Vummidi Ethiraj (99), who crafted the Sengol given to Nehru in 1947 and installed in the new Parliament in 2023, passes away

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News

Vummidi Ethiraj, one of the craftsmen of the Sengol and patriarch of the family that owns Chennai's 125-year-old Vummidi Bangaru Jewellers, died in Chennai on Wednesday, 21 Oct 2026. Born on 25 Nov 1926, he was 99; he was 20 when the Sengol was made in 1947. PM Narendra Modi, Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan and Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar condoled his death. The PM recalled meeting him when the Sengol was installed in the new Parliament in 2023.

Key facts

Name	Vummidi Ethiraj
Born–died	25 Nov 1926 – 21 Oct 2026, Chennai; aged 99
Firm	Vummidi Bangaru Chetty – Chennai jewellers (125 years)
Sengol	Gold-plated silver; about 5 ft long; Nandi on top
1947	Night of 14 Aug 1947 – Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam handed it to Nehru; 'Kolaru Pathigam' was sung
2023	28 May 2023 – installed by PM Modi near the Lok Sabha Speaker's chair

Background

- History: when Mountbatten asked about a symbol for the transfer of power, C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) suggested the Chola tradition of a spiritual head handing a sceptre to a new king. At the request of the Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam, the Sengol was made by Vummidi Bangaru Chetty jewellers of Madras. The Adheenam's envoys first handed it to Mountbatten, sanctified it with holy water and presented it to Nehru at his residence on the night of 14 Aug; Thirugnana Sambandar's 'Kolaru Pathigam' was sung by Oduvars.
- Museum: the Sengol was kept for decades with Nehru's other belongings in the Allahabad (Prayagraj) Museum (not Anand Bhavan), where it was listed as a 'golden stick'. It was installed in the Lok Sabha at the inauguration of the new Parliament building on 28 May 2023.
- Literature: 'Sengonmai' (just rule) is chapter 55 of the Thirukkural, in the Arasiyal section of Porutpal (Kurals 541–550); the next chapter is 'Kodungonmai' (tyranny, 56). Kural 546 says it is not the spear but the king's unbending sceptre that brings victory.
- Debate: the 1947 event drew little attention at the time; in 2023 some questioned whether a monarchical symbol suits a parliamentary democracy.

Tamil Nadu link: the Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam that presented the Sengol is a Saiva mutt in Mayiladuthurai district; it was made by Chennai jewellers. In 2023, Adheenams from Tamil Nadu handed the Sengol to the PM in New Delhi.

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