

Ramachandran Nagaswamy - (1930-2022)



Padma Bhushan, Dr. Ramachandran Nagaswamy, the eminent archaeologist, epigraphist, a renowned expert in Indian Temple iconography and architectures, an ardent devotee of Kanchi Paramāchārya and Pūjya Swami Dayananda Saraswati passed on January 23, 2022. He was the director

of the Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department since its inception in 1966, the post he held till 1988. He founded the annual Chidambaram Natyanjali festival in 1980. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2018.

Dr. Nagaswamy was a multilinguist, proficient in Sanskrit, Tamil, and English. Accordingly, he was a prolific writer on diverse topics related to art and architecture of South Indian temples, Tamil culture, Vedic roots of Hindu iconography, dance, drama, music and so on. He was well known for his role as an expert witness in the London High Court, in the famous “London Nataraja case” in the 1980s, which resulted in the recovery of the Chola-era Nataraja *vigraha*m that had been smuggled to London. In Dr. Nagaswamy’s own words he attributed the success of his testimony to the moral strength he derived from Kanchi Paramāchārya’s blessings. In fact, Dr. Nagaswamy’s expertise in reading temple inscriptions endeared him to Kanchi Paramāchārya. In the preface of his book, “Tamil Nadu, The Land of Vedas”, Dr. Nagaswamy wrote that he had the good fortune of sitting under the feet of Kanchi Paramāchārya and learning from him. In the same preface, Dr. Nagaswamy recorded his regard and admiration of Pūjya Swami Dayananda Saraswati as the master teacher who taught him many nuances of Indian philosophy. In fact, Pūjya Swamiji invited Dr. Nagaswamy on several occasions to Arsha Vidya Gurukulam both in Coimbatore and in Saylorsburg (USA) to address the students and share his vast knowledge of temple architecture.

In his book, “Tamil Nadu, The Land of Vedas”, Dr. Nagaswamy unfolds brilliantly the per-

meation of the Vedic culture in the ancient Tamil Nadu starting from the Sangam period (from c. 6th century BCE to c. 3rd century CE), citing incontrovertible evidence from ancient Tamil literature and historical copper inscriptions. In his book, “Dharma Yoga”, Dr. Nagaswamy traces fascinatingly the spread of Manu’s code of ethics beyond India to as far as Syria and Greece and the worship of Vedic gods as evidenced in the Greek coins of Agathocles period (190-180 BCE). His various publications (<http://tamilartsacademy.com/home.php>) all attest unequivocally to Dr. Nagaswamy’s passion about the Vedic traditions and his indomitable spirit of supporting his claims with immense research. Despite his deep erudition, Dr. Nagaswamy was a man of humility and simplicity, true to the adage, “*vidyā dadāti vinayam* - knowledge gives humility”.

The author of this report had the privilege of knowing Dr. Nagaswamy since September 2012 when the latter gave a talk in a weekend class in the presence of Pūjya Swami Dayananda Saraswati at the Saylorsburg ashram. Dr. Nagaswamy was very devoted to preserving the Thirumurais (the Saiva canonical texts including the Tamil hymns known as Thevarams) and accordingly showed a keen interest in the Odhuvar project initiated by Pūjya Swamiji. He gave the benediction in the 2020 annual thirumurai awareness program conducted by the author. He was always available to share his boundless knowledge and was ready to give his time unconditionally.

In the *śraddhāñcali* of Dr. Nagaswamy held in Chennai on February 6, 2022 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WkOXD_Lfnk&t=1659s), Mahamahopadhyaya Sri. R Krishnamurthy Shastrigal cited a verse from Bhartṛhari’s *nīṭisatakam* as a fitting tribute of Dr. Nagaswamy. The verse is as follows:

परिवर्तिनि संसारे मृतः को वा न जायते ।

स जातो येन जातेन याति वंशः समुन्नतिम् ॥

parivartini saṁsārē mṛtaḥ kō vā na jāyatē

sa jātō yēna jātēna yāti vaṁśaḥ samunnatim

“In the cycle of worldly existence of birth and death, who is not born again while he dies? It is he who deserves his birth by whom his lineage attains dignity”.

Sri. Shastrigal said that in the case of Dr. Nagaswamy, the word *vaṁśa* stands for not just Dr. Nagaswamy’s immediate lineage but for the whole Bhārat. This is true. Indeed, Dr. Nagaswamy was a Bhāratīya in every sense of the word. He brought dignity to his *vaṁśa*.

- Report by Sri V Swaminathan, Bethlehem, PA, USA