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THE METHOD FOR ALLEVIATING SLEEPINESS IN THE SAUNDARANANDA-MAHĀKĀVYA

Sudaporn KHIEWNGAMDEE

Lecturer in Pali and Sanskrit Program, Department of Oriental Language, Faculty of Humanities, Mahamakut Buddhist University, Bangkok / THAILAND

ORCID: 0000-0003-3694-8779

ABSTRACT

Aśvaghōṣa's Saundarananda-Mahākāvya will be familiar to readers of Sanskrit literature with regards to its narration of the love affair between the Venerable Nanda and the mistress Sundari. However, it also contains many other interesting and useful themes for consideration. The researcher is particularly interested in the analysis of the method for alleviating sleepiness as taught by the Buddha in Chapter 14 of this work. The researcher's aim is to study the background and method of practice for the alleviation of sleepiness in the Saundarananda-Mahākāvya, as well as analyzing the application of this method in terms of modern medical science. This article is a documentary research, based on the study of the Saundarananda-Mahākāvya, the Tripitaka (Pali Canon), the Commentaries and other related articles and theses.

The results of research were found that Aśvaghōṣa's explication of the method to alleviate sleepiness in the Saundarananda-Mahākāvya was influenced by the Moggallāna Sutta in the Tripitaka. Aśvaghōṣa transformed the Pali version of the text written in prose into Sanskrit verses in order to create a work of greater literary appeal. He also altered the interlocutor of the Buddha, from the Venerable Moggallāna to the Venerable Nanda. The method for alleviating sleepiness in this text is mainly based on different types of meditation practice aimed at suppressing the sleepiness. Furthermore, the poet wrote about the arising of fear, happiness and sadness as means for alleviating sleepiness. In this respect Aśvaghōṣa's work no longer presents the teaching of the Buddha, who avoided such methods on the ground that the arising of these emotions is potentially injurious to the nervous system. In the Moggallāna Sutta the Buddha taught the last resort method of laying down mindfully on one's right side and going to sleep with the intention to arise again soon and continue one's diligent effort. The Buddha must have known, through the power of his great insight, that laying down on one's right side is the position most suitable and beneficial to the human body. This resonates with the discovery of modern medical science which has shown that lying down on one's right side is the healthiest position for repose because it increases the heart's ability pump blood, allows the contents of the stomach to be pushed down into the small intestine without hindrance, and can also relieve back pain.

Keywords : Alleviating Sleepiness, Saundarananda-Mahākāvya, Moggallāna Sutta

1. STATEMENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEMS

The *Saundarananda-Mahākāvya* is one of the two Sanskrit epics composed by *Aśvaghōṣa*¹. It presents the story of Lord Buddha with a delicate style of poetry thorough the whole story. The poet describes the story of *Nanda*, Lord Buddha's half brother as a main character from the beginning until the end of the story. It begins with portrayal of founding of the city *Kapilavastu*, the king, *Tathāgata*, and *Nanda*'s ordain unwillingly, for he would not separate from his beloved wife, Princess *Sundarī*. Lord Buddha then contrived to relieve *Nanda*'s grief by bringing him to see the heaven. They happened to see a female monkey blind in one eye. So Lord Buddha compared the beauty of the monkey with Princess *Sundarī*. Later, when they reached the heaven, Lord Buddha compared the beauty of the *apsarās* (aerial nymphs)

¹ The First work of *Aśvaghōṣa* was the *Buddha-Carita*. The poet had added scenes in the *Saundarananda*, which had never been in the *Buddha-carita*. But some literature historians say that he first composed the *Saundarananda*, and later the *Buddhacarita*. Cited in: M. Winternitz, Ph. D. *A History of Indian Literature Vol. II.* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1985), 262.

with Princess *Sundarī*. *Nanda* replied that the blind monkey is much more ugly than his wife, but the *apsarās* are much more beautiful than her, and desired to have an *apsarā* as his wife. Lord Buddha told that he needed to practice meditation for getting anything as desired. When *Bhikṣu Nanda* industriously tried and practiced all the Buddha taught, his mind was steadfast, calm and steady, relieved erotic love, and ended his desire of *apsarās*. Finally, he attained enlightenment.

This story of was composed after the legendary plot from an ancient time, was not an entire imagination of the composer. There was a description of the cities, families, and gameness, especially, suffering from love. But the true objective of the poet was to describe the hero's behavior and practice until attained the ultimate goal, that is salvation. It consists of 18 chapters, with literary sentimentality, and has a good continuities. It clearly presents the 4 aims of life or *puruṣārtha*: *kāma* (acquisition of desire), *artha* (acquisition of wealth), *dharma* (discharge of duty), and *mokṣa* (final emancipation).² The poet use techniques of the insertion matters into the story, not only for entertainment, but for being useful from teachings of Buddhism and many other tidbits.

