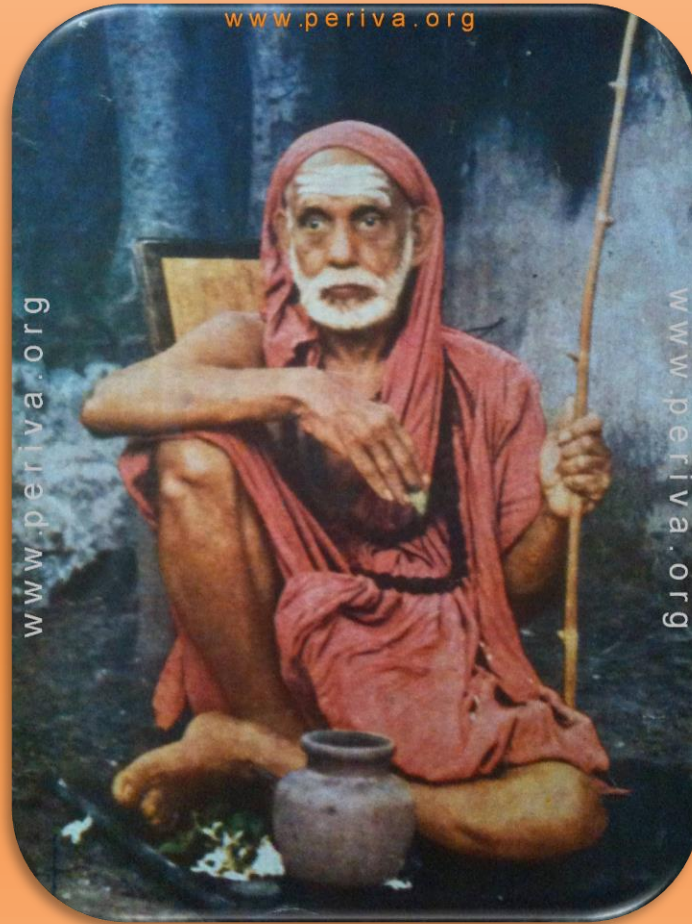


*Glimpses from
Sri Maha Periva's Life History*



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Volume 1

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Glimpses from Sri Maha Periva's Life History

Volume 1

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Preface

In my home library, I have a collection of books covering a wide range of topics. One of the books is really a treasure that I am blessed to possess.

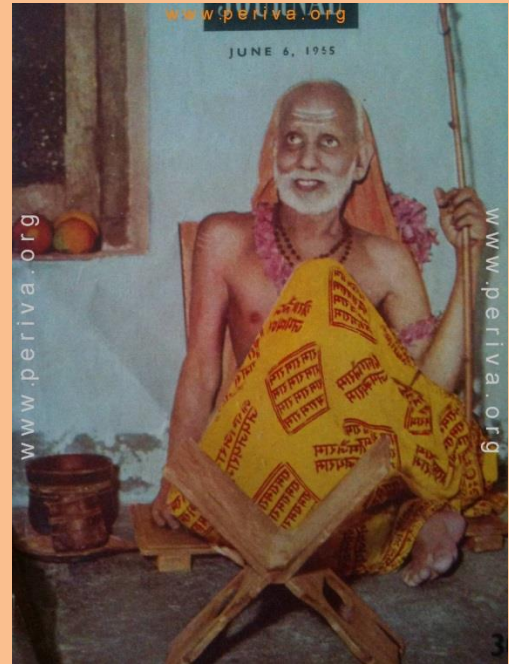
It is a book on the biography of Kamakoti Peetam's 68th Sankaracharya Srimad Jagadguru Sri. Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Swamigal, well known as Kanchi Maha Periva.

Sri. Sambamurthy Sastrigal, the learned author of this book and one of Maha Periva's siblings presented a copy of this book to me as a gift at my wedding.

I am grateful to Sri. Sastrigal for this nice present that I cherish as the most precious gift that I have ever received.

Let me say a few words about this book. Written in Tamil, the book

describes the *Divya Charitram* (divine history) of Maha Periva. The book has over 470 pages.



In the preface, the author says that he compiled the book based on information gathered from a variety of sources including the daily notes of the author and translations of relevant articles from other Indian languages.

The author has acknowledged the commendable assistance provided by Pudukottai Sri. Dakshinamurthy Sastrigal and Sri. R. Viswanatha

Iyer (Professor of Tamil in Madras Presidency College) in the translation work and review of this book.

As regards the contents of this book, it provides a description of the early life of Maha Periva, his nationwide travels, interesting narrations of many incidents and meetings, Maha Periva's teachings at various places, and some old but rare pictures.

Maha Periva assumed charge of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam in the year 1907. Interestingly, this biography book was published in the year 1957 that happened to coincide with the completion of 50 years by Maha Periva as head of the Kanchi Peetam.

The author mentions that the book was a therefore a commemorative publication to mark the golden jubilee of Maha

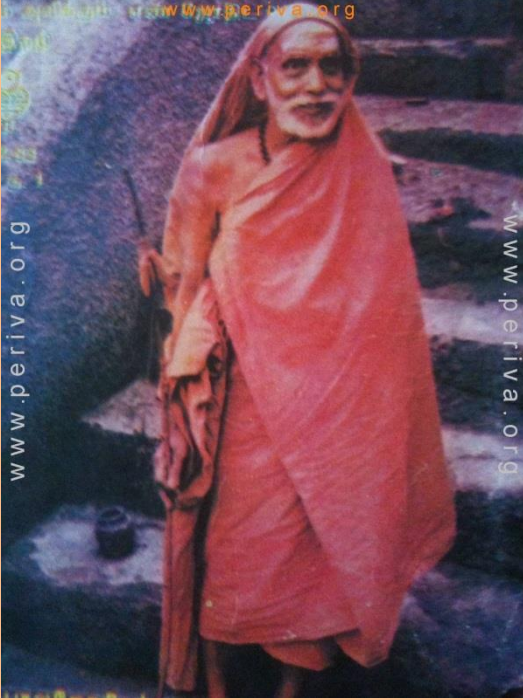
Periva's tenure at the Kanchi Peetam.

Much to my embarrassment, I must admit that for many years I did not care to read this book. The reasons are not far to seek. The size of the book and more importantly, my own indifference significantly delayed the process of reading this precious book.

Realizing such barriers could exist for others too, I thought of extracting a few glimpses from the Tamil book and presenting them as short, easy-to-read e-books in English language. I propose making them in a couple of volumes to be released once a month.

Stories about great men inspire us and contribute to our learning. The Tamil book on the life history of Maha Periva provided me a great inspiration and a valuable resource to attempt at writing in

English a condensed version in the form of an e-book.



You will find many Tamil and Sanskrit words in this e-book. I have not adopted any uniform style in the spelling and usage of these words; For the benefit of those readers who are not familiar with some intricate words, I have italicized them and provided with simple meanings in English when used for the first time.

However, as you will appreciate, it is very difficult to provide exact

translations. A basic knowledge of Sanskrit and Tamil would be very useful in reading, pronouncing and understanding the words correctly as used in this book.

In the Tamil book, the author has used the word 'Swamigal' for Maha Periva. I felt the word 'Swamigal' is commonly used for any saint in India. Therefore, it could cause some confusion in the minds of readers. Therefore, in this e-book, I have used the exclusive word 'Maha Periva' in place of Swamigal.

I have provided a few pictures in this book. The quality of these pictures is not good as these are very old pictures copied from the original Tamil book.

Nevertheless, they are included in the e-book as they may help readers to visualize people and places.

Maha Periva's charm and grace attracted all - the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the urban and rural dwellers alike.

One of the most glorified sages in the entire world, Maha Periva personified humility and simplicity.

He attracted his devotees as a magnet draws iron particles. I offer my *ananthakoti namaskarams* (most humble salutations) at the Lotus Feet of Maha Periva for providing me the inspiration to undertake this work.

This e-book is dedicated to Maha Periva.

I am indeed grateful to the Kanchi Periva forum for offering me an opportunity to provide you glimpses from Maha Periva's life history in the electronic format.

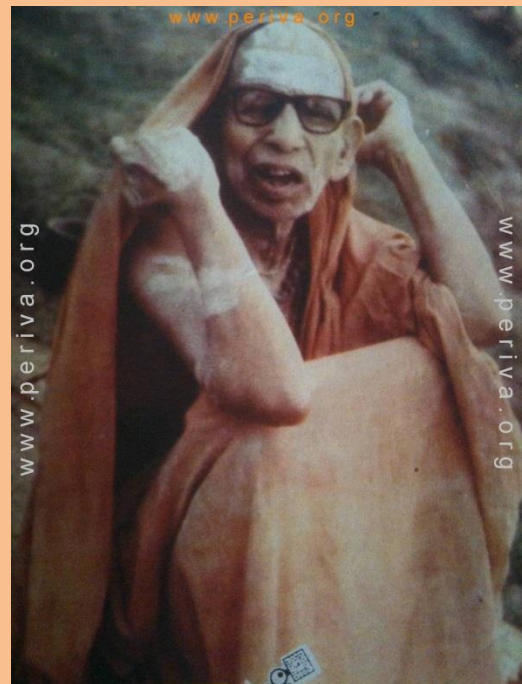
I would greatly appreciate readers' feedback on this e-book, as it will guide me in my future work.

Thank you for your time and encouragement.

Jaya Jaya Sankara Hara Hara Sankara

Sundaresan Subramanian
(*"Subi Anna"*)

Chicago, July 2013



Chapter 1 - Early Life

The 68th Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam Srimad Jagadguru Sri. Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Swamigal, popularly known as Maha Periva, was born on Sunday, May 20, 1894 in Vizhupuram city, Tamil Nadu, India.



Figure 1. A picture of the house in Vizhupuram, Tamil Nadu, India where Maha Periva was born as Swaminathan in the year 1894.

