

ANANTA VRATA

This Vrata is celebrated on Bhadrapada suddha chaturdasi continuously for a period of fourteen years. In the fifteenth year Brahmins are fed and dana (jaggery and fried flour paste) is given. Following this Vrata is said to regain lost wealth.

Pooja procedure : This is performed after taking bath at noon. A copper vessel filled with water and little sandal paste and Pachche Karpura (Borneol/Camphene) and a red silk cloth is tied around it. A sasha is made out of darbha, and placed inside the vessel so that a portion of it protrudes outside. An image of Ananta or Saligrama is placed. Alongside, a red silken chord with fourteen knots is prepared and the pooja is performed. After the pooja, the chord is tied in the right upper arm. A keerthan or katha kalakshepam (discourse) is arranged for the evening. It is necessary to keep awake that night.

Story of Ananta Vrata

Suta, a pupil of Vyasa, speaking to Saunaka and other maharishis, asked them, "O, maharishi, in this world, do you know, millions of people are afflicted by poverty. There is a Vrata, which many are not aware and which, if observed with sincerity can, give relief from poverty and ensure happiness. Please listen, so he began :

"Once, King Pandu's son, Dharmaraja (better known as Yudhishtira) was in exile in a forest, along with his four brothers, leading a miserable life. He met Lord Krishna, and asked him, "O Krishna, you are well aware of my suffering, why don't you suggest me a way to come out of this ordeal?". Krishna replied, "O, Dharmaraja, there is a Vrata known as Ananta Vrata" which if observed, will rid you of all your sins and lead to prosperity. This Vrata should be observed on Bhadrapada sukla chaturdasi every year. Dharmaraja interrupted, "O, Consort of Rukmani, I am eager to know all about this Vrata. Tell me. Who is the God, whom you call Ananta? Is he Adishesha? Is he Vishnu, the protector? Is he Brahma, the creator, or is he Paramatma swaroopa? Who is he, please elaborate?". Upon which, Lord Krishna went on to say. "O, son of Pandu, I am the one who is called Ananta (infinite) and nobody else. I am all pervasive. All changes due to Sun's motion like day and night, seasons, months, days and years, are all symbolic of Me and merge in Me. I am Ananta, Kala and all other forms. To reduce Bhoobhara, to kill demons, to rid the world of the wicked, to protect the worthy, I was born in Vadudeva's home. I am Vaasudev, Krishna, Vishnu, Harihara, Parameswara, centre of creation, I take various avatars. In fact, I am Ananta Padmanabha. This worship is dedicated to Me. Merged in my heart are 14 Indras, 8 Vasus, 11 Rudras, 12 Suns, 7 rishis and oceans".

Stunned at this description of Ananta, Dharmaraja again questioned Lord Krishna, "O, Jagannatha, tell me what fruits will accrue by observing this Vrata which you described? What danas (gifts) are to be given? Which deity is to be worshipped and how? Who all benefitted in the earlier days by observing this Vrata? Please elaborate".

Lord Krishna replying, "Listen O, Dharmaraja, In Krutha Yuga, when dharma stood on four legs, there lived a Brahmin by name Sumanta, born in Vasista Gotra and was well versed in dharma sastras. His wife was called Diksha Devi, daughter of Brigu Maharishi. They were an ideal couple. In course of time, a daughter was born to them and they named her Sheela. Diksha Devi died suddenly of illness. Apprehending that he would be

