


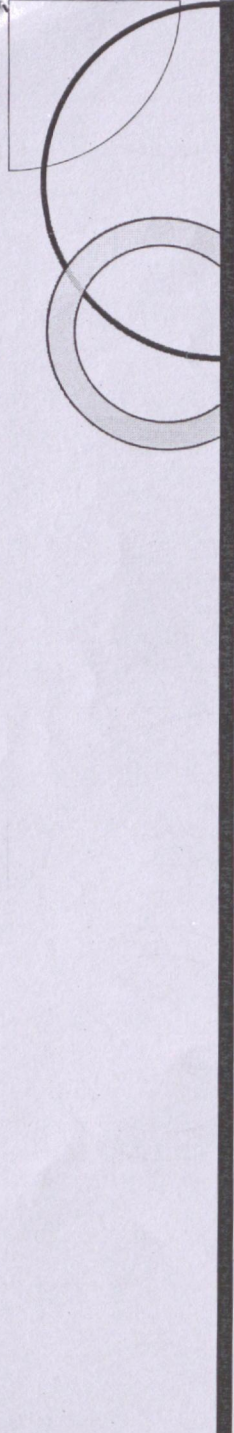


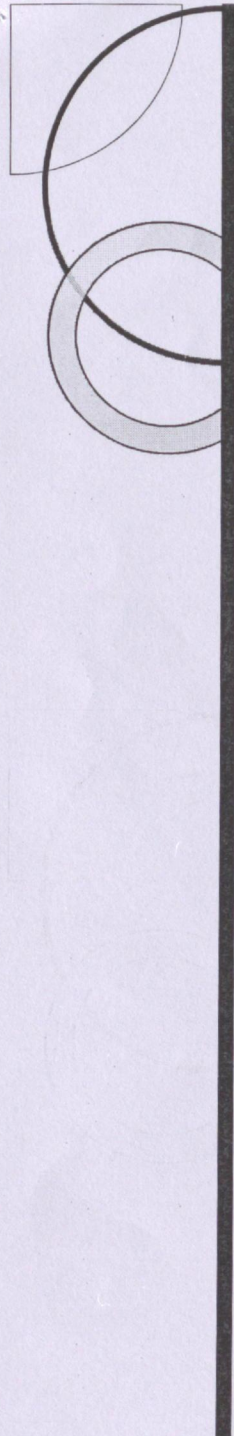
# Looking Back: A Personal Reflection

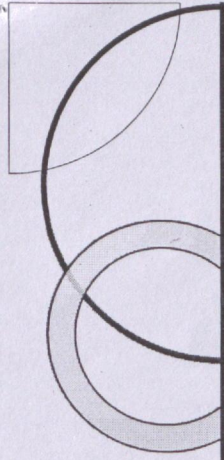
**B V Sreekantan**


**NIAS Foundation Day : Celebrating 30 Years**  
**20 June 2018**


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- I will be entering my 93 year at the end of this month. I sincerely attribute this long life to my continued academic association with NIAS from 6<sup>th</sup> August 1992 - to present time (~26 years)!
  - I am grateful to the series of Directors of NIAS – Dr Raja Ramanna, Prof. R Narasimha, Prof. K Kasturirangan, Prof. V S Ramamurthy, Prof. Baldev Raj and Prof. Shailesh Nayak for enabling this continued association with NIAS over the past 26 years after my retirement from TIFR, where I had spent 44 years from 1948 – PhD student of Dr Bhabha (1948-53); Researcher (1953-75); Director (1975-87); INSA Ramanujan Professor (1987-92)

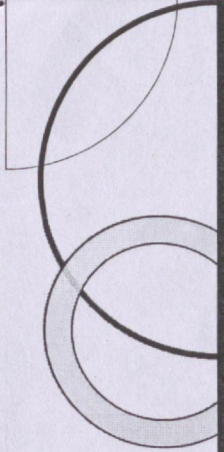
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- I had the good fortune of being associated <sup>with</sup> three of the institutions for which Sri J R D Tata was responsible namely (i) TIFR, (ii) TERI and (iii) NIAS, in different capacities. JRD was the Chairman of all the three for long periods.
  - Sri J R D Tata & NIAS: The very interesting story about the genesis of NIAS is told by J R D himself in his inaugural speech delivered at Pune on the occasion of the Inauguration of NIAS and the first Administrative Officers Course held at the Tata Management Centre in 1989.
  - According to this fascinating narrative, NIAS should have been an Advanced Mathematics Centre on pattern of the famous French Institutes – the ECOLE Polytechnics, as a Memorial Institute to honour the memory of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, as early as 1966. However this did not happen then.


