

Introduction to Vaidika Mantra Kalpalata

(From the CD of Vaidika Mantra Kalpalata published by Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham)

India has been the fountainhead of a great civilization. It is a great fortune of the people of this country that they have inherited a great culture, rich moral values and very many diverse languages and literature. In spite of adverse challenges it has faced, our ancient cultural tradition nurtured by selfless seers and protected by great sacrifice of very many men and women of this land has survived.

In this Punya Bhoomi of ours, where innumerable rishis (sages), sannyasis (saints) and jnanis (enlightened souls) traversed the length and breadth of this land on foot, each handful of dust is as worthy as sandal powder, each village a ground of penance and meditation. In almost every village there is a temple with some hoary history behind it. These temples were the pivot of life. They reflect our tradition in which philosophy, religion and ethics are not merely abstract principles detracted from real life, but they are its very core, shaping all aspects of life both mundane and spiritual. This is the uniqueness of our Bharatiya tradition.

Definition of Bharat

What is the definition of Bharat? The Vishnu Purana says “uttaram̐ yat samudrasya himādreścaiva dākṣiṇam, varṣam̐ tad bhārataṁ nāma bhāratī yatra santatiḥ” i.e. “that which is towards north of the great ocean, and to the south of the Himalaya, that is the Bharata Varsha where the Bharatiya-s live”. The southernmost area of this country is then Kanyakumari, and the northernmost area Kashmir. Now what is most remarkable is that these two regions, and all regions in between, are united by the same single Vedic culture and heritage of Bharat.

Origins of Kashmir as per mythology

The Kashmiri tradition holds that the region was once a great lake by name Sati-saras. It was the lake (saras) in which young Sati Devi (Goddess Uma when born as the daughter of Daksha) would bathe and sport in. Later on, the Naga-s, born of Kashyapa Prajapati, populated these waters.

Apparently there suddenly rose in these waters an asura by name Jalodbhava (“born in water”). He had a boon that he could not be destroyed in water, and therefore began to persecute the Nagas in impunity. At this, and there are two stories beyond this point, the

Naga-s appealed to their patriarch Sage Kashyapa, who by His powers of penance dried the region thereby rendering the asura powerless and easy to conquer. As “Kashyapa” caused this land to relatively become a “Maru” (desert, in compared to the entire area being under water before), it came to be called “Kashyapa-Maru” which transformed into “Kashmira”.

Another account says that the Nagas appealed to Vishnu, Shiva and Ambika. Taking pity on them, Shiva created a path for the water to drain away from the region by the edge of a great plough (or the tip of His bow the Pinaka). Even then, the asura by his powers of illusion, would fly here and there when attacked. To prevent this, the Devi took the form of a mynah (Hari in Kashmiri) and dropped a stone on him, which prevented him from flying. Vishnu then beheaded him with His discus.

[It is interesting to note that even in modern geography, they say that in very ancient times, towards the north of India was a great lake by name Tethys Sea which slowly drained away as a result of geological shifts in the Himalayan region.]

The Devi who took a form of a Hari then came to rest in a hill in Kashmir, which came to be called Hari Parbat. She is manifested in the form of a Shrichakra on the rock-face of this hill, and the place is called Chakreshvari Peetham. This is one of the numerous Shakti Peethams in Kashmir. Due to the importance of the Devi manifested in the Shrichakra, the city that developed around this kshetra became to be called Shri-nagara. As the bird Hari is also known as Sharika, the Devi here is known as Sharika Devi, and is the presiding family deity to many Kashmiri Hindu families.

Once the water had been drained for vanquishing the asura, the Nagas were no longer able to live in physical form as before, and therefore took a subtle form and entered the various water sources underground. Thus every spring is called a “Nag” in Kashmir. The villagers would use river water for bathing, washing etc, but for cooking and drinking they would only use the sweet water of the Nag after doing puja to the Naga deity. As a result of the draining of water many learned people from all around came to the region and settled there, enamoured by the natural beauty and peace that prevailed in this place. It was also the favourite haunt of many sages doing their penance. Thus was the settlement of Kashmir in times long gone.

