

became the charioteer of King Ṛtuparṇa.

5) *Nala and Damayantī to the forest.* Puṣkara got the kingdom, wealth and everything that his elder brother, Nala, had possessed. The miserable Nala left everything he had and clad in only one cloth got out of the palace. His wife Damayantī followed him. They stayed outside the city for three days. Puṣkara made a proclamation that if anybody rendered any help to Nala he would be ruthlessly put to death. After that Nala stayed there for three more days, with only water for food and drink. Then he went to the forest. His wife followed him. They were hungry. Nala saw some golden birds. Nala wanted to catch them for food. So he took his only cloth and spread it on the ground. The birds took that cloth and flew away. Those birds were the dices used in the game. They were influenced by Kali. The miserable and hungerstricken Nala asked his wife Damayantī to go with the caravan traders who were going to Avanti and save herself. But she did not consent to go away from him.

They spent that night in an inn. They both fell asleep because of weakness. After a time Nala woke up. He thought that his wife would somehow or other get to some country closeby and save herself, if he left her there. So he decided to take half of her cloth. How to do it without her knowledge? Thinking so he walked round the inn. He saw a good sword. He took the sword, and cut half of the cloth of Damayantī and leaving her in the inn he went away.

In a short while she woke up and missing her husband she cried aloud and ran here and there in search of him. Then she went into the forest crying. A big snake caught hold of her and began to swallow her. She cried aloud. Hearing the cry, a forester came there. He cut the snake open and saved Damayantī. But when he saw her he became overpowered by libido and tried to make her his wife. She got angry and cursed him and he instantly fell down dead. After this she began to wander in the forest aimlessly, often seeing wild animals and fearing them. At last she got on a rock and sat there and began to wail thinking of Nala.

6) *Damayantī in the kingdom of Cedi.* While she was sitting on the rock wailing, a caravan of traders came by that way. They had been attacked by a herd of elephants and were running away from them. They saw Damayantī. She told them her story. They brought her to the kingdom of Cedi. She wandered through the country for a while and finally reached the palace of the King Subāhu. Thinking her to be a mad woman the street boys were following her. The queen saw the woman surrounded by street boys and felt pity for her. She sent her maid and brought her to the palace. Without revealing that she was the queen of King Nala, she told everything else to the queen. The queen consoled her and said that she would get her husband back. She invited Damayantī to stay in the palace till she got her husband back. Damayantī replied as follows: "Mother, I shall stay here. But there are certain conditions. I won't eat remains and offals of victuals, I won't make others to wash my legs. I won't talk with men who are not related to me. If anybody hankers after me you must order him to be killed. Brāhmaṇas may come and see me only in connection with the search for my husband. This is my vow." The queen agreed to her conditions and made

her the attendant of her daughter Sunandā.

7) *Nala in Ayodhyā.* Nala filled with sorrow was walking along the forest when he saw a wild fire. From the midst of the fire somebody was calling Nala by name and crying. When Nala approached the fire, he saw the great and famous serpent Karkoṭaka lying entwined in the flames. Karkoṭaka the King of the Nāgas had once deceived Nārada, who then cursed him that he would become stationary in a place like an immovable thing till Nala came and rescued him. From that day onwards, Karkoṭaka was remaining in that forest without moving. Then the forest caught fire. Karkoṭaka being unable to move had to remain in the fire. Nala immediately saved Karkoṭaka from the fire and with that he was absolved from the curse of Nārada. Karkoṭaka asked Nala to walk forward, counting the steps. When Nala counted ten, Karkoṭaka bit on the leg of Nala and he became ugly. Then the serpent said to the flurried Nala, "Don't fear. I have made you ugly so that others may not recognize you. Now you are ugly because of my poison. But my poison has affected Kali who is in your body. Because he had harmed you who are blameless, he has to suffer for it. So long as this poison is in you, nobody will harm you. You must go to Ṛtuparṇa the King of Ayodhyā and tell him that you are Bāhuka a charioteer. You must give Ṛtuparṇa the spell 'Aśvahrdaya mantra' and get from him the spell 'Akṣahrdayamantra'. After that you will have reunion with your wife and children. Here are two cloths for you. Whenever you want to get your original form you need only wear them." Saying these words Karkoṭaka gave Nala two divine garments and then disappeared.

Nala started for Ayodhyā. He reached the palace on the tenth day. There he was employed as the horse keeper of Ṛtuparṇa on a pay of hundred pieces of gold. Thus he stayed there under the name Bāhuka. Vārṣṇeya and Jivala who were the horse-keepers of Ṛtuparṇa upto that time, were placed under Bāhuka. Bāhuka used to recite a poem every evening when he returned from his work.

Weary and worn of hunger and thirst,
That poor woman, where might she be?
Serving whom will she be now,
Thinking of the unlucky fool?

Hearing this song of lamentation everyday, once his assistant Jivala asked Bāhuka, whom he was reciting the poem about. Bāhuka replied: "Once there was a man who was a fool. He got a good wife. For some reason they were separated. The fool is still wandering about weary and sad in search of his wife."

8) *Damayantī in Kuṇḍinapura.* At this time Damayantī was living in the palace of the King of Cedi, as the maid of princess Sunandā. King Bhīma became very sorry not knowing where Nala and Damayantī had gone. He sent men in all directions to search for them. The King proclaimed that those who found them would be awarded thousand cows, lands assigned to Brahmins, and villages. He proclaimed that so many cows would be given even to those who could give any information about them. Hearing this Brāhmaṇas went in all directions and Sudeva, one of them, reached the Kingdom of Cedi. He recognized Damayantī who was like fire inside the cover of smoke. When Damayantī was alone Sudeva approached her and