

Evolution of Kanchi City and its Philosophies

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India, a land of varied culture and traditions has seen the rise and fall of several dynasties at various points of history. The rulers of these dynasties have patronized different religions as a result of which many cities have flourished in culture, art and religion.

Kanchipuram is one such city in South India which has carved a unique place for itself in the history of this country. It is one of the seven Mokshapuris in India besides Ayodhya, Mathura, Gaya, Kasi, Avantika and Dwaraka. Kanchipuram, enjoys the special status of being the only Mokshapuri in South India all others situated in the North.

Though being a very small city it has been the eye of attraction for almost all the important dynasties of South India. The Capital of Pallavas was Kanchipuram. The secondary Capital of Chōlas was Kanchi first being Tanjore. The Cherās, the Pāṇḍyas, the Rāshtrakūṭas, the Chalukyas of Badami, the Vijayanagar empire, the Satavahanas of Andhra and also king Ashoka of Mauryan dynasty ruled over Kanchi for certain period of time. This resulted in Kanchi becoming an outstanding city in politics, art, religion, education and culture till present day.

Kanchipuram has been the home of various religious movements like Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Vaishnavism and to an extent also Islam. A spiritual revolution took place when Sri Adi Sankara Bhagavatpada established the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam (Sri Sankara Mutt) based on his Advaita Philosophy. This period saw the fall of 72 'Dhur Mathas' (evil ways of worship) and the rise of 'Shanmatha Worship' (six ways of worship) established by Sri Adi Sankara. The Shanmathas are Ganapatyam (worship of Lord Ganapathy), Kaumaram (worship of Lord Subramnaya) Saktham (worship of Goddess), Saivism (worship of Lord Siva), Vaishnavism (worship of Lord Narayana) and Souram (worship of Sun God.)

Kanchipuram has been an architectural splendour from earliest days. It is also called 'the city of temples.' The Pallavas, the Chōlas and the Vijayanagar style of architecture predominate the temples. The kings either built new temples or renovated existing ones. The various inscriptions and epigraphs speak of the heritage of this holy city, which is also a centre of tourist attraction.

Kanchi can be called a seat of education or learning. It is said that a Hindu University equivalent to the Nalanda had been functioning in ancient times. Sanskrit, as a language has been given much importance. Evidences of great scholars from different periods who have either visited or stayed in this city for the purpose of learning are available. Kanchi also had connections with foreign countries mostly in the East as it was an important centre of trade and commerce.

This thesis 'Evolution of Kanchi city and its Philosophies' is an attempt to bring into light the cultural and religious history of one of the greatest cities of South India from the earliest days till today.

Though this thesis has been titled 'Evolution of Kanchi City and its Philosophies', my main area or focus of study has been the establishment and development of Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. Hinduism flourished in ancient times but during the Medeval period it faced a setback due to the advent of several other religions. It was Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada who destroyed the heretic sects and established the supremacy of Hinduism over other religions. It was he who revived and rekindled the spirit of Hinduism among people. The Mutts created by him all over the country are lasting monuments of his far sighted genius.

Thus the study of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam in itself has the evolution of the city prior to the times of Sri Sankara, during his time and after his time.

The chapters of the thesis are as follows:

The first is the Introductory Chapter

The second Chapter "History of Kanchipuram" deals with various dynasties that ruled this city and their legacy. The sources of study for this chapter has been taken from Tamil literary works of Sangam period. Secondary sources i.e. published books are also consulted for this purpose. Various inscriptions from Archaeological Survey of India has also been referred.

The third Chapter is “Sri Adi Sankara and his Advaita Philosophy. This covers Sri Sankara’s birth and life history, his advaita philosophy, establishment of Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. Regular rituals of the Peetam which are being followed by the Acharyas in the lineage of Bhagavatpada till present day has also been studied in the second part of the thesis. Primary sources mainly in Sanskrit and secondary sources like published books are the materials for this chapter.

The Fourth Chapter is a brief account of the pontiffs of this Peetam after Sri Sankara till before Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Swamigal (the 68th Pontiff). As the source material is very limited the official website of the Peetam has been referred to for information.

The Fifth Chapter focuses on the life and times of the three Acharyas Pujyasri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Swamigal, Pujyasri Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal and Pujyasri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi Swamigal (68th, 69th and 70th Pontiffs) of the Peetam. Secondary sources, Paper cuttings, Magazine articles provide the source material.

The Sixth Chapter is the role of the Mutt in contemporary society. If not for the 69th pontiff Pujyasri Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal this chapter would not have been necessary, for the Mutt has gained a new dimension during his period. From being a place of spiritual activity it has now a new role to play in the contemporary society. Under his guidance the Mutt has become a social and welfare organization benefitting masses from all walks of life irrespective of caste, creed and sect. The result of the tireless work of Pujyasri Periyaval is that the popularity of the Peetam has gone beyond the boundaries of this

country and attracted devotees worldwide. In doing so he (Pujiyasri Periyaval) has not deviated from Sanatana Dharma or Sanyasa Dharma. On contrary he has brought into fold several philanthrophists who had the will to help people but did not know where to go or whom to approach for such welfare activities.

A complete list of all the institutions functioning under the auspices of the Mutt has been given in this chapter.

The seventh is the conclusive chapter in which findings are presented with a discussion on the sacred nature of Kanchi, the philosophies developed there and on Sri Kamakoti Peetam.