

THE *NALOPĀKHYĀNA* REVISITED

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*I Introduction*¹

In my paper “The *Nalopākhyāna* seen through the lens of *kāvya*”² I have hinted to some of the still unexplained elements of the story which may remain as such. A short overview of different opinions on the Nala story (Biardeau, Hiltebeitel, Shulman, von Simson, Smith) shows how divergent are the opinions concerning this story. Then I shall try to point to some of the still unclear facets of the story (*lokapālas*, *svayaṃvara*, *dyūta*, *sabhā*, *satyakriyā*, Nala as a dwarf, Nala as a cook) as they appear in the text. Though I have tried to decipher the earlier mentioned concepts, I think that I have mostly failed in giving answers. I am notorious as someone with many questions, especially when the *Mahābhārata* is concerned. David Shulman remarked well in his “Toward a Historical Poetics of the Sanskrit Epics: “The *Mahābhārata* is unbalanced, chaotic, dangerously expansive, and stubbornly reluctant to come to terms with the world and, above all, with its familiar cultural order ...”³

That Nala’s story was and still is very popular can be seen in its various versions composed in different languages throughout the Indian subcontinent. That the Western public was also impressed by this short literary gem is well known and substantiated with numerous translations as well as with copious scholarly work on it as presented in articles dealing with the subject. My passing overview of some seminal theories concerning the *Nalopākhyāna* published during last few decades is to highlight only some of the still many hazy concepts found

¹ I use the text of PCE of the *Mahābhārata* and the translation of van Buitenen.

² Gönc Moačanin [2016: 405–415].

³ Shulman [2001: 39].

in the story.

II Elaboration: presenting the authors and their ideas in chronological order as their texts appeared.

Madeleine Biardeau in the abstract of her article *Nala and Damayantī, héros épiques*,⁴ mentions that the story of Nala and Damayantī “n’est guère plus qu’un conte ... not much more than a tale ...”.⁵ And that’s why it has been inserted in the 3rd *parvan* of the *Mahābhārata* as a sous-récit or sub-story, an *upākhyāna*. I do not think that *upākhyāna* takes the epic plot in its own way, as she thinks, but contrarily, as I see it, epic takes this Nala story trying to explain some happenings that do not suit the perfect *dharma* image of Yudhiṣṭhira. In the *Nalopākhyāna*, which is for me a love story, I do not see allusions that Biardeau saw — *haṃsas* as connected with upaniṣadic thought and with Brahmā,⁶ I do not see Puṣkara connected with lotus⁷ like a cosmogonic motif. Puṣkara has been hardly mentioned at all and he is there because of the story. Without him as an antagonist, as a counter figure, there would be no story of Nala. Why should Ṛtuparna be an *asura* because his name is Bhāṅgāsuri⁸ when he is a positive character in the story? Why would he be an *asura* like Kali and Dvāpara just because he showed interest in Damayantī’s *svayaṃvara* and only after hearing of it. I do not understand why should the victory of Nala over Kali be a symbolic *dyūta*? Only because of Biardeau’s hypothesis that Nala is “l’Homme par excellence, le roi aux fonctions avatārique.”⁹! For Biardeau Kali and Dvāpara are incarnations of dices¹⁰ and, if as she thinks, that Duryodhana is an incarnation of Kali, and Śakuni of Dvāpara,¹¹ I can just remark that Dvāpara is hardly mentioned after he went into Puṣkara. And if Kali is represented by Duryodhana in the *Sabhāparvan*, it is

4 Biardeau [1984: 247–273] [1985: 1–34].

5 Biardeau [1984: 247].

6 Biardeau [1984: 251].

7 Biardeau [1984: 253].

8 Biardeau [1984: 266].

9 Biardeau [1984: 270].

10 Biardeau [1984: 252] [2002 I: 497] “... on ne dit ni qu’ils sont des *asura*, ni qu’ils sont les coups de dés, mais qui habitent les dés ...”

11 Biardeau [1985: 4].

worth noting that Śakuni/Dvāpara plays not for himself but for Duryodhana. And Puṣkara plays for himself.

What does the concept of mirror story mean?¹² Mirroring what? Are the stories mirrored in concave or convex forms?¹³ I see only distorted pictures in the mirror stories. Biardeau puts too much stress on connection between *yugas* and the name of dices as well as on the meaning of names of the characters.¹⁴ I find it a stretched point when she explains that the union of the couple is implicitly interpreted in upanishadic terms as union of Puruṣa (= Nara/Nala) and Prakṛti or as union of individual *ātman* with supreme Ātman-Brahman, etc.¹⁵ In my opinion the *Nalopākhyāna* is foremostly a human love story between Nala and Damayantī. How can it be proved that Karkoṭaka taking the small form of a thumb alludes to *Kaṭha-up.* IV,12–13 with an image of “dimension du pouce”?¹⁶ This motifs are often found in folk literature, in fairy tales. Though Biardeau’s thoughts are inspirative and made a great impact on some indologists (Hiltebeitel, Bailey, et al.) her conclusions are open to new reevaluations.

J.D. Smith in his article “The Hero as gifted man — Nala in the Mahābhārata”¹⁷ rightly observes: “Despite being so popular, the story of Nala and Damayantī has not often been subjected to critical examination ... It is clearly not an obvious candidate for the attentions of literary critics, who might perhaps feel that analysing such a story would be like using a chainsaw to prune a rosebush.”¹⁸ I agree with his criticism of Biardeau’s approach to the *Nalopākhyāna*. Smith says: “Everything stands for something else, and *everything* stands for

¹² Hiltebeitel [2005: 476] “‘Nala’ is what Biardeau now calls one of Book 3’s three ‘mirror stories’ [2002, I, 412–413] — tales that mirror the listeners’ (the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī’s) current trials.”

¹³ Ramanujan [1999: 23–24] says that “the substories (like Nala’s) often reflect and condense, as in a concave mirror, the main tale. The story of Nala, told to Yudhisthira when he is despondent, exiled in the forest, gives him a perspective on himself, completes in imagination the curve of his life: for Nala, like him, has gambled away his kingdom to his brother, even lost his wife, wanders in the forest, but finally regains wife and kingdom. The substory contains the main story, as the main story contains the substory.”

¹⁴ Biardeau [1984: 262].

¹⁵ Biardeau [1984: 258].

¹⁶ Biardeau [1984: 262].

¹⁷ Smith [1992: 13–31].

