</sup>

## Non-cinematic output

Ilaiyaraaja's first two non-film albums were explorations in the fusion of Indian and Western classical music. The first, How to Name It? (1986), is dedicated to the Carnatic master Tyāgarāja and to J. S. Bach. It features a fusion of the Carnatic form and *ragas* with Bach *partitas*, fugues and Baroque musical textures.<sup>[48]</sup> The second, Nothing But Wind (1988), was performed by flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia and a 50-piece orchestra and takes the conceptual approach suggested in the title—that music is a "natural phenomenon akin to various forms of air currents".<sup>[49]</sup>

He has composed a set of Carnatic *kritis* which were recorded by electric mandolinist U. Srinivas for the album Ilaiyaraaja's Classics on the Mandolin (1994). Ilaiyaraaja has also composed albums of religious/devotional songs. His Guru Ramana Geetam (2004) is a cycle of prayer songs inspired by the Hindu mystic Ramana Maharshi, and his Thiruvasakiyam: A crossover (2005) is an oratorio of ancient Tamil poems transcribed partially in English by American lyricist Stephen Schwartz and performed by the Budapest Symphony Orchestra.<sup>[50][51]</sup> His most recent release is a world music-oriented album called The Music Messiah (2006).<sup>[52]</sup> In 2025, he composed his first English classical symphony "Valiant", performed by Royal Scottish National Orchestra.<sup>[53]</sup>



Ilaiyaraaja and Vikram at the Nadigar Sangam Protest

In May 2020, he composed a song titled Bharath Bhoomi, as tribute to the people working amid COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>[54]</sup> The song was crooned by S. P Balasubrahmanyam and the video of the song was unveiled by Ilaiyaraaja on his YouTube channel on 30 May 2020, in Tamil and Hindi.<sup>[55][56]</sup>

On his birthday in 2020, Ilaiyaraaja announced the upcoming launch of his 'Isai OTT' app. He stated that the app would contain much more than just his songs, like behind-the-scenes trivia about how each song was conceived, produced, and delivered, as well as collaborations with other musicians.<sup>[57]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja's song 'Naanthaan Ungappanda' from the 1981 film *Ram Lakshman* was part of the playlist for the opening ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics.<sup>[58][59]</sup>

His compositions *Paayum Puli Title Music* and *Ilamai Itho* were part of the soundtrack of Ashim Ahluwalia's 2012 Cannes Film Festival entry, *Miss Lovely*.<sup>[60]</sup> *The Lovebirds* (2020) incorporated a section of Ilaiyaraaja's "Oru kili" soundtrack composed for the movie *Aanandha Kummi* (1983) as background music in its official trailer.<sup>[61]</sup>

The Black Eyed Peas sampled the Ilaiyaraaja's composition "Unakkum Ennakum" from *Sri Raghavendra* (1985) for the song "The Elephunk Theme" in *Elephunk* (2003).<sup>[62]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja's song "Mella Mella Ennaithottu" from *Vaazhkai* was sampled by Rabbit Mac in the song *Sempoi*.<sup>[63]</sup> Popular American rapper Meek Mill sampled one of Ilaiyaraaja's hit songs for *Indian Bounce*.

The alternative artist M.I.A. sampled "Kaatukuyilu" from the film *Thalapathi* (1991) for her song "Bamboo Banga" on the album *Kala* (2007).<sup>[64]</sup>

Alphant sampled Ilaiyaraaja's music for his song *An Indian Dream*.<sup>[65]</sup> Gonjasufi sampled Ilaiyaraaja's "Yeh Hawa Yeh Fiza" from the movie *Sadma*.<sup>[66]</sup>

## Live performances

Ilaiyaraaja rarely performs his music live. His first major live performance since his debut was a four-hour concert held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium in Chennai, India, on 16 October 2005.<sup>[67]</sup> He performed in 2004 in Italy at the Teatro Comunale di Modena, an event-concert presented for the 14th edition of Angelica, Festival Internazionale Di Musica, co-produced with the L'Altro Suono Festival.<sup>[68]</sup>

A television retrospective titled *Ithu Ilaiyaraja* ("This is Ilaiyaraja") was produced, chronicling his career.<sup>[69]</sup> He last performed live at the audio release function of the film *Dhoni* and before that, he performed a programme that was conducted and telecasted by Jaya TV titled *Enrendrum Raja* ("Everlasting Raja") on 28 December 2011 at Jahawarlal Nehru Indoor Stadium, Chennai.



