The Evolution of a Sanskrit Literary Culture:
A Study of the *Naiṣadha* Tradition in Light of Its Commentaries and Receptive Histories

by

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THE EVOLUTION OF A SANSKRIT LITERARY CULTURE:
A STUDY OF THE *NAIṢADHA* TRADITION IN LIGHT OF ITS COMMENTARIES
AND RECEPTIVE HISTORIES

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Abstract

The Evolution of a Sanskrit Literary Culture:
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This dissertation, "The Evolution of a Sanskrit Literary Culture: A Study of the

Naiṣadha Tradition in Light of Its Commentaries and Receptive Histories," is a textual

and historical study of how, over the course of many centuries, a culture of reading and

re-reading comes to be formed around seminal works of Sanskrit literature. Focusing on

poet-philosopher Śrīharṣa's twelfth century epic poem (*mahākāvya*) *Naiṣadhīyacarita* (or

Naiṣadha), a vastly influential text with a rich history of adaptation and critical

interpretation in Sanskrit and regional South Asian languages, this thesis seeks to

highlight the importance of commentary and anecdotal literature in shaping the text's

form, production, understanding, dissemination, and appreciation.

Taking fragments from eight to ten Sanskrit commentaries on the *Naiṣadha*--

three of them published or partially published and the rest from unpublished manuscripts

-- and selections from relevant semi-historical texts or largely anonymous anecdotal

traditions that touch on various aspects of the poem's receptive history, this thesis

investigates the early critical superstructure that creates or informs the growth of the

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Naiṣadha tradition, one of the most important literary text traditions of pre-modern South Asia. Seeing the ways in which early critical documents from the first four or five centuries of an eight hundred year-old tradition might inform contemporary reading communities, the study offers insight into the life of texts in South Asia, the processes of their use and canonization.

A central argument of this thesis is that a seminal cultural text and its hermeneutic and critical documents can be seen as converging aspects of the same literary process that come to constitute what one may call a text-tradition. In order to begin to provide a coherent account of the "life" of the *Naiṣadha* tradition, the dissertation primarily focuses on the way in which the poem's literary culture came to be formed during its early periods of reception. It assesses the content, reading strategies, and social context of Sanskrit commentary writing during the first few centuries of the second millennium and its successive impact on later generations of commentators.
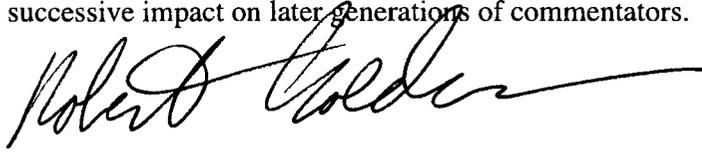
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My time as a research scholar in India yielded the opportunity to study with some of the great living scholars of Sanskrit. I am especially thankful to have had the opportunity to read the entire *Naiṣadhīya* under the patient and loving tutelage of Srinivas Rath, to my mind the most eminent Sanskrit *mahākavi* of modern India. I also thank the

kindness of my friends and teachers in Puri, Pondicherry, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Varanasi, Delhi, Kolkata, Pune, Vadodara, Ahmedabad, and especially Ujjain.

For every page of this thesis, I am grateful to a number of institutions. If it were not for the generous financial support from the University of California at Berkeley, the Fulbright DDRA program, and the Muktabodha Indological Research Institute, I would not have had sufficient means to travel to and live in India for any significant period of time. I am also grateful to the Kuppuswami Sastri Insitute in Chennai and, in particular, to the Kalidas Akademi and Scindia Oriental Institute of Ujjain, where I had the privilege of access to books and human resources for several important months of research.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO *NAIṢADHA* AS TEXT-TRADITION

Poet Śrīharṣa's celebrated *Naiṣadhīyacarita* ["Life of Nala"] (often called

simply *Naiṣadha*) has inspired one of the more fascinating literary developments

in the Sanskrit tradition. The poem itself was probably composed in the middle of

the twelfth century in Kānyakubja under the Gāhaḍavāla reign of Govindacandra,

Vijayacandra or Jayantacandra.[1] Judging from the poem's influence on later

literature in Sanskrit and the regional languages of South Asia, the *Naiṣadha* may

be safely cited as the most important *mahākāvya* -- if not the most significant

Sanskrit literary composition -- of the age. The ways in which this poem's literary

culture came to be formed in its early periods of reception essentially constitutes

the subject of the following discussion. Through a selective examination of the

information provided in some of the *Naiṣadha*'s early commentaries[2] and

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[1] Commentators are divided in their opinions. Gadādhara places Śrīharṣa in Govindacandra's court while Rājaśekharasūri mentions him in the court of Govindacandra's grandson Jayantacantra (or Jayacandra). Some scholars identify Śrīharṣa's lost *Vijayapraśasti* (see Jani 116) as a paean to Vijayacandra, father of Jayantacandra. It seems that the poet's tenure most probably overlapped in the reign of Vijayacandra and his son Jayantacandra.

[2] Paul Griffiths (in *Religious Reading*) succinctly defines commentary:

> If a work is a metawork in which there are overt signs of the presence of another work, by quotation, summary, or paraphrase; if these signs outweigh, either quantitatively or qualitatively, other elements in the work; and if the structure and order of the work is largely given to it by those of the other work whose presence is evident in it -- then the work in question is a commentary (85).

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traditional lore, the larger interest is to better understand from the point of view of its receivers the processes that inform the shaping of a canonical Sanskrit literary tradition. The poem and its hermeneutic and critical documents are here understood to be converging aspects of the same literary process that come to constitute what one may call a "*Naiṣadha* tradition." With most pre-modern Sanskrit literary texts, the various threads that tie together their "tradition" often remain obscure, unavailable or unrecorded. Fortunately, a rather substantial nucleus of material for the *Naiṣadha* -- primarily in the form of Sanskrit commentaries -- remains accessible for students interested in understanding how a Sanskrit text comes to be historically received. Several dissertations have already investigated, along with their study of the poem, traces of the *Naiṣadha*'s literary and receptive process in terms of composition, transmission, historical contexts, interpretive frames and the agents of interpretation, literary criticism, canonization, pedagogical and creative application, and contemporary valuation.[3] The contribution here is to carry forward their investigations in a few places and to organize some of the information in such a way as to foreground the significance

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He discusses the purposes of commentary, citing six major categories: comprehension, application, justification, refutation, absorption, and fulfillment of extratextual needs (see Griffiths 1999: 89-94).

[3] Several studies in English and Hindi are consulted and cited in this dissertation, the single most important English source being A.N. Jani's *magnum opus A Critical Study of the Naiṣadha* (1957), which has condensed numerous texts' worth of information about the *Naiṣadha* and its hermeneutic traditions into a single point of reference. The classic study of the *Naiṣadha* in the Hindi language is Caṇḍika Prasād Śukla's *Naiṣadha-pariśilan* (1960), which puts forth the topics of the *Naiṣadha* tradition along the traditional lines of Sanskrit literary schooling.

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of the Sanskrit commentaries and the processes they embody in the formation of an enduring literary culture.

In conjunction with their role as links between text and audience, the commentaries constitute traditions of interpretation that generally revolve around issues of authority, hierarchy, community, and tradition.[4] With little scrutiny put on them as significant documents in their own right, a traditional Sanskrit commentary's aesthetic, historical, and social reasons for being in light of their role in the shaping of a text's receptive tradition have been largely ignored or misrepresented by historians and Sanskrit scholars alike.[5] The early hermeneutic

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[4] Griffiths has valuably articulated this point around what he calls the nature of "religious reading," a term for traditional attitudes and methods that cross-culturally and cross-temporally sustain institutions for teaching and learning: "The key elements here are authority, hierarchy, community, and tradition. The presence of these in institutions of religious reading will inevitably have effects upon how curriculum is decided, how teaching is done, and how certification is granted" (63-64).

[5] Much modern criticism seems to focus negatively on the traditional commentary's putative *naivete* and lack of sophistication "especially when compared to the principles set forth in contemporary philosophical hermeneutics and literary theory" (Cabezon [in Timms 166]. According to Griffiths, an influential "consumerist" spirit of hermeneutics differs radically from the traditional text-centered models in that it "is subject to nothing other than [its] own creative impulses, and constrained by nothing other than the limitless potential of the signifiers to be arrayed to serve and please them" (45). Cabezon elaborates: "In other instances, "overlooking" traditional hermeneutics provides modern scholarship with the necessary space to develop "exegesis" (*lege agenda*) of their own . . . [using] native exegesis selectively in an attempt to create a formal system unknown to, and frequently in conflict with, the tradition's self-understanding" (167). A very common knock on traditional commentaries has been that they do not focus on the "original" meanings of the text. Arthur Waley, for example, speaking about traditional Chinese commentaries sees them as lacking "any intention or desire to discover what is meant originally , , , and therefore useless." Radhakrishnan bemoans one aspect of "the scholastic period" of Sanskrit

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efforts of the *Naiṣadha*'s Sanskrit commentators have, by and large, determined

the appreciation and grounds for inquiry suitable to the text. Their successors have

generally sustained the early traditions while reflecting in their work an evolving

discourse of the text.[6] In exerting interpretive control through a host of strategies,

these documents have guided generations of readers and cultural producers in

processing, enjoying, and using the *Naiṣadha*.[7] Leaving aside the paramount task

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culture as "sometimes grossly polemical . . . more confusing than enlightening." (76) Self-critiques
of a more specific nature also emerge among Sanskrit commentators themselves (Bhoja, most
famously, in his preface to a commentary on the *Yogasūtra*), a point that will be taken up later.

[6] Ronald Inden offers a perspective from which to study such a phenomenon:

> People read texts of the past through the later commentaries that frame them and
> especially through those of their own present. Most of these commentaries in India were
> the oral commentaries of the text's teachers. Some teachers formalized and inscribed their
> commentaries or glosses (almost invariably leaving out what we in the present would most
> like to know). We do not want, however, to suggest either that these supplements were
> either violent appropriations or the unfolding of an original author's intention. Rather, we
> wish to see the relationship between text and supplement as problematic. There is always
> some gap between them . . . The reader is, thus, always confronting a discourse in the text
> (including its earlier commentaries) that differs from his or her own discursive position.
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[7] Although remarking on the critical contexts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, Robert Goldman's
comments on the importance of these documents as translating agents between text and reader hold
fundamental relevance to the popular *Naiṣadha* tradition as well:

> "The translator(s) of the major popular literary texts of a traditional culture such as India's
> do not sit in direct, unmediated contact with their author(s), struggling alone to grasp his
> or her intention across the barriers of time, space, and culture. For the very fact of the
> popular success of these texts means that from ancient to modern times they have been
> subject to a vast multiplicity of readings, commentaries, interpretations, and reworkings
> both in the original language of the text and in many others. Such documents thus come
> to us with an unusually intricate and deeply embedded intertextuality that the would-be
> translator can ignore only at his or her peril." ("Translating Texts Translating Texts", 93)

Elsewhere, about their broader value:

> "[T]hese works give us a unique avenue through which we can gain insight into the ways
> in which a variety of individuals were able to deploy the entire spectrum of the traditional
> systems of Sanskritic/*śāstraic* knowledge in the service of the elucidation of deeply
> cherished but contested texts. In short, I believe that these works, when taken seriously --

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of facilitating comprehension, some of their other important contributions are assessed in this discussion, including:

- **The determination of a critical text.** Having debated the authenticity and extent of the *Naiṣadha*'s variant readings, the commentators have soberly considered doubts raised by their inherited version of the text. The *Naiṣadha*'s semantic richness and multiplicity of readings -- the most "bewildering mass" of readings in all of *kāvya* literature, according to K.K. Handiqui -- makes their work in this area particularly noteworthy.

- **The reinforcement of cultural models and canons of rules and, in some cases, the framing of interpretive strategies applied to the text by succeeding readers.** Most commentaries are products of scholars specially trained in specific disciplines. By the time of Śrīharṣa, analysis of a poem's rhetorical elements and discussion about its total contexts had become a long-standing practice. Therefore, all of the commentators, to some extent, display a heightened sensitivity to linguistic "rules" revolving around the science of traditional grammar (*vyākaraṇaśāstra*), customary poetic usage (*sāhityaśāstra*), and available lexicographical resources

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let me stress this again -- afford us an unparalleled opportunity to observe the workmanlike application, rather than simply the formulation, theorization, and defense of pre-modern Sanskrit knowledge systems. They also give modern Sanskrit teachers a valuable resource through which to develop their students' grammatical, lexical, and stylistic skills without undue reliance on western style reference works. They also enable students and teachers alike to grasp and appreciate the intellectual habits of the scholarly mind in pre-modern India from roughly 12th to the 18th centuries." ["How fast do monkeys fly?" (5)]

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(*koṣa*). While performing their acts of *glossa* and interpretation to make the poem clear and enjoyable for readers, the commentators in their role as professional pedagogues and guardians of traditional institutions also frequently point out, with varying degrees of bluntness, usages considered jarring, ineffective, or grammatically unhappy (*doṣa*) according to their inherited tradition. In some interesting cases, commentators have exceeded the standard demands of facilitating literal comprehension by organizing exegesis around their specific expertise; one professional reader, for example, has focused on *Naiṣadha* primarily through the prism of literary effects (*sāhityaśāstra*), another on its relationship to philosophical ideas, while several others have aimed to expand the text's hermeneutic discourse to include not only the breadth of numerous literary, scientific and philosophical points of view but also to invest the poem with spiritual and mystical undertones. Ultimately, the interpretive frames that these scholars set up in their commentaries draw attention to the poem itself and have influential consequences on how the text is received by later readers.

