

THE INDIAN RESEARCH SERIES

THE STORY OF

King Nala &
Princess
Damayanti



A Narrative Poem by

MAURICE LANGTON

From the Tamil of

PUHALENDI PULAVAR

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THE STORY OF KING NALA AND PRINCESS DAMAYANTI is one of the great love-stories of the world, and in its Tamil form as versified by Puhallēdi Pūlavār it is one of the gems of Tamil poetry.

Poetry in the Indian languages, and not least in Tamil, is notoriously hard to translate into English verse. But to this translation—a labour of love over many years—Mr Langton has brought gifts both of scholarship and poetic taste which make it an English poem in its own right. It will take rank among the very few satisfactory verse translations of Indian classics.

THE REV. M. C. LANGTON, M.A., was born in London in 1909. He was educated at St Dunstan's College, Catford, and Trinity College, Cambridge (Classical Scholar, 1927-30). After periods as Assistant Lecturer in Greek at the University of Leeds and as a student at Salisbury Theological College, he was ordained by the Bishop of Chichester and held an assistant-curacy at Horsham, Sussex. In 1937 he married and came out to India under the S.P.G. to the Diocese of Tinnevely, which he has served in a variety of capacities. He is now (among other things) Principal of the C.M.S. Schools for the Blind, Palayamkottai (Palamcottah). He lists his recreations as 'poetry, Oriental languages and four riotous children'.

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AND
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THE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE SOCIETY FOR INDIA
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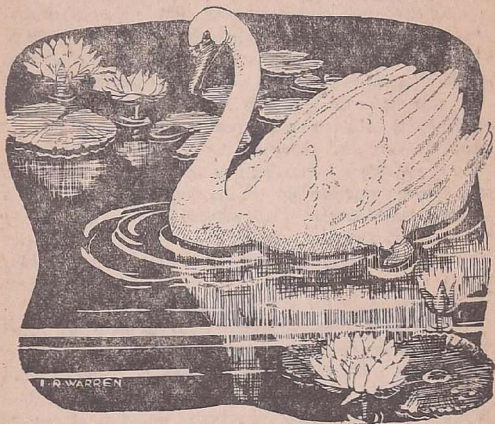
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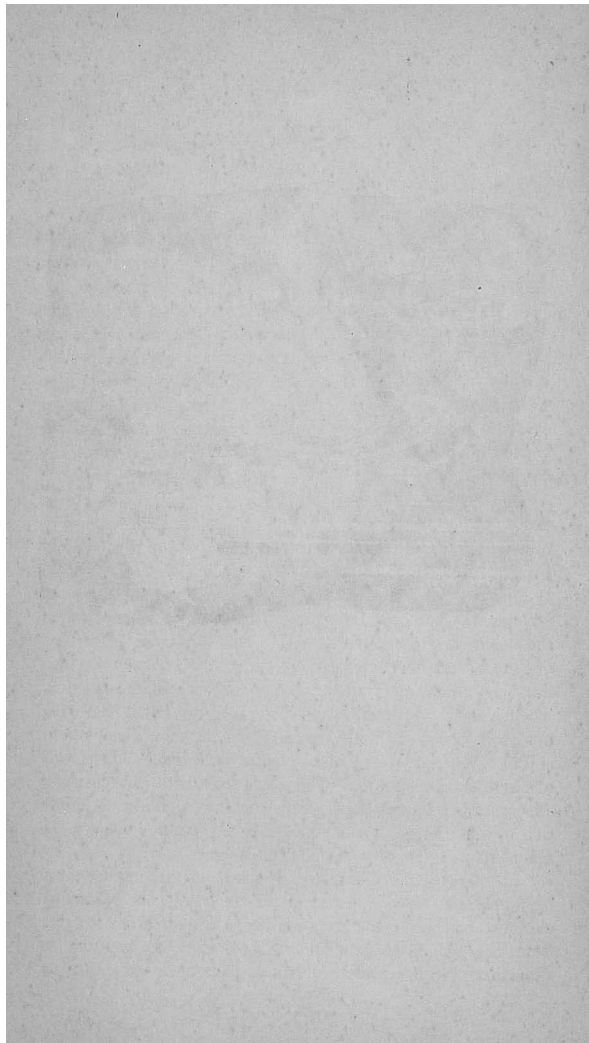
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TO
MY WIFE





TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

THIS TRANSLATION was begun eight years or so ago as a labour of love, without any thought of publication. Much of it was written to while away the time on wearisome journeys by train, omnibus, bullock-cart, cycle, or on foot across the plains of Puhâlêndi's own Pândian Land. Some stanzas call to mind a rest-house on the shore of the Indian Ocean, others a village Church after Evensong, when the lamps have burned too low to read, others again a railway waiting-room or wayside 'bus-stop in the sultry heat of a tropic noon. The translator makes no claim to be a poet, but as a great lover of poetry, especially of those poets who know that the chief business of a poet is to tell a tale in verse, he believes that Puhâlêndi's *Nala* is worthy to stand in the company of the great narrative poems of the world; and it is that belief that has urged him on to the completion of the task.

On the vexed question whether poetry, if it is to be translated at all, should be literally translated into prose or rendered into verse, the translator is clearly on the side of Fitzgerald and Conington. A literal translation of such a poem as this would be intolerable. It must be admitted that there are stanzas where, owing to the immense compression of which the Tamil language is capable, the less significant of a mass of conceits has inevitably been omitted, and occasionally an idea has been added to bring out the significance of the original. The frequently recurring otiose epithets of the Tamil poet have not always been faithfully rendered; on the other hand otiose epithets familiar to English poetry have been introduced as a kind of compensation. The whole style, with its archaisms, affectations, repetitions, and poetic *clichés*, is a deliberate imitation of the original. It is hoped that the resulting effect gives a not untrue impression of Puhâlêndi's poem.

In following the rule that each stanza of the original must be represented by one stanza in the translation, an occasional exception has been made in transferring a less important conceit from one stanza to another, in preference to omitting it altogether. In one place two stanzas have been transposed to

provide a more logical order. The extremely dull introductory verses have been compressed into a prose prologue, and the prayers to the gods with which each canto is prefaced have been omitted, as being so packed with allusions to Hindu mythology as to defy translation.

In reading the poem the reader should keep in mind a picture of Puhâlêndi seated in the palace at Mûranai with his orchestra, in the presence of King Chandiran-swargi himself and an admiring throng of courtiers, the apparently irrelevant references to the monarch evoking a gracious smile from the throne and applause from the audience.

THE POET

Puhâlêndi was Poet Laureate at the court of King Varakuna Pândian at Madhurai in the twelfth century A.D. Hence the honorific title of Pûlavâr appended to his name. He is said to have belonged to the Vellâla caste, the cultured and wealthy gentlemen-farmers of the Tamil land. Little is known of his personal history. One account gives as his birthplace a village near Chingleput, but his affection for the Pândian country would suggest that this was his native land. The greater part of the traditions concerning his life is occupied with the account of his life-long rivalry with Ottakkûttan, the court poet of the Chôla king, Kulôttungan. When Kulôttungan's father on his death-bed determined to negotiate a marriage for his son and heir with the daughter of the Pândian king, he sent Ottakkûttan to Madhurai as his envoy. It was here that the rivalry between the two poets began. Puhâlêndi incurred the jealousy of Ottakkûttan both by excelling him in poetic skill and by comparing the Chôla kingdom unfavourably with the Pândian. Quixotically King Varakunan decided to send Puhâlêndi to Urai-yûr as part of his daughter's dowry. The rivalry between the poets continued unabated, until Ottakkûttan succeeded in getting Puhâlêndi put in prison. By all accounts Puhâlêndi does not seem to have suffered very arduous confinement, and he spent his time writing poetry. He was eventually released through the influence of the young queen. He then retired to Mûranai, to the court of King Chandiran-swargi, a vassal of the Chôla King. There in response to Chandiran-swargi's desire he composed the *Nala Venba*, the story of Nala and Damayanti.

The last glimpse we have of him is the story of his hiding in the house of Ottakkûttan with the intention of murdering him, where, upon hearing Ottakkûttan express privately to his wife high praise of his *Nala Venba*, he revealed himself and flung himself into Ottakkûttan's arms. So at last the two enemies were reconciled.

The other great poet of the age was the greatest and the most famous of the three, Kamban, the author of the Tamil *Râmâyana*. This period of Tamil literature, A.D. 1100-1400, is an age of Sanskrit influence, as may be seen from the fact that both the *Râmâyana* and the *Nala Venba* are based on Sanskrit originals. The ornateness of the style is also said to be imitated from the Sanskrit and is less highly esteemed by Tamil literary critics that the purer style of the three classical ages that preceded it. The language is also blamed for its admission of Sanskrit derivatives. For all that, the vocabulary of the *Nala Venba* is more than ninety per cent pure Dravidian. The whole setting too of the poem is South Indian; the names alone are Northern. In the account of Damayanti's suitors, for example, it is clear that the poet knows nothing of North India; the descriptions of Oudh and of the Punjab are purely literary, but when he speaks of the Pândian, Chôla and Chera kingdoms he speaks of the land he knows and loves.

METRE

This is not the place for an excursus on the metres of Tamil classical poetry. Suffice it to say that the *Venba* metre consists of four-line stanzas, of which the first three lines are tetrameters and the fourth a trimeter catalectic. The stanza used in the translation consists of three iambic tetrameters followed by a dimeter catalectic, as near an equivalent as could be expected. (The tetrameters are divided by a strong caesura and a hypermetric syllable is occasionally introduced for the sake of variety.) Acknowledgement for the source of this metre should be made to George Herbert; the debt will be obvious.

In the translation the lines rhyme in couplets, with occasional interior rhymes. In the original they rhyme in couplets, with a less pronounced interior rhyme after a caesura in the second line. In Tamil verse, however, the rhyme occurs at the beginning not the end of the line. This is occasionally found

as an incidental embellishment in English poetry, as in Keats' *Sleep and Poetry*, ll. 211-213:

‘Did not their shames
Affright you? Did our old lamenting Thames
Delight you?’

But the translator felt that to imitate the Tamil practice regularly in English, even if practicable, would be pedantic and wearisome. Only twice has it been attempted: in I.5, where it is demanded by a play upon words in the Tamil; and again in II.92, where a repetition in the original requires it, and the effect there is carried on by the repetitions of the succeeding stanzas. Both in the original and in the translation alliteration is freely used for purely decorative effect.

PROPER NAMES

The Tamil language possesses no aspirated consonants, no true sibilants, and does not distinguish between b and p, between d and t, ḍ and ṭ, g and k. To preserve the Tamil flavour of the poem the Tamil spelling has been in the main retained, though for the sake of euphony the Sanskrit form is sometimes preferred, as for instance Nishada rather than Niṭada. Nor has the process been carried to extremes; ‘Damayanti’ might have been written ‘Tamayanti’, as it actually is in Tamil. For the same reasons the final n or r of the Tamil masculine nominative ending is used along with the more usual form; i.e., ‘Nala’ and ‘Nalan’, ‘Vīma’ (Skt. ‘Bhīma’) and ‘Vīman’, ‘Viyâsar’ (Skt. ‘Vyâsa’). For those who are ignorant of Indian languages, the names should be pronounced as in Italian, except that the short a has the sound of the u in ‘butter’; e.g., ‘Nala’ rhymes with ‘duller’, and ‘Kali’ with ‘gully’. In the text no distinction has been made between dentals and linguals (between t and ṭ, d and ḍ). This distinction holds good in Tamil, and those acquainted with Sanskrit will be able to make it for themselves. On the first occurrence of a name all the long vowels are marked with the circumflex accent, and where doubt might arise the stress is marked on a short syllable by the acute accent. In conclusion it may be added that the h in Puhāḷēṇḍi’s name is actually a very soft k and the l is a letter peculiar to Tamil, a retroflex liquid pronounced in different parts of the Tamil country sometimes as ṛ, sometimes ḷ, sometimes almost zh.

THE PHILOSOPHY

The main interest of the poem is of course aesthetic—it is a good story told in lovely verse. Students of religion will also find a subsidiary interest in studying in it a popular form of the doctrine of *karma* which is universal in Hinduism. When a character acts meanly and plunges himself and his dear ones in distress, the poet ascribes this to his *karma*, the fruit of his misdeeds in earlier lives. This concept is quite alien to Western ways of thought: those to whom it comes as a strange doctrine will do well to remember that it is the attempt of a great religion to deal with the same problem of human suffering and Divine justice as is wrestled with, in the Christian Scriptures, in the book of Job.