Ilaiyaraaja at the inauguration of 91st Music Academy Concerts & Conferences

On 5 September 2012, Ilaiyaraaja performed in a live concert in Chennai with the Hungarian National Philharmonic orchestra; during this event the music launch of his films Neethaane En Ponvasantham and Yeto Vellipoyindhi Manasu took place.<sup>[70]</sup> On 23 September 2012, he performed live in Bangalore at National High School Grounds.

On 16 February 2013, Ilaiyaraaja made his first appearance in North America performing at the Rogers Centre in Toronto, Canada.<sup>[71]</sup> The Toronto concert was promoted by Trinity Events for Vijay TV in India and produced by Sandy Audio Visual SAV Productions with PA+. Following his show at Toronto, Ilaiyaraaja also performed at the Prudential Center Newark, New Jersey, on 23 February 2013 and at the HP Pavilion at San Jose on 1 March 2013. After his North America tour, he made a live performance at The O2 Arena in London on 24 August 2013, along with Kamal Haasan and his sons Yuvan Shankar Raja and Karthik Raja.<sup>[72]</sup>

## Musical style and sensibility

Ilaiyaraaja, once reflecting over his works after turning seventy-five, said his "life experiences and learning" have been the fount from which his musical output poured, but sometimes felt that some of his compositions transcended them as if they were "the reflection of the efforts of past lives — mine, or those of other musical exponents." When enquired if it was mystical as in the case of mathematical genius Srinivasa Ramanujan, who insisted he received math formula in dreams from a goddess, Ilaiyaraaja said that unlike Ramanujan who felt a supernatural being guiding him, he always felt a moment of clarity when a composition came to his mind—"It is as if I am the subject and the object of art at the same time when that happens," he said.<sup>[73]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja uses the same harmonium, both in his studio and in concerts. He has scored with it throughout his career. When he was younger, he was never allowed to touch it by his brother who thought he would spoil it. However, Ilaiyaraaja would play with it whenever he was not there; "that's how I learnt how to play," he said, "the harmonium knows that it was made for me. It tells me that there is more music to be made."<sup>[1]</sup> The harmonium was reportedly bought for eighty-five rupees.<sup>[70]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja's musical style is characterised by an orchestration which is a synthesis of Indian folk music and Western classical music, with traditional Indian instruments and modes. He uses electronic music technology that integrates synthesizers, electric guitars and keyboards, drum machines, rhythm boxes and MIDI with large orchestras that feature traditional instruments such as the veena, venu,

"Only the film director will be with me when the situation and the story are narrated. Then, it's just me and my harmonium. I just think about the situation and touch my harmonium and music flows. If people consider it as an alternate world, so be it. To me, it is something that I can't explain."

— Ilaiyaraaja on his creative process<sup>[1]</sup>



nadaswaram, dholak, mridangam and tabla as well as Western lead instruments such as saxophones and flutes.<sup>[41]</sup>



Ilaiyaraaja speaking after receiving the centenary award at the 46th International Film Festival of India (IFFI-2015), in Panaji, Goa