- **The provision of a coherent narrative of the poet's life, the composition of the text, and an accounting of its widespread dissemination.** While the poem's semantic and syntactic properties constitute the single most important determinant of value, presuppositions held about the history of its production invest the text with a significance that it might not otherwise have. Several of the *Naiṣadha* commentators give the illusion of providing

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a remembered history of Śrīharṣa's biography. With the absence of any

corroborative sources, the commentators' narratives -- while perhaps based

in some fact intrinsically embedded in the text or part of an oral tradition

available to them -- are ultimately structured around anecdotal, semi-

historical, and pseudo-biographical data crafted to suit a credible legend of

the poet and text. In this way, textual criticism and unresolved curiosities

are artfully inserted into provocative, though unlikely, literary histories.[8]

Such insertions are made to explain, for example, the *Naiṣadha*'s

"difficulty," its association with the mystical *cintāmaṇi* mantra, its non-

customary linguistic style and usage, and the shadowy history of its

transmission and recognition among different communities.

- **A move toward critical judgment of the poem's aesthetic value and
  literary significance.** Assessing a text's value historically seems to be
  intrinsically tied to interpretation.[9] While performing low-key exegesis of

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[8] Much ink has flowed in modern times speculating about Śrīharṣa's home and native language,
essentially because the credible historical records are obscure on the question. While a few of the
traditional *Naiṣadha* commentators and other writers firmly locate his origins in various places
(discussed later), others seem not to be particularly interested. Such is not the case among the
modern scholars. Kashmir, Kanauj, Benaras, and the collective region (Gauḍa) of modern Assam,
Orissa, and Bengal are often argued as the birthplace and home of Śrīharṣa. See Jani 95-109 for a
full account of these arguments.

[9] Gregory Currie writes: "Evaluation is, as I shall say, historically sensitive. But interpretation
plays a role in evaluation that makes it historically sensitive too. Evaluation depends on
interpretation, in the sense that many of the features we would appeal to in defending an evaluation
of the work are interpretive features . . . anachronistic interpretation makes for anachronistic

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individual verses, Sanskrit commentaries on literary texts generally do not

indulge in overt and autonomous acts of valuation -- so much a part of the

modern notion of interpretation. However, the need to express judgment or

to remark on something extraordinary sometimes does find a level of

expression either in the opening or closing praise-verses (*praśasti*) to the

cantos, in the introductory prefaces (*avataraṇa* or *avataraṇika*), and to a

lesser extent in the body of the text. Taking cues from how commentaries

construct the nature of a text, most of the evaluative criticism of a work and

its historical legacy is left up to an influential store of anonymous verses

that mushroom around a popular text and its commentaries. For at least the

last few hundred years, it appears that no study of the text *Naiṣadha* in

India is complete without accounting for these verses, which have become

integral parts of the tradition of the text itself.

Taking fragments from eight to ten Sanskrit commentaries -- three of them

published or partially published and the rest from unpublished manuscripts -- and

selections from relevant semi-historical texts or largely anonymous anecdotal

traditions that touch on various aspects of the poem's receptive history, the

intention here is to investigate an early critical superstructure that seeks to create

or inform the growth of the *Naiṣadha* tradition.

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evaluation, and anachronistic evaluation is misevaluation" (332). [Currie, Gregory. "Work and
Text." Mind, Vol. 100.399, July, 1991. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.]

I. *Popularity and Legacy of the* Naiṣadha *in South Asia*

The richness of the *Naiṣadha* tradition reveals itself in the diverse reasons given for its appeal by generations of scholars.[10] From its inception in the late twelfth century C.E. to the present day, the textual and critical tradition of one of the most popular Sanskrit literary texts remains unbroken and wholly available to the scholar of literature and history. The *Naiṣadha* marks a major transition point between the classical literature produced in the Sanskrit language before it and the Sanskrit literature in the context of the emerging literatures of the regional languages of pre-modern India that follows it. A comprehensive literary history of this eight hundred year-old tradition would include all of the exegetical and creative material tied to the *Naiṣadha*: the recorded oral and written historical, anecdotal, and creative conjecture surrounding it; a close analysis of the summaries, translations, adaptations, and transcreations in Sanskrit and regional Indian languages drawn from it; and a studied familiarity with the collective body of accumulated thought, discussion, polemic, explanation, and criticism on the poem that has coalesced to form a set of popular notions about what one may call, for lack of a better word, a "tradition" of the text. Moreover, a full study of the

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[10] Meher (11) notes, for example: "This literary composition of Śrīharṣa earns high admirations from many noted Sanskrit scholars, both Oriental and Occidental. For the felicitous expression, bold approach, intellectual relevance, emotional charm, scriptural significance, philosophical probing and above all, scholarly structure of Indian wisdom, this epic is renowned as a monumental masterpiece in Sanskrit."

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Naiṣadha tradition might also include a comprehensive presentation of the contents provided in all available commentaries on *Naiṣadha*, in Sanskrit and otherwise; a detailed discussion of the poem's relationship with the regional languages[11] and literatures of South Asia[12]; a historical tracing of its ancient and

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[11] There are a number of linguistic usages in *Naiṣadha* that exhibit the way in which 12th century Sanskrit was linguistically interacting with the emerging regional languages of the time. While it is often highlighted that Śrīharṣa "mines" the Sanskrit dictionaries (*kośa*) to render some 1,000 difficult and obsolete words in his poem (See Appendix 6 in Jani), the numerous contemporary (*samākālika*), local (*deśīya*), and newly minted (*navya*) words brought into the Sanskrit idiom by Śrīhārṣa also deserve prominence in histories of South Asian language. Very often in *Naiṣadha* commentaries, one finds commentators labeling diction directly inserted from the regional languages as *bhāṣaśabda* or *deśyaśabda*, sometimes speculating on the particular region as well. Nārāyaṇa, for example, in locating the origins of the word *laladḍimba* (in *Nc.* 22.51) says that in Gauḍa langauge, *laladḍimba* is the word for "a toy top," while the word in the languages of Kānyakubja and Mahārāṣṭra, the word is *bhāvarā [ḍimbaṃ laladimbamiti vā gauḍadeśabhāṣāyāṃ bhramarakasya sañjñā mahārāṣṭrabhāṣāyāṃ kānyakubjabhāṣāyāṃ ca 'bhavarā' iti sañjñā]*

It is perhaps no coincidence that the *Naiṣadha*'s conscious accounting for the emerging influence of regional South Asian languages and their peculiar literary predilections corresponds to its meteoric dissemination throughout the cultural landscape and its wide use by regional artists in all genres. A.N. Jani provides examples of some of the distinctive twelfth century Sanskrit usages in *Naiṣadha* that show the period's growing proximity (but not necessarily competition, as some literary historians seem to suggest) between the linguistic worlds of Sanskrit and regional languages. For instance, in describing the moon's activity of destroying pining lovers in *Nc* 4.62, the poet uses the word *vyasana* in the sense of "general habit," uncommon in Sanskrit before this time and a primary sense of the word in many modern regional languages. Another interesting "modern" use (in *Nc* 3.8) is of the root √lag in the sense of "following" (commentator Nārāyaṇa, for example, glosses *lagati* with *cacāla*).

Jani also provides nearly fifty examples of the ways in which the idiomatic register of various South Asian languages has been impacted by newly minted Sanskrit expressions in *Naiṣadha*. He cites, for example, several usages that "are common today in Gujarati and Marathi languages" (241):

present place in the Sanskrit curriculum[13], especially in the fields of *kāvya*,

sāhityaśāstra, and *darśana*; and an expansive overview of its representation in the

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katham āsyaṃ darśayitāhe (*Nc* 5.71; *Nc* 20.49) = How shall I show my face? *navīnam
aśrāvi tavānanād idam* (*Nc* 9.41) = I heard this quite new from your mouth. *āsitum
nādatta* (*Nc* 18.53) *vikṣituṃ nādatta* (*Nc* 18.53) *gātuṃ nāyāti* (*Nc* 20.156).

He concludes: "Thus Śrīharṣa's language gives, on the one hand, a colloquial tinge to his poetry
while on the other, it enriches the Sanskrit vocabulary -- a contribution which is indeed valuable"
(242).

[12] The fluidity of linguistic usage among the various regional languages and Sanskrit during the
twelfth and eighteenth centuries is sometimes suggested by the information found in the Sanskrit
commentaries on *Naiṣadha*. In addition to the translingualism of *Naiṣadha*, however, the *Naiṣadha*
tradition suggests a widespread interpenetration of literary motifs, narrative structures and
strategies, and shared cultural themes between the period's Sanskrit literature and literatures being
produced in the various regional languages. Some of these interactions are directly evident in the
adaptations of *Naiṣadha* in Sanskrit and regional languages. Others emerge in the poetry and
poetics that it had a hand in inspiring. [A recent symposium (Jerusalem, Israel 2005) on the role of
Sanskrit literature post-1000 in the different regions of pre-modern India has aimed to investigate
the specificities of this relationship between Sanskrit literary production and the emergence of
regional literatures (See forthcoming essay by Professors Shulman and Bronner).]

[13] While the process through which the *Naiṣadha* found consensus as a classic and worthy entry
into the traditional curriculum of a Sanskrit education is essentially mysterious, it is clear that even
without the auspices of a centralized academic body it became a standard text in many places.
A.N. Jani, for example, cites S. Bhaṭṭācārya: "In the early period, right up to the introduction of the
university system [in Bengal], the *Naiṣadhacarita* was a compulsory text for Sanskrit learners."
Jaydev Jani explained to me that the full text was part of a paṇḍit's culture in Gujarat up until the
last century, citing that the Gaekwad introduced an annual examination (*śrāvaṇamās-
dakṣiṇaparīkṣā*), where for the *ācārya* degree in Sanskrit the entire *Naiṣadha* was a required text.
Traditionally, as an integral part of an institutional method of certification, a commentary on the
Naiṣadha earned a scholar the title of *mahāmahopadhyāya*, equivalent perhaps to a modern
university professorship. Other difficult works that are often formally commented upon for this
purpose include poetician Mamaṭṭa's *Kāvyaprakāśa* and logician Udayana's *Kusumāñjali* whose
authors, remarkably, are figures meaningfully attached to the legend of Śrīharṣa's life (discussed
later). This institutional aspect of the poem's history appears to be an important factor in

musical, dance, theatrical, and plastic arts of all the diverse regions of ancient and modern India that it has penetrated. There are at least sixty works based on the story in Sanskrit alone, including several works that were directly influenced by the *Naiṣadha*, such as *Naiṣadha* commentator Kṛṣṇānanda's thirteenth century *Sahṛdayānanda* and Vandārubhaṭṭa's *Uttaranaiṣadha*.[14]

Although the Nala-Damayantī theme has a rich narrative pedigree[15] and revered religious sanctity[16] from its telling in the *Mahābhārata*[17] and various

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explaining why so many commentaries have been written on the poem. The opening comments found in some commentaries (discussed later) imply as much.

[14] Krishnamachariar 184-185

[15] NP Unni reports that in Malayalam itself the number of works based on this story comes to more than fifty, embracing almost every branch of literature. See Encyclopedia of India Literature (EIL) 2354.

[16] The oft-quoted couplet from the *Vanaparva* of the *Mahābhārata* establishes the meritorious nature of Nala's name (*puṇyaśloko nalo nāma*): "Singing the fame of Karkotaka the snake, King Ṛtuparṇa, and of Nala with Damayantī (effects) the destruction of Kali" [*karkotakasya nāgasya damayantyā nalasya ca / ṛtuparṇasya rājarṣeḥ kīrtanaṃ kalināśanam //* (*MhB* 2.79.11)]. Or the frequent: "Auspicious is Nala, auspicious is Yuddhiṣṭhira, auspicious is Sītā, auspicious is Kṛṣṇa." [*puṇyaśloko nalo rāja puṇyaśloko yudhiṣṭhiraḥ // puṇyaśloko ca vaidehī puṇyaśloko janārdanaḥ //*]. The commentators' remarks on this aspect of the tradition are discussed later. Jani writes that "the reason for its popularity lies possibly in a tradition which has accorded to it a religious sanctity by declaring that its recitation destroys sin and ill-luck" (48), while Krshnamachariar adds that "the story is very popular in India and there is not a household where its narration does not serve as a real solace in many a grievous calamity. Tradition has likewise accorded to it a religious sanctity and a recapitulation of Nala's tale destroys sin and ill-luck." This aspect as it relates to Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadha* is discussed later in light of the way in which commentators introduce the poem to their readers and interpret *Nc.* 1.1 and 1.2. There are also allegorical interpretations of *Naiṣadha* available that see every component of the surface story as symbolic of Vedāntic philosophy or an unfolding of a powerful mantra.

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purāṇa-s,[18] as well as in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and in Jain versions of

Kumārapālapratibodha,[19] Śrīharṣa's poem establishes (like many of his

predecessors who re-imagine classical themes) a narrative and aesthetic presence

markedly different from his sources, whereby even the language, style and genre

innovations,[20] tone, and psychology of the epic poem translate into the subsequent

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[17] It spans nearly thirty chapters in the *vanaparva* of the *Mahābhārata* (3.50.1-, in the Poona critical edition). [It is also referred to in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in pre-epic sources such as the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (ii.2.4.1-2) and the *Vājasaneyisaṃhitā*.]

[18] Versions occur in the *Brahmāṇḍa, Matsya, Vāyu, Padma* and *Liṅga purāṇā*-s.

[19] See Jani, pg. 13 fn. 4 for full details.

