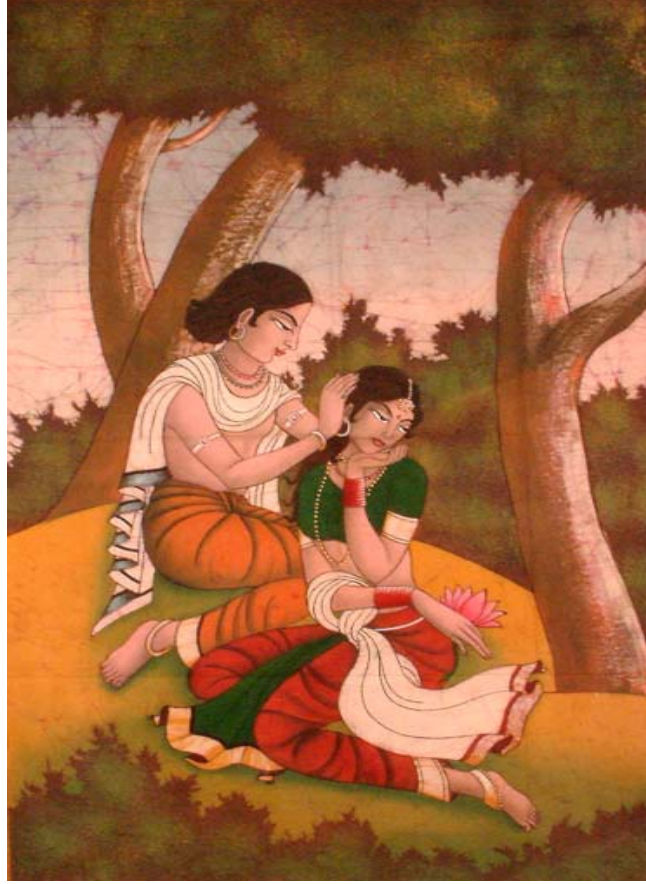


*The Story of Nala and Damayanti*¹



(Nala and Damayanti. Retrieved May 2, 2006 from, <http://www.exoticindiaart.com/product/BF79/>)

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¹ Continuous trouble with software has resulted in me *italicizing* all Sanskrit words and writing diacritics by hand.

The *Mahabharata* is one of the most extensive and engaging epic stories ever compiled. It is a work so integral to the rich cultural heritage of India that many individuals from within the Hindu tradition doubt that any philosophical concept exists if it cannot be found within the *Mahabharata*. Though somewhat daunting at first, what proves to be especially powerful about this epic is the complexity of its characters and the implications of the great struggle they engage in. A historical tour de force, the *Mahabharata* provides a robust set of circumstances to dissect and paradigms to uncover with respect to destiny, love, devotion, morality, and leadership.

AK Ramanujan (1991) claims that the “central structuring principle” of the *Mahabharata* “is a certain kind of repetition” (p. 421)². He contends that the *upakhyana* or sub stories “intensify the repetition of events” in the epic (Ibid). While on the surface these sub tales seem to interrupt the main story, Ramanujan argues that they serve a narrative function³. The *Nalopakhyana* is one of the many sub stories within the *Mahabharata* and it demonstrates the idea that experiences transcend single characters.

Many sages visited *Yudhisthira* while he was in exile. When *Yudhisthira* told the sage *Brhadasva* that there has not been a king more unfortunate than himself the sage tells him the story of king *Nala* who had also gambled away his kingdom and lost his wife but eventually wins everything back. While he listens to the tale of *Nala Yudhisthira*

² Ramanuja cites an Encyclopedia Britannica entry about crystallography that represents his ideas concerning repetition in the Mahabharata. “All crystals have at least this kind of order, which can be described as a periodic repetition of their atomic chemical motif by translations. Repetition can be defined by translation, rotation, and by reflection...or combinations of these simple devices” (1991, p. 441).

³ The sub stories are “performative, i.e. they too are acts, not merely explanations. They add the vector of past and precedent to present and future. They are “bovariste” as the French would say. They also help in amassing repetitive networks and density, to make the heroes’ lives not singular but representative” (Ramanujan, 1991, p. 427).

realizes that his “plight is not singular” and that his story is only “half finished”

(Ramanujan, 1991, p. 427).