But, once more, it is as a love story in verse that this poem has its main appeal. The closing couplet of Dryden's *All for Love*, applied by him to Anthony and Cleopatra, could more justly be applied to Nala and Damayanti—

‘And fame to late posterity shall tell
No lovers lived so great or died so well.’

I should like to take this opportunity of thanking Miss I. R. Warren for the beautiful illustrations which she has made for this book.

Palamcottah, 1948

M. C. LANGTON

TO PUHALENDI

*Sweetest of Púlavars, Puhalêndi! long
Hast thou been wont to lead me by the hand,
And on the gilded pinions of thy song
Transport my soul to that enchanted land,*

*Where in clear waters swans sedately steer
And spicy trees perfume the summer gale,
Where pearl-enamelled on the crystal mere
The lily and the lotus never fail;*

*Where lords and ladies in their garlands gay
With buzzing of innumerable bees
Walk peacock-like in beauty night and day,
And aye for gods and men a Fate decrees*

*Virtue and courage have their guerdon due,
And hate is shamed, but love is ever true.*

M.C.L.

PROLOGUE

PRINCE DHARMA, eldest of the sons of Pându, was driven from his kingdom by his brother Duryôdhana. In exile he is visited by the Brahman sage and poet, Viyâsar. From him he seeks encouragement and consolation. Viyâsar proceeds to relate to him the story of King Nala, who in ancient time was likewise driven unjustly from his throne.

The whole succeeding story is thus put in the mouth of Viyâsar, but this original *mise en scène* is entirely forgotten as the tale proceeds, and outside the prologue neither Dharma nor Viyâsar is mentioned again.



CANTO THE FIRST

SYNOPSIS

IN THE LAND of Nishada and in its capital city Maha Vindapuram there dwelt a noble and virtuous king named Nala. One day king Nala, walking with the ladies of his court in the royal park, sees a white swan floating on the lake close to the shore. He sends the girls to catch it, and, when they bring the swan to him, addresses it with gentle and flattering words. The swan, pleased with the king's favour, tells him of a fair princess named Damayanti, daughter of Vima the king of Vidarpa, whom it promises to make his bride. Nala falls in love with Damayanti at first hearing of her beauty, and sends the swan to plead his cause with the princess. The swan flies away to Kundinapuram, Vima's capital, where she finds Damayanti, and, telling her of Nala's high courage and renown, causes her to fall in love with him as he with her. The swan then flies back to king Nala, who anxiously awaits its return.

Damayanti's lovesickness is at once known to her maids-in-waiting, and by them reported to her mother and father. King Vima, impressed by his daughter's beauty, resolves to invite all the princes of India to attend a Swayamvaram, at which according to ancient Indian custom she shall choose her own husband by putting a golden garland about his neck.

The suitors, Nala among them, throng in hundreds to Vima's court. The news of this event is reported even to Indra in heaven by the sage Narada. The gods themselves join the procession of suitors, and on their way the four great gods, Indra, Yama, Agni and Varuna, encounter King Nala. Indra begs Nala to act as their advocate to press their suit with Damayanti. Nala agrees to their request before knowing what it is. Learning what they ask he resolves to put loyalty to his plighted word before the attainment of his own desires. Made invisible by Indra's magic power, he enters the palace and the apartments of the Princess and converses with her in secret. Although he speaks only of Indra's suit and conceals his own passion, Damayanti knows the truth and promises him her hand. Nala returns secretly as he came. The gods approve his conduct of their suit and grant him a fourfold boon.

At the Swayamvaram the four great gods attempt to confuse Damayanti by appearing before her in the guise of Nala side by side with the real Nala among the suitors. Damayanti, remembering in time the four attributes of Divinity, distinguishes the human Nala among the five Nalas she sees before her and puts the garland about his neck.

On their way back to heaven the gods meet the demon Kali who has come too late for the Swayamvaram. In spite of Indra's warning he threatens out of jealousy to ruin the happy pair. For all his threats, however, the marriage is joyfully celebrated without mishap.

CANTO THE FIRST
THE BETROTHAL

The Land of Nishada

The poet describes the land of Nishada,

There's a land where the silver minnows play
and lily-buds burgeon all the year,
And from their prison honey-sweet
the crimson lotus-petals flare.
To thee creation sees no peer
but radiant Lakshmi's eye serene,
Land of all lands the Queen!

and the city of Maha Vindapuram. °

And there's a city broad and fair,
where girls of flower-frail loveliness
Full oft the cool well-waters pour
o'er saffroned frame, o'er musky tress;
Then flows the fragrant ooze so rich
the ambling tusker in the street
With effort keeps his feet.

On pennant-flaunting balconies
as oft the crisping locks they dry,
From countless sandal-reeking fires
thick odorous fumes ascend the sky,
Till wafted by the southern breeze
the trailing clouds on hall and tower
Descend in perfumed shower.

Here's nothing crook'd but the bending bow,
nothing droops but the trailing tresses,
Naught but the anklets' silver speech
a note of agony expresses;
Trembles naught but the rippling wave,
naught from the straight path turns
But the maiden's glancing eye. [awry

When lordly Nalan for a flower
comes seeking in his royal pleasaunce;
A living bower of jewelled grace,
an arbour starred with maiden eyes,
Attends the fair emprise.

While Mánmadan, great god of love,
all-conquering huntsman, bends his
And South Wind with his balmy showers [bow,
besprinkles all the paths below,
Where woodbine crowns the fields of corn,
through circling vales the gentle
Comes forth to greet the King. [Spring (10)

Reaching the wooded shores of a lake.

With scented dew his fair escort
from locks with living flowers inlaid
Bespray the thirsty chariot-dust;
so gains the king the inmost glade,
Where drowsy Night to joyful hum
of darkling wings seems aye to shun
In sanctuary the sun.

The Swan

he espies a swan approaching across the water,

The murky shades dissolved in light,
the royal bosom kindling shone,
As forth from lotus-paven haunts
moved o'er the lake a milk-white
Her flashing white brings day to night, [swan;
her ruddy shanks with rosy hues
The limpid waves suffuse.

and bids his attendant maidens capture the fair creature.

[illegible]

'Go, seek that graceful gentle swan,
 seize her, make no mistake,' cried he,
'And bring her safe to me.'

Then like a circling cavalcade
 of peacocks flaunting in the sun,
Flaunting the long and jet-black tresses
 flower-enamelled as they run—
Those willowy maids obediently
 encircling seize the lovely thing
A tribute for their king.

The swan, looking in vain for other swans to come to her rescue, is reassured by the king's gentle words.

There captive stands the timorous swan
 astonied in the hands of men,
With darting glance she seeks in vain
 her cruising clansmen of the fen;
There 'mid the admiring maiden throng
 with beating heart and fluttering wing
In awe she greets the king.
(15)

'Fear not, fair swan,' the Prince replied,
 'but cast thy gentle gaze on these,
Who in their motion softly sway
 like oleanders in the breeze;
Whose the divinest grace, or theirs,
 or thine? To solve this mystery
We sought thy company.'

Fair was the captor, fair as she
 who reigns upon the lotus-throne;¹
Fair was the prize who trembled there
 dreading the royal wrath, alone;
Her fluttering breast assuaged forthwith
 the gentle monarch's word sincere
And banished all her fear.

¹ The goddess Lakshmi.

and in gratitude promises to make the Princess Damayanti his bride. The king falls in love with Damayanti at the first mention of her name.

The Swan—

'O Ruler of a far-flung realm!
for stalwart arms and chariot famed!
A damosel divine I know,
a princess, Damayanti named;
Silk-sheathèd shafts of slim bamboo
her slender arms unblemished shine
Full fit to match with thine.'

E'en ere the swan's smooth-spoken speech
had smote the monarch's outward
Love's arrow smote his inmost breast [ear,
and scored the maiden's image there.
That Sovereign Lord of Earth Divine
with stammering lips cried eagerly,
'This maid, whose daughter she?'

The swan describes the beauty and virtue of Damayanti.

'O King, whose arms are pillars twain!
the great Vidarpan's¹ daughter she.
Knowest thou that bounteous Prince's land,
where by the conduits coursing free
Crushing the myriad blossoms blue
the ploughman drives his furrow true
Through streams of honey-dew? (20)

‘The Virtues four her armèd troops,
her Senses five her Earls-in-chief,
Her anklets sounding a martial strain,
her eyes for lance and sword, beneath
The crescent banner of her brow
she rules her Kingdom chaste and
The Estate of Womanhood. [good,

'Her swelling breasts twin vernal hills
 where Youth his freshest grace be-
Her slender waist doth seem to be [stowed;
 a shaft too frail to bear that load;

¹ Vîman (Sanskrit, Bhîma), king of Vidarpa (Vidarbha).

And heeding this in sympathy
 her tinkling anklets as in pain
 Clash out a mournful strain.

'The feeblest breeze that stirs the air,
 that stirs not e'en the thistledown,
 O King! the gentle fluttering
 of small six-footed wingers brown
 Her slender frame caressed perceives
 and yielding as the soft air plays
 So delicately sways.

'Her speech is ruddy nectar sweet,
 and 'neath her coiling ringlets black
 Her brow shines like the crescent moon
 beneath the lowering low cloud-
 There Cupid lays aside his bow, [wrack;
 that fatal foe to human hearts,
 There whets his flowery darts.'

Nala, thrilled by the description of the swan-like maiden, asks the swan how she knows her so well,

That swan-like form whose graceful gait
 disgraces every swan that vies,
 The monarch meditating swoons
 with love, and languorously cries:
 'That swan of whom you speak to me,
 O Swan! 'twixt you and that fair
 What sweet society?' [She
 (25)

The Swan—

'Her loyal Maids-in-waiting we
 our Lady serve with deep devotion,
 And there from our preceptress learn
 the art of undulating motion,
 Where Cupid cons his cunning arts
 enwrap in constant contemplation
 Of artless fascination.'

and begs the swan to plead his cause with the Princess.

Nala—

'Stricken is my heart, my vows forsworn,
 honour forgot, and shame forshent;
The leaping flame of fierce desire
 my aching heart in twain hath rent.
Naught but thine intercession can
 this agony allay, I wis,
In consummated bliss.'

The swan flies away on this errand,

The Swan—

‘Great Viman’s daughter delicate,
I swear, thy stalwart arms shall grasp,
And soon, O Prince of peerless pride,
her tender breasts to thine shall clasp.’
So spake the swan and soaring high
her snowy pinions swiftly plied
To Damayanti’s side.

and Nala waits her return in feverish anxiety.

Nala—

‘Ere this should she have found my fair.
 Ere this should she have seen my
Ere this should she have told my tale. [dear.
 Ere this she should have lighted here.’
Thus mused the king whose stern control
 the raging elephant confessed
But not his quaking breast.

The sights and sounds of nature around him all serve to remind him of his passion.

As through the thicket thrilled the note
of blackbird calling to his mate,
His spirit swooned with anguish sweet
to woo the damsel delicate
By that fair flame-fluked swan described
fair-famed as the Swan-Queen¹ benign,
Damayanti divine. (30)

The peacock prancing in his pride
 displays his painted plumage bright;
 The royal lover lifts his eyes
 and faints with longing at the sight,
 His marrow melted with desire,
 distraught with fervid fear his brain
 Like any love-sick swain.

Nala—

‘O come, ye Vines! ye Creepers tall!
 your delicate voluted bands
 Recall to this my sighing soul
 the liquid spiral of her stance;
 Your mellowing fruits that overhead
 in purple clusters drooping fall
 Her bright-zoned breasts recall.

‘Oh, where refresh my fevered brow?
 And where my raging spirit calm?
 Her breasts shall yield me fragrant mead,
 her honeyed words shall be my balm;
 Her rose-wreathed tress shall shade my head,
 her scalloped navel lave me cool
 In its pellucid pool.’

Damayanti's Abode

The swan approaches Damayanti

By Nalan's royal hand released
 that scintillating shapely swan
 Approached the maid, who left her play
 and sought a secret station,
 Where fair with fair soft converse held,
 ‘Oh, tell me now, my sweet swan
 What tidings bring thee here?’
 [dear!

and describes the beauty and virtue of King Nala.

