

The History of Nala and Damayanti From the Mahabharata, Vanaparva

The following is the history of Nala and Damayanti from the Mahabharata. The story begins in chapter 52. To get the complete Mahabharata go to www.ShyamasundaraDasa.com download section.

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Vaisampayana continued, "Thus addressed by Bhima, king Yudhishtira the just, smelt the crown of that son of Pandu, and pacifying him said, 'O mighty-armed one, without doubt, thou wilt, assisted by the wielder of the Gandiva, slay Suyodhana at the expiry of the thirteenth year. But, O son of Pritha, as for thy assertion, 'O Lord, the time is complete', I cannot dare tell an untruth, for untruth is not in me. O son of Kunti, without the help of fraud, wilt thou kill the wicked and irrepressible Duryodhana, with his allies.'

"While Yudhishtira the just, was speaking unto Bhima thus, there came the great and illustrious Rishi Vrihadaswa before them. And beholding that virtuous ascetic before him, the righteous king worshipped him according to the ordinance, with the offering of Madhuparka. And when the ascetic was seated and refreshed, the mighty-armed Yudhishtira sat by him, and looking up at the former, addressed him thus in exceedingly piteous accents:

'O holy one, summoned by cunning gamblers skilled at dice, I have been deprived of wealth and kingdom through gambling. I am not an adept at dice, and am unacquainted with deceit. Sinful men, by unfair means, vanquished me at play. They even brought into the public assembly my wife dearer unto me than life itself. And defeating me a second time, they have sent me to distressful exile in this great forest, clad in deer skins. At present I am leading a distressful life in the woods in grief of heart. Those harsh and cruel speeches they addressed me on the occasion of that gambling match, and the words of my afflicted friends relating to the match at dice and other subjects, are all stored up in my remembrance. Recollecting them I pass the whole night in (sleepless) anxiety. Deprived also (of the company) of the illustrious wielder of the Gandiva, on whom depend the lives of us all, I am almost deprived of life. Oh, when shall I see the sweet-speeched and large-hearted Vibhatsu so full of kindness and activity, return to us, having obtained all weapons? Is there a king on this earth who is more unfortunate than myself? Hast thou ever seen or heard of any such before? To my thinking, there is no man more wretched than I am.'

"Vrihadaswa said, 'O great king, O son of Pandu, thou sayest, 'There is

no person more miserable than I am' O sinless monarch, if thou wilt listen, I will relate unto thee the history of a king more wretched than thyself?

Vaisampayana continued, "And thereupon the king said unto the ascetic, 'O illustrious one, tell me, I desire to hear the history of the king who had fallen into such a condition.'

"Vrihadaswa said, 'O king, O thou that never fallest off, listen attentively with thy brothers, I will narrate the history of a prince more miserable than thyself. There was a celebrated king among the Nishadhas, named Virasena. He had a son named Nala, versed in (the knowledge of) virtue and wealth. It hath been heard by us that, that king was deceitfully defeated by Pushkara, and afflicted with calamity, he dwelt in the woods with his spouse. And, O king, while he was living in the forest, he had neither slaves nor cars, neither brother nor friends with him. But thou art surrounded by thy heroic brothers like unto the celestials, and also by foremost regenerate ones like unto Brahma himself. Therefore, it behoveth thee not to grieve.'

"Yudhishthira said, 'I am anxious to hear in detail, O thou foremost of eloquent men, the history of the illustrious Nala. It behoveth thee therefore to relate it unto me.'

Chapter 53

Vrihadaswa said, "There was a king named Nala, the son of Virasena. And he was strong, and handsome, and well-versed in (the knowledge of) horses, and possessed of every desirable accomplishment. And he was at the head of all the kings, even like the lord of the celestials. And exalted over all, he resembled the sun in glory. And he was the king of the Nishadhas, intent on the welfare of the Brahmanas, versed in the Vedas, and possessed of heroism. And he was truth-telling, fond of dice, and the master of a mighty army. And he was the beloved of men and women, and of great soul and subdued passions. And he was the protector (of all), and the foremost of bowmen, and like unto Manu himself. And like him, there was among the Vidarbhas (a king named) Bhima, of terrible prowess, heroic and well-disposed towards his subjects and possessed of every virtue. (But withal) he was childless. And with a fixed mind, he tried his utmost for obtaining issue. And, O Bharata there came unto him (once) a Brahmarshi named Damana. And, O king of kings, desirous of having offspring, Bhima, versed in morality, with his queen gratified that illustrious Rishi by a respectful reception. And Damana, well-pleased, granted unto the king and his consort a boon in the form of a jewel of a daughter, and three sons possessed of lofty souls and great

fame. (And they were called respectively) Damayanti, and Dama and Danta, and illustrious Damana. And the three sons were possessed of every accomplishment and terrible mien and fierce prowess. And the slender-waisted Damayanti, in beauty and brightness, in good name and grace and luck, became celebrated all over the world. And on her attaining to age, hundreds of hand-maids, and female slaves, decked in ornaments, waited upon her like Sachi herself. And Bhima's daughter of faultless features, decked in every ornament, shone in the midst of her hand-maids, like the luminous lightning of the clouds. And the large-eyed damsel was possessed of great beauty like that of Sree herself. And neither among celestials, nor among Yakshas, nor among men was anybody possessed of such beauty, seen or heard of before. And the beautiful maiden filled with gladness the hearts of even the gods. And that tiger among men, Nala also had not his peer in the (three) worlds: for in beauty he was like Kandarpa himself in his embodied form. And moved by admiration, the heralds again and again celebrated the praises of Nala before Damayanti and those of Damayanti before the ruler of the Nishadhas. And repeatedly hearing of each other's virtues they conceived an attachment towards each other not begot of sight, and that attachment, O son of Kunti began to grow in strength. And then Nala was unable to control the love that was in his bosom. And he began to pass much of his time in solitude in the gardens adjoining the inner apartment (of his palace). And there he saw a number of swans furnished with golden wings, wandering in those woods. And from among them he caught one with his hands. And thereupon the sky-ranging one said unto Nala. 'Deserve I not to be slain by thee. O king. I will do something that is agreeable to thee. O king of the Nishadhas. I will speak of thee before Damayanti in such a way that she will not ever desire to have any other person (for her lord).' Thus addressed, the king liberated that swan. And those swans then rose on their wings and went to the country of the Vidarbhas. And on arriving at the city of the Vidarbhas the birds alighted before Damayanti, who beheld them all. And Damayanti in the midst of her maids, beholding those birds of extraordinary appearance was filled with delight, and strove without loss of time to catch those coursers of the skies. And the swans at this, before that bevy of beauties, fled in all directions. And those maidens there pursued the birds, each (running) after one. And the swan after which Damayanti ran, having led her to a secluded spot, addressed her in human speech, saying, O Damayanti, there is a king amongst the Nishadhas named Nala. He is equal unto the Aswins in beauty, not having his peer among men. Indeed, in comeliness, he is like Kandarpa himself in his embodied form. O fair-complexioned one, O thou of slender waist, if thou become his wife, thy existence and this thy beauty may be of purpose. We have, indeed, beheld celestials and Gandharvas, and Nagas, and Rakshasas, and men, but never saw we before any one like Nala. Thou also art a jewel among thy sex, as Nala is the prime among men. The union of the best with the best is happy.' Thus addressed by the swan. Damayanti, O monarch, replied unto him there,

saying, 'Do thou speak thus unto Nala also, 'Saying So be it, to the daughter of Vidarbha, the oviparous one, O king, returned to the country of the Nishadhas, and related everything unto Nala.'

Chapter 54

"Vrihadaswa said, 'O Bharata, hearing those words of the swan, Damayanti thenceforth lost all peace of mind on account of Nala. And heaving frequent sighs she was filled with anxiety, and became melancholy and pale-faced and lean. And with her heart possessed by the god of love, she soon lost colour, and with her upturned gaze and modes of abstraction, looked like one demented. And she lost all inclination for beds and seats and object of enjoyment. And she ceased to lie down by day or night, always weeping with exclamation of Oh! and Alas! And beholding her uneasy and fallen into that condition, her hand-maids represented, O king, the matter of her illness unto the ruler of Vidarbha by indirect hints. And king Bhima, hearing of this from the handmaids of Damayanti, regarded the affair of his daughter to be serious. And he asked himself, 'Why is it that my daughter seemeth to be so ill now?' And the king, reflecting by himself that his daughter had attained to puberty, concluded that Damayanti's Swayamvara should take place. And the monarch, O exalted one, (invited) all the rulers of the earth, saying, Ye heroes, know that Damayanti's Swayamvara is at hand, And all the kings, hearing of Damayanti's Swayamvara, came unto Bhima, agreeable to his message, filling the earth with the clatter of their cars, the roar of their elephants, and the neighing of their horses, and accompanied with their fine-looking battalions decked in ornaments and graceful garlands. And the mighty-armed Bhima paid due reverence unto those illustrious monarchs. And duly honoured by him they took up their quarters there.'

"And at the juncture, those foremost of celestial Rishis possessed of great splendour, of great wisdom and great vows--namely, Narada and Parvata--having arrived in course of their wandering at the regions of Indra entered the mansion of the lord of the immortals, receiving proper worship. And Maghavat having worshipped them reverentially, inquired after their undisturbed peace and welfare as regards all respects. And Narada said, 'O lord, O divine one, peace attendeth us in every respect. And, O Maghavat, peace attendeth also O exalted one, the kings of the whole world.'

"Vrihadaswa continued. 'Hearing the words of Narada the slaver of Vala and Vritra said, 'Those righteous rulers of the earth who fight renouncing all desire of life, and who meet death when their time is come by means of weapons, without flying from the field,--theirs is this region, everlasting unto them and granting all desires, even as it is to

me. Where be those Kshatriya heroes? I do not see those kings approach (now) Where are my favourite guests?' Thus addressed by Sakra, Narada replied, 'Listen, O Mahavat, why seest not thou the kings (now)? The ruler of the Vidarbhas hath a daughter--the celebrated Damayanti. In beauty she transcendeth all the women of the earth. Her Swayamvara, O Sakra, will take place shortly. Thither are going all the kings and Princes from all directions. And all the lords of the earth desire to have that pearl of the earth,--desire to have her eagerly, O slaver of Vala and Vritra.' And while they were talking thus, those foremost of the immortals, the Lokapalas with Agni among them, appeared before the lord of the celestials. And all of them heard the words of Narada fraught with grave import. And as soon as they heard them, they exclaimed in rapture, We also will go there. And, O mighty monarch, accompanied by their attendants and mounted on their (respective) vehicles, they set out for the country of Vidarbhas, whither (had gone) all the kings. And, O son of Kunti, the high-souled king Nala also hearing of that concourse of kings, set out with a cheerful heart, full of Damayanti's love. And (it came to pass) that the gods saw Nala on the way treading on the earth. And his form owing to its beauty was like that of the god of love himself. And beholding him resplendent as the sun, the Lokapalas were filled with astonishment at his wealth of beauty, and abandoned their intention. And, O king, leaving their cars in the sky the dwellers of heaven alighted from the welkin and spake unto the ruler of the Nishadhas, saying, 'O foremost of monarchs ruling the Nishadhas, O Nala, thou art devoted to truth. Do thou help us. O best of men, be thou our messenger.'"

Chapter 55

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'O Bharata, Nala pledged his word to the celestials saying, 'I will do it.' And then approaching these, he asked with folded hands. 'Who are ye? And who also is he that desireth me to be his messenger? And what, further, shall I have to do for you? O tell me truly!'--When the king of the Nishadhas spoke thus, Maghavat replied, saying, 'Know us as the immortals come hither for Damayanti's sake. I am Indra, this one is Agni, this the lord of waters, and this, O king, is even Yama the destroyer of the bodies of men. Do thou inform Damayanti of our arrival, saying, 'The guardians of the world, (consisting of) the great Indra and the others, are coming to the assembly, desirous of beholding (the Swayamvara). The gods, Sakra and Agni and Varuna and Yama, desire to obtain thee. Do thou, therefore, choose one of them for thy lord.' Thus addressed by Sakra, Nala said with joined hands, 'I have come here with the self same object. It behoveth thee not to send me (on this errand). How can a person who is himself under the influence of love bring himself to speak thus unto a lady on behalf of others? Therefore, spare me, ye gods' The gods, however, said, 'O ruler of the Nishadhas,

having promised first, saying, 'I will! why wilt thou not act accordingly now? O ruler of the Nishadhas, tell us this without delay.'

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'Thus addressed by those celestials, the ruler of Nishadhas spake again, saying, 'Those mansions are well-guarded. How can I hope to enter them?' Indra replied, 'Thou shalt be able to enter.' And, saying, So be it.' Nala thereupon went to the palace of Damayanti. And having arrived there, he beheld the daughter of the king of Vidarbha surrounded by her hand-maids, blazing in beauty and excelling in symmetry of form, of limbs exceedingly delicate, of slender waist and fair eyes. And she seemed to rebuke the light of the moon by her own splendour. And as he gazed on that lady of sweet smiles. Nala's love increased, but desirous of keeping his truth, he suppressed his passion. And at the sight of Naishadha, overpowered by his effulgence, those first of women sprang up from their seats in amazement. And filled with wonder (at his sight), they praised Nala in gladness of heart. And without saying anything, they mentally paid him homage, 'Oh, what comeliness! Oh, what gentleness belongeth to this high-souled one! Who is he? Is he some god or Yaksha or Gandharva?' And those foremost of women, confounded by Nala's splendour and bashfulness would not accost him at all in speech. And Damayanti although herself struck with amazement, smilingly addressed the warlike Nala who also gently smiled at her, saying, 'What art thou, O thou of faultless features, that hast come here awakening my love? O sinless one, O hero of celestial form, I am anxious to know who thou art that hast come hither. And why hast thou come hither? And how is it that thou hast not been discovered by any one, considering that my apartments are well-guarded and the king's mandates are stern.' Thus addressed by the daughter of the king of the Vidarbhas, Nala replied, 'O beauteous lady, know that my name is Nala. I come here as the messenger of the gods. The celestials, Sakra, Agni, Varuna and Yama, desire to have thee. O beautiful lady, do thou choose one of them for thy lord. It is through their power that I have entered here unperceived, and it is for this reason that none saw me on my way or obstructed my entrance. O gentle one, I have been sent by the foremost of the celestials even for this object. Hearing this, O fortunate one, do what thou pleasest.'"