Essentially, the *Nalopakhyanam* is a tale about king *Nala*, who is selected by princess *Damayanti* to be her husband at her *svayamvara*. The couple then incurs the wrath of the god *Kali* who causes *Nala* to lose his kingdom to his brother in a game of dice. Left with no home or country *Nala* and *Damayanti* roam the forests and *Nala* leaves his wife while she is sleeping. Eventually, *Damayanti* is restored to her father’s kingdom and she dispatches a search for *Nala* who is disguised as a charioteer in another kingdom. News travels that *Damayanti* is holding a second *svayamvara* and after some difficulties the couple are reunited. *Nala* is freed from *Kali* and has acquired a magic control of dice enabling him to win back his kingdom.⁴ What follows is a translation⁵ of the first three chapters of the *Nalopakhyanam*. Unfortunately, the translation does not include some of the most exciting portions of the tale that occur in later chapters.

⁴ This summary was adapted from numerous sources detailing the story of *Nala* and *Damayanti*. The sources contributing most to the summary are the works of Aiyar and Parkhill. (See references section of this paper).

⁵ Text is translated from Lanman’s *A Sanskrit Reader*. It should be noted that in order to demonstrate understanding of Sanskrit grammar the translated English sentences have peculiar constructions.

Here begins the story of *Nala*:

1. *Brhadasva*⁶ said: There was a king⁷ named *Nala*, the powerful son of *Virasena*. Endowed with desirable qualities, possessing good looks, he was very knowledgeable about horses.
2. He stood at the head of the kings of men, like the lord of gods and like the sun because of his splendor.
3. Pious, knower of the *Vedas*, heroic, king among the *Nisadhas*⁸, he was fond of dice, a speaker of truth, and the great lord of a complete army⁹.
4. Desired by excellent women, noble, whose senses were controlled, a protector, and the best of archers, he was like *Manu*¹⁰ himself before the eyes.
5. Similarly, among the *Vidarbhas*¹¹, there was *Bhima* of terrible courage, a hero endowed with all good qualities. Desirous of offspring but not having any, very intently, he made a great effort at producing offspring¹².

⁶ *Brhadasva*, the name of the sage telling the story of *Nala* and *Damayanti* to *Yudhisthira* is a bahuvrihi meaning “having mighty horses.” (See Maurer, 1995, p. 568).

⁷ In ancient India a king often possessed divine qualities. Sheldon Pollock’s (1984) *The Divine King in the Indian Epic* cites the *Ahirbudhnya Samhita* which states: “The king if the ultimate being, a lord consisting of [parts of] all gods. He is the locus of the effective energy of *Visnu* [*kriyasakter vaisnavyah*], he consists of the Blessed One Himself. The Lord God created the king long ago, emitting from His own head; consecrated on the head, therefore, the king is placed far above all other creatures. The king is twice so great as a *Brahman*, and his praises are sung in the *Vedas* and *sastras*...the wise man who seeks earthly and heavenly prosperity will esteem the king, the supreme deity [*adhidaivata*] of all worlds” (p. 526).

⁸ According to Epic and *Puranic* literature this tribe has derived its name from *Nisadha* who is said to be the son of *Atithi*, the grandson of *Kusa* and father of *Nala* (Law, 1943, p.100). It is difficult to determine the exact location. The *Puranas* however “locate the *Nisadhas* in the upper and lower regions of the *Vindhya* ranges and according to the *Mahabharata*, the capital of the *Nisadhas* was *Giriprastha*” (Ibid). “The *Nisadhas* seem to have played a prominent part in the *Kuruksetra* was in which they ranged themselves on the side of the *Pandavas*, along with the *Mekalas*, *Kosalas*, *Madras* and *Dasarnas*. They were at one time defeated by *Karna*” (Ibid, p.101).

⁹ A complete army consists of 21,870 chariots, 21,870 elephants, 65,610 horses, and 109,350 foot soldiers. (See Maurer, 1995, p. 570).

¹⁰ *Manu*, as the “first man and progenitor of mankind (like Adam), is here regarded as a type of manly perfection” (See Maurer, 1995, p. 570). This reference to *Manu* is used to illustrate *Nala*’s exceptional nature.