¹⁸ Smith [1992: 13–14].

something or other. The great war of the Bhāratas symbolizes the *pralaya* at the end of the *kalpa*; Damayantī symbolizes the Earth; and various other characters in the Nala story similarly have symbolic status. That status is normally determined by the ‘meaning’ of the person’s name, and some of Biardeau’s etymologies are very funny indeed ... After this — very selective — list of absurdities, it will come as no surprise to learn that Biardeau’s overall argument is far from convincing.”¹⁹ To Smith seems it very fanciful when she maintains: “... the ‘sub-text’, by taking up the plot of the Epic in its own way and in its own register, gives us a picture of the Epic that is in some measure renewed and deepened ...” Smith finds more sense in van Buitenen’s words “... The emphasis of the *Nala* story, to be sure, is wholly different from that of The *Mahābhārata*.”²⁰ After analysing Nala’s qualities and the gifts of the gods, describing happenings in the story and adding an appendix with the summary of the story of Nala, he concludes that the story is the story of Nala, not of Damayantī as Biardeau and van Buitenen thought.²¹ At the end Smith says: “Despite the happy ending, the story is thus intrinsically fatalistic, in that it sees *daiva* and not *pauruṣa* as the final determiner of human fortunes. But in *Nala*, unlike the *Mahābhārata*, *daiva* seems generally well-disposed to mankind, and it is the malign Kali who is ultimately the loser.”²²

David Shulman in his “On being human in the Sanskrit Epic — the Riddle of Nala”²³ writes “... about a story about a man who lost his ‘self’ — along with everything else that was his.”²⁴ One may ask whether Nala really lost himself because he was not an agent of his own doings after Kali entered him. Shulman’s article is an attempt of a psychological portrait of Nala²⁵ with almost hostile attitude towards him. While judging his character he gives opinion on Nala as a real human person, not a fictional hero of the *Nalopākhyāna*. It is not easy to present his text in a cursory form. One can agree or disagree with his

19 Smith [1992: 14–15].

20 Smith [1992: 15].

21 Smith [1992: 27].

22 Smith [1992: 28].

23 Shulman [1994: 1–29].

24 Shulman [1994: 1].

25 von Simson [2005: 113] says that Shulman is concerned with psychological-philosophical issues of self, self knowledge, and the autonomy of will against fate.

opinion about "... commonplace conclusion of modern scholarship that the story illuminates from its own perspective certain of the central themes and events of the main epic narrative".²⁶ Shulman says that "... the story is clearly a Märchen, a fairy tale, in the analytic, cross-cultural classification of the folklorists ... a fairy tale with a sting to it ... Like its hero, the story wears a mask, an iconic disguise which all too readily deceives its listeners, lulling them into a dangerous complacency."²⁷ And what to think about his judgement that: "One might be excused for regarding the story not as a fairy-tale with a happy ending but as an intimate, schizoid nightmare."²⁸

Shulman is mostly concerned with Nala's self-knowledge, self-revelation because he starts with an assumption that Nala has lost himself. I don't think that he ever lost himself during all the trials he went through. He criticizes Nala for judging Damayantī because of her second *svayaṃvara* and for blaming Kali for what happened to him.²⁹ I think that Nala just expresses his love towards Damayantī who never resented his behavior. Shulman sees Nala as not being wholly himself, he detects the gap in their communication, he thinks that there is a space between them that is never crossed. I don't agree with his criticism of Nala when on Damayantī's question ... "Where are you, beloved gambler?" he does not just answer "Here ... or I am here ... or I am."³⁰ Nala has to keep his disguise, he cannot be free until Kali is in him. He will be free only after he gets rid of him and after learning *akṣaḥrdaya* which will bring back to him everything he lost. That is why Nala cannot ask, as Damayantī did, "Where are you?", he can speak only in the third person "Where is she ...?" I think that Shulman wrongly thinks that their questions, or riddles, how he calls them, are never really answered.³¹ With unanswered questions and unsolved riddles their happiness could not be described as follows:

26 Shulman [1994: 2].

27 Shulman [1994: 6].

28 Shulman [1994: 12].

29 Shulman [1994: 7–10].

30 Shulman [1994: 11].

31 Shulman [1994: 12].

*sa caturthe*³² *tato varṣe saṃgamyā saha bhāryayā /*
sarvakāmaih susiddhārtho labdhavānparamāṃ mudāṃ // 3,75,25 //
damayantīyapi bhartāramavāpyāpyāyitā bhṛṣam /
ardhasaṃjātasasyeva toyam prāpya vasumdhārā // 3,75,26 //
saivam sametya vyapanītatandrī
śāntajvarā harṣavivṛddhasattvā /
rārāja bhaimī samavāptakāmā
śītāṃśunā rātririvoditena // 3,75,27 //

Three years had passed before he was reunited with his wife, and, his heart contented with all that he desired, he found complete happiness. Damayantī too, on regaining her husband, was wholly refreshed like an acre with half-grown crops on receiving rain.

Rejoined with her husband, her weariness gone,
 Her fever appeased, heart swelling with joy,
 Damayantī, in all her desires fulfilled,
 Shone clear as the night with a rising moon.

It is difficult to follow Shulman when he says “that the text never explicitly connects the *svayaṃvara* nightmare to Nala’s later inner divisions and disguise ...”³³ He does not explain what was the *svayaṃvara* nightmare or why was it a nightmare. Was there any? Maybe the reason for that “nightmare” might have been Kali, an unsuccessful suitor who then waited twelve years to punish not so much Nala, but Damayantī.

Kali told Śakra that he will choose Damayantī at her *svayaṃvara* and when he heard that she chose Nala for her husband, Kali was enraged and said to Gods:

devānām mānuṣam madhye yatsā patimavindata /
nanu tasyā bhavennyāyāṃ vipulam daṇḍadhāraṇam // 3,55,6 //

If she has found herself a human husband in the midst of Gods, then for that she surely deserves a severe punishment!

But if Kali would not have gone into Nala’s body there would be no Nala story at all. Indologists would then have one subject less to ponder upon, a subject so full of resonances that every researcher working on the story gives different solutions, often quite disparate as

³² van Buitenen translates it as “three years” not “in the fourth year” — but that makes no difference in the meaning.

³³ Shulman [1994: 16].

if writing on different textual source. Shulman includes subjects as fate (*daiva*), dicing (*devana*), chance. “... The text articulates not only the obvious and difficult question of whether two can ever be one (as the riddle falsely suggests), but also the even more troubling and rooted problem of whether *one* can ever be one ... The aspect of the riddle that is most saliently made present by this story is not that of coding and decoding, of concealing and revealing ... but rather that of alienation and identity, the integrating or dis-integrating potential of the individual, self-questioning being.”³⁴

Alf Hiltebeitel in his book “Rethinking the Mahābhārata”, in the chapter *Listening to Nala an Damayantī* gives an extensive overview on the subject.³⁵ He comments on Biardeau’s articles of interreferential correspondences or “mirror effects” between the *Nalopākhyāna* and the *Mahābhārata*, on Shulman’s “encapsulation”, on Smith’s stress on Nala’s various gifts, etc. He then focuses on Nala’s possession by Kali.³⁶

Hiltebeitel rightly says that “... *Nala* is perhaps classical India’s greatest love story ... it remains at heart a love story in its vernacular folk tellings as well.”³⁷ That is why I find difficult to follow Hiltebeitel’s way of reasoning when he says that *haṃsa* “... represents the higher flights of Brahmā as the highest transmigrating soul, perhaps it “possesses” with the breathing sound of self-recognition — *so ’ham*, *so’ham*, “I am this, I am this” — which, these epic scenes seem to suggest, is found through love of another. I am, of course arguing that *Nala* is a text alive to both philosophers and lovers: Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī included.”³⁸ As I find that the *Nalopākhyāna* is a kind of a fable, a fairy tale,³⁹ for me *haṃsa* is just *dūta*, a messenger in *kāvya*⁴⁰ sense and not connected with Brahmā. He compares Vārṣṇeya Nalasārathi with Kṛṣṇa Vārṣṇeya but I don’t see how can Nala’s charioteer Vārṣṇeya be compared with Kṛṣṇa as Arjuna’s charioteer? I

³⁴ Shulman [1994: 19].