For tidbits from this work, we must consider its history and the poet's background. The biography of *Aśvaghōṣa* is unclear, most believed that he was a contemporary with King *Kaniṣka* of the Kuṣāṇa. So it is assumed that he had lived between 80-150 C.E.³ He was born in a brahmin family and versed in the Vedas. But later he truly believed in Buddhism⁴ as seen from his works which appeared Buddhistness clearly, as in the *Buddhacarit*, the *Saundarananda*, and the *Vajrasūcī*.⁵ In the *Saundarananda*, *Aśvaghōṣa* described Lord Buddha's stories from his faith and his brahmanism traditions, and inserted useful knowledge and practices for the readers until the present time. For example, in Chapter 13, titled "śīlendriyajaya") moral conduct and faculty of sense(, relates about how to behave and live the life successfully. In Chapter 14, titled "ādiprasthāna") a preliminary procedure of the performance) related about how to eat and the method of alleviating sleepiness. Chapter 15, titled "vitarkaprahāṇa") abandoning doubt(, relates about methods of abandoning doubt, etc.

This work is well known as a story about the love of *Nanda* and *Sundarī*. In fact, it is not just a matter of romantic love, but there are knowledge of the practices in daily life in those days. This gives the readers who were contemporary with the poet or those in the present still get useful knowledge from this work. So the researcher has the attention to select one practice from the story to analyze and criticize, i.e., as a method for alleviating sleepiness the poet inserted in Chapter 14. The researchers will study that practice to get a clear answer from the concept of the poet, to find out that the solution was from the imagination of the poet or he was influenced by the writings of other books, and whether it can be benefit or not.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

2.1 To find out the sources and the method for alleviating sleepiness in the *Saundarananda*.

2.2 To compare an application of the method for alleviating sleepiness in the *Saundarananda* and the modern method.

3. SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

This is an analytic study of the method for alleviating sleepiness in the *Saundarananda*, as studied from Chapter 14, titled "ādiprasthāna") a preliminary procedure of the performance(. The source materials used in the study are **Mahākāvya Saundarananda** by *Aśvaghōṣa*, translated by Samniang Luemsai, Ph.D., published by Paetmuengsiphaphrathamkhan Foundation in 2000, and The *Saundarananda* of *Aśvaghōṣa*. edited by E.H. Johnston, published in 1975 by Motilal Banarsidass. Moreover, there are Pali source materials and other related documents.

² Samniang Luemsai, Ph.D. **Mahakab Saundarananda**. (Bangkok: Foundation of Paetmuengsiphaphrathamkhan, 2543), 6.

³ Patrick Olivelle, Suman Olivelle. **Manu's Code of law**. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 24.

⁴ Later, *Aśvaghōṣa* converted to Buddhism and ordained as *Bhikṣu* in Saravāstivāda, cited in : M. Winternitz, Ph.D. **A History of Indian Literature Vol. II**, 257.

⁵ *Vajrasūcī* was composed by *Aśvaghōṣa* with a clear attitude against the castes system of Brahmanism. Cited in : Ibid, 265.

4. METHOD OF RESEARCH

This is a documentary research in interdisciplinary, including Pāli Language, Sanskrit Language, Buddhist Studies, and Medical Science, as following:

- 4.1 Search and collect data from the primary sources, i.e., The Saundarananda.
- 4.2 Search and collect data from the secondary sources, i.e., The Tipiṭaka, and other scriptures, and related documents.
- 4.3 Collect and analyze the data, report the results in the descriptive form.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOME

- 5.1 The sources and the method used for alleviating sleepiness in the Saundarananda.
- 5.2 Application of the method for alleviating sleepiness in the *Saundarananda* and the modern method.

6. RESULTS

Chapter 14 of the *Saundarananda* contains 52 verses, and not more than 15 verses describes about the method for alleviating sleepiness, which was taught by the Buddha to Bhikṣu Nanda. At this point, we must go back to the background of the poet, who was born in the brahmanism family, and later had true faith in Buddhism. By study each work of Aśvaghōṣa, it is found that he has a fair knowledge of the original Theravada teachings. The Saundarananda is influenced by the Tipiṭaka, written in Pāli. The poet had changed some suttas from the Tipiṭaka and created a new plot by changing the characters in the story, and inserted some contents for the literary sentiment. Like an issue of the method for alleviating sleepiness in this work, it is supposed that Aśvaghōṣa was influenced by the Tipiṭaka of the Theravada, from the chapter called “Moggallana Sutta,” in the Commentary division.