6. Oh *Bharata*¹³, desirous of offspring, a *Brahmin rsi* named *Damana* went towards him [*Bhima*].
7. *Bhima*, knower of dharma, desirous of offspring, along with his principle queen satisfied *Damana* of great splendor with hospitality.
8. Pleased, *Damana* gave a boon¹⁴ to him along with his wife. Thence he gave them a jewel of a girl and three noble, renowned princes.
9. Their names were *Damayanti*, *Dama*, *Danta*, and *Damana*¹⁵. They were of great splendor, fierce and of terrible courage and endowed with all good qualities.
10. *Damayanti*, having a slender waist, obtained fame in the world by her beauty, splendor, fame, wealth and good fortune.
11. When she had grown up one-hundred well adorned slaves and one-hundred friends served her like *Sachi*¹⁶.
12. There, the daughter of *Bhima*, of faultless limbs, adorned with ornaments, shown in the midst of her friends like lightening shines from the midst of clouds.
13. She was very beautiful with big eyes like *Laksmi*. Not among the gods, not among the *Yaksas*¹⁷ and also not among others had such a beautiful one been seen or heard anywhere before. The beautiful girl confused the minds even of the gods.

¹¹ *Vidharbha* is approximately modern Berar, south of the *Vindhya* Mountains cutting across central India. (See Maurer, 1995, p. 570).

¹² In the *Hindu* tradition it is very important to have offspring so your children can perform practices such as *pitr tarpana* to ensure well being in the after life.

¹³ *Bharata* refers to *Yudhisthira* because this tale of *Nala* is being narrated to *Yudhisthira* by the sage *Brhadasva*. *Bharata* may be translated as “descendent of *Bharata*.” *Bharata* was the son of King *Dussanta* and *Sakuntala*. (See Maurer, 1995, p. 572).

¹⁴ In much of ancient Indian literature *Brahmins* are depicted as having great power to grant boons from their practice of austerities.

¹⁵ Out of gratitude to the *Brahmin rsi* *Damana*, all of the children are named from the same “*Dam*” which forms the foundation for his name. (See Maurer, 1995, p. 574).

¹⁶ *Sachi* is the wife of *Indra* and an example of “lavish attention” (See Maurer, 1995, p. 575).

¹⁷ “The *Yaksas* are an order of superhuman beings, generally described as the attendants of *Kuvera* the *Hindu* god of wealth” (Peile, 1881, p.20). Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1928) study of *yaksas* claims that they are guardians of the vegetative source of life and closely connected with the waters.

14. *Nala*, a tiger among men, because of his beauty was incomparable like the god of love¹⁸ himself.
15. They praised *Nala* in her [*Damayanti*] vicinity eagerly. Likewise, they praised *Damayanti* in the presence of *Nala*.
16. Hey son of *Kunti*¹⁹, upon hearing the praise of each other an unseen love developed between the two and that reciprocal love which abides in the heart grew strong.
17. *Nala*, unable to bear his desire of the heart secretly sat in the forest near his private chambers²⁰.
18. After that, he saw birds²¹ that were adorned in gold. He grasped at one of the birds²² that was going around in the forest.

¹⁸ *Kandarpa*, the god of love is the “epitome of handsomeness” and was “reduced to ashes by *Siva* when he disturbed his meditation” (Maurer, 1995, p. 577).

¹⁹ Another way of addressing *Yudhishthira* who is *Kunti*’s eldest son.

²⁰ “Of course *Nala* went to this retreat ‘in secret’ as he was distracted by his love and did not want his distractions to be noticed” (Maurer, 1995, p. 578).

²¹ J. Peile states that a *hamsan* is the wild grey goose but T.K.R. Aiyar translates it as a swan and Maurer refers to it as a bird and Lanman says it can be a goose, gander or a swan. Because of the discrepancy I will just refer to it as a bird.