The parents of the child named him as Swaminathan adopting the name of the family deity at the Swamimalai temple. Swaminathan's father Subramania Sastrigal was a scholar and worked

as a supervisor in the government's education department. His mother Mahalakshmi was a talented homemaker and a deeply religious woman.

Swaminathan had five siblings – an elder brother named Ganapathi Sastry, three younger brothers by the names of Sambamurthy Sastry, Sadashiva Sastry and Krishnamurthy Sastry, and a younger sister named Lalithambal.

Until the age of eight, Swaminathan did not attend any school but learnt many things including music at home from his parents. However, at this time, Swaminathan did not get an opportunity to learn Sanskrit.

In the year 1905, Subramania Sastrigal performed the upanayanam (thread ceremony) for Swaminathan. By then, the family had moved to another city

called Tindivanam. It was in Tindivanam that Swaminathan joined the Arcot American Mission High School in second form (equivalent to present 7th standard or grade 7).

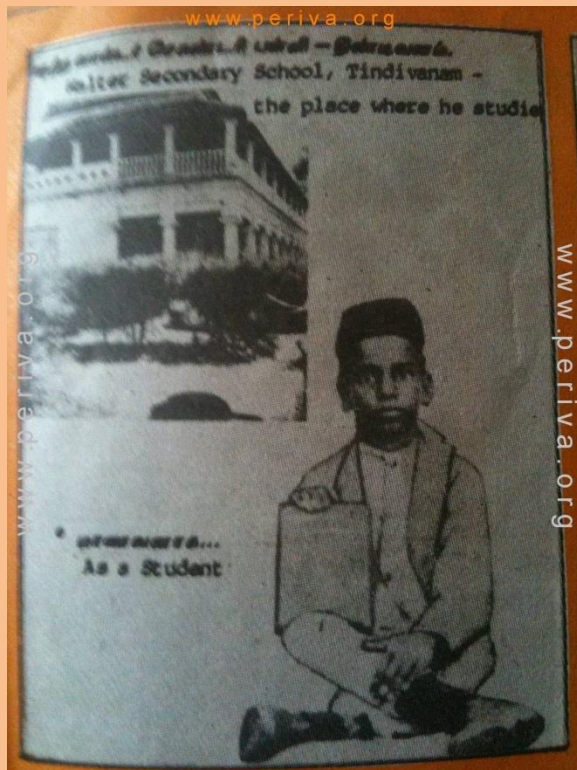


Figure 2. A picture of the student Swaminathan with a certificate in his hand. His School is set in the background of the image.

At school, Swaminathan proved to be a brilliant student and participated in many school activities. He won many prizes at competitive events including a

demonstration of proficiency in the holy bible.

As a student of the mission school, Swaminathan displayed remarkable intelligence and grasping power in studies. The Christian mission teachers were proud of having Swaminathan as a student in their school. An interesting incident happened while Swaminathan was studying in third form (present 8th standard).

To ensure that schools were functioning effectively in the field of education, the local government had then many school inspectors. One of the inspectors of schools named Singaravelu Mudaliar once visited the mission school for inspection.

While checking on how students were faring in their studies, he picked Swaminathan to ask him several questions.

The inspector was so pleased with Swaminathan's perfect answers that he called Subramania Sastrigal and told him, "Some day, your son will become a great man." It seemed like a prophecy and Sastrigal felt immensely happy.

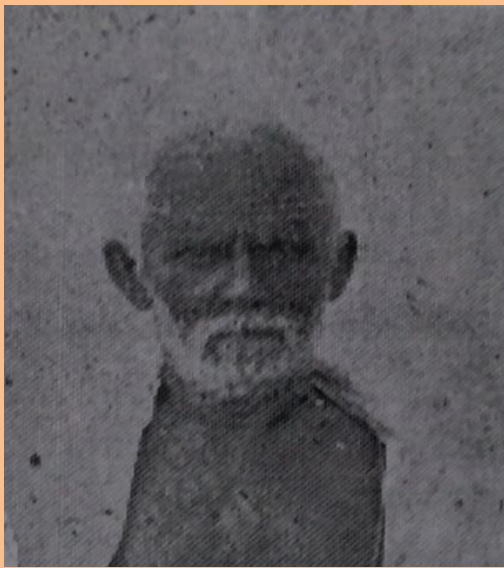


Figure 3. Sri. Subramania Sastrigal, Father of Maha Periva.

At that time, little did Sastrigal realize that his son Swaminathan would someday leave his home and relatives to become a *Sanyaasi* (an ascetic) and head the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam.

Young Swaminathan had very good speaking skills and a fine sense of humor. When he was studying in the fourth form (present 9th grade), he was selected for a school drama to perform the role of Prince Arthur in Shakespeare's play "King John."

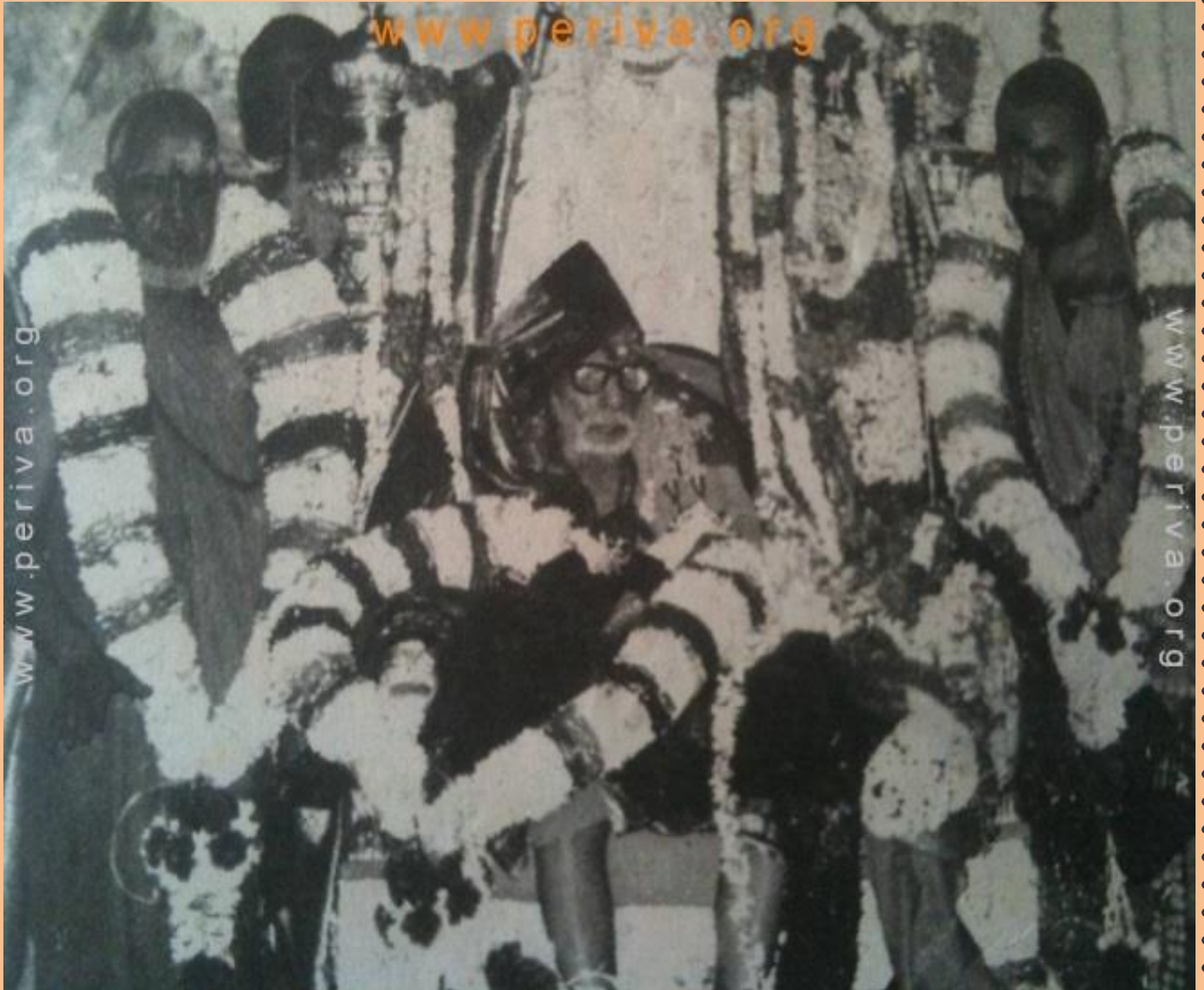
Though his orthodox parents were not too happy about their son acting in a drama, they did not want to curb his desire.

Therefore, they agreed to his performing the assigned role in the school event and made special clothes for him to suit his role as a prince in the drama.

Acting as Prince Arthur, Swaminathan performed so well that he impressed everyone in the school with his superb acting and won the first prize for his great performance in the play.

The day after the play at school, Swaminathan's teachers visited the home of Subramania Sastrigal and expressed their happiness on his son's talents.

No doubt, the parents must have been very proud at their son's splendid performance at school.



Chapter 2 - Meeting with Guru & Renunciation

In the year 1906, the 66th Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam Sri Chandrasekarendra Swamigal (referred to as 'the Guru' hereafter) was camping at a small village called Perumukkal in South Arcot District.

To meet with this Guru, Subramania Sastrigal went with his family to Perumukkal. During the family's 2-days stay at the village, the Guru had several meetings with young Swaminathan and asked him many questions. Impressed with Swaminathan's answers, the Guru had instructed Sastrigal to bring him more often to the Guru's camp.

Later, in compliance with the Guru's instructions, Swaminathan accompanied his father many times to meet with the Guru. Thus

began a fond relationship between the Guru and young Swaminathan.

One day, Swaminathan was missing at his home. His parents were worried and searched all around. After spending two sleepless nights, the parents got a message that Swaminathan was safe at the Guru's camp. Two days later, Swaminathan returned home. It was not clear as to how and why he went to meet the Guru.