³⁵ Hiltebeitel [2001: 215–239].

³⁶ Hiltebeitel [2001: 220–236].

³⁷ Hiltebeitel [2001: 218].

³⁸ Hiltebeitel [2001: 221].

³⁹ Gönc Moaçanin [2016: 407–408]; Tokunaga [2009: 22–23] sees in the *Nalopākhyāna* a romance.

⁴⁰ Gönc Moaçanin [2016: 409].

don't see that Kṛṣṇa rescued Draupadī by preventing Draupadī's disrobing because he was not present in *sabhā* during *dyūta* nor is Nala's Vārṣṇeya saving Damayantī and Nala by saving their children "and probably the horses and chariot that will eventually allow Nala to regain his kingdom".⁴¹ In my opinion Nala regained his kingdom after knowing *akṣahṛdaya* and defeating Puṣkara in a final play with dice and that has nothing to do with Vārṣṇeya, the coacher. I also think that the following comparison is overfetched: "Vārṣṇeya recognizes Bāhuka-Nala as *mahātman*, a "great-self", evoking for readers Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on the chariot in the *Gītā*, and also Arjuna's disguise as "the great Nalā".⁴² Following Biardeau's ideas ... "In evoking the indestructible soul, this thumb-sized snake is like the gander: complementary bird and snake images of the soul, each working mysteriously, as it were from opposite ends, to unite Nala and Damayantī. From its cosmic grandeur as the haṃsa that brings two selves together, the self is reduced to its minimum in the single heart, all but lost from the love of its partner."⁴³ When Nala tells Keśinī: "... no other man (*puruṣa*) knows Nala ... his form lost (*naṣṭarūpo*). The self (*ātmā*) surely knows Nala and she who is nearest him ..." In commenting this (3,72–14) Hiltebeitel says that "there is a suggestive juxtaposition here in the usages of the terms *puruṣa*, which only Nala knows, perhaps suggesting a Sāṃkhya isolation of *puruṣa*, and *ātman*, which knows itself."⁴⁴ One may not agree with Hiltebeitel's reasoning but his thought-provoking text has to be taken into account by whoever works on the subject of Nala.

Georg von Simson in his article "The *Nalopākhyāna* as a Calendar Myth"⁴⁵ mentions allusions to botanical and astronomical entities connected with seasonal myth. He maintains that the structure of the *Nalopākhyāna* can be explained on the basis of a year myth that is based mainly on botanical symbolism. That means that "... the main characters of the story carry names which allow of botanical interpretation, and the plants thus hinted at lead us through the year with seasons, starting and ending with the rainy season."⁴⁶ Nala means reed,

41 Hiltebeitel [2001: 226].

42 Hiltebeitel [2001: 233].

43 Hiltebeitel [2001: 229].

44 Hiltebeitel [2001: 234; 234 fn. 41].

45 von Simson [2005: 113–135].

46 von Simson [2005: 113].

Puṣkara lotus, Damayantī a kind of jasmine, etc. “... the union of Nala and Damayantī can be associated with the rainy season, which starts around the summer solstice and forms the most important part of *dakṣiṇāyaṇa*. The period of separation of the two lovers would then correspond to *uttarāyaṇa*.”⁴⁷ All these I could not find reading and rereading the story of Nala.

There were also some other attempts to explain the story of Nala and Damayantī. Parkhill uses as a tool the tripartite process of trying to describe a narrative as a rite of passage transformation (van Gennep, Turner) explaining the happenings with liminal situations (*svayaṃvara*, Kali’s possession of Nala, Nala’s and Damayantī’s realization that gods are at the root of their trials, forest as a symbolic threshold).⁴⁸ Morton Smith, after grammatical and metrical analysis, divides the text into the works of two authors with numerous later insertions.⁴⁹ Gresseth found close similarities in story construction between the *Odyssey* and the *Nalopākhyāna* using as a basis of comparison their linear storyline. In his article he listed the theme and structure correspondences shared by two texts.⁵⁰

After these short glimpses into different views on the *Nalopākhyāna* one easily has a feeling of overinterpretations because of preconceived ideas put into explanations. Obviously, the story is still an unexplored mine giving impetus for further research.

III Vague concepts

Though the *Nalopākhyāna* may give an impression of an easy literature the text presents a number of unresolved problems. I shall mention some of them chronologically as they appear in the story: *lokapālas*, *svayaṃvara*, *akṣadyūta*, *sabhā*, *satyakriyā*, Nala as dwarf, Nala as a cook. And mostly my questions follow.

Lokapālas are world guardians, regents of the four directions: Indra of East, Varuṇa of West, Kubera of North, Yama of South. An interesting change is introduced into the *Nalopākhyāna* when Nārada told Indra that “the World Guardians and the Fire God, supreme

⁴⁷ von Simson [2005: 117].

⁴⁸ Parkhill 1[984: 325–341].

⁴⁹ Smith [1960: 357–386.]

⁵⁰ Gresseth [1979: 63–85].

Immortals all, came to join the king of Gods.” (3,51,22) And they all went to Vidarbha. This is unclear to me because here *lokapālāścāgniḥ* (*lokapālas* and Agni) are mentioned and later as *lokapālāḥ sahendrās* (*lokapālas* and Indra, 3,52,5) and *lokapālāḥ saheśvarāḥ* (3,53,13). Indra, Agni, Yama, Varuṇa are presented (3,52,4; 3,52,6) but Kubera is not among them. Why is Agni taking his place? I have no answer but for Biardeau it is clear that Agni is needed as a cosmic destroying fire when *dharma* is at stake.⁵¹ Question is when did the concept of *lokapālas* as mentioned in this group arise in the Indian cosmological view and when was the list of four fixed. One might have supposed that there were five *lokapālas* with Agni specially mentioned as added to *lokapālas* or maybe just three because *lokapālas* and Agni came to Indra (3,51,22). But how to explain that Indra is joined (3,52,5) though he is one of them four. Indra, Agni, Yama, Varuṇa presented themselves as immortals (*amara*) to Nala (3,52,4) and as gods (*devās*, 3,52,6) and that can only mean that there were really only four of them — without Kubera. If so, then why is Wind/Vāyu who says that “...we have been her guardians for these three years.” (3,75,12) Who are these *sākṣiṇo rakṣiṇaścāsyā vayam*?