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- There is a brief note by Prof. R Narasimha which explains the concept and creation of NIAS in its present form inspired by Nehru's own views. "Between these two (Humanism and the scientific spirit) there has been an apparent conflict but the great upheaval of thought to-day, with its questioning of all values is removing the old boundaries between these approaches, as well as between the external world of science and the internal world of introspection. There is a growing synthesis between humanisms and the scientific spirit, resulting in a kind of scientific humanism".
  - In his letter to the Minister for Human Resources, Sri J R D Tata wrote in 1988, "The Institute (NIAS) will have two principal objectives. It will provide programs for Managers and Officers and Secondly the Institute will set up small groups to conduct in depth studies and research on specific problems of importance to the country".

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- My informal association with NIAS began in Jan. 1989 when the first course for the Administrative Officers were held at Poona at the Tata Management Centre and Dr. Ramanna invited me to give a course of lectures on “Creation”. I gave the third course of lectures in 1991 when the buildings of the institute were under construction at Bangalore in the IISc campus.
  - In summer of 1992, I had come to Bangalore for the Gruha Pravesha of my house at Malleshwaram and I casually met Dr. Ramanna in his office which was in the present Alumni Office. I mentioned to him that I am at last retiring from TIFR in August that year. He asked me what my plans are after that. I told him that both my sons have gone to US for their post-graduation. I have an invitation from MIT (Boston) to work on a new x-ray Astronomy Satellite project. So, I am planning to leave for ~~US~~ at the end of the year after moving to Bangalore in August.

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- Immediately Dr. Ramanna said “Sreekantan, you are not going to do that. We want you here. I have taken this responsibility of building NIAS because of JRD. Prof. M N Srinivas and Prof. Sundaram have joined us, you should also join us. I was in a fix. I could not say ‘No’ to Ramanna. I told him I have already made a commitment with MIT. He said you join here first and that go for a short term. He called Prof. Ravi Kapur who was in the next room and told him to give letter of appointment to me as Sir Radhakrishnan Chair Professor for a period of five years.
  - Well, I joined NIAS on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1992 and then went to USA in April 1993 and came back on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1994.
  - Dr Ramanna told me that there are not going to any laboratories in NIAS. You have to decide the area you would like to do research here. I told him in recent times, there is increasing interest in understanding consciousness scientifically. So I may start thinking on that line. He said that he is also interested in that subject.

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- When I went back to TIFR, for the remaining months May to August, I sat in the Library and studied few books that were there on the subject of Consciousness. A very interesting book by Penrose “Emeror’s New Mind” and another by a Physicist Euan Squires “Conscious Mind in the Physics World” had just come to the Library. I was quite fascinated reading them. They certainly encouraged me to enter the field of Consciousness Research.
  - When I joint<sup>ed</sup> NIAS on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1992, the faculty consisted of five retied professors, Dr. Ramanna, Dr. M N Srinivas, Dr. C V Sundaram and Dr. Ravi Kapur (He was the youngest) and I was the fifth. One Dr Biswajit Sen and a Doctoral student Sushmita were working with Prof Kapur- all Psychologists. Dr. P K Shetty and Maj Gen Paul joined on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August. No wonder NIAS was called by some as National Institute of Aged Scientists. During 1993 there was no addition. Only in 1994 onwards academic activity picked up.

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- In 1994, several young members joined NIAS, namely Dr P K Shetty, Dr SundarSarukkai, Dr Srilatha Batlivala and Dr Anusuya Devi; in 1995: Dr B K Anitha; and in 1996: Dr Sangeetha Menon and Dr Arvind Kumar, Dr Anindya Sinha – this changed the complexion of the institute's activities.
  - The courses which till 1994 were confined only to IAS and Defence Service Administrators expanded into courses for UGC Teachers, DST Officers, ISRO Officers, etc. and some international programmes also started like WOPRA. National and International conferences were organized by NIAS



## The Associates Programme:

JRD Tata has<sup>d</sup> suggested that NIAS should play an active role in bringing together senior people not only in science but also in other fields- professionals, businessman, Lawyers etc. to create awareness of new developments in various fields. Dr Ramanna introduced the Associate Programme in NIAS- once a month have lectures, drama, dance and other cultural programmes. This was a grand success.

NIAS Associates were mostly from Bangalore, but there were some exceptional persons from outside. The participants in the courses became automatically associates.