Sometime in early February 1907, while Subramania Sastrigal was away at work in Tiruchy, his family received a telegram from the Guru's camp requesting Sastrigal to bring Swaminathan immediately to Kanchipuram.

Realizing the importance and urgency of the matter, friends of Sastrigal sent the family members by train to Kanchipuram. At that time, the Guru was was camping

at a small village called Kalavai – about 30 miles away from Kanchipuram.

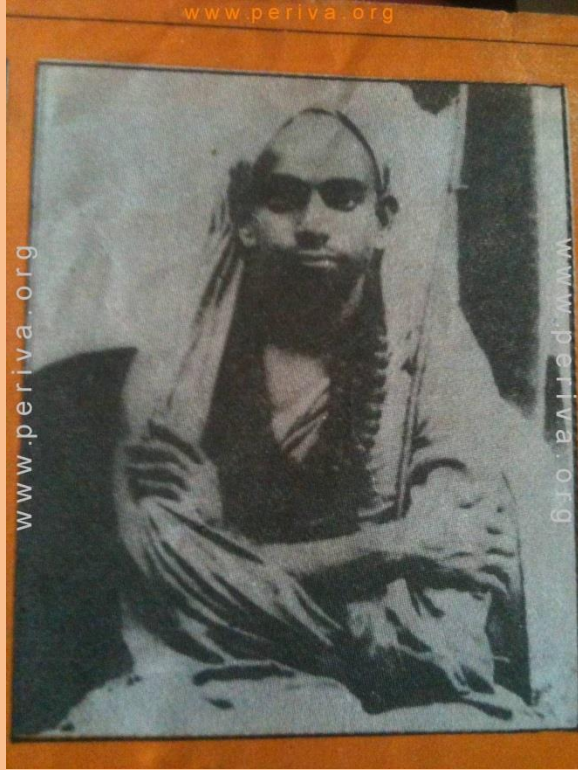


Figure 4. Sri Maha Periva, at a very young age

The officials at the Kanchi Mutt arranged to dispatch Swaminathan to Kalavai leaving the other family members in Kanchipuram.

When the telegram was sent to Sastrigal, the Guru was suffering from small pox. Realizing that he may not live long, the Guru desired to appoint Swaminathan

as his successor. He had instructed the Kanchi Mutt officials to call Swaminathan and his father Subramania Sastrigal. Accordingly, the mutt officials sent a telegram to Sastrigal asking him to come immediately with Swaminathan.

Unfortunately, before Swaminathan could reach Kalavai, the Guru had attained *siddhi* (a Sanskrit term to signify the passing away of a Guru). The Guru, in his final moments, had initiated his 18-year old disciple Lakshmikanthan (who was proficient in Rig Veda and was readily available) to succeed him. Therefore, Lakshmikanthan became the 67th Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Peetam.

However, the ways of Almighty are strange and unpredictable! It so happened that the 67th Sankaracharya too suffered from an attack of small pox and lived only for 8 days after taking over

the Peetam. However, before attaining siddhi, he approved the appointment of young Swaminathan as his successor to the Kanchi Peetam.

Following the Guru's desire, on the thirteenth day of February 1907, Swaminathan was initiated into *Sanyasa* (becoming an ascetic) to take over the reins of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam as the 68th Sankaracharya. He accepted the *Deeksha* (assigned) name of Sri. Chandrasekerandra Saraswathi.

Swaminathan's parents were stunned at the unexpected turn of events. Becoming a Sanyasi is not an easy task for anybody, particularly for a 13-year old boy, as it involves a very strong personal discipline, meditation, worship and disconnection of the family members. They were most reluctant to give away their loving son to the Kanchi Peetam.

The officials of the Kanchi mutt pleaded with them to spare Swaminathan for the welfare of the world at large and for the sake of other disciples at the mutt who urgently needed a Guru.

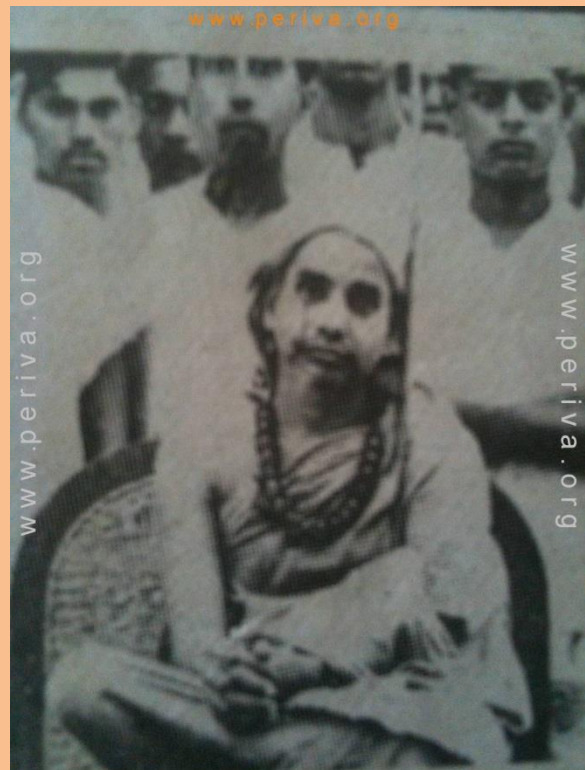


Figure 5. The young Sannyasi - Sri Maha Periva, sitting amidst His disciples

Perplexed and not knowing what to do, Swaminathan's parents did not have a ready response to the mutt officials. As if to relieve the great mental torture his parents were going through, the gentle

Swaminathan offered salutations to his parents and told them, “Why do you hesitate? I have the fullest blessing of the Guru and I shall fulfill my duties as ordained. Please permit me to accept Sanyasam with your full heart.”

Those words were a source of great solace to Swaminathan's parents and they reconciled and gave permission to their son.

Thus, the bright young boy who was until then Swaminathan suddenly became a *Sanyasi* (an ascetic) renouncing all bondage with his family and his possessions. With a clean-shaven head and donning ochre robes, he looked magnificently like Adisankara himself. Quite aptly, he acquired the title of Sankaracharya. Later, devotees started addressing him as Periva. (Hereafter in this book, we revere him as Maha Periva to distinguish him from other Kanchi Perivas).

After the renunciation event, Swaminathan's parents returned home and never met him again. Later, if anyone ever asked about their son Swaminathan, the parents would just remain silent.

Visit to Kumbakonam

During the 18th century, for reasons of internal wars, the administrative headquarters of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam was shifted from Kanchipuram to Kumbakonam city. This move happened during the tenure of the 62nd Sankaracharya.

Maha Periva accepted the Acharya *Peetam* (Seat) at Kalavai Village. After this event, in the same year, he traveled to Kumbakonam. Enroute, he stayed for three days in Tindivanam where his parents were living. In those days, people celebrated the visit of any Sankaracharya Swamigal as a local festival.

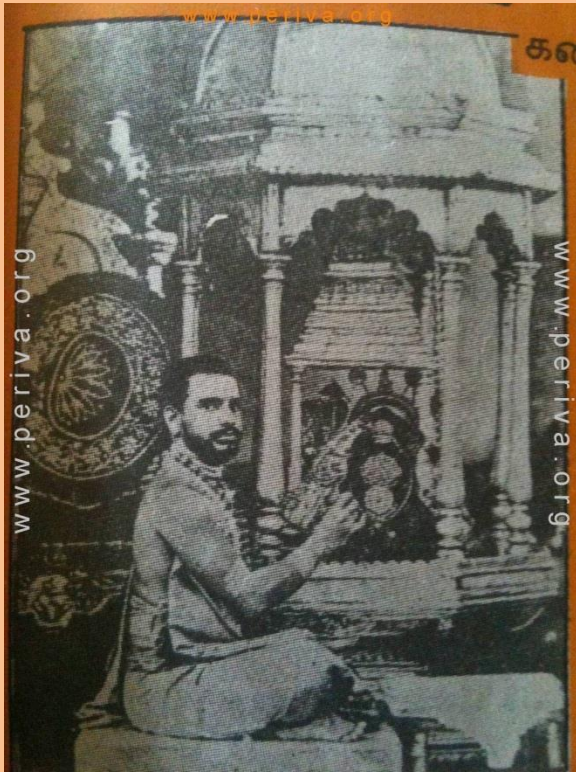


Figure 6. Sri Maha Periva, performing Sri Chandramouleeshwara Pooja

Thousands of people used to gather to watch the Acharya performing the *Pooja* (ritual worship) to the deities of Sri. Chandramouleeshwara and His consort Tripurasundari Amman.

After the Pooja, the Acharya used to distribute the *Abhisheka Theertam* (the holy water) to the devotees.

Maha Periva's visit to Tindivanam in 1907 had a special significance. Until then, the residents of Tindivanam knew him only as a young boy but now they were seeing him as an ochre robe-wearing ascetic – a charming Sankaracharya. It was natural that the local residents were proud that the Sankaracharya Maha Periva belonged to their city of Tindivanam.

For this reason, people gathered in large numbers to see him and express their devotion. The teachers and students from the local mission school were particularly interested to see him. Maha Periva delighted them by conversing with them.

All the Sankaracharyas of Kamakoti Peetam were/are Sanyasis. However, since they worked for the welfare of people at large, it was a tradition to visualize them like Emperors. The

disciples, therefore, wanted to perform the formal *Pattabishekam* (traditional coronation) of Maha Periva.

On May 9, 1907, this important Pattabishekam event was celebrated in a grand manner at the Kumbakonam Mutt.

At this event, Maha Periva received *Abhishekam* (holy bath) with water from the holy River Ganges.

After the abhishekam, Maha Periva was seated on a *simhasana* (throne).

Thousands of people including many dignitaries from the government, and royal representatives of the queens from Thanjavur kingdom witnessed the coronation ceremony.