Chapter 56

"Vrihadaswa said, 'Damayanti, having bowed down unto the gods, thus addressed Nala with a smile, 'O king, love me with proper regard, and command me what I shall do for thee. Myself and what else of wealth is mine are thine. Grant me, O exalted one, thy love in full trust. O king, the language of the swans is burning me. It is for thy sake, O hero, that I have caused the kings to meet. O giver of proper honour, if thou forsake me who adore thee, for thy sake will I resort to poison, or fire,

or water or the rope.' Thus addressed by the daughter of the king of the Vidarbhas, Nala answered her saying, 'With the Lokapalas present, chooseth thou a man? Do thou turn thy heart to those high-souled lords, the creators of the worlds, unto the dust of whose feet I am not equal. Displeasing the gods, a mortal cometh by death. Save me, O thou of faultless limbs! Choose thou the all-excelling celestials. By accepting the gods, do thou enjoy spotless robes, and celestial garlands of variegated hues, and excellent ornaments. What woman would not choose as her lord Hutasana--the chief of the celestials, who compassing the earth swalloweth it? What woman would not choose him as her lord the dread of whose mace induceth all creatures to tread the path of virtue? And what woman would not choose as her lord the virtuous and high-souled Mahendra, the lord of the celestials, the chastiser of Daityas and Danavas? Or, if thou couldst choose in thy heart Varuna amongst the Lokapalas, do so unhesitatingly. O accept this friendly advice.' Thus addressed by Naishadha, Damayanti, with eyes bathed in tears of grief spake thus unto Nala, 'O lord of the earth, bowing to all the gods, I choose thee for my lord. Truly do I tell thee this.' The king, who had come as the messenger of the gods, replied unto the trembling Damayanti standing with folded hands, 'O amiable one, do as thou pleasest. Having given my pledge, O blessed one, unto the gods in especial, how can I, having come on other's mission, dare seek my own interest? If seeking my own interest consists with virtue, I will seek it, and do thou also, O beauteous one, act accordingly.' Then Damayanti of luminous smiles slowly spake unto king Nala, in words choked with tears, 'O lord of men I see a blameless way, by which no sin whatever will attach unto thee. O king, do thou, O foremost of men, come to the Swayamvara in company with all the gods headed by Indra. There, O Monarch, in the presence of the Lokapalas I will, O tiger among men, choose thee--at which no blame will be thine.' Thus addressed, O monarch, by the daughter of Vidarbha, king Nala returned to where the gods were staying together. And beholding him approach those great gods, the Lokapalas, eagerly asked him about all that had happened saying, 'Hast thou, O king, seen Damayanti of sweet smiles? What hath she said unto us all? O sinless monarch, tell us everything.' Nala answered, 'Commanded by you I entered Damayanti's palace furnished with lofty portals guarded by veteran warders bearing wands. And as I entered, no one perceived me, by virtue of your power, except the princess. And I saw her hand-maids, and they also saw me. And, O exalted celestials, seeing me, they were filled with wonder. And as I spake unto her of you, the fair-faced maiden, her will fixed on me, O ye best of the gods, chose me (for her spouse).' And the maiden said, 'Let the gods, O tiger among men, come with thee to the Swayamvara, I will in their presence, choose thee. At this, O thou of mighty arms, no blame will attach to thee.' 'This is all, ye gods, that took place, as I have said. Finally, everything rests with you, ye foremost of celestials.'"

Chapter 57

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'Then at the sacred hour of the holy lunar day of the auspicious season, king Bhima summoned the kings to the Swayamvara. And hearing of it, all the lords of earth smit with love speedily came thither, desirous of (possessing) Damayanti. And the monarchs entered the amphitheatre decorated with golden pillars and a lofty portal arch, like mighty lions entering the mountain wilds. And those lords of earth decked with fragrant garlands and polished ear-rings hung with jewels seated themselves on their several seats. And that sacred assembly of Kings, graced by those tigers among men, resembled the Bhogavati swarming with the Nagas, or a mountain cavern with tigers. And their arms were robust, and resembling iron maces, and well-shaped, and graceful, and looking like five-headed snakes. And graced with beautiful locks and fine noses and eyes and brows, the countenance of the kings shone like stars in the firmament. And (when the time came), Damayanti of beauteous face, stealing the eyes and hearts of the princes by her dazzling light, entered the hall. And the glances of those illustrious kings were rivetted to those parts of her person where they had chanced to fall first, without moving at all. And when, O Bharata, the names of the monarchs were proclaimed, the daughter of Bhima saw five persons all alike in appearance. And beholding them seated there, without difference of any kind in form, doubt filled her mind, and she could not ascertain which of them was king Nala. And at whomsoever (among them) she looked, she regarded him to be the king of the Nishadhas. And filled with anxiety, the beauteous one thought within herself, 'Oh, how shall I distinguish the celestials, and how discern the royal Nala?' And thinking thus, the daughter of Vidarbha became filled with grief. And, O Bharata, recollecting the marks belonging to the celestials, of which she had heard, she thought, 'Those attributes of the celestials, of which I have heard from the aged, do not pertain to any of these deities present here upon the earth.' And revolving the matter long in her mind, and reflecting upon it repeatedly, she decided upon seeking the protection of the gods themselves. And bowing down unto them with mind and speech, with folded hands, she addressed them trembling, 'Since I heard the speech of the swans, I chose the king of the Nishadhas as my lord. For the sake of truth, O, let the gods reveal him to me. And as in thought or word I have never swerved from him, O, let the gods, for the sake of that truth, reveal him to me. And as the gods themselves have destined the ruler of the Nishadhas to be my lord, O, let them, for the sake of that truth, reveal him to me. And as it is for paying homage unto Nala that I have adopted this vow, for the sake of that truth, O, let the gods reveal him unto me, O, let the exalted guardians of the worlds assume their own proper forms, so that I may know the righteous king.' Hearing these piteous words of Damayanti, and ascertaining her fixed resolve, and fervent love for the king of Nishadhas, the purity of her heart and her

inclination and regard and affection for Nala, the gods did as they had been adjured, and assumed their respective attributes as best they could. And thereupon she beheld the celestials unmoistened with perspiration, with winkless eyes, and unfading garlands, unstained with dust, and staying without touching the ground. And Naishadha stood revealed to his shadow, his fading garlands, himself stained with dust and sweat, resting on the ground with winking eyes. And, O Bharata, discerning the gods and the virtuous Nala the daughter of Bhima chose Naishadha according to her truth. And the large-eyed damsel then bashfully caught the hem of his garment and placed round his neck a floral wreath of exceeding grace. And when that fair-complexioned maiden had thus chosen Nala for her husband, the kings suddenly broke out into exclamations of Oh! and Alas! And, O Bharata, the gods and the great Rishis in wonder cried Excellent! Excellent!, applauding the king the while. And, O Kauravya, the royal son of Virasena, with heart filled with gladness, comforted the beauteous Damayanti, saying, 'Since thou, O blessed one, hast chosen a mortal in the presence of the celestials, know me for a husband ever obedient to thy command. And, O thou of sweet smiles, truly do I tell thee this that as long as life continueth in this body of mine, I will remain thine and thine alone. Damayanti also, with folded hands paid homage unto Nala in words of like import. And the happy pair beholding Agni and the other gods mentally sought their protection. And after the daughter of Bhima had chosen Naishadha as her husband, the Lokapalas of exceeding effulgence with pleased hearts, bestowed on Nala eight boons. And Sakra, the lord of Sachi, bestowed on Nala the boon that he should be able to behold his godship in sacrifices and that he should attain to blessed regions thereafter, and Hutasana bestowed on him the boon of his own presence whenever Naishadha wished, and regions also bright as himself. And Yama granted him subtle taste in food as well as pre-eminence in virtue. And the lord of waters granted Nala his own presence whenever he desired, and also garlands of celestial fragrance. And thus each of them bestowed upon him a couple of boons. And having bestowed these the gods went to heaven. And the kings also, having witnessed with wonder Damayanti's selection of Nala, returned delighted whence they had come. And on the departure of those mighty monarchs, the high-souled Bhima, well pleased, celebrated the wedding of Nala and Damayanti. And having stayed there for a time according to his desire, Naishadha, the best of men, returned to his own city with the permission of Bhima. And having attained that pearl of a woman, the virtuous king, O monarch, began to pass his days in joy, like the slayer of Vala and Vritra in the company of Sachi. And resembling the sun in glory, the king, full of gladness, began to rule his subjects righteously, and give them great satisfaction. And like unto Yayati, the son of Nahusha, that intelligent monarch celebrated the horse sacrifice and many other sacrifices with abundant gifts to Brahmanas. And like unto a very god, Nala sported with Damayanti in romantic woods and groves. And the high-minded king begat upon Damayanti a son named Indrasena, and a daughter named Indrasena. And

celebrating sacrifice, and sporting (with Damayanti) thus, the king ruled the earth abounding in wealth."

Chapter 58

"Vrihadaswa said, 'When the blazing guardians of the worlds were returning after the daughter of Bhima had chosen Naishadha, on their way they met Dwapara with Kali approaching towards them. And seeing Kali, Sakra the slayer of Vala and Vritra, said, 'O Kali, say whither thou art going with Dwapara.' And thereupon Kali replied unto Sakra, 'Going to Damayanti's Swayamvara, will I obtain her (for my wife), as my heart is fixed upon that damsel.' Hearing this, Indra said with a smile, 'That Swayamvara is already ended. In our sight she hath chosen Nala for her husband.' Thus answered by Sakra, Kali, that vilest of the celestials, filled with wrath, addressing all those gods spake, 'Since in the presence of the celestials she hath chosen a mortal for her lord, it is meet that she should undergo a heavy doom.' Upon hearing these words of Kali, the celestials answered, 'It is with our sanction that Damayanti hath chosen Nala. What damsel is there that would not choose king Nala endued with every virtue? Well-versed in all duties, always conducting himself with rectitude, he hath studied the four Vedas together with the Puranas that are regarded as the fifth. Leading a life of harmlessness unto all creatures, he is truth-telling and firm in his vows, and in his house the gods are ever gratified by sacrifices held according to the ordinance. In that tiger among men--that king resembling a Lokapala, is truth, and forbearance, and knowledge, and asceticism, and purity and self-control, and perfect tranquillity of soul. O Kali, the fool that wisheth to curse Nala bearing such a character, curseth himself, and destroyeth himself by his own act. And, O Kali, he that seeketh to curse Nala crowned with such virtues, sinketh into the wide bottomless pit of hell rife with torments.' Having said this to Kali and Dwapara, the gods went to heaven. And when the gods had gone away, Kali said unto Dwapara, 'I am ill able, O Dwapara, to suppress my anger. I shall possess Nala, deprive him of his kingdom, and he shall no more sport with Bhima's daughter. Entering the dice, it behoveth thee to help me.'"

Chapter 59

"Vrihadaswa said, 'Having made this compact with Dwapara, Kali came to the place where the king of the Nishadhas was. And always watching for a hole, he continued to dwell in the country of the Nishadhas for a long time. And it was in the twelfth year that Kali saw a hole. For one day after answering the call of nature, Naishadha touching water said his

twilight prayers, without having previously washed his feet. And it was through this (omission) that Kali entered his person. And having possessed Nala, he appeared before Pushkara, and addressed him, saying, 'Come and play at dice with Nala. Through my assistance thou wilt surely win at the play. And defeating king Nala and acquiring his kingdom, do thou rule the Nishadhas.' Thus exhorted by Kali, Pushkara went to Nala. And Dwapara also approached Pushkara, becoming the principal die called Vrisha. And appearing before the warlike Nala, that slayer of hostile heroes, Pushkara, repeatedly said, 'Let us play together with dice.' Thus challenged in the presence of Damayanti, the lofty-minded king could not long decline it. And he accordingly fixed the time for the play. And possessed by Kali, Nala began to lose, in the game, his stakes in gold, and silver, and cars with the teams thereof, and robes. And maddened at dice, no one amongst his friends could succeed in dissuading that represser of foes from the play that went on. And thereupon, O Bharata, the citizens in a body, with the chief councillors, came thither to behold the distressed monarch and make him desist. And the charioteer coming to Damayanti spake to her of this, saying, 'O lady, the citizens and officers of the state wait at the gate. Do thou inform the king of the Nishadhas that the citizens have come here, unable to bear the calamity that hath befallen their king conversant with virtue and wealth.' Thereupon Bhima's daughter, overwhelmed with grief and almost deprived of reason by it, spake unto Nala in choked accents, 'O king, the citizens with the councillors of state, urged by loyalty, stay at the gate desirous of beholding thee. It behoveth thee to grant them an interview.' But the king, possessed by Kali, uttered not a word in reply unto his queen of graceful glances, uttering thus her lamentations. And at this, those councillors of state as also the citizens, afflicted with grief and shame, returned to their homes, saying, 'He liveth not.' And, O Yudhishtira, it was thus that Nala and Pushkara gambled together for many months, the virtuous Nala being always worsted."

Chapter 60

Vrihadaswa said. "Bhima's daughter, the cool-headed Damayanti, seeing the righteous king maddened and deprived of his senses at dice, was filled, O king, with alarm and grief. And she thought the affair to be a serious one with the king. And apprehensive of the calamity that threatened Nala, yet seeking his welfare and at last understanding that her lord had lost everything, she said unto her nurse and maid-servant Vrihatsena of high fame, intent upon her good, dexterous in all duties, faithful and sweet-speeched, these words, 'O Vrihatsena, go thou and summon the councillors in the name of Nala, and tell them also what of wealth and other things hath been lost and what remaineth.' The councillors then, hearing of Nala's summons, said, 'This is fortunate for us' and

approached the king. And when the subjects in a body had (thus) come a second time, the daughter of Bhima informed Nala of it. But the king regarded her not. Finding her husband disregarding her words, Damayanti, filled with shame, returned to her apartments. And hearing that the dice were uniformly unfavourable to the virtuous Nala, and that he had lost everything, she again spake unto her nurse, saying, 'O Vrihatsena, go thou again in Nala's name to bring hither, O blessed one, the charioteer, Varshneya. The matter at hand is very serious.' And Vrihatsena, hearing those words of Damayanti caused Varshneya to be summoned by trusty servants. And the blameless daughter of Bhima, acquainted with conduct suitable to time and place, addressing soft words said according to the occasion, 'Thou knowest how the king hath always behaved towards thee. He is now in difficulty, and it behoveth thee to assist him. The more the king loseth to Pushkara, the greater becometh his ardour for the play. And as the dice fall obedient to Pushkara, it is seen that they are adverse to Nala in the matter of the play. And absorbed in the play, he heedeth not the words of his friends and relatives, nor even those of mine. I do not think, however, that in this the high-souled Naishadha is to blame, in as much as the king regarded not my words, being absorbed in play. O Charioteer, I seek thy protection. Do my behest. My mind misgiveth me. The king may come to grief. Yoking Nala's favourite horses endued with the fleetness of the mind, do thou take these twins (my son and daughter) on the car and hie thou to Kundina. Leaving the children there with my kindred as also the car and the horses, either stay thou there, or go to any other place as it pleaseth thee.' Varshneya, the charioteer of Nala, then reported in detail these words of Damayanti unto the chief officers of the king. And having settled (the matter) in consultation with them, and obtaining their assent, O mighty monarch, the charioteer started for Vidarbha, taking the children on that car. And leaving there the boy Indrasena and the girl Indrasena, as also that best of cars and those steeds, the charioteer, with a sad heart grieving for Nala, bade farewell unto Bhima. And wandering for some time, he arrived at the city of Ayodhya. And there he appeared with a sorrowful heart before king Rituparna, and entered the service of that monarch as charioteer."