Svayamvara for van Buitenen ‘in the epic seems to be a status for highborn women’⁵² but Brockington comments “that seems less apposite for others such as Mādhavī’s and Damayantī’s second *svayamvara*.”⁵³ Brockington says that it is “... literally “self-choice but in reality more of a contest for the woman’s hand among several suitors — is the most favoured by its *kṣatriya* heroes ...”⁵⁴ Brockington also thinks that “... the term seems to belong not so much to the earliest heroic phase of the epics’ development as to the next, more aesthetically and even romantically motivated phase: ...”⁵⁵ and also explains: “Thus the genuine epic *svayamvara* is the contest for the bride’s hand by eligible suitors, that is by eminent heroes, and the prime

51 Biardeau [1984: 261] “La présence d’Agni aux côtés de trois *lokapāla* devient claire: si l’intervention des dieux indiquait leur sollicitude particulière pour le mariage de Damayantī, la présence d’Agni était ambiguë: le Feu sacrificiel pouvait se transformer en bûcher funéraire cosmique.”

52 van Buitenen [1978: 7].

53 Brockington [2006: 39].

54 Brockington [1998: 220].

55 Brockington [2006: 36].

examples of it are those of Draupadī and Sītā. A transitional stage is visible in Damayantī's *svayaṃvara* where the suitors assemble but Damayantī herself then chooses ... a clear sign of its difference from the earlier more robust values ... Thus the contest form of the *svayaṃvara* is in a very real sense a characteristic of the Sanskrit epics.”⁵⁶ There is obviously a difference between two *svayaṃvaras* of Draupadī and of Damayantī.⁵⁷ Difference can be due to different periods when the stories were produced but also from them belonging to two literary styles: Draupadī's “robust” *svayaṃvara* in epic and Damayantī's “transitional” in an *upākhyāna* of the Märchen type included into epic. Damayantī chose Nala by her own wish, as Holtzmann said “vollständig unbeeinflusst,” while the best archer shall win the hand of Draupadī without her expressing any wish about her future husband. Holtzmann perceived it well when he said: “Hier ist also die Freiheit der Tochter in der Wahl des Gatten nicht mehr vorhanden und doch heisst auch diese spätere Form Selbstwahl.”⁵⁸ This means that Holtzmann would not agree with Brockington's view. As a different view for Damayantī's *svayaṃvara* Insler proposed a new reading and translation of *Mahābhārata* 3,54,26, the passage in which Damayantī chooses her husband. Insler focuses on the question: whose garment has Damayantī grasped? Her own or Nala's? He concludes that “... she is taking hold of the end knot of her own lower garment, and this act itself most probably signifies sexual submission to Nala.”⁵⁹

Do epics and *purāṇas* mention *svayaṃvara* as happening twice? It is clear that the second *svayaṃvara* was just Damayantī's stratagem to bring Nala back to her. And why at all do *lokapālas* go to Damayantī's *svayaṃvara*? Why should exactly Kali want to marry Damayantī?⁶⁰ Kali told Śakra: “... I'll choose her, for my heart has gone out to her!” (*mano hi mama tadgatam* 3,55,3). There is no explanation for his

56 Brockington [2006: 40].

57 cf. Gönc Močanin [2016: 407].

58 Holtzmann [1892: 21].

59 Insler [1989: 579–580].

60 Biardeau [1984: 267] has a curious idea that the 2nd *svayaṃvara* was connected with dice. “La reconquête de Damayantī à la cour de son père est déjà un jeu de dés déguisé en *svayaṃvara*. Le nom de Sudeva est donc aussi à mettre en rapport avec le radical *div-*, “jouer aux dés”. C'est un “bon joueur de dés”, ou un joueur de dés dont le jeu est bon, destiné à donner la victoire au bon camp.”

sudden infatuation with Damayantī. Why would Kali wait twelve years? In the meantime he stayed near Nala but what was his shape? Was he present but unseen or did he take a human form? Is Kali a god⁶¹ or a demon?⁶² There are many unanswered questions but to have the story of the *Nalopākhyāna* Kali had to get into Nala's body.

*Akṣadyūta*⁶³ is a very complicated matter in Indian culture. A number of indologists were interested in the subject (Roth, Grierson, Lüders, Keith, Held, de Vreese, Shulman, Syed, White et al.)⁶⁴ trying to understand the game of dice, the way of its playing, its function, connections with *yugas*,⁶⁵ etc. The question of the gambling throws and *yugas*⁶⁶ is not easy to explain because there are different modes of throwing the dice which are still unexplained — from Ṛgvedic *vibhītaka* (RV 10,34) to *pāśakas* and other ways of gambling (e.g. as described in *Sabhāparvan*, in *Virāṭaparvan*⁶⁷, in *Vidhurapāṇḍita-jātaka*,⁶⁸ in *Mṛcchakaṭikā*, etc).⁶⁹ The names of dices correspond with the names of *yugas* (*krta*, *tretā*, *dvāpara*, *kali*) and their meaning equated leads to an ideal scheme — gambling throws as cyclical

61 Shulman [1994: 3].

62 White [1989: 301 fn.76] “Kali is often personified, in myth and ritual, as evil fate which cannot be avoided. In general sense, this is the symbolism of the Kali yuga, the “iron age” in which we are living.”

63 Syed [1996: 279] “Die Bezeichnung *akṣadyūta* kommt im *Mahābhārata* nur an einer Stelle vor: als Kali Puṣkara überredet, Nala herauszufordern, nennt er das Spiel *akṣadyūta*. Ansonsten spricht das Epos von *dyūta* und *devana*.”

64 See references.

65 White [1989: 292–293] “... the *yugas* of the Vedic period were not the astronomical eras of later periods but, rather, five-year cycles. The names of these cycles, rather than corresponding to the four “standard” names for the *yugas* in later literature, were altogether different, each ending in *-vatsara*. The late identification of the four *yugas* (the lot of the universe) with the four *ayas* (the lots one cast), in spite of its analogical correctness, was thus an ex post facto one.”

66 cf. Gonzáles-Reimann [2002].

67 Lüders [1907: 126] “Nun ist es gewiß kein Zufall, daß alle diese Stellen, wo wir *akṣa* im Sinne von *pāśaka* nehmen müssen, gerade im *Virāṭaparvan* vorkommen, d.h. in dem Parvan, in dem auch sonst zum Teil andere und offenbar spätere Sitten und Gebräuche zutage treten als in den übrigen Teilen des Epos.”