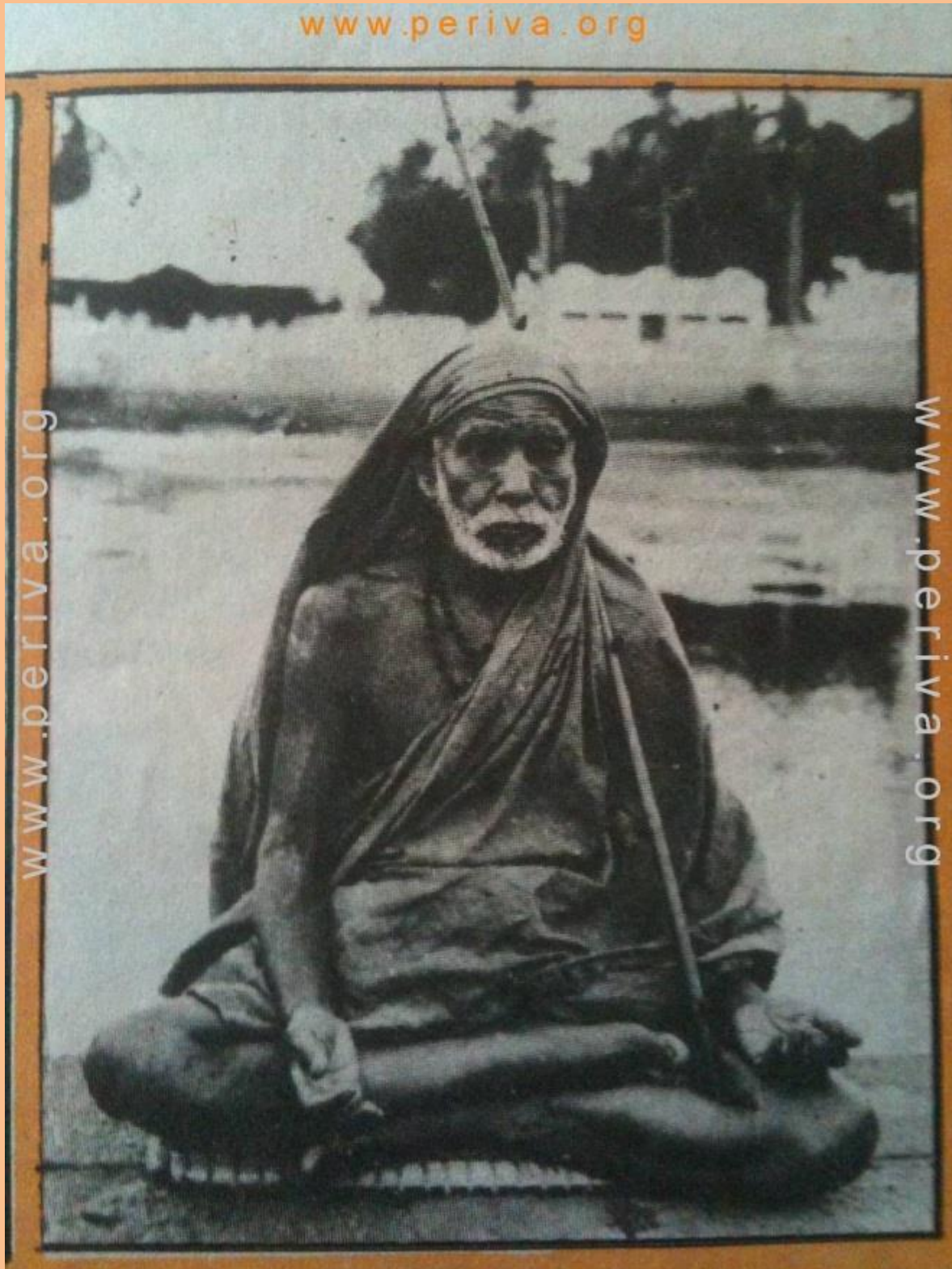
Figure 7. Sri Maha Periva, adorning a Simhasanam (throne) and being worshipped by an Elephant

Many talented artists and professionals were honored with gifts.

Later in the night, seated on an elephant, Maha Periva went on a procession around the city providing a scene that mesmerized the people around.

Thus, a thirteen-year-old boy called Swaminathan became a Sanyasi and attained the position

of 68th Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam with the title of Jagadguru.



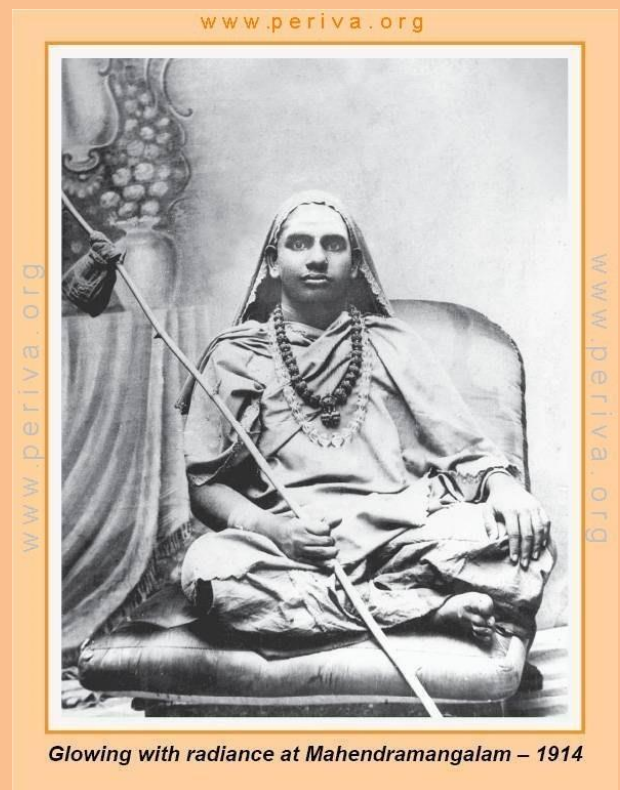
Chapter 3 - Study Phase at the Mutt

In the initial years of 1909-10, Maha Periva studied Sanskrit scriptures, fine arts, and Vedas at the Kumbakonam Mutt under the guidance of the *pandits* (learned teachers) of the Mutt. The *pandits* were immensely impressed with Maha Periva's grasp and intelligence.

However, the visits of numerous devotees and disciples to the mutt were seen to be a disturbance to the studies at Kumbakonam. Therefore, for continuing the studies without disturbance, the mutt officials identified a calm and beautiful location at a village called Mahendra Mangalam.

This village was located on the banks of River Cauvery, about five miles west of Musiri town, beyond Thottiyam on the Tiruchy-Namakkal road. In those days, there were not much of transportation facilities. To reach

this village, one had to disembark at Laalapettai Railway Station and travel by a ferry over one-mile wide Cauvery River.



Glowing with radiance at Mahendramangalam – 1914

Figure 8. The baala sannyasi – in Mahendra Mangalam

Because of the travel ordeals, not many people would venture to visit Mahendra Mangalam for Maha Periva's *darshan* (seeing a holy person). In 1911, Maha Periva moved to the chosen new location to continue his studies.

The method of Maha Periva's study was unique. Generally, a student respects the teachers and treats them as Gurus. Before beginning and after ending the lessons, the teachers used to prostrate before Maha Periva as they regarded Maha Periva (who was really the student) as their Guru.

Despite this unusual situation, Maha Periva greatly respected his teachers and learnt many new subjects such as grammar, logic, Vedanta and others. He also learnt Meemasam. During the three years of 1911 to 1913, the village became the travel destination for numerous pundits and leaders.

Notably, those who assisted in Maha Periva's study of the various subjects include Painganadu Panchapakesa Sastrigal, *Mahamahopadyaya* (title given to a great teacher) Sastra Ratnakara Venkatasubba Sastrigal, Sastra

Ratnakara Vishnupuram Sami Sastrigal and Tiruvisainallur Venkatrama Sastrigal.

Among the mutt's important official pundits who greatly encouraged Maha Periva were Mahamahopadyaya Ganapathy Sastrigal, Mahamahopadyaya Karungulam Krishna Sastrigal, and Koti Kannikadaanam Upayavedanta Rajagopala Thathachariar.

It would be surprising to note that Maha Periva was also learning French and English languages along with other subjects. As Maha Periva was also keen to learn Marathi language and study books in Marathi, a Marathi Pandit was specially brought from Bombay Presidency and made to stay at the mutt for three years.

Working with the Marathi pandit, Maha Periva researched many Marathi books. Maha Periva's

interest in Tamil language was the greatest of all. With the help of some Tamil scholars, Maha Periva learnt Tamil grammar and literature.

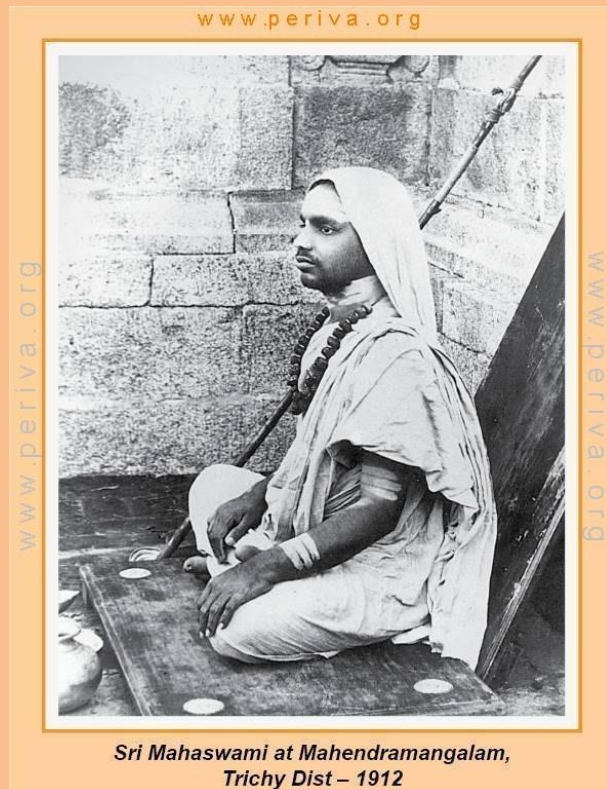


Figure 9. Sri Maha Periva, during the course of his studies at Mahendra Mangalam

He also continued to research on Tamil classics Thevara, Thiruvachakam, Periya Puranam, Thiruvizhaiyadal Puranam and Thirukural. He did not allocate a separate time for learning the fine arts. In spare time, during conversations with people skilled

in fine arts, Maha Periva learnt the intricacies of fine arts. Amongst fine arts, the art of music attracted Maha Periva.