Chapter 61

"Vrihadaswa said, 'After Varshneya had gone away, Pushkara won from the righteous Nala that latter's kingdom and what else of wealth he had. And unto Nala, O king, who had lost his kingdom, Pushkara laughingly said, 'Let the play go on. But what stake hast thou now? Damayanti only remaineth; all else of thine hath been won by me. Well, if thou liketh, that Damayanti be our stake now.' Hearing these words of Pushkara the virtuous king felt as if his heart would burst in rage, but he spake not

a word. And gazing at Pushkara in anguish, king Nala of great fame took all the ornaments off every part of his body. And attired in a single piece of cloth, his body uncovered, renouncing all his wealth, and enhancing the grief of friends, the king set out. And Damayanti, clad in one piece of cloth, followed him behind as he was leaving the city. And coming to the outskirts of the city, Nala stayed there for three nights with his wife. But Pushkara, O king, proclaimed through the city that he that should show any attention to Nala, would be doomed to death. And on account of these words of Pushkara and knowing his malice towards Nala, the citizens, O Yudhishtira, no longer showed him hospitable regards. And unregarded though deserving of hospitable regards, Nala passed three nights in the outskirts of the city, living on water alone. And afflicted with hunger, the king went away in search of fruit and roots, Damayanti following him behind. And in agony of famine, after many days, Nala saw some birds with plumage of golden hue. And thereupon the mighty lord of the Nishadhas thought within himself, 'These will be my banquet today and also my wealth.' And then he covered them with the cloth he had on--when bearing up that garment of his, the birds rose up to the sky. And beholding Nala nude and melancholy, and standing with face turned towards the ground, those rangers of the sky addressed him, saying, 'O thou of small sense, we are even those dice. We had come hither wishing to take away thy cloth, for it pleased us not that thou shouldst depart even with thy cloth on.' And finding himself deprived of his attire, and knowing also that the dice were departing (with it), the virtuous Nala, O king, thus spake unto Damayanti, 'O faultless one, they through whose anger I have been despoiled of my kingdom, they through whose influence distressed and afflicted with hunger, I am unable to procure sustenance, they for whom the Nishadhas offered me not any hospitality, they, O timid one, are carrying off my cloth, assuming the form of birds. Fallen into this dire disaster, I am afflicted with grief and deprived of my senses, I am thy lord, do thou, therefore, listen to the words I speak for thy good. These many roads lead to the southern country, passing by (the city of) Avanti and the Rikshavat mountains. This is that mighty mountain called Vindhya; yon, the river Payasvini running sea-wards, and yonder are the asylums of the ascetics, furnished with various fruit and roots. This road leadeth to the country of the Vidarbhas--and that, to the country of the Kosalas. Beyond these roads to the south is the southern country.' Addressing Bhima's daughter, O Bharata, the distressed king Nala spake those words unto Damayanti over and over again. Thereupon afflicted with grief, in a voice choked with tears, Damayanti spake unto Naishadha these piteous words, 'O king, thinking of thy purpose, my heart trembleth, and all my limbs become faint. How can I go, leaving thee in the lone woods despoiled of thy kingdom and deprived of thy wealth, thyself without a garment on, and worn with hunger and toil? When in the deep woods, fatigued and afflicted with hunger, thou thinkest of thy former bliss, I will, O great monarch, soothe thy weariness. In every sorrow there is no physic equal unto the wife, say the physicians. It is

the truth, O Nala, that I speak unto thee.' Hearing those words of his queen, Nala replied, 'O slender-waisted Damayanti, it is even as thou hast said. To a man in distress, there is no friend or medicine that is equal unto a wife. But I do not seek to renounce thee, wherefore, O timid one, dost thou dread this? O faultless one, I can forsake myself but thee I cannot forsake.' Damayanti then said, 'If thou dost not, O mighty king, intend to forsake me, why then dost thou point out to me the way to the country of the Vidarbhas? I know, O king, that thou wouldst not desert me. But, O lord of the earth, considering that thy mind is distracted, thou mayst desert me. O best of men, thou repeatedly pointest out to me the way and it is by this, O god-like one, that thou enhancest my grief. If it is thy intention that I should go to my relatives, then if it pleaseth thee, both of us will wend to the country of the Vidarbhas. O giver of honours, there the king of the Vidarbhas will receive thee with respect. And honoured by him, O king, thou shall live happily in our home.'"

Chapter 62

"Nala said, 'Surely, thy father's kingdom is as my own. But thither I will not, by any means, repair in this extremity. Once I appeared there in glory, increasing thy joy. How can I go there now in misery, augmenting thy grief?'

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'Saying this again and again unto Damayanti, king Nala, wrapped in half a garment, comforted his blessed wife. And both attired in one cloth and wearied with hunger and thirst, in course of their wanderings, at last they came to a sheltered shed for travellers. And arrived at this place, the king of the Nishadhas sat down on the bare earth with the princess of Vidarbha. And wearing the same piece of cloth (with Damayanti), and dirty, and haggard, and stained with dust, he fell asleep with Damayanti on the ground in weariness. And suddenly plunged in distress, the innocent and delicate Damayanti with every mark of good fortune, fell into a profound slumber. And, O monarch, while she slept, Nala, with heart and mind distraught, could not slumber calmly as before. And reflecting on the loss of his kingdom, the desertion of his friends, and his distress in the woods, he thought with himself, 'What availeth my acting thus? And what if I act not thus? Is death the better for me now? Or should I desert my wife? She is truly devoted to me and suffereth this distress for my sake. Separated from me, she may perchance wander to her relatives. Devoted as she is to me, if she stayeth with me, distress will surely be hers; while it is doubtful, if I desert her. On the other hand, it is not unlikely that she may even have happiness some time.' Reflecting upon this repeatedly, and thinking of it again and again, he concluded, O monarch, that the desertion of Damayanti was the best course

for him. And he also thought, 'Of high fame and auspicious fortune, and devoted to me, her husband, she is incapable of being injured by any one on the way on account of her energy.' Thus his mind that was influenced by the wicked Kali, dwelling upon Damayanti, was made up for deserting her. And then thinking of his own want of clothing, and of her being clad in a single garment, he intended to cut off for himself one half of Damayanti's attire. And he thought, 'How shall I divide this garment, so that my beloved one may not perceive?' And thinking of this, the royal Nala began to walk up and down that shed. And, O Bharata, pacing thus to and fro, he found a handsome sword lying near the shed, unsheathed. And that repressor of foes, having, with that sword cut off one half of the cloth, and throwing the instrument away, left the daughter of Vidharbha insensible in her sleep and went away. But his heart failing him, the king of the Nishadhas returned to the shed, and seeing Damayanti (again), burst into tears. And he said, 'Alas! that beloved one of mine whom neither the god of wind nor the sun had seen before, even she sleepeth to-day on the bare earth, like one forlorn. Clad in this severed piece of cloth, and lying like one distracted, how will the beauteous one of luminous smiles behave when she awaketh? How will the beautiful daughter of Bhima, devoted to her lord, all alone and separated from me, wander through these deep woods inhabited by beasts and serpents? O blessed one, may the Adityas and the Vasus, and the twin Aswins together with the Marutas protect thee, thy virtue being thy best guard.' And addressing thus his dear wife peerless on earth in beauty, Nala strove to go, reft of reason by Kali. Departing and still departing, king Nala returned again and again to that shed, dragged away by Kali but drawn back by love. And it seemed as though the heart of the wretched king was rent in twain, and like a swing, he kept going out from cabin and coming back into it. At length after lamenting long and piteously, Nala stupefied and bereft of sense by Kali went away, forsaking that sleeping wife of his. Reft of reason through Kali's touch, and thinking of his conduct, the king departed in sorrow, leaving his wife alone in that solitary forest."

Chapter 63

Vrihadaswa said, "O king, after Nala had gone away, the beauteous Damayanti, now refreshed, timorously awoke in that lonely forest. And O mighty monarch, not finding her lord Naishadha, afflicted with grief and pain, she shrieked aloud in fright, saying, 'O lord? O mighty monarch! O husband, dost thou desert me? Oh, I am lost and undone, frightened in this desolate place. O illustrious prince, thou art truthful in speech, and conversant with morality. How hast thou then, having pledged thy word, deserted me asleep in the woods? Oh, why hast thou deserted thy accomplished wife, ever devoted to thee, particularly one that hath not

wronged thee, though wronged thou hast been by others? O king of men, it behoveth thee to act faithfull, according to those words thou hadst spoken unto me before in the presence of the guardians of the worlds. O bull among men, that thy wife liveth even a moment after thy desertion of her, is only because mortals are decreed to die at the appointed time. O bull among men, enough of this joke! O irrepressible one, I am terribly frightened. O lord, show thyself. I see thee! I see thee, o king! Thou art seen, O Naishadha, Hiding thyself behind those shrubs, why dost thou not reply unto me? It is cruel of thee, O great king, that seeing me in this plight and so lamenting, thou dost not, O king, approach and comfort me. I grieve not for myself, nor for anything else. I only grieve to think how thou wilt pass thy days alone, O king. In the evening oppressed with hunger and thirst and fatigue, underneath the trees, how wilt it take with thee when thou seest me not?' And then Damayanti, afflicted with anguish and burning with grief, began to rush hither and thither, weeping in woe. And now the helpless princess sprang up, and now she sank down in stupor; and now she shrank in terror, and now she wept and wailed aloud. And Bhima's daughter devoted to her husband, burning in anguish and sighing ever more, and faint and weeping exclaimed, 'That being through whose imprecation the afflicted Naishadha suffereth this woe, shall bear grief that is greater than ours. May that wicked being who hath brought Nala of sinless heart this, lead a more miserable life bearing greater ills.'

"Thus lamenting, the crowned consort of the illustrious (king) began to seek her lord in those woods, inhabited by beasts of prey. And the daughter of Bhima, wailing bitterly, wandered hither and thither like a maniac, exclaiming, 'Alas! Alas! Oh king!' And as she was wailing loudly like a female osprey, and grieving and indulging in piteous lamentations unceasingly, she came near a gigantic serpent. And that huge and hungry serpent thereupon suddenly seized Bhima's daughter, who had come near and was moving about within its range. And folded within serpent's coils and filled with grief, she still wept, not for herself but for Naishadha. And she said 'O lord, why dost thou not rush towards me, now that I am seized, without anybody to protect me, by this serpent in these desert wilds? And, O Naishadha, how will it fare with thee when thou rememberest me? O lord, why hast thou gone away, deserting me today in the forest? Free from thy curse, when thou wilt have regained thy mind and senses and wealth, how will it be with thee when thou thinkest of me? O Naishadha, O sinless one, who will soothe thee when thou art weary, and hungry, and fainting, O tiger among kings?' And while she was wailing thus, a certain huntsman ranging the deep woods, hearing her lamentations, swiftly came to the spot. And beholding the large-eyed one in the coils of the serpent, he rushed towards it and cut off its head with his sharp weapon. And having struck the reptile dead, the huntsman set Damayanti free. And having sprinkled her body with water and fed and comforted her. O Bharata, he addressed her saying, 'O thou with eyes like

those of a young gazelle, who art thou? And why also hast thou come into the woods? And, O beauteous one, how hast thou fallen into this extreme misery' And thus accosted, O monarch, by that man, Damayanti, O Bharata, related unto him all that had happened. And beholding that beautiful woman clad in half a garment, with deep bosom and round hips, and limbs delicate and faultless, and face resembling the full moon, and eyes graced with curved eye-lashes, and speech sweet as honey, the hunter became inflamed with desire. And afflicted by the god of love, the huntsman began to soothe her in winning voice and soft words. And as soon as the chaste and beauteous Damayanti, beholding him understood his intentions, she was filled with fierce wrath and seemed to blaze up in anger. But the wicked-minded wretch, burning with desire became wroth, attempted to employ force upon her, who was unconquerable as a flame of blazing fire. And Damayanti already distressed upon being deprived of husband and kingdom, in that hour of grief beyond utterance, cursed him in anger, saying, 'I have never even thought of any other person than Naishadha, therefore let this mean-minded wretch subsisting on chase, fall down lifeless.' And as soon as she said this, the hunter fell down lifeless upon the ground, like a tree consumed by fire." 131

Chapter 64

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'Having destroyed that hunter Damayanti of eyes like lotus petals, went onwards through that fearful and solitary forest ringing with the chirp of crickets. And it abounded with lions, and leopards, and Rurus and tigers, and buffaloes, and bears and deer. And it swarmed with birds of various species, and was infested by thieves and mlechchha tribes. And it contained Salas, and bamboos and Dhavas, and Aswatthas, and Tindukas and Ingudas, and Kinsukas, and Arjunas, and Nimvas, and Tinisas and Salmalas, and Jamvus, and mango trees, and Lodhras, and the catechu, and the cane, and Padmakas, and Amalahas, and Plakshas, and Kadamvas, and Udumvaras and Vadaris, and Vilwas, and banians, and Piyalas, and palms, and date-trees, and Haritakas and Vibhitakas. And the princess of Vidarbha saw many mountains containing ores of various kinds, and groves resounding with the notes of winged choirs, and many glens of wondrous sight, and many rivers and lakes and tanks and various kinds of birds and beasts. And she saw numberless snakes and goblins and Rakshasas of grim visage, and pools and tanks and hillocks, and brooks and fountains of wonderful appearance. And the princess of Vidarbha saw there herds of buffaloes. And boars, and bears as well as serpents of the wilderness. And safe in virtue and glory and good fortune and patience, Damayanti wandered through those woods alone, in search of Nala. And the royal daughter of Bhima, distressed only at her separation from her lord, was not terrified at all in that fearful forest. And, O king, seating herself down upon a stone and filled with

grief, and every limb of hers trembling with sorrow on account of her husband, she began to lament thus: 'O king of the Nishadhas, O thou of broad chest and mighty arms, whither hast thou gone, O king, leaving me in this lone forest? O hero, having performed the Aswamedha and other sacrifices, with gifts in profusion (unto the Brahmanas), why hast thou, O tiger among men, played false with me alone? O best of men, O thou of great splendour, it behoveth thee. O auspicious one, to remember what thou didst declare before me, O bull among kings! And, O monarch, it behoveth thee also to call to mind what the sky-ranging swans spake in thy presence and in mine. O tiger among men, the four Vedas in all their extent, with the Angas and the Upangas, well-studied, on one side, and one single truth on the other, (are equal). Therefore, O slayer of foes, it behoveth thee, O lord of men, to make good what thou didst formerly declare before me. Alas, O hero! warrior! O Nala! O sinless one being thine, I am about to perish in this dreadful forest. Oh! wherefore dost thou not answer me? This terrible lord of the forest, of grim visage and gaping jaws, and famishing with hunger, filleth me with fright. Doth it not behove thee to deliver me? Thou wert wont to say always, 'Save thee there existeth not one dear unto me.' O blessed one, O king, do thou now make good thy words so spoken before. And, O king, why dost thou not return an answer to thy beloved wife bewailing and bereft of sense, although thou lovest her, being loved in return? O king of the earth, O respected one, O represser of foes, O thou of large eyes, why dost thou not regard me, emaciated, and distressed and pale, and discoloured, and clad in a half piece of cloth, and alone, and weeping, and lamenting like one forlorn, and like unto a solitary doe separated from the herd? O illustrious sovereign, it is, I, Damayanti, devoted to thee, who, alone in this great forest, address thee. Wherefore, then, dost thou not reply unto me? Oh, I do not behold thee today on this mountain, O chief of men, O thou of noble birth and character with every limb possessed of grace! In this terrible forest, haunted by lions and tigers, O king of the Nishadhas, O foremost of men, O enhancer of my sorrows, (Wishing to know) whether thou art lying down, or sitting, or standing, or gone, whom shall I ask, distressed and woe-stricken on thy account, saying, 'Hast thou seen in this woods the royal Nala?' Of whom shall I in this forest enquire after the departed Nala, handsome and of high soul, and the destroyer of hostile arrays? From whom shall I today hear the sweet words, viz., 'That royal Nala, of eyes like lotus-leaves, whom thou seekest, is even here?' Yonder cometh the forest-king, that tiger of graceful mien, furnished with four teeth and prominent cheeks. Even him will I accost fearlessly: Thou art the lord of all animals, and of this forest the king. Know me for Damayanti, the daughter of the king of the Vidarbhas, and the wife of Nala, destroyer of foes, and the king of the Nishadhas. Distressed and woe-stricken, I am seeking my husband alone in these woods. Do thou, O king of beasts, comfort me (with news of Nala) if thou hast seen him. Or, O lord of the forest, if thou cannot speak of Nala, do thou, then, O best of beasts, devour me, and free me from this