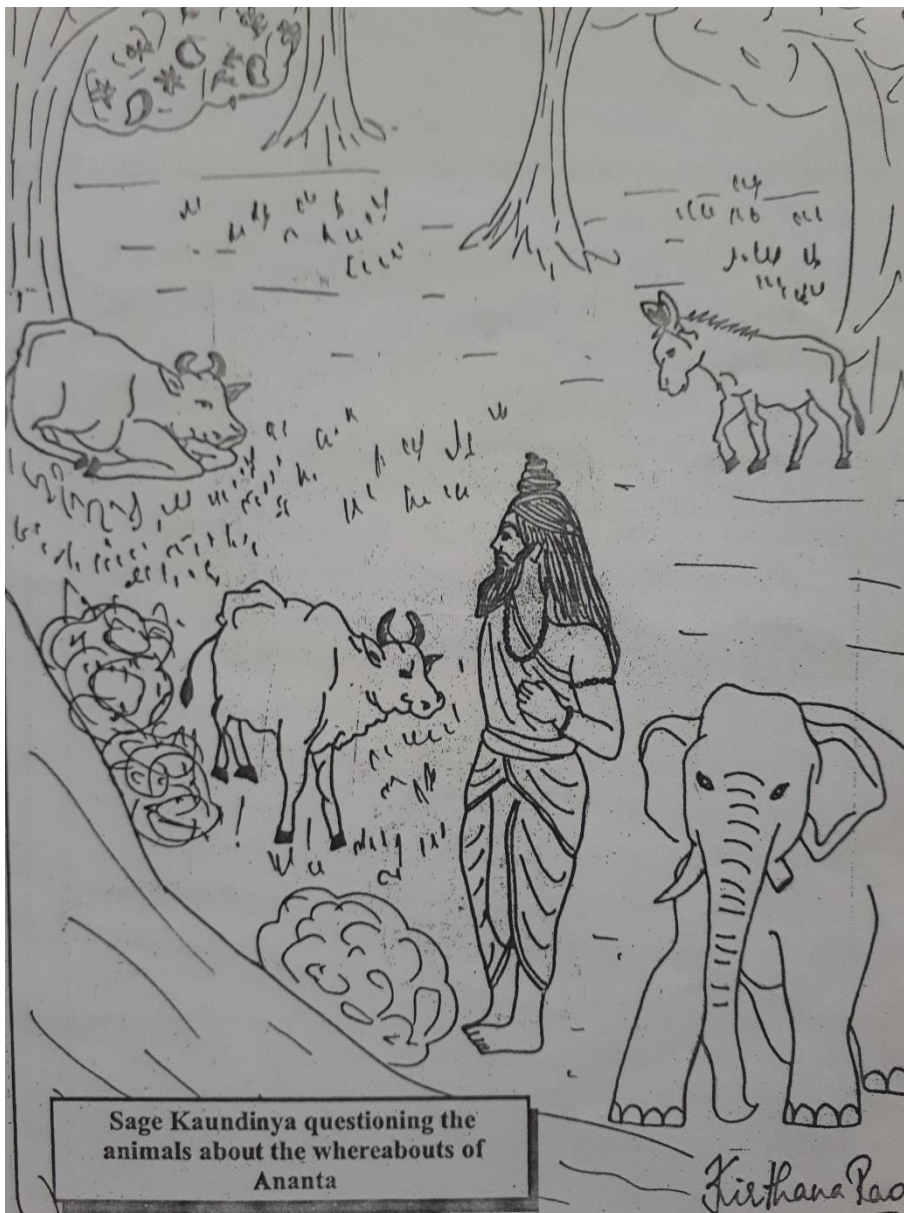
unfit for Vaidika karmas, he married a second time, a lady called, Karkasa. She was wicked, cunning and quarrelsome. Sheela continued to live with her father and was good at painting and other fine arts. Soon she was married to Kaundinya Maharishi. Kaundinya with his wife Sheela left for their ashram. On the way, they stopped near a tank for resting. It was Badrapada Sukla Chaturdasi, the day of Ananta vrata. A number of women dressed in red clothes were seen performing the Vrata separately. Sheela, out of curiosity, enquired of them, what is this Vrata and which God they are worshipping.

The women began to explain the details thus : “O, Noble lady, this is Ananta Vrata puja, performed annually on Bhadrapada sukla chaturdasi. A kalasa adorned with a red cloth and with mango leaves and coconut and dharba should be worshipped with all upacharas. Side by side, a red silken cord with 14 knots, should also be kept and worshipped. After the pooja, male members should tie this red silken cord round their right upper arm and women round their right wrist. By so observing this Vrata, all

prosperity will accrue.” Sheela too performed this Vrata immediately and when she returned to the ashram with her husband, there was prosperity and plenty all round. All these must have been the result of her having observed the Vrata, she thought.

One day, Kaundinya observing the silken cord round the wrist of Sheela enquired, “O, dear, for whom and to fulfil what vow are you wearing this cord? Is it to keep me spellbound over you or to keep someone else?” So saying, in rage he threw the cord into the fire. Quickly, however, Sheela retrieved it and dipped it in milk and again tied it around her wrist.

Kaundinya lost all his wealth, was in a



forlorn state and began to wander in a forest in search of Ananta repenting for his actions.

During his wanderings, he came across several objects, like a mango tree full of fruits but useful to none, a cow eating grass, a bull standing, a donkey, an elephant and finally a rivulet branching into two smaller rivulets and began questioning each of them, whether they ever saw Ananta, only to get a negative reply. Kaundinya got tired and swooned. The Lord pitied him and appearing before him in the guise of a Brahmin, and took him to His home, richly decorated. Perplexed, Kaundinya asked the Lord, "O, Brahmin, who are you? What are all these peculiar things I saw on my way?"

The Lord disclosing his identity explained, "The mango tree was a Brahmin in his previous birth who was a learned man but refused to share his knowledge with others. The cow you saw was a rich man who never did any charity, the bull was a king who never donated land to the poor, the donkey represents a man who never saw good in others. The elephant is a Brahmin who forgot all dharmas of his forefathers. The two rivulets present Dharma and Adharma, which always coexist, sometimes one prevailing over the other. I am Ananta and came in the guise of a Brahmin for your upliftment. Observe Ananta Vrata, dedicated to me, for 14 years. I will assure you a place among the stars in the sky". So saying, the Lord disappeared. Kaundinya got a place among the stars.

Lord Krishna addressing now Dharmaraja confirmed, "O, Dharmaraja, I have narrated to you the story of Kaundinya and the worship of Ananta. Agastya became famous by observing this Vrata. Sagara, Dileepa, Bharata, Harischandra, King Janaka all observed this Vrata and were blessed.

All those who observe this Ananta Vrata with great sincerity will be blessed with all prosperity and happiness. Thus ended the conversation between Lord Krishna and Dharmaraja.

The Marathi School and the Maharashtra Association Building Trust, Chennai.