

ARCHAEOLOGIST AND EPIGRAPHER NAGASWAMY PASSES AWAY AT 92

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R. NagaswamyVELANKANNI RAJ B

R. Nagaswamy, the first Director of the Department of Archaeology, died of age-related complications on Sunday. He was 92, and is survived by two daughters and two sons.

An authority in archaeology, architecture, epigraphy, numismatics, iconography, south Indian bronzes and temple rituals, Nagaswamy favoured the idea of closing temples in Tamil Nadu during the COVID-19 pandemic. He would say that *ahamic* principles allowed such closure during *mahamari* (epidemic), fire, earthquake and invasion. "Invoke the God in a *tharpai* [tarpaulin] and worship in a private place," he said.

Nagaswamy was born at Kodumudi in Erode district, an abode of Lord Siva sung by Saivate saints. But he would take pride in saying, " *K.P. Sundaramabalukkum enga ooruthan* [It is also the birthplace of actor and singer K.P. Sundarambal]."

He had deep knowledge of Tamil and Sanskrit. He obtained his MA in Sanskrit from the University of Madras. He was awarded a Ph.D. in Indian arts by Pune University. After serving the Department of Archaeology in various capacities, he became its Director in 1966 and held the post till his retirement in 1988.

Nagaswamy, whose name was synonymous with archaeology, was always available for his views on South Indian history, its temples, *ahamas*, Chola bronzes and the *shastras* of Bharatanatyam. He penned a book, *Masterpieces of Early South Indian Bronzes*, in 1983 and compiled a coffee-table book for the Tamil Nadu government to mark the World Classical Tamil Conference. His other important books are on Mamallapuram, published by the Oxford University Press, Uthiramerur and Gangaikondacholapuram. He had also published books in Tamil.

According to his website tamilartsacademy.com, Nagaswamy was instrumental in protecting several historical monuments, including the Chera inscriptions at Pugalur, the palace site of Gangaikondacholapuram, the famous 17th century Thirumalai Nayak Palace in Madurai, the Danish Port at Tranquebar and the birthplace of national poet Subramania Bharati in Ettayapuram. He oversaw excavations at the palace site of Veerapandiya Kattabomman at Panchalankurichi and at Korkai.

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