The Swan—

‘A Prince I saw whose martial mien
 might any maiden’s mind emprey;
 Nor earth nor heaven knows his peer
 and boundless is his sceptred sway—
 Nalan, the flower of chivalry
 and crown of magnanimity,
 A spouse most meet for thee. (35)

‘Oh, how describe his eye benign,
 or how declare his soul sincere?
 And for his valiant victor arms
 in this wide world where find the
 If Vishnu vies not, the Violet-eyed, [peer?
 of mortal monarchs who would dare
 With Nalan to compare?’

Damayanti falls in love with the swan’s description of the king’s grace and valour,

That golden maid, gold beetles gilding
 the braided blossoms of her hair,
 Hears and with passion sighs to hear
 the wing’d words of that wingèd fair;
 Her golden lustre gently fades,
 her cheek forgets his ruddy gleam
 To ape the pale moon-beam.

Her maiden musing all enthralled
 by that so passionate narration
 Foretastes her lover’s fond embrace
 in exquisite anticipation;
 And, gazing on her heaving breasts,
 her eyes in innocent collusion
 Confirm the sweet illusion.

To rhythmic melody of bees
 upon rose-braided tresses humming
The Princess Damayanti stands
 and waits her august father's
Then, like a slender vine bowed down [coming,
 with full-ripe clusters, at his feet
Inclines in reverence meet.

and resolves to hold a Swayamvaram for her betrothal.

Her sweat with pearly drops engems
the radiant crescent of her brow,
'No common fate such beauty claims;'
her raptured sire resolves, 'I vow
From all the realms of Hindustan
a thousand suitors I will call
And she shall choose from all.'

The Envoys

Vima's envoys carry the invitation to all the Princes of India.

So spake the lord of that goodly land
 where the holy Ganges' silver spray
 Spumes o'er the áreca's emerald fronds;
 his envoys speeding on their way
 Proclaim through all the realms of Ind
 for Damayanti's nuptial
 A seven-day festival. (45)

(O King of wealth and beauty rare,
that bearest Hari-Chandira's name,
Swargi! as through the haunts of men
in Tamil numbers spreads thy fame,
So spread the splendid cavalcades
of royal suitors and their trains
Across the sunlit plains.)



The Princes gather for the Swayamvaram at Vima's court.

From far and near the knightly bands
 foregather at the golden gate
Of him upon whose corselet huge
 the Queen of Valour¹ holds her state,
And, where the tethered tuskiers tower,
 rein in their coursers, and prepare
To woo and win that Fair.

There 'mid the laughing lotus-pools
 and carolling birds in the gardens gay
In bright pavilions richly lodged
 blissful they linger night and day;
On Damayanti's charm divine
 they meditate, and dream awhile
Of Damayanti's smile.

Nala

Meanwhile Nala awaits the swan's return.

What time King Nalan, his ear attuned
to naught but Damayanti's name,
His eye strained on the distant air,
his heart from Cupid's torch aflame,
Sick with relief and rapture spies
the soaring wing majestic sweep
Across the azure steep.

¹ Lakshmi.

As stands some sorry mendicant
 gazing in mute expectancy,
And braves the rich man's haughty stare
 if woe may win him clemency,
So stands that gallant swordsman staunch
 craving the preening swan's narration
In speechless supplication.

(50)

and asks for news of her visit.

So stands the chief who spared no foe,
till longing loosed his lisping tongue:
'O Queen of Swans! this pining soul
'twixt death and life ambiguous
Till by thy safe return revived; [swung,
oh, tell me, tell me, hast thou found
My darling safe and sound?'

She told of Damayanti's court,
 of Damayanti's salutation,
She told of Damayanti's love,
 till from her passionate oration
Nepenthe nectar-sweet distilled
 into fain numbness nympholept
His ravished senses swept.

His dull'd ear now scarce apprehends
the purport of the swan's discourse,
He gropes in whirling night, he falls
like a trapped tusker in the fosse;
Exanimate his massy frame
crumples as on the autumnal pyre
A green leaf in the fire.

Vima's Envoys

Vima's envoys arrive at Nala's court.

Where every flower's a silken hammock
that rocks a pair of slumbering bees,
And every glade a symphony
of waters—flashing through the trees

And thorough the castle's open gate
 ride Viman's flawless heralds gay
 To cry the trysting day.

Nala receives them, and immediately sets out for Kundinapuram.

Though drooping like the stricken hart,
 victim of Love's shrewd archery,
 The princely envoys he receives
 with princely state and dignity;
 Their message heard he instant calls
 his charioteer and straight him speeds
 To yoke his shining steeds. (55)

'Speed on, slack not the rein,' quoth he,
 'till thou that sea-girt champaign
 Where slender serf-maids bending low [view,
 heap high the lily-blossoms blue,
 And, ere the ploughman turns his plough,
 in rills of honey trickling slow
 Crumbles the rank ridge-row.'

Behind—a sea of ripe corn waving,
 before—a sea of brave plumes danc-
 As through the golden glebe he goes; [ing,
 his lancers host on host advancing
 To that proud city point his gaze,
 where Viman's daughter richly dight
 Dwells, his great heart's delight.

In Heaven

Narada brings news of the Swayamvaram to Indra,

To Indra's throne hies Nâradan,
 whose magic lute allays the ire
 Of Siva, when that single eye
 flashes intolerable fire,
 And hasies that god to greet who guards
 the Heavenly Jewel, the Heavenly
 The Heaven's whole Sanctuary. [Tree,

Indra

who wonders at the absence of worshippers.

Twirling the Diamond-blade¹ mused he,
the blade whose gleam is the lightn-
That stripped the wing'd hills of their pride [ing-flash,
and made them rue their emprise
'No warfare rages there below, [rash;
yet royal worshippers none we see,
What means this mystery?'

To whom at length that guileless Sage:
 'See how the countless suitors throng
To Viman's court, each princely one
 elect, in his own esteem, ere long
With Damayanti's garland dight
 victorious 'mid his peers to stand
And claim her royal hand.

(60)

'Can one frail frame the weight sustain
 of such accumulated grace,
One head such weight of beauty bear
 as crowns fair Damayanti's face?
The glory of her father's house,
 the incorruptible warder she
Of Cupid's treasury.'

The Coming of the Gods

The gods set out for Vima's palace,

Enthrall'd by tale of mortal charms
 a thousand hearts immortal beat.
Lord Indra and the gods arise
 and speed from their celestial seat,
To exchange the bright abodes of heaven,
 bewitchèd all by Cupid's spell,
For Vima's citadel.

¹ The 'Vajra', with which Indra makes the lightning and smites his enemies; see stanza 68.

and, meeting King Nala on the way,

To whose descending view appears
King Nala. As with urgent speed
To race the quarry to his lair
the evening huntman spurs his steed,
His scudding chariot scours the plain
to seek in Damayanti's smile
The heart he lost erewhile.

persuade him to be their advocate with the Princess.

Indra—

‘Well met! Who worthier, Prince, than thou
to be our advocate today?
Pledge now thy word, O Naishadan!¹
our urgent summons to obey.’
Magnanimous his instant troth
he plights, to question naught he
Nor knows not what he swears. [cares,

Nala's Embassy

Spake Indra: 'Four great gods ye see,
 suitors for mortal maid who stand.
Go, and for one of the great gods four
 seek Damayanti's wreath² and hand.'
Slain in the lover's heart lies love
 beneath the roses and the musk,³
And shrunk to a shrivelled husk.

(65)

Nala, realising too late what he has promised to do,

Nay, not so soon is true love tamed,
nor lov'd from lover lightly rent,
But, now on Indra's dread command,
and now on Damayanti bent,
As swift his thought flies to and fro
as flies the wayward shuttle sharp
Thorough the steadfast warp.

¹ Naishadan = King of Nishada.

² The garland with which she is to indicate the suitor of her choice.

³ The garlands which are part of the uniform of royal personages.

Fierce raged the strife in that large heart,
primeval strife of ice with fire,
Stern Virtue in the event supreme
allayed the storm-waves of desire.
'Thy will, O gracious Sire! be mine;
what if me entrance should deny
The watchman's baleful eye?'

Indra—

'Am I not Indra? Did not I
the great wing'd mountains wingless
And by my thunderbolt benign [shear,
deliver nations from their fear?
Go to her, naught shall hinder thee,
nor iron bars nor gates of brass,
And none shall see thee pass.'

Nala enters the city and the palace unseen;

Her gates are lips that aye resound
the melodies of celestial song,
Her lofty walls with tongue divine
high metaphysical debate prolong;
Like Indra's wide-wayed citadel
all gold, transported from the skies,
The Queen of Cities lies.

the lovers meet in secret,

As face to face in a leafy pool
the lily blue and the lotus red
Unfolding, to the lily's smile
the lotus bows his courtly head,

3

Nala, in loyalty to his promise to Indra, conceals his love,

Nala—

‘By Indra’s might, at Indra’s word,
 I come thy favour free to pray,
 That thou choose one of the great gods four
 and grace him with the garland gay.
 From Nîshada Nâd¹, that noble land,
 the title Naishadan I claim,
 And Nala is my name.’ (75)

So spake the king, nor whispered word
 of the tempestuous tides within,
 While chivalry and silence seal
 more favour than mere words might
 ‘If men and gods thine eyes disdain, [win;
 scorn not Lord Indra’s cause I bring,
 Whom gods and men call King.’

but Damayanti guesses the truth and promises her betrothal garland to Nala.

At length the might of true love moves
 the lips in shy distraction mute:
 ‘When we my spousal celebrate
 with braying conch and lilting lute,
 The golden garland of my gift,
 O Naishadan! if he thou be,
 Shall circle none but thee.

‘To Indra give my deference due,
 bid welcome to that company,
 But know that, as thy troth to him,
 so Damayanti’s troth shall be—
 Though all the kings of Hindustan
 and all the gods of heaven sue—
 To Nalan ever true.’

¹ Nâd, Tamil for ‘country’.

*Nala's Return**Nala returns to Indra and tells of Damayanti's choice.*

Swift as his entrance, undelayed
 by friend or foe his safe retreat.
 Gay are his garlands, glad his heart,
 his patrons as he hastes to meet,
 And first, ere he begins to praise
 that maiden of the radiant brow,
 To Indra makes his bow.

Eager they stand, the gods, to hear
 of voyage safe and secret meeting,
 Of Damayanti's modest mien
 and to themselves her humble
 His loyal service and her choice [greeting.
 approving, in serene accord
 Celestial lips applaud. (80)

*The gods promise to Nala a fourfold gift.**Indra—*

'Nor earth nor water shalt thou blame
 bounteous throughout thy broad
 Nor flame of fire nor raiment fair [domain,
 thy prayers shall ever ask in vain;
 Fourfold the boon that we bestow
 four hearts divine, Indran, Yaman,
 Agni and Várunan.'

King Nala to the deathless gods
 homage with due obeisance pays;
 Then, suitors all, advancing wend
 their mortal and immortal ways
 For Damayanti's Choosing-day¹
 to Vima's hospitable halls,
 Where one all hearts enthralls.

¹ In Sanskrit 'Swayamvaram'. By ancient Indian custom a princess was allowed to choose her own husband; she expressed her choice by garlanding him with a garland of gold and flowers.

Damayanti's Distress

Damayanti in her apartment awaits the coming of the Betrothal Day.

The maiden bides within her bower,
her thought all with her lover flown,
And oft their converse sweet recalling
she sighs, nor answers word to none;
Her pallid cheeks with pearly drops
perfus'd, drugg'd with delight her
Upon her couch reclined. [mind,

As swoops in sapphire panoply
the kingfisher to seize his prey,
She knows that Love has seized her heart
and borne her precious life away.
A cloud those lustrous pools bedims
that lurk as in a sable glade
'Neath the long lashes' shade.

Silent the voice, the silver voice
that shames the vina's gentle tone;
'O woe for the wingèd dart's wide wound;'
musing her heart heaves plaintive
'Thereby though all my life-blood ebb, [moan,
ne'er shall this well-spring passionate
His leaping tide abate.'

(85)

Sunset

The daylight fades, from stream and pool
the day-birds bend their homeward
Alone the andril² leaves his mate [flight;
to warble in the summer night.
With slanting ray the slow sun sinks
beyond the grey Ghats, crest on crest
That bound the purple West;

² The Indian nightingale.