[20] For example, although Śukla (34) believes that it is a poetic motif "grounded in the popular culture" (*lokavyavahāramūlak*), it is a well-established practice of early Sanskrit poets (from Vālmiki to Kālidāsa to Kumāradāsa and Bilhaṇa) to elaborately describe feminine beauty "from head to toe" (*nakhaśikhavarṇana* or *padādikeśāntavarṇana*), With the *Naiṣadha*, it becomes elevated (or, as some modern critics would have it, exploited in "bad taste") to full-blown genre status. Thus, *Nc* 7.109 begins by saying: "[thus] describing [Damayantī] beginning with the top of her head and upto the nails [on her feet] . . . " (*cikurād ārabhyainām nakhāvadhi varṇayan*). From the *Naiṣadha*, the motif apparently proliferates into and nourishes many types of emerging poetry in the regional languages. In 1600, Keśavamiśra in his *Alaṃkāraśekhara* categorizes head-to-toe descriptions under 'simile' which, according to some, serves as the model for the fifteenth chapter of Hindi *alaṃkārika* Keshvadas' *Kavipriyā*, which delineates at least thirty-nine parts of the female body that merit the poetic gaze. [See K. Krishnamoorth in EIL 2852-2853 for details]. It is almost certain that these works on poetics were informed by or influenced the love lyrics of such poets as Bihārilal (See Goswamy 15). The *Encyclopedia of Indian literature* also reports that early Oriya *kāvya*-s, like the *Uśābilāśa* of Śiśuśaṅkaradāsa and the *Rukmiṇibibhā* of Kārtikadāsa as well as the work of celebrated Bhañja poets, also came under the influence of the *Naiṣadha*, in terms of "the physical charms of the heroines [being] described in voluptuous idioms and sensuous lines" (EIL 1343).

    Mcgregor (35) also suggests that the early seventeenth century Braj poet Puhkar's *Ras Ratan* incorporates some of Śrīharṣa's narrative innovations in telling the story of the prince and princess falling in love through viewing the paintings of itinerant artists. A similar phenomenon

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translations into various South Asian languages.[21] The record of the *Naiṣadha's*

popularity is staggering in its variety and unique status among the lengthy epic

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occurs, according to Jani, in Marathi poet Narendra's thirteenth century *Rukmiṇīsvayaṃvara*, which

models the love story between Rukmiṇī and Kṛṣṇa on Śrīharṣa's telling (Jani 278). There is also

the famous Hindi poet Canda's thirteenth century *Pṛthvīrāja Rāso*, which speaks of Rāja Jaichand

and his daughter being carried off in a svayaṃvara by Rai Pithirā of Ajmer. Canda's poem actually

mentions its indebtedness to Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadha* (See Jani 278). Some have speculated a firm

connection between the historical events surrounding Pṛthvīrāj Chauhan, his rival Jayacandra

(believed by some to be Śrīharṣa's patron), Jayacandra's daughter Saṃyuktā and his second wife

(*bhogapatnī*) Suhāvadevī. This topic is further discussed later in the thesis in light of information

given by Sanskrit sources.

[21] Two fascinating translations of the *Naiṣadha*, or rather transcreations, come from Andhra

Pradesh (Śrīnātha's *Śṛṅgāra-Naiṣadha*) and Tamil Nadu (Ativīrarāma Pāṇḍiya's sixteenth century

Naiṭatam). The poet Ativīrarāma Pāṇḍiya, a royal scholar of the late sixteenth and early

seventeenth century in southern Tamil Nadu composed the well-known *Naiṭatam*, drawing from

Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadha*. The various choices the Tamil poet makes in light of the *Naiṣadha* prove

interesting for literary historians. For example, whereas the *Naiṣadha* devotes a full chapter to the

popular motif of the heroine (Damayantī) castigating the moon and Kāmadeva (*Nc* 4.75-100), the

Naiṭatam divides the subject into three whole cantos: one chapter assigned to the rising of the

moon, another to accusations hurled against the moon (*candropālambana*), and yet another

censuring Kāmadeva (*manmathopālambana*). On the other hand, where the *Naiṣadha* devotes four

full cantos to describing the national and international gathering of kings at Damayantī's

svayaṃvara, the *Naiṭatam* is content with a single chapter on the subject. Again, the marriage of

Nala and Damayantī occupies two long cantos in *Naiṣadha* while only a short single chapter of

Naiṭatam. What is interesting here from a literary historical point of view is the popularization and

inter-regional development of *Naiṣadha* themes into full-scale poetic genres; in addition, the

particular choices that each tradition makes in terms of elaboration speak to their specific aesthetic

tastes. The Tamil poem also receives the acclaim of being a "testing stone for learned people"

(*naiṭatam pulavark kauṭatam*) corresponding to the epithet *naiṣadham vidvadauṣadham* attached to

the Sanskrit poem. (I am indebted to Dr. C.S. Sundaram for these details. See his *Contributions of*

Tamil Nadu to Sanskrit Literature [Institute of Asian Studies: Chemmancheryy, Chennai, 1999] for

more details.)

 With respect to Śrīnātha's Telugu *Śṛṅgāra-Naiṣadhamu*, which may have been an

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poems (*mahākāvya*) of pre-modern India. One would not fully understand the phenomenon of its eminence in this regard, however, from its representation in the literary histories of Sanskrit literature available in English.[22] There are least fifty

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outgrowth of his own now-lost Sanskrit commentary on Śrīharṣa's poem, V. Nārayana Rao writes that since the eleventh century, the *Naiṣadha* is the only Sanskrit *kāvya* taken as a subject for translation into Telugu (422). B.V. Srinivasacharyulu writes that the *Śṛṅgāra-Naiṣadham* may be considered a forerunner of the full-length poem genre (*prabandha*) in Telugu (See EIL 3307-3308). In treating the *Naiṣadha*, Śrīnātha puts forth an interesting theory of translation. Respecting the original, while aiming to exhibit his own imagination, Śrīnātha claims to eliminate the original text's improprieties; he refuses, for example, to include the *pativratā* goddesses as voyeurs of Nala's beauty (*Nc*.28-31) but is content to replicate Śrīharṣa's portayal of the *apsarā* Rambhā (*Nc*.26), who by habit is sexually unrestricted (*veśya*). He also seeks to eliminate repetitions, while summarizing excessive description (sometimes fitting the content of six Sanskrit verses into a single Telugu verse) or extending a complex idea in one of Śrīharṣa's verses to two or more Telugu verses. By the same token, he is sure to repeat the author's poetic and linguistic usages, often modifying the original without simplifying it. He makes sure that he keeps intact verses he considers learned and beautiful but removes ones that are merely learned. (I am indebted to Dr. Jagdish Sharma of the Kalidas Akademi, Ujjain, for his reading and explaining relevant sections of the text). The *Naiṣadha* seems to have had a very long and important place in Andhra Pradesh.

Other known pre-modern translations of *Naiṣadha* include Guman Mishra's early eighteenth century Hindi translation of the poem known as *Kāvyakalānidhi*. A.S. Mishra reports that Har Dayal had begun a translation into Brajbhāṣā and offers a few examples (See Mishra, pg. 24). Jani mentions that Gujarati poet Bhālana's *Nalopākhyāna* draws upon and actually reproduces much of the *Naiṣadha* into Gujarati. See Jani 278-9 and Appendix 1 for a partial list of known translations of the poem. See also Aufrecht 232-233.

[22] The poem seems not to have appealed to the aesthetic sensibility of several twentieth century Indologists who commented on the poem in their literary histories. With respect to the *Naiṣadha*'s style, descriptive taste, diction, grammatical usage, narrative propriety, and overall choice of theme, the pre-modern and modern critical record of the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* reflects in its own way the extent to which this important text has polarized critical communities. Some of these views (especially those of S.K. De, S.N. Dasgupta, and M. Winternitz) with respect to specific aspects of

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known Sanskrit commentaries and, as the most recent entry into the orthodox canon of *mahākāvya* that still informs the Sanskrit learning of the traditional school system (*pāṭhaśāla*), it overshadowed some three hundred and fifty other *mahākāvya*-s.[23] It also receives over one hundred and thirty citations in at least eleven anthologies of Sanskrit literature.[24] The *Naiṣadha* also stands as the last and most scholastically fecund member of the select "Five Great Poems" (*pañcamahākāvya*) designation of a traditional Sanskrit syllabus.[25] Unlike most other Sanskrit texts, it achieved virtually overnight celebrity, hailed as an "instant classic" in almost every part of the country, leading one of its important commentators to conclude:

> Many are there at present, many poets were born in the past, and many
> more shall be born in times to come. But let the non-jealous poets honestly

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the poem are taken up later when discussing the commentators' assessment of the *Naiṣadha*'s usages and overall place in Sanskrit tradition.

[23] See Jani 164.

[24] Some of the anthologies, beginning as early as the turn of the thirteenth century, include: the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* of Śrīdharadāsa (c. 1206), the *Sūktimuktāvali* of Bhagadatta Jalhaṇa (c. 1257), the *Subhāṣitaratnākara* and the Subhāṣitaratnabhāṇḍāgara, the *Subhāṣitāvali* of Vallabhadeva (c. 15th century), the *Rasikajīvana* of Gadādharabhaṭṭa (c. 1670), the *Subhāṣitapadyaveṇi* of Veṇidatta (c. 17th century). See Appendix 13 of Jani for a complete list.

[25] In another formulation of the canon, the *Naiṣadhīyacarita* is the last member of the "Heavy Three" (*bṛhat-trayī*) or "The Three Touchstones" (*pāṣāṇatrayī*), which includes Bhāravi's *Kirātārjunīya* and Magha's *Śiśupālavadha*. The "Heavy Three," so named because of the length, difficulty, and complexity of composition involved with the poems is balanced with the so-called "Light Three" (*laghutrayī*) of Kālidāsa, which includes the two *mahākāvya*-s *Raghuvaṃśa* and *Kumārasambhava*, in addition to the revered short poem (*khaṇḍakāvya*) *Meghadūta*.

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admit the fact that who else other than Śrīharṣa can dare to ascend the literary throne of all quarters of the country?[26]

Almost immediately after its composition, the *Naiṣadha* in fact reached an unparalleled pitch of popularity, as Gāgābhaṭṭa notes, in "all quarters of the country," with commentaries on it coming from Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Vārāṇasi and other parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Gujarat, Mahārāṣṭra, and southern India from an early period.[27] Its numerous commentaries and regional adaptations, the colorful stories constructed around the poet's identity and the text's transmission,[28] its dramatic appeal for Indian theater and painting, the poetic

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[26] jāyante kati jajñire kati janiṣyante katīha kṣitau sraṣṭāro nitarām idam tu kavibhir nirmatsaraiḥ kathyatām / āpūrvāpara-dakṣiṇottara-harit-sāhitya-siṃhāsana-svair ārohaparākramam bhajatu kaḥ śrīharṣasūreḥ paraḥ// -- Viśveśvara (a.k.a Gāgābhaṭṭa)

[27] At least with the case of poetry, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in South Asia seem to have been a time of porous geographical borders, where traveling singers and promoters of poetry seem to have had easy access to share and receive cultural production from different regions. According to Dr. Jani, the immediate popularity of the *Naiṣadha* is borne out by the available record: in Gujarat, for example, Śrīharṣa's contemporary Mahendrasuri (a pupil of the famous Hemacandra) quotes verses from the *Naiṣadha* in his commentary on *Anekārthasaṃgraha*. There is also a story that Harihara, a descendant of Śrīharṣa, brought a manuscript of the poem to Gujarat in the first half of the 13th century that was copied in a single night by a minister named Vāstupāla who, according to Jani, was "mad after the poem" (274). Also, the first two available commentaries on the poem were composed in Gujarat within a century. In Bengal, it seems to have been popular ever since Jayadeva (*Gītagovinda*) utilized it [See Footnote 5b on Pg. 275 of Jani for examples of influence between the two poets]. One may also add to this list a virtually contemporaneous poem from Tamil Nadu called *Nalavempa* which, as Sundaram shows, plays with similar themes and images used by Śrīharṣa (See Sundaram 134). Further details provided by commentators about the text's transmission are discussed later.

[28] Some of these anecdotes composed by Sanskrit commentators and biographers are dealt with in the thesis in the context of the text's history of production and transmission. Discussing the oral legends surrounding Śrīnātha, the celebrated Telugu poet who composed a creative translation of

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themes and styles associated with lyrics and romance that finds a full voice in

regional language poetry between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and its

interpretive potential (in discrete stanza or *in toto*) for an urbanely secular[29],

allegorically religious, philosophically sectarian, and potently mystical reading[30]

immediately touched scholars[31], theater men,[32] folk singers,[33] painters,[34] pan-

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the *Naiṣadha*, V. Nārāyaṇa Rao writes: "Although rejected by recent literary historians as historically unreliable, these legends, honored by tradition, have a value similar to literary criticism, and they are worth considering as serious representations of the collective wisdom of the literary community" (424).

[29] The reception of Śrīnātha's *Śṛṅgāra-Naiṣadha* in contemporary Telugu literary circles casts a provocative light on what effect Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadha* may have had on some of his contemporary audience and certainly has had on influential modern literary critics like S.K. De and S.N. Dasgupta. V. Narayana Rao writes about the author of *Śṛṅgāra-Naiṣadha*m: "Śrīnāthuḍu kept advertising himself as the maker of *Naiṣadhamu* in Telugu, but to no avail. The work was apparently too secular to be of interest to his patrons" (402). Notice in the Sanskrit sources of its early fame and sustained praise in courts, schools, and poetry gatherings suggests that the *Naiṣadha* was appreciated and not derided for the "distinct lack of taste" that a few modern eyes have seen in it.

[30] Pt. Anjaneya Sarma and modern Telugu poet Sheshendra Sharma related personal knowledge of legendary teachers in the twentieth century who taught *Naiṣadha* as a Vedāntic allegory informed by the Cintāmaṇi mantra.

