

Bhagavad Gita Jayanthi in Houston, USA



Srinivasan Jayakumar, left, president and chairman of Arsha Vidya Satsanga, Houston, and Vivek Shankar Natarajan lead the worship on the occasion of Bhagavad Gita Jayanthi on Dec. 16

Dr. R. Nagaswamy, the first director of archaeology of Tamil Nadu State, is not only an iconographer, but an iconoclast as well in that he dispels many myths about Hindu temples and the Vedic scriptures through his erudite and scholarly research.

He has succeeded in bringing to light many hidden facets and relics of India's splendid past.

Nagaswamy has great scholarship in various branches - numismatics, iconography, sculpture and epigraphy, besides music, dance and poetry.

The 82-year-old veteran takes pleasure in understanding the Tamil and Indian culture and in popularizing it, without compromising on facts or diluting them.

An acknowledged international expert on South Indian Bronzes, Nagaswamy appeared as an expert witness in the London High Court, in the now famous London Nataraja case.

The judge described Nagaswamy as an unequalled expert in his subject and took his definition of a Hindu temple as authentic, guiding principle.

The bronze icon belonging to the 12th century AD, which was spirited away from Pathur village in Thanjavur district in 1976, changed hands and was with a Canadian corporation. The Tamil Nadu Government fought the case and thanks to Dr. Nagaswamy's knowledge and his clinching testimony, the Nataraja was returned to its rightful setting in 1991.

Currently on a visit to Houston, Nagaswamy spoke at a gathering of the Arsha Vidya Satsang in Houston on Dec. 16.

Nagaswamy in his talk titled Hindu temples and their meaning, responded to a news item of the day which said a United Nations human rights group had asked the Government of India to take steps to uplift the Dalits in India who were denied entry into Hindu temples.

Nagaswamy showed a series of pictures where Hindu deities were taken to the dwellings of the so-called Dalits or untouchables so that they were directly able to worship the deities.

This showed that the propaganda that Dalits were denied rights to worship was misleading, Nagaswamy said.

A temple need not necessarily mean that there is traditional temple architecture with an idol and a regular worship. Even a thatched roof over an idol, where people worshipped for a few days, but abandoned the site later, would be construed as a temple under Hindu traditions, according to Nagaswamy.

A consecrated idol buried on a temple site within the perimeter compound, is a "legal entity," and has the right to be returned to the original abode, even in the absence of a structure.

This logic was upheld in the U.K. High Court as per Nagaswamy's testimony. Once a temple, the place is always a temple, seems to be the dictum.

The temple is designed to symbolize various natural forces, or symbolizing spirits, with perfect measurement of length, width and height, on different geometrical grids. When people worship an idol, they actually worship the spirit symbolized by the idol and not the mere stone, Nagaswamy says.

One of the very widely used Vedic prayer among Hindus invoked the sun to provide the worshipper a critical intellect and wealth or good health, thus suggesting the universality of the Vedic scriptures, followed by Hindus.

Hindu scriptures regard the human body as a temple, according to Nagaswamy. The human body is the temple that enshrines the sacred space.

A Vedic hymn, Nârâyaṅa śukta, gives an insight into human heart and its function that amazingly is a scientific, biological description.

It says the heart is in the form of a lotus bud, inverted, facing down, situated a span beneath the neck and a span above the navel. It shines like a flaming flower garland. It is indeed "the temple of the universe."

It is obviously a clear reference to the pulsating life force which is the cause of all of man's action.

It is in the center of this flame the supreme soul is enshrined.

Through the pulsating vital breadth inside the human body the individual can visualize and experience the Supreme who remains engulfing the Universe.

Thus the human body has always been praised as the temple and the pulsating vital breadth, the life principle, as the divine.

When Hindus worship many gods they worship the universal power beyond lands, languages, forms, race, color, sex, or times and that is the concept of Hindu Godhood. The Hindus loudly proclaimed that 'Critical knowledge' itself is god and that concept of ever expanding knowledge is different from the Creative power and that was the contribution of the Vedas.

In his latest book, Mirror of Tamil and Sanskrit, Nagaswamy challenges the long-held anti-brahminical and anti-Sanskrit belief of some fanatical Tamil scholars and places Tamil and Sanskrit interaction in proper historical and chronological perspective.

In the field of language, grammar, poetics, literature, art, architecture, music, dance, royal administration, judicial administration, and social functions, astronomy, philosophy and religion, the ancient Tamils followed the Vedic Tradition and were greatly influenced by the northern system.

At no point of time in Tamil history, there was any attempt to suppress the study of Tamil, according to Nagaswamy.

Earlier, members of the Arsha Vidya Satsanga, Houston chapter of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, observed Gita Jayanthi.

Srnivasan Jayaraman briefly highlighted the significance of the Bhagavad Gita, after members recited verses from the scriptural text.

The local AVS group has also initiated a history project, comprising several community members, who are experts or scholars in Indian history.

The project is aimed at raising awareness on separating myths from realities, through books and other works based on sound research of India's history.

Nagaswamy's talk provided an appropriate backdrop for the launch of the history project.

For more information on Dr. Nagaswamy's work, visit www.Tamilartsacademy.com

Any form of prayer is as efficacious as any other. This must be understood well, not as tolerance for or accommodation of forms of worship other than one's own, but in terms of understanding the universal order alone that is being implied. There is no pagan's prayer, there is only prayer.

Pujya Swamiji