

CHAPTER THIRTYTHREE

The Greatness of Śivarātri Vrata¹

The sages said:

1. What was the name of that Kirāta? What holy rite was performed by him? O great Brāhmaṇa, narrate it. We are very eager.

2. We wish to hear everything. Let it be described exactly. Excepting you, there is no one else, O foremost one among eloquent people. Hence recount everything, O lord of Brāhmaṇas, to us who wish to hear.

3. On being told thus by the noble-souled Śaunaka, (Lomaśa) narrated every thing done by the Puṣkasa² (? Forester).

Lomaśa said:

4. Once there was an excessively terrible vicious man named Caṇḍa.³ He used to associate with cruel people. He was roguish and of bad conduct. He used to terrorize all living beings.

5-6. With a net that evil-minded one used to capture and kill fish incessantly. That wicked fellow killed different kinds of deer, beasts of prey and porcupine as well as rhinoceros by means of arrows. Sometimes he furiously killed birds. The sinner killed Brāhmaṇas in particular. The forester of great sins was wicked himself and was a favourite of all wicked people. The wife of that Puṣkasa was also very terrible, like him.

7-8. Even as he amused himself thus, many years passed by. He continued to be engaged in those sinful activities and much time passed.

1. *Śivarātri* falls on the fourteenth day of the dark half of Māgha. It is sacred to Śiva. Observance of fast on that complete *Tithi*, worship of Śiva and keeping vigil that night in performing devotional service etc. to Śiva are the main features of the *Vrata*.

2. *Puṣkasa* is a hyper-Sanskritisation of Prakrit *Pukkasa*—name of a forest tribe.

3. The story of a vicious Caṇḍāla called Caṇḍa illustrates how service to Śiva performed without knowing it and observance of fast on that day forced by unforeseen circumstances leads even a sinner to inclusion in the Gaṇas of Śiva.

9. Once that sinful fellow sat on a Bilva tree at night with the bow in his hand. He wanted to kill a wild boar and he kept awake even without winking. He had stored some water in his quiver, lest he should be distressed due to hunger and thirst.

10. It was the fourteenth day in the dark fortnight of the month of Māgha (January-February). He was looking in front for the animal and unintentionally he (plucked and) made many Bilva (*Aegle Marmelos*) leaves fall down.

11-15. Sometimes in anger he plucked a number of Bilva leaves and dropped them down. Wafted (by the wind) they fell upon a *Liṅga* that was at the root of the Śrīvṛkṣa (Bilva tree). Sometimes that wicked fellow gargled and that water fell on the *Śivaliṅga*. The leaves of the Bilva tree also fell. In such a manner, by sheer good luck and happy coincidence the action of that forester became a worship of Śiva.

With mouthfuls of water the great rite of bathing was performed; with the numerous leaves of the *Aegle Marmelos* the great rite of worshipping too was carried out in ignorance, O Brāhmaṇas, by that evil-minded Puṣkasa. On the fourteenth day in the black fortnight of the month of Māgha when the crescent moon was about to rise (at dawn), that Puṣkasa of evil conduct got down from the tree. Coming near the water-pond he began to catch (and kill) fish.

16. The wife of that Puṣkasa was known by the name Ghanodari. She was vicious and she used to steal other people's wealth. She was engaged in committing sins.

17. In the evening she started from her house and stood outside the city gates. Desirous of meeting her husband on his arrival, she was watching the road to the forest.

18-22. When even after a long time her husband did not return, the huntress began to think:

'All the other hunters and fowlers have returned in the evening today. The four cardinal points and the intermediate quarters have been covered with mass of darkness. Two *Yāmas* ($2 \times 3 = 6$ hours) have gone by in the night. Has the forester come yet? Was he torn to pieces by a lion because he had coveted the mane? Was he tortured and afflicted by the poison of serpents because he was about to remove the gems and jewels from the hoods of serpents? Did he meet death on being hit and struck by the tips

of the curved teeth of boars? Did he fall down on the ground from the top of a tree which he climbed up because he coveted honey? Where shall I enquire? Whom shall I ask? To whom shall I go?’

After lamenting thus in various ways, she returned to the house.

23. Throughout that day, nothing was eaten by her. Even water was not taken in. The fowler’s wife spent the whole of the night thinking about her husband.

24. At dawn when everything was free from impurities (i.e. darkness), the Puṣkasi went to the forest in a hurry, taking with her food for him to eat.

25. Wandering in the forest, she saw a big river. On seeing her own husband seated on its bank, she became delighted.

26. She placed the food on the bank and began to cross the river. On seeing (her), he brought the fish caught in his net.

