

A Temple of Good Fortune: *Chintamani*

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Abstract: The construction of Chintamani temple was an important event in the history of Mughal Gujarat. It was built and faced many ups and downs during seventeenth century. It was the Centre of attraction for the people, Jain community and Mughal prince Aurangzeb; and also a cause of worry for Mughal Emperor. This paper intends to find out different phases of construction and destruction of the temple. It was located in the flourishing suburb of Bibipurin Ahmedabad which is now known as Saraspur.

Keywords: Jain community, Gujarat, Chintamani temple, Parshvanath, Shantidas Zaveri, Ahmedabad.

I. Introduction

Chintamani-Parshvanath temple is an important episode in the annals of Mughal Gujarat. The temple was built and faced many ups and downs during seventeenth century. It was the Centre of attraction for the people, Jain community and Mughal prince Aurangzeb, and a cause of anxiety for Mughal Emperor.

In V.S. 1678 i.e. A.D. 1621, Shantidas and his brother had heard that building a temple led to good luck so they had built a magnificent temple in the suburb of Bibipur.¹ According to the *Chintamani-Prashasti*², the temple construction was begun in 1621 A.D. by Shantidas and his elder brother Vardhman, it was completed in 1625 A.D.

II. Sources

The details of the construction of this temple are given in a document in Sanskrit verse called *Chintamani-Prashasti*. The original composition of this record is unknown, but as colophon states that it was a song of praise for the temple of *Chintamnai-Parshvanath*. It was written in V.S 1697 (Friday, the bright half of *Pausha*) i.e. 04th of December 1640 A.D. it was composed by Vidyasaubhagya. This temple was located in the flourishing suburb of Bibipur which is now known as Saraspur. In 1625 A.D. Shantidas is said to have arranged for its consecration by the formal installment of the image of the image of the *Tirthankar* to whom it was dedicated – Parshvanath.³ This temple was built at a cost of nine lakhs of rupees.⁴

An attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the history of the temple from its genesis on the basis of available sources and information. The significance of the temple lies in the fact that it was turned into a mosque by Aurangzeb and then restored to the Jain community at the instance of Shantidas Zaveri. One can cull from the *Jain Aitihāsik Rasmala* as well as *Ahmavadno Itihas* rich information pertaining to life and origin of Shantidas. This can be corroborated from *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*. Shantidas was an *Oswal Jain*⁵ (a sect of Jainism, primarily the adherents of *Svetambara* Jainism). Interestingly enough his father Sahasrakiran had migrated from *Osian*, a place 30 Km. away in the North-West of Jodhpur in Rajasthan, in the second half of the 16th century and settled down in Ahmedabad.⁶

The *Chintamani Prashasti* furnishes full details of the ancestry of Shantidas and his descent is traced from a remote ancestor called Padma or Padam⁷ *Jain Aitihāsik Rasmala* also mentions that Shantidas was a *Kshatriya* and closely related to Sisodia dynasty. His grandfather Vatsasheth and great-grandfather Padam Shah⁸ or Harpal Sheth belonged to the family of *Samant Sangram Singh* and *Kumarpal* of Sisodia dynasty.⁹ Sisodias gave protection to Jainism in their earlier period. Some of the rulers encouraged trade and commercial activities as well.¹⁰ Thus Shantidas was originally a *Kshatriya*.¹¹

Introduction of the Builder: Shantidas

Shantidas Zaveri (1585-1659) was a famous jeweler and *sarraf* of Ahmedabad, who flourished during the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, he sold and designed jewelry to cater to the needs of the Mughal court and other rich people of the state. It is observed that he breathed the business environment of Ahmedabad.¹² He operated as a financier, *sarraf* and a wholesaler as well, which enabled him to enjoy considerable favour and influence at the imperial court at Delhi.¹³ His high social position proves that the Hindu merchants of Gujarat during Mughal period, enjoyed freedom to pursue their normal activities in trade and commerce. They amassed great wealth.¹⁴

When Sahasrakiran, the father of Shantidas, settled down in Ahmedabad, he learnt the skills related to profession of jeweler probably in a shop owned by a Jain.¹⁵ Shantidas inherited this skill. He also adopted the

sarraf business.¹⁶ Basically he was a court jeweler. The earliest reference is extant from a *farman* which he procured from Jahangir in 1622 A.D. It refers to Shantidas as ‘Zaveri’ indicating his association with the business of jewels.¹⁷ English Factory records also refers to him as the “deceased king’s jeweler”.¹⁸ The profession of jeweler was not the only business in which Shantidas was interested. The Dutch accounts refers that he purchased a large quantity of cloves from the Dutch.¹⁹ He also provided huge loans to Europeans in order to finance their trade.²⁰ Being a merchant and a *sarraf*, Shantidas seems to have controlled the local money market as well.²¹