[31] Even until the middle of the twentieth century, the *Naiṣadha* seems to have held a preeminent place in the scholarly Sanskrit culture of Vārānasi. Dr. Trinath Sharma, for example, related stories of his teacher (the legendary Mahādev Śāstri) recommending only the study of *Naiṣadha* during their summer vacations and of interspersing verses from *Naiṣadha* during their intensive study of *śāstra* and *darśana*. Several scholars in Vārāṇasi also informed me of a recent tradition of all-night scholarly gatherings (*goṣṭhī-s*) in Benaras where Sanskrit paṇḍits played the popular Sanskrit word game *antyākṣarī* -- employing only *Naiṣadha* verses.

[32] The famous Kathakali text (*attakkathā*) of Unnayi Variyar known as *Nalacaritam* is according to N.P. Unni "one of the best, if not the best, of original literary productions in Malayalam . . . the only one of its kind in the whole range of *kathakali* literature and unsurpassed." (See EIL 2855).

Indian teacher-mystics,[35] poets and audiences throughout the pre-modern Indian

subcontinent and continues to have scattered impact even today.[36]

The four-day dramatic performance follows Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadha* closely during the first day, after
which certain changes are made according to taste. Kathakaḷī director Kāvalam Pannikar explains
that the graceful verses that contain the dialogue between the *hamsa* and Damayantī (*Nc* 3.1-3.15)
are treated with special innovation and enacted with gusto.

[33] Dr. T.N. Satheesan, a professor of Malayalam at Aligarh University, informs me that during the
early twentieth century, a few musical plays in Malayalam came to be written on the *Naiṣadha*
theme, which gave ample opportunity to explore all of the sentiments (*rasa*). *Sangeeta
Naishadham* of T.C.Achutamenon was the most popular among them, fusing folk themes with the
familiar elements from the Kathakaḷī text of *Nalacaritam*. As of 1931, according to Dr. Satheesan,
it had 18 editions with 33,000 known copies, a distinction that no other Malayalam drama shares.

[34] B.N. Goswamy, in writing about the famous set of Pahari paintings based on the *Naiṣadha* of
Śrīharṣa, explains that these paintings "have to be related to the [*Naiṣadha*] . . . because they have
to be seen in its terms. Without an understanding of the ethos, the flavour, of the *Naiṣadhacarita*,
the understanding of these paintings, at least their enjoyment, can remain only imperfect" (12).
About the paintings themselves, Goswamy writes: "The present set of paintings . . . present a
largely secular setting . . . Nala and Damayantī in these paintings emerge as archetypal lovers in a
story full of romance and intrigue, mystery and magic. In the hands of these anonymous artists of
two centuries ago, the personages and events of the Nala-Damayantī story take on a new
significance" (vii). He explains some of the approaches the artists take with the *Naiṣadha*'s
contents. For example, with respect to condensing the lush poetry into manageable frames,
Goswamy writes: "This happens especially in paintings in which a long conversation occurs, like
that between Nala and Damayantī when Nala comes as messenger of the gods. The poet, in the
original text, lingers lovingly and long over this, but the artist condenses the sequence into four
paintings and the *paṇḍit* has to confine himself to describing the gist of the conversation on the fly-
leaves of these four paintings" (11). The paṇḍit that Goswamy refers to above is the commentator
of the "Lamp to illumine the meanings of the paintings" (*citrārthadīpikā*), an anonymous Sanskrit
commentary appended to the paintings, whereby the relationship between each individual painting
and Śrīharṣa's verses is elucidated for the viewer. See Goswamy 13.

[35] Sd. Gollaudi Venkata Rama Sastry, a retired judge from the high court of Andhra Pradesh, writes
of his guru's (Brahma Sri Tadepalli Raghava Nararyana Sastrygaru) teaching of the *Naiṣadha* as an
allegory of Vedānta philosophy and Śrīvidyā worship and another of Sastrygaru's students, Dr.

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The manuscript records reveal that sections of the *Naiṣadha* were copied down as discrete works, such as the famous *śleṣa* verses from the thirteenth canto known as the "Five Nalas" (*pañcanalīya*). In addition, there are several poetic summaries of the poem's contents (twenty-two cantos and more than twenty thousand verses), the most well known digest being 19th century Jaipuri pandit Kṛṣṇarāma's "Digest of the *Naiṣadhīyacarita*" (*Naiṣadhīyacaritasāra*).[37] With an aim to simplify and guide similar to that of the anonymous commentator who provided comment for the Pahari paintings of the *Naiṣadha*, Kṛṣṇarāma skillfully summarizes selected aspects of the *Naiṣadha's* content canto by canto in twenty-two verses in *śārdūlavikrīḍitā* meter. His Sanskrit digest respects Śrīharṣa's narrative design while also aiming to reproduce the quality of the language and literary craft of the original. In some measure, this digest -- on account of its extensive representation in the manuscripts and its wide printing in Pt. Śivadatta's standard edition -- has become a part of the modern study of *Naiṣadha* itself. The

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Jayaseetaram Sastry, has authored a book entitled *The Elements of Darsanas of Shriharsha's Naisadha* in Sanskrit and Telugu, which provides in its preface an analysis of the first verse of the *Naiṣadha* along these lines. There is another modern work by Telugu poet Seshendra Sharma which, within this same tradition of allegorically reading *Naiṣadha*, explains the contents of *Naiṣadha* as an unfolding of the *cintāmaṇi* mantra. These traditions are discussed later in the thesis.

[36] In Kerala, for example, in addition to the annual presentation of the Nalacaritam (see Note 31), Kavalam Pannikar has recently produced a modern Kathakali play called *Kaliveshanam* ("Possession of Kali"), which deals with the figure of Kali along the lines that Śrīharṣa has envisioned him in the seventeenth canto of the *Naiṣadha*.

[37] Printed in Pt. Śivadatta's introduction to the Nirṇayasāgar edition of the *Naiṣadha*.

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following is a translation of the twenty-two verses, along with the opening

mañgalācaraṇa verse.

II. *Summary of the* Naiṣadha*'s Content and Style: A Translation of the* Naiṣadhīyacaritasāra

Opening hymn (*maṅgalācaraṇa*):

I pay homage to Śrīharṣa, who occupies a supreme prominence among the poets,

the appearance of whose downpour of flawless aesthetic expression rivals worldly

joy and tames the proud reader.[38]

Canto 1:

There was a king Nala, lustrous like fire. Mutually attracted to each other's

qualities, Damayanti, princess of Vidarbha loved him and Nala also desired her.

In order to ease his mind, the longing lover roamed around the well-laid pleasure

garden. There he caught a golden swan, which became very sad and hopeless.

The kindly disposed Nala set him free.[39]

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[38] kaviṣu dadhatam utkarṣaṃ visphurad anavadyahṛdyavāgvarṣam /
iha khalu khalapradharṣaṃ śrīharṣaṃ naumi harṣasaṃgharṣam //

There is reference here to one of the four end verses attached to the critical text of *Naiṣadha*, where Śrīharṣa tells proud readers to stay clear of his text (*mā'smin khala khelatu*). Most textual scholars feel that since these same four verses are appended to Śrīharṣa's philosophical treatise *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, they are interpolations of a later writer. It should be noted, however, that the earliest commentators acknowledge their presence.

[39] bhūpaḥ ko'pi nalo 'naladyutir abhūt tatrānurāgaṃ dadhau
vaidarbhī damayantikā guṇaruciḥ so'py āsa tasyāṃ spṛhī /
jātu svāntavinodanāya virahī līlāṭavīṃ paryaṭan
haimaṃ haṃsam asau nigṛhya tarasā dūnaṃ dayālur jahau// 1

The first canto of *Naiṣadha* also provides a detailed description of Nala's greatness, might and beauty; an account of how the women of the three worlds pined for Nala's affections; an extended

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Canto 2:

'King, I will make Damayanti be attracted to you in such a way that she will even scoff at the romantic proposals of Indra and the other gods,' expressed the grateful swan. 'Dear bird, if it is like this, then please accomplish what you think is best,' he was happily addressed by the king. Quickly the bird flew to Kundinapūra and saw the daughter of Bhīma walking in the palace garden.[40]

Canto 3:

O daughter of Bhīma, why are you running after me? I am a bird, a flattering conversationalist, and an emissary of Nala. If you have any fascination with me, then choose Nala. Having told her this, that bird became silent. The bird was instructed by the daughter of Bhīma as follows: 'Tell him (of my love) in such a way that he will want to marry me.' Speedily, the bird returned and informed Nala of his successful mission.[41]

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description of Nala's horse, which takes him to the garden; a naturalistic account of the trees in the garden with their poetic connotations of furthering a lover's psychological anguish; and finally the famous lament of the golden *haṃsa* bird (*hasṃsavilāpa*) on being captured.

[40] rājaṃs tāṃ damayantikāṃ tvayi tathā kartā 'smi raktāṃ yathā
śakrādīn api hāsyatīti nṛpatiṃ haṃsaḥ kṛtajño 'bhyadhāt /
evaṃ cet khaga sādhayepsitam iti proktaḥ sa rājñā mudā
drag uḍḍīya dadarśa kuṇḍinagato bhaimīm aṭan niṣkuṭe// 2

The second canto, in addition to what Kṛṣṇarāma alludes to here, also gives long descriptions of Damayantī's beauty, Nala's expressions of love for her, and a majestic picture of the city of Kuṇḍinapūra.

[41] Mām uddiśya kim eṣi bhaimi caṭuvin nālo 'smi viste ruciś
cen mayy asti nalaṃ vṛṇīṣva bata tām uktvā vyaraṃsid vayaḥ /
tasmai brūhi tathā yathā sa nṛpatir mām udvahed ity upā-

23

Canto 4:

She became very weak from the emotional distress of love-longing. She censured the moon-rays, on account of whose feverish heat she dried up like a flower and lost consciousness. Hearing their worried talk, King Bhīma summoned her girlfriends. And having seen her (Damayantī), he came to know of the disease. 'Ah, I will convene a gathering of suitors for her hand in marriage,' he declared.[42]

Canto 5:

Having come to know from Nārada about the husband-choosing ceremony of Bhīma's daughter, Indra and all the other deity-lords of the directions became desirous of her. Indra (and the others) came to earth as his wife Śaci intently looked on with grief. That duplicitous deity employed Nala as their messenger, saying, "King, accept a role as ambassador and go to the daughter of Bhīma; you will not be recognized by the security guards (in her inner chambers). In a swift manner, make her favorable to us.[43]

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diṣṭo bhīmajayā khago drutagatiḥ siddhiṃ nalāyālapat // 3

In the third canto, Śrīharṣa enumerates Nala's moral virtues, presents Damayantī's first resolution and confession of love for Nala, and the *haṃsa's* confirmation of Nala's love for her.

[42] kṣāmāṅgī virahādhinā vidadhatī nindāṃ sudhāṃśor jvara-
jvālābhir drutamurmurīkṛtasumā kalpātha sā'mūmuhat /
bhīmas tat paricārikākalakalā hūtas tathā vīkṣya tāṃ
jñāto vyādhirayi svayaṃ varam ahaṃ kartāsmy avādīd iti // 4

In canto four, there is long rebuke of Kāmadeva and some playful verses between Damayantī and her friends where a half-verse spoken by a friend is completed by Damayantī.

[43] jñātvā nāradataḥ svayaṃvaravidhiṃ bhaimyāḥ spṛhālur hariḥ

24

Canto 6:

Although he was the one form visible to all the world -- he was, after all, the king -- quite jarringly, he now became invisible. Having crossed seven different chambers, he reached the palace of Bhīma's daughter. There, he came to observe from a distance that Damayanti was rejecting a proposal delivered by a female messenger that the gods (had sent ahead of Nala). He was somewhat consoled but utterly depressed for having accepted the messenger's job.[44]

---

sārdham dikpatibhih paphāṇa pṛthivīm śacyā śucā vīkṣitaḥ /
asmād dautyam upetya yāhi nṛpa bho bhaimīm adṛṣṭo bhaṭais
tām asmāsv anukūlayāśv iti nalam so'yuṅkta dautye chalī // 5

The fifth canto seems to provide a note of veiled bitterness on the part of the Śrīharṣa toward the political condition of his day, as the opening dialogue between Nala and Ṛṣi Nārada bemoans the indifference of the warriors of Bhārata and their obsession with sensual pleasure. There is also an account of the traditional Indian guest-host relationship, as Indra hosts Nārada and Pārvata. The dramatic conflict in the story arises here as Indra expresses his desire for mortal Damayanti and is roundly ridiculed by his wife and the nymphs of heaven. Nala is then summoned as messenger, blindly pledges his services, politely refuses and then guiltily accepts the awkward task of persuading his beloved to marry another. Indra, meanwhile, already dispatches another female envoy to beseech Damayantī.

[44] bhūjānir bhuvanaikadṛśyatanur apy uccair adṛśyas tadā
kakṣāh sapta vagāhya bhīmaduhituḥ prāsādam āsādayan /
tām tatra prasamīkṣya khaṇḍanaparām gīrvāṇadūtīgirām
dūrād ucchvasiti sma cetasi bhṛśam dūno'pi dautyena saḥ // 6

In canto six, there is an introduction of a miraculous element, as Nala is granted the power of invisibility (tiraskariṇī-śakti) to enter the women's inner chambers, where he literally bumps into some of the other women as they move about and play. An undetected Nala becomes relieved upon hearing Damayanti reject the female messenger's proposal with a stirring pledge to forsake even the gods to marry a human husband from Bhārata, the most blessed of all lands: "I want my duties (dharma) to mingle with waves of happiness as I serve a husband in that place Bhārata which the best of the noble people (āryadhuryā) praise as the best of lands, just as the householder stage of life is best among all stages of life." (Nc 6.97)

25

Canto 7:

Restless, his mind swam in an ocean of wonderment. In adoration, Nala (in his own mind) reveals her in description from head to toe. But she, among her stunned friends, is startled to see someone looking like the one she desires so much. She herself inquires, 'Who are you? How did you get in here?'[45]

Canto 8:

Beautiful lady, know me as a messenger of the inhabitants of heaven. You are blessed because Indra, along with the rest of the lords of the directions, speaks himself -- through the torrent of my words -- these words: "Choose one among us. Be pleased, delightful girl. Don't get stuck on any human being." Nala tried many things to persuade her.[46]

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[45] aśrāntaṃ tarad antaro 'dbhutarasākūpārapūrāntare
pratyārabhya mukhān nakhāvadhi nalastāṃ prādur āsa stuvan /
sā tu vyaktam amuṃ samīkṣya cakitā tad rūpalubdhā sakhīṣv
āścaryastimitāsu ko 'si kim iha prāpto 'sy apṛcchat svayam // 7

Canto seven almost solely focuses on Nala's head-to-toe description of Damayantī (*nakhaśikhavarṇana*).