Night

A summer lightning, summer dew
soft fall'n, a light wind in the leaves,
Are terrors to a mind distraught;
‘Ye swans! sweet rest be yours,’ she
‘If I this dread tempestuous night [grieves,
survive, a miracle confess
And my good fortune bless.

‘Ye maidens all whose virgin breasts
released from their silken bonds
Half-veil’d in ebon locks unbound
are chalices of beaten bronze!
Oh tell me not the expanse above
blistered with cosmic passion’s fire
Is but the planets’ quire.

‘All flowery groves, all forest glades
are Love’s luxuriant armoury;
The sky his chariot’s broad highway,
his flag the myriad-spangled sea;
When all the world’s his hunting-ground,
ye bards! how can your tale be true
That Siva Cupid slew?

‘What poison pulses in my veins
this livelong Night sans shame, sans
That hornèd jewel in her ear [ruth?
must be some monstrous serpent’s
Why must I toss in fevered trance, [tooth.
all deaf to mortal colloquy
In fond soliloquy? (95)

‘Oh, whence hath this fell Night sucked up
the heat she breathes upon my brow?
Is’t from the bright moon riding high?
or from the engulfèd sun below?
Or hath she from a thousand breasts
absorbed the heat of our desire
Who languish in love’s fire?

And now no moon; but Night alone;
and Darkness broods o'er all the land,
Dark that a man may grasp in hand,
dark, nor yields to the flaming brand,
Dark as the dark of a harlot's heart,
Love's gaudy-gilded altar-tomb
That lures men to their doom.

Midnight—beneath the palace-wall
the swart stout-belted warders come,
The city watch, with lusty shout
and rat-tat-tat of kettledrum;
The clash of sword, the thump of lance,
with hammer-clang-on-anvil smite
The echoing wall of night.

The yawning tusker in his stall,
the lute relax'd in her shallow crypt,
The drowsy bees in petaled cell
into Sleep's gentle arms have slipt;
Beneath all mortal eyelids Sleep
slips soft and softly folds his wings—
But here no balm he brings.

Midnight—the vampire-sprites of hell,
 their hideous hands upon their prey,
Pause gloating, and with sudden dread
 shriek, shudder, shrink, and fade
All foul fiends fear that midnight hour, [away;
 auspiciouslest for every prayer
But lone lovers' despair. (105)

'Tis said the andril-bird alone
to shield his gentle mate from harm
With one eye sleeps and one eye wakes,
his nest secure from all alarm.
Nor Damayanti for her love
nor Nalan for his leman's sight
One eyelid closed that night.

Like one who dozes half-awake
 and knows not if she slept or no,
Upon her tumbled couch she tosses
 or idly paces to and fro;
Anon she thrills with hope, anon
 in agony of doubt she weeps—
Till with the dawn she sleeps.

O Night! who all the world's wide ways
 o'ershadowest like a mighty tree,
 An ancient banyan from whose head
 a hundred roots hang gloomfully,
 When men or devils lose their way,
 or lovers in thy mazes stray,
 To what god shall they pray?

Sunrise

Now lily-buds all their fingers fold
and Brahmins fold their hands to
Now ope the lotus-blossoms fair [prayer;
and mortal eyelids everywhere;
Now Damayanti freshly dight
in fragrant garlands greets the day
That drives her care away.

Now yawning Love lays down his bow,
and the flowered arrows idly spill,
As Sûrya with his footprints red
comes striding up the eastern hill;
And Night sees all her shades disperse
and all her lesser lights absorb
One omnisplendent orb. (11)

(115)

The Swayamvaram

The royal suitors enter the Hall of the Swayamvaram,

Seven days the herald-drums have drummed
daily the doom'd betrothal day;
Huge as the heaving hills advancing
in crowns of gold and garlands gay

That slim throat in a maze of pearls,
 those ears, dew-pearlèd petals pure,
 That downcast eye demure.

The Suitors

As Damayanti passes down the line of suitors, one of her maids-in-waiting describes each prince in turn.

A maiden of immortal mien
 attends at Damayanti's side,
 Well versed in all romantic lore,
 her mistress' faltering steps to guide,
 Each prince's several praise to sing
 and tell each monarch's martial fame,
 His land, his house, his name.

The Maid-in-waiting—

'O mistress dapple-golden fair!
First stands the CHŌLA king whose
Where on Kauvêry's golden sands [sway
the áreca's plume-tip sips the spray;
As oft he leads his hosts to war,
his stout sword stains with rebel
The Coromandel shore. [gore

‘O beauteous Maid, whose eyes’ red darts
in glowing triumph put to flight
The veterans of a hundred fields!
before thee stands great PĀNDIAN’S
In anger once he smote a ball [might;
and Mēru’s mountain massif whirled
As on a pivot twirled.

'O Princess of immortal fame!
 behold! the CHĒRA prince is this:
His banner bears a great curved bow;
 his are the hills of Coorg, and his,
Like folds of Bûmâdêvi's¹ robe,
 the silver-bright cascades that scar
The vales of Malabar.

(125)

¹ The goddess of Earth.

'And this the prince, on Lanka's¹ shore
 who washed his arrows in the sea;
 Who sat enthroned in sacred haunts
 of music and of poesy;
 Once went on embassy to heaven;
 and fought in Mahâbârata—
 The Lord of MATHURA.²

'And this the lord of an ancient land
 where o'er the marshes all night long
 Like sleeping water-snakes the buds
 of lotus lie, and with a song
 The heron lulls her quaking brood,
 the peasant mother lulls her child—
 The KURU-DĒSA mild.

'And for this youthful prince's sire
 the bright chank in his ivory whorls
 On a proud red lotus sheds a tear,
 and the broad leaf that idly sprawls
 Beside her holds a glistening pearl
 in the deep canals and the waving
 Of MATTRA's watery meads. [reeds

'A land there lies in midmost Ind,
 where red juice from the sugar-mills
 O'erflows into the rich rice-fields,
 and from the cow's lip-corner spills—
 This noble youth before you stands
 heir to that rich raj of RANGPORE
 And lord of Dinajpore.

'And hast thou heard, O virtuous Maid!
 of Āvanti, the Muses' sward,
 Where reigns this youth of valiant mien
 thewed like an elephant, MĀLVA's
 There, as the calves stretch out their tongue [lord?
 to tender lily-buds, they refrain
 To hear the bees' sweet strain. (130)

¹ Ceylon.

² This stanza is exceedingly obscure, and involves an obvious anachronism; Nala belongs to an earlier age than that of the *Mahabharata*.

‘Seest thou this bowman’s polished shaft?
 He holds his sway in far PUNJAB,
 Where, when the angler casts his line,
 if e’er the sly bait slips the barb,
 And the sharp hook slashes the frail palm-frond,
 the red juice richly streams to stain
 The green and fertile plain.

‘Behold, O honey-tongued! the king
of KŌSALA, where, so they tell,
The paddy-reapers pause to whet
their curv’d scythes on the horny shell
Of broody turtles, and the steel
arouses with its stridor loud
The slumbering swans of Oudh.

'And lo! this lusty charioteer,
 where crimson lotus flames like fire,
And aye on MĀGADA'S crystal water
 the bees ascend in smoky spire,
Hath ne'er his golden quiver turned
 'mid royal warriors armed for
To foe from any quarter.
 [slaughter

‘And next, O sweet-voiced Damsel! this
of ANGĀ-NĀD the saviour brave;
There little curly conches splash
o’er coral knops, swirl’d in the wave
Of th’ ocean-swell that booming sweeps—
one low lugubrious “Oh” withal—
The beaches of Bengal.

'Where is the land of the pearly lakes,
 where little white fish stampede the
And from the trampled lily-pools [herds
 rise swarms of mingled bees and
The great KALINGA rajah he; [birds?
 he drives a chariot swift and keen
In garlands cool and green. (135)

In all her virgin modesty
 and beauty of her gentle frame
And puts them all to shame. (140)

Damayanti prays to Brahma for help to distinguish the true Nala:

Damayanti—

'O God! if I a daughter am
 and worthy scion of Vima's house,
To him whom once the sacred swan
 promised me for my royal spouse
This golden garland guide', she prays
 and lifts her heart to supplicate
The Brahma, Lord of Fate.

Her prayer is answered, for she remembers the Four Attributes of Divinity.

Radiant as Lakshmi, Queen of Grace,
an answer to her prayer she found,
The four-fold attributes divine—
the feet that never touch the ground,
The sleepless eyes that never wink,
th' ethereal forms that cast no shade,
The flowers that never fade.

Damayanti garlands Nala with the Wedding Garland.

Now Nala's throat the golden wreath
 encircles; strangling jealousy
Clutches each rival heart; dismay
 clouds the divine serenity;
Till radiances of rapture thrill
 all hearts, all dissonance destroy,
And bathe the world in joy.

Nalā and Dāmayanti pass hand in hand through the throngs of disappointed suitors.

As Nalan with her choice she crowns,
 herself the crown of a noble line,
The lance that crowned his honour yields
 to the swift shafts of her eyes divine;

For Nala hath the garland borne,
Nala the maiden's heart hath won.
Your scheme in vain. Begone!

But Kali persists.

Quoth Kali: ‘Insolence! do not
 your hearts with rage immortal boil;
To scorn *us* for a mortal’s hand!
 Trust me her impious scheme to
And for her precious paramour, [spoil.
 how brave soe’er he be or wise,
Ruin will I devise.’

Indra—

'Know'st thou not Nalan? Armed is he
 'gainst all thy malice to prevail.
Hast found him erst in purity,
 truth, courage, justice yet to fail?
And—stay me not to answer—scorn'st
 his bride's stern spotless chastity?
No victims these for thee!' (150)

Quoth Kali: 'What! in my despite
my chosen bride with mortal wight
Disport and take secure delight
and my seared eyeballs bear the
Oh! soon or late their parlous fate', [sight!
he yells to Indra's vanishing view,
'That pair shall surely rue.'

The Marriage Day

In spite of Kali's jealousy the marriage is happily consummated.

At last for Nala and his bride
 dawns the auspicious nuptial day,
And first of wedding-guests the Sun
 his chariot mounts in bright array,
And, as blown blossoms wilt and die,
 so dies the flame of their desire
In his so welcome fire.

Then Damayanti's maidens all
 whose only life is in her smile,
 Adorn, with leaden hearts a-quake,
 fingers in fumbling haste agile,
 (Too dazzling beauty hid must be
 with flowers and jewels overlaid)
 The tabour-waisted maid.

So were those twain upon the time
 By skill'd soothsayers certified,
 Nala and Damayanti, wed—
 for peerless prince a peerless bride—
 When to the rich gold-ceil'd abode
 by fussy chamberlains attended
 The bridal progress wended.

Then Love his arrow-petals five—
 the lotus, and the jasmine frail,
 Nelumbo, and sweet blossoms of
 the mango and the asôka pale—
 Arrays with deadly art to strike
 two hearts with fiery poison through,
 And bends the sweet-cane bow. (155)

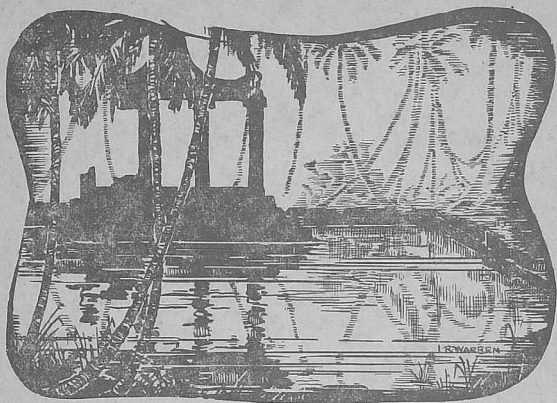
There strength and beauty, grace and fame,
 by Love's fierce interfusion,
 Two hearts, two bodies throb as one
 blended in nuptial unison,
 As when two mountain-torrents pure
 their waters once commingling seem
 Were never but one stream.

Her gaze, that with swift-lifted lids
 stole one glance in her husband's eyes,
 Shyly surveys the silken cloud
 that o'er her shoulder billowing lies;
 While on his tunic's chequered field
 her bosoms gay in mimic fray
 Like dainty chessmen play.

Lord of the chariot and the lance
to Lakshmi's clasp his arms resigning
The broad field of his bosom bathes
in rippling tresses sable-shining,
While from her sandal-fragrant sweetness
in torrent-streams of living fire
Flow rivers of desire.