68 Gönc Moačanin [2009: 373–398].

69 About different kinds of gambling, see Bhatta [1985.]

cosmological time ending in *pralaya*⁷⁰ and starting anew. But as there can be more than four throws depending on the still unknown and unexplained ways of playing, the ideal picture of connection of *yugas* with the names of dices is shaded.

In my view *Sabhāparvan* is one of the oldest part of the *Mahābhārata*,⁷¹ the *Nalopākhyāna*⁷² is later and the way of gambling is different.⁷³ *Virāṭaparvan* is later than the *Nalopākhyāna* because without having the secret of *akṣahrdaya* received from Bṛhadaśva while listening to the Nala story, Yudhiṣṭhira could not have been able to present himself as a gambler Kaṅka at *Virāṭa*'s court. R̥tupaṇṇa showed Nala his skill in enumerating⁷⁴ at glance the leaves and fruits on *vibhūṭaka* tree, the skill in counting (3,70,23)⁷⁵ was the secret of the dice-game, and he gave Nala this *akṣahrdaya* (3,70,26)⁷⁶ in exchange for Nala's *aśvahrdaya*. *Hṛdaya*, secret or heart, is also mentioned as *vidyā* or knowledge (3,70,22; 3,70,26). Nala had to go through all his trials to receive *akṣahrdaya* and Yudhiṣṭhira received this great gift without giving anything in return.

In Nala's story there is a problematic concept of *vr̥ṣo gavām* (3,56,6) mentioned.⁷⁷ After Kali took possession of Nala, he went to

⁷⁰ Tieken [2004: 45] "...it would seem that the *Mahābhārata* is not determined by the *pralaya* myth but that this myth has its origin in the epic, in particular in the archaic world of potlatch depicted in it." Hildebeitel [1976: 90] "As Biardeau has shown so well, in the symbolism of the *pralaya* that pervades the epic at many points, the destructive role of Śiva is counterbalanced by the reconstitutive role of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa."

⁷¹ Gönc Moaçanin [2005: 163–164].

⁷² Interestingly, Bhatta [1985: 96] says that the story of Nala "...belongs to much earlier period of history even though it is found in the M.Bh. Nala's behaviour towards his wedded wife Damayantī is nobler compared to that of Yudhisthira towards Draupadī."

⁷³ Gönc Moaçanin [2016: 405–407]. About different versions of the play in the Mbh, see Mehendale [1995: 33–39]. Though Duryodhana is equated with Kali (1,61,80) and Śakuni with Dvāpara (1,61,72) I do not see any analogy with game in the *Sabhāparvan* with the game in the *Nalopākhyāna*. For Falk [1986: 108–111] Kali is the losing die and „Rudra fährt in Form des Kali in den Menschen da ist von Nala her zur Geringe bekennt.“

⁷⁴ cf. Grierson [1904.]

⁷⁵ Lüders [1907: 163] *akṣahrdaya* "ist die Fähigkeit, im Augenblick eine größere Anzahl gleichartiger Dinge zu zählen."

⁷⁶ de Vreese 1948: 360–361 "...in the *Nalopākhyāna* the *saṃkhyāna* is represented as a means to influence the event of playing. This cannot be called in question. But what is wrong, is that from this datum no deduction at all can be derived as to the real game."

⁷⁷ Syed [1997: 257] „Der Vergleich der *akṣa-s* mit Kühen, für den ich keinen weiteren

Puṣkara and said to him that with his help he will surely defeat Nala at the dicing game. Puṣkara went to Nala and “Kali again became the Bull-of-the-Cows and joined Puṣkara.”

kalīścaiva vr̥ṣo bhūtvā gavām puṣkaram abhyayāt // 3,56,6//

Why does van Buitenen say that Kali again became *vr̥ṣo gavām*? Till now he was not presented as *vr̥ṣa* and using the word “again” is wrong because the game started just now.

Puṣkara repeatedly urged Nala: “Let us dice! With the Bull!”

dīvyāveti abravīt bhrātā vr̥ṣeṇeti muhur muhuḥ //3,56,7//⁷⁸

And Nala, possessed by Kali, mindlessly gambled crazed by the thrill of dice and lost everything except Damayantī.

Lüders, in his seminal book on gambling in ancient India, pays attention to the word *vr̥ṣa*, the bull. He thinks that it cannot mean the main dice (Hauptwürfel – *akṣamukhya*) as Nīlakaṇṭha thought and that meaning was taken into the Petersburger Dictionary. And if *vr̥ṣa* is a notion at all connected with gambling then it can only be *āya* chosen by Puṣkara for his throw. Lüders gives an example from the *Vidhura-pāṇḍitajātaka* where the King chose *bahula* and Punnaka *sāvaṭa* and thinks that it would rather be a prize (*āya*)⁷⁹ than a mode of play.⁸⁰ Keith agrees with his explanation.⁸¹ Roth thought “der Stier” (*vr̥ṣha*) unter den Kühen” ... vielmehr ist Kali seiner ursprünglichen Bedeutung gemäss der *vr̥ṣha*, das Haupt des Heerde, *Dwāpara* wohnt in den übrigen Würfeln.“⁸² Biardeau thinks that Kali enters into Puṣkara in

Beleg finden konnte, kann sich nur auf die Farbe und die springende Bewegung beider beziehen.“

⁷⁸ Syed [1997: 258] “Unklar bleibt mir Puṣkaras Aufforderung, um oder mit dem Stier zu spielen: *dīvyāveti abravīt bhrātā vr̥ṣeṇeti muhur muhuḥ* (3,56,7). War *vr̥ṣa* möglicherweise eine feststehende Bezeichnung für den einen *akṣa* zuviel, den *kali* in der Gesamtzahl der $x \text{ mal } 4 + 1 \text{ akṣa-s}$?”

⁷⁹ Lüders [1907: 134] “Es kann darnach keinem Zweifel unterliegen, daß *āya* soviel wie ‚Wurf‘, d.h. eine bestimmte Anzahl oder Verbindung von Würfelaugen bedeutet, und das wird durch die Pāśakakevalī bestätigt.”

⁸⁰ Lüders [1907: 141].

⁸¹ Keith [1908: 824].

⁸² Roth [1848: 124].

the form of *vr̥ṣa* (taureau), “le dé le plus puissant”.⁸³ How does she know that it is the most potent dice when, till when she was writing and as well till now, nobody solved the meaning of *vr̥ṣa*?⁸⁴ But if Kali in Nala is *vr̥ṣa* and Puṣkara wins then we can conclude that Kali as *vr̥ṣa* is really a prize or gain as Lüders thought though one may ask what is then the function of Dvāpara in Puṣkara? This short unexplained meaning of just one notion *vr̥ṣa*, connected with gambling, shows that the vexed question of *dyūta* in Indian culture awaits further research.