In an explanation of the *Abhidharma*, sleepiness on one of 14 *akusalacetāsika* (unwholesome Mental Factors). This factor called “*middham*,” means sloth or indolence. It can be described as 1. A state improper for work (*akammaññatā*), 2. Internal covertness (to prevent *cetasika* which is born with *cita*) *antosamorodho* (, 3. Sleepiness; nodded; began to doze) *pacalāyikā* (, 4. Wrong reflection) *ayonisomanasikāra*⁶. While, in the Suttanta Piṭaka, there is a section which describes what the Buddha taught Bhikṣu Moggallāna about the method for Alleviating Sleepiness. When the Buddha stayed in the Bhagga country, He knew by his profound meditation that Bhikṣu Moggallana sat and was sleepy in the Magadha country, He went to present Himself before Moggallana with a miracle and taught the method for Alleviating Sleepiness, which can be summarized into 8 methods. “1. You should have a closely promise in the mind)It is possibly that to remind of the useful memory from the six senses.) 2. You should reflect on the dharma that you have learnt and listened to. 3. You should preach the dharma that you have learnt and listened to.)possible that to recite dharma aloud(, 4. You should pick your ears, and caress the body. 5. You should get up to wash your face, look all the directions, and face to the sky. 6. You should have *ālokasaññā*⁷ in the mind)it may mean that to keep thinking of lightness in the mind always, such as while being in the night, he should think as the day.(7. You should do meditation walking, and be aware of the body. 8. You should lie down on the right side, the feet rest overlapping on each other)in this case suggested that if the above 7 methods can't help, and still sleepy, he should sleep, with consciousness and be prompted to wake you to work, didn't mean that sleeping with pleasure for it causes forgetting to awake⁸.”

The content of the method for alleviating sleepiness in the Saundarananda is like in the Moggallana Sutta. There is only difference, that is, in the Saundarananda, the Buddha taught Nanda in Sanskrit verses, while in the Pāli Tipiṭaka, the Buddha taught Bhikkhu Moggallana in Pāli prose. The poet

⁶ Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation. *Phratraipidok lae athakatha, Book 76 (translation), Phraabhithampidok Thammasangkhini, Book 2.* (Nakhonpathom: Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation Press, 2003), 415-417.

⁷ *Ālokasaññā* means consciousness or faculty of sight or perception. Cited in : Rhys Davids. *Pali Text Society Pali-English Dictionary*. Accessed April 12, 2015. Available from www.buddhistboards.com

⁸ Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation. *Phratraipidok Chabap Sayamrat, Book 23*, (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist Foundation Press, 1982), 82-84.

adopted and arranged the content from an older scripture into a new, and more elaborated and appreciable story. Some of the verses are as follows:

Initiative and constancy,
 Inner strength and courage,
 Are the elements to bear constantly in mind
 While you are being oppressed by sleep. (14.22)

Recite clearly

Those dharma-teachings that you have learnt;
 Point others in their direction,
 And think them out for yourself. (14.23)

Wet the face with water,
 Look around in all directions,
 And glance at the stars,
 Wanting always to be awake. (14.24)

By the means of inner senses that are not impetuous
 But in a state of subjection,
 By the means of a mind that is not scattered,
 Walk up and down at night or sit. (14.25)

In fear, in joy and in grief,
 One does not succumb to sleep;
 Therefore against the onslaughts of sleep
 Resort to these three: (14.26)

But having spent the first of the three night-watches
 Engaged in active practice,
 You should go to bed to rest the body,
 Pulling your own strings. (14.32)

On your right side, then,
 Remaining conscious of light,
 Thinking in your heart of wakefulness,
 You might with peace of mind fall asleep. (14.33)

Again, by getting up in the third watch
 And going into movement, or indeed just sitting,
 You might renew your practice, with mind refreshed,
 And power of the senses curbed. (14.34)⁹

⁹ dhātūrāmbhadhṛtyośca sthāmavikramayorapi|
 nityaṃ manasi kāryaste bādhyamānena nidrayā||22||)Saun.14/22)
 āmnātavyaśca viśadaṃ te dharmā ye pariśrutāḥ|
 parebhyaścopadeṣṭavyāḥ saṃcintyāḥ svayameva ca||23||)Saun.14/23)
 prakledyamadbhīrvadanam vilokyāḥ sarvato diśaḥ|

It is seen that the Buddha teaching of the method for Alleviating Sleepiness is still useful in the present time, and always, such as washing the face, facing up to the sky, reciting a book aloud. Moreover, the Buddha suggested related methods with use of meditation to suppress the sleepiness, such as fixing the mind, practice of kasiṇa, practice of samādhi, and walking meditation. While for some, sitting meditation would cause sleepiness, he has to change the position for awake the mind to walking meditation, by supporting the mind by consciousness, and controlling the pace.)In another word, to sit causes sleepiness easier than walking.) Besides, in the verse 26, there are sayings of states of fear, happy, and sorrow, while suppressing the sleepiness. By this principle, when we have these feelings, the body releases adrenaline, a hormone for stimulating the muscles and mechanism in the body to wake up and want to work.¹⁰ This method may be benefit for alleviating sleepiness, but the bad side is that if this substance was released too much from the temper, it would cause stress and be harmful for the nervous system. It is seen that the Tipiṭaka, the Buddha didn't teach this method, for he might recognize its bad side. But Aśvaghōṣa added this method here, probably for hiding the philosophical issues, i.e., causing fear of sufferings, sorrows of birth, and pleasure of dharma listening.