[46] dyūtaṃ viddhi varāṅgi māṃ diviṣadāṃ dhanyāsi yat tvām aho
so 'py āśā patibhiḥ saha svayam idaṃ brūte vṛṣā madgirā /
asmāsv anyatamaṃ vṛṇīṣva kam api tvaṃ nandane nanda bho
mā kutrāpi nare skhaleti bahudhā bhaimīṃ nalo 'lobhayat // 8

Leading up to the culminating events of the next canto, canto eight relates a charming exchange filled with cautious flirtatiousness, as the two introduce themselves to each other in hidden language. Nala sets out his mission to her by detailing the gods' absurd lovesickness for her.

26

Canto 9:

Addressed with the words, "My heart is fixed on Nala, not on the gods. Who are you? You have the splendor of fire (or Nala)," he (Nala) responds, "Leaving the gods, you seek Nala? Are you such a simpleton?" Thereafter, seeing her with tears in her eyes, he suddenly exclaims, "Please, don't cry! It is I, Nala, my dear." By chance, that swan also descended there from the sky.[47]

Canto 10:

In the festive celebration that was the husband-choosing ceremony were the leaders of the four directions -- Indra and the others. Pleased with Nala, they each came in Nala's form. In the presence of this gathering of kings, the task of describing them fell to the goddess of Speech. The Indra of the earth, Bhima, in the center of the royal assembly, called forth his daughter.[48]

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[47] cittaṃ me 'sti nale na lekhapatiṣu tvaṃ ko 'nalaśrīs tayety
uktaḥ projjhaya surān nalaṃ śrayasi kiṃ mugdhāsy avocat sa tām /
paścād asrumukhīm udīkṣya sahasā so 'haṃ nalas tatpriye
mā rodīr iti tatra vādini sa vir daivād divo 'vātarat // 9

Canto nine is the emotional center of the poem. [I have found it twice printed separately with two different translations into Oriya. See Vrajakishor Nayaka's recent translation and commentary into Oriya with Sanskrit introduction and commentary (1997)]. Here Damayantī refuses the messenger's words and insists on her exclusive love for Nala. Nala relentlessly argues the case for choosing the gods to which Damayantī threatens suicide in the belief that she's lost Nala forever. Nala suddenly reveals himself and then recoils for having done so. The *haṃsa* arrives to console an apprehensive Nala who then returns to report to the gods. Damayantī is overwhelmed with joy and confusion but advises Nala to be present the next day at the *svayaṃvara*.

[48] ājagmur mahati svayaṃvaramahe nandan nale nāyakāś
catvāro haritāṃ hariprabhṛtayaḥ kṛtvā nalasyākṛtim. /

27

Canto 11:

'These are gods. Here, to this side, there are shining Vidyādharas. And the

masters of different islands are on this side. They are all befitting. You can

choose anyone. Or wherever else your desire will be fulfilled.' Even though all

kinds of speeches were made to entice her, only Nala shimmered in her heart.[49]

Canto 12:

Look there on that side, another set have arrived for your sake. And this other

group has come from the far end of the oceans. Theirs are very powerful,

powerful kingdoms. O lotus-eyed one, they are all lords of the earth. Accept one

of them. Sarasvati instructed her like this. But she looked towards those smiling

five Nalas on the dais and, having seen them, she returned their smile.[50]

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vāgdevyāṃ nṛpavṛndavarṇanavidhau baddhodyamāyāṃ puro
madhye rājakam ājuhāva tanayāṃ bhīmo mahīvāsavaḥ // 10

Canto ten contains a beautiful description of Sarasvatī's limbs imagined as the various śāstra-s.

[49] ete santi surā itaḥ punar ime diṣyanti vidyādharāḥ
kiṃca sphārarucaḥ pṛthak pṛthag ito dvīpādhipā āsate /
sarve yogyatamā vṛṇīṣva kamapi syād yatra vā tvadrucir
vācā bhūri vilobhitāpi vijahau sā cittacañcan nalā // 11

Canto eleven catalogues the peripheral island kings and the first set of kings from Jambūdvīpa

(Avanti, Mathurā, and Kāśi) who have come to win Damayantī's hand in marriage. Here begins the

most detailed exposition of pre-modern Indian geography (deśavṛtta) in kāvya literature, a tradition

started by Kālidāsa in the Raghuvaṃśa. Śrīharṣa lovingly dwells on the merits of every region of

India from where the kings have come to marry the princess. Śrīnivās Rath finds the paean to

Benaras (Nc 11.113-128) to be the first among many in later kāvya literature.

[50] pārśve paśya pare tvadartham apare drāgā samudrād ime
prāptāḥ prājyaparākramakramayujaḥ padmākṣi pṛthvībhujaḥ /
eṣu svīkuru kaṃcid ekam iti vāgdevyopadiṣṭā puro
yāntī vīkṣya visismiye smitavatāḥ sā pañca mañce nalān // 12

28

Canto 13:

'Greet these five Nalas, slender girl. After thoroughly examining them, choose
some son of Vīrasena as your lord. Why do you waver? Don't render our being
here futile." Addressed with words whose double meanings indirectly clarified
who was a human king and who was divine, the daughter of Bhīma was thrown
into a wilderness of uncertainty.[51]

Canto 14:

Her eyes dulled (with confusion), she propitiated the gods with prayers so that (the
real) Nala might become visible. Having understood who was who, she put the
garland around (the real) Nala. All the divine masters of the directions went up to
the sky with Sarasvati. Exuberantly, they showered boons from on high and
garlanded both with a flower-necklace.[52]

The catelogue of kings continues in canto twelve, with descriptions of kings from Ayodhyā, the
Pāṇḍya kingdom, Kaliṅga, Kāñci, Nepāl, Malaya, Mithilā, Kāmarūpā, Utkala, and Magadha.

[51] pañcasvañca naleṣu tanvi kamapi śrīvīrasenodayaṃ
devaṃ mañkṣu parikṣya kiṃ bhramayasi vyarthaṃ tvam asmān iti /
vācā śleṣavacaḥprapañcaphalitāmartyeśamartyeśayā
proktā pañcanalīṃ vibhāvya samabhūt saṃdehabhūr bhīmabhūḥ // 13

Canto thirteen contains the celebrated (and often independently excerpted) "description of five
Nalas" (pañcanalīya), an extended two-meaning (śleṣa) portrayal of the gods if read one way and
of Nala if read in another way. [Yigal Bronner has written a detailed explanation of the artistry of
the pañcanalīya, I am told, but it has remained unavailable to me at present]. This section marks
the dramatic high point of the story with the conflict out in the open.

[52] stotraprītadigīśadarśitanalā mandākṣamandā satī

29

Canto 15:

Her mothers then made that spectacular daughter of Bhīma ready for the celebration, purifying her with lavish baths and ornamenting her in vermillion. Powerful Nala, radiant with jewels, was an extraordinary picture of prosperity. The women drank him in through their eyes. Desirous of marriage, he went forth upon being formally invited by the king of Kuṇḍinapūra.[53]

Canto 16:

Bhīma, an ocean of goodness, joyfully sealed the marriage of his daughter with the respected king of Nisadha. He then fed the people excellent food and lots of sweets. Having spent some nights with the daughter of Bhīma, a contented Nala set out to return with her to the land of Niṣadha.[54]

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matvā tāniyam utsasarja karataḥ kaṇṭhe nalasya srajam /
dikpāleṣu gateṣu kham saha girā dattvā varānambarāt
sāmodā nipapāta mūrdhani tayoḥ kalpaprasūnāvaliḥ // 14

Canto fourteen resolves Damayantī's dilemma in the happiest of ways, with the gods offering their blessings for the union of Nala and Damayantī, whereupon she garlands him as her husband. They and the other rejected kings depart amicably.

[53] raktālaṃkṛtibhiś camatkṛtimatī snānapramṛṣṭākṛtir
bhaimī mātṛbhir utsavaprakṛtibhiḥ saṃskṛtya sajjīkṛtā /
bhūṣodbhāsibalo nalo 'tha vibhavaiś citro 'pi pīto dṛśā
svībhis tatra jagāma kuṇḍinanṛpāhūto vivāhotsukaḥ // 15

The next few cantos relate the significance of an elaborate marriage ritual in ancient and modern India. Canto fifteen lovingly describes the pre-wedding preparations of the bride and groom.

[54] bhīmaḥ śrīniṣadheśvareṇa duhituḥ sampādya pāṇigraham
janyān bhaktam abhojayad bahusitaṃ saujanyasindhur mudā /
itthaṃ tāṃ pariṇīya bhīmabhavena rātrīr uṣitvā kati
prītātmā vilasaṃs tayā sa niṣadhoddeśāt pratasthe nalaḥ // 16

30

Canto 17:

Desirous (himself) of capturing the hand of Damayanti by force, Kali became wild

and thrashed about. Although they were on their way back, the gods told him,

"Don't go there. She has already chosen Nala." Then, that treacherous sinner took

an oath that (if he cannot have her), "I will separate the daughter of Bhīma from

Nala." Unfortunately a fearful Kali, wandering here and there, somehow reached a

Vibhītaka tree in Nala's palace garden.[55]

Canto 16 gives a picture of the actual marriage ritual, followed by the exchange of presents and the festive reception. The details of food (veg and non-veg), witty back-and-forth between the guests and servants, and dirty jokes contain all the elements of a middle-English fabliau tale.

[55] lipsur bhīmasutāṃ balena kalitaḥ kūrdan karālaḥ kalir
mā gās tatra vṛtas tayā nala iti prokto 'pi devaiḥ pathi /
bhaimīṃ tarhi viyojayāmi nalataḥ pāpī pratijñāya hā
bhrāmyann āpa kathaṃcid asya nilayārāme vibhītaṃ vibhīḥ // 17

The seventeenth canto constitutes the ideological center of the poem, an unhurried interlude in the romance narrative for the poet to display his commitment to his social and cultural surroundings. It is also itself a ingenious summary of the "tricky" doctrinal issues inherent in the religious philosophy and praxis of the Vaidikas, Jainas, Bauddhas, Cārvākas, and Siddhas. The mention of the Vibhītaka tree (above) draws attention to the wood used to make traditional gambling dice in ancient India, an ominous reminder of the tragic consequences left out of Śrīharṣa's narrative of the Nala-Damayantī story. The structure of this canto is a dialogue between the gods and Kali, whereby each utterance of the gods is subverted by Kali to yield an inauspicious meaning. Even in this non-romantic interlude, some scholars see a *śṛṅgāra-rasa* angle; Meher (308), for example: "The repudiation of the Cārvāka view of life, therefore, fairly contributes to the elaboration of the theme of eternal love in the poem."

Canto 18:

Meanwhile, the Indra of the earth Nala began life with the Indrāṇī of the earth

(Damayantī) on the golden, gem-studded floors of the palace. In the nights -- a

master of all the arts of seduction, he gradually shed her inhibitions. And he

enjoyed sweet pleasure with her who was a vessel (as it were) to cross over to the

farther shore of that (endless) ocean that is sensual pleasure.[56]

Canto 19:

Those who are appointed to wake up the king in the morning enthusiastically

awakened him with the striking of drums and songs of victory, the nectarine flood

of whose sentiment pervaded the palace gardens. Upon awaking, the lord of

Niṣadha first bathed in the divine river Gaṅgā. Then he sat on his chariot.

Everyone could see him returning, but none could tell when he left.[57]

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[56] ittham tām atha medinītalaśacīm āsādya saudhe mahā-
ratnasphūrjitakāñcanakṣitibhṛti kṣmācakraśakro nalaḥ /
naktam yatnavaśīkṛtām kramagalal lajjām kalākovidaḥ
kaṃdarpodadhipāralambhanatarīm uccair mudārīramat // 18

A target of censorship by Victorian-minded critics of the early to mid-twentieth century, canto
eighteen serves as the locus for Śrīharṣa to recount the early conjugal life of the couple by detailing
the highly developed "science" of erotics (kāmaśāstra).

[57] prātar bodhavidhitsavo rasasudhāvarṣāḥ saharṣā jagur
gāthā bodhakarāḥ karāhatakalātodya gṛhodyānagāḥ /
buddhvā prāññiṣadheśvaraḥ surasaritsnāto rathasthaḥ samā-
gacchaṃs tair avalokito natu punas tannirgamaḥ saudhataḥ // 19

Canto 20:

Upon (Nala) arriving with a golden lotus, the queen comes forward and accepts it.

