

Shṛṅga Bherī Avadāna
(The Buffalo Horn-blowing Tale)
Kathmandu, Nepal: Smṛti Press, 1979

So I have heard: Once Lord Shākyamuni was dwelling on Mount Gr̥ddhakūṭa in Rājagṛha city accompanied by 1300 fellow *bhikṣus*, *bodhisattvas* and *mahāsattvas*.

At that time the gods and human beings also gathered there to listen intently to the discourses delivered by the sage of the Shākyā clan, Lord of the world.

From the audience, Shāriputra arose and went close to the Tathāgata, then knelt down before him with folded hands and said, “O Lord! Kindly tell me about those who were liberated through *caitya* worship accompanied by the playing of musical instruments, including the buffalo horn.”

Upon hearing this, Tathāgata Shākyamuni said to Shāriputra within the hearing of all the gods and human beings in the audience, “Verily, Verily, O Shāriputra! Emancipation obtained through *caitya* worship that is accompanied by the blowing of buffalo horns, is illustrated in the following story:

In the distant past, the King Suvarṇaketu and his queen Hiranyavatī lived happily in the city of Suvarṇavati. The king had five sons from his queen Hiranyavatī, namely: 1. Puṣpaketu 2. Ratnaketu 3. Shuryaketu 4. Dīpaketu 5. Chandraketu. The oldest son Puṣpaketu once went to his parents, paid them compliments, and asked for permission to go to Bandhumati city for listening to the discourses being

delivered by Vipashvī Buddha. With their permission, he left Svarṇavati city for Bandhumati city.

Upon reaching Bandhumati city, Prince Puṣpaketu went to see Vipashvī Tathāgata at a monastery. Kneeling down before Vipashvī Buddha, Prince Puṣpaketu said, 'O Lord! Please tell me of those who were liberated through *caitya* worship performed while playing musical instruments, including the buffalo horn.'

Hearing the prince's request, the Buddha said, 'The month of Shrāvaṇa is considered holy for *caitya* worship accompanied by music. For this, the month of Kārtik is equally holy. During these two months, after ritual bathing in the morning, if one circumambulates *caityas* or *vihāras* playing drums, cymbals and blowing horns, one will accumulate good fortune and religious merit here in this life and be reborn hereafter in a noble family. If one circumambulates the *caitya* blowing horns and then offers gifts in the name of the dead, that one will avoid bad destinies and be reborn in a family of noble birth. And anyone seated in front of a *caitya* who seeks refuge in the *Tiratna* with a purified mind will attain supreme enlightenment or be reborn hereafter in heaven to attain the title of Indra, King of Gods. Similarly if one whitewashes a *caitya* with lime, decorates it with flags and garlands, and worships with a fivefold offering (*pañcopacāra pūjā*), that one will accumulate a great deal of religious merit. O Prince! Please be attentive and let me now proceed to tell you how once one person was liberated through buffalo horn playing.

Once there was a king named Siṃhaketu who ruled the city of Shashīpaṭṭana. The King there had no consideration for the lives of other living beings and every day visited the forest to hunt. With his bow and arrow, he killed many different wild birds and beasts such as deer, tigers, and bears.

Unable to bear the daily sight of her husband taking the lives of wild birds and beasts in the forest, Queen Sūrakṣaṇī said to her husband one day, "O my Lord! I must make an urgent request: Please give up hunting the wild birds and beasts in the forest. Listen! The demerit of taking the lives of living beings will subject you to a great deal of suffering in your future births. [She quoted the verses:]

Ahiṃsā is the best among knowledges,
The greatest of all teachings.
Ahiṃsā is the best among virtues,
The greatest of all meditations.

[Sūrakṣaṇī continued:] If men say they earnestly seek salvation, they should be non-violent in body, speech and mind, toward all living beings. O my Lord! If you so wish, you may pronounce the names of the *Triratna* seeking refuge, worship a *caitya* while saying prayers and circumambulating, give liberally to the *bhikṣus*, the *brāhmaṇs*, the *ācāryas*, and show compassion to many suffering ones. By so doing, your happiness here and in the hereafter will be assured.”