misery. Alas! hearing my plaintive appeal in the wilderness, this king of mountains, this high and sacred hill, crested with innumerable [...?]-JBH] rolleth towards the sea. Let me, then, for tidings of the king, ask this king of mountains, this high and sacred hill, crested with innumerable heaven-kissing and many-hued and beauteous peaks, and abounding in various ores, and decked with gems of diverse kinds, and rising like a banner over this broad forest, and ranged by lions and tigers and elephants and boars and bears and stags, and echoing all around with (the notes of) winged creatures of various species, and adorned with kinsukas and Asokas and Vakulas and Punnagas, with blossoming Karnikaras, and Dhavas and Plakshas, and with streams haunted by waterfowls of every kind, and abounding in crested summits, O sacred one! O best of mountains! O thou of wondrous sight! O celebrated hill! O refuge (of the distressed)! O highly auspicious one! I bow to thee, O pillar of the earth! Approaching, I bow to thee. Know me for a king's daughter, and a king's daughter-in-law, and king's consort, Damayanti by name that lord of earth who ruleth the Vidarbhas, that mighty warrior-king Bhima by name, who protecteth the four orders, is my sire. That best of kings celebrated the Rajasuya and Aswamedha sacrifices, with profuse gifts to the Brahmanas. Possessed of beautiful and large eyes, distinguished for devotion to the Vedas, of unblemished character, truth-telling, devoid of guile, gentle, endued with prowess, lord of immense wealth, versed in morality, and pure, he having vanquished all his foes, effectually protecteth the inhabitants of Vidarbha. Know me, O holy one, for his daughter, thus come to thee. That best of men--the celebrated ruler of the Nishadha--known by the name of Virasena of high fame, was my father-in-law. The son of that king, heroic and handsome and possessed of energy incapable of being baffled, who ruleth well the kingdom which hath descended to him from his father, is named Nala. Know, O mountain, that of that slayer of foes, called also Punyasloka, possessed of the complexion of gold, and devoted to the Brahmanas, and versed in the Vedas, and gifted with eloquence,--of that righteous and Soma-quaffing and fire-adoring king, who celebrateth sacrifices and is liberal and warlike and who adequately chastiseth (criminals), I am the innocent spouse--the chief of his queens--standing before thee. Despoiled of prosperity and deprived of (the company of my) husband without a protector, and afflicted with calamity, hither have I come, O best of mountains, seeking my husband. Hast thou, O foremost of mountains, with thy hundreds of peaks towering (into the sky) seen king Nala in this frightful forest? Hast thou seen my husband, that ruler of the Nishadhas, the illustrious Nala, with the tread of a mighty elephant, endued with intelligence, long-armed, and of fiery energy, possessed of prowess and patience and courage and high fame? Seeing me bewailing alone, overwhelmed with sorrow, wherefore, O best of mountains, dost thou not today soothe me with thy voice, as thy own daughter in distress? O hero, O warrior of prowess, O thou versed in every duty, O thou adhering to truth--O lord of the earth, if thou art in this forest, then, O king,

reveal thyself unto me. Oh, when shall I again hear the voice of Nala, gentle and deep as that of the clouds, that voice, sweet as Amrita, of the illustrious king, calling me Vidharva's daughter, with accents distinct, and holy, and musical as the chanting of the Vedas and rich, and soothing all my sorrows. O king, I am frightened. Do thou, O virtuous one, comfort me.'

"Having addressed that foremost of mountain thus, Damayanti then went in a northerly direction. And having proceeded three days and nights, that best of women came to an incomparable penance grove of ascetics, resembling in beauty a celestial grove. And the charming asylum she beheld was inhabited and adorned by ascetics like Vasishtha and Bhṛigu and Atri, self-denying and strict in diet, with minds under control, endued with holiness, some living on water, some on air, and some on (fallen) leaves, with passions in check, eminently blessed, seeking the way to heaven, clad in barks of trees and deer-skins, and with senses subdued. And beholding that hermitage inhabited by ascetics, and abounding in herds of deer and monkeys, Damayanti was cheered. And that best of women, the innocent and blessed Damayanti, with graceful eye-brows, and long tresses, with lovely hips and deep bosom, and face graced with fine teeth and with fine black and large eyes, in her brightness and glory entered that asylum. And saluting those ascetics grown old in practising austerities, she stood in an attitude of humility. And the ascetics living in that forest, said, 'Welcome!' And those men of ascetic wealth, paying her due homage, said, 'Sit ye down, and tell us what we may do for thee.' That best of women replied unto them, saying, 'Ye sinless and eminently blessed ascetics, is it well with your austerities, and sacrificial fire, and religious observances, and the duties of your own order? And is it well with the beasts and birds of this asylum? And they answered, 'O beauteous and illustrious lady, prosperity attendeth us in every respect. But, O thou of faultless limbs, tell us who thou art, and what thou seekest. Beholding thy beauteous form and thy bright splendour, we have been amazed. Cheer up and mourn not. Tell us, O blameless and blessed one, art thou the presiding deity of this forest, or of this mountain, or of this river?' Damayanti replied unto those ascetics, saying, 'O Brahmanas, I am not the goddess of this forest, or of this mountain, or of this stream. O Rishis of ascetic wealth, know that I am a human being. I will relate my history in detail. Do ye listen to me. There is a king--the mighty ruler of the Vidarbhas--Bhima by name. O foremost of regenerate ones, know me to be his daughter. The wise ruler of the Nishadhas, Nala by name, of great celebrity, heroic, and ever victorious in battle, and learned, is my husband. Engaged in the worship of the gods, devoted to the twice-born ones, the guardian of the line of the Nishadhas, of mighty energy, possessed of great strength, truthful, conversant with all duties, wise, unwavering in promise, the crusher of foes, devout, serving the gods, graceful, the conqueror of hostile towns, that foremost of kings, Nala by

name, equal in splendour unto the lord of celestials, the slayer of foes, possessed of large eyes, and a hue resembling the full moon, is my husband. The celebrator of great sacrifices, versed in the Vedas and their branches, the destroyer of enemies in battle, and like unto the sun and the moon in splendour, is he. That king devoted to truth and religion was summoned to dice by certain deceitful persons of mean mind and uncultured soul and of crooked ways, and skilful in gambling, and was deprived of wealth and kingdom. Know that I am the wife of that bull among kings, known to all by the name of Damayanti, anxious to find out my (missing) lord. In sadness of heart am I wandering among woods, and mountains, and lakes, and rivers, and tanks and forests, in search of that husband of mine--Nala, skilled in battle, high-souled, and well-versed in the use of weapons, O hath king Nala, the lord of the Nishadhas, come to this delightful asylum of your holy selves? It is for him, O Brahmanas, that I have come to this dreary forest full of terrors and haunted by tigers and other beasts. If I do not see king Nala within a few days and nights, I shall seek my good by renouncing this body. Of what use is my life without that bull among men? How shall I live afflicted with grief on account of my husband?'

Unto Bhima's daughter, Damayanti, lamenting forlorn in that forest, the truth-telling ascetics replied, saying, 'O blessed and beauteous one, we see by ascetic power that the future will bring happiness to thee, and that thou wilt soon behold Naishadha. O daughter of Bhima, thou wilt behold Nala, the lord of the Nishadhas, the slayer of foes, and the foremost of the virtuous freed from distress. And O blessed lady, thou wilt behold the king--thy lord--freed from all sins and decked with all kinds of gems, and ruling the selfsame city, and chastizing his enemies, and striking terror into the hearts of foes, and gladdening the hearts of friends, and crowned with every blessing.'

""Having spoken unto that princess--the beloved queen of Nala--the ascetics with their sacred fires and asylum vanished from sight. And beholding that mighty wonder, the daughter-in-law of king Virasena, Damayanti of faultless limbs, was struck with amazement. And she asked herself, 'Was it a dream that I saw? What an occurrence hath taken place! Where are all those ascetics? And where is that asylum? Where, further, is that delightful river of sacred waters--the resort of diverse kinds of fowls? And where, again, are those charming trees decked with fruits and flowers?' And after thinking so for some time, Bhima's daughter, Damayanti of sweet smiles melancholy and afflicted with grief on account of her lord, lost the colour of her face (again). And going to another part of the wood, she saw an Asoka tree. And approaching that first of trees in the forest, so charming with blossoms and its load of foliage, and resounding with the notes of birds, Damayanti, with tears in her eyes and accents choked in grief, began to lament, saying, 'Oh, this graceful tree in the heart of the forest, decked in flowers, looketh beautiful,

like a charming king of hills. O beauteous Asoka, do thou speedily free me from grief. Hast thou seen king Nala, the slayer of foes and the beloved husband of Damayanti,--freed from fear and grief and obstacles? Hast thou seen my beloved husband, the ruler of the Nishadhas, clad in half a piece of cloth, with delicate skin, that hero afflicted with woe and who hath come into this wilderness? O Asoka tree, do thou free me from grief! O Asoka, vindicate thy name, for Asoka meaneth destroyer of grief. And going round that tree thrice, with an afflicted heart, that best of women, Bhima's daughter, entered a more terrible part of the forest. And wandering in quest of her lord, Bhima's daughter beheld many trees and streams and delightful mountains, and many beasts and birds, and caves, and precipices, and many rivers of wonderful appearance. And as she proceeded she came upon a broad way where she saw with wonder a body of merchants, with their horses and elephants, landing on the banks of a river, full of clear and cool water, and lovely and charming to behold, and broad, and covered with bushes of canes, and echoing with the cries of cranes and ospreys and Chakravakas, and abounding in tortoises and alligators and fishes, and studded with innumerable islets. And as soon as as she saw that caravan, the beauteous and celebrated wife of Nala, wild like a maniac, oppressed with grief, clad in half a garment, lean and pale and smutted, and with hair covered with dust, drew near and entered into its midst. And beholding her, some fled in fear, and some became extremely anxious, and some cried aloud, and some laughed at her, and some hated her. And some, O Bharata, felt pity for, and even addressed, her, saying, 'O blessed one, who art thou, and whose? What seekest thou in woods? Seeing thee here we have been terrified. Art thou human? Tell us truly, O blessed one if thou art the goddess of this wood or of this mountain or of the points of the heaven. We seek thy protection. Art thou a female Yaksha, or a female Rakshasa, or a celestial damsel? O thou of faultless features, do thou bless us wholly and protect us. And, O blessed one, do thou so act that this caravan may soon go hence in prosperity and that the welfare of all of us may be secured.' Thus addressed by that caravan, the princess Damayanti, devoted to her husband and oppressed by the calamity that had befallen her, answered, saying, 'O leader of the caravan, ye merchants, ye youths, old men, and children, and ye that compose this caravan, know me for a human being. I am the daughter of a king, and the daughter in-law of a king, and the consort also of a king, eager for the sight of my lord. The ruler of the Vidarbhas is my father, and my husband is the lord of the Nishadhas, named Nala. Even now I am seeking that unvanquished and blessed one. If ye have chanced to see my beloved one, king Nala, that tiger among men, that destroyer of hostile hosts, O tell me quick.' Thereupon the leader of that great caravan, named Suchi, replied unto Damayanti of faultless limbs, saying, 'O blessed one, listen to my words. O thou of sweet smiles, I am a merchant and the leader of this caravan. O illustrious lady, I have not seen any man of the name of Nala. In this extensive forest uninhabited by men, there are only elephants and

leopards and buffaloes, and tigers and bears and other animals. Except thee, I have not met with any man or woman here, so help us now Manibhadra, the king of Yakshas!' Thus addressed by them she asked those merchants as well as the leader of the host saying, 'It behoveth you to tell me whither this caravan is bound.' The leader of the band said, 'O daughter of a great king, for the purpose of profit this caravan is bound direct for the city of Subahu, the truth-telling ruler of the Chedis.'"

Chapter 65

"Vrihadaswa said, 'Having heard the words of the leader of that caravan, Damayanti of faultless limbs proceeded with that caravan itself anxious to behold her lord. And after having proceeded for many days the merchants saw a large lake fragrant with lotuses in the midst of that dense and terrible forest. And it was beautiful all over, and exceedingly delightful, (with banks) abounding in grass and fuel and fruits and flowers. And it was inhabited by various kinds of fowls and birds, and fall of water that was pure and sweet. And it was cool and capable of captivating the heart. And the caravan, worn out with toil, resolved to halt there. And with the permission of their leader, they spread themselves around those beautiful woods. And that mighty caravan finding it was evening halted at that place. And (it came to pass that) at the hour of midnight when everything was hushed and still and the tired caravan had fallen asleep, a herd of elephants in going towards a mountain stream to drink of its water befouled by their temporal juice, saw that caravan as also the numerous elephants belonging to it. And seeing their domesticated fellows the wild elephants infuriated and with the temporal juice trickling down rushed impetuously on the former, with the intention of killing them. And the force of the rush of those elephants was hard to bear, like the impetuosity of peaks lessened from mountain summits rolling towards the plain. The rushing elephants found the forest paths to be all blocked up, for the goodly caravan was sleeping obstructing the paths around that lake of lotuses. And the elephants all of a sudden, began to crush the men lying insensible on the ground. And uttering cries of 'Oh!' and 'Alas!' the merchants, blinded by sleep, fled, in order to escape that danger, to copses and woods for refuge. And some were slain by the tusks, and some by the trunks, and some by the legs of those elephants. And innumerable camels and horses were killed, and crowds of men on foot, running in fright, killed one another. And uttering loud cries some fell down on the ground, and some in fear climbed on trees, and some dropped down on uneven ground. And, O king, thus accidentally attacked by that large herd of elephants, that goodly caravan suffered a great loss. And there arose a tremendous uproar calculated to frighten the three worlds, 'Lo! a great fire hath broken out. Rescue us.

Do ye speedily fly away. Why do ye fly? Take the heaps of jewels scattered around. All this wealth is a trifle. I do not speak falsely, 'I tell you again, (exclaimed some one) think on my words, O ye distracted one!' With such exclamation they ran about in fright. And Damayanti awoke in fear and anxiety, while that terrible slaughter was raging there. And beholding slaughter capable of awaking the fear of all the worlds, and which was so unforeseen, the damsel of eyes like lotus leaves rose up, wild with fright, and almost out of breath. And those of the caravan that had escaped unhurt, met together, and asked one another, 'Of what deed of ours is this the consequence? Surely, we have failed to worship the illustrious Manibhadras, and likewise the exalted and graceful Vaisravana, the king of the Yaksha. Perhaps, we have not worshipped the deities that cause calamities, or perhaps, we have not paid them the first homage. Or, perhaps, this evil is the certain consequence of the birds (we saw). Our stars are not unpropitious. From what other cause, then hath this disaster come?' Others, distressed and bereft of wealth and relatives, said, 'That maniac-like woman who came amongst this mighty caravan in guise that was strange and scarcely human, alas, it is by her that this dreadful illusion had been pre-arranged. Of a certainty, she is a terrible Rakshasa or a Yaksha or a Pisacha woman. All this evil is her work, what need of doubts? If we again see that wicked destroyer of merchants, that giver of innumerable woes, we shall certainly slay that injurer of ours, with stones, and dust, and grass, and wood, and cuffs.' And hearing these dreadful words of the merchants, Damayanti, in terror and shame and anxiety, fled into the woods apprehensive of evil. And reproaching herself she said, 'Alas! fierce and great is the wrath of God on me. Peace followeth not in my track. Of what misdeed is this the consequence? I do not remember that I did ever so little a wrong to any one in thought, word, or deed. Of what deed, then, is this the consequence? Certainly, it is on account of the great sins I had committed in a former life that such calamity hath befallen me, viz., the loss of my husband's kingdom, his defeat at the hands of his own kinsmen, this separation from my lord and my son and daughter, this my unprotected state, and my presence in this forest abounding in innumerable beasts of prey!'"