He then goes and finishes his morning duties of worship, which incites a slightly

jealous anger in her. (Afterwards,) bringing the shy girl to his lap, he dismissed

the maidservants and made contact with the knot of her skirt-cloth. (At the

conclusion of their love-making), she swiftly rose and proceeded outside, a

laziness detectable in her walk and swaying hips.[58]

Canto 21:

Leaving the palace, he was smiling. He accepted salutations. Having bathed, he

worshipped Shiva and composed hymns to Visnu. After eating, he walked a

hundred deliberate steps. He attended to his beloved on the bed and described

evening to her. I offer salutations to that king Nala.[59]

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[58] prāpte rājñi purogatā vitarati svarṇāmbujanmāny urī-
kurvāṇā niyamaṃ samāpayati sā mānaṃ manāgāśritā /
aṅke kurvati lajjitā sahacarīr utsārya nīvisprśi
drag utthāya cacāla cālasagatir lolannitambā bahiḥ // 20

Cantos nineteen and twenty continue to describe the growing familiarity between the married
couple.

[59] saudhān niḥsarate smitaṃ vikirate rājñāṃ namo gṛhṇate
snātvā tryambakam arcate murāripoḥ stotrāṇy aho grathnate /
bhuktvā paryaṭate śanaiḥ śatapadaṃ mañce priyām añcate
sāyaṃ varṇayate namāṃsi kalaye tasmai nalakṣmābhṛte // 21

Canto twenty-one demonstrates the developing equilibrium between Nala's duties as husband and

king. It contains a glowing *stuti* to Viṣṇu incarnations (*avatāra-s*) and to other deities.

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Canto 22:

Completing the evening twilight rituals, all sins were expunged. With the rising of

the moon, praise was sung for the lover's union with the beloved. Listening to her

words which like nectarine moonlight fell, Nala -- whose learning was grounded in

a poet's sensibilities -- experienced for the first time the joys of a new love and

attained a wonderful ecstasy.[60]

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[60] sāyaṃ sāndhyavidhiṃ vidhāya vigalad doṣaḥ pradoṣastavaṃ
pratyārabhya vidhūdayāvadhi vadhūtsaṅgād anaṅgī stuvan /
tasyā glauviṣayā giro 'mṛtakiraḥ śrutvā sa kāvyasthira-
prajñaḥ prāpa paraṃ smaran smaran avānando nalo vismayam // 22

The twenty-second and final canto (at least according to the tradition of the received text),

famously describes twilight and moon-rise.

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CHAPTER TWO: COMMENTARY AND THE DETERMINATION OF A CRITICAL TEXT OF *NAIṢADHA*

The first significant stamp that the Sanskrit commentators leave on the

development of the *Naiṣadha* as a tradition concerns the provision of a critical text

that can be explained and interpreted. One may explore the ways in which text-

critical observations, decisions and justifications made by commentators around

certainties in the text reflect the broader understandings of the text's nature --

understandings that transform over time into what might be called a tradition of the

text. In the tradition of a text like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, three facts of the *Naiṣadha*'s

textual history take on prominence: first, the fact of the *Naiṣadha*'s multiple

readings; second, its numerous points of controversy regarding interpolations; and,

third, the lively debates among the commentators about the extent of the text.

I. *Multiple Readings of Commentators and Scribes*

"A study of the [*Naiṣadha*] commentaries," writes K.K. Handiqui, "reveals

a bewildering mass of variant readings, and there is probably no other poem of the

kāvya period, which presents so many of them."[61] The proliferation of so many

textual variants suggests the initial vibrancy of this poem's oral performance.[62] The

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[61] Handiqui, K.K. (xxxix). Handiqui's notes on six *Naiṣadha* commentators provide most of the details in this section.

[62] Pollock writes about this historical period's changing literary conditions: "Sanskrit poetry in recitation came alive in the minds of listeners in a way that purely bookish literature -- works of

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ever self-conscious *Naiṣadha* itself (1.14) alludes to the prevailing conventions of

the manuscript culture of his day by citing the practice of circling an unwanted

letter in a manuscript, presumably part of a scribal system of isolating wrong

readings (*apapāṭha*-s) in the process of arriving at the best and correct reading.[63]

In general, it has been argued that commentaries play a very significant and

important role in the preparation of critical editions.[64] On the other hand, some

argue that the commentators have tampered with "original" readings to suit their

own hermeneutic desires.[65] Still others lay the "corruption" of "correct" readings

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mute, dead letters such as those of Western modernity -- can hardly do" (91). Although speaking in

the context of Bhaṛthari's manuscript history, his comments seem relevant with respect to the

Naiṣadha tradition as well:

> This is a fact that takes on visible shape in the manuscript histories of many poems . . .
> The manuscripts . . . show countless variants -- not scribal errors or learned corrections but
> clearly oral variants in what by any standard still counts as fundamentally a literate
> culture. A living tradition, then, carries costs for contemporary text-critical and other
> literary scholarship. Or perhaps better put: The text as unitary entity -- however much
> this is required by the participants' own insistence on authorial intentionality -- is
> constantly and in some cases irremediably destabilized by the messy business of bringing
> literature to life in a world of oral performance. (91)

[63] tadojasastadyaśasaḥ sthitāvibhau vṛtheti citte kurute yadā yadā / tanoti bhānoḥ

pariveṣakaitavāttadā vidhiḥ kuṇḍalanāṃ vidhorapi // *Nc* 1.14

[64] Jayanti Tripathi in an article from 19 ("The Role of Commentaries in Critical Editions" [172-

183]), writes: "Sometimes an editor with all his critical apparatus fails to present the original text

or a text nearer to the original, which may be gathered from the commentaries . . . [at times,] the

reading recorded by the commentator is far superior to that of the critical edition . . . (172)." K.K.

Rāja explains: "Ancient commentaries are valuable in restoring the original text. Some of the

commentaries quote the original terms before explaining; such text or *pratīka*-s help us in

reconstructing the corresponding part of the text."

[65] Olivelle: "Since the nineteenth century there has been among western scholars a pervasive

mistrust of ancient Indian interpreters and commentators . . . Early scholars were confident -- to

modern eyes, overconfident -- of their ability to uncover 'original' meanings through philological

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at the feet of the scribes.[66] It may be the case, however, as K.K. Rāja explains, that

the commentators or scribes took a more proactive approach to the question of

"correct" readings, not only of the poet's work but also of a commentator's:

> But often the attempt of scholars was not to reconstruct the text as the
> original author intended it to be, but rather to decide the best version or the
> one the writer should have written. Hence correction by the scribe or the
> commentator was a common feature of ancient Indian scholarship.[67]

A manuscript of Īśānadeva's commentary[68] on the *Naiṣadhacarita* corroborates

this urge by the scribe to provide a complete text of the commentator when one is

not available to him. Often, the scribe will simply supply someone else's available

commentary to fill in the gaps left by a missing folio in his commentator's

manuscript. In some cases, however, a learned scribe will provide a gloss

himself.[69] Handiqui explains such a case among the *Naiṣadha* commentators:

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acumen unmediated by native gloss or comment (173) . . . [reflecting an] [a]rrogantly imperious

attitude toward the text (176) . . . Native commentators and theologians did not, as often assumed,

carelessly or deliberately change the received texts to suit their doctrinal or grammatical tastes"

(176).

[66] K.K. Rāja elucidates some of the modern axioms of text criticism. He cites that sometimes

modern philologists prefer the *lectio difficilior* to the *lectio facilior*, the harder reading to the easier

one, since scribes will change archaic or obsolete words to simpler ones. According to him, some

believe that readings that are grammatically or stylistically defective are likely to be the original

ones, rather than the 'commonplace, correct ones. Others hold that the *textus simplicioris* is earlier

than the *textus ornatior* (the shorter text is likely to be the earlier one).

[67] Raja 97.

[68] No. 188 (1879-80), BORI

[69] This seems the case with a scribe known as Joshi Narapati, an *Audicya* Brahmin who copied a

manuscript of Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's commentary for the study of the sons of the minister Bhābhala of the

Nāgara caste. Jaydev Jani, in summarizing this manuscript's details, notes that there are long

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At the end of Canto XIX, the scribe remarks that a folio is missing in the manuscript of last six verses of the Canto (19.61-66) has been written by himself with the help of Vyāsa Kālidāsa, who was his teacher, as we learn from the colophon at the end of our manuscript.[70]

Handiqui goes on to relate that Īśānadeva often incorporates the commentary of his predecessors Vidyādhara and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita and follows their readings, which in turn helps to supply omissions in their respective commentaries. The scribe, in the case of Īśānadeva 's manuscript mentioned above, similarly incorporates Cāṇḍu's gloss (without mentioning it) into his text when a comment from Īśānadeva is unavailable.[71] The familial relationship suggested by this example between the foundational text, its commentary, and a scribe's recording of it leads one to agree with V.N. Rao's conclusion about the symbiotic process of textual criticism:

Texts have communities which use them, which have an active role in

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discussions added to the manuscript on topics ranging from grammar to astronomy to rhetorics. Sometimes the scribe is perhaps not a professionally learned man at all; in this regard, a curious example may be of some interest from a historical point of view, not only in terms of who the scribes were but also for whom they were reproducing *Naiṣadha* manuscripts: it seems that one manuscript of Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's commentary on *Naiṣadha* (from BORI, Pune) reads that it was copied for the study of a certain Malik Mufarriha at Vejalpur, who was a governor of Gujarat during the late fourteenth century. The scribe, however, though not giving his name, explains that his occupation is that of a "weapons dealer" (*śilāra-sarapha*). ["iha vayajalapure malika śrīmupharihapratipatau silārasaraphavyāpāre naiṣadhamahākāvyasya ṭīkā śrī cāṇḍumahākaviviracitā likhitā.] See J. Jani viii-ix for details.

[70] Handiqui, pg. xxviii. The scribe writes about his interpolation: dākṣīputretyādi tathā āgacchannityantaṃ ślokaṣaṭkasya vyākhyāsthāne bhāṣyapratipustake pūṭhikā muktā'sti. ato mayā . . . vyāsaśrīkālidāsopadiṣṭavyākhyārītyā vicārya śuddhamaśuddhaṃ vā kimapi likhitam asti. sudhībhiḥ śodhyam. tathā yadīśānadevabhāṣyasyāparā prati ghaṭate tadā tatratyaṃ viśeṣavyākhyānaṃ patrikāyāṃ likhitvā atra prakṣepyam. tāvad idaṃ vilokyam.

[71] Handiqui, pg. xxviii

making and remaking them. Changes in text are produced not only by
scribal errors, which do occur and should be corrected, but more
significantly, by community participation in using the text. If the
community which uses the text is tight, unchanging and coherent, the text
remains tight, unchanging and coherent . . . However, when the
communities which use the text are distributed over a wider area, are
complex, and practice more than one kind of text culture, the text changes
to suit the need of the community which uses it. Texts not only have
histories, they have cultures and communities. Texts not only have births,
they have *saṃskāra*, families, deaths and rebirths. Texts are not isolated
artefacts, they are members of societies. They also reflect and reproduce
the practices of the society they belong to.[72]

This question of "textual communities" will be revisited later when discussing the

shared content of the various exegetical acts. However, with respect to the

"family" of *Naiṣadha* textual readings, the conclusions that Handiqui has drawn

from his analysis of several commentaries offer some idea of the development of a

critical text among the commentators, especially with respect to the proliferation

of *varie lectiones* (*pāṭhāntara*).[73] He makes an interesting observation that other

readings were available even before Vidyādhara and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita, the two oldest

available commentators on the *Naiṣadha*.[74]   The fact of multiple textual readings

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[72] V.N. Rao, pg. v

[73] Handiqui believes that Cāṇḍupaṇḍita and Vidyādhara generally -- but not always -- agree and are

followed in their readings by Īśānadeva and Jinarāja. Handiqui feels that Nārāyaṇa, Mallinātha,

and Narahari often agree on readings, but finds that Mallinātha's "are sometimes very peculiar" and

do not seem to agree with either Nārāyaṇa or the earlier commentators. Handiqui finds the text to

be "well-preserved in the commentary of Nārāyaṇa, though it is Cāṇḍupaṇḍita and Vidyādhara who

record the earlier and more authoritative readings." (xxxix-xli). See Chapter 4 of Jaydev Jani's

introduction to the critical edition (part 1) of Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's Dīpikā, where he discusses

"agreement and disagreement of Cāṇḍu with Vidyādhara, Mallinātha, and Nārāyaṇa." (xxxxiv-
xxxxvii)

[74] Handiqui cites Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's mention and criticism of other readings in a gloss on *Nc* 6.109.

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when the two earliest commentators are believed to have lived only fifty years to a

century after the poet suggests that the link between the oral poetic tradition of the

itihāsa literature and the subsequent efflorescence of the ornate and very literary

mahākāvya may not have completely snapped even in the late 12th century.[75]

Almost certainly, more reflection on how the oral tradition of Sanskrit texts related

to the manuscript culture that stored, displayed, and transmitted them seems to be

required before more meaningful things can be said about the nature of textuality

in pre-modern South Asia.[76]

The fact that a Sanskrit commentator has even chosen to comment almost

certainly indicates a reverence for the text, or at the least an understanding of its

significance and promulgation. Having thus placed a text (and the author) on a

pedestal, it is essential that it (and he) live up to the aesthetic standards of

traditional readers. Thus, for example, one of the primary concerns for the

commentator, as Robert Goldman has argued with respect to the *Vālmīki*

Rāmāyaṇa, is to "validate the work as a basically unitary and internally consistent

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[75] Professor Ram Karan Sharma feels that a stylistic study reveals that Kālidāsa's *mahākāvya*-s represents the transition between these the oral and written in the Sanskrit poetic tradition.

[76] As Pollock notes, however, this is a thesis which hitherto remains inadequately explored: "Precisely how the new manuscript culture interacted with an orality that long remained dominant both in fact and in the ideology of authentic knowledge -- to say nothing of its interaction with the true oral culture that maintained its existence outside of literature and history -- is one of the great complexities of South Asian literary cultures" (21).