²² The *hamsa* plays a very special role in Indian Literature and Art. The late J.Ph.Vogel compiled a study of the *hamsa* in Indian works of literature and art. In the Mahabharata, the divine mother of *Bhisma* orders the *rsis* in the shape of geese to fly around her dying son. Vogel cites the door frame of the temple of Dah Parbatiya near Tezpur, Assam where *hamsas* are carved next to the head of the *Ganga* and *Yamuna*, the River Goddesses. While *Bhishma* is dying he tells the story of *Brahma* in the shape of a goose and the *Sadhya* gods. *Indra* is referred to being worshipped in the shape of a *hamsa* in the Mahabharata and in the Ramayana *Varuna* is to have taken the shape of *hamsa*. We see that while the *hamsa* plays the role of the love messenger in this story of *Nala* and *Damayanti*, it also plays a similar role in the story of *Pradyumna* and *Prabhavati*. *Hamsas* are also instrumental in the death of the demon father of *Prabhavati* in a plan coordinated by the gods. In Vogel’s chapter on the *hamsa* in Buddhist literature, he claims that the wild gander can be likened to the *Arhat*, which is a being who has attained nirvana. *Hamsas* are also depicted as encircling the Buddha, making *pradakshinas* around him just before his enlightenment. (Vogel, 1962). *Hamsas* are also known for their special ability to separate milk from water. This symbolizes their discrimination in distinguishing what is of value (milk) from what lacks value (water). This quality is why many great spiritual teachers take on the tile, *paramahamsa* (Goldman, 2006).

19. Then the bird uttered a speech to *Nala*. “King, I am not to be killed by you. I will do what is dear to you.”
20. “Oh king of the *Nisadhas*. I will talk about you in the vicinity of *Damayanti*. She will never think of any other man but you.”
21. Thus addressed, the king released the bird. Then those birds having flown up together went to *Vidarbha*.
22. Having gone to the city of *Vidarbha*, those birds flew near *Damayanti* and she saw the flock of birds.
23. Surrounded by a group of friends, having seen those who possess an amazing form, she excitedly approached the birds rushing to grab them.
24. Now the birds spread out in all directions in the pleasure garden and the girls ran towards them one by one.
25. The bird that *Damayanti* ran after assumed human speech and then spoke to *Damayanti*.
26. “*Damayanti*, there is a king named *Nala* among the *Nisadhas*. He is as handsome as the *Asvins*²³, there are no men like him.”
27. “Oh woman of a beautiful complexion, if you are to become his wife then oh fair wasted one, your birth and beauty would be fruitful.”
28. “For we have seen gods, *gandharvas*²⁴, men, snakes and demons but such a one [*Nala*] has not been seen by us before.”

²³ Hymns in the *Rg Veda* about the *Asvins* emphasize their beauty. (See Maurer, 1995, p. 580).

²⁴ A comparison is made to *gandharvas* to emphasize *Nala*'s beauty. According to Stephen Naylor, the *gandharvas* were spirits of the air, forests, and mountains; they were the mates of the *apsaras*. They are all male, and had differing descriptions. Sometimes they were seen as shaggy, damp, and dirty creatures who were part man and part animal; other times they were men with birds' legs and wings; they could be centaur-like, half man and half horse; or they sometimes were seen as fair men who had effeminate features. They were known for their musical skills, their power to cast illusions, and their skill with horses. They sometimes were the attendants of the *devas*, and would often combat human heroes. If the hero was victorious, the *gandharva* would help the hero on his quest, but if the hero lost, he would be carried away, never to be heard from again. The *gandharvas* were also the protectors of *Soma*, which they guarded with jealous intent (2006).

29. “You are a jewel among women and he is the best among men. The coming together of an exceptional woman with an exceptional man would be good.”
30. Oh king²⁵, thus addressed by the bird, *Damayanti* said to that bird, “You also say the same thing to *Nala*.”
31. Oh king, having said “yes” to the daughter of *Vidarbha*, the bird having come again to the *Nisadhas* informed *Nala* of all of this.
32. This is the first chapter of the story of *Nala*.
33. *Brhadasya* said: So *Bharata*, having heard that speech of the bird, from then on *Damayanti* was not herself with respect to *Nala*.
34. Then *Damayanti* was afflicted with great worry, her face was pale, she was emaciated and she continuously sighed.
35. At one moment, she whose mind was filled with love would gaze upward, have a frantic look, be pale in color and look as if she was absorbed in contemplation.
36. She didn’t get pleasure in bed, in sitting, or in eating ever. She did not sleep at night or during the day and alas she cried over and over²⁶.
37. Then, *Damayanti*’s friends informed the lord of man, the lord of the *Vidarbha*’s that *Damayanti* was not herself.
38. Having heard that from *Damayanti*’s friends, king *Bhima* thought about what great things should be done with respect to his daughter.
39. The king having noticed that his daughter was of marriageable age²⁷ saw that *Damayanti*’s *svayamvara*²⁸ should be performed by him.