Apart from all these things Shantidas was a religious man. He held influential position among the Jains of Gujarat. His brother Vardhaman and he spent lavishly for constructing the temple of *Chintamani-Parshwanath* in the Bibipur suburb (now called Saraspur) of Ahmedabad in 1625 A.D. *ChintamaniPrashasti* provides graphic details of his family. His brother had six sons. Shantidas himself had four wives and these ladies are mentioned with their respective sons, who were Panaji, Ratanji, Kapurchand and Lakhmichand.²² Shantidas took equal interest in the advancement of religious learning. He helped the monks in setting up *Paathshalas*.²³

Construction of *Chintamani-Parshvanath* Temple:

One of the verses of *Chintamani-Prashasti* refers to a noble who might be the viceroy of Gujarat when it was composed.²⁴ If we compare this information with *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* we come to know that this noble was Azam Khan who was the *subahdar* of the region from 1636 A.D. to 1642 A.D., under Shah Jahan.²⁵ On the arches of the temple there were statues of female resembling celestial nymphs, while at the door of the temple there was the *Panchpatra* for protection. The lofty steps of the temple indicate the way for the heavenward march of the devotees. There were six halls in the temple called –

1. Meghanada
2. Sinhanada
3. Suryanada
4. Rangaram
5. Khela
6. Gudhagotra

It had two turrets, four square temples around, and four underground shrines with idol of *Jina*.²⁶

According to Jain iconography all the images of the *Tirthankaras* were based on the fundamental concept of *maha-purusa-laksana*²⁷ and placed on highly sculptured thrones and surrounded by other smaller attendant figures. At the right of the *Jina* is a male figure representing the *Yaksha* attendant or servant of that particular *Jina*. At the left end of the throne is the corresponding female or *Yakshini* or *Sasanadevi*, whilst in a panel in the middle there is often another *devi*.²⁸ According to Jain tradition, the *Tirthankaras* have certain extraordinary qualities or *atisaya*.²⁹

Another source to know about this temple is the German traveller John Albert de Mandelslo, who arrived at Surat at the end of the April 1638 A.D. and reached Ahmedabad in October 1638 A.D. He visited this great Jain temple which was built only a few years before. He called this temple ‘the principal mosque of the *banyas*³⁰’ and ‘a new building’. He also adds that ‘it was without dispute one of the noblest structures that could be seen’ and its constructor was a rich *Banya* merchant named Shantidas lived in my times.³¹

Mandelslo described it in these words - it stood in a middle of a great court which was enclosed by a high wall of freestones. There was gallery inside this wall which was very much similar to the monasteries in Europe. This gallery had a large number of cells, in each of the cell there was a statue of black or white marble. These figures no doubt represented the Jain *Tirthankaras*. He explained them as ‘representing a woman naked, sitting and having her legs lying across under her, according to the mode of the country’. Some of the cells had three statues in them – a large one between two smaller ones.³² At the entrance of the temple there were two elephants of life size made of black marble were situated. On one of the there was an effigy of the builder. The walls of the temple adorned with figures of human and animals. On the other end of the building there were shrines consisting of three chapels which were divided by a wooden rail. Marble statues of *Tirthankars* were placed in it with a lighted lamp before them, which was stood in the central shrine. One of the priests had to attend the temple who was busy in receiving flowers from the devotees to adorn the images and oil also for the lamps which were hanging before the railing, and wheat and salt for the sacrifice. He set the flowers about the statues. The priest covered his mouth and nose with a piece of linen cloth, so that the impurity of his breath should not profane the images.³³

Aurangzeb and Chintamani Temple:

In 1645 A.D., Shah Jahan appointed his third son Aurangzeb as *subahdar* of Gujarat.³⁴ Prince ordered to convert this temple into a mosque which was given a name of *Quwwat-ul-Islam* or might of Islam.³⁵

French traveller M. de Thevenot, who arrived at Surat on tenth day of January 1666 and then visited Ahmedabad, he gives an interesting information about the temple and says –

“Ahmedabad being inhabited by a large number of heathens,³⁶ there are pagods or idol-temples in it. That which was called the pagods of Shantidas was the chief, before Aurangzeb converted into a mosque. When he performed this ceremony, he caused a cow to be killed in the place, knowing very well that, often such an action, the gentiles, according to their law, could worship no more therein. The inside roof of the mosque is pretty enough, and the walls are full of the figures of the men and beasts; but Aurangzeb who hath always made a show of an effected devotion, which all length raised him to the throne, caused the noses of all these figures, which added a great deal of magnificence to that mosque, to be beat of.”³⁷

Another French traveller and jeweler Tavernier, who visited several times in Ahmedabad during seventeenth century, also talks about the conversion of this temple into a mosque by Prince Aurangzeb. He says –

