

CANTO 15
TRIUMPHANT TOUR OF THE LAND

Confrontation with Kapalikas in Karnataka

(1-23) Now Acharya Sankara, along with the king Sudhanva and a large number of disciples, started on a Dig-vijaya—a missionary tour for the propagation of the Advaita doctrine by controverting all philosophies opposed to it. He first travelled towards the Setu. On his way, he came across a sect whose followers were externally Saivas, but drank liquor in their worship like the Saktas. He entered into a very heated debate with these Brahmanas of Sakta persuasion, silenced them in argument for the good of the world, and made them accept the right code of rituals that he formulated. After worshipping Ramanatha at Rameswaram, the Acharya travelled through the Pandya and Chola countries and reached the city of Kanchi which shone like an ornament to the Hasti ranges. There he built a temple, instituted the worship of Devi, with rituals that are in accordance with the Vedic traditions and suited to the attainment of supreme knowledge. He eschewed, in those rituals, every trace of the Tantrika modes of worship.¹ Next, blessing the people of Andhra country and worshipping Lord Venkatanatha, he reached the land of Vidarbha. He was given a cordial reception by the king of that place. There, Padmapada and other disciples engaged themselves in controverting the perverse doctrines of the Bhairavas. After a time, the Acharya started towards the Karnataka country, but was warned by the king of Vidarbha that those regions were very dangerous, as they were full of Kapalikas who were followers of the cult of human sacrifice who condemned the Vedic religion and were, on the whole, a curse to humanity. They were not likely to tolerate the spread of the Acharya's influence in those regions. Hearing this warning,

¹ According to the traditions relied on by Anantanandagiri, Sankara came to Kanchi at the end of his spiritual mission and settled down there till his end. He either founded a new Devi temple there, or renovated and reformed the existing one, and helped the growth of the two blocks in that temple town, Siva Kanchi and Vishnu Kanchi, centred on the two deities of these names there. He also received large numbers of disputants and enquirers from Tamraparni and other parts of South India.

king Sudhanva, who was accompanying the Acharya on his travels, said, displaying his bow and arrows, that there was no danger from those brutish people so long as he was with the party. Thereupon the Acharya, along with his disciples, entered into the heart of this region of Kapalikas, with a view to controvert their vicious doctrines. He was soon opposed by Krakacha, the leader of the Kapalika cult. Krakacha's body was smeared all over with the ashes from the cremation ground, and in his hands were a skull and a trident, the emblems of his cult. Accompanied by several disciples similar to him in their make-up, Krakacha said in a tone replete with pride and audacity, "It is quite proper that you are wearing marks with ashes. But why are you having in your hand this ugly water pot of mud in place of the most sacred skull? And above all, why are you not adoring the great Kāpali (Siva with a skull in hand)? Without the offering consisting of the red lotus of a bleeding skull and liquor, how can the Bhairava (Kapali), embraced by Uma, be pleased?" Thereupon king Sudhanva, who was accompanying the Acharya with his men, drove away Krakacha with the contemptuous words: "You wretch! Get away." With his lips quivering and eye-brows arching in anger, Krakacha declared, flourishing his battle axe, "I am not the famous Krakacha unless I reap a harvest of the heads of your fellows!" He then despatched a large band of well equipped Kapalikas, who approached the party with fierce and angry roars like a turbulent sea. The king put on his mail, and seated in his chariot, resisted the approaching Kapalika hoard with his bow and arrows. While this conflict was going on, Krakacha sent another batch of his followers to attack the party of Sankara's disciples and the entourage of devotees from the rear. Frightened by the sight of the Kapalika hoard, the members of the party immediately took shelter at the feet of the Acharya, their last resort. With the utterance of the mystic syllable 'Hung', the Acharya reduced to ash these terrible Kapalikas who were approaching the party with deadly weapons. Simultaneously, the king also spread the earth with a carpet formed of the heads of those Kapalikas who had come to attack at the front.

(24-29) Krakacha was much disconcerted to see that many of his own followers had been killed while the Sannyasins and their followers remained unhurt. So he now approached the Acharya

once again and said: "O infidel! See now my power, and suffer the consequences of your misdeeds.!" He then stood still with eyes closed, and a skull in hand. As he continued to meditate, the skull became full of liquor. He then drank half of it, and again continued to meditate on the Bhairava. Then there appeared before him the great Kapali (Bhairava) with a garland of skulls, long matted locks, and a trident in hand, bellowing out wild laughter and fierce roars. Addressing his deity, the Kapalika said, "O Lord! Destroy this persecutor of Thy devotees!" Then the great Kapali said: "Am I to destroy myself?" and with that question he cut off Krakacha's head. Then the Acharya sang a hymn in praise of the great Kapali, who forthwith disappeared from the sight of men. On the discomfiture of these sordid types of men, good folk everywhere praised the Acharya in great joy.

The Acharya at Gokarna

(30-39) Travelling through many lands and controverting the atheistic and corrupt doctrines of many sects, Sankara reached the shores of the western sea. The sea looked like a great opposing controversialist—its waves standing for gesticulating hands, and its loud sound, for noisy argument to the accompaniment of kettle drums. The all-forgiving Acharya left that place for Gokarna without entering into a controversy with that challenging sea, as if out of the feeling that the sea, an agitated, unsteady and watery being, had already been conquered by the Devas who churned it, and, therefore, needed no special attention from him. At Gokarna, he took his bath in the sea and worshipped at the shrine of Lord Siva there. Then, while the Acharya was preaching his philosophy to those who came to pay obeisance to him, a person named Haradatta went to his teacher Neelakantha, an upholder of Saivism, and said: "Revered Sir, a Sannyasin named Sankara, after having defeated famous scholars like Viswarupa, has now arrived at the temple along with his disciples. His idea is to defeat you also in argument and establish the supremacy of his doctrines." The great Saiva teacher, who had himself written, besides other works, a commentary on Vyasa's Sutras on the lines of Saivism, said at this: "He can never be an equal to me, be he capable of drinking up the sea, or rolling up the sky like a sheet of cloth, or plucking the disc of the sun from its wonted course. He will now see how