"The next day, O king, the remnant of that caravan left the place bewailing the destruction that had overtaken them and lamenting for their dead brothers and fathers and sons and friends. And the princess of Vidarbha began to lament, saying, 'Alas! What misdeed have I perpetrated! The crowd of men that I obtained in this lone forest, hath been destroyed by a herd of elephants, surely as a consequence of my ill luck. Without doubt, I shall have to suffer misery for a long time. I have heard from old men that no person dieth ere his time; it is for this that my miserable self hath not been trodden to death by that herd of elephants. Nothing that befalleth men is due to anything else than Destiny, for even

in my childhood I did not commit any such sin in thought, word, or deed, whence might come this calamity. Methinks, I suffer this severance from my husband through the potency of those celestial Lokapalas, who had come to the Swayamvara but whom I disregarded for the sake of Nala.' Bewailing thus, O tiger among kings, that excellent lady, Damayanti, devoted to her husband, went, oppressed with grief and (pale) as the autumnal moon, with those Brahmanas versed in the Vedas that had survived the slaughter of the caravan. And departing speedily, towards evening, the damsel came to the mighty city of the truth-telling Subahu, the king of the Chedis. And she entered that excellent city clad in half a garment. And the citizens saw her as she went, overcome with fear, and lean, melancholy, her hair dishevelled and soiled with dust, and maniac-like. And beholding her enter the city of the king of the Chedis, the boys of the city, from curiosity, began to follow her. And surrounded by them, she came before the palace of the king. And from the terrace the queen-mother saw her surrounded by the crowd. And she said to her nurse, 'Go and bring that woman before me. She is forlorn and is being vexed by the crowd. She hath fallen into distress and standeth in need of succour. I find her beauty to be such that it illumineth my house. The fair one, though looking like a maniac, seemeth a very Sree with her large eyes.' Thus commanded, the nurse went out and dispersing the crowd brought Damayanti to that graceful terrace. And struck with wonder, O king, she asked Damayanti, saying, 'Afflicted though thou art with such distress, thou ownest a beautiful form. Thou shinest like lightning in the midst of the clouds. Tell me who thou art, and whose. O thou possessed of celestial splendour, surely, thy beauty is not human, bereft though thou art of ornaments. And although thou art helpless, yet thou art unmoved under the outrage of these men.' Hearing these words of the queen-mother, the daughter of Bhima said,

Know that I am a female belonging to the human species and devoted to my husband. I am a serving woman of good lineage. I live wherever I like, subsisting on fruit and roots, and whom a companion, and stay where evening overtaketh me. My husband is the owner of countless virtues and was ever devoted to me. And I also, on my part, was deeply attached to him, following him like his shadow. It chanced that once he became desperately engaged at dice. Defeated at dice, he came along into the forest. I accompanied my husband into the woods, comforting the hero clad in a single piece of cloth and maniac-like and overwhelmed with calamity. Once on a time for some cause, that hero, afflicted with hunger and thirst and grief, was forced to abandon that sole piece of covering in the forest. Destitute of garment and maniac-like and deprived of his senses as he was, I followed him, myself in a single garment. Following him, I did not sleep for nights together. Thus passed many days, until at last while I was sleeping, he cut off half of my cloth, and forsook me who had done him no wrong. I am seeking my husband but unable to find him who is of hue like the filaments of the lotus, without being able to cast my eyes on that delight of my heart, that dear lord who owneth my heart

and resembleth the celestials in mien, day and night do I burn in grief."

"Unto Bhima's daughter thus lamenting with tearful eyes, and afflicted and speaking in accents choked in grief, the queen-mother herself said, 'O blessed damsel, do thou stay with me. I am well pleased with thee. O fair lady, my men shall search for thy husband. Or, perhaps he may come here of his own accord in course of his wanderings. And, O beautiful lady, residing here thou wilt regain thy (lost) lord.' Hearing these words of the queen mother, Damayanti replied, 'O mother of heroes, I may stay with thee on certain conditions. I shall not eat the leavings on any dish, nor shall I wash anybody's feet, nor shall I have to speak with other men. And if anybody shall seek me (as a wife or mistress) he should be liable to punishment at thy hands. And, further, should he solicit me over and over again, that wicked one should be punished with death. This is the vow I have made. I intend to have an interview with those Brahmanas that will set out to search for my husband. If thou canst do all this, I shall certainly live with thee. If it is otherwise, I cannot find it in my heart to reside with thee.' The queen-mother answered her with a glad heart, saying, 'I will do all this. Thou hast done well in adopting such a vow!'"

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'O king, having spoken so unto the daughter of Bhima, the queen-mother, O Bharata, said to her daughter named Sunanda, 'O Sunanda, accept this lady like a goddess as thy Sairindhri! Let her be thy companion, as she is of the same age with thee. Do thou, with heart free from care, always sport with her in joy.' And Sunanda cheerfully accepted Damayanti and led her to her own apartment accompanied by her associates. And treated with respect, Damayanti was satisfied, and she continued to reside there without anxiety of any kind, for all her wishes were duly gratified.'"

Chapter 66

"Vrihadaswa said, 'O monarch, having deserted Damayanti, king Nala saw a mighty conflagration that was raging in that dense forest. And in the midst of that conflagration, he heard the voice of some creature, repeatedly crying aloud, 'O righteous Nala, come hither.' And answering, 'Fear not,' he entered into the midst of the fire and beheld a mighty Naga lying in coils. And the Naga with joined hands, and trembling, spake unto Nala, saying, 'O king, that I am a snake, Karkotaka by name. I had deceived the great Rishi Narada of high ascetic merit, and by him have I been cursed in wrath, O king of men, even in words such as these: 'Stay thou here like an immobile thing, until one Nala taketh thee hence. And, indeed, on the spot to which he will carry thee, there shalt thou be freed from my curse. It is for that curse of his that I am unable to stir

one step. I will instruct thee in respect of thy welfare. It behoveth thee to deliver me. I will be thy friend. There is no snake equal to me. I will be light in thy hands. Taking me up, do thou speedily go hence.' Having said this, that prince of snakes became as small as the thumb. And taking him up, Nala went to a spot free from fire. Having reached an open spot where there was no fire, Nala intended to drop the serpent, upon which Karkotaka again addressed him, saying, 'O king of the Nishadhas, proceed thou yet, counting a few steps of thine; meanwhile, O mighty-armed one, I will do thee great good.' And as Nala began to count his steps, the snake bit him at the tenth step. And, lo! As he was bit, his form speedily underwent a change. And beholding his change of form, Nala was amazed. And the king saw the snake also assume his own form. And the snake Karkotaka, comforting Nala, spake unto him, 'I have deprived thee of thy beauty, so that people may not recognise thee. And, O Nala, he by whom thou hast been deceived and cast into distress, shall dwell in thee tortured by my venom. And, O monarch, as long as he doth not leave thee, he will have to dwell in pain in thy body with thee every limb filled with my venom. And, O ruler of men I have saved from the hands of him who from anger and hate deceived thee, perfectly innocent though thou art and undeserving of wrong. And, O tiger among men, through my grace, thou shalt have (no longer) any fear from animals with fangs from enemies, and from Brahmanas also versed in the Vedas, O king! Nor shalt thou, O monarch, feel pain on account of my poison. And, O foremost of kings, thou shalt be ever victorious in battle. This very day, O prince, O lord of Nishadhas, go to the delightful city of Ayodhya, and present thyself before Rituparna skilled in gambling, saying, 'I am a charioteer, Bahukaby name.' And that king will give thee his skill in dice for thy knowledge of horses. Sprung from the line of Ikswaku, and possessed of prosperity, he will be thy friend. When thou wilt be an adept at dice, thou shalt then have prosperity. Thou wilt also meet with thy wife and thy children, and regain thy kingdom. I tell thee this truly. Therefore, let not thy mind be occupied by sorrow. And, O lord of men, when thou shouldst desire to behold thy proper form, thou shouldst remember me, and wear this garment. Upon wearing this, thou shalt get back thy own form.' And saying this, that Naga then gave unto Nala two pieces of celestial cloth. And, O son of the Kuru race, having thus instructed Nala, and presented him with the attire, the king of snakes, O monarch, made himself invisible there and then!'"

Chapter 67

"Vrihadaswa said, 'After the snake had vanquished, Nala, the ruler of the Nishadhas, proceeded, and on the tenth day entered the city of Rituparna. And he approached the king, saying, 'My name is Bahuka. There is no one in this world equal to me in managing steeds. My counsel also should be

sought in matters of difficulty and in all affairs of skill. I also surpass others in the art of cooking. In all those arts that exists in this world, and also in every thing difficult of accomplishment, I will strive to attain success, O Rituparna, do thou maintain me.' And Rituparna replied, 'O Bahuka, stay with me! May good happen to thee. Thou wilt even perform all this. I have always particularly desired to be driven fast. Do thou concert such measures that my steeds may become fleet. I appoint thee the superintendent of my stables. Thy pay shall be ten thousand (coins). Both Varshneya and Jivala shall always be under thy direction. Thou wilt live pleasantly in their company. Therefore, O Bahuka, stay thou with me.'"

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'Thus addressed by the king, Nala began to dwell in the city of Rituparna, treated with respect and with Varshneya and Jivala as his companions. And residing there, the king (Nala), remembering the princess of Vidarbha, recited every evening the following sloka: 'Where lieth that helpless one afflicted with hunger and thirst and worn with toil, thinking of that wretch? And upon whom also doth she now wait?' And once as the king was reciting this in the night, Jivala asked him saying, 'O Bahuka, whom dost thou lament thus daily? I am curious to hear it. O thou blest with length of days, whose spouse is she whom thus lamentest?' Thus questioned, king Nala answered him, saying, 'A certain person devoid of sense had a wife well-known to many. That wretch was false in his promises. For some reason that wicked person was separated from her. Separated from her, that wretch wandered about oppressed with woe, and burning with grief he resteth not by day or night. And at night, remembering her, he singeth this sloka. Having wandered over the entire world, he hath at last found a refuge, and undeserving of the distress that hath befallen him, passeth his days, thus remembering his wife. When calamity had overtaken this man, his wife followed him into the woods. Deserted by that man of little virtue, her life itself is in danger. Alone, without knowledge of ways, ill able to bear distress, and fainting with hunger and thirst, the girl can hardly protect her life. And, O friend, she hath been deserted by that man of small fortune and having little sense, with the wide and terrible forest, ever abounding in beasts of prey'--

"Thus remembering Damayanti, the king of the Nishadhas continued to live unknown in the abode of that monarch!"

Chapter 68

"Vaisampayana said, 'After Nala, despoiled of his kingdom, had, with his wife, become a bondsman, Bhima with the desire of seeing Nala sent out Brahmanas to search for him. And giving them profuse wealth, Bhima

enjoined on them, saying, 'Do ye search for Nala, and also for my daughter Damayanti. He who achieveth this task, viz., ascertaining where the ruler of the Nishadhas is, bringeth him and my daughter hither, will obtain from me a thousand kine, and fields, and a village resembling a town. Even if failing to bring Damayanti and Nala here, he that succeeds learning their whereabouts, will get from me the wealth represented by a thousand kine.' Thus addressed, the Brahmanas cheerfully went out in all directions seeking Nala and his wife in cities and provinces. But Nala or his spouse they found not anywhere. Until at length searching in the beautiful city of the Chedis, a Brahmana named Sudeva, during the time of the king's prayers, saw the princess of Vidarbha in the palace of the king, seated with Sunanda. And her incomparable beauty was slightly perceptible, like the brightness of a fire enveloped in curls of smoke. And beholding that lady of large eyes, soiled and emaciated he decided her to be Damayanti, coming to that conclusion from various reasons. And Sudeva said, 'As I saw her before, this damsel is even so at present. O, I am blest, by casting my eyes on this fair one, like Sree herself delighting the worlds! Resembling the full moon, of unchanging youth, of well-rounded breasts, illumining all sides by her splendour, possessed of large eyes like beautiful lotuses, like unto Kama's Rati herself the delight of all the worlds like the rays of the full moon, O, she looketh like a lotus-stalk transplanted by adverse fortune from the Vidarbha lake and covered with mire in the process. And oppressed with grief on account of her husband, and melancholy, she looketh like the night of the full moon when Rahu hath swallowed that luminary, or like a stream whose current hath dried up. Her plight is very much like that of a ravaged lake with the leaves of its lotuses crushed by the trunks of elephants, and with its birds and fowls affrighted by the invasion. Indeed, this girl, of a delicate frame and of lovely limbs, and deserving to dwell in a mansion decked with gems, is (now) like an uprooted lotus-stalk scorched by the sun. Endued with beauty and generosity of nature, and destitute of ornaments, though deserving of them, she looketh like the moon 'new bent in haven' but covered with black clouds. Destitute of comforts and luxuries, separated from loved ones and friends, she liveth in distress, supported by the hope of beholding her lord. Verily, the husband is the best ornament of a woman, however destitute of ornaments. Without her husband beside her, this lady, though beautiful, shineth not. It is a hard feat achieved by Nala in that he liveth without succumbing to grief, though separated from such a wife. Beholding this damsel possessed of black hair and of eyes like lotus-leaves, in woe though deserving of bliss, even my heart is pained. Alas! when shall this girl graced with auspicious marks and devoted to her husband, crossing this ocean of woe, regain the company of her lord, like Rohini regaining the Moon's? Surely, the king of the Nishadhas will experience in regaining her the delight that a king deprived of his kingdom experienceth in regaining his kingdom. Equal to her in nature and age and extraction, Nala deserveth the daughter of Vidarbha, and this damsel of black eyes

also deserveth him. It behoveth me to comfort the queen of that hero of immeasurable prowess and endued with energy and might, (since) she is so eager to meet her husband. I will console this afflicted girl of face like the full moon, and suffering distress that she had never before endured, and ever meditating on her lord.'

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'Having thus reflected on these various circumstances and signs, the Brahmana, Sudeva, approached Damayanti, and addressed her, saying, 'O princess of Vidarbha, I am Sudeva, the dear friend of thy brother. I have come here, seeking thee, at the desire of king Bhima. Thy father is well, and also thy mother, and thy brothers. And thy son and daughter, blessed with length of days, are living in peace. Thy relatives, though alive, are almost dead on thy account, and hundreds of Brahmanas are ranging the world in search of thee.'"