“Exterior of the mosque is ornamented with mosaic, the greater part of which consists of agates of different coloures, obtained from the mountains of Cambay, only two days’ journey thence.”³⁸

Aurangzeb converted it into a mosque; however it was subsequently restored to the Jains under the orders of Emperor Shah Jahan. Shantidas succeeded in saving the principal image and he built another temple for it in the city.³⁹

Emperor’s Farman and Rescue Orders:

Shantidas stood high in favour with the Emperor, Shah Jahan granted about a dozen royal *farmans* in his favour. Although he was Emperor’s favourite it did not mean that he would allow this insult to his religion, even though the action was offered by an imperial Prince. Shah Jahan ordered to issue a *farman* on this subject, which had the *nishan* and seal of Prince DaraShukoh, and it was addressed to Ghairat Khan, the deputy of Gujarat.⁴⁰ Ghairat Khan was the title of Baqar Beg. When DaraShukoh appointed as viceroy of Gujarat, he preferred to stay in the capital and Ghairat Khan was sent as his deputy viceroy to carry on the administration.⁴¹

Nishan of DaraShukoh addressed to the *subahdar*, *hukkam* and *mutasaddis* of *subah* Gujarat, especially Ghairat Khan. The *nishan* informs that there was a *farman* related to the issue of the temple of ShantidasZaveri had been formerly issued to *undat-ul-mulk* Shaista Khan to the effect that Prince Aurangzeb have constructed several *mihrabas* in the said temple and had given it the name of a *masjid* and thereafter Mulla Abdul Hakim had represented to the Emperor that this building could not be considered a mosque according to the inalienable Islamic law, because it was another person’s property. The imperial orders were, therefore, issued stating that because of its *mihrabas*, no obstruction should be caused to the above mentioned person (Shantidas) and that the *mihrabas* should be removed and the building should be restored to him. Now the royal orders are issued to the effect that the *mihrabas* which the Prince above referred to had constructed there may be retained and a wall should be built close to the *mihrabas* between the temple and *mihrab* to serve as screen. Now since the Emperor has granted the said temple to Shantidas, he should have its possession as usual. He may worship there according to his religion. No one should cause any problem to him in this regard. Some *faqirs* who have settled there should be ejected. The Emperor have got informed that some of the Bohras have carried away and removed the *masala* or material of the temple, so he ordered that the material should be recovered from them and restored to Shantidas. If the said material has been used by them, then its price should be recovered from them and paid to Shantidas.⁴²

This document bears the *tughra* of Shah Jahan in addition to the *tughra* and seal of Prince DaraShukoh. There is a note on the top on their right hand side which begins with the word- *huwa* and directs the *hukkam* to act in conformity with the *nishan-i-ali*, dated 13 *rajjab* 22 *julusi*/ 1058 A.H. (3rd August 1648 A.D.)⁴³

Aftermath:

The royal *farman* gave some satisfaction to Shantidas but by the other people of his community in Ahmedabad the edifice must have been considered for ever desecrated, as Thevenot mentioned – ‘no worship therein was possible.’ Neither Muslim would utilize the building as a mosque after the imperial order, nor would Jains be ready to worship there. Under these circumstances the monument fell gradually into decay and after a period it was disappeared.⁴⁴

There is a later reference to this temple made by the author of *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* to the effect that when it was converted into a mosque, Shantidas had arranged that two of its great marble images should be concealed underground, though it was given out that they would be destroyed. Each of the image weighing about a *mann*. After hundred years later in 1743 A.D., during the reign of Mohammad Shah when JawanMard Khan Babi had established his de facto authority at Ahmedabad, Jains took advantage of political chaos attending the imminent

fall of the empire in the region and realized that Islamic intolerance was on decline. They managed to bring these images into light with the help of some bribe, and then they install them publicly in a Jain temple situated in the *Zavrivada* at Ahmedabad.⁴⁵

III. Conclusion:

This study can be concluded thus:

1. It is unfortunate that *ChintamaniPrashasti* is not available in its original form now, however some sketchy and scattered information is available in different works so that we can get some idea of events of that time.
2. Shantidas being a wealthy and leading merchant and a court jeweler, still he wanted to lead the community by building a huge temple. As *Prashasti* informs that both the brothers had heard that 'building a temple led the good fortune', so they built this temple not because they were religious men but just for the sake of good luck and spent millions of rupees on it and the *ChintamaniPrashasti* not only praises *ChintamaniParshvanath* but the builder as well. No doubt Shantidas was a religious man but more than that he was a clever businessman who wished to show his power through his money and to lead the merchants of the region.
3. One can glean orthodox and secular viewpoints within the imperial circle which caused check and balance the sensitive communal issue.
4. Basically the construction and the destruction of this temple was a power game in which nobody was the winner. Neither it was used by the Muslims nor the Jains worshiped there.

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