I add some further thoughts on Nala’s gambling as expressed in the book of Shulman and Handelman “God Inside Out: Śiva’s Game of Dice”: “... Nala’s acquisition of the ‘heart of the dice’ (*akṣa-hṛdaya*), the facility with numbers that allows him his final victory in the game ... But is Nala’s gift the ability to calculate rapidly and correctly, or the ability to *create* and shape reality as he knows it? ...”⁸⁵ and later they add: “... but we may be closer to this ‘heart’ of the matter if we conceive of Nala’s newfound knowledge not as a technical expertise in counting magic, or even as a hard-won facility in calculating a series of complicated moves with many dice or tokens, but, rather, as a creative ability to bring external reality into line with his own precise, internal imagination of it. In this sense, Nala really belongs with the tricksters, who are more than God.”⁸⁶ My comment to this explanation can only be that I miss the point!

Sabhā is an important term in ancient Indian culture though its meaning as found in various literary sources is not clear. Van Buitenen translates it as a lodge in Nala story but as an assembly room in Sabhāparvan, Harry Falk mentions that *sabhā* is outside settlements in

⁸³ Biardeau [2002 I: 485].

⁸⁴ Syed [1997: 258–259, fn. 64] “Mit dem im *Nalopākhyāna* verwendeten Begriff *vr̥ṣa* konnten schon spätere Autoren nichts mehr anfangen...Um dem unverstandenen Begriff einen Sinn zu geben, wird Kali in Gestalt eines Stieres zum Einsatz Puṣkaras erklärt, der über keine anderen Güter verfügt. Diese Interpretation ergibt keinen Sinn, da ein Stier als Einsatz an anderer Stelle im Mbh. nicht mehr erscheint und als *paṇa* in *akṣadyūta* nirgends belegt ist. Der gennante Einschub hängt wahrscheinlich mit späteren Versionen des Nala-Stoffes zusammen, deren Autoren in ähnlicher Unkenntnis des Spieles wie wir aus dem Stier, der ein *akṣa* ist, einen eingesetzten lebenden Stier gemacht haben, siehe die Nala-Episoden im Kathās. und in der Bhāratamañjarī. Lüders S.141 und Keith S.824 übernehmen die nachepische Ansicht, der *vr̥ṣa* sei ein Tier.”

⁸⁵ Handelman and Shulman [1997: 103, fn. 181].

⁸⁶ Handelman and Shulman [1997: 107].

a forest and adds “Schon Held (236) vermutete...daß die Sabhā außerhalb der Ansiedlungen befunden haben muß, vorzugsweise in bewaldeter Landschaft. Tatsächlich finden Nala und Damayantī auf ihrem Irrweg eine Sabhā im Walde und übernachten dort. (3,59,4) ... So deuten alle Stellen darauf hin, daß wir die ursprüngliche Sabhā außerhalb der Siedlung zu suchen haben, im Süden, also in traditionellen Richtung des Todes ... Im Laufe ihrer Geschichte verliert die Sabhā ihre Funktion als Ort der Ahnenverehrung und rückt näher an die Wohnstätten der Lebenden.”⁸⁷ Biardeau thinks that *sabhā* is “... sans doute une sorte d’abri construit dans la forêt ...”⁸⁸ and “... un abri de voyageurs.”⁸⁹ For Shulman *sabhā* is an enclosure in the forest,⁹⁰ for Hildebeitel *sabhā* is hall,⁹¹ for White *sabhā* is a gambling hall,⁹² Edgerton sees in it a court or palace.⁹³ All these explanations did not bring us closer to the understanding of what *sabhā* was. I can just conclude that *sabhā* in which *dyūta* took place in the *Sabhāparvan* is very different from empty *sabhā* in the *Nalopākhyāna* in which Nala and Damayantī spent three nights.⁹⁴

Satyakriyā for N. Brown meant that women “have to base an Act of Truth on the perfection of their sex life. For example, Damayantī performed a Truth Act at her *svayamvara*, basing it upon her chastity, which was complete, even in word and thought, being virginal and prenuptial, and thus compelled the four gods, when disguised as her destined and chosen husband Nala, to reveal themselves.”⁹⁵ He also thought that “the Act must be based upon the perfect performance of one’s function in the universe ...” In the use of Truth he saw a ritual performance which, if correctly executed, even the gods had to oblige, as can be seen in the *Nalopākhyāna*: “... Damayantī, who made a formulaic statement that Nala was her choice and then adjured the gods, in the imperative mood, to assume their true form and so reveal Nala to

87 Falk [1986: 89].

88 Biardeau [1984: 255].

89 Biardeau [2002 I 486].

90 Shulman [1994: 4].

91 Hildebeitel [2001: 227].

92 White [1989: 294].

93 Edgerton [1944: XXV].

94 cf. Gönc Moaçanin [2016: 407].

95 Brown [1968: 172].

her (*tena satyena me devās tam pradiśantu me*).⁹⁶ For Hiltebeitel “it seems that *satya*, in its epic contexts, must be viewed as both a virtue and a quality which can put other virtues or “duties” into effect.”⁹⁷

R. Söhnen-Thieme in her article “On the Concept and Function of Satya (truth) in Ancient Indian Literature”⁹⁸ mentions that there are two *satyakriyās* in the *Nalopākhyāna*, but without further explanation. Interesting is her observation “that they only occur in incidental stories or in parts that are presumably later ... Apparently this motif indeed belonged to legends and tales, but not to the genuine epics which are considered to tell ancient history ... Fairy tales may have things like that, but in real life they have become obsolete ... Thus it seems to be rather a question of literary genre, whether an ‘act of truth’ is made use of or not.”⁹⁹

I think that there are three *satyakriyās* proclaimed by Damayantī:

haṁsānām vacanaṁ śrutvā yathā me naiṣadho vṛtaḥ /
patitve tena satyena devāstaṁ pradiśantu me //3,54,17//
vācā ca manasā caiva yathā nābhicarāmyaham /
tena satyena vibudhāstaṁ eva pradiśantu me //3,54,18//
yathā devaiḥ sa me bhartā vihito niṣadhādhipaḥ /
tena satyena me devāstameva pradiśantu me //3,54, 19 //
svaṁ caiva rūpaṁ puṣyantu lokapālāḥ saheśvaraḥ /
yathāhamabhijāntīyāṁ puṇyaślokaṁ narādhipam //3,54,20 //

If it be true that I chose the Niṣadhan to be my husband, when I heard the words of the wild geese, then by this truth the Gods must point him out to me! If it be true that I have never strayed in speech and thought, then by this truth the Gods must point him out to me! If it be true that the Gods themselves have ordained for the king of Niṣadha to be my husband, then by this truth the Gods must point him out to me! The World Guardians and the Lord must display their own forms, so that I may recognize King Puṇyaśloka!