Quite often, Maha Periva took walks on the sand dunes located in the middle of Cauveri. He would enjoy the natural beauty and many times sat there alone in meditation.

He liked to take pictures of natural scenes. In those days, a person with a camera would follow Maha Periva as a practice.

Maha Periva would ask him randomly to take many pictures of natural scenes. As he knew the intricacies of a camera very well, Maha Periva used to offer suggestions to photographers on clicking the best shots.

He would also advise them on the techniques in developing the films, and taking prints.

Maha Periva became well versed in Mathematics, Astrology and astronomy too. To receive training in these subjects, Maha Periva arranged to have Marur Ramaswami Sastrigal (a disciple of Thiruvaiyaru Sundaresa Shrowdhigal) to stay in the mutt for many years and provided support to his family.



Figure 10. Maha Periva on completion of studies in 1914

Maha Periva was keen in listening to Thevaram songs. Whenever talented musicians visited the mutt, he would spend hours with

them in listening to his favorite Thevarams. Maha Periva also developed keen interest in Vaishnavite scriptures such as Thiruvaimozhi and others.

Maha Periva stayed in the village of Mahendra Mangalam from 1911 to 1914. After completion of studies, he returned to Kumbakonam in 1914. To commemorate his study and training, a *Sankaralayam* (Sankara Temple) was established in Mahendra Mangalam on the banks of Cauvery.

Within a short period of 6 years, Maha Periva excelled in his pursuit of knowledge and became well versed in a wide range of topics.

He became familiar with a variety of subjects including epics, history of holy places, archaeology, modern world and others. He quickly gained knowledge from visiting scholars and applied his

knowledge to discover truth. He was one among few who were excellent in interaction with others and evaluating their qualities.

Barely twenty years old, had Maha Periva proved himself to be mature and well talented to hold his position as the 68th Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam.



Chapter 4 - 1911-1915: Mutt's Administration

Maha Periva was a minor (he was only 13 years old!) when he became the 68th Sankaracharya of Kanchi Mutt. Some of the concerned devotees had appealed to the Chennai government that the administration of the mutt should be under the protection of the district court.

There was not enough property for the mutt to warrant administration by a court. However, in the interests of the mutt, the court ordered the administration of the mutt be conducted under the "Guardian and Wards" act. Accordingly, Sri. C.H. Venkatramana Iyer, a prominent person from Coimbatore district's Kolinjiwadi Village, was appointed as the guardian of the mutt. From the year 1911 to 1915, Venkatramana Iyer administered the mutt.

On the Sankara Jayanthi day in May 1915, Maha Periva completed 21 years of age and took over the administration of the mutt. However, all the administrative work was actually carried out by an authorized agent.

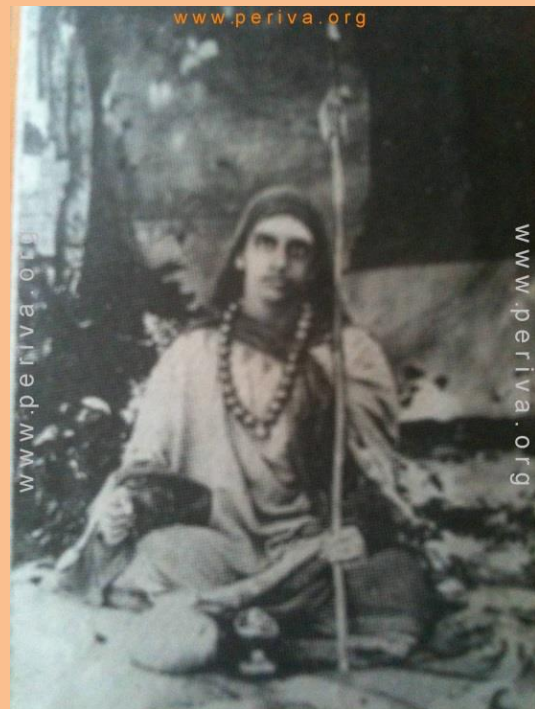


Figure 11. Sri Maha Periva, sitting under a Vriksha

At that time, Pasupathi Iyer, a resident of Tirupathiripuliyur city and a long-time devotee of Maha Periva efficiently performed the administrative activities without any remuneration.

As per tradition, Maha Periva never signed any documents. Instead, the mutt's "*Srimukham*" (official letter) was used to empower the agents and attest documents.

Sankara Jayanthi in the year 1915 was celebrated in a grand manner at the mutt.

A large number of devotees from different parts of the country had collected for the event.

Several noteworthy activities took place at this event.

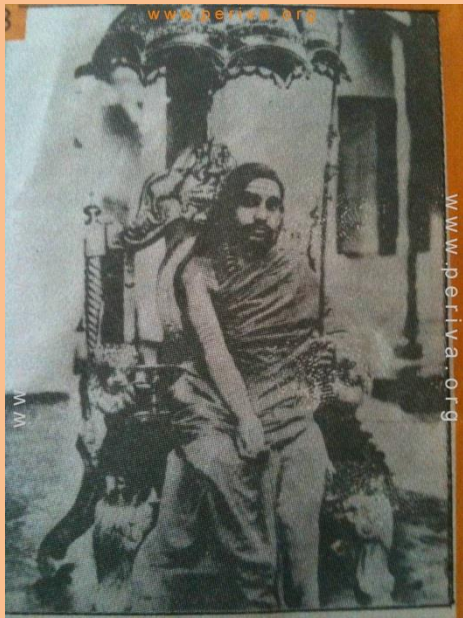


Figure 12. Sri Maha Periva decorating the throne

To enable people understand the essence of Vedas, Maha Periva released the mutt's monthly Tamil magazine titled 'Arya Dharmam.'

Under the supervision of Sri. T.K. Bala Subramania Iyer, this high-quality magazine was printed at the Srirangam Vanivilas printing press.

To improve efficiency, several reforms were made to the administration of the mutt.

For the benefit of disciples and devotees, the history of the mutt was published in different languages.

Thiruvananthapuram

Archeological inspector Sri T.A.Gopinatha Rao examined the relics and artifacts of the mutt and helped in compiling the mutt's history book.

Chapter 5 - Navaratri Festival

In October 1916, the mutt at Kumbakonam celebrated the *Navaratri* (nine nights) festival in a grand manner. On each of the nine days, there was *laksharchana* (a worship chanting names of the deity 100000 times) to *Ambikai* (Goddess). The festivities included lighting of one lakh (100,000) lamps with ghee, and feeding one lakh Brahmins.

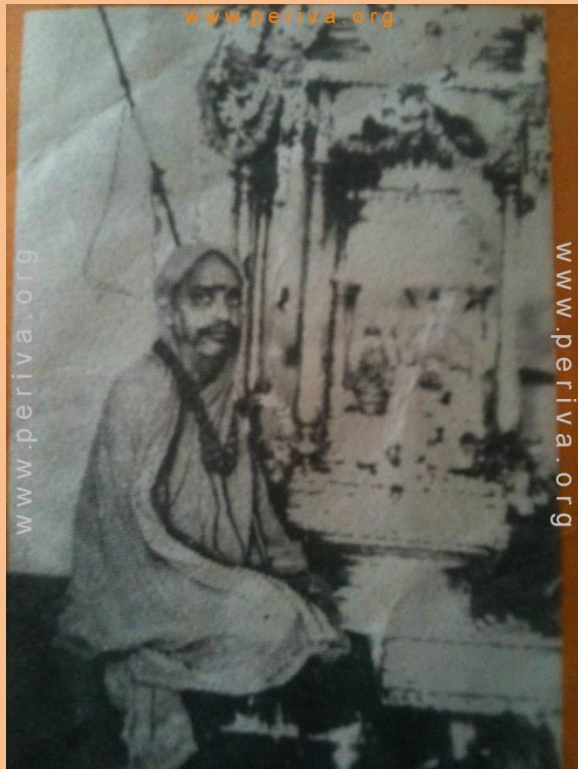


Figure 13. Maha Periva in front of Sri Chandramouleeswara & Ambaal

A brief description of this festival was provided by Sri C. Subramania Bharathiar in one of his articles. Excerpts of Bharathiar's description follow.

“During the spring season, people traditionally worship the Goddess for nine nights. There was flash news that the Kumbakonam mutt will conduct special celebrations for the Navaratri. It was common news. Since I was somewhat curious about Sankara mutt, I read the news. More than half of it was about *Shastras* (Sacred scriptures/teachings). It seemed uncommon to introduce shastras in commercial news. Nevertheless, the shastras in it were truthful. I did not expect it. Therefore, I was very happy when I read the news.

About the special Navaratri celebrations, the Kumbakonam newspaper commented that the purpose of this special worship is

welfare of the world. During Navaratri, the Yoga Maya (Ambika) takes three forms – Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi – to get rid of evil and spread happiness for humanity.

Ever since Devi took such *avatara* (incarnation) to alleviate human sufferings, the people of India have been celebrating this festival. Devi is Omni-present; She is also present in every material; She is the *Maya* (illusion); She is the *Shakti* (Divine force); She is the performer of action, the activity and the result of the activity; She is the mother and father; She is the Parabrahmam.”

The Navaratri festival of the mutt was actively supported by people from different walks of life – *mirasdars* (landlords), company owners, Tirupanandal mutt Tambiran Swamigal, and others.