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'O Yudhishtira, Damayanti recognising Sudeva, asked him respecting all her relatives and kinsmen one after another. And, O monarch, oppressed with grief, the princess of Vidarbha began to weep bitterly, at the unexpected sight of Sudeva, that foremost of Brahmanas and the friend of her brother. And, O Bharata, beholding Damayanti weeping, and conversing in private with Sudeva, Sunanda was distressed, and going to her mother informed her, saying, 'Sairindhri is weeping bitterly in the presence of a Brahmana. If thou likest, satisfy thyself.' And thereupon the mother of the king of the Chedis, issuing from the inner apartments of the palace, came to the place where the girl (Damayanti) was with that Brahmana. Then calling Sudeva, O king, the queen-mother asked him, 'Whose wife is this fair one, and whose daughter? How hath this lady of beautiful eyes been deprived of the company of her relatives and of her husband as well? And how also hast thou come to know this lady fallen into such a plight? I wish to hear all this in detail from thee. Do truly relate unto me who am asking thee about this damsel of celestial beauty.' Then, O king, thus addressed by the queen-mother, Sudeva, that best of Brahmanas, sat at his ease, and began to relate the true history of Damayanti.'"

Chapter 69

"Sudeva said, 'There is a virtuous and illustrious ruler of the Vidarbhas, Bhima by name. This blessed lady is his daughter, and widely known by the name of Damayanti. And there is a king ruling the Nishadhas, named Nala, the son of Virasena. This blessed lady is the wife of that wise and righteous monarch. Defeated at dice by his brother, and despoiled of his kingdom, that king, accompanied by Damayanti, went away without the knowledge of any one. We have been wandering over the whole earth in search of Damayanti. And that girl is at last found in the house

of thy son. No woman existeth that is her rival in beauty. Between the eye-brows of this ever-youthful damsel, there is an excellent mole from birth, resembling a lotus. Noticed by us (before) it seems to have disappeared, covered, (as her forehead is) with (a coat of) dust even like the moon hid in clouds. Placed there by the Creator himself as an indication of prosperity and wealth, that mole is visible faintly, like the cloud-covered lunar crescent of the first day of the lighted fortnight. And covered as her body is with dust, her beauty hath not disappeared. Though careless of her person, it is still manifest, and shineth like gold. And this girl--goddess-like--capable of being identified by this form of hers and that mole, hath been discovered by me as one discovereth a fire that is covered, by its heat!'

"O king, hearing these words of Sudeva, Sunanda washed the dust that covered the mole between Damayanti's eye-brows. And thereupon it became visible like the moon in the sky, just emerged from the clouds. And seeing that mole, O Bharata, Sunanda and the queen-mother began to weep, and embracing Damayanti stood silent for a while. And the queen-mother, shedding tears as she spoke, said in gentle accents, 'By this thy mole, I find that thou art the daughter of my sister. O beauteous girl, thy mother and I are both daughters of the high-souled Sudaman, the ruler of the Dasarnas. She was bestowed upon king Bhima, and I on Virabahu. I witnessed thy birth at our father's palace in the country of the Dasarnas. O beautiful one, my house is to thee even as thy father's. And this wealth, O Damayanti, is thine as much as mine.' As this, O king, Damayanti bowing down to her mother's sister with a glad heart, spake unto her these words, 'Unrecognised, I have still lived happily with thee, every want of mine satisfied and myself cared for by thee. And happy as my stay hath been, it would, without doubt, be happier still. But, mother, I have long been an exile. It behoveth thee, therefore, to grant me permission (to depart). My son and daughter, sent to my father's palace, are living there. Deprived of their father, and of their mother also, how are they passing their days stricken with sorrow. If thou wishest to do what is agreeable to me, do thou without loss of time, order a vehicle, for I wish to go to the Vidarbhas.' At this, O king, the sister to (Damayanti's) mother, with a glad heart, said, 'So be it'. And the queen-mother with her son's permission, O chief of the Bharatas, sent Damayanti in handsome litter carried by men, protected by a large escort and provided with food and drink and garments of the first quality. And soon enough she reached the country of the Vidarbhas. And all her relatives, rejoicing (in her arrival) received her with respect. And seeing her relatives, her children, both her parents, and all her maids, to be well, the illustrious Damayanti, O king, worshipped the gods and Brahmanas according to the superior method. And the king rejoiced at beholding his daughter gave unto Sudeva a thousand kine and much wealth and a village. And, O king, having spent that night at her father's mansion and recovered from fatigue, Damayanti addressed her mother,

saying, 'O mother, if thou wishest me to live, I tell thee truly, do thou endeavour to bring Nala, that hero among men.' Thus addressed by Damayanti, the venerable queen became filled with sorrow. And bathed in tears, she was unable to give any answer. And beholding her in that plight, all the inmates of the inner apartments broke out into exclamation of 'Oh!' And 'Alas!' and began to cry bitterly. And then the queen addressed the mighty monarch Bhima, saying, 'Thy daughter Damayanti mourneth on account of her husband. Nay, banishing away all bashfulness, she hath herself, O king, declared her mind to me. Let thy men strive to find out (Nala) the righteous.' Thus informed by her the king sent the Brahmanas under him in all directions, saying, 'Exert ye to discover Nala.' And those Brahmanas, commanded by the ruler of the Vidarbhas (to seek Nala) appeared before Damayanti and told her of the journey they were about to undertake. And Bhima's daughter spake unto them saying, 'Do ye cry in every realm and in every assembly, 'O beloved gambler, where hast thou gone cutting off half of my garment, and deserting the dear and devoted wife asleep in the forest? And that girl, as commanded by thee stayeth expecting thee, clad in half a piece of cloth and burning with grief! O king, O hero, relent towards, and answer, her who incessantly weepeth for that grief. This and more ye will say, so that he may be inclined to pity me. Assisted by the wind, fire consumeth the forest. (Further, ye will say that) the wife is always to be protected and maintained by the husband. Why then, good as thou art and acquainted with every duty, hast thou neglected both the duties? Possessed of fame and wisdom, and lineage, and kindness, why hast thou been unkind? I fear, this is owing to the loss of my good luck! Therefore, O tiger among men, have pity on me. O bull among men! I have heard it from thee that kindness is the highest virtue. Speaking so, if anybody answereth you, that person should by all means, be known, and ye should learn who he is, and where he dwelleth. And ye foremost of regenerate ones, do ye bring me the words of him who hearing this your speech will chance to answer. Ye should also act with such care that no one may know the words ye utter to be at my command, nor that ye will come back to me. And ye should also learn whether that answers is wealthy, or poor, or destitute of power, in fact all about him.'

"Thus instructed by Damayanti, O king, the Brahmanas set out in all directions in search of Nala overtaken with such disaster. And the Brahmanas, O king, searched for him in cities and kingdoms and villages, and retreats of ascetics, and places inhabited by cow-herds. And, O monarch, wherever they went they recited the speeches that Damayanti had directed them to do."

"Vrihadaswa said, 'After a long time had passed away, a Brahmana named Parnada returned to the city (of the Vidarbhas), and said unto the daughter of Bhima, 'O Damayanti, seeking Nala, the king of Nishadhas, I came to the city of Ayodhya, and appeared before the son of Bhangasura. And, O best of women, I repeated those words of thine in the presence of the blessed Rituparna. But hearing them neither that ruler of men, nor his courtiers, answered anything, although I uttered them repeatedly. Then, after I had been dismissed by the monarch, I was accosted by a person in the service of Rituparna, named Bahuka. And Bahuka is the charioteer of that king, of unsightly appearance and possessed of short arms. And he is skillful in driving with speed, and well acquainted with the culinary art. And sighing frequently, and weeping again and again, he inquired about my welfare and afterwards said these words, 'Chaste women, although fallen into distress, yet protect themselves and thus certainly secure heaven. Although they may be deserted by their lords, they do not yet become angry on that account, for women that are chaste lead their lives, encased in the armour of virtuous behaviour. It behoveth her not to be angry, since he that deserted her was overwhelmed with calamity, and deprived of every bliss. A beauteous and virtuous woman should not be angry with one that was deprived by birds of his garment while striving to procure sustenance and who is being consumed with grief. Whether treated well or ill, such a wife should never indulge in ire, beholding her husband in that plight, despoiled of kingdom and destitute of prosperity, oppressed with hunger and overwhelmed with calamity.' Hearing these words of his, I have speedily come here. Thou hast now heard all. Do what thou thinkest proper, and inform the king of it.'

"O king, having heard these words of Parnada, Damayanti with tearful eyes came to her mother, and spake unto her in private, 'O mother, king Bhima should not, by any means, be made acquainted with my purpose. In thy presence will I employ that best of Brahmanas, Sudeva! If thou desirest my welfare, act in such a way that king Bhima may not know my purpose. Let Sudeva without delay go hence to the city of Ayodhya, for the purpose of bringing Nala, O mother, having performed the same auspicious rites by virtue of which he had speedily brought me into the midst of friends.' With these words, after Parnada had recovered from fatigue, the princess of Vidarbha worshipped him with profuse wealth and also said, 'When Nala will come here, O Brahmana, I will bestow on thee wealth in abundance again. Thou hast done me the immense service which none else, indeed, can do me, for, (owing to that service of thine), O thou best of the regenerate ones, I shall speedily regain my (lost) lord.' And thus addressed by Damayanti, that high-minded Brahmana comforted her, uttering benedictory words of auspicious import, and then went home, regarding his mission to have been successful. And after he had gone away, Damayanti oppressed with grief and distress, calling Sudeva, addressed him, O Yudhishtira, in the presence of her mother, saying, 'O Sudeva, go thou to the city of Ayodhya, straight as a bird, and tell king Rituparna

living there, these words: 'Bhima's daughter, Damayanti will hold another Swayamvara. All the kings and princes are going thither. Calculating the time, I find that the ceremony will take place tomorrow. O represser of foes, if it is possible for thee, go thither without delay. Tomorrow, after the sun hath risen, she will choose a second husband, as she doth not know whether the heroic Nala liveth or not. And addressed by her, O monarch thus, Sudeva set out. And he said unto Rituparna, all that he had been directed to say.'"

Chapter 71

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'Having heard the words of Sudeva king Rituparna, soothing Bahuka with gentle words, said, 'O Bahuka, thou art well-skilled in training and guiding horses. If it pleases thee, I intend to go to Damayanti's Swayamvara in course of a single day.' Thus addressed, O son of Kunti, by that king, Nala felt his heart to be bursting in grief. And the high-souled king seemed to burn in sorrow. And he thought within himself, 'Perhaps Damayanti in doing this blinded by sorrow. Or, perhaps, she hath conceived this magnificent scheme for my sake. Alas, cruel is the deed that the innocent princess of Vidarbha intends to do, having been deceived by my sinful and low self of little sense. It is seen in the world that the nature of woman is inconstant. My offence also hath been great; perhaps she is acting so, because she hath no longer any love for me owing to my separation from her. Indeed, that girl of slender waist, afflicted with grief on my account and with despair, will not certainly do anything of the kind, when especially, she is the mother of offspring (by me). However whether this is true or false, I shall ascertain with certitude by going thither. I will, therefore, accomplish Rituparna's and my own purpose also.' Having resolved thus in his mind, Bahuka, with his heart in sorrow, spake unto king Rituparna, with joined hands, saying, 'O monarch, I bow to thy behest, and, O tiger among men, I will go to the city of the Vidarbhas in a single day. O king!' Then, O monarch, at the command of the royal son of Bhangasura, Bahuka went to the stables and began to examine the horses. And repeatedly urged by Rituparna to make haste, Bahuka after much scrutiny and careful deliberation, selected some steeds that were lean-fleshed, yet strong and capable of a long journey and endued with energy and strength of high breed and docility, free from inauspicious marks, with wide nostrils and swelling cheeks, free from faults as regards the ten hairy curls, born in (the country of) Sindhu, and fleet as the winds. And seeing those horses, the king said somewhat angrily, 'What is this, that thou wishest to do? Thou shouldst not jest with us. How can these horses of mine, weak in strength and breath, carry us? And how shall we be able to go this long way by help of these?' Bahuka replied, 'Each of these horses bears one curl on his forehead, two on his temples, four on his sides, four on his

chest, and one on his back. Without doubt, these steeds will be able to go to the country of the Vidarbhas. If, O king, thou thinkest of choosing others, point them out and I shall yoke them for thee.' Rituparna rejoined, 'O Bahuka, thou art versed in the science of horses and art also skillful (in guiding them). Do thou speedily yoke those that thou thinkest to be able.' Thereupon the skillful Nala yoked upon the car four excellent steeds of good breed that were, besides, docile and fleet. And after the steeds had been yoked, the king without loss of time mounted upon the car, when those best of horses fell down upon the ground on their knees. Then, O king, that foremost of men, the blessed king Nala began to soothe the horses endued with energy and strength. And raising them up with the reins and making the charioteer Varshneya sit on the car, he prepared to set out with great speed. And those best of steeds, duly urged by Bahuka, rose to the sky, confounding the occupant of the vehicle. And beholding those steeds gifted with the speed of the wind thus drawing the car, the blessed king of Ayodhaya was exceedingly amazed. And noticing the rattle of the car and also the management of the steeds, Varshneya reflected upon Bahuka's skill in guiding horses. And he thought, 'Is he Matali, the charioteer of the king of the celestials? I find the same magnificent indications in the heroic Bahuka. Or, hath Salihotra versed in the science of horses taken this human shape so beautiful? Or, is it king Nala the reducer of hostile towns that hath come here? Or, it may be that this Bahuka knoweth the science that Nala knoweth, for I perceive that the knowledge of Bahuka is equal to that of Nala. Further, Bahuka and Nala are of the same age. This one, again, may not be Nala of high prowess, but somebody of equal knowledge. Illustrious persons, however, walk this earth in disguise in consequence of misfortune, or agreeably to the ordinance of the scriptures. That this person is of unsightly appearance need not change my opinion; for Nala, I think, may even be despoiled of his personal features. In respect of age this one equals Nala. There is difference, however, in personal appearance. Bahuka, again is endued with every accomplishment. I think, therefore, he is Nala.' Having thus reasoned long in his mind, O mighty monarch, Varshneya, the (former) charioteer of the righteous Nala, became absorbed in thought. And that foremost of kings Rituparna, also, beholding the skill of Bahuka in equestrian science experienced great delight, along with his charioteer Varshneya. And thinking of Bahuka's application and ardour and the manner of his holding the reins, the king felt exceedingly glad."