Till faded lies the lotus, soft
and softer every fond caress;
Jangling the jewelled harmony,
and tangled all the cloudy tress;
Eye-embers smouldering, vainly strives
the pupil in eye-corner mewn
With ear-tip to commune.

So Nala, in his vasty palm,
 lord of the towering tusker-hordes,
Took Damayanti's dainty hand
 and wooed the maid with winsome
And many a sweet secluded hour [words;
 of lawful bliss they took their fill
Undimmed by dreams of ill. (160)



CANTO THE SECOND

SYNOPSIS

AFTER THE marriage Nala and Damayanti return to Vindapuram, where they live in peace and prosperity for twelve years. Twin children, Prince Indrasena and Princess Indrasenai, are born to them. But all these years Kali has been watching for his opportunity. At last one evening Nala in performing his daily ablutions leaves one speck of dirt uncleansed, and by this ritual impurity allows Kali to enter and take possession of his soul. Kali incites Nala's brother and vassal Pushkara to challenge Nala to play at dice. Under Kali's spell Nala consents, and by Kali's assistance Pushkara wins from him his kingdom, his treasure and all his possessions. Nala refuses to stake Damayanti as a final wager, and they set off with the twin children into the jungle with nothing but the clothes they wear.

When the children are weary with the journey, they entrust them to a passing Brahman, who conveys them safely to Kundinapuram. Nala himself refuses to seek hospitality as a poor relation in his father-in-law's palace, and Damayanti declines to leave him. They shelter for the night in a ruined shrine. While Damayanti sleeps, Kali incites Nala to abandon her. They have nothing but Damayanti's saree to cover them, since Kali in the guise of a bird has flown off with Nala's cloak. Nala divides the saree with a knife, and, wrapping one half round him, steals out into the night.

When Damayanti awakes, she searches in vain for Nala, and, while she is tracking his footprint in the sand, stumbles over a python, which with one gulp swallows her down all but her head and shoulders. From the python she is rescued by a hunter, only to find herself the object of his lust. Fleeing from him and unable to escape, she turns and blasts him to ashes with one glance of her eyes. Finally an honest merchant takes her up into his chariot and conveys her to the town of Chedi. There she wanders disconsolate in the streets until the Chedi queen, hearing of her plight, brings her into the palace. There Vima's envoy finds her, and in his charge she returns home to Kundinapuram.

CANTO TO SECOND

KALI'S VENGEANCE

The Homecoming

After the wedding Nala and his bride return to Nishada; the poet describes their adventures on the way.

Bright gleams the royal parasol
 and dark gleams Damayanti's eye
As Nala and his consort true
 mounting the carven chariot high
Ride forth for the fabled Nishada land,
 where o'er the golden paddy-sheaves
The coral-jasmine waves.

Then as along the homeward way
from scene to changing scene they
Would he with lance extended stand [move,
and thus and thus address his love:
'Look, love! how those girls gathering buds
scatter at every stem they seize
The speckled honey-bees.

'My lady of the rose-wreath'd locks
and golden stomacher pearly-gay!
What creature in the world doth not
to lovely woman homage pay?
Each bloom that maiden stoops to pluck
the stiff stalk at her gentle tread
Submissive bows his head.

‘And she, who, mirror’d in the mere,
her face in flowery form dissembles
A blushing lotus, and her hands
flame-finger’d gloriosa,¹ trembles
Scared as the shrewd bee doubting hovers
to kiss the rosy finger-tip
Or honey-laden lip.

¹ The *gloriosa superba*, a luxuriant creeper bearing orange-tipped yellow flowers.

'See, honey-sweet! she goes her way,
and, one by one the slight stems
Espies two stripy-sharded forms [breaking,
all snug in a lily-bud love-making;
And tiptoe like a peacock steps
lest e'en her anklets' silver rustling
Disturb their blissful nuzzling. (5)

'A posy in his hands—to set
upon her hair-knot's silken lap—
Reflecting, "What if with the weight
that slender, slender waist should
See yonder swain an armful plucks [snap?"
and heaps the laughing lotus-feet
With blossoms honey-sweet.

'Yon bank where shells and petals lie
pattern'd in many a wind-blown
Is like a tumbled couch bestrewn [whirl
with flowers and many a wayward
Where lover with his mistress coy [pearl,
half-quarrelling and half in play
Has striven and won the day.

'And seest thou, love! that darkling grove,
where under lifeless branches bare
Blown blossoms in profusion spread
by artless art make beauty rare,
As lie the maiden limbs released
from wanton lover's wild embrace
In languid, lawless grace?

'And there's a maid whose bosoms crush
the blossoms, kissing and dew-kissed;
Could aught the fragrance of her curls,
the radiance of her smile resist?
Moon-lilies whisper, "'Tis the moon",
and gently in her arms unfold
Their glory crimson-polled.

'And as she wrings the massy tress,
 that flaming-kântal¹-fingered maid,
 The delicate palely-lustrous face
 peeps through the darkly-writhing
 'Tis like the demon-serpent poised [braid;
 with mighty sable coils upclewn
 To crush the white-faced moon. (15)

'Thy breasts, my love! are lotus-buds,
 and honey-tongued thy lotus-lips!
 To pluck for thee a lotus red
 see to and fro the damsel trips—
 In vain; where'er those bright orbs bend
 their mirror'd beams, its native hue
 Turns wholly, purely blue.

'How shine thy gold-enclaspèd arms!
 how smile thy cheeks' soft-dimpled
 How nobly to his brazen dome [dells!
 thy waist-stem's slender narthex
 And how this bumble-haunted glade, [swells!
 wherein we'll light and idly roam,
 Remindeth me of home!'

The Quarrel

Damayanti:

'Remindeth thee of darkling glades
 where whilom thou wert wont to
 Remindeth thee of happy hours [play!
 thou sportedst with thy ladies gay!
 From pouting lips the roguish words
 fall with a feigning-frenzied cry
 And counterfeited sigh.

As in a snow-white panoply
 fresh-carmin'd with the bright blood-
 So Nala in those fire-fleck'd eyes, [splash,
 those lips' pomegranate-purple gash,

¹ The *gloriosa superba*.

Where, when the leaping waves rise high,
 the minnows shelter in the shoals,
 The carp cower in their holes.

The End of the Journey

Thence through the plantain-groves they drive,
 where each unfurling leaf-scroll fills
With liquor that from rich ripe fruit
 the mango drop by drop distils,
And delicate damsels wandering there
 deem it an emerald goblet sure
Of honey golden-pure.

(25)

At last Nala points out to his bride the walls and towers of Maha Vindipuram.

Nala—

‘O thou whose beauty was the glory
of Vima’s city broad and high,
Whose walls in rainbow glow outshine
the glory of the sunset sky!
These wide sky-soaring terraces
bright-bannered upon the road
Are our august abode.’

The Reign of Nala and Damayanti

For twelve years Nala and Damayanti reign in peace and prosperity.

Twelve years the shady paths they trace,
the broad lakes and the dancing rills,
The fragrant groves, the shining falls
among the artificial hills,
Twelve years free from the fiend's annoy,
twelve years of harmony serene,
King Nala and his Queen.

Meanwhile twin children, Indrasena and Indrasenai, are born to Damayanti.

Now darkly bloomed the surging breasts,
englobèd teemed the fine-spun waist,
All lustreless the silky tress,
the cheeks with pallid shadows traced,

Putkara sets out to visit Nala.

For where the spindly buffalo-calves
 tread down the myrrhy myrtle-brakes,
And pollen on their horny hooves,
 like gold-dust on the touch-stone,
Prince Putkaran sets forth in state [shakes,
 visit to his liege lord to pay
And challenge him to play.

Where Ganges in his golden glory
 goes surging down the roaring weirs,
Fills full the furrows, floods the fields,
 spares but the topmost golden ears,
Putkara, mounted on his steed,
 a wicked-tempered wild-eyed steer,
To Nala's court draws near.

and challenges him to play at dice.

King Nala gives him courteous greeting;
 ‘But what new ensign this?’ he cries,
To whom perfidious Putkaran
 at Kali’s whispered urge replies,
‘This banner bold no challenge bears
 to combat of the couchèd lance
But to the lists of chance.’

(35)

Nala accepts the challenge.

'Agreed! I take you,' cries the King
 (whose fields teem with the leaping
That plunge and splash in purling pools [fish
 of nectar in the leaf-bole-dish
Of overarching cocopalms),
 'and if your fortune you would try,
Come, let us throw the die.'

His ministers attempt to dissuade him.

‘Lord of the turtle-teeming pools!’
his Ministers of State exclaim,
‘Oh know’st thou not the works of those
who clothe themselves in Virtue’s
[shame?’

The five marks of their shameful way
 are whoring, gaming, drinking, lying,
 And charity-denying.

'For gaming rips up Virtue's roots;
 it cleaves the clearest path to hell;
 And gaming steels the heart to hate
 and soundeth gentle mercy's knell;
 The dice-box and its deadly lure
 all princes to their honour true,
 All noble hearts eschew.

'Tis lovely Virtue's mortal foe;
 'tis death to honour and to truth,
 To wealth and bounty, fame and friendship,
 self-respect and mutual ruth;
 When one small cause confederates
 so many evils in its train,
 Will not the wise refrain?

'What is the verdict of the Sage,
 the wise and worthy Counsellor,
 Has sifted all life's verities
 and studied all our ancient lore?

"Who falls for harlot's empty lure,
 who falls for gaming's gaudy snare,
 Is fast in Folly's lair.'" (40)

Nala rejects this advice,

But anger blazed beneath the brows
 of Nala at their warning words,
 (How rich his turgid waters teem
 with leaping fish and lowing herds!)
 'My word is given; my honour pledged;
 and who are ye to say me nay?
 Come good, come ill, I'll play.'

'And now, O King!', quoth Putkaran,
 'down whose broad estuaries the
 With thwacks of sweet-cane thrust the herds [churls
 o'er nature's, not men's, tribute-pearls!

If this imponderable sport
 in earnest thou'rt resolved to play,
 What wager dost thou lay?'

and wagers his jewelled chain against Putkara's bull.

Cried Nala: 'First this jewelled chain,
 whose coruscating stones outshine
 The gaudy bow of heaven, this prize
 my wager be; and what of thine?'
 Then Putk'ra, 'neath whose garlands gay
 a wrestler's massy shoulders rear,
 Wagers the wild-eyed steer.

Putkara plans with Kali's assistance to win Nala's wealth and also his queen.

And as the loathsome fires of lust
 revolve within his whirling brain,
 How he may win him Nala's wealth
 and Damayanti's couch attain,
 E'en so within the whirling dice
 the foul fiend's fume infesting all
 Revolves and guides the fall.

Nala loses all his treasure and all his possessions,

'Aha! your chain I capture—so!'
 quoth Putkaran, 'and now your plea-
 And Nala stakes, and stakes again, [sure?]
 till piling treasure upon treasure
 By constant cumulation mounts
 the wager million upon million
 To twice ten thousand billion. (45)

He stakes, he loses, loss on loss,
 a hundred hundred noble stallions,
 He stakes his pearl-encrusted cars
 by thousands, bowmen by battalions,
 He stakes his elephants—heifers huge
 and bulls whose vasty bulk reproves
 Indra's celestial droves.

Putkaran—

'O Nala! mine is all your might;
mine the four squadrons of your
Foot, chariots, elephants, and horse. [host—
What now?' Then Nala staked and
The bands of braided puppet maids [lost
who to the lute's soft symphony
Sing sweet songs of the sea.

For as in their fell folly men
 anon forsake the faithful arms
Of chaste wives for infatuate
 pursuit of mercenary charms,
So fickle Fortune unprovoked
 forsakes that noble, steadfast soul
For spirit false and foul.

till the whole kingdom belongs to Putkara.

Putkaran—

‘This realm, where down the deep green pools
the rich red lotus-honey rains
Upon the white-whorl’d conches, *was*
O Nala! yours. One hope remains.
In one last throw I stake it all,
your wealth, your chariots, your land
For Damayanti’s hand!’

but refuses to wager his bride.

Then Nala to his golden bride:
 'O daughter of a mighty King
Whose gardens, mango-groves, and glades
 with beetles' busy rout do ring!
Nurtured in wealth and beauty, *thou*
 the hazard-gage of penury! Nay.
No more. Come, love! away!' (50)

Exile

Nala and Damayanti with their twin children set out for the forest, to live in exile.