Kashmiri Culture & Tradition

Of the many diverse cultures that we come across in India, Kashmiri culture & tradition is a very unique and important one. Kashmir-the land of Kashyapa Muni, was an ancient centre of learning on the lines of Nalanda & Takshashila. Many learned scholars and students across countries gathered there to exchange knowledge and wisdom. The very fact that the Goddess

of learning, Sharada Devi is blessing the land is a testimony to this truth. Great literary works in Sanskrit and devotional treatises have sprung out of Kashmir. Mammata, Udbhata, Vamana, Anandavardhanacharya, Abhinavagupta, Kalhana and Bilhana are some of the great poets who hailed from this land. Kashmiri Shaivism is very famous and is studied and researched all around the world with great interest. Kashmir also has its unique script called Sharada which is now used only by a few. Ancient manuscripts of the region have been written mostly in Sharada script.

Importance of Kashmir in Bharatiya Vedic Culture

Among the few geographic references that occur in the Vedas, Kashmir is importantly referred to. The Vedic Sukta prescribed to be chanted during one's daily bath recalls, immediately after the Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati, the rivers of Jammu and Kashmir: Shutudri (Sutlej), Parushni/iravati (Ravi), Asikni/Chandrabhaga (Chenab), Vitasta (Jhelum), etc. The all important Sindhu River and its other tributaries are also mentioned in the Vedas.

The very fact that the rivers of Kashmir are listed along with Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati indicate that the rivers of Kashmir are holy. Thus just as all Hindus make a point to take Ganga Snan (ritual bath in the Ganga), so should the rivers of Kashmir be revered. Since people from even far South go far north to Badarinath, Kedaranath etc, so should efforts be made to visit the holy rivers and Kshetras of Kashmir!

Not only from the religious viewpoint but from the heritage viewpoint also Kashmir is important to Vedic culture. Some of the oldest available Vedic manuscripts are found to be from Kashmir in the Sharada script (more on this script later). The use of hardy birch bark coupled with the cool temperature there, has preserved even manuscripts from the 8th century CE or so. For comparison, manuscripts of even the 15th century CE are hard to come by in the hotter southern regions.

Temples of Kashmir

One finds many Shakti Peethas in Kashmir. Indeed, another interesting point to note is that when we say "From Kashmir to Kanyakumari", Kanyakumari is a Shakti Peetha, and Kashmir again abounds with them.

Apart from the Chakreshvari Peetham of Shrinagar, one finds many other Peethams in the Kashmir Valley, for example, Kshira Bhavani (Tulamula) to the north-east of Shrinagar at a distance of within an hour, Kulavagishvari (Kulgam) to the south at three hours' distance, and so on.

Especially to be noted is the ancient Sharada Peetham, which was a Sarvajna Peetham (seat of omniscience) of the North, just like Kanchipuram is the Sarvajna Peetham of the South. This temple is situated on the banks of the Krishna Ganga river, which flows along the current Line Of Control (LoC), in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). Sadly, due to the difficult socio-political situation in the region, the temple is totally in ruins. Many other temples like Martand (Mattan), Avantishvara & Avantiswami (Avantipur), etc are all in dilapidated condition. It is important to note that this land of Kashmir has originally been full of Vedic scholars and those devoted to the Veda-based shastras. All the three main deities, Siva, Vishnu and Ambika, termed as Ratna Traya by the Tamil Nadu Vedic savant Appayya Dikshita, have been worshipped since time immemorial in Kashmir. Why, in the times of the Mahabharata, Bhagavan Krishna Himself is said to have visited Kashmir.

Bhagavan Amarnath, the ice-formed Shiva Linga in the mountains of Kashmir, an important Kshetra of the region attracts thousands of devotees every year. Even in Shrinagar itself, rises the high hill of Gopadri, today called Shankaracharya Parbat. Bhagavan Shiva stands majestically atop this hill in the form of a Linga by name Jyeshtheshvara, the most senior God! Shri Adi Shankara on His vijaya yatra, had come here.