Idols of Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswathi were installed facing East. Those who were proficient in Devi Puja recited Lalitha Sahasranamam and performed Archana many times.

Priest conducted several *homams* (sacrificial fire) such as Chandi homam, and Srividya homam. Scholars recited scriptures like *Ramayanam*, *Bhagavatham*, *Devi Mahatmiyam*, *Soundarya Lahari*, and *Bhagavad Gita*. Vedic experts recited Vedas.

There were also lectures on different topics by other experts, and musical programs. On the Vijayadasami Day (tenth day), Maha Periva visited the local temples.

Later, Maha Periva, sitting on top of an elephant, was taken on a mile-long procession around the city.

On both sides of the procession route were accompaniments of hundreds of power lights, attractive display of fireworks, six pairs of *Nadaswarams* (pipe instrument), three pairs of musical

band, groups reciting Vedas and Thevaram, four elephants, and horses. Those who witnessed this event were indeed very fortunate!



Chapter 6 - Inspiring Initiatives in Education and Arts

Beginning in 1917 at Kumbakonam, Maha Periva initiated many laudable activities to encourage education and arts in various parts of India. Some of these activities are briefly described in the following paragraphs:

Honoring Scholars

Soon after the annual convention of the Kumbakonam Advaita Sabha in August 1917, Maha Periva convened a meeting of scholars. At this meeting, Maha Periva honored numerous well-qualified people from all over India including professors from prominent educational institutions such as the Calcutta University, Kasi Hindu University, Chennai Sanskrit College, Bombay Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and talented Vedic scholars from different cities. Maha Periva also

conferred the title of “*Sastra Ratnakaram*” on two great Vedic scholars – Brahmasri Pazhamaneri Ramaswami Sastrigal and Brahmasri Tiruvisainallur Venkata Subba Satrigal. Later on, many scholars have received this title. *(Note: The names of nineteen scholars who received this title later are given in the Tamil book. From time to time, Maha Periva had honored them.)*

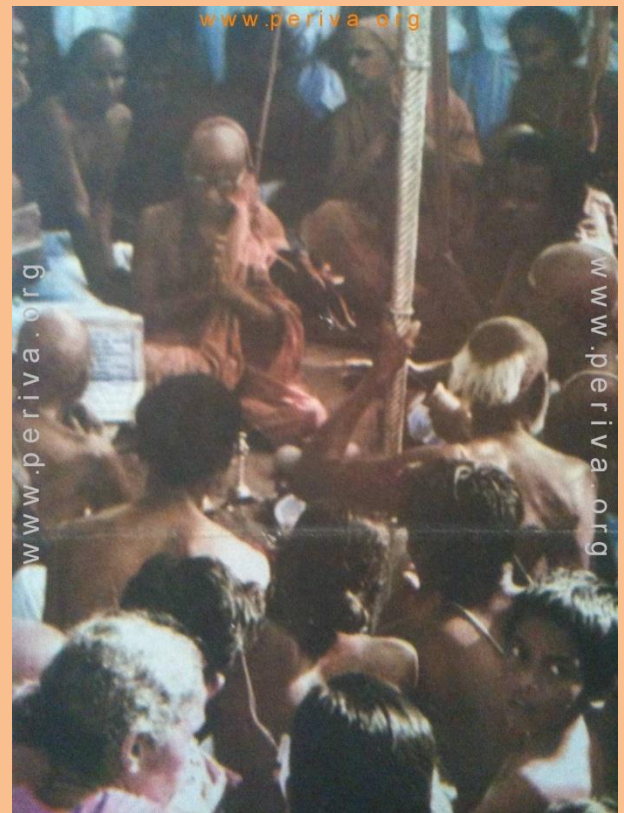


Figure 14. Maha Periva in front of a batch of Scholars & Pandits

Encouraging Students

Essay Competition: In the same year, in order to get college students interested in religion, Maha Periva announced an essay competition for them. The topic for the essay in English was “Pursuant to changes taking place all round, how to determine ways to protect Sanathana Dharma?”

Many students from colleges in major cities like Chennai, Tiruchy, Madurai and others participated in this essay competition. Students who wrote the first three winning essays received cash prizes and books.

The student winner of the first prize at this competition – V.R. Ramachandra Deekshitar later became the professor of history in the University of Madras.

Financial Assistance: Maha Periva had arranged to provide

scholarships to college and university students for the year 1917 and for subsequent years. He had also extended financial assistance to schools that provided religious education.

Medical Aid to Poor

During 1917, Maha Periva had established an Ayurvedic clinic to provide free healthcare to poor people. The doctors who served at this clinic were *Vaidya Visharaths* (a qualification title) Jagadrakshaka Shastrigal and Thiruvannamalai Krishna Shastrigal - both graduates from Venkataramana Ayurvedic college in Mylapore, Chennai.

Encouraging Arts

During Maha Periva's stay in Kumbakonam from the year 1914 to 1918, artists, musicians, linguists and scholars from different parts of India continued

to visit the mutt for Maha Periva's darshan.

Almost every day, there used to be a meeting of scholars in the evening time and heated discussions on matters related to sastras.

Maha Periva would patiently listen to all arguments and at the end, explain the truth and validity behind every argument.

Everyone around would be surprised at the admirable manner in which Maha Periva used to draw conclusions acceptable to all.

Maha Periva and Avadhanam

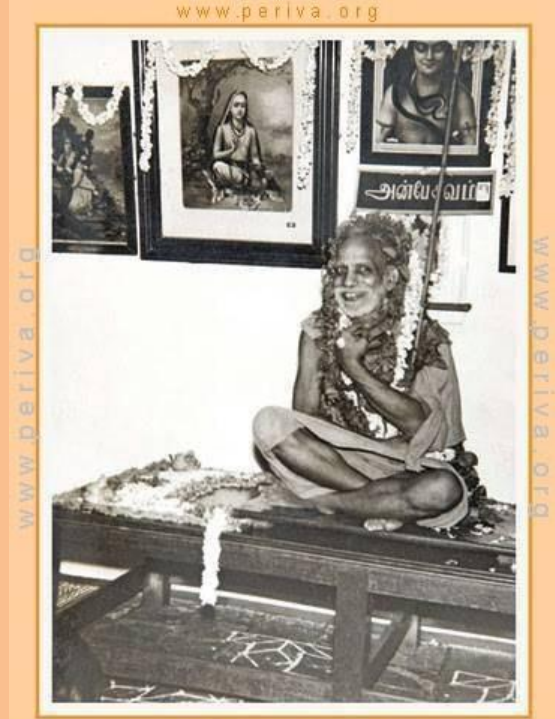
'*Avadhana*' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'concentration'. *Avadhanam* refers to a person's ability to concentrate and perform correctly multiple tasks at the same time.

It requires a very high level of attention, quick grasp, strong memory power and knowledge of various topics including literature.

Avadhani refers to the individual who successfully performs Avadhanam.

In those days, talented scholars and poets called *Ashtaavadanis* and *Shataavadanis* used to travel across the country and demonstrate their knowledge and superior skills to people in high places to earn their appreciation and some gifts.

Ashtaavadanis (*Ashta* means eight) were experts who quickly understood eight questions from different scholars at one go and answered each of the questions correctly and exactly in the same order in which they were asked.



Sri Mahaswami at the Sanskrit College, Mylapore, Chennai

Figure 15. Maha Periva giving darshan in Sanskrit College, Chennai

Likewise, *Shataavadanis* (*Shata* means hundred) were those who could answer one hundred questions correctly. To prove their skills, the *avadhanis* had to be smart and proficient in different subjects such as languages, arts and poetry, mathematics, astrology, logic, *Vedanta*, *Meemamsa* and *Vyakarana*.

In order to test and verify the skills of each *avadhani*, many scholars (subject experts) would be seated

around the *avadhani* and shoot questions at him from various subjects, one after another.

For example: one scholar may recite the first line of a poem and ask the *avadhani* to recite the next line; another scholar may ask for answer to a complex question in mathematics; the third scholar could be an astrologer describing an horoscope and asking for predictions based on astrological science; a musical scholar might sing a rare *raga* (tune) and ask the *avadhani* to identify the *raga*; another scholar could question him on flowers; yet another scholar may test the *avadhani's* knowledge of epics by asking a question from the *Ramayana*, and so on.

At the end of a set number of questions in quick succession, the *avadhani* had to answer all the questions correctly in the same order.

The Avadhani's amazing feat required intimate knowledge on various topics, the ability to listen carefully and concentrate and above all, remembering many unrelated questions in the same sequence.

Therefore, the event to test avadhani skills generally provided a literary feast and entertainment to the audience.

An interesting incident related to avadhanam took place at the mutt. Once, an aged *Vaishnavite* (Devotee of Vishnu) *Sathawadhani* (one who could answer one hundred questions) had visited the Kumbakonam mutt.

Following the usual practice, experts in different subjects grilled the Sathawadhani with various test questions. While the experts were asking the questions, Maha Periva asked a person to note

down his own answer to every question.

The talented Sathawadhani visitor replied all the test questions correctly without any hesitation.

At the end, a comparative check of his answers with Maha Periva's own answers (noted down separately) revealed that both sets of answers matched perfectly. People around were immensely impressed with Maha Periva's knowledge.

Maha Periva then complimented the Sathawadhani and honored him with a Kashmiri shawl and other gifts. Later, for a couple of years, the same Sathawadhani used to visit the mutt often.

Likewise, many other artists used to visit the mutt often to demonstrate their skills before Maha Periva and receive gifts from him.

Visitors' Impressions

The owner of a large circus company in those days, Professor Ramamurthy, once met with Maha Periva and got his doubts on Yoga clarified by Maha Periva.