27. By that time, Caṇḍa was told by her: “Come quickly. Take your food. I have observed fast throughout the day and food has been brought for your sake.

28. What has been done by you today? What was done yesterday, O dull-witted one? Was not anything taken in by you, O stupid fellow? You sinner, did you refrain from taking food?”

29-30. That couple of pure holy rites took their bath in the river. When he went (to the other bank) for taking his food a dog came that way. All the food was eaten by it. The fierce woman became infuriated and proceeded to kill the dog.

31. “Our food has been eaten by this sinful wretch. What will you eat, O dull-witted one? You will have to remain hungry now.”

32-35. On being (reproachfully) told thus by her, Caṇḍa who had become a favourite (devotee) of Śiva,¹ spoke to her: “I have been gratified by the food that has been eaten by the dog. Of what avail is this perishable body bereft of long life? This ill-fated body of momentary existence is being worshipped in the world. Those who are overwhelmed by emotional attachments and go on nourishing their body, are foolish ones. They

1. The transformation of a wicked Caṇḍāla into a pious devotee of Śiva is due to the observance of *Śivarātri Vrata* even without knowing it.

should be known as sinners, excluded from both the worlds. Hence abandon false pride and unrestrained anger. Be composed by means of discrimination (between good and evil). Be steady by means of the intellect based on reality (i.e. through knowledge of reality).”

36. That fierce woman was extremely enlightened by the Puṣkasa then. That Puṣkasa had carried out the rite of keeping awake on the *Caturdaśī* night.

37. In view of the connection with *Śivarātri*, he attained that perfect knowledge which is undoubtedly produced at the time of *Śivarātri*.

38. Two *Yāmas* (i.e. six hours) passed and *Amāvāsyā* started. Many Gaṇas deputed by Śiva came there.

39. Many aerial chariots also came there near him. Those aerial chariots and the Gaṇas were seen by him.

40. The Puṣkasa spoke to them with great devotion: “From where have you come? All of you wear *Rudrākṣa* beads.

41. Some of you are riding in aerial chariots. Some have mounted bulls. All of you resemble the crystal. All of you have the crescent moon as coronet.

42. All of you have matted hair. Hides are your garments. (Bodies of) serpents have been worn as ornaments. You are equipped with all glorious features. Your heroism is like that of Rudra. Explain specifically and exactly what is proper unto you.”

43. On being asked by Puṣkasa, then, all the lotus-eyed *Pārśadas* (attendants) of Rudra, the lord of Devas, said very humbly:

Gaṇas said:

44. O Caṇḍa, we have been sent by the great god Śiva. Come on. Hurry up. Get into the vehicle along with your wife.

45. The worship of the *Liṅga* of Śiva has been performed by you at night. As a result of that good rite you have attained Siva's presence.

46. Told thus by Virabhadra, the Puṣkasa too laughingly said the following words relevant to the occasion, in accordance with his own intellect.

The Puṣkasa said:

47. What (good) has been done today by me who have been a sinner, a violent tormentor, an evil-minded Puṣkasa interested in hunting?

48. I have been perpetually committing sins. How can I go to heaven? How was the worship of *Liṅga* performed? Let it be explained.

49. My curiosity has been roused much. I am asking you for the exact state (of affairs). Explain, O deity of great fortune, everything in due order.

50. As the Puṣkasa put these questions properly, (Vīrabhadra) described the Śaiva rites entirely with great joy.

Virabhadra said:

51. Mahādeva, the lord of Devas, Īśvara, the lord of refulgent ones, Maheṣa, the consort of Umā, is delighted today, O Caṇḍa.

52. In the month of Māgha, the worship of *Liṅga* was performed by you incidentally. It is the cause of the delight of Śiva. Undoubtedly you have become sanctified today. The worship was incidentally performed on the *Śivarātri* night.

53. O Caṇḍa, the leaves of the Bilva tree were plucked by you who were on the lookout for a wild boar. At the same time, they fell on the head of the *Liṅga*. Hence you have become full of merits, O holy lord.

54. Similarly the great rite of keeping awake was performed by you on the tree. The Lord of the universe is delighted at that keeping awake.

55. Under the pretext of watching (the arrival) of a wild boar, you had no sleep on the *Śivarātri* night. Nor did your wife sleep.

56. The noble-souled lord, the most excellent one among Devas, is delighted on account of that fast and keeping the vigil. In order to please you, the lord of great magnanimity, the bestower of boons, granted you all festivities.

57-60. On being told thus by the intelligent Virabhadra, the Puṣkasa got into the excellent aerial chariot even as the Gaṇas,