

Kashmir and Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham through the ages

Bhagavan Sadashiva, from His Guru svarupa of Dakshinamurti, was born about two thousand and five hundred years ago in the village Kaladi in Kerala. He took this avatara seeing dharma on the descent everywhere due to the increase of adharma, and thereby restored dharma to its former strength. To ensure the continued protection of this dharma parampara, He established four pitha-s in the four directions of Bharata and appointed four of His shishya-s as the Acharya-s there. He Himself, however, stayed at the Sharada Matha in Kanchi as the Acharya of the Sarvajna Pitha which derives its spiritual power directly from Devi Kamakshi, who is also called Kamakoti. He also attained Siddhi at Kanchi in front of Devi Kamakshi. These facts are given to us by respected texts such as Shiva Rahasya and all noble-minded souls have accepted this.

Kanchi is also known as Southern Kashmir. Just as the Veda Vidya-s are excellently preserved in Kanchi, even in Kashmir it was previously so. Thus there is much relating Kanchi, and especially the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha, to Kashmir. Some relevant details are given here as far as we were able to collect from different works.

There is no doubt that the first Acharya of the Kamakoti Pitham **Shrimad Adya Shankara Bhagavatpada** (509-477 BCE) has been to Kashmir. The Kashmir king Gopaditya (417-357 BCE) built a temple for Shri Shankara Bhagavatpada in Shrinagar in view of the fact that the Acharya had been to Kashmir only a short time before his rule. (Ref: A Short History of Kashmir, Gwasha Lal, 1932.)

Shri Sureshvaracharya who is respected as the second Kamakoti Acharya and supervised the Pithadhipatya from 477 to 407 BCE was born in Kashmir. Punya Shloka Manjari which summarizes the lives of the Acharya-s of the Kamakoti Pitha says about Shri Sureshvara: “gaudaḥ kāśmīrajanmā”. Of the five Gauda-s – Sarasvata, Kanyakubja, Gauda, Utkala and Maithila – He was a Kanyakubja Gauda in His purvashrama i.e. before sannyasa. The father of Shri Sureshvara, Himamitra, was a Rajaguru of the Kashmir king.

The sixteenth Acharya **Shrimad Ujjvala Shankarendra Sarasvati** (329-366 CE), after having curbed those hindering Sanatana Dharma during his tenure as Pithadhipati, attained Siddhi in Kashmir. Punya Shloka Manjari states: “vimatān āmūlam unmūlayan ākāśmīram agān-mahāyatir iti khyātyojjvalaḥ śaṅkaraḥ”. His Siddhi place in Kashmir was called Kalapura. It came to be known as Ujjvala Mahayati Pura because of His Siddhi there. Punya Shloka Manjari states this as: “apa-harṣa-śokam ajaram brahmaiva yaḥ śāsvatam kāśmīreṣu kalāpure yad adhunā (a)pyākhyāyate (a)syākhyayā”.

There is a stotra in praise of the Acharya Parampara named Guru Ratna Mala authored by the great Yogi Sadashiva Brahmendra. Its commentary Sushama states regarding the seventeenth Acharya **Shrimad Gauda Sadashivendra Sarasvati** (366-374 CE) that He was the son of a Kashmir minister named Deva Mishra Sharma. This Deva Mishra was excessively attached to the Jaina religion. However, the Acharya even as a child strongly asserted the greatness of the Sanatana Dharma and the Advaita Siddhanta. Enraged by this, the Jaina-s threw the child into the Sindhu river. The river, however, bore Him with affection on a lotus leaf and carried Him to one Bhurivasu Sharma, resident of Pushpapura, who was in desire of a son and had descended into the river for his ablutions. Bhurivasu Sharma then brought up the child. Later the Acharya received sannayasa from Acharya Ujjvala Shankara when He came to Kashmir. After the Siddhi of the Guru, He taught the Advaita Vedanta Brahma Sutra Bhashya to His shishya-s about fifty times in just eight years, and later attained Siddhi at Tryambakeshvara in Maharashtra.

The eighteenth Acharya **Shrimat Surendra Sarasvati** (374-384 CE) visited the court of the Kashmir king Surendra. There was a notorious hedonist there named Durdidivi who was spreading wicked practices. The Acharya defeated him in debate. The Deva Guru Brihaspati by His yogic powers then came there in the form of a Charvaka and argued in support of Durdidivi (in order to bring out the greatness of the Acharya). The Acharya defeated even Him, and thus re-established Sanatana Dharma and Advaita. The king Surendra then expressed his respect to the Acharya and donated land to the Shrimatha.

The relation of the twentieth Acharya **Shrimad Muka Shankarendra Sarasvati** (397-436 CE) is as follows. A certain Brahmana brahmachari by name Matr Gupta - who was also a poet - was doing services during the time of puja to the Acharya. He was excessively proud of his ability as a poet. To rid him of this pride, the Acharya made the caretakers of the horses and elephants of the Shrimatha, by name Ramila and Menthaka, poets by His graceful glance alone. Upon seeing this, Matr Gupta realized that worldly skills like poetry can be attained or lost in a split second.