Then like a pair of downy swans
 that yield their lotus-mansion wide
To some black-breasted corbie, so
 with Damayanti at his side
King Nala wends his weary way,
 from crown and kingdom basely
Barefooted in the dust.

So Viman's daughter delicate,
 Clewed in the coils of destiny,
 Cleaves constant to her consort dear,
 the pride of kingly chivalry,
 As to the forest forth they fare
 together; for who can frustrate
 The stern decrees of Fate?

amid the pity and amazement of their subjects.

And, as he passes, suppliant lie
his subjects prostrate to the earth:
'O King! O Saviour of our souls!
O fount of grace! O womb of worth!
What legate leavest thou', they cry,
'to guard our gates and fend our
And wash his feet with tears. [fears?]

‘Sooner the ocean burst his bound,
the earth her fixed axis fly,
The Vedas to themselves prove false,’
they murmur in perplexity,
‘Ere from the path of probity
in word, in action, or design
The sceptred hand decline.

‘O King, whose spike-leaved lances oft
waved o’er thy ways victorious!
Let not this cruel city’s name
by thine instant departure thus

Be doubly-shamèd; hear our prayer;
oh, grant this day's respite to sorrow,
And part upon the morrow.' (55)

Nala doubts whether to stay one more night, a guest of his former subjects, but Putkara forbids any to give them hospitality, or to accompany them on their way.

The monarch in the city square
 stood musing in his noble mind.
He gazed upon the ranged ranks
 of upturned faces sorrow-lined;
He gazed upon his gentle queen:
 ‘Ah! Shall I not my darling spare
One day at least of care?’

But Putkaran, insensate prince,
vindictive in his victory,
Sends taborers drumming through the town:
‘If to his sometime majesty,
King Nala, any man refuge
or entertainment offereth,
The penalty is death!’

Frail Damayanti to her lord
 turns wond'ring as the sound she
He sees her, innocent of ill, [hears;
 her forehead pale with nameless fears,
And, sighing for his useless lance,
 cries, 'Of this city's grief, and thine,
The guilt, the guilt is mine.'

So Nala, who but yesterday
held Earth and Wealth his vassals,
His smiling head, and with his son, [bows
his princess daughter, and his spouse
Passes thro' that fair city's pale
and leaves without a word unkind
The golden gate behind.

But how should prince's daughter mild,
 abandoned in world unkind,
 A loving consort find?'

Quoth Nalan: 'Though his heart from guile
 his hand from every knavish sleight
 A man refrain, and with all care
 perform each penitential rite,
 Who hath no son to purge his sin,
 his feet shall never tread the road
 To Indra's blest abode. (65)

'What though a man all wealth attain,
 and the world's highest honour gain,
 And hath no little cherry lips
 his cheeks with fragrant kiss to stain,
 And hath no dimpled fingers small
 to dabble in the mulsèd meal,
 What worth is all his weal?'

'And what avails to comprehend
 philosophy's design complete
 To one who never knows the sound
 of tinkling bells on tiny feet,
 Nor ever hears about his board
 the merry first milk-drooling trips
 Of lisping baby lips?'

To whom his tender queen and true:
 'Your wealth, your kingdom, and your
 Lost in the hazard of the game— [throne
 there this mischance need not be
 Come, gentle husband, come with me; [known;
 there shall be shelter for us all
 In my dear father's hall.'

Nalan—

'Whoe'er shall at the rich man's door
 his fortune to restore endeavour
 With one swift blow his whispered "Give"
 like a sharp sword his pride shall
 [sever;

His honour in dishonour lies,
his virtue from corruption flies,
His hope of heaven dies.

'My gentle glowing-eyed gazelle!
the prince who, maniac fool, would
At prince's board to gorge his fill [live
and fawning in his favour thrive—
That creature, as the proverb says,
like eunuch-manhoo's beardless jowl,
Is neither flesh nor fowl.' (70)

They decide to send them to King Vima in the charge of a Brahman who chances to be at hand.

'If to thy noble mind,' sighs she,
'my sceptred lord! this seemeth well,
Send them away, yea, send them hence
to Vima's shining citadel.'
So Damayanti, as at last
she steels her heart those loves to hate
Her love did once create.

Nalan—

'If mother-love be tempered thus,
can not a father's courage knit
The broken heart that ne'er before
to tears surrendered? So be it!
Sir!¹ wilt thou these sweet babes conduct
to their grandfather's loving arms
Secure from all alarms?'

The while both weeping out their eyes
between them stands that pretty
They gaze upon their mother fair, [pair;
they gaze upon their father dear,
'Oh! will you tear us from your side?
And will you send us all alone
Where we are all unknown?'

¹ According to tradition this is addressed to a Brahman, but who he is or how he comes to be present at this juncture is not explained.

Not with the wonted mascara
but with unwonted sorrow lined
Her brows are bent, her head is bowed;
weary in body, and in mind
Distracted, Damayanti stands,
clasps to her breast her darling dears,
And bathes them in her tears.

And when on willing shoulders raised
 he bears them safely from the scene,
Well may those piteous parent eyes
 their Brahman benefactor ween
No better than a brigand bold
 who would in cruel hands convey
Their very life away.

(75)

Then like a great sky-searing wind
King Nala heaves a mighty sigh,
As on those dear fast-fading forms
he fixes his untiring eye;
Speechless he stands, moveless, the while
on his fast-fading garlands gay
The honey-beetles play.

Then from that land they turn away,
 sweet land where the silver fishes
And barefoot through the desert drear [play,
 they take their melancholy way,
Where nothing lovely lives, but trails
 of heat-racked sun-blind serpents
And scorched whin-bushes sprawl. [crawl

And now he flutters at their feet

his black breast cloaked in the glit-
Of the golden oriole. [tering stole

As Sita, who is compared to a peacock,¹ begged Rama to catch the fawn, so Damayanti begs Nala to catch for her the golden bird.

A paradise-bird in glory greeting

the flame-shot hyacinth-clouds of
Stood Sîta once her lord entreating [dawn

to seize for her the dappled fawn;

So Damayanti now her lord

Bids snare the golden bird. with pretty parrot-prattling word

But ever as his fingers reach

to grasp the pretty golden thing,

Escaping from beneath his hand

it trails one bright elusive wing,

As feigning faint it falters, flutters,

flutters, flatters his conceit

To find an easy feat.

(80)

Nala strips off his own robe to snare the bird,

'Now by the lovelight of those eyes

For thee, if on this weary road
this golden guerdon will I snare

henceforth we twain one vesture

Cried Nala, as from his shoulders broad [share',

he straight in love's impatience tore

The gold-webb'd vest he wore.

So softly stalked the golden prey

that lord of the sacred sea-girt land—

Where 'neath the sprouting coral's shade

wave-washed upon the soft sea sand

White mother-molluscs spawn their pearls—

and deftly o'er the prize at last

The golden mantle cast.

¹ The translator has ventured to substitute 'bird of paradise' for 'peacock', as in English to call a woman a peacock suggests not beauty but vanity.

but Kali flies away with it on his back.

Then, snare and all, that crafty bird
 on gilded pinions soaring sped,
 Gazed on the thwarted lovers' grief
 and hovered mocking overhead:
 'O King! Who filched thy throne away?
 Who gives thy raiment wings to fly?
 None else but Kali I!

Cursing Kali in vain they pass on their way.

They stand, the blue-eyed bulbul-maid,
 and her bull-throated consort there
 Framed in the forest-flowers' fresh glory
 dismayed their sport so ill should fare;
 That lightly-rendered raiment now
 doth in their jealous eyes appear
 Than very life more dear.

'There is a hell for such as thou,'
 cried Damayanti in disdain,
 'For all by godless word and vain
 have murdered truth and virtue slain,
 For all who basely get them gain,
 and all who shameless seek their door
 To batten on their store.'
(85)

Then to her lord she sadly said:
 'When God Himself works vanity
 In vengeance to afflict mankind
 with undeserved adversity,
 Ah! what avails th' unsullied name,
 the sceptred ruth, the guiltless
 Come, love! let us journey on.'
[throne?]
 So through that wide wild waste they fare,
 while Father Sûrya¹ stoops to gaze
 And turns appalled from the fierce fire
 of his reverberating rays
 To plunge beneath the western wave
 his golden wain in headlong flight
 And veil the world in night.

¹ The sun-god.

His wide wain cleaves the vasty wave;
 and soon the Lord of forest lawns,
Where everywhere the cloven leaves
 of deer's-foot mock the grazing fawns,
King Nala, and his fair lady leal,
 are swallowed in a dark so deep
That ev'n the devils sleep.

Into the stagnant sultry night
 he stumbles on his weary way,
Refuge of all for refuge groping;
 till he who was but yesterday
To all the world a stronghold sure
 is glad to make his citadel
A hermit's ruined cell.

and compose themselves to rest on the hard earth, wrapped in the one robe they now possess.

'Seest thou, fair lady mine!' he sighs,
 'how twilight swiftly yields to dark?
Didst thou through this ungracious wild
 ought other place of shelter mark?
In this deserted sanctuary
 come let us make our stoney bed
And rest thy tousled head.'

(90)

'Alack!' sighed she, 'for thy blest head
imperial here is no reprieve;
Ears that were ne'er to slumber lulled
but by the lute's soft sound, this eve
No gentle note shall soothe; no note
but the mosquito's shrill, sharp stab
Shall pierce this night's black scab.'

'Steep not,' said he, 'with fretful tears
the jewel in tressèd cloud that lies!
Weep not,' said he, 'nor weary out
that pretty pair of carp-fish eyes!

Shall she', he cried, 'benighted thus
 upon the rude earth make her bed
 And not a tear be shed?'

The Separation

Kali induces Nala to abandon Damayanti.

But even as his fingers touched
 the withered roses in her hair,
 An evil thought, a fell design,
 a devil's counsel of despair
 Did Kali's cursèd craft contrive,
 those ne'er inconstant eyes to blind
 And warp that noble mind.

As when the coiling serpent turns
 to one black coal the sun's red fire,
 Black clouds of folly round his heart
 t' eclipse that pure serene conspire.
 A traitor to his martial name
 will he desert his winsome mate
 And leave her to her fate?

But now to his delirious eyes
 repugnant is her piteous plight,
 And madness goads him, demon-driven
 to plan a swift and silent flight,
 And for his own habiliment
 that one, that only robe divide
 That wrapped them side by side. (100)

Finding a knife at his side,

And Kali, lest he lack the means
 to perfect the inspired design,
 Forsaking, faithless knight, the maid
 whose speech was melody divine,
 In steely sheath his loathsome form
 at Nala's waist discreetly laid
 A sharp and shining blade.

The hands that wreathed his neck with flowers,
 the breasts that craved his soft caress,
 Recall him not; nor, wrapped in sleep,
 her all-unconscious helplessness,
 Half-naked now and all forlorn,
 of a true wife's true stay deceived,
 And as of life bereaved.

But he on bleeding feet apace
 flees down the forest and the night,
As, blinded by that godlike grace—
 those shoulders huge like Meru's
Those spreading arms like Taru's boughs— [height,
 the fiercest foemen ever flee
From Chandiran-swargi!

Damayanti's Wanderings

Damayanti awakes,

But Damayanti like a dawn-
 dew-pearl'd ripe-budded willow-
 Half-waking opes a tear-dew'd eye, [wand,
 and, stretching out a dainty hand,
 If twining love-lock'd fingers may
 his presence and his comfort prove,
 Whispers, 'Where art thou, love!'

and looks in vain for her lord.

The mists of sleep begin to clear,
and as she rubs her doubting eyes,
Sees the half of her raiment gone
and of her lord no sign, surmise
Sickens her heart: 'O Naishada!
O Naishada!' with streaming cheeks
Once and again she shrieks.

Far from that plenteous land of peace
 where on the sweet cane graze the
Groping she crawls athwart the dark, [kine,
 great Vima's daughter, maid divine,

His savage countenance adorned,
and in his piercèd ear-lobes shone
Pendants of sun-bleach'd bone.

He saw the vultures overhead,
 he heard the piercing shrieks of
He marked the radiance of those eyes [doom,
 like jewels shining though the gloom.
'O stranger! pity me,' cried she,
 'succour me while I yet have breath,
And save me from this death.' (125)

Her prayer is heard, her peril stayed;
by bowman's skill and bravery
Drawn from the dreadful dragon's throat
is Damayanti soon set free,
As—through Kubêra's¹ favour—we
are rescued from adversity
By Chandiran-swargi!