Of course, the adjoining region of Jammu also is not lacking in temples and holy tirthas. The temple of Vaishno Devi (again another Shakti Peetham) has the high honour of being second only to the Tirumala Tirupati Venkateshvara Shrine in the number of visitors per year. The Raghunath Mandir of Jammu is also a notable shrine in the region.

All these temples are a clear indication of the true origins and heritage of this land of Kashmir. It is important that devotees from other parts of Bharat visit the area and its shrines.

Kanchipuram and Kashmir

History clearly shows us that while Kashmir and Kanyakumari are at a distance of almost 3000 kms, even in the olden days, there was quite fast exchange of thoughts between scholars of Kashmir and South India. Works which were composed in Kashmir reached Tamil Nadu and had commentaries written here in the span of a few months. To this day manuscripts in the Kashmiri Sharada script of works by South Indian authors are to be found in manuscript libraries in Kashmir. Both Kanchipuram and Kashmir were ancient centres of Vedic learning, As such, it is only to be expected that there was continuous academic and cultural contact between Kashmir and Kanchipuram.

The Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham established by Shri Adi Shankara at Kanchipuram in 482 BCE is the Acharya Peetham (seat of spiritual head) associated with the Sarvajna Peetham of the South. This was the Peetham that the Shankara Bhagavatpada had established for Himself, and as such its spiritual reign extends all over the Bharata Varsha. Hence among all the Shankara Acharya Peethas, the Kanchi Peetham is called the Mula (root/central) Amnaya (traditional) Peetham.

Therefore, and especially due to the traditional connection between Kanchipuram and Kashmir, the Kanchi Acharyas have always been visiting the Kashmir region and ensuring the preservation of the Sanatana Dharma there also. Some highlights are given below:

1. Shri Adi Shankara Himself had visited Kashmir as we have mentioned before.
2. His famed disciple Shri Sureshvara, was in His Purva Ashrama (life before sannyasa) the son of the Raja Mantri of Kashmir.
3. The sixteenth Acharya Shri Ujjvala Shankara who was very strong on curbing anti-Vedic religions, spent His last days in Kashmir and attained Siddhi there.
4. His disciple the 17th Acharya Shri Gauda Sadashiva was a Kashmiri born on the banks of the Sindhu. He was a great realized soul.
5. Many later Acharyas had been revered by the Kashmiri kings as preceptors, and thereby ensured the preservation of Vaidika Dharma in the region.
6. The Kashmiri king Lalitaditya had established a great Annadana shala in Kashmir with the name of the 31st Acharya Shri Shilanidhi Brahmanandaghana.

The Kanchi Peetham's efforts in Kashmir today

Continuing the above-mentioned tradition, today's Acharyas His Holiness Shri Jayendra Sarasvati Shankaracharya, 69th Acharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham and Shri Shankara Vijayendra Sarasvati Shankaracharya, 70th Acharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham continue to work for the welfare of the Kashmiri people and the preservation of the Vedic Dharma there. The Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham has been actively in contact with the Kashmiri Pandit community, especially in their current situation of living outside their home state, and continues to make efforts for their social and educational welfare.

Most importantly, efforts are afoot by Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham to bring back peace to the Kashmir region, so that the Kashmiri Pandits may return back to their home state and live in a congenial atmosphere there. Moreover people from all places of Bharat can visit the holy places of Kashmir. The Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham has been conducting Vishva Shanti Maha

Yajnas at selected places in Jammu and Kashmir. The Shankaracharyas Themselves have visited and continue to visit Jammu and Kashmir to bless and spiritually uplift the Kashmiris living there.

It is also to be noted that Shri Jayendra Sarasvati Shankaracharya was one of the key initiators of the current yearly Sindhu Pujan in Ladakh region conducted during Guru Purnima, in which the representatives of many religions meet in peace and offer their respects to the River Sindhu. His Holiness has also constructed a temple for Goddess Saraswati in the late eighties in Ramban, which lies in between Srinagar and Jammu.