Finally, the Buddha said that if those methods cannot help, conscious sleeping should be done. He said in Moggallana Sutta, “*You should do Sīhasaiyā¹¹, that is lying on the right, the foot rests overlapping on each other, being conscious, aware to wake up, get up as soon as you are awake for you intended that not to have pleasure in sleeping...*” Lord Buddha thought that if we have over pleasure in sleeping, it would bring you to be lazy, would not like to get up. In the Saundarananda, Aśvaghōṣa wrote about sleeping and lying in the verses 32 and 33 but the difference is he wrote is only about lying on the right side. To lie on the right side is the best way, it would be the original knowledge of Lord Buddha who knew that this posture is the most suitable for human body.

After the medical research, it is found that lying down on the right is the best posture among others, for it helps the hearts beat easily, and the food from the stomach would be squeezed well into the small intestine, and it can relieve back pain too. But lying down on the left would cause dyspepsia, since the food left undigested before sleeping, and stays in the stomach.¹² In the Tipiṭaka, there is a teaching of resting the foot on the other, for by human nature, if we rest the feet on each other directly, it will be strain at the legs and ankles. To lie down by resting the foot overlapping on the other is more natural, for we have a curve foot arch, to lie the left foot overlapping on the right would help the left foot arch on the right foot side, which is round, and the right heel can support the left foot well.



Picture 1, 2 : “Sīhasaiyā” Sleeping lion’s posture of the Buddha, lying on his right side, and the feet placed overlapping on each other.



Source: Salathamma. **Kannon Yang Arahan.** Accessed April 16, 2015. Available from http://dharmahall.blogspot.com/2011/05/blog-post_14.html

cāryā drṣṭīśca tārāsu jijāgarīṣuṇā sadā||24||)Saun.14/24)
 antargatairacapalairvaśasthāyibhirindriyaiḥ|
 avikṣiptena manasā caṃkramyasvāsva vā niśi||25||)Saun.14/25)
 bhaye pṛtau ca śoke ca nidrayā nābhībhūyate|
 tasmānindrābhiyogesu sevityamidaṃ trayam||26||)Saun.14/26)
 pūrvaṃ yāmaṃ triyāmāyāḥ prayogeṇātināmya tu |
 sevya śayyā śarīrasya viśrāmārthaṃ svatantriṇā||32||)Saun.14/32)
 dakṣiṇena tu pārśvena sthitayālokaśaṃjñayā|
 prabodhaṃ hṛdaye kṛtvā śayīthāḥ śāntamānaśaḥ||33||)Saun.14/33)
 yāme tṛtīye cotthāya carannāsīna eva vā|
 bhūyo yogam manāḥsuddhau kurvīthā niyatendriyaḥ||34||)Saun.14/34)

¹⁰ Assoc.Dr.Somsak Tiamkao. Sansueprasat)**Neurotransmitter**). Accessed April 12, 2015. Available from <https://haamor.com/th/สารสื่อประสาท/>

¹¹ Sīhasaiyā means *Sleeping lion’s posture*, i.e., lying on his right side, the left arm rests on the body, the left foot rests on the right, the right hand supports the head. Cited in : Royal Institute. **Photchananukrom Chabap Ratchabandittayasathan.**)Bangkok : Royal Institute, 2011), 1239.

¹² Dr. Chanin Leewanun. Department of HANIN LEEWANUN Department of Rehabilitation Medicine. Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital. **Labsabaidaisukhaphap.** Accessed April 12, 2015. Available from <http://www.si.mahidol.ac.th/sidoctor/e-pl/articledetail.asp>

7. SUGGESTION

The stories in the Sanskrit scripture have different contents from the Pāli scriptures in some aspects. Most Thai researchers have analytical studies of many issues presented in the Tripiṭaka, but a few researchers who have studied the Sanskrit scriptures and found that some content issues in the Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures are interested for study in depth, such as The Buddha Stories, observance of precepts, food consumption, relieves of muddle. There are other Sanskrit scriptures for study to analyze and get benefit in modern times.

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