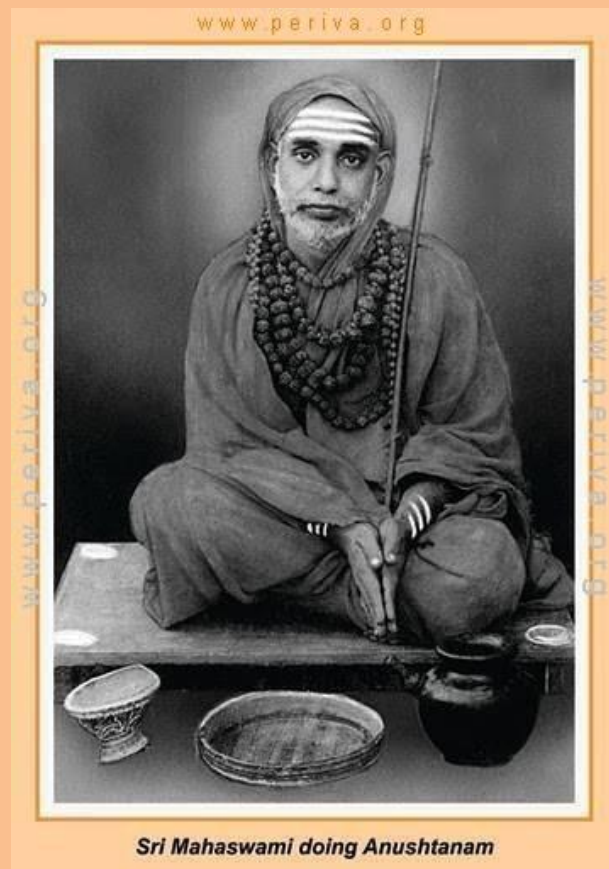


Figure 16. Maha Periva doing Anushtanam

Later, this person referred about his meeting with Maha Periva to one of his friends, and told him, "I saw the real power of

"*Brahmacharya*" (celibacy) in Maha Periva.

With such power, one can achieve all the feats that are considered unachievable in this world."

In the year 1917, the *Maharaja* (King) of Darbhanga, during his travels in South India, stayed in Kumbakonam for three days.

At that time, he met with Maha Periva discussed with him about the temples that integrated North and South and the cultures.

Impressed with Maha Periva's spiritual power, the Maharaja requested Maha Periva to visit North India.

Maha Periva's multiple initiatives in the field of education and arts inspired millions of people in various parts of the country.

Chapter 7 - Impact on Science Scholars

In Kumbakonam, Sri. P. Rajagopala Iyer, a scholar in Science, served as a Professor of Physics (and later as Principal) at the Government College. Professor Iyer, through his friends, had heard a lot about Maha Periva's knowledge of arts and his genius. Therefore, he was very keen to meet Maha Periva in person. However, in his mind, he was not sure whether Maha Periva, being a Sanyasi and head of a religious Peetam, would be appropriately responsive to him and talk meaningfully. Therefore, Iyer kept on postponing his meeting with Maha Periva.

Despite his lingering doubt, Iyer somehow steadied his mind one day and traveled to the mutt to have a darshan of Maha Periva. He was not aware of the proper way of offering salutations to Maha Periva who was holding the position of Acharya at the mutt.

However, when he reached the mutt, Maha Periva received him warmly and spoke to him cordially without much ado. The conversation between the two began with college and general events, and later turned to science. Listening to Maha Periva, the learned Professor Iyer was awe-struck by the ease with which Maha Periva explained some of the intricacies in the field of Physics.

While Maha Periva was busy in discussion with Professor Iyer, the Superintending Engineer of Public Works Department (PWD), Sri. P.V. Manicka Nayakkar (another scholar with a Master's degree in Mathematics) walked in for Maha Periva's darshan. Nayakkar was already a great devotee of Maha Periva. He was known to Maha Periva for many years. However, Professor Iyer was a complete stranger to Nayakkar. Observing the interesting trend of

discussions on Science, Nayakkar was curious to know who the stranger was. At this stage, Maha Periva himself introduced Nayakkar to Iyer. Soon after the introduction, the discussions continued and took a turn to the subject of Astronomy. Maha Periva started explaining similarities between our ancient ways and Western ways in astronomy. Using a telescope that was specially brought from the local college, Maha Periva added great clarity to the points he had explained earlier on Astronomy.

After listening to Maha Periva's lucid explanations on the intricacies of Astronomy, both the highly qualified scientists (Iyer and Nayakkar) were astonished. They wondered how Maha Periva could acquire such in-depth scientific knowledge without a formal university education. Maha Periva's clear explanations on the scientific subjects of Physics and

Astronomy helped both of them to lose their pride as high-ranking university graduates. After this incident, Iyer had a high reverence for Maha Periva. He visited the mutt frequently and considered that conversation with Maha Periva was the best among his life's goals.

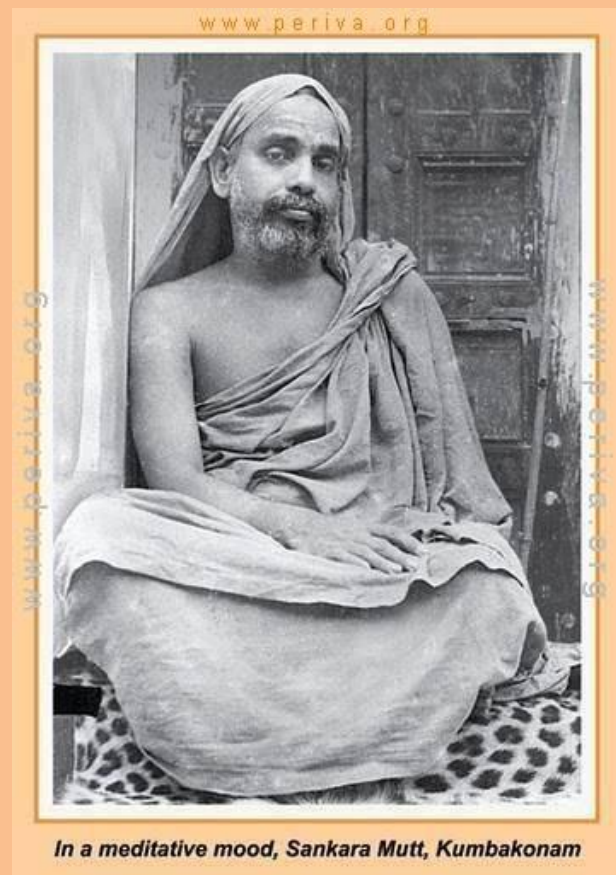


Figure 17. Maha Periva in a meditative mood at Sankara Mutt, Kumbakonam

Innovation

Sri. P.V. Manicka Nayakkar had invented an innovative way of using Tamil alphabets to pronounce words in Sanskrit and other languages. He had also published his innovation in the form of a book.

Maha Periva appreciated his work and provided a *Srimukham* (the official appreciation letter of mutt) to Nayakkar's book.

During his travels to many cities, Nayakkar participated in scholarly meetings and spoke about his innovative transliteration technique. He pleaded with the audience to adopt it.

There was a report that while speaking about his technique at a public meeting in Thanjavur, Nayakkar publicized Maha Periva's endorsement of his innovation.

Telescope Gift

Raja A.V. Jecca Rao, a property owner from Vishakapatnam District of Andhra Pradesh had invested several lakhs of Rupees to set up an astronomical research centre in Vizag. He had traveled around the world, met with many astronomers, and through them learnt many special techniques in astronomy. He wanted to apply the foreign techniques in India for the benefit of his home country. He came to Kumbakonam to have a darshan of Maha Periva and get his blessings.

While speaking with Maha Periva, Jecca Rao was so impressed with Maha Periva's keen interest and wide knowledge of astronomy that he gifted a special and expensive telescope (4 ft long, 6" diameter, bought in Italy) to help Maha Periva's research into astronomy.

The abovementioned incidents illustrate the strong impact made by Maha Periva on scholars of science.

View on other religions

Maha Periva respected any religion that accepted God. With his open mind, he created a healthy impact on scholars from other religions. His confirmed opinion was that people of any religion should stick to their own religion and continue to worship

the God of their religion. (*His opinion is confirmed by many incidents later*).

Many people had witnessed and/or known Maha Periva's open mind and his tolerance to all other religions. Once Sri. Jinaraja Dasar, a scholar of Brahmagnana Sabha had met with Maha Periva and discussed about religions of the world.

He was greatly impressed by Maha Periva's open mind on religions.



Sri Mahaswami with Parakalamutt Swami at Kanchipuram

Chapter 8 - Support to Classical Music

None can match Maha Periva in enjoying the sastric aspects of classical music. Whenever leading musicians performed at the mutt, Maha Periva focused his attention on the meaning of lyrics, *raga* (tune) and *thalam* (rhythm) of the musical presentation. Later, he aroused the interest of artists with relevant questions and doubts.

As Maha Periva was well trained in Telugu language, he used to explain to the visiting artists meanings of various Telugu compositions by Sri. Thyagaraja Swamigal and others. Stressing that one should sing only after knowing the meaning, Maha Periva would often urge the *Vidwans* (artists) to learn at least three languages - Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit - so that they can understand the meanings of many musical compositions. He used to point out to them that in olden

times *Vidwans* had learnt many languages. Observing that the classical compositions of Sri. Shyama Sastri and Sri. Muthuswamy Deekshitar were not being practiced much by the *Vidwans*, he used to advise the artists to learn and practice these compositions.

In those days, the musical *Vidwans* (artists) and the *Bhagavatars* (devotees) engaged in *Kathakalakshepam* (an Indian style of telling religious stories) considered it a great honor to perform before Maha Periva and receive his blessings.

Many artists used to visit Kumbakonam not only for Maha Periva's darshan but also to display their artistic skills before him and discuss matters related to music. Such artists are so numerous that to cover all their names and meetings with Maha Periva is beyond the scope of this

e-book. Therefore, we provide a brief description relating to some of the prominent artists.