'O stranger, who hast succoured me,'
she cried, 'in mine extremity!
A life snatched from the dragon's jaw
great Vima's daughter owes to thee.
What recompense could e'er suffice,
what guerdon meet in mortal sight,
Such service to requite?'

Her beauty tempts the hunter to evil thoughts.

The beauty of that moon-bow brow
 alas! did in his bosom start
 Such evil thoughts as agitate
 a huntsman's base and brutish heart;
 Nearer he moved and in her ear
 murmured with ogling flattery,
 'Come pretty! come with me.'

¹ The god of wealth.

takes pity on her,

‘Oh, tell what is thy blest abode,
thy house, thy lineage and thy name,
And who doth of the lords of earth
for wife this wealth of beauty claim?’
The courteous prince of merchants cried:
‘Come, freely tell of thy distress,
O maid of the sable tress!’

'I had a palace and a crown,
 and jewels bright and raiment fair,
I had a husband, but', she sighed,
 'he left me in this forest drear.
A queen I was, and now am none;
 here in the wild-wood all alone
I weep for sins unknown.'

and escorts her to Chédi.

Cheerly he charged her mount the wain,
and when in Chêdi's royal town
Revived, refreshed, but sad at heart
with kindly care he set her down,
That honest merchant went his way
to glorify his sovereign's name
And spread his country's fame. (135)

The Queen of Chédi, hearing of a strange maiden wandering disconsolate in the streets, sends for her,

Full soon the palace maidens there
came thronging round the golden
'A damsel in the street we saw, [throne:
O Queen! who wandered sad and
A prince's daughter she did seem [lone;
and never garment had she on
But half a silken gown.'

‘This lame-wing’d lovebird,’ spake the lips
like bryony-berries all aglow,
‘This poor bedraggled goldfinch, who
and what she is I fain would know.

Run thou to her, O jewelled one!
 let her not pass our palace gate,
 But bring her to me straight.'

and gives her sanctuary in the palace.

They led her softly by the hand,
and where she stood, she drooped,
Clasping the lily feet so fair: [she lay
'O lady blissful, blest and gay!
Have pity on my lot, ah me!
due recompense, I ween, at last
For sins of ages past.'

Then spake the queen, her fragrant locks
with starry flowers enamelled o'er,
(Oft wond'ring if 'twere Lakshmi's self
whose soft hands those green bangles
'Come, fair one! to my yearning breast [wore]
confiding all thy misery
Unfold this mystery.'

Damayanti tells her story, but does not reveal her name.

'In forest wild I lost my lord;
in vain I called his royal name;
Wildly I ran—I know no more—
save that I to this city came.
My lips are parched with long travail,
my tongue the tripping phrases fail
To tell o'er all my tale.'

(140)

‘Come, child ! and rest thy tousled head;
 in peace revive thy jaded charms;
 For we will seek and find thy lord
 and soon restore thee to his arms;
 Till then about our throne abide,
 and in our palace roam at large’—
 Such was her gracious charge.

*Viman's Quest**Vima sends a Brahman to search for his daughter and son-in-law.*

The while sat Viman grieving sore:
 like quaking hills his shoulders
 A holy Brahman to his side [heaved;
 he called and spake: 'I am bereaved
 Of son and daughter. Through the world
 go, seek them! Speed thine embas-
 Such is my urgent charge.' [sage!

The Brahman comes at length to Chêdi and

From clime to balmy clime, where'er
 the sun his coursing chariot guides,
 From realm to realm, from court to court,
 that best of couriers coursing rides,
 Till Chêdi's blessed land appears,
 where courted of her lotus-trains
 The blessed Lakshmi reigns.

*Damayanti Discovered**recognizes Damayanti.*

Her eyes were sad, her flowing locks
 in flower-sprent confusion wild;
 Hiding amid the maiden throng
 he knew her for king Vima's child;
 Then bending over her he wept,
 and she wept bending o'er his feet—
 So tears with tears did greet.

The King and Queen of Chêdi embrace Damayanti with renewed affection, knowing her now as their kinswoman.

And as they watch the tear-drops stream
 o'er Brahman feet and maiden frame,
 And knew that she who in their midst
 nameless so long concealed her shame
 Is cousin of their own true kin,
 like soul and body loath to part
 They clasp her to their heart. (145)

The Brahman—

‘Oh, knew you not your cousin’s face
 in woe and weariness forspent?
 Oh, knewst thou not thy sister’s child
 for that her royal robe is rent,
 For that her locks hang all unkempt,
 and senses like the linch-pin reel
 Of sorrow’s whirling wheel?’

In Chêdi land, where wallowing herds
 through floating lotus-gardens bore
 Their hornèd course, and overhead
 indignant herons circling soar,
 The queen swoons in her daughter’s¹ arms,
 her limbs forget their natural force
 In anguish of remorse.

and send her back to her father.

Then spake the king: ‘By doom of yore
 afflicted though she be, this grief
 In her belovèd children’s sight
 will find by sure degrees relief.
 Come, let us send her home, where yet
 Vidarpa opens wide its gates
 And loving welcome waits.’

*Kundinapuram*²

Damayanti returns to Kundinapuram,

Thronged were the palace and the hall,
 the walls with waving banners gay,
 And thronged were all Vidarpa’s gates
 with royal and popular array,
 To greet the maid who for her love
 bade farewell to each winsome child
 And dared the dreadful wild.

¹ ‘Daughter’ is here used for ‘niece’, a natural usage in the Tamil country, where sister’s daughters call one another ‘sister’ not ‘cousin’.

² Capital of Vidarpa, Vima’s Kingdom.

Some lifted up their hands to heaven,
 and others filled the air with sighs,
And others wept and others swooned
 and others doubted of their eyes,
As waves of surging love o'erswept
 and flowed around her where she stood
In never-failing flood.

(150)

and meets her father and mother.

Her eyes like dew-drenched lotuses
 she stood before her father's face;
With melting heart and mingled mind
 tear-blinded sank in his embrace.
And whispering through the streaming drops,
 'O father, father mine!' she said,
'What I have suffered!'

And when that royal pair survey
 their child in such unseemly guise,
With parchèd lips and palsied limbs
 they weep till to their aching eyes
The whole assembled company,
 as mirrored in a pool, appears
To swim upon their tears.

'O daughter!' cried that mother fair
 lamenting o'er the golden maid,
'When in the shuddering night thy lord
 alone in that fell ruin laid
Forsook thee, faithless ingrate! then
 what desperate thoughts assailed thee
And after what befell.' [tell



CANTO THE THIRD

SYNOPSIS

NALA, leaving Damayanti in the forest shrine, wanders on through the night. He rescues a serpent from a forest-fire, for which he is treacherously rewarded. The serpent's bite transforms him into an ugly dwarf. But the serpent assures him that it is decreed that he should live in concealment until the time of his restoration, and gives him a magic robe which will restore his proper shape at the appointed time. At the serpent's bidding Nala journeys to Oudh and takes service with King Rutuparna as cook and charioteer, under the name of Vahuvan.

Meanwhile Damayanti sends a Brahman to search the world for her husband. The Brahman recognises Nala by his answer

to a riddle without betraying his true name to Rutuparna. On hearing of his disguise Damayanti devises a stratagem. She sends the Brahman back to Oudh with an invitation to a second Swayamvaram. Rutuparna accepts the invitation and Nala accompanies him as his charioteer. On the way Rutuparna imparts to Nala the principles of mathematics in return for instruction in the art of the charioteer. Nala now possesses the knowledge and skill to beat Putkara at dice, and Kali's spell is broken.

Arriving at Kundinapuram Nala retires to the kitchens unrecognized. But Damayanti's intuition assures her that it is he. Vima commands him to resume his proper form, and Nala puts on the magic robe. Restored to his wife and children Nala is congratulated by men and gods, and even Kali is reconciled.

Nala and Damayanti return with their children to Vindapuram. Putkara accepts Nala's challenge to a second game of dice, loses all his former gains and returns home as he came. Nala re-enters his own city amid universal rejoicing.

KALI'S DEFEAT

Nala, driven on through the forest by the remorseless Kali, is attracted by the screams of a serpent in danger of perishing by a forest fire. Calling on Agni to redeem the promise made to him on their way to Damayanti's Swayamvaram, Nala rescues the serpent, and carries him away in his arms.

'A Brahman skilled in sacred lore
this heavy curse upon me laid;
Ere in this furnace I expire,
haste, by thy mercy, to my aid;

If of that royal race thou art
 whose garlands thrum with murmur-
 Oh, grant me swift release! [ing bees,

'If thou wilt quench this piercing flame,
 Prince of incomparable worth!
 And carry me a little hence
 and set me down upon the earth,
 While in this forest realm I reign
 evil shall never touch me more',
 The scorching serpent swore. (5)

Then Nala in those mighty arms
 that could in equanimity
 The weight of seven worlds sustain
 the mountains and the circling sea,
 Embraced the serpent at his word
 incautious if a foe he nursed
 Malignant and accursed.

The serpent by a trick induces Nala to utter the word 'daśa' ('bite').

To compass by his own command
 his doom that ingrate beast devised,
 'Sire! carry me no farther now!'
 it cried with fawning hiss disguised,
 'But measure first upon the ground'
 ten times the stride of martial men
 And count from one to ten!'

But when the shrewd king-serpent's words
 great-hearted Nala heeding well
 And striding with those lotus-feet
 (obedient still to Kali's spell)
 Counts 'eight—nine—ten',—'Aha!' it cries,
 'tenaciously¹ my fangs I fix;
 Thy fingers feel the pricks.'

¹ In Sanskrit the word 'daśa' means both 'ten' and 'bite', but the play on words is as meaningless in Tamil as in English.

The serpent's bite transforms Nala into a dwarf.

That glorious form, whose total grace
 e'en Damayanti's eye defies,
 Shrank with the poison's magic power
 and wasted to a dwarfish size,
 As wastes the wealth of one who grasps
 with clutching hands his golden store
 And gives not to the poor.

'O serpent! ne'er to foe did yield',
 cried Nala, 'in my days of pride
 The lance whose flashing signals bright
 brought Yema¹ striding to my side.
 For what cause hath thine unprovoked
 twi-fanged infusion venomous
 By guile unmanned me thus?' (10)

The serpent explains that Nala is fated to live in concealment until the time of his restoration, and gives him a magic robe which shall restore his proper shape at the appointed time.

'O king, for towering tuskers famed
 in battle as in lust ferocious!
 Since in concealment thou must live
 henceforth, I dared this deed atro-
 For good by evil means devised [cious;
 who bear the world will bear the
 Kârkôdakan² my name. [blame;

'O prince of that delightsome land
 where shoals of skipping crayfish shake
 The lotus-pods' green honeycombs
 and gaping frogs their sweet thirst
 Thy hands did pluck me from the flames, [slake!
 the guerdon of thy clemency
 This magic robe shall be.

¹ The god of death.

² One of the eight serpents that support the eight cardinal points of the earth.

'Lord of the streams where scaly tribes
 in beds of water-hyacinth breed
 And tender pike poke forth the tongue
 for nectar! in thy hour of need
 This noble robe about thee wrapped
 shall swiftly to his pride of yore
 Thy shrunken form restore.

He advises Nala to seek employment with the King of Oudh.

'The hand that held the sceptre, now
 must hold the reins of alien steeds.
 In far Ayôtti¹ lives a king
 will give thee hope of glorious deeds;
 His golden chariot be thy care,
 and from thy shoulders' shrivelled
 Thy name be Vâhuvan.'² [span

Nala, proceeding on his way disguised,

Grateful in this disguise to hide
 the form so famèd, so admired
 That save this stratagem could ne'er
 dwell unobservèd and retired
 Though through th' eight-serpent-pillared world
 he wander, forth without delay
 King Nalan went his way. (15)

is reminded by the sight of every creature he sees of his abandoned love.

So onward through the night he passed
 beside the never-slumbering sea,
 And 'neath the creeper-ribboned shade
 a love-lorn egret there saw he
 His coy mate softly stalking, then
 a tempest of frustrate desire
 Did set his heart on fire.

¹ Tamil for Ayôdhya = Oudh.

² Sanscrit Bâhuka = dwarf.