yathāsau rathanirghoṣaḥ pūrayanniva medanīm /
mama hlādayate ceto nala eṣa mahīpatiḥ // 3,71,8//
adya candrābhavaktraṁ taṁ na paśyāmi nalaṁ yadi /
asaṁkhyeyaguṇaṁ vīraṁ vīnaśiṣyāmyasaṁśayaṁ //3,71,9//
yadi vai tasya vīrasya bahvornādyāhamantaram /

96 Brown [1968: 174].

97 Hiltebeitel [1976: 209].

98 Söhnen-Thieme [1995: 235–244].

99 Söhnen-Thieme [1995: 241].

*praviṣāmi sukhasparśaṃ vinaśiṣyāmyasaṃśayam //3,71,10//
yadi mām meghanirghoṣo nopagacchati naiṣadhaḥ /
adya cāmṭkaraprakhyo vinaśiṣyāmyasaṃśayam //3,71,11//
yadi mām siṃhavikrānto mattavāraṇavāraṇaḥ /
nābhigacchati rājendro vinaśiṣyāmyasaṃśayam //3,71,12//*

If the roar of the chariot that seems to fill the earth gladdens my heart, it must be King Nala! If I do not see today that hero with the moonlike face and countless virtues, I shall perish without a doubt. If I am not held today in that hero's arms, of such delicious touch, I shall perish without a doubt. If the Niṣadha who roars like the thunder of the monsoon, shining like gold, does not come to me today, I shall perish without a doubt. If that Indra of kings, valiant as a lion, who can stop a mad elephant, does not come, I shall perish without a doubt.

*tathā cemaṃ mahīpāla bhaje'haṃ carāṇau tava /
yathā nāsatkṛtaṃ kiṃcinmanasāpi carāmyaham //3,75,6//
ayaṃ carati loke'sminbhūtasākṣī sadāgatiḥ /
eṣa muñcatu me prāṇānyadi pāpaṃ carāmyaham //3,75,7//
tathā carati tigṃāṃśuḥ pareṇa bhuvanaṃ sadā /
sa vimuñcatu me prāṇānyadi pāpaṃ carāmyaham //3,75,8//
candramāḥ sarvabhūtānāmantaścarati sākṣivat /
sa vimuñcatu me prāṇānyadi pāpaṃ carāmyaham //3,75,9//
ete devāstrayaḥ kṛtsnaṃ trailokyam dhārayanti vai /
vibruvantu yathāsatyamete vādya tyajantu mām //3,75,10//*

Even as I hug these feet of yours, even so I have not ever dishonored you even in my thoughts! The ever-restless wind that courses through the world, spying on all creatures, shall rid me of my life if I have done any wrong. So the sting-rayed sun that forever travels over the world of beings shall rid me of my life, if I have done any wrong. The moon that moves through all creatures as a witness to their doings shall rid me of my life, if I have done any wrong. These three Gods who support all the three worlds shall pronounce the truth or relinquish me on the spot!

For curse to be effective *satya* is also needed:

*yathāhaṃ naiṣadhādanyaṃ manasāpi na cintaye /
tathāyaṃ patatāṃ kṣudraḥ parāsurmṛgaṇvānaḥ //3,60,37//*

If even in my heart I have never thought of any man but Nala, so let this brute who lives of animals fall dead!

Nala as a dwarf After saving Karkoṭaka Nala suddenly becomes disfigured. He is described as a dwarf, as a hunchback (63,10; 64,4, 69,27) with a new name Bāhuka or Hrasvabāhu. Hiltebeitel says that

Nala sees himself deformed (*virūpa*, 3.68.6) and dwarfish or short (*hrasva*).¹⁰⁰ Biardeau observed that Nala with his name Bāhuka indicates that Nala's short hands are humiliating for a king warrior (*roi guerrier*).¹⁰¹ Shulman sees Nala as an ugly, short-armed dwarf.¹⁰² His beautiful form was changed in order that he be not recognized. In this I see an element of a fable, of fairy tale where in happy end the hero gets restored to his original form after the trials he had to go through being in disguise. Without pretending to be someone else he would never succeed in being who he really was and is. My mentioning Nala's changed appearance is in hope that Indologist will pay more attention to this feature of Nala's story as well as to *Nala as a cook*. Nala became an outstanding cook and specialist for preparing meat thanks to the boon from Yama, one of the *lokapālas*. Why it was Yama who gave him a taste for food is unclear to me. The meaning of such an importance of being a cook is eluding me.

IV Conclusion containing unanswered questions

One of the unsolved problems connected with the *Nalopākhyāna* is its relation to *Virāṭaparvan* and there exists a number of divergent views concerning this subject. About *Virāṭaparvan* van Buitenen said: "... it is likely that an earlier form of the *Bhārata* did without it. It is an addition, no doubt, but in the sense that an embellishment is an addition, pointing up a particularly beauty of the wearer."¹⁰³ Shulman is of different view when he states that "As has become increasingly clear from recent studies, the *Virāṭaparvan* is no mere accretion interpolated into the "original" *Mahābhārata* — as an earlier generation of scholars believed — but a critically important statement of major epic themes and concerns ... we may agree with Hiltebeitel's view of the *Virāṭaparvan* as embodying "the 'deepest' level of their (the epic poets') play with symbols."¹⁰⁴ How to understand Hiltebeitel when he says that *Virāṭaparvan* "may show each of the Pāṇḍavas to be a mini-Śiva as complement to Draupadī, incarnation of the goddess. More

¹⁰⁰ Hiltebeitel [2001: 230, fn. 32].

¹⁰¹ Biardeau [1984: 262; 2002 I: 490].

¹⁰² Shulman [1994: 4].

¹⁰³ van Buitenen [1978: 21].

¹⁰⁴ Shulman [1985: 257–258].

clearly, however, each of them is a refraction of Nala as complement to Draupadī, mirror image of Damayantī.”!? And he also mentions “obvious identifications of Nala and Damayantī with Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna, and Draupadī.”¹⁰⁵ How can they be compared, not to say be identified, when their characters are so disharmonious? Is there anything identical in the case of Damayantī and Draupadī? Indeed, it is their being *sairāndhrī*¹⁰⁶ while in disguise. Hiltebeitel says for Draupadī: “But it is clear enough that the epic presents Draupadī as willfully undertaking a state of extended symbolic menstrual defilement by continuing to wear her hair loose during her twelve years of exile and her thirteenth year in the ironic disguise of a hairdresser.”¹⁰⁷ Though they both play a role of *sairāndhrī*, I think that Damayantī and Draupadī cannot be compared because they are so different as characters.¹⁰⁸ It is hard to imagine that they could really be chambermaids/hairdressers when they were so neglected, dirty, even terribly dirty as Damayantī (3,65,8), disheveled. They being *rajasvalā* — what can mean menstruating but also being dusty — does not solve the problems with identifications. Biardeau thinks that as *sairāndhrī* Damayantī is showed as having a connection with Earth.¹⁰⁹ For me it is difficult to follow Biardeau’s way of thinking and her conclusions about Damayantī compared to Goddess (Déesse guerrière) like one in *Devīmāhātmya*.¹¹⁰ “Il est normal que le N (= *Nalopākhyāna*), en mettant en avant une héroïne, aide en même temps à approfondir le personnage féminin central de l’épopée.”¹¹¹ That means Draupadī.