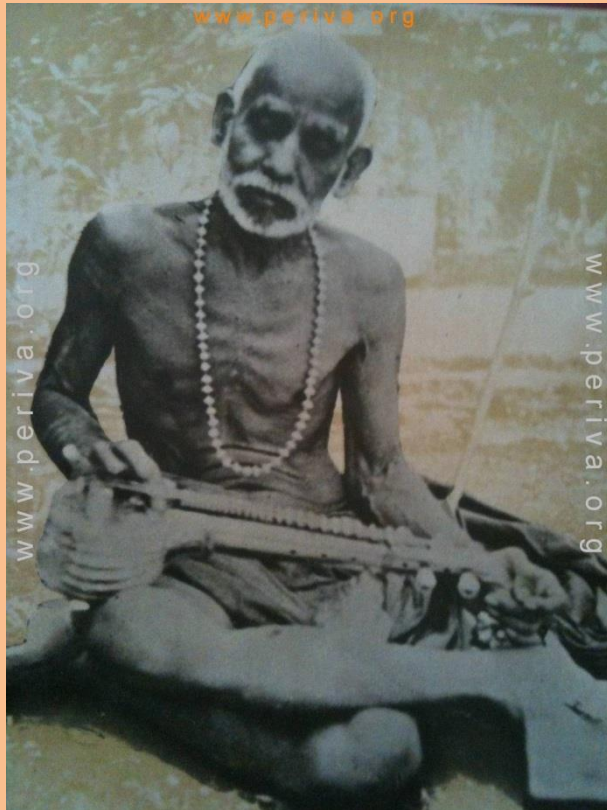


Figure 18. Maha Periva with a small, beautiful tampura in his lap

Umayalpuram Swaminatha Iyer was a stalwart among musicians. He was an important disciple of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer and a descendant of Sri. Tyagaraja Swami's direct disciple. He was also a Guru to many students. He came almost every day to have a darshan of Maha Periva. At that

time, Maha Periva will discuss with him many things related to the art of music. Maha Periva honored Swaminatha Iyer with the title of "*Nadanubhav Saragnya.*"

Mayavaram Vaidyanatha Iyer, a Veena player, used to come often with his sons Sabesa Iyer and Krishnamoorthy to see Maha Periva. Sabesa Iyer was a unique player on the *Veena* (a string instrument).

Much to the delight of listeners, he effectively integrated the Veena's musical tone with his gentle background singing. After he started playing the Veena, his father Vaidyanatha Iyer stopping giving performances.

One day, Sabesa Iyer was giving a splendid performance on the Veena before Maha Periva. Vaidyanatha Iyer was so ecstatic at his son's performance that he impulsively shouted, '*Sabash!* (an

exclamation of delight for a job well done), en Appane' (my father).

With a smile on his face, Maha Periva looked at Vaidyanatha Iyer and told him, "In the midst of this assembly, you should not openly praise your son's performance. Only when others praise him, your son will feel proud. You must appreciate him within your mind."

Vaidyanatha Iyer accepted Maha Periva's advice and offered salutations to him.

Other prominent artists who used to perform before Maha Periva and receive encouragement and gifts included the following:

Nagaraja Rao on flute, accompanied by Semmangudi Narayanaswami Iyer on Violin; Sakkottai Rangu Iyengar on *Mridangam* (a percussion instrument); Umayalpuram

Sunadram Iyer on *Ghatam* (an earthen pot instrument).

Thirupazhanam Panchapakesa Sastrigal, who lived in Kumbakonam itself, used to frequently conduct Kathakalakshepam at the mutt.

Thousands of people heard him with delight. He was unmatched for his musical and oratory skills most suited to the tastes of his fans. He was supported by an accomplished team of accompanying artists.

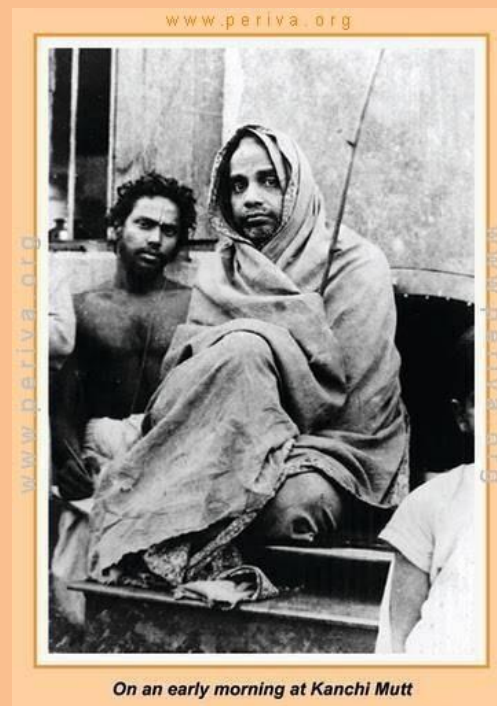


Figure 19. Maha Periva on an early morning in the Sri Matam

Assisted by several vidwans, Sastrigal had compiled the life history of Adisankara in the form of prose and musical compositions. He requested Maha Periva to listen to this life history.

Following Maha Periva's acceptance of his request, Sastrigal divided the story in seven parts and presented at the mutt a 7-day Kathakalakshepam on "Sankara Vijayam."

Thousands of people heard the story that was never presented before by anyone.

Maha Periva sat through the program everyday and listened to the story fully. On the concluding day, Maha Periva congratulated Sastrigal and honored him with gifts.

Besides Sastrigal, many other talented bhagavatars from various towns and villages of Tamil Nadu

had performed Kathakalakshepams in the presence of Maha Periva.

Maha Periva never differentiated music based on language. He enjoyed devotional music in any language.

A renowned Harikatha expert from Maharashtra (the birthplace for Kathakalakshepam) had also visited Kumbakonam.

He was the head of Morgamkar Peetam that belonged to the disciples Samasta Ramadas Swami (Guru to King Shivaji.)

He performed three Kathakalakshepams at the mutt. Though the performance was in Marathi language, people enjoyed the pleasing music and dialogues filled with high devotion.

Pandit Vishnu Digambar of Bombay Gandharva Maha

Vidyalaya, a renowned artist in Hindusthani Music had performed North India Bhajans before Maha Periva and received his appreciation.

Maha Periva encouraged artists from all over India by honoring them with titles and gifts.

A few examples will illustrate his support to the cause of classical music.

- In appreciation of singing Tamil compositions, Maha Periva had honored Papanasam Sivan, a well-known singer composer in Tamil. He conferred on Sivan the title of 'Sivapunyagana Mani' on his 60th birthday and added prestige to Tamil music.
- Venkatagiriappa, a Veena player from Mysore had performed a few concerts at the mutt. Maha Periva honored

him with the title 'Vainika Sikamani.'

- Maha Periva had appointed a young vidwan named Srivanchiam Ramachandra Iyer as the *Asthana Vidwan* (mutt's official artist) and conferred on him the title of "Asthana Keerthanmani."

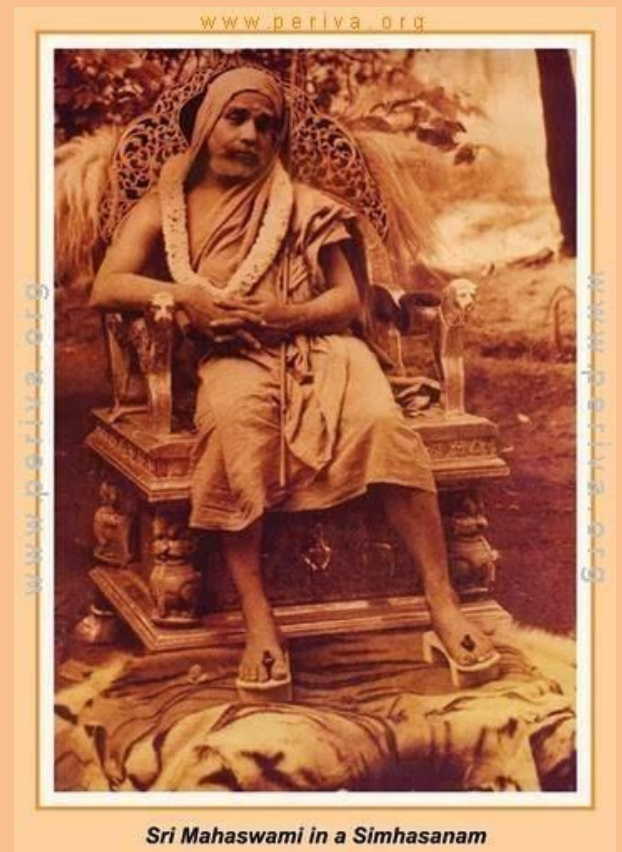


Figure 20. Maha Periva in a Simhaasanam

An instrument that adds prestige to Carnatic music is the Nadaswaram. Even villagers enjoy the music from this wind instrument but it is difficult to handle this instrument.

This instrument in its smaller is called Thimiri and Pari in large size. During Maha Periva's time, a child prodigy called Narayanan used to play thimiri in the mutt. He passed away at a young age.

Later, Nadaswaram artist Kumbakonam Kandaswamy and his sons Kumararathnam and Chinnayya played the nadaswaram at the mutt.

Nadaswaram music was played every day as a part of Maha Periva's worship rituals in the mutt. Over time, the smaller size of Nadaswaram has almost vanished.

In the year 1934, during a visit to Kaasi (now Varanasi), Maha Periva attended a conference on Hindustani music. Mutt's nadaswaram artists were also invited to this conference.

With permission from Maha Periva, the artists played at this conference some of the rare Hindustani ragas using the Thimiri nadaswaram.

The Hindustani artists were held in awe at their performance. Maha Periva provided great encouragement to all nadaswara vidwans who later became very popular among the people.

It is noteworthy that Maha Periva fondly supported for over 40 years six families of nadaswaram groups that traveled with Maha Periva all over.



Sangeethanjali in the Divine Presence of HH Paramacharyal of Kanchi Kamakoti Peedam at Suruttapalli on 1.12.1971

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Sri Mahaswami at Sanskrit College, Chennai - 1958