In those days, Harsha Vikramaditya was the Chakravarti of Ujjaini and bore high respect for the Acharya. To his court, the Acharya sent Matr Gupta as court-poet. The king had much affection for Matr Gupta. In the meanwhile, Hiranya, the Kashmir king of that time, by name passed away without issue. His brother was Toramana, who also met with an untimely death. Toramana's wife Anjana was pregnant at that time, and she took refuge in a potter's house. There she gave birth to a son by name Pravarasena.

Upon Hiranya's death, his ministers requested the Ujjaini Chakravarti Harsha Vikramaditya to ensure the security of the Kashmir kingdom. The Chakravarti sent Matrgupta – as a fitting honour in recognition of the excellence of his poetry – to be the Kashmir king. In accordance with this Matrgupta ruled there for five years. Upon hearing of Harsha Vikramaditya's death, Matrgupta became disinterested in worldly matters. Making Pravarasena the Kashmir king, as he was the nephew of the previous king Hiranya and hence had the right to the throne, Matrgupta returned to his Guru Shri Muka Shankara and took sannyasa.

In those days, those wishing to go on pilgrimage to the holy kshetra-s in Kashmir found it very difficult because of the dense forests of the mountainous Kashmir region. Seeing this, the Acharya was filled with compassion for the pilgrims and had Pravarasena refine the forest path into a highway and named it Sushama. This fact had been mentioned by all those who had received the anugraha of the Acharya such as Matrgupta, Ramila, Menthaka and Pravarasena in their respective works.

We come to know of these details from Sushama, the commentary of Guru Ratna Mala, and from the works of the well-known Andhra research scholar Kota Venkatachalam.

The twenty-first Acharya **Shrimad Jahnvi Chandrachudendra Sarasvati** (436-446 CE) was, as mentioned before, known previously as Matrgupta. After having ruled over Kashmir for sometime, He took sannyasa. Spending ten years in penance on the banks of the Ganga, He attained Siddhi there.

The thirty-first Acharya **Shrimat Sheelanidhi Brahmanandaghanendra Sarasvati** (654-667 CE) was object of the devotion of the Brahmana Kashmir king Lalitaditya. This king conquered all of Bharata Varsha. In the course of his travels of conquest, he came to Kanchi, and having reached the Kamakoti Pitha, he stayed there for quite some time in the seva of the Acharya. Mahakavi Bhavabhuti had mentioned this in his work named Mahapurusha Vilasa. This we come to know from Guru Ratna Mala and other such works.

The thirty-second Acharya **Shrimat Chidanandaghanendra Sarasvati** (667-671 CE) was also highly respected by the same Lalitaditya. After His Guru having attained Siddhi, this Acharya had Lalitaditya establish an annadanashala in Kashmir after the purvashrama name of His Guru – Jyeshtha Rudra. In that annadanashala food was provided for lakhs of pilgrims. The Acharya also had Lalitaditya place on the Karnataka throne the orphaned son of the former queen of that kingdom who had lost her life during his conquest.

When the thirty-fourth Acharya **Shrimat Chandrashekharendra Sarasvati** (691-709 CE) came to Kashmir he defeated an atheist by name Chakuna who, in the name of spreading the Jaina religion was obstructing the Sanatana Dharma. Thus the Acharya re-established the Shastric Dharma in Kashmir.

In the days of the thirty-eighth Acharya **Shrimad Dhira Shankarendra Sarasvati better known as Abhinava Shankara** (788-839 CE), the durmata-s of mleccha-s (the malpractices of those devoid of Sanatana Dharma) had spread all over Bharata. In the course of His vijaya yatra-s (tours of victory over adharma) as if another avatara of Shri Adya Shankara, He re-established Sanatana Dharma and Advaita Siddhanta everywhere. In Kashmir in those days there was a great pandita by name Bhattodbhata who was undefeatable, having defeated eight other great pandita-s. The Acharya, however, upon coming to Kashmir, won over Bhattodbhata in debate, and ascended the Sarvajna Pitha in Kashmir in front of the Vagdevi Sharada. This is mentioned in Guru Ratna Mala, Sushama and many works such as Shankarendra Vilasa and Sadguru Santana Parimala quoted by Sushama. This Acharya attained Siddhi in the Himalayas.

During the reign of the forty-sixth Acharya **Shrimat Sandrananda Bodhendra Sarasvati** (1060-1097 CE) mleccha-s were (once more) causing trouble to the Sharada Shrimatha. In accordance with the Acharya's wish to protect those around Him, the minister of the Kashmir king Kalasheshvara drove away the trouble-making mleccha-s. This Acharya attained Siddhi at Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu).

In the time of the forty-seventh Acharya **Shrimat Chandrashekharendra Sarasvati** (1097-1165 CE), there was in Kashmir a Jain king named Kumarapala. He was misguided by the Jaina leader Hemacharya. The Acharya, upon visiting that Kashmir king's court, clearly explained the Advaita Tattva, defeated Hemacharya in debate and re-established dharma in Kashmir (once more).

The forty-eighth Acharya **Shrimad Advaitananda Bodhendra Sarasvati** (1165-1199 CE) had debated with, won over and were highly respected by the well-known Kashmiri Shaivaite Abhinava Gupta.

We have given a few examples of the various relations that have existed between Kashmir and the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha as is learnt from the works such as Guru Ratna Mala, Sushama and Punya Shloka Manjari. It is highly likely that more research will uncover many more such relevant facts.

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