I shall just point to comparable items concerning our heroines. They can be compared but they can never be taken as identical nor as to mirror each other. For example: hair (Draupadī’s¹¹² pledge not to bind her hair,¹¹³ Damayantī’s uncombed hair without an oath); garment

¹⁰⁵ Hiltebeitel [2001: 237].

¹⁰⁶ About the meaning of the word see van Buitenen [1978: 8–9].

¹⁰⁷ Hiltebeitel [1985: 43].

¹⁰⁸ Gönc Moačanin [2016: 406–407].

¹⁰⁹ Biardeau [1984: 267].

¹¹⁰ Biardeau [1985: 33].

¹¹¹ Biardeau *ib* [1985: 33].

¹¹² Cf. Hiltebeitel [2011: 3–32].

¹¹³ It is interesting that in 4,8,1 Draupadī braided her perfect, curly-tipped locks and in 4,15,36 she undid her hair what means that it was not unbound.

(attempt of disrobing Draupadī in *sabhā*, Damayantī's garment cut in two by Nala);¹¹⁴ Draupadī is impure because she is menstruating, Damayantī is not; behaviour (Draupadī is wild and always dissatisfied and complaining,¹¹⁵ Damayantī is dignified); reason for exile (Yudhiṣṭhira's weakness and Nala being under the influence of Kali as reasons for losing in *dyūta* that led to different outcomes), etc. All these observations could be subjects for further research.

In my view *Virāṭaparvan* is later¹¹⁶ than the *Nalopākhyāna* what can be seen from the allusions to the Nala story. Nala is mentioned there by Arjuna (4,2,27) though Arjuna was not present when Bṛhadaśva told the story about Nala and Damayantī. Van Buitenen uses the word masquerade for *Virāṭaparvan*,¹¹⁷ Pāṇḍavas became new personae¹¹⁸ wearing a mask. Their appearances did not change as it happened with Nala but in order not to be recognized they lived disguised.

Yudhiṣṭhira is a gambler Kaṅka;¹¹⁹ he, after receiving a boon of *akṣaḥṛdaya* from Bṛhadaśva, becomes skilled in gambling. It is interesting to notice again a fact that Yudhiṣṭhira receives *akṣaḥṛdaya* not giving anything in return as Nala did while exchanging his *aśvaḥṛdaya* with Ṛtuparna's *akṣaḥṛdaya*. Hiltebeitel follows Biarreau in taking Nala as a homonym for Nara and connects Nala with Arjuna "... who was a sage called Nara in a previous life, and who is himself

114 van Buitenen [1975: 183] striking parallel between Damayantī's and Draupadī's loss, or near loss, of their garments "... he (Nala) loses his kingdom; he must dwell in the forest; his wife follows him; they rest in a traveller's lodge in the forest that is inexplicably called a *sabhā*, an assembly hall; in this *sabhā*, Damayantī loses half her skirt and is deserted." ; about Draupadī's garment see Hiltebeitel [2011: 33–51].

115 van Buitenen [1978: 11] says for Draupadī that she is "... an extremely proud lady on whom the servitude of her husbands and herself grates painfully."

116 van Buitenen [1978: 15] "If we assume that the Book of *Virāṭa* is relatively late ..."; 1978: 19 "... I have no difficulty accepting the historical lateness of the Book of *Virāṭa*, though I think a better argument can be made for that ... Here then there is a problem within a problem: there can be occasions when a particular text portion (*Virāṭa*) appears to be an interpolation *in toto*, because of a secondary interpolation *in parte* (*Durgāstava*).” Cf. Gönc Moaçanin [2016: 413].

117 van Buitenen [1978: 5].

118 van Buitenen [1978: 5–10]; Hiltebeitel [1980: 147–174].

119 Fitzgerald [1998: 258–259] thinks that Kaṅka does not mean a heron but a carrion-eating bird ... and storks are the most plausible heron-like birds to look to.” Why is Yudhiṣṭhira represented as a carrion-eating bird is unclear to me. It sounds ominously and might be connected with his role in fatal war.

recursively identified with Nala by the disguise he takes in the *Virāṭaparvan* as a eunuch under the name Bṛhannalā,¹²⁰ “the great Nalā”, which, with its feminine ending, means “the Great Man, as Woman”. Damayantī evokes these connections herself when, with mixed joy and bitterness upon sensing Nala’s return, she says, “Nala has been like a eunuch to me” (3,71,14).¹²¹ I don’t see any connection between Arjuna as Bṛhannalā and Nala.¹²² I think that Damayantī expresses her lonesomeness without Nala who was not with her for three years. That means that without him she had no marital life as if she were living with an eunuch. Attempt as to whether the disguises of Pāṇḍavas can be found in only one person, in Nala, was made by Hiltebeitel,¹²³ but the subject needs to be further explored. One might ask why exactly these disguises? I can almost feel a kind of autoirony in their choices. Their appearances did not change, their disguises were voluntarily chosen contrary to Nala’s which was forced on him and disfigured him.

V Epilegomena

Critical view of Nala is found in S. Jamison’s book *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer’ Wife*: “The Vedas and epics abound in stories of resourceful, energetic, and verbally and dharmically accomplished women, coupled with weak or dilatory men. Other examples besides Damayantī in the epic include Sāvitrī, Śakuntalā (in her epic form, not that of the famous play of Kālidāsa), and Draupadī (especially in the aftermath of the dicing scene) ... In story after story women see what needs to be done, take command, and order the bewildered, hand-wringing male participants into their supporting roles — and the enterprise fails only when one of these ninnies messes up his part of the woman’s plan. (Nala is a prime example).¹²⁴ And she adds that

¹²⁰ Cf. Shulman: The Androgynous Clown: Bṛhannaḍā at *Virāṭa*’s Court in [1985: 256–276].

¹²¹ Hiltebeitel [2001: 218–219].

¹²² cf. J.D. Smith [1992: 14–15] criticizing Biardeau’s explanation that Bṛhannalā refers to “the incarnation of the *r̥ṣi* Nara /*nala*=*nara* again/” Bṛhannalā, as every Sanskrit-studying schoolboy doubtless knows, means ‘she of the big prick’.”

¹²³ Hiltebeitel [2001: 238–239].

¹²⁴ Jamison [1996:15].

“Damayantī is always mopping up after Nala’s stupid behavior.”¹²⁵

We may or may not agree with her rigid observation what shows that this popular story invites for new revisitings in the attempt better to understand it.

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¹²⁵ Jamison [1996: 262 fn. 37].

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