²⁵ Literally, “Oh Lord of the people,” this vocative is used by the sage when narrating the story to *Yudhisthira*. (See Maurer, 1995, p. 581).

²⁶ In the previous three lines these characteristics describing *Damayanti* are the “standard hallmarks of lovesick women in Sanskrit literature” (Maurer, 1995, p. 583).

²⁷ “having arrived at marriageable age is an abstract noun, meaning ‘the condition of youth, youthfulness’ by secondary derivation from *yuvan*, ‘a youth’” (Maurer, 1995, p. 584).

²⁸ Literally meaning self-choice, *svayamvara* refers to the “free choice of a husband which was permitted to a woman of the *ksatriya* class” (Maurer, 1995, p. 584). Even though this translation does not cover the actual proceedings of the *svayamvara* it is important to note S. Insler’s (1989) article, *Damayanti*’s *Svaymvara* which discusses the instance in which *Damayanti* chooses *Nala* as her husband. Insler proposes a new reading

40. Lord²⁹, the lord of the people invited the kings: “Hey hero’s, let this *svayamvara* be experienced!” (Please attend the *svayamvara* of my daughter.)
41. Having heard about the *svayamvara* of *Damayanti*, all of the kings went to *Bhima* at his command filling the earth with the sound of elephants, horses, chariots and handsome armies well adorned with many colored garlands and ornaments³⁰.
42. The mighty armed *Bhima* showed his respects to those great souled kings as they deserved. Worshipped, they stayed there.
43. At this very time, the two best *rsi*’s of the gods, the two great souls wandering went to the world of *Indra*³¹ from here.³²
44. *Narada* and *Parvata*, possessed of great knowledge, great vows, and well-worship, entered the home of the king of the gods³³.
45. Having worshipped them, lord *Indra*³⁴ asked about their unchanging welfare and their all pervading health.

of the passage where *Damayanti* chooses her husband. Insler contends that when *Damayanti* selects *Nala* she takes hold of the “end knot of her lower garment” signifying sexual submission to *Nala*” (Insler, 1989, p. 580). This description sheds light on the relationship between husband and wife in epic literature.

²⁹ The sage *Brhadrasva* addressing *Yudhisthira*.

³⁰ Lines 1 and 2 of page 5 in Lanman are translated together to make better sense.

³¹ This line marks a complete change of scenery.

³² The theme of divine intervention is central to the story of *Nala* and *Damayanti* according to Thomas Parkhill (1984). He utilizes a three part process of transformation in order to illuminate the change which is a key component of the story. While none of the specific instances of divine intervention that Parkhill notes occur in the first three chapters presented in my translation, Parkhill discusses four moments of divine involvement that prove crucial to the story. The instances of divine involvement are crucial because they occur in “liminal situations” (Parkhill, p. 337). For example during her *svayamvara*, *Damayanti* is in a situation where she is no longer a girl or just her father’s daughter and she is in the midst of choosing her husband. “She is betwixt and between men, and therefore in the traditional *Hindu* context she is in a most unusual situation, powerful in its potential” (Ibid, p. 337). (See Parker, 1984).

³³ *Indra* is referred to as the King of the Gods.

³⁴ *Indra* is referred to *Maghavan* in the text which means “possessing gifts” and was applied to the “patron of a sacrifice, who was expected to be bountiful in his dispensation to the priests who had performed the sacrifice. Later it was applied to *Indra* and became practically his exclusive epithet, really an alternative name” (Maurer, 1995, p. 585).