It is the desire of their Holinesses the Shankaracharyas that all devout Hindus may visit the Kashmir region, have darshan of the various kshetras there, and contribute in whatever way they can for bringing back peace and upholding Sanatana Dharma in the region.

Vedic & Cultural Tradition of Kashmir Pandits

Kashmiri Pandits, the residents of this hoary land, as per inputs from Shri Kashinath Handoo and also seen in preface of Laugakshi Gruhya Sutra by Madhusudan Kaul, belong to a rare branch of the Krishna Yajur Veda called the Katha Shakha and some might have belonged to Sama Veda. They follow rituals prescribed by the Lougakshi Gruhya Sutra written by Lougakshi Rishi. Gobhila Gruhya Sutra is also followed. The procedures mentioned for performing marriage and other functions have a lot of similarity with the South Indian traditions. There are a few procedures mentioned in those texts, praying for the protection of cattle from diseases, which are unique. The Shankaracharya Hill which is situated in the heart of Srinagar is a place of great significance to the people of Kashmir. The Kashmiri Pandits till date chant in their homes a hymn known as Gauri Dashakam composed by Adi Shankaracharya. Having said all this, it should be remembered that due to several reasons which history reveals, the Kashmiri Pandits have to be supported to protect their culture and identity. A majority of them have left their homes and are scattered. With the blessings of His Holiness Pujya Shri Shankaracharyas of Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, Kanchipuram, periodic seminars on Kashmiri Culture and traditions have been held in Kanchipuram and in cities of Bengaluru, Chennai and Delhi where considerable Kashmiri Pandit population is located. His Holiness visited Khir Bhavani Mandir where a Vishwa Shanti Yagnya was performed with assistance from Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, Tirupati for the welfare of the region. In continuation with the current activity and keeping in mind the long term objective of cultural protection, it was felt that it is necessary to reprint, record and restore the ancient treasures of the land.

Taking the guidance of Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham and assistance of very senior Kashmir Pandit scholars of the region like Shri Kashinath Handoo who currently lives in Jammu and Shri TN Ganjoo who resides in Srinagar, and other eminent scholars, efforts are on to collect old manuscripts and books for reprinting. It is pertinent to mention that His Holiness released a book “Lougakshi Grihya Sutra” on 10th October 2011 in Jammu, printed with support from Venkateshwara Vedic University and blessed the first copy to Shri Kashinath Handoo and honoured him. The book was earlier printed and published by Madhusudan Kaul by order of Maharaja Hari Singh in two volumes, in Nirnaysagar Press Mumbai, the first in 1928 and second in 1932 as a part of Kashmir series. Shri TN Ganjoo (Trilokinath) of Srinagar is also in touch with scholars in Kanchi and has been providing a wealth of information regarding Kashmir culture.

Shri TN Ganjoo visited Jyeshtha Mata Mandir during the performance of Rigveda Samhita Havan and Veda Parayana event in September 2011 by the Peetham. He was very happy that Vedic chanting of Rig, Yajur and Sama Vedas was being held in Srinagar in a traditional way after a gap of many years and lauded the efforts of the Peetham. He then presented to the visiting scholars a copy of **Vaidika Mantra Kalpa Lata, also called as Kashmirika Mantra Kalpadruma** printed in **1835 Shaka** during the period of Maharaja Pratap Singh, the then King of Jammu & Kashmir, the grand father of Dr.Karan Singh, to be submitted at the lotus feet of His Holiness with a mention that it can be used in any way for the benefit of the community. The book earlier printed in Shri Pandit Vishwanatha Sharma’s own printing press named as “Pratap Steam Press” though a century old, looks intact but for a few missing pages like in the introduction where the writer has mentioned that

“ततः काललीलया अस्मिन् देशे श्रुतिस्मृतिविध्वंसियवनराज्यप्राबल्यात् प्रजाक्षोभाच्च एवंविधानि यज्ञकाण्डपुस्तकानि प्रायशो लुप्तप्रायाणि बभूवुः। यानि पुनरधुना अवशिष्टानि तानि च असम्यक्पदच्छेदविन्यासात् प्रायशः अशुद्धानि कुत्रचित् कुत्रचित् भ्रष्टाक्षराणि च दरीदृश्यन्ते इत्यतो विदुषां मनः क्लेशमेव जनयन्तीति न काप्यत्युक्तिः।

