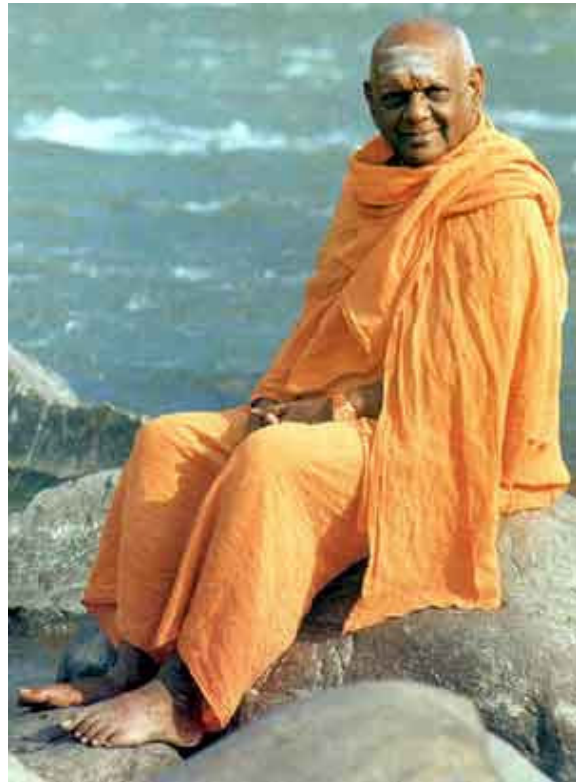


End of a an unusual life

A recent obituary notice in The Hindu said Sreelasree Nachiappa Swamigal of the Koviloor Math had passed away. It was the end of a most unusual life—a successful professional in a number of disciplines connected with the premier art institution of Kalakshetra, who turned a religious head in seventies. His years as a sanyasi were no less eventful than his earlier life, as he took up several activities to promote and expand the religious order he headed, including the running of Vedic schools and opening several new pilgrim centres around the world, besides publications he brought out regularly.

Hailing from Chettinad, Nachi arrived in Kalakshetra as a youngster and came under the influence of Rukmini Devi Arundale. He soon became an understudy of Conrad Woldring, a well known Dutch photographer and in time became a reputed photographer himself. He also trained in printing, his expertise in letter press printing technology making him a much sought after printer in the West after offset printing swept the world, and the old method became almost extinct there.



In the 1990s, international celebrities in the arts like Alan Ginsberg, Francesco Clemente and Raymond Foye sought him out to bring out the exotic series of Hanuman Books.

Earlier Nachiappan offered the first microfilming facility in Chennai and many organizations, including newspapers like The Hindu, utilized his services for quite a few years. His Kalakshetra press was also renowned for its reproductions

of colour photography. He introduced to Madras the klischograph, an electronic engraving machine that produced letterpress-printing plates directly from an original without the use of any intermediate stages.

As a child, Nachiappan had the good fortune of learning from Maria Montessori during her years in Madras during World War II. He remained devoted to Montessori education all his life, not only running a Montessori school and teacher training centre, but also publishing a whole set of books on the great educationist and her work.

A much travelled man, Nachiappan was always keen to introduce to Kalakshetra and Madras the latest technology he had learnt abroad. He used his knowledge of stage lighting to advantage in Kalakshetra's dance drama productions. He will probably be remembered best for his excellent work in photography as displayed in his exhibitions and books on Kalakshetra and Rukmini Devi.

No feature on Nachiappan can be complete without reference to the controversies that sometimes surrounded him, the court cases he was involved in, including some against close associates at Kalakshetra and the TS.

Nachiappan was 88 when he passed away.

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