46. *Narada* said, “Hey lord, hey lord, our welfare is indeed all pervasive. In the whole world the kings are doing well.”
47. *Brhadrasva* said: Having heard the words of *Narada*, the slayer of *Bala* and *Vrtra*³⁵ asked, “The knowers of dharma, who are protectors of the earth, fighters who are willing to abandon their lives, and for those who die by weapons at the proper time, without turning their faces away from battle, this imperishable world is the yielder of desires for them just like for me.”
48. “Where are those *ksatriya* heroes? I do not see those beloved kings, my guests, coming.”
49. Thus addressed by *Indra*³⁶, *Narada* replied, “Listen, hear from me *Indra*, why the kings are not seen (by you).”
50. “The king of *Vidarbha* has a daughter, *Damayanti*. She has surpassed all of the women on earth by her beauty.”
51. “Oh *Indra*, her *svayamvara* will happen soon and all of the kings and princes from all directions are going there.”
52. “Oh destroyer of *Bala* and *Vrtra*, seeking that jewel of the world (*Damayanti*), the kings (protectors of the Earth) desire her greatly.”
53. While this was being said, the world protectors, the *Lokapalas*³⁷ with *Agni*, came near the king of the gods (*Indra*).

³⁵ Another epithet of *Indra* whose slaying of the demons *Bala* and *Vrtra* is often referred to in the *Rg Veda*.

³⁶ In the text, *Indra* is referred to as *Sakra*, “the strong or powerful one” (Maurer, 1995, p. 588).

³⁷ *Lokapalas* are the supporters or guardians of the world. The guardian deities who preside over the eight points of the compass, *i.e.*, the four cardinal and four intermediate points of the compass:--(1.) *Indra*, east; (2.) *Agni*, southeast; (3.) *Yama*, south; (4.) *Surya*, southwest; (5.) *Varuna*, west; (6.) *Vayu*, northwest; (7.) *Kuvera*, north; (8.) *Soma*, northeast. *Nirriti* is by some substituted for No. 4, and *Prithivi* or *Siva*, especially in his form *Isana*, for No. 8. Each of these guardian deities has an elephant who takes part in the defence and protection of the quarter, and these eight elephants are themselves called *Lokapalas*:--(1.) *Indra's* elephant at the east is *Airavata*. He is also called *Abhramatanga*, 'elephant of the clouds;' *Arkasodara*, 'brother of the sun;' *Nagamalla*, 'the fighting elephant;' *Sadadana*, 'always in rut;' *Madambara*, 'covered with ichor.' His wife's name is

54. Then they all heard the great speech of *Narada*. They excitedly said, “We shall go too.”
55. Oh great king, then all of those lords of the earth (kings) went from there to *Vidarbha* with their hosts and vehicles.
56. Oh son of *Kunti*, king *Nala*, also having heard went to the gathering of the kings. He was cheerful and devoted to *Damayanti*.
57. Now the gods saw *Nala* standing on a road on the earth. He looked like the god of love himself possessing a body.
58. Having seen him shining brilliantly like the sun, they stood there irresolute and surprised by his beauty of form.
59. Oh king, then, having stopped their vehicles in mid air and having come down from heaven, the gods said to the king of the *Nisadhas*:
60. “Hey *Nala*, king of the *Nisadhas* and the best of the kings, you are truthful to your vows, oh best of men, help us and be a messenger.”
61. This is the second chapter in the story of *Nala*.
62. *Brhadhasva* said: Hey *Bharata*, now having promised them, “I will do it.” He asked them while respectfully placing his hands together in by his heart standing there.
63. “Who are you and who is he. Who wants me as a messenger? And what is to be done by me for you truly?”

Abhramu. (2.) Agni's elephant at the southeast is *Pundarika* and his female *Kapila*. (3.) *Yama's* at the south is *Vamana* and his female *Pingala*. (4.) *Surya's* at the southwest is *Kumuda* and his female is *Anupama*. (5.) *Varuna's* at the west is *Anjana*, whose female is *Anjanavati*. (6.) *Vayu's* at the northwest is *Pushpadanta*, whose female is *Subhadanti*. (7.) *Kuvera's* at the north is *Sarvabhauma*; and and (8.) Soma's elephant at the northeast is *Supratika*. The two other females are *Anjana* and *Tamrakarni*, whose spouses are doubtful. *Anjanavati* is sometimes assigned to *Supratika*. In the *Ramayana* (1.) *Indra's* eastern elephant is called *Virupaksa*; (2.) *Varuna's* elephant at the west, *Saumanasa*; (3.) *Yama's* at the south is *Mahapadma*, and (4.) *Kuvera's* at the north is *Himapandara* (Dowson, 1979).