The basslines in his songs tend to be melodically dynamic, rising and falling in a dramatic fashion. Polyrhythms are also apparent, particularly in songs with Indian folk or Carnatic influences. The melodic structure of his songs demand considerable vocal virtuosity, and have found expressive platform amongst some of India's respected vocalists and playback singers, such as T. M. Soundararajan, S. Janaki, P. Susheela, K. J. Yesudas, K. S. Chithra, S. P. Balasubrahmanyam, M. G. Sreekumar, Rajkumar, Asha Bhosle, Lata Mangeshkar, Jayachandran, Uma Ramanan, S. P. Sailaja, Jency, Swarnalatha, Minmini, Sujatha, Malaysia Vasudevan, Kavita Krishnamurti, Hariharan, Suresh Wadkar, Udit Narayan, Sadhana Sargam and Shreya Ghoshal. Ilaiyaraaja has sung more than 400 of his own compositions for films, and is recognisable by his stark, deep voice. He has penned the lyrics for some of his songs in Tamil.<sup>[74][75]</sup> He considers M. S. Viswanathan as an overwhelming influence on his music.<sup>[33]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja is nicknamed "Isaignani" (the musical genius), a title conferred by Kalaigarnar Karunanidhi. He is often referred to as "Maestro", the title conferred by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London.<sup>[3]</sup> He was one of the earliest Indian film composers to use Western classical music harmonies and string arrangements in Indian film music.<sup>[4]</sup> This allowed him to craft a rich tapestry of sounds for films, and his themes and background score gained notice and appreciation among Indian film audiences.<sup>[76]</sup> The range of expressive possibilities in Indian film music was broadened by his methodical approach to arranging, recording technique, and his drawing of ideas from a diversity of musical styles.<sup>[4]</sup>

According to musicologist P. Greene, Ilaiyaraaja's "deep understanding of so many different styles of music allowed him to create syncretic pieces of music combining very different musical idioms in unified, coherent musical statements".<sup>[41]</sup> Ilaiyaraaja has composed Indian film songs that amalgamated elements of genres such as Afro-tribal, bossa nova, dance music (e.g., disco), doo-wop, flamenco, acoustic guitar-propelled Western folk, funk, Indian classical, Indian folk/traditional, jazz, march, pathos, pop, psychedelia and rock and roll.<sup>[77]</sup>

By virtue of this variety and his intermingling of Western, Indian folk and Carnatic elements, Ilaiyaraaja's compositions appeal to the Indian rural dweller for its rhythmic folk qualities, the Indian classical music enthusiast for the employment of Carnatic ragas, and the urbanite for its modern, Western-music sound.<sup>[78]</sup> His sense of visualisation for composing music is always to match up with the movie storyline and help the audience feel the emotions flavoured through his musical score. He mastered this art of blending music to the narration, which very few others managed to adapt themselves over a longer time.<sup>[79]</sup> Although Ilaiyaraaja uses a range of complex compositional techniques, he often sketches out the basic melodic ideas for films in a very spontaneous fashion.<sup>[20][41]</sup>

Actor Rajnikanth noted that Ilaiyaraaja used to complete the re-recording of three films in a single day without any sleep, while present generation composers take 30 days for a single film.<sup>[80]</sup>

## Honours and legacy

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi conferred an honorary doctorate to Ilaiyaraaja during the 36th Convocation Ceremony of Gandhigram Rural Institute in Tamil Nadu's Dindigul.<sup>[81]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja has been awarded five National Film Awards—three for Best Music Direction and two for Best Background Score.<sup>[82]</sup> In 2010, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan, the third-highest civilian honour in India and the Padma Vibhushan in 2018, the second-highest civilian award by the government of India.<sup>[83][84]</sup> In 2012, he received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the highest Indian recognition given to practising artists, for his creative and experimental works in the music field.<sup>[85]</sup> He is a gold medalist in classical guitar from Trinity College of Music, London, Distance Learning Channel.<sup>[25]</sup>

Ilaiyaraaja's soundtrack for the 1991 film *Thalapathi* was included in *The Guardian's 100 Albums to Hear Before You Die*.<sup>[86]</sup> In 2003, according to an international poll conducted by BBC of more than half-a million people from 165 countries, his composition "Rakkamma Kaiya Thattu" from *Thalapathi* was voted fourth in the top 10 most popular songs of all time.<sup>[87]</sup> In 2013, when the Indian news channel CNN-IBN conducted a poll commemorating 100 years of Indian cinema, he secured 49% of the people's vote and was adjudged as the country's greatest music composer; A. R. Rahman stood second with 29% of the vote.<sup>[8]</sup>