Chapter 72

"Vrihadaswa said, 'Like a bird coursing through the sky, Nala soon crossed rivers and mountains, and woods and lakes. And while the car was coursing thus, that conqueror of hostile cities, the royal son of

Bhangasura, saw his upper garment drop down on the ground. And at soon as his garment had dropped down the high-minded monarch, without loss of time, told Nala, 'I intend to recover it. O thou of profound intelligence, retain these steeds endowed with exceeding swiftness until Varshneya bringeth back my garment.' Thereupon Nala replied unto him, 'The sheet is dropped down far away. We have travelled one yojana thence. Therefore, it is incapable of being recovered.' After Nala had addressed him thus, O king, the royal son of Bhangasura came upon a Vibhitaka tree with fruits in a forest. And seeing that tree, the king hastily said to Bahuka, 'O charioteer, do thou also behold my high proficiency in calculation. All men do not know everything. There is no one that is versed in every science of art. Knowledge in its entirety is not found in any one person. O Bahuka, the leaves and fruits of this tree that are lying on the ground respectively exceed those that are on it by one hundred and one. The two branches of the tree have fifty millions of leaves, and two thousand and ninety five fruits. Do thou examine these two branches and all their boughs.' Thereupon staying the car Bahuka addressed the king, saying, 'O crusher of foes, thou takest credit to thyself in a matter which is beyond my perception. But, O monarch, I will ascertain it by the direct evidence of my senses, by cutting down the Vibhitaka. O king, when I actually count, it will no longer be matter of speculation. Therefore, in thy presence, O monarch, I will hew down this Vibhitaka. I do not know whether it be not (as thou hast said). In thy presence, O ruler of men, I will count the fruits and leaves. Let Varshneya hold the reins of the horses for a while.' Unto the charioteer the king replied, 'There is no time to lose.' But Bahuka answered with humility, 'Stay thou a short space, or, if thou art in a hurry, go then, making Varshneya thy charioteer. The road lies direct and even.' And at this, O son of the Kuru race, soothing Bahuka, Rituparna said, 'O Bahuka, thou art the only charioteer, there is none other in this world. And, O thou versed in horse lore, it is through thy help that I expect to go to the Vidarbhas. I place myself in thy hands. It behoveth thee not to cause any obstacle. And, O Bahuka, whatever thy wish. I will grant it if taking me to the country of the Vidarbhas to-day, thou makest me see the sun rise.' At this, Bahuka answered him, saying, 'After having counted (the leaves and fruits of the) Vibhitaka, I shall proceed to Vidarbha, do thou agree to my words. Then the king reluctantly told him, 'Count. And on counting the leaves and fruits of a portion of this branch, thou wilt be satisfied of the truth of my assertion.' And thereupon Bahuka speedily alighted from the car, and felled that tree. And struck with amazement upon finding the fruits, after calculation, to be what the king had said, he addressed the king, saying, 'O monarch, this thy power is wonderful. I desire, O prince, to know the art by which thou hast ascertained all this.' And at this king, intent upon proceeding speedily, said unto Bahuka. 'Know that I am proficient at dice besides being versed in numbers. And Bahuka said unto him, 'Impart unto me this knowledge and, O bull among men, take from me my knowledge of horses.' And king Rituparna,

having regard to the importance of the act that depended upon Bahuka's good-will, and tempted also by the horse-lore (that his charioteer possessed), said, 'So be it.' As solicited by thee, receive this science of dice from me, and, O Bahuka, let my equine science remain with thee in trust.' And saying this, Rituparna imparted unto Nala the science (he desired). And Nala upon becoming acquainted with the science of dice, Kali came out of his body, incessantly vomiting from his mouth the virulent poison of Karkotaka.

And when Kali, afflicted (by Damayanti's curse) came out (of Nala's body), the fire of that curse also left Kali. Indeed, long had been the time for which the king had been afflicted by Kali, as if he were of unregenerate soul. And Nala the ruler of the Nishadhas, in wrath, was bent upon cursing Kali, when the latter, frightened, and trembling, said with joined hands, 'Control thy wrath, O king! I will render thee illustrious. Indrasena's mother had formerly cursed me in anger when she had been deserted by thee. Ever since that time undergoing sore affliction I resided in thee, O mighty monarch, O unconquered one, miserably and burning night and day with the venom of the prince of snakes. I seek thy protection. If thou dost not curse me who am affrighted and seek thy protection, then those men that will attentively recite thy history, shall be even free from fear on my account.' And thus addressed by Kali, king Nala controlled his wrath. And thereupon the frightened Kali speedily entered into the Vibhitaka tree. And while the Kali was conversing with Naishadha, he was invisible to others. And delivered from his afflictions, and having counted the fruits of that tree, the king, filled with great joy and of high energy, mounted on the car and proceeded with energy, urging those fleet horses. And from the touch of Kali the Vibhitaka tree from that hour fell into disrepute. And Nala, with a glad heart, began to urge those foremost of steeds which sprang into the air once and again like creatures endued with wings. And the illustrious monarch drove (the car) in the direction of the Vidarbhas. And after Nala had gone far away, Kali also returned to his abode. And abandoned by Kali, O king, that lord of earth, the royal Nala, became freed from calamity though he did not assume his native form.'"

Chapter 73

"Vrihadaswa said, 'After Rituparna of prowess incapable of being baffled had, in the evening, arrived at the city of the Vidarbhas, the people brought unto king Bhima the tidings (of his arrival). And at the invitation of Bhima, the king (of Ayodhya) entered the city of Kundina, filling with the rattle of his car all the ten points, direct and transverse, of the horizon. And the steeds of Nala that were in that city heard that sound, and hearing it they became delighted as they used to be

in the presence of Nala himself. And Damayanti also heard the sound of that car driven by Nala, like the deep roar of the clouds in the rainy season. And Bhima and the steeds (of Nala) regarded the clatter of that car to be like that which they used to hear in days of yore when king Nala himself urged his own steeds. And the peacocks on the terraces, and the elephants in the stables, and the horses also, all heard the rattle of Rituparna's car. And hearing the sound, so like the roar of the clouds, the elephants and the peacocks, O king, began to utter their cries, facing that direction, and filled with delight such as they experience when they hear the actual roar of the clouds. And Damayanti said, 'Because the rattle of his car filling the whole earth, gladdens my heart, it must be King Nala (that has come). If I do not see Nala, of face bright as the moon, that hero with countless virtues, I shall certainly die. If I am not clasped today in that hero's thrilling embrace, I shall certainly cease to be. If Naishadha with voice deep as that of the clouds doth not come to me today, I shall enter into a pyre of golden brilliance. If that foremost of kings, powerful as a lion and gifted with the strength of an infuriated elephant, doth not present himself before me, I shall certainly cease to live. I do not remember a single untruth in him, or a single wrong done by him to others. Never hath he spoken an untruth even in jest. Oh, my Nala is exalted and forgiving and heroic and magnificent and superior to all other kings, and faithful to his marriage vow and like unto a eunuch in respect of other females. Night and day dwelling upon his perceptions, my heart, in absence of that dear one, is about to burst in grief.'

"Thus bewailing as if devoid of sense, Damayanti, O Bharata, ascended the terrace (of her mansion) with the desire of seeing the righteous Nala. And in the yard of the central mansion she beheld king Rituparna on the car with Varshneya and Bahuka. And Varshneya and Bahuka, descending for that excellent vehicle, unyoked the steeds, and kept the vehicle itself in a proper place. And king Rituparna also, descending from the car, presented himself before king Bhima possessed of terrible prowess. And Bhima received him with great respect, for in the absence of a proper occasion, a great person cannot be had (as a guest). And honoured by Bhima, king Rituparna looked about him again and again, but saw no traces of the Swayamvara. And the ruler of the Vidarbhas, O Bharata, approaching Rituparna, said, 'Welcome! What is the occasion of this thy visit?' And king Bhima asked this without knowing that Rituparna had come to obtain the hand of his daughter. And king Rituparna, of unbaffled prowess and gifted with intelligence, saw that there were no other kings or princes. Nor did he hear any talk relating to the Swayamvara, nor saw any concourse of Brahmanas. And at this, the king of Kosala reflected a while and at length said, 'I have come here to pay my respects to thee.' And the king Bhima was struck with astonishment, and reflected upon the (probable) cause of Rituparna's coming, having passed over a hundred yojanas. And he reflected, 'That passing by other sovereigns, and leaving

behind him innumerable countries, he should come simply to pay his respect to me is scarcely the reason of his arrival. What he assigneth to be the cause of his coming appeareth to be a trifle. However, I shall learn the true reason in the future.' And although king Bhima thought so, he did not dismiss Rituparna summarily, but said unto him again and again, 'Rest, thou art weary.' And honoured thus by the pleased Bhima, king Rituparna was satisfied, and with a delighted heart, he went to his appointed quarters followed by the servants of the royal household."

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'And, O king, after Rituparna had gone away with Varshneya, Bahuka took the car to the stables. And there freeing the steeds, and tending them according to rule, and soothing them himself, sat down on a side of the car. Meanwhile, the princess of Vidharba, Damayanti, afflicted with grief, having beheld the royal son of Bhangasura, and Varshneya of the Suta race, and also Bahuka in that guise, asked herself, 'Whose is this car-rattle? It was loud as that of Nala, but I do not see the ruler of the Nishadhas. Certainly, Varshneya hath learnt the art from Nala, and it is for this the rattle of the car driven by him hath been even like that of Nala. Or, is Rituparna equally skilled with Nala so that the rattle of his car seemeth to be like that of Nala?' And reflecting thus, O monarch, the blessed and beauteous girl sent a female messenger in search of Nishada."

Chapter 74

"Damayanti said, 'O Kesini, go thou and learn who that charioteer is that sitteth by the car, unsightly and possessed of short arms. O blessed one, O faultless one, approaching him, cautiously and with sweet words, make thou the usual inquiries of courtesy and learn all particulars truly. Having regard to the feeling of satisfaction my mind experienceth, and the delight my heart feeleth, I am greatly afraid this one is king Nala himself. And, O faultless one, having inquired after his welfare, thou shalt speak unto him the words of Parnada. And, O beauteous one, understand the reply he may make thereto.' Thus instructed, that female messenger, going cautiously, while the blessed Damayanti watched from the terrace, addressed Bahuka in these words, 'O foremost of men, thou art welcome. I wish thee happiness. O bull among men, hear now the words of Damayanti. When did ye all set out, and with what object have ye come hither. Tell us truly, for the princess of Vidarbha wisheth to hear it.' Thus addressed, Bahuka answered, the illustrious king of Kosala had heard from a Brahmana that a second Swayamvara of Damayanti would take place. And hearing it, he hath come here, by the help of excellent steeds fleet as the wind and capable of going a hundred yojanas. I am his charioteer. Kesini then asked, 'Whence doth the third among you come, and whose (son) is he? And whose son art thou, and how hast thou come to do this work?'

Thus questioned, Bahuka replied, 'He (of whom thou inquirest) was the charioteer of the virtuous Nala, and known to all by the name of Varshneya. After Nala had, O beauteous one, left his kingdom, he came to the son of Bhangasura. I am skilled in horse-lore, and have, therefore, been appointed as charioteer. Indeed, king Rituparna hath himself chosen me as his charioteer and cook.' At this Kesini rejoined, 'Perhaps Varshneya knoweth where king Nala hath gone, and O Bahuka, he may also have spoken to thee (about his master).' Bahuka then said, 'Having brought hither the children of Nala of excellent deeds, Varshneya went away whither he listed: He doth not know where Naishadha is. Nor, O illustrious one, doth anybody else know of Nala's whereabouts; for the king (in calamity) wandereth over the world in disguise and despoiled of (his native) beauty. Nala's self only knoweth Nala. Nala never discovereth his marks of identity anywhere.' Thus addressed, Kesini returned, 'The Brahmana that had before this gone to Ayodhya, had repeatedly said these words suitable to female lips, 'O beloved gambler, where hast thou gone cutting off half my piece of cloth, and deserting me, his dear and devoted wife asleep in the woods? And she herself, as commanded by him, waiteth expecting him clad in half a garment and burning day and night in grief. O king, O hero, do thou relent towards her that weepeth ceaselessly for that calamity and do thou give her an answer. O illustrious one, do thou speak the words agreeable to her for the blameless one panteth to hear them. Hearing these words of the Brahmana thou didst formerly give a reply! The princess of Vidarbha again wisheth to hear the words thou didst then say.'"

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'O son of the Kuru race, hearing these words of Kesini, Nala's heart was pained, and his eyes filled with tears. And repressing his sorrow, the king who was burning in grief, said again these words, in accents choked with tears: 'Chaste women, though overtaken by calamity, yet protect themselves, and thereby secure heaven. Women that are chaste, deserted by their lords, never become angry, but continue to live, cased in virtue's mail. Deserted by one fallen into calamity, bereft of sense, and despoiled of bliss, it behoveth her not to be angry. A virtuous lady should not be angry with one that was deprived by birds of his garment while striving to procure sustenance and who is burning in misery. Whether treated well or ill she would never be angry, seeing her husband in that plight, despoiled of his kingdom, bereft of prosperity, oppressed with hunger, and overwhelmed with calamity.' And, O Bharata, while speaking thus, Nala oppressed with grief, could not restrain his tears, but began to weep. And thereupon Kesini went back to Damayanti, and acquainted her with everything about that conversation as well as that outburst of grief."

"Vrihadaswa said, 'Hearing everything, Damayanti became oppressed with grief, and suspecting the person to be Nala, said unto Kesini, 'O Kesini, go thou again, and examine Bahuka, and staying in silence at his side mark thou his conduct. And, O beauteous one, whenever he happens to do anything skilful, do thou observe well his act while accomplishing it. And, O Kesini, whenever he may ask water or fire, with the view of offering him obstruction, thou shalt be in no hurry to give it. And marking everything about his behaviour, come thou and tell me. And whatever human or super-human thou seest in Bahuka, together with anything else, should all be reported unto me.' And thus addressed by Damayanti, Kesini went away, and having marked the conduct of that person versed in horse-lore, she came back. And she related unto Damayanti all that had happened, indeed, everything of human and superhuman that she had witnessed in Bahuka. And Kesini said, 'O Damayanti, a person of such control over the elements I have never before seen or heard of. Whenever he cometh to low passage, he never stoopeth down, but seeing him, the passage itself groweth in height so that he may pass through it easily. And at his approach, impassable narrow holes open wide. King Bhima had sent various kinds of meat--of diverse animals, for Rituparna's food. And many vessels had been placed there for washing the meat. And as he looked upon them, those vessels became filled (with water). And having washed the meat, as he set himself to cook, he took up a handful of grass and held it in the sun, when fire blazed up all on a sudden. Beholding this marvel, I have come hither amazed. Further, I have witnessed in him another great wonder. O beauteous one, he touched fire and was not burnt. And at his will, water falling floweth in a stream. And, I have witnessed another greater wonder still. He took up some flowers, began to press them slowly with his hands. And pressed by his hand, the flowers did not lose their original forms, but, on the contrary, became gayer and more odorous than before. Having beheld wonderful things I have come hither with speed.'"

"Vrihadaswa continued, 'Hearing of these acts of the virtuous Nala, and discovering him from his behaviour, Damayanti considered him as already recovered. And from these indications suspecting that Bahuka was her husband, Damayanti once more weepingly addressed Kesini in soft words, saying, 'O beauteous one, go thou once more, and bring from the kitchen without Bahuka's knowledge some meat that hath been boiled and dressed (by him).' Thus commanded, Kesini, ever bent on doing what was agreeable to Damayanti, went to Bahuka, and taking some hot meat came back without loss of time. And Kesini gave that meat, O son of the Kuru race, unto Damayanti. And Damayanti who had formerly often partaken of meat dressed by Nala, tasted the meat that was brought by her hand-maid. And she thereupon decided Bahuka to be Nala and wept aloud in grief of heart. And, O Bharata, overwhelmed with grief, and washing her face, she sent her two children with Kesini. And Bahuka, who was the king in disguise,

recognising Indrasena with her brother, advanced hastily, and embracing them, took them up on his lap. And taking up his children like unto the children of the celestials, he began to weep aloud in sonorous accents, his heart oppressed with great sorrow. And after having repeatedly betrayed his agitation, Naishadha suddenly left the children, and addressed Kesini, saying, 'O fair damsel, these twins are very like my own children. Beholding them unexpectedly, I shed tears. If thou comest to me frequently people may think evil, for we are guests from another land. Therefore. O blessed one, go at thy ease.'"