64. Thus addressed by the king of the *Nisadhas* *Indra* said: “Know that we are immortals who have come for *Damayanti*.³⁸”
65. Oh King, “I am *Indra*, this one is *Agni*, this is the lord of the waters (*Varuna*), and this is *Yama* who destroys the bodies of men.”
66. “You inform *Damayanti* that we have come and tell her: ‘The *Lokapalas* and the great *Indra* etc. are coming desirous of seeing you.’”
67. “Gods *Agni*, *Indra*, *Vaurna*, and *Yama* desire to obtain you. Of them, choose one god for a husband.”³⁹
68. Thus addressed by *Nala* who spoke with hands placed together respectfully by his heart. “You should not send me who has come for the same purpose.”
69. “How can a man who is in love say such a thing to a woman for the sake of another? Oh great lords, please forgive me.”
70. The gods said. “Oh king of the *Nisadhas*. Having previously promised to us, ‘I will do it.’ Why would you not do it?”
80. *Brhadhasva* said: Thus addressed by these gods, *Nala* said again, “How will I be able to enter the well guarded palace?”
81. *Indra* again said, “You will enter.” Having said yes, he went to the dwelling of *Damayanti*.
82. There he saw *Damayanti* surrounded by a group of her friends. She was shining greatly with her appearance and beautiful complexion.

³⁸ *Indra* is known for his insatiable desire for beautiful women. One of the more famous stories of his sexual exploits is in the *Ramayana* when he takes the form of the beautiful *Ahalya*’s human husband in order to sleep with her. (See Doniger, 1997, p. 36-40).

³⁹ Ernest Bender (1950) compared *Nalarayadavadanticaritam* an Old Gujarati version of the *Jain* parallel to the story of *Nala* and *Damayanti* from the *Mahabharata*. He notes that the *Jain* version has some “unique” aspects because of its purpose for the “edifying presentation of the *Jain* religion” (p. 267). He notes that the *Jain* versions take on a sermon like quality. For example, in the *Jain* version, there are no gods vying for *Damayanti*. Instead *Nala*’s competitor is a mortal, king *Krsna* (p. 269). The adaptation of ancient Hindu tales into other Indian religious traditions is not uncommon. Usually stories were adopted and revised to reflect the doctrine of the specific religious co-opting the story. Bender notes that ALL versions he examined “emphasize the power of female chastity” (Ibid).

83. Indeed, she who has tender limbs, a slim waist and beautiful eyes shamed the splendor of the moon with her own splendor.
84. Having seen her who is sweetly laughing his love grew. Desiring to keep his promise he restrained his love.
85. Then, having seen *Nala*, those best of women, confused, jumped from their seats overpowered by his splendor.
86. They who were well pleased, praised *Nala* accompanied by surprise. But, they did not speak to him, they worshipped him in their minds.
87. Oh what beauty, oh what loveliness, oh what great strength of this great one. Who could this god or *yaksa* or *gandharva* be?
88. They were not even able to say anything to him. Those bashful women were overcome by his splendor.
89. Speaking smilingly, *Damayanti* surprised, spoke to the hero *Nala* who himself was smiling.
90. “Who are you of faultless limbs, increaser of my love? Oh hero, you have arrived like an immortal. I wish to know you who are without sin.”
91. “How have you come here? My palace is well protected and the king is a strict ruler. How have you not been seen?”
92. Thus addressed by the daughter of *Vidarbha*, *Nala* said to her, “Hey auspicious one. Know me to be *Nala*. I have come as a messenger of the gods.”
93. “The gods *Agni*, *Indra*, *Varuna*, and *Yama* desire to obtain you. Hey beautiful one, choose one of the gods for your husband.”
94. “I entered unseen only by their power. No one saw me entering, nor did anyone stop me.”
95. “For the sake of that, good lady, I was sent by the best of gods. Having heard this oh beautiful one, make a choice in the manner you desire.”
96. This is the third chapter of the story of *Nala*.

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