Hearing this, the king replied, “Darling! What’s this you are saying? Don’t you know that a son born in a royal family can take his pleasure in hunting wild birds and beasts in the forest?”

Having discerned the king’s attitude, the queen still tried her best to change his mind but could not stop him from hunting in the forest.

After a certain time, the king passed away and Sūrakṣaṇī was so upset at his death that she immolated herself on her husband’s funeral pyre. His wicked hunting of the wild birds and beasts in the forest caused the king to be consigned to purgatory and afterwards be reincarnated as a buffalo in the same city of Shashīpaṭṭana. But Queen Sūrakṣaṇī, as a result of her meritorious deeds, including sparing the lives of living beings and being chaste and faithful to her husband, was reincarnated as a woman in a certain *brāhmaṇ* family in the same city of Shashīpaṭṭana.

The *brāhmaṇ* couple became very glad when she was born to them. They celebrated the name-giving ceremony of the baby girl in accordance with their custom. The name of Rūpavatī [Beautiful One] was given to the child because she was very beautiful. The baby was brought up with proper care and gradually grew up like a lotus in a pond. When Rūpavatī became a mature girl, her father gave her the job of tending a buffalo in the forest.

Rūpavatī every day tended her buffalo, cleaned his shed, and took great care of him.

Because Rūpavatī was beautiful, many people came to propose marriage. Her parents discussed this and eventually broached the subject, “O Rūpavatī! Now you have come of age. People have come to us asking for you in marriage. Do you want to marry?”

The daughter answered her parents, “Dear Father and Mother, I do not want to be married. Please do not insist on it. I prefer staying unmarried and devoting myself to you here. I will not marry.”

Hearing this, the parents gave up the idea of giving their only daughter in marriage and she remained at home.

One day Rūpavatī was in the forest as usual tending her buffalo. While she was sitting under a tree looking at the many-hued blossoms, listening to the sweet birdsongs, and smelling many colorful sweet-scented flowers, a bodhisattva named Supāraga, emanating brilliant light from his body, descended from the sky and stood before her. He said, “O Rūpavatī! The buffalo you are tending was your husband in a previous birth. In his former existence, he hunted many birds and beasts in the forest. As a result of this, he is now reborn as a buffalo. For his past wicked deeds, the buffalo will be killed and devoured by the birds and beasts of the forest. O Rūpavatī! If you wish to assist the husband of your previous birth to attain a good destiny, collect the mortal remains of the buffalo after it is killed and devoured, then deposit them inside a sand *caitya*. One of the two horns of the buffalo may be used for offering water to the *caitya* and the other horn may be used as a trumpet at the time of circumambulating it.” Having said this to Rūpavatī, Supāraga Bodhisattva disappeared miraculously.

Then Rūpavatī also remembered the facts of her previous birth and took even greater care of the buffalo by taking it to the forest and feeding it nutritious grasses.

One day as usual, Rūpavatī was sitting under a tree while tending her buffalo. After eating grass nearby the buffalo wandered off to drink water from a stream in the forest. In

an instant, tigers and lions attacked the buffalo and tortured it to death. Then they and bears, vultures and other birds devoured its flesh, leaving only bones and the two horns behind.

[At just this same time] Rūpavatī heard a strange sound made by the buffalo and it did not come back as usual from the stream. Very much agitated, she went to the stream looking for the buffalo but did not find it. Instead, she saw only the dead animal's bones and two horns left behind. At the sight of the buffalo's bones and horns, Rūpavatī wept. Taking them affectionately in her arms, she said to herself, "What bodhisattva Supāraga prophesied has come true." She then returned home crying and related to her parents all that had happened to her in the forest that day.

Upon hearing Rūpavatī's story, her parents comforted her, saying, "Enough, enough! Do not mourn the death of one buffalo very much. We will buy another."

In response to her parents, the daughter cried out, "Oh Mother and Father! No buffalo can be like the one that has been killed. You may buy a new buffalo but the new one cannot bring me peace and consolation." The parents retorted, "Grieve no more over a dead animal. It is of no use because the dead cannot be brought back to life. Get a hold of yourself!"