Oudh

Nala arriving at Oudh is laughed at for his comic appearance, but comforts himself with thoughts of his native land.

When Nala to Ayôtti came
 beside the thrice-replenished¹ sea,
 The fisher-maidens gathered round
 and shewed their pearly teeth with
 But the golden lotus-honey bursting [glee;
 and golden bees a-thirsting seem
 Of Nishada to dream.

He presents himself to the King, and seeks employment as cook and charioteer.

‘Go tell, ye guards!’ he cried, ‘whate’er
 puissant monarch here resides
 That one in horsemanship expert,
 in culinary art besides
 Supreme, seeks service at his court;
 as steward or as charioteer
 Knows Vahuvan no peer.’

The courtly messengers conveyed
 his courteous message to their lord,
 And he upon reflection due
 gave gracious credence to that word,
 ‘Go, to our presence swiftly bring
 the author of this noble boast,
 That we may be his host.’

Then Nala to the presence strode,
 and Rutuparnan smiled to greet
 That master of munificence
 whose noble heart abhorred deceit;
 ‘O master of all crafts!’ he cried,
 ‘of what dost thou most valiantly
 Profess the mastery?’ (25)

¹ Thrice-replenished, i.e., by river-, spring- and rain-water. Oudh, of course, is five hundred miles from the sea, but to the Tamil poet the sea-shore is as much a part of his local colour as it was to Shakespeare.

On Nala's conscient ear it fell,
 who hasted to the stranger's side
And boldly thus replied : (30)

Nala's reply reveals to the Priest his true identity.

‘Think not, sir priest! if one who claims
the pearl-zoned parasol of kings
That jewel of jewels cast away,
such choice of wilful malice springs;
All fates that in this life befall
are but the fruit in woe or bliss
Of other lives than this.’

The Priest's Return

The Priest returns and makes his report to Damayanti.

Full fast did Damayanti's tears
her beauteous breasts with floods
'What climes, what shores thou didst traverse, [o'erflow.
what realms thou visitedst, I would
And sawst thou there the prince who reigned [know,
of yore by sacred Ganges' side,
And what did there betide?'

‘A princely charioteer I saw;
his very speech breathed royalty.
But, when upon his form I gazed,
I knew not if in sooth ’twere he;
But that his riddling answers apt,
O lady of the braided rose!
The inward heart disclose.’

Damayanti's Stratagem

Damayanti, in order to persuade Nala to return to her, pretends to hold Swayamvaram,

'Go! bearer of the sacred thread!
 proclaim in Rutuparna's halls
That to a second choosing-day
 your Damayanti's bidding calls,

will hold, as erst she held of yore,
Swayamvaram once more.'

(35)

[she?

by Cupid's fond futility,

As when by passion's heat inflamed
 the great bull-tusker runs amok
 And heeds nor shout nor shock.

Nala begins to guess Damayanti's purpose,

'Has she no shame,' mused Nala, 'thus
 her own disgrace t' annunciate?
 Or was it so the curst entail
 of birth and rebirth t' expiate?
 Or was it, O my soft-tressed sweet!
 thy comfort that by this design
 Thy eyes might look in mine?

and agrees to accompany Rutuparna as a loyal servant should.

'To Rutuparna heart and hand
 a vassal's loyal service owe;
 Where Rutuparna's word commands
 there Vahuvan must surely go.'
 He donned a garland meet to drench
 with dew a maid's ambrosial weeds,
 And yoked his shining steeds. (40)

He donned a garland of delight
 where booming honey-beetles play;
 'My lord! a wain, will overtake
 the whirling one-wheeled car of day,
 I bring, thine expeditious need
 to compass. Leap thy chariot on,
 And speed we hence anon!'

The Ride to Vidarpa

Nala drives the chariot with such speed that Rutuparna's cloak is left behind.

Then fiercely that demented prince
 drave on the urge of destiny,
 But fiercelier drave Vahuvan
 his faultless fair to find, for he
 Now in his inmost being knew
 that soft-tressed maiden's pure intent
 And trembled as he went.

So prince and charioteer they sped
and came within the destined hours
To Vima's golden towers.

Rutuparna enters the palace expecting to see the rival suitors arrayed for the Swayamvaram, but finds himself alone in the presence of Vima,

And when within those gates at last
to rest the coursing chariot came,
That prince in presence-chamber bade
his advent and his style proclaim;
Then wreathed in mingled blossoms fair
he entered blithe and debonair
To find no rival there!

‘Lord of a land where the brinded bees
o’er the crimson lotus swarm and
There sip and rest and afterward [play,
to the blue nelumbo¹ dance away!
Come, tell me’, cried Vidarpa’s king,
‘whence hath thy heart conceived
This visit to inspire?’ [desire

and, addressing the absent Princess, declares the purpose of his visit.

But that fond prince as he advanced
did still of Damayanti dream:
‘O damosel divine,’ he sighed,
‘whose eyes flash with a dagger’s
For that my heart with longing of [gleam!
thy balmy garland was distraught,
Thee, thee alone I sought.’ (50)

Reconciliation

Nala, still in disguise, retires to the kitchen,

Meanwhile the Lord of Nishada,
(where buffalo-mouths with lilies
His matchless chariot did unyoke [bloom)
and those celestial coursers groom,

¹ The blue water-lily.

Then entered with a pensive air
 the royal kitchens to prepare
 A feast of savour rare.

where all the vessels fill automatically at his magic touch.

Minds in celestial wisdom steeped
 with virtuous thoughts inconscient
 So, when through Vima's storehouse strode [fill;
 that golden waggoner, at his will
 Without all human aid appeared
 each vessel of its own accord
 With viands richly stored.

Damayanti sends first her attendant,

'Is't he who left me', mused the maid,
 'betrayed, benighted, and forspent?
 Is't he, my noble-hearted lord?'
 she sighed. A damsel then she sent
 And sweetly bade her mark his ways,
 how he performed in every part
 The caterer's cunning art.

then her son and daughter, to meet the stranger.

In pensive mood as she surveyed
 on wasted wrists her bangles slide,
 Her son and daughter she despatched
 to their supposed father's side
 And bade them frolic thereabout,
 his high celestial arts appraise,
 And note his noble traits.

Nala converses with his own children unknown by them.

The king their father sees them come,
 his breath he heaves in fiery gasps,
 His spirit thrills with anguish sweet,
 close in his arms the pair he clasps.
 'How to my own', he cries, 'ye bear
 a likeness wonderful to see,
 Come, tell me whose ye be!'

'Though in this distant land we dwell,
 proud Naishadan's proud children
Our lady mother lives forlorn ; [we;
 another rules our fair country ;
For thus our father left us.' So
 they twain with trembling lips
And wept upon his breast. [confessed,

Then Nala with a sigh recalled
his native plains where numerous
The straight silk-cotton trees, like slaves [stand
with brassy goblets in their hand,
And at his children's piteous words
poured out in sobs his great heart's
And swooned all but to death. [breath

Then Nala to his darling son
 begot with prayer and penance dear.
'Another rules your own fair realm,
 and your royal hand lies idle here;
Beseems it as a suppliant
 in exiled comfort thus to hide?
Where is your princely pride?'

Indrasena, resenting a supposed insult to his father's honour, abuses his father face to face.

'Could heart conceive', the prince replied,
 'but thine, thou mean ignoble
This thought? Attend thy menial toil, [drudge!
 nor high-born virtue basely grudge!
My father ne'er to baseness stooped;
 my father all this loss befell
For honour, mark it well!

'My father's feet were nobly scarred,
 scarred with the crowns he trampled on,
Scarred with the crowns of vassal'd heads
 that rode on elephants every one,
And brought him tribute and renown
 from every corner of this curl'd-
Clew'd-serpent pillared world.'

(60)

Vima too is convinced that Vahuva is Nala in disguise.

In sweet new-budding garlands dight
 great Vima to the hearth-hall came
 With all his princely train attended,
 his darling's darling to reclaim.
 He found the lord of the Nishada land
 that lies beside the shell-strewn sea,
 And knew not if 'twere he. (65)

Then Vima spake with Vahuva,
discerned in manner, mind and word
A grace that with his stature dwarf
and shape deformed did ill accord,
And every way discerning knew
there dwelt in him a faculty
Of rarest quality.

and commands him to resume his true nature.

'In Nishada land the blue baboon
 observes the areca's virid spathe,
And flees in terror lest that form
 a dreaded cobra's hood doth swathe;
So Naishada in loathed guise',
 cried Vima, 'doth his shape conceal.
Come! thy true form reveal!'

Nala puts on the magic robes.

Then Nala took the magic garb
that once the serpent-monarch gave,
When through the forest stark his steps
curst Kali from his kingdom drave;
One robe about his loins he girt,
and one about his shoulders slung
And massy torse he flung.

and in an instant is transformed to his former shape.

The suppliant at Vishnu's feet
 departs from blackest sin set free;
 So in that flash of time departs
 that doughty charioteer, and he

and even Kali adds his blessing.

Then Kali too with reverence low :
 'Where doth in all the world abide
 A prince so virtuous or a spouse
 so chaste as Nala and his bride?
 A boon I grant you—fear no more
 from envious Kali ache or ill—
 Ask of me what ye will.'

'O Kali!' cried that glorious prince,
 'for this one boon my spirit yearns—
 When through the circling spheres of time
 thine own appointed age¹ returns,
 Touch not with thine effulgent sword
 the souls that shall in graceful verse
 My thralling tale rehearse!' (75)

'When with the circling years return
 the centuries of Kali's reign,
 The eager hearers of your tale
 no act of mine shall e'er restrain'—
 So mighty Kali spake and swore
 that promise never to betray,
 And softly went his way.

Nala and Damayanti are feasted in the palace.

Through golden glades where pollen-tufts
 are drowned in pools of honey-dew
 Beauty and virtue hand in hand
 went Nala and his consort true,
 Where Vima led them with their babes,
 and feasted them right royally
 With rout and revelry.

¹ Kaliyugam, one of the four epochs of time, is the Evil Age, the last of the four ages of the world; it is reckoned as beginning about 300 B.C., and its length is 432,000 years, after which the Golden Age will return.

Rutuparna's Departure

Rutuparna returns to Oudh.

‘Lord of the golden garlands gay!
I knew thee not in stranger’s guise;
A master’s idle words forgive!’
Thus did Ayotti’s lord arise
Wounded in heart but not in pride,
mounted his empty car, and rode
To his lake-lined abode.

The Restoration

Nala and Damavanti once more set out for Vindapuram.

Before them moved the bowmen brave,
 behind the lancers' noble band,
As forth with his sweet spouse he drove,
 the lord of that abounding land
Where streams of honey overspilling
 to feed the paddy's red-gold glow
From full-blown blossoms flow.

‘O thou whose spear is strong to slay
a human or a demon foe!
How far our journey?’ cried the queen;
quoth Nala, ‘List! my gentle doe!
This mountain passed and seven beyond
shall Vinda-nagar’s pile arise
To greet our longing eyes.’

Unresting onward through the night
 they drove, and with the day's first
They passed the bound of that blest land [beams
 of fertile fields and leaping streams,
As o'er the eastern hill in haste
 the sun his glowing coursers plied
To view what should betide.

A golden ring, the gift of him¹
 who slept upon the darkling sea,
 His golden gage to be.

In one game Putkara loses all he gained before,

One game sufficed; and with delight
 the whole august assembly roared
 To see the victor vanquished—all
 long-festered wrongs to right restored,
 Wealth incomputable, cohorts
 unnumbered, cities wide-demesned
 In one brief hour regained.

and departs to his own place.

For Putkaran there staked and lost
 that land of surging source and spring
 To him whom Tamil poets true
 in sparkling numbers love to sing;
 Then all his state and sovereignty
 resigning to the victor's claim
 Departed as he came.

Nala enters his own city once again, and is rapturously entertained by his adoring subjects.

Then Nala clomb the golden wain
 and charioted down the golden ways,
 While armed troops about him thronged
 and crownèd warriors sang his praise,
 As when great Indra with the gods
 returns in radiant majesty
 To Amarâvati.²

As blue clouds to the thirsty swan,
 loved eyes to longing lover's eye,
 As water to the thirsty pool—
 the answer to a people's sigh
 King Nala to his city came;
 the rapture of that city fair
 To what shall I compare?

(90)

¹ Vishnu.

² The celestial city of Indra.



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