

# Finest soul of our times

EVER since the 13-year-old Kannada speaking Swaminathan of Villupuram ascended the throne of the Kanchi Kamakoti Sankara Mutt in 1907 as its 68th Acharya with the hallowed name of Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal, the Tamil word *Periyava* has come to refer to His Holiness alone, though news reports call him Paramacharya also. The very mention of *Periyava* evokes from everybody, Hindu or non-Hindu, not only love and admiration but genuine awe and respect. What is the magic that has worked this miracle of our times?

The prestige of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, founded by Adi Sankara (who was the first Sankaracharya) in the Vaisaka Sukla Full Moon Day in 481 BC in his 28th year, has always been high because of the sages who came to adorn it as Matadhipatis. But in its 68th Acharya, His Holiness Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal who completed 95 years on May 20, 1989, (his birth star 'Anuradha' falls on May 21) the Kamakoti Sankara Peetam has got a Matadhipati acknowledged by all as one of the noblest and finest souls of all times. Had he not taken to a life of renunciation at that tender age *Periyava* would

To the devout Hindus, the Paramacharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam is their guiding spirit and many have felt the impact of the 'magic' of his personality. *Periyava*, as he is reverentially called by his followers, completed 95 years on May 20. The article, a tribute to this noble saint, highlights *Periyava's* selfless social service and his efforts to preserve the Vedas and Vedic learning in the last eight decades.

certainly have blossomed into a statesman, a litterateur, a scientist, a patron of music, arts and sculpture and a linguist, all combined into one and would have taken his rightful place alongside the giants of modern science and history. Ever since he became the Matadhipati in 1907 he has been guiding aspirant souls from all over India and even abroad.

*Periyava* is almost entirely self-taught but what will astound everybody is the intensity of his Guru-bhakti towards Adi Sankara, the exponent of Advaita.

Says *Periyava*: "It was by the Avatara of Sri Sankara that the Vedas, the smritis, etc. were resuscitated. It is by their resuscitation alone that the observances connected with auspicious days such as Rama Navami, Nrisimha Jayanti, Krishna Jayanti, Uttarayana sankranti, Sivaratri, etc. have been revived. The Jayanti of Sri Sankara is the Jayanti that has imparted to all Jayantis their character as Jayantis. On the fifth day of the bright half of the month of Vaisaka falls Sri Sankara Jayanti. Like the pure white jasmine (*Vasanti-madhavi*) creeper, that causes delight, let this fifth day of the bright — half month in the spring season (*Vasanti-Madhavi*) embellish and delight our intelligence."

If ever there was one among the mystics and saints of modern India, who has systematically discouraged belief in magic with respect to himself, it is *Periyava*. There are thousands who have on one occasion or the other felt the impact of the "magic" of *Periyava's* personality that has helped them to turn a new leaf in life.

Paul Brunton who was directed to Bhagavan Ramana by *Periyava* was one such. A savant from Angarai village who gave up a good government job long ago at *Periyava's* command to propagate the 'Bhagavatam' is moved to tears when he speaks about the Paramacharya. It took Valmiki 24,000 'slokas' to narrate the story of Sri Rama. Veda Vyasa was able to compose the entire Mahabharata in a lakh verses. But can anyone, even Veda Vyasa himself, pack (asks this savant) all that *Periyava* has meant to countless men and women in all the 82 years of his ministration into a 'Kavya' of any length?

All the same *Periyava* like Mahatma Gan-

dhi and C. Rajagopalachari, is a staunch votary of the work-ethic. He himself holds the office he has been called to from 1907 onwards as a trust for the spiritual welfare of one and all. He never deviates from any of the tenets laid down by his distinguished predecessors even in minor details — the only legendary figure reputed for such strict observance of 'Swadharma' that comes to mind is Sri Rama:

*Periyava* has been wearing khadi ever since it came into vogue and it is well known that he discourages ostentation in marriages and advocates selfless social service and harmonious community living all around. Mahatma Gandhi met *Periyava* in Nellisseri in

Palghat District in the early Twenties — C. Rajagopalachari was with the Mahatma then. *Periyava* spoke in Sanskrit to Gandhiji — but nobody knows to this day what transpired between the two Mahatmas then — except that the meeting was called a memorable one by Gandhiji himself! Not that *Periyava* could bring himself to agree with everything that Gandhiji or Rajaji said or did. But it is plain that *Periyava* held Gandhiji and Rajaji in the highest esteem.

The Paramacharya has extensively travelled on foot throughout the country and has addressed gatherings of all kinds, from the learned pandits to illiterate villagers on the need to practice the eternal verities exemplified in the Vedas and the Shastras. His Holiness has always discouraged denominational squabbles and has striven hard to inject a sense of unity among the followers of all faiths in India transcending caste and linguistic barriers. *Periyava's* efforts in these eight decades for the renaissance of Hindu religion and all Indian arts is such as to merit classifying His Holiness among the Greats of History, but what is special glory is that he has been achieving all this without the backing of military might or money power. Is it not a tribute then to the intuitive wisdom of the simple

Tamil people that they chose long ago to identify this Kanchi Acharya as *Periyava* which also means great.

*Periyava* is ever on the alert to discourage attempts to weave stories of magic and miracle around himself. The central theme of all his lectures is *Vaidika matham* — religion propounded by the Vedas which His Holiness envisions as the hope and succour of the future generations not only in India but throughout the world. His Holiness is therefore never tired of making efforts to preserve the Vedas and Vedic learning and is personally supervising the activities of the Veda Rakshana Nidhi Trust created by him for the purpose.

Those who go to have a glimpse of *Periyava* see not only his humility but also his native humour and logical approach. *Periyava's* utterances are always marked by simplicity and restraint — which are expressive of an inner harmony that is in its measure as absolute as any that the greatest of saints has achieved. Strictly religious, deeply spiritual and intensely human, *Periyava* is also unbelievably generous and forgiving — words will be of no avail to describe the grace that flows from his eyes!

K. Vedamurthy

## A Benediction for Peace on Earth By

His Holiness  
Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya  
of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam

मैत्री भजताखिलहृजेत्री

Cultivate friendship, which will  
conquer all hearts.

आत्मवदेव परानपि पश्यत ।

Look upon others as thyself.

युद्धं त्यजत स्पर्धा त्यजत

Renounce war; forswear competition.

त्यजतपरेष्वक्रममाक्रमणम् ॥

Give up aggression on others which is  
wrong.

जननी पृथिवी कामदुघाऽऽस्ते

Wide mother Earth, our Mother is here  
ready to give us all our desires.

जनको देवः सकलदयालुः ।

We have the Lord, our Father,  
compassionate to all.

दाम्यत दत्त दयध्वं जनताः

Ye peoples of the World! Restrain  
yourselves, give, be kind.

श्रेयो भूयात् सकलजनानाम् ॥

May all people be happy and prosperous.