व्यतीताब्दार्धशत्यामपि कश्मीरभूमौ एवंविधानां दुरवगहानां कार्याणां बहुद्रव्यप्रयत्नसाध्यत्वात् अन्यस्मात्कस्मात्त्वित् एवंविधात् हेतोः प्रजाभाग्यवैकल्येन न केनापि विद्वद्वरेण एतदुद्धारं प्रयत्नः श्रितः।

अधुना निसीमदयाभरितश्री १०८मन्महाराजाधिराजप्रतापसिंहप्रभूणामाज्ञामवाप्य तदीयं साहाय्यं.....”

“Due to play of TIME, in this place (Kashmira), continued political turmoil by invasion of the Yavanas who are oppressors of the Shrutis (Vedas) & Smritis which resulted in disturbed mind set of the people, many ancient books connected with Yagna Kanda were destroyed and lost. The books which survived the onslaught are not complete, with many words and alphabets lost, wrongly laid out, and that it is causing much anguish to the scholars is not an over statement.

Even in the past fifty years, even when efforts were made to reprint, due to economical constraints and other reasons, much to the misfortune of the people, many a scholar could not take up such works. Now with the permission and support of the ever compassionate Maharaja 108 Shri Pratap Singh” and the introduction stops due to the missing pages.

The scholars after their return submitted the book to His Holiness with Shri Ganjo's submission. His Holiness went through the book and ordered for necessary action to be taken for reprinting. The book was first carefully digitized in the International library run by Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham and copies were printed there from and given to Shri Sudarshan Sharma, Vice Chancellor of Venkateshwara Vedic University, Tirupati for reprinting as a fresh edition. The university successfully reprinted and the same was released in Srinagar by His Holiness on 25th April 2012, as a part of Shankara Jayanthi celebrations. More such endeavors are welcomed by the Peetha.

Vaidika Mantra Kalpa Lata

Vaidika Mantra Kalpa Lata, like Laugakshi Gruhya Sutra, also has been authored by Maharshi Laugakshi and it contains the various mantra prayogas starting from Kushmanda Homa, Kalasha sthapana, Svasti Mantra, Gayatri Mantra Brahmana, Navagraha Homa and Japa Vidhi, Rudradhyaya, Chamaka and other important mantras and suktas like Purusha sukta, Bruhat Purusha Sukta, Shri Sukta, Devi Sukta, Ratri Sukta, Rakshoghna Mantras etc. His Holiness has directed that the same should be recorded as audio CDs and distributed to all Kashmiri Pandits so that all Kashmiri homes shall once again reverberate with the divine vibrations of the Vedic mantras for eternal peace, harmony and prosperity.

We have mentioned earlier that majority of the Kashmiri Pandits belong to the rare Shakha called as Katha Shakha which is a branch of Krishna Yajur Veda. Katha Shakha has many mantras which are identical with Rig Veda and Taittiriya Shakha of Krishna Yajur Veda. The Vaidika Mantra Kalpalata too has used in various prayogas many mantras from Rigveda and others which are similar to Taittiriya Shakha of Krishna Yajurveda. In this audio CD, the Rig

Veda Mantras and the similar mantras from Krishna Yajur Veda have been recorded. The mantras which are found purely in Katha Shakha have to be recorded in the future. Other than this the portions covering Dhyana Shlokas, Tarpana and Phala (Benefit) have also been recorded. Hence an attempt has been made to record maximum portion of the book. The unique feature of this effort is that it enables Kashmiri Pandit families to hear the chant while following the book. Vedic Pandits of Rig and Yajur Veda of Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Shankaracharya Peetha have recited the mantras. Om Shanti Shanti Shanti.

Note:

DHYANA SLOKAS of various deities from Vaidika Mantra Kalpalata of Maharishi Lougakshi of Kashmir with translation in English will be serially presented in the forthcoming issues of DILIP.

– P.R.Kannan