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narrative."[77] The early *Naiṣadha* commentators, for example, are heavily taxed by

even the suspicion that their text is somehow incomplete and not a conclusive

reflection of the poet's vision. This discussion spills over to following centuries in

the form of lively debates that still stand unresolved. But this specialized

discourse about the extent of the *Naiṣadha* is a singularly text-specific matter

(taken up at the end of this section). More common is a strong distaste

commentators have in leaving their author and text vulnerable to the charge of

being illogical, improper, or simply, wrong.[78] While open to emendation, they are

also wary of falsifying their poet's usage without due consideration. In this vein,

Robert P. Goldman speaks of the *Rāmāyaṇa* commentators: " [The] instinct of the

commentators is not to falsify the words of the poet-seer, which according to a

well-established cultural convention can, virtually by definition, never be other

than true. Instead they resort to another form of scientific reasoning -- that of the

textual critic -- to show that this utterly incredible passage is not the work of

Vālmīki at all."[79] While they are judicious in doing so, in the process of settling

upon a valid reading, occasionally the *Naiṣadha* commentators also engage in

controversial acts of emendation. These acts seem to presuppose a complex

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[77] Goldman, R.P. "How Fast Do Monkeys Fly? How long Do Demons Sleep: Reading
Commentaries on Sanskrit Epic Poetry As Windows to the Knowledge Systems of Pre-Modern
India." Pg. 29

[78] The *Naiṣadha* is especially infamous for its questionable usages from many traditional points of
view, in terms of language and choice of content. A discussion of these usages is taken up again in
various contexts.

[79] Goldman ("How Fast Do Monkeys Fly") 12.

understanding of author and text and an awareness of their potential to influence

subsequent readings of the text.

II. *Commentarial Logic in the Identification of Textual Interpolation*[80]

Once they perceive that some undesirable textual usage must have been
interpolated, the commentators use the terms *kṣepaka* or *prakṣipta* to swiftly
eliminate, alter, or at the least draw attention to their inherited reading. It is clear
that the commentators are keenly aware of the existence of allegedly incorrect
readings or dubious verses in certain manuscripts. Sometimes, their zeal fails to
take notice of the poet's stylistic tendencies. For example, Śrīharṣa
characteristically exhausts his imaginative conceits, either by garbing them in new
language or elaborating on their multiple possibilities. This often leads him to
repeat the same thought in a different way over the span of two verses.
Commentators have been trained by the science of poetics (*sāhityaśāstra*) to not
tolerate apparent redundancy (*punarukti*) from one verse to the next. Thus, they
sometimes resort to labeling a "suspected" verse in question as interpolated and
remove it altogether or call it a variant reading in their own preferred way.[81]

The commentators' handling of verse 10.41 and the textually controversial

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[80] A complete list of complex textual issues in the *Naiṣadha* commentaries is provided by A.N.
Jāni. Only a few of the more interesting examples are explored in detail here.

[81] Various expressions are employed to highlight an alleged interpolation or cite textual difficulties.
For example, for *Nc* 7.87 Cāṇḍupaṇḍita says, "Some do not read this verse" (*kecid imaṃ ślokaṃ na
paṭhanti*) whereas Jinarāja writes that "this verse is a variant reading [of the preceding one] and
others don't even read it" (*pāṭhāntaram idam. evam anye 'pi na paṭhanti*). Nārāyaṇa says that
"even though it is a variant verse, it is generally commented upon" (*iti ślokāntaram api
vyākhyātaprāyam*).

10.42 demonstrates the diverse text-critical practices of the traditional Sanskrit

exegete. During Damayantī's husband-choosing ceremony (*svayaṃvara*), Śrīharṣa

imagines the various kings to collectively express their envy for Nala in a mocking

tone:

> The jealous kings belittled him under the pretext of praising him: "What, is
> he the new (*prathama*) moon descended over the earth? Is he a second
> (*dvitīya*) god of love? Is he a third (*tṛtīya*) of the Aśvin twins?"[82]

> Those jealous ones contemptuously praised [or sincerely praised][83] him:
> "He is the first (*ādya*) birth of the moon on the earth. This youth is the
> second (*dvaita*) god of love. He is the third (*tṛtīyatā*) embodiment of the
> (two) Aśvins."[84]

The second of the above two (10.42) is not even acknowledged by commentators

Vidyādhara and Jinarāja, presumably on the grounds that it is an interpolation.[85]

Cāṇḍupaṇḍita does comment on it very briefly and makes no mention of its

repetitiveness, saying that it an expression of "false praise" (*vyājastuti*) in both

10.41 and 10.42. Nārāyaṇa is clearly not happy with the second verse's inclusion

in his inherited text, patiently offering a spare remark on it (about the word

dvaitam) and then swiftly concluding that "its meaning repeats the previous verse's

meaning" (*ayaṃ ślokaḥ gatārthatvāt punaruktaḥ*). Mallinātha seems, at first, to

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[82] sudhāṃśur eṣa prathamo bhuvīti smaro dvitīyaḥ kim asāv itīmam / dasras tṛtīyo 'yam iti kṣitīśāḥ stuticchalān matsariṇo nininduḥ // 10.41

[83] Translation depends on whether one takes Nārāyaṇa and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's reading of *kṛtamatsaraiḥ* or Mallinātha's reading and comment of *kila matsaraiḥ*.

[84] ādyaṃ vidhor janma sa eṣa bhūmau dvaitaṃ yuvāsau rativallabhasya / nāsatyayor mūrtitṛtīyatāyam iti stutas taiḥ kṛtamatsaraiḥ saḥ // 10.42

[85] Jani 27

distinguish 10.42 from 10.41 by reading in the last quarter of 10.42 *kila matsaraih*

instead of *kṛtamatsaraih*. If it is *kṛtamatsaraih*, then little doubt remains that

Śrīharṣa is simply rephrasing the same idea from the previous verse, that the

jealous kings are mocking Nala. However, by suggesting that the word *kila*, which

commonly expresses 'contempt', is synonymous here with *khalu*, which implies

'certainty' (*taih stutah kila stutah khalu*), Mallinātha seems to be opening up the

possibility that the kings are actually praising Nala, thus proving that his greatness

compels even enemies to respect him. However, two different readings of

Mallinātha's final comment on 10.42 offer a curious perspective: either, "even

though [this verse] is a repetition of the previous verse, because the poet wrote it, it

is an established reading like the one before (*pūrvaślokena punaruktam api kavinā*

likhitatvāt sthitam pūrvavat)"[86] or "even though [this verse] is a repetition of the

previous verse, on account of the poet's greed, [still] it is an established reading

like the one before (*pūrvaślokena punaruktam api kavilobhāt sthitam pūrvavat*)"[87].

By the poet's "greed," one assumes that Mallinātha understands the poet to be

trying to milk too much from his ideas by extending it over into two verses. It is

perhaps indicative of the fluidity of the ancient Indian intellectual tradition that a

scribe thought better to change the reading of Mallinātha's comment, whether from

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[86] Krishnadas Academy edition.

[87] This is the version quoted in the notes by Pt. Śivadatta in the Nirnayasāgar Nārāyaṇiṭīkā edition.
Pt. Śivadatta says that having considered that it is thus a repetition, Mallinātha and others do not
even comment on it (*iti nirdiśya na vyākhyātah*). This, however, is contradicted by the evidence of
other manuscripts used by the Krishnadas Academy edition where Mallinātha does comment on it.

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kavilobhāt to *kavinā likhitatvāt* or vice versa. Mallinātha's comment also demonstrates the dual forces dueling in the commentator's consciousness -- whether to tolerate perceived flaws in the text or to rationalize the poet's genius -- and the attempt to reconcile the two by offering criticism while also trying to construct a perspective the poet might have considered.

Looking at this example, one may objectively conclude that Śrīharṣa is simply playing with the same idea using differently gendered words and constructions. Most of the commentators, however, do not allow the poet this freedom without scrutiny. A.N. Jāni cautions against this exegetical approach to the text and introduces the 14th or 15th century commentator Gadādhara's spirited defense of the poet's so-called "repetition":

> Most of the stanzas, which are called 'kṣepaka' by Nārāyaṇa and others, are simply variants of their preceding ones. One should not, therefore, jump to the conclusion that they are interpolations, because it is evidently a characteristic feature of our poet's style to repeat the expressed idea in a different manner. Gadādhara has a nice discussion on this point in the beginning of his commentary.[88]

Jāni's warning to not "jump to conclusions" echoes the comments made by Gadādhara some five centuries[89] ago in discussing the authenticity of the first two verses of the very first canto of the text[90]:

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[88] Jani, Pg. 29

[89] It still provokes a discussion in contemporary Sanskrit *paṇḍitasabhā*-s, as I had the opportunity to hear during an exchange between two Sanskrit scholars in Ujjain, India. Both were unaware of Gadādhara's commentary and that this same debate had exercised scholars five hundred years before them. Gadādhara's commentary on the *Nc* has been recently edited by Vandana D. Mehta

Nala was a mass of radiance, resplendent from festivities, the circle of his fame serving as a white umbrella for him. Drinking in his story, protector as he was of the earth, the gods do not in a like manner esteem even nectar.[91]

Nala, whose story by the varieties of its sweetness surpasses nectar, was the lord of the earth, marvellous in his virtues. The flaming trail of his might and the circle of his fame served as a sceptre of gold and a unique, white umbrella.[92]

According to Gadādhara's introduction to *Nc* 1.1, whether or not the second verse repeats the content of the first has exercised commentators to the point that clarification was deemed necessary. His comments shed light on the traditional nature of oral debate that must have conditioned these formal exegetical statements.[93] Although the evidence cannot confirm the ways in which these theoretical debates were internalized by commentators, one can certainly assert their existence through inference. One sees such an internalized discourse in Gadādhara's opening:

In desiring to compose this poem, this poet's first (thought might have

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as a dissertation for M.S. University, Vadodara, Gujarat. I have accessed the first canto of this work.

[90] K.K. Handiqui's published translation of these two verses is provided here. Both are loaded with interpretive possibilities and have been treated variously by the commentators. This discussion will be taken up later.

[91] nipīya yasya kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ kathās tathādriyante na budhāḥ sudhām api / nalaḥ sitacchatritakīrtimaṇḍalaḥ sa rāśir āsīn mahasāṃ mahojjvalaḥ // 1.1

[92] rasaiḥ kathā yasya sudhāvadhīraṇī nalaḥ sa bhūjānir abhūd guṇādbhutaḥ / suvarṇadaṇḍaikasitātapatritajvalat pratāpāvalikīrtimaṇḍalaḥ // 1.2

[93] Śrīnātha, for example, explains in his Telugu adapation that the first two *ślokas* are not necessary because the words are different but the meaning is same so has removed the first one and kept the second one.

been): "What hero-king existed in this world, who was stoic and yet charming? I will make such a personality the hero of my story, which will surpass even the taste of nectar. Because he was thinking about this again and again for a long time and devotedly practicing the *cintāmaṇi* mantra, it is said that an answer flashed forth. And having (mentally) received the first verse beginning with the phrase "having drunk" (*nipīya*), he composed the poem out loud. The point of all this is to say that in doing so, the poet is saying: "I coronate as the hero of this story a king named Nala, who in the Golden Age was adorned with virtue upon virtue."[94]

Gadādhara now attempts to establish that the second verse (1.2) is not a repetition of the first verse (1.1). The gist of his argument is that the first verse satisfies the requirement of being an invocatory verse to spread auspiciousness ̓(*maṅgalācaraṇa*), while the second one deals with the subject matter of the poem (*vastunirdeśa*). The presupposition is that the poetics texts (*sāhityaśāstra*) "mandate" that the first verse either be a *maṅgalācaraṇa* or a *vastunirdeśa*. It is possible that some critics must have argued that the first and second verses serve an identical purpose of *vastunirdeśa* and, therefore, either the poet is guilty of repetition or the second verse must be an interpolation. Gadādhara systematically deconstructs this argument in defense of the poet's usage and the inherited textual tradition by first providing a summary of the various opinions on the matter:

> In the second verse, beginning with the words 'the story with sentiments (*rasaiḥ kathā*)', however, there is an indication of (the poem's) subject-matter (*vastunirdeśa*). This poet is reiterating the same meaning (indicated in the first verse) in a different style. Some, however, say that the first verse itself presents the story's subject matter and that the second verse is a variant reading. Others say that (this second verse) supplements the (idea)

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[94] prathamataś cāsya kaveḥ kāvyam idaṃ nirmātum icchataḥ -- ko'atra jagati tathāvidhaḥ khalu dhīralalitaḥ kṣitipatir abhūd yam aham iha jitasudhārasakathaṃ kathānāyakaṃ karomīti. bhūyaś ciraṃ cintayataḥ samyag upāsitasya cintāmaṇimantrasya prasādādyaḥ kilā'rtho'ntaḥ prāsphurat sa eva nipīyetyādāvādimaśloke bahir upanibaddhaḥ. yo'yamevaṃ guṇaguṇālaṅkr̥taḥ kr̥tayuge nalo nāma kṣitipatir āsit tam aham iha kathāyāṃ nāyakapade'bhiṣekṣyāmīti cātra tātparyārthaḥ.

