

BENEFITS OF CAITYA WORSHIPING ACCORDING TO THE *AHORĀTRAVRATACAITYASEVĀNUŚAṂSĀVADĀNA*

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Introduction

Avadāna literature is an inseparable part of the Buddhist Sanskrit literature. It includes different types of stories under different themes. All those themes are connected with Buddhist values. The *ahorātravratacaityasevānuśamsāvadāna* is the tenth chapter of the *asokāvadāna*. It describes a rite which should be performed throughout day and night. This special rite is called as *ahorātravrata*. Once, king Ashoka came onto Upagupta Thera who resided in *Kukkuṭārāma* and inquired about the *ahorātravrata*. Then Upagupta Thera explained the rite in detail as he heard from his teacher.

Content of the *ahorātravratacaityasevānuśamsāvadāna*

According to the edition of the *ahorātravratacaityasevānuśamsāvadāna*, done by Prof. Ratna Handurukandeit include 356 verses. Prof. Ratna Handurukande has divided the whole text of the *ahorātravratacaityasevānuśamsāvadāna* into twenty three parts in her introduction. They are as follows:

- 1). Formula of adoration at the commencement of the text (1st verse).
- 2). The Introductory verse (2nd verse).
- 3). The frame story. (Dialogue between King Aśoka and the Elder Upagupta) (2 – 6 verses)
- 4). Story of the time of Śākyamuni (7 – 23 verses).
- 5). A story of the past related by Śākyamuni. (Vasubandhu's sermon on the *ahoratra* rite to King Indraprṣṭa) (24 – 60 verses).
- 6). Preparatory procedure relating to the rite. Erection of a *dharmaśālā* (61 – 65 verses).

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- 7). Setting up of a *maṇḍala* (66 – 67 verses).
- 8). Procedure to be observed on the thirteenth day of the light half of the month (68 verse).
- 9). Procedure prescribed for the observer of the rite on the fourteenth day (69 – 72 verses).
- 10). Procedure to be followed on the full-moon day and until the conclusion of the rite (73 – 96 verses).
- 11). The benefit of performing the *ahoratra* rite and worshipping *caityas* in relation to it (97 – 129; 137; 142 - 145).
- 12). The division of merit accrued by the performance of the rite (146, 147 verses).
- 13). Caste stipulations relating to *caitya* worship (130 – 136 verses).
- 14). Time for the performance of the rite (138 – 141 verses).
- 15). Performance of the rite by King Indraprṣṭa (149 – 171 verses)
- 16). Request made by the monks to relate episodes about those who observed the rite in the past (173 – 180 verses)
- 17). The observance of the rite by Indra (181 – 182 verses)
- 18). Performance of the rite by Nirghoṣadamana (183 – 196 verses)
- 19). The story of the *nāga*-maidens (197 – 210 verses)
- 20). The story of the shell-maidens (211 - 228 verses)
- 21). The story of the fisher-maidens (231 – 234 verses)
- 22). The story of King Kṛkin's daughters (335 – 348 verses)
- 23). The concluding episodes of the texts (349 – 351 verses)

However, only 100 – 129 verses are discussed here. There are some special features in these verses. In many occasions one verse explains only one idea. To prove the main idea various terms have been used. This style is similar to the *muktaka* verse category depicted in the classifications of classical Sanskrit verse literature. There are only three exceptions to this main style. Here two verses are used to explain one idea (115 & 116; 117 & 118; 122 & 123 verses). It represents the *yugmaka* style in the classical Sanskrit verse literature. Due to the usage of these two styles the flow of the



content is very clear and regular. The language is used here is very simple and could be understood very easily.

Discussion on the benefits of *caitya* worshiping

As mentioned in the aforesaid verses of the *ahorātravratacaityasevānuśamsāvadāna* someone can offer different types of sacred offerings to the *caitya* such as ornaments, cloths, traditional music and dances. Apart from these offerings, worshiping and praising the *caitya* (124th& 125th verses), circumambulation the *caitya* (126th verse), sweeping and cleaning the compound of the *caitya* (127th verse) and protecting the *caitya* from various threats are also activities (120th verse) that are beneficial. The *ahorātravratacaityasevānuśamsāvadāna* mentions the benefits of the offering of each thing individually. It is important that these benefits represent the people, belong to the every level. For an example, either king or a poor person has opportunity to make their offerings according to their ability. The person, who is unable to offer other sacred things to the *caitya*, can perform this rite through worshiping the *caitya*, praising the *caitya*, circumambulation the *caitya* or sweeping and cleaning the compound of the *caitya*. Even the person who is clever in music or dancing can pay their respects to the *caitya* according to their abilities (117th& 119th verses). The *ahorātravrata* is a remarkable rite which has capability to collect all people in different status in the society. Thus the *ahorātravratacaityasevānuśamsāvadāna* is a collection of rites that can be performed by every person according to their social status. At the same time it prompts the people to respect the *caitya* and offer sacred things to it. On the other hand, the significance of the things which are offered to the *caitya* is an important point depicted here. Offering flowers, incenses and oil lamps to the *caitya* is a very popularised. To mark some events some people offer flags, cloths, garlands, food and fruits to the *caitya*. Those are offered occasionally. But as mentioned in the *ahorātravratacaityasevānuśamsāvadāna* other offerings like gems, diamonds and pearls (122nd verse), medicines (110th verse), leaves and roots (109th

verse), sacred threads to different colours, betel and areca nuts (111th verse), canopies (113th verse), banners (114th verse), umbrellas (115 verse) are not very familiar. Moreover, some unfamiliar terms have been used in the text such as *pañcāmṛta* (100 verse), *pañcasugandhatoya* (100 verse), *jalamāṇḍalā* (101st verse), *pañcagandha* (103rd verse). Those terms may display some kind of offerings to the caitya conducted on special occasions or in a particular society.

Major benefits of the worshipping and offering the sacred things which are mentioned in this text, to the *caitya* are taking birth as a human being with many luxuries things, prosperity and ensuring kingship and divinity in after-life. It reveals that this special rite is mainly focused on worldly happiness and thereby prompts others to conduct this rite. Only in a single place it mentions about the abode of the Buddha (123rd verse). The term 'abode of the Buddha' clearly reflects the influence of the *mahāyāna* tradition.

Making attention of kings to the *caitya* may be another purpose of the highlighting the connection between kingship and this rite. Once kings know these benefits they definitely make attempts to do this rite and protect the *caitya*. It is a good way to assure the protection of the *caitya* and pay homage to it in a grand scale. Through this research the researcher hopes to discuss the content of the *ahorātravratcaityasevānuśamsāvadāna* in an analytical and critical way with special reference to the aforementioned point.

Keywords: The *ahorātravratcaityasevānuśamsāvadāna*, benefits of *caitya* worshipping, the *ahorātravrata*, offerings to the *caitya*