Ilaiyaraaja receiving the Padma Vibhushan from President Ram Nath Kovind

He is reputed to be the world's most prolific composer<sup>[88]</sup> having composed more than 7,000 songs, provided film scores for more than 1,000 movies and performed in more than 20,000 concerts.<sup>[2][89][90][91]</sup> He was one of the earliest Indian film composers to use Western classical music harmonies and string arrangements in Tamil film music.<sup>[4]</sup> In 1986, he became the first Indian composer to record a soundtrack with computer, for the film *Vikram*.<sup>[6]</sup> In 1993, he became the first Indian to compose a full symphony, performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London,<sup>[5][89]</sup> and is also known to have written the entire symphony in less than a month.<sup>[92][93]</sup> Composed by Ilaiyaraaja, the critically acclaimed *Thiruvvasakam in Symphony* (2006) is the first Indian oratorio.<sup>[7]</sup>

Achille Forler, board member of the Indian Performing Right Society, said in 2017, "the kind of stellar body of work that Ilaiyaraaja has created in the last 40 years should have placed him among the world's top 10 richest composers, somewhere between Andrew Lloyd Webber (\$1.2 billion) and Mick Jagger (over \$300 million)."<sup>[94]</sup>



British musician Andy Votel, described Ilaiyaraaja in an essay thus, "Whatever "genre" of music you choose to like/ love/ promote/ protect/ politicise/ over-intellectualize/ despise/ defend or pretend to enjoy, Ilaiyaraaja has done it."<sup>[33]</sup> Carnatic vocalist T. M. Krishna considers that no other film composer has displayed the broad range of understanding music like Ilaiyaraaja, and the way he modifies himself and creates music is "unfathomable" making him the "absolute master".<sup>[95]</sup>

On 6 July 2022, Ilaiyaraaja was nominated to the Rajya Sabha as Member of Parliament by the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind.<sup>[96]</sup>

## Personal life

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Ilaiyaraaja was married to Jeeva, and the couple has three children—Karthik Raja, Bhavatharini and Yuvan Shankar Raja—all of them are film composers and singers.<sup>[97][98]</sup> His wife Jeeva died on 31 October 2011.<sup>[99]</sup> His brother, Gangai Amaran, is also a music director and lyricist in the Tamil film industry,<sup>[100]</sup> and both were not on talking terms for 13 years until they met in February 2022.<sup>[101][102]</sup> His daughter Bhavatharini died of liver cancer on 25 January 2024.<sup>[103]</sup>

## Legal issues and controversies

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In 2017, claiming copyright violations, Ilaiyaraaja sent legal notices to singers, S. P. Balasubrahmanyam, his son S. P. Charan and Chithra, prohibiting them from singing his compositions without his consent, and warned they would have to pay huge royalties and face legal action if they do so.<sup>[104]</sup> Ilaiyaraaja's brother Gangai Amaran criticized him, saying legal notice to SPB is 'foolishness'.<sup>[105]</sup>

In 2018, during a talk show in the US, Ilaiyaraaja expressed his doubts regarding the credibility of the Christian belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and claimed that resurrection happened only in the case of the Hindu saint Ramana Maharshi. In protest, a Christian group lodged a complaint with the Police Commissioner of Trichy, demanding an apology or police action against Ilaiyaraaja for raising doubt about the "ultimate belief of Christians".<sup>[106]</sup>

In early 2022, talking about the state of music composers in industry, Ilaiyaraaja said, "There are no composers in the film industry today; there are only programmers."<sup>[107]</sup>



Ilaiyaraaja (center) with Kamal Haasan (left) and Rajinikanth (right) at the Nadigar Sangam Protest in 2018

In April 2022, Ilaiyaraaja triggered a controversy by writing a foreword in the book titled, "Ambedkar & Modi—Reformer's Ideas", in which he praised the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and compared him to B.R. Ambedkar. When he received some criticism, leaders from BJP came to his support.<sup>[108]</sup>

## Discography

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Ilaiyaraaja 1970s	Ilaiyaraaja 1980s	Ilaiyaraaja 1990s	Ilaiyaraaja 2000s	Ilaiyaraaja 2010s	Ilaiyaraaja 2020s	New / Non-Film
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## See also

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- List of songs recorded by Ilaiyaraaja

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