Then Rūpavatī went again to the streamside, collected all the pieces of bone, and buried them in a sand *caitya*, all as advised by Supāraga Bodhisattva. She next used one of the two horns of the buffalo for offering water to the *caitya* and the other for playing while circumambulating and performing a *pañcopacāra pūjā*. She worshipped the *caitya* in this way daily. One day during her *caitya* worship, while Rūpavatī was offering water with one of the horns and blowing the other, a bejeweled *caitya* appeared in the sky emitting radiant light in all directions. She was surprised and with folded hands looked skyward in great reverence.

Then the *caitya* that appeared in the sky descended to the earth and merged into the sand *caitya* in which the bones of the buffalo were buried. When the bejeweled *caitya* did so, the sand *caitya* was absorbed into it.

Because of the presence of the *caitya* there, stone walls and other masonry constructions came into sight by themselves around the *caitya* to make a high-walled courtyard. Doorways and festoons also appeared, just as plants possessing different flowers and fruits started growing all around.

This is not all. From the horn of the buffalo that was used for blowing, a person came out who grew instantly into a young man. At that sight of the individual springing from the horn, Rūpavatī became very surprised and said, “Who are you and where did you come from?”

Turning to the brāhmaṇ lady, the person who emerged from the horn said, “How could you not recognize me, O faithful woman! You liberated your husband through your conjugal fidelity and pious charitable acts. O Rūpavatī! I have been able to come out of the horn, liberated on this day. It is all due to your accumulation of *puṇya*. Do you not know that in our former existences I was the king of this city and you were my queen Sūrakṣaṇī? Although you tried to prevent me from going to the forest to hunt birds and beasts, I insisted upon doing so. As a result of these wicked deeds, I was consigned to purgatory, subjected to great suffering. Ultimately I was reborn as a buffalo. Now I am liberated through your pious meritorious *caitya* worship accompanied by buffalo horn playing.”

Upon hearing this from the person emanating from the horn, Rūpavatī, said, “Oh! How fortunate I have been! As a result of the pious act of this *caitya* worship I have been able to end the separation and rejoin my husband.” Jubilant, they both circumambulated the *caitya*. Then the person emanating from the horn chanted the goddess Tārā’s name and remained seated before the *caitya*. He recited prayers from a holy text while blowing on the horn. The whole of Shashīpaṭṭana city echoed with the sound produced by the horn. Once the citizens of Shashīpaṭṭana city heard the pleasant sound of the horn, they gathered there.

All those who assembled around the *caitya* were taken aback to see Rūpavatī seated beside a handsome person and so they asked her who he was. At that time and within the hearing of all, Rūpavatī related the whole story of how



Fig 2.2. Line Drawing of the Miraculous Appearance of the Former Husband from the Buffalo Horn

Supārāga Bodhisattva had prophesied strange events, how they had lived in their previous births as King Siṃhaketu and Queen Sūrakṣaṇī in Shashīpaṭṭana, and what had happened in front of the sand *caitya*.

The people assembled there were gladdened after hearing this and realized that the person emanating from the horn and the *brāhmaṇ* lady were formerly their king and queen. Both of them were taken to the city in an elaborate, joyful procession. Then the person emanating from the horn was given the name of Bhadra Shṛṅga and was enthroned as king.

Then King Bhadra Shṛṅga and Queen Rūpavatī ruled over the city of Shashīpaṭṭana happily. One day King Bhadra Shṛṅga invited the citizens to his palace to tell them the story of how his queen delivered him from his sufferings in purgatory by her pious and charitable devotional actions and how he eventually succeeded in ascending to the throne of Shashīpaṭṭana for the well-being of the people.

King Bhadra Shṛṅga and Queen Rūpavatī lived happily for many years. King Bhadra Shṛṅga made it widely known to his countrymen how his wife delivered him from his sufferings in purgatory. He preached and propagated the significance and sanctity of *caitya* worship and reigned happily over the country.

This is what was told to Prince Puṣpaketu by Vipashvī Buddha. After hearing this from Vipashvī Buddha, Prince Pushpaketu returned to Suvarṇapura and relayed to his parents the same story. Upon hearing the story from his son, King Suvarṇaketu happily ruled over the country and performed the proper worship of *caityas*. And this was told to Bhikṣu Shāriputra by Lord Shākyamuni on Mount Gṛddhakūṭa.