Chapter 76

"Vrihadaswa said, 'Beholding the agitation of the virtuous and wise Nala, Kesini returned unto Damayanti and related everything unto her. And thereupon Damayanti with a sorrowful heart and eager to behold Nala, again despatched Kesini to her mother, asking her to say on her behalf: Suspecting Bahuka to be Nala, I have tried him in various ways. My doubt now only relates to his appearance. I intend to examine him myself. O mother, either let him enter the palace, or give me permission to go to him. And arrange this with the knowledge of my father or without it. And thus addressed to Damayanti, that lady communicated unto Bhima the intention of his daughter, and upon learning it the king gave his consent. And, O bull of the Bharata race, having obtained the consent both of her father and mother, Damayanti caused Nala to be brought to her apartments. And as soon as he saw Damayanti unexpectedly, king Nala was overwhelmed with grief and sorrow, and bathed in tears. And that best of women, Damayanti, also, upon beholding king Nala in that condition, was sorely afflicted with grief. And, O monarch, herself clad in a piece of red cloth, and wearing matted locks, and covered with dirt and dust, Damayanti then addressed Bahuka, saying, 'O Bahuka, hast thou ever seen any person acquainted with duty, who hath gone away, deserting his sleeping wife in the forest? Who, except the virtuous Nala, could go away, deserting in the woods, his dear and unoffending wife overcome with fatigue? Of what offence was I guilty in the eyes of that monarch since my early youth that he should go away deserting me in the woods while asleep overcome with fatigue? Why should he whom I formerly chose in preference to the gods themselves abandon his ever-devoted and loving wife who had become the mother also of his children? Before the fire, and in presence also of the celestials, he had taken my hand, vowing, 'Verily I will be thine.' Oh, where was that vow when he deserted me. O represser of foes.' While Damayanti was saying all this, tears of sorrow began to flow plentifully from her eyes. And beholding her thus afflicted with grief, Nala also, shedding tears, black as those of the gazelle with extremities of reddish hue, said, 'O timid one, neither the loss of my kingdom nor my desertion of thee was my act. Both were due to Kali. And,

O foremost of virtuous women, lamenting for me day and night, and overcome with sorrow, thou hadst in the woods cursed Kali, and so he began to dwell in my body, burning in consequence of thy curse. Indeed burning with thy curse, he lived within me like fire within fire. O blessed girl, that our sorrows might terminate, that wretch have I overcome by my observances and austerities. The sinful wretch hath already left me, and it is for this that I have come hither. My presence here, O fair lady, is for thy sake. I have no other object. But, O timid one, can any other woman, forsaking her loving and devoted husband, ever choose a second lord like thee? At the command of the king, messengers are ranging this entire earth, saying, 'Bhima's daughter will, of her own accord, choose a second husband worthy of her.' Immediately on hearing this, the son of Bhangasura hath arrived here.' Hearing these lamentations of Nala, Damayanti, frightened and trembling, said with joined hand, 'It behoveth thee not, O blessed one, to suspect any fault in me. O ruler of the Nishadhas, passing over the celestials themselves, I choose thee as my lord. It was to bring thee hither that the Brahmanas had gone out in all directions, even to all the sides of the horizon, singing my words, in the form of ballads. At last, O king, a learned Brahmana named Parnada had found thee in Kosala in the palace of Rituparna. When thou hadst returned a fit answer to those words of his, it was then, O Naishadha, that I devised this scheme to recover thee. Except thee, O lord of earth, there is no one in this world, who in one day can clear, O King, a hundred yojanas with horses. O monarch, touching thy feet I can swear truly that I have not, even in thought, committed any sin. May the all-witnessing Air that courseth through this world, take my life, if I have committed any sin. May the Sun that ever courseth through the sky take my life, if I have committed any sin. May the Moon, that dwelleth within every creature as a witness, take my life, if I have committed any sin. Let the three gods that sustain the triple worlds in their entirety, declare truly, or let them forsake me today.' And thus addressed by her, the Wind-god said from the sky, 'O Nala, I tell thee truly that she hath done no wrong. O king, Damayanti, well guarding the honour of thy family, hath enhanced it. Of this we are the witnesses, as we have been her protectors for these three years. It is for thy sake that she hath devised this unrivalled scheme, for, except thee, none on earth is capable of travelling in a single day a hundred yojanas. O monarch, thou hast obtained Bhima's daughter, and she hath also obtained thee. Thou needst not entertain any suspicion but be united with thy partner.' And after the Wind-god had said this, a floral shower fell there and the celestial kettle-drum began to play, and auspicious breezes began to blow. And beholding those wonders, O Bharata, king Nala, the represser of foes, cast away all his doubts in respect of Damayanti. And then that lord of earth, remembering the king of serpents, wore that pure garment and regained his native form. And beholding her righteous lord in his own form, Bhima's daughter of faultless limbs embraced him, and began to weep aloud. And king Nala also embraced Bhima's daughter devoted to him, as

before, and also his children, and experienced great delight. And burying her face in his bosom, the beautiful Damayanti of large eyes began to sigh heavily, remembering her griefs. And overwhelmed with sorrow, that tiger among men stood for some time, clasping the dust-covered Damayanti of sweet smiles. And, O king, the queen-mother then, with a glad heart, told Bhima all that had passed between Nala and Damayanti. And the mighty monarch answered, 'Let Nala pass this day in peace, to-morrow I shall see him after his bath and prayers, with Damayanti by his side.' And, O king, they passed that night pleasantly, in relating to each other the past incidents of their life in the forest. And with hearts filled with joy, the princess of Vidarbha and Nala began to pass their days in the palace of king Bhima, intent upon making each other happy. And it was in the fourth year (after the loss of his kingdom) that Nala was re-united with his wife, and all his desires gratified, once more experienced the highest bliss. And Damayanti rejoiced exceedingly in having recovered her lord even as fields of tender plants on receiving a shower. And Bhima's daughter, thus recovering her lord, obtained her wish, and blazed forth in beauty, her weariness gone, her anxieties dispelled and herself swelling with joy, ever like a night that is lit by the bright disc of the moon!"

Chapter 77

"Vrihadaswa said, 'Having passed that night, king Nala decked in ornaments and with Damayanti by his side, presented himself in due time before the king. And Nala saluted his father-in-law with becoming humility and after him the fair Damayanti paid her respects to her father. And the exalted Bhima, with great joy, received him as a son, and honouring him duly along with his devoted wife, comforted them in proper words. And duly accepting the homage rendered unto him, king Nala offered his father-in-law his services as became him. And seeing Nala arrived, the citizens were in great joy. And there arose in the city a loud uproar of delight. And the citizens decorated the city with flags and standards and garlands of flowers. And the streets were watered and decked in floral wreaths and other ornaments. And at their gates citizens piled flowers, and their temples and shrines were all adorned with flowers. And Rituparna heard that Bahuka had already been united with Damayanti. And the king was glad to hear of all this. And calling unto him king Nala, he asked his forgiveness. And the intelligent Nala also asked Rituparna's forgiveness, showing diverse reasons. And that foremost of speakers versed in the truth, king Rituparna, after being thus honoured by Nala, said, with a countenance expressive of wonder, these words unto the ruler of the Nishadhas. 'By good fortune it is that regaining the company of thy own wife, thou hast obtained happiness. O Naishadha, while dwelling in disguise at my house, I hope I did not wrong thee in any way, O lord of the earth! If knowingly I have done thee any wrong, it behoveth thee

to forgive me.' Hearing this, Nala replied, 'Thou hast not, O monarch, done me ever so little an injury. And if thou hast, it hath not awakened my ire, for surely thou shouldst be forgiven by me. Thou wert formerly my friend, and, O ruler of men, thou art also related to me. Henceforth I shall find greater delight in thee. O king, with all my desires gratified, I lived happily in thy abode, in fact more happily there than in my own house. This thy horse-lore is in my keeping. If thou wishest, O king, I will make it over to thee.' Saying this, Naishadha gave unto Rituparna that science and the latter took it with the ordained rites. And, O monarch, the royal son of Bhangasura, having obtained the mysteries of equestrian science and having given unto the ruler of the Naishadhas the mysteries of dice, went to his own city, employing another person for his charioteer. And, O king, after Rituparna had gone, king Nala did not stay long in the city of Kundina!"

Chapter 78

"Vrihadaswa said, 'O son of Kunti, the ruler of the Nishadhas having dwelt there for a month, set out from that city with Bhima's permission and accompanied by only a few (followers) for the country of the Nishadhas. With a single car white in hue, sixteen elephants, fifty horses, and six hundred infantry, that illustrious king, causing the earth itself to tremble, entered (the country of the Nishadhas) without loss of a moment and swelling with rage. And the mighty son of Virasena, approaching his brother Pushkara said unto him, 'We will play again, for I have earned vast wealth. Let Damayanti and all else that I have be my stake, let, O Pushkara, thy kingdom be thy stake. Let the play begin again. This is my certain determination. Blessed be thou, let us stake all we have along with our lives. Having won over and acquired another's wealth or kingdom, it is a high duty, says the ordinance, to stake it when the owner demands. Or, if thou dost not relish play with dice, let the play with weapons begin. O king, let me or thyself have peace by a single combat. That this ancestral kingdom should, under all circumstances and by any means, be recovered, there is the authority of sages for holding. And, O Pushkara, choose thou one of these two things--gambling with dice or bending the bow in battle!' Thus addressed by Nishadha, Pushkara, sure of his own success, laughingly answered that monarch, saying, 'O Naishadha, it is by good fortune that thou hast earned wealth again to stake. It is by good fortune also that Damayanti's ill-luck hath at last come to an end. And O king, it is by good fortune that thou art still alive with thy wife, O thou of mighty arms! It is evident that Damayanti, adorned with this wealth of thine that I will win, will wait upon me like an Apsara in heaven upon Indra. O Naishadha, I daily recollect thee and am even waiting for thee, since I derive no pleasure from gambling with those that are not connected with me by

blood. Winning over to-day the beauteous Damayanti of faultless features, I shall regard myself fortunate, indeed, since she it is that hath ever dwelt in my heart.' Hearing these words of that incoherent braggart, Nala in anger desired to cut off his head with a scimitar. With a smile, however, though his eyes were red in anger, king Nala said, 'Let us play. Why do you speak so now? Having vanquished me, you can say anything you like.' Then the play commenced between Pushkara and Nala. And blessed be Nala who at a single throw won his wealth and treasures back along with the life of his brother that also had been staked. And the king, having won, smilingly said unto Pushkara, 'This whole kingdom without a thorn in its side is now undisturbedly mine. And, O worst of kings, thou canst not now even look at the princess of Vidarbha. With all thy family, thou art now, O fool, reduced to the position of her slave. But my former defeat at thy hands was not due to any act of thine. Thou knowest it not, O fool, that it was Kali who did it all. I shall not, therefore, impute to thee the faults of others. Live happily as thou chooseth, I grant thee thy life. I also grant thee thy portion (in the paternal kingdom) along with all necessities. And, O hero, without doubt, my affection towards thee is now the same as before. My fraternal love also for thee will never know any diminution. O Pushkara, thou art my brother, live thou for a hundred years!'"

"And Nala of unbaffled prowess, having comforted his brother thus gave him permission to go to his own town, having embraced him repeatedly. And Pushkara himself, thus comforted by the ruler of the Nishadhas saluted that righteous king, and addressed him, O monarch, saying these words with joined hands, 'Let thy fame be immortal and live thou happily for ten thousand years, thou who grantest me, O king, both life and refuge. And entertained by the king, Pushkara dwelt there for a month and then went to his own town accompanied by large force and many obedient servants and his own kindred, his heart filled with joy. And that bull among men all the while blazed forth in beauty of person like a second Sun. And the blessed ruler of the Nishadhas, having established Pushkara and made him wealthy and freed him from troubles, entered his richly decorated palace. And the ruler of the Nishadhas, having entered his palace, comforted the citizens. And all the citizens and the subjects from the country horripilated in joy. And the people headed by the officers of state said with joined hands, 'O king, we are truly glad to-day throughout the city and the country. We have obtained to-day our ruler, like the gods their chief of a hundred sacrifice!'"

Chapter 79

"Vrihadaswa said, 'After the festivities had commenced in the city that was full of joy and without anxiety of any kind, the king with a large

force brought Damayanti (from her father's home). And her father, too, that slayer of hostile heroes, Bhima of terrible prowess and immeasurable soul, sent his daughter, having honoured her duly. And upon the arrival of the princess of Vidarbha accompanied by her son and daughter, king Nala began to pass his days in joy like the chief of the celestials in the gardens of Nandana. And the king of undying fame, having regained his kingdom and becoming illustrious among monarchs of the island of Jambu, began once more to rule it. And he duly performed numerous sacrifices with abundant gifts to Brahmanas. O great king, thou also wilt with thy kindred and relatives, so blaze forth in effulgence soon. For, O foremost of men, it was thus that subjugator of hostile cities, king Nala, had fallen into distress along with his wife, in consequence, O bull of Bharata race of dice. And, O lord of the earth, Nala suffered such dire woe all alone and recovered his prosperity, whereas thou, O son of Pandu, with heart fixed on virtue, art sporting in joy in this great forest, accompanied by thy brothers and Krishna. When thou art also, O monarch, mixing daily with blessed Brahmanas versed in the Vedas and their branches, thou hast little cause for sorrow. This history, besides, of the Naga Karkotaka, of Damayanti, of Nala and of that royal sage Rituparna, is destructive of evil. And, O thou of unfading glory, this history, destructive of the influence of Kali, is capable, O king, of comforting persons like thee when they listen to it. And reflecting upon the uncertainty (of success) of human exertion, it behoveth thee not to joy or grieve at prosperity or adversity. Having listened to this history, be comforted, O king, and yield not to grief. It behoveth thee not, O great king, to pine under calamity. Indeed, men of self-possession, reflecting upon the caprice of destiny and the fruitlessness of exertion, never suffer themselves to be depressed. They that will repeatedly recite this noble history of Nala, and those that will hear it recited, will never be touched by adversity. He that listeneth to this old and excellent history hath all his purposes crowned with success and, without doubt, obtaineth fame, besides sons and grandsons and animals, a high position among men, and health, and joy. And, O king, the fear also that thou entertainest, viz., (Some one skilled in dice will summon me), I will for once dispel. O thou of invincible prowess, I know the science of dice in its entirety. I am gratified with thee; take this lore, O son of Kunti, I will tell unto thee."

Vaisampayana continued, "King Yudhishtira then, with a glad heart, said unto Vrihadaswa, 'O illustrious one, I desire to learn the science of dice from thee.' The Rishi then gave his dice-lore unto the high-souled son of Pandu, and having given it unto him, that great ascetic went to the sacred waters of Hayasirsha for a bath.

"And after Vrihadaswa had gone away, Yudhishtira of firm vows heard from Brahmanas and ascetics that came to him from various directions and from places of pilgrimage and mountains and forests that Arjuna of high

intelligence and capable of drawing the bow with his left hand, was still engaged in the austere of ascetic penances, living upon air alone. And he heard that the mighty-armed Partha was engaged in such fierce asceticism that none else before him had ever been engaged in such penances. And Dhananjaya, the son of Pritha, engaged in ascetic austerities with regulated vows and fixed mind and observing the vow of perfect silence, was, he heard, like the blazing god of justice himself in his embodied form. And, O king, (Yudhishtira) the son of Pandu hearing that his dear brother Jaya, the son of Kunti, was engaged in such asceticism in the great forest, began to grieve for him. And with a heart burning in grief, the eldest son of Pandu, seeking consolation in that mighty forest held converse with the Brahmanas possessed of various knowledge who were living with him there."