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from the previous verse, but that they share a singular purpose, (having a semantic relationship) of a kisser (becoming a kisser) because of a kiss. And so, in saying that "it is just a variant reading," one means that it (the content of the second verse) attains the position of being a cause of that (idea expressed in the first verse). According to this argument, then, the synonymous use of the word 'bhūpāla' ["king"] (in the second verse) for 'kṣitirakṣin' ["king"] (in the first verse), the specific mention (of the subject 'king') is indicated in the compound predicate's second half (rakṣin). Having drunk whose story the gods do not regard even nectar as such, that kind of king, named Nala, existed in the past. The specific mention of the subject of the story (in the case of both the first and second verse) is simply the predicate element (king) of the distinguishing word ('kṣitirakṣin' in the first and 'bhūjāṇiḥ' in the second verse) found in both verses.[95]

Gadādhara cites three different opinions, either of his own creation or those expressed by other (unnamed) commentators: one, that the second verse (1.2) is a roundabout repetition of the first (1.1) and, therefore, can be safely eliminated; two, that 1.2 is an equally valid variant reading that can be exchanged for 1.1; or three, that 1.2 is a continuation of 1.1 and, therefore, should be semantically understood as a single verse. The first two opinions are straightforward. Gadādhara skillfully explains the third opinion by saying that 1.1 and 1.2 share in the same act as two kissers share in the act of kissing. Thus, both verses share the intention of being a vastunirdeśa, or mentioning of the subject matter, i.e., king Nala. Gadādhara further elaborates on the anonymous commentator's view by citing that the specific mention of the concept "king" (described as protector

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[95] rasaiḥ kathetyādau dvitīyaśloke tu vastunirdeśarūpatayā tam evārthaṃ bhaṅgyā kavir ayam anūktavān.. kecit tu prathamaślokam eva vastunirdeśya pratipādakam āhur dvitīyaṃ tu pāṭhāntaram. mukharūpasya pūrvaślokasyaikārthatvena pratimukharūpatayā cumbanāc cumbako'yam ity apare. tac ca pāṭhāntara eva samāviśatīti tenaiva tatkāryam avāpyate. atra pakṣe ca bhūpālaparyāyasya kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ iti vidheyapadasyottarārdhe nirdeśo yuktaḥ. yasya kathāṃ nipīya budhās tathā sudhām api nādriyante sa tathāvidhaḥ khalu nalo nāma kṣitipatiḥ pūrvam āsīd iti. kathāvastunirdeśo hi viśeṣaṇasya vidheyatvam.

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(*rakṣin*) in 1.1 and lord (*jāniḥ*) in 1.2) signals a unity of purpose: to tell the story of king Nala.

Now, Gadādhara moves to his own opinion, which is an extension of the latter discussion: that the poet could not logically sustain the desired expression in a single verse and so divided it into two verses, whereby 1.1 primarily fulfills the role of being an invocatory verse (*maṅgalācaraṇa*), while 1.2 touches upon the subject-matter (*vastunirdeśa*). Therefore, he believes that both verses are necessary and the poet's usage should not be faulted:

> The name [of the hero] is provided in the ancient story literature (*purāṇa*), e.g., "There was a king named Suratha." It is provided in poetic texts (*kāvya*), e.g. "There was a king of mountains named Himālaya." [A name] is also used in ordinary life, e.g. "In the town of Kāmpilya, there was a priest named Viṣṇuśarmā." And so, here in the second verse (1.2), it reads "There was a king named Nala." However, if it were held that Nala's being the predicate here (in 1.2) does not indicate the subject-matter [of the poem], then it would be inauspicious, so to speak. On the other hand, if there is a specified predicate too closely joined to a related word [in the utterance], then there would immediately arise an ambiguity [whose deciphering would] produce a great deal of stress [on the reader]. [Therefore,] a predicate dissimilar (from the one in 1.2) has been employed in 1.1, whereby the uselessness of nectar to the gods has been conveyed (as the predicate), that is to say, the cause for the gods' disregarding of nectar (i.e., the presence of Nala stories). Sensing that this idea might be misconstrued, the poet has thus in 1.2, under the guise of a variant reading, purposefully extended the expression of his desired meaning. And, therefore, in doing this, the gifted [poet] exhibits the profound maturity of his poetic efforts. Otherwise, why wouldn't this all-knowing poet embed in a single verse the primary subject matter in an uncontroversial and felicitous manner? I offer this comment based on my own learning and common sense. The secret truth of the matter only the poet knows. To merely tender an original response is the connoisseur's lot.[96]

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[96] nāmnas tvanūdyatvam eva yathā purāṇe 'suratho nāma raja 'bhūt' kāvye 'himālayo nāma nagādhirājo' 'sti loke 'pi 'kāmpilye nagare viṣṇuśarmā nāma brāhmaṇo babhuve' tyādi. atraiva ca dvitīyaśloke nalo nāma rasājānir abhūd iti. nalasyaiva tv atra vidheyatve vastunirdeśatvaṃ

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The last bit reveals the reverential attitude of many traditional Sanskrit commentators, one that is repeated again and again in their introductory verses.[97] Gadādhara's comment at the end, that the poet could have made things easier, suggests that he too is intuitively uneasy with Śrīharṣa's usage but, with considerable reflection on the matter, is able to tease out an acceptable justification for it. His explanation is certainly in keeping with the traditional perspective that even the mention of the Nala story (the predicate of 1.1, according to Gadādhara) drives away all auspiciousness. Although rare in most Sanskrit commentarial works, Gadādhara's discussion provides a glimpse into the mind-set that informs one aspect of the text-critical practices of ancient India.

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vimṛsyamānam asamañjasam iva syāt.
yathākathañcit padasambaddhena vidheyānūdyakramayuktim āpādyamāne tu prathamata eva kliṣṭakalpanā khalv atīvodvegajananī bhavet. prathamśloke vidheyānūdya vaisadṛśyaṃ budhānāṃ sudhāyāṃ anādarahetor anupādānān nirhetutvaṃ ca dūṣaṇam aśaṅkamānaḥ kavir ayaṃ tasyaivārthaṃ dvitīyaśloke pāṭhāntarāpadeśena sayuktikaṃ kṛtvā pratyapīpadat. evaṃ ca śrīmatā 'nena nijasya kavikarmaṇaḥ khalu prauḍhīḥ pradarśitā. anyathā kavir ayaṃ sarvajñaḥ sadvastunirdeśaparaṃ saguṇaṃ nirdoṣaṃ cātraikam eva ślokaṃ kiṃ na vidadhyāt. iti mayā yathāśrutaṃ yathāmati ca vyākhyātam. nijaṃ rahasyaṃ tu kavir eva veda. vyākhyānaviśeṣaṃ tu sahṛdayā iti.

[97] See Chapter Three, section 1c.

III. *Establishing the Extent of the Text: Determining the Intrinsic Nature of* Naiṣadha

Yet another fascinating discussion among the commentators regarding the critical text of the *Naiṣadha* centers on the extent of the poem. Spanning twenty-two lengthy cantos (*sarga*) and nearly 2,760 verses, the *Naiṣadha* is the longest *mahākāvya* available in Sanskrit literature, with the exception of Ratnākara's *Harivijaya* and Vimaladevagaṇi's *Hīrasaubhāgya*.[98] For the Sanskrit commentators that remark on the extent of the poem, the consensus seems to be that twenty-two cantos serve the intentions of the author and his subject.[99] The first known commentator Vidyādhara (early-mid 13th century), apparently reacting to circulating debates, states the position held by some:

> Some have observed that there being propriety in relating the Nala story as it is told in the Mahābhārata, how has Śrīharṣa ended the poem at a single point in the narrative? It would be proper to relate the entire Nala story, wouldn't it?[100]

To this, Vidyādhara clearly responds:

> (What you say is) true, but a poem attracts the hearts of appreciative connoisseurs. And a poem attracts the heart through its own poetic charm.

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[98] Jani 191

[99] What Sheldon Pollock writes about the *Kumārasambhava*'s textual tradition seems to apply to the *Naiṣadha* as well: "A courtly epic like Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava*, which ends before the birth of the hero named in the title, could in a later age be perceived as unfinished and requiring completion (nine chapters were in fact later added), but the body of the work had an integrity that strongly resisted interpolation" (60-61).

[100] nanu mahābhārate nalopākhyānasyaiva vaktum ucitatvāt śrīharṣeṇopākhyānaikadeśe kāvyaviśrāntiḥ kathaṃ kṛtā. sakalanalopākhyānasyaiva vaktum ucitatvāt.

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Here, however, the poetic charm is seen only in a single part (of the original story). Therefore, the poet concludes the poem here.[101]

Nārāyaṇa picks up on the traditional discussion and confidently argues for a conscious continuity in Śrīharṣa's composition, remarking at the end of the first canto: "Because of the use of the word 'delight' in the final verses of all the cantos, this poem itself embodies delight."[102] Nārāyaṇa introduces the final verse of the final canto by saying: "Now, Śrīharṣa desires to end the poem by having the benedictory blessing come from the mouth of his hero."[103] He then concludes his commentary on Nc 22.148[104] with these remarks:

> With the use of the word "delight" and the benediction "May it delight us," (the poet) signals the end of the composition. Even though the latter half of Nala's story is described in the other places beginning with the *Mahābhārata*, by describing the fall of the hero here, (it would be) unsavory and the essential poetic flavor of the poem would be spoiled. And because the purpose is to delight the connoisseurs, it is to be

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[101] satyam. kāvyam hi sahṛdayahṛdayānāmāvarjakam bhavati. hṛdayāvarjakam ca kāvyam svarasena kriyate. tatra ca punaraitihye ekadeśe sarasatvam dṛśyate. tatraivānenāpi viśrāntiḥ kṛteti bhāvaḥ.

[102] Nārāyaṇa on Nc 1.144: sarvasargasamāptiślokeṣu ānandapadaprayogādānandāṅkamidam kāvyam.

[103] Nārāyaṇa's introduction to 22.148: idānīm kāvyasamāptim cikīrṣuḥ śrīharṣo nāyakamukhenāśiṣamāśāste.

[104] svarbhānuprativārapāraṇamiladdantaughayantrodbhavaśvabhrālīpatayāludīdhitisudhāsārastuṣāra-dyutaḥ / puṣpeṣvāsanatatpriyāpariṇayānandābhiṣekotsave devaḥ prāptasahasradhārakalaśaśrīrastu nastuṣṭaye // "May the divine moon delight our hearts! In the gay festival of ceremonial bathing forming part of the marriage of Cupid with Rati, the moon, looking like a jar with a thousand apertures, showers nectar, its beams, which fall through the holes bored in it by Rāhu's jaws, each time he comes to gorge on the moon." [Trans. by K.K. Handiqui]

understood, Śrīharṣa does not describe the later events (of Nala's life-story).[105]

According to Nārāyaṇa, because the last verse is benedictory in nature, the poem ends here. Śrī Vyāsarāja Śāstrī seconds Nārāyaṇa's idea: "At the end of the twenty second canto, the benedictory words 'let there be prosperity' and 'may it delight us' being heard clearly signals the culmination of the poem."[106]

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[105] Nārāyaṇa on Nc 22.148: ānandapadena tuṣṭaye 'stu ity āśiṣā ca granthasamāptiṃ dyotayati. mahābhāratādau varṇitasyāpyuttaranalacaritrasya nīrasatvān nāyakānudayavarṇanena rasabhaṅgasadbhāvāc ca kāvyasya ca sahṛdayāhlādanaphalatvāccātrottaracaritraṃ śrīharṣeṇa na varṇitam ity ādi jñātavyam.

[106] tatra dvāviṃśasya sargasyānte śrūyamāṇā śrīr astu nastuṣṭaye ity eva rūpā maṅgalāśaṃsā kāvyasyaitāvanmātratvameva jñāpayati. [(Naisadha Intro, P. 12-13 (Palghat ed. 1930)] (19 of Jani).

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IV. *Extending the Discourse of Critical Text: the* Naiṣadha *in Social and Political Context*

While the ancient *Naiṣadha* commentators only allude to objections to the

present text's extent, oral stories that were current among twentieth century paṇḍits

and modern Sanskrit scholars demonstrate the longevity of this discourse.[107] Some

of the arguments rest on "internal evidence." For example, Jāni himself points to

Śrīharṣa's suggestion of future events (found in the *Mahābhārata* version) in his

poem and the invention of the character of Kali in the seventeenth canto as strong

evidence to suggest an incomplete text.[108] Another story hints at a ghostly

tradition of an extensive, now-lost commentary (*bhāṣya*) of Śrīharṣa's grandson,

who had supposedly written a commentary on 60,000 verses (nearly thirty times

the size of the present text).[109] There are also some fantastic stories of modern

paṇḍits who claimed to have seen manuscripts and can quote passages from a lost

text.[110] Still another theory that has acquired some currency rests on an

anachronistic and confused account of Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadha* by the *Kāvyaprakāśa*

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[107] See Jāni 19-25

[108] See Jāni 23

[109] See Jāni 24

[110] Jāni writes on Pg. 23: "N.K. Bhaṭṭācārya . . . informs us that Pt. Rāmagopāla Smṛtibhūṣaṇa of Banaras had witnessed with his own eyes a manuscript of the sequel in Uriya character with an Uriya pupil of his named either Dāmodara or Rudranārāyaṇa (he did not recollect which) and that he remembered two verses (one in full and the other in part) from that sequel. The same scholar refers to the late revered MM Rākhāladāsa Nyāyaratna who too used to quote a half verse which according to him belonged to the *Naiṣadha* but is not found in the extant poem." See Jāni for fragments of these verses.

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commentator Acyutarāja, who claims that the original text had one hundred

cantos.[111] There are also actual texts written to fill the perceived narrative void,

such as the *Uttaranaiṣadha* of Vandārubhaṭṭa.[112] These decidedly philological

perspectives arguing for "higher criticism" models or lost textual traditions seem to

be attempts to deny Śrīharṣa's episodic dismemberment of the "original"

Mahābhārata narrative in the service of an indefinite proliferation of meaning.

The early commentators, while aware of this urge to not accept the integrity of the

poem, reveal in their comments an underlying sense that Śrīharṣa's choice to end

the narrative with the rising and setting of the moon at the end of the married

couple's honeymoon is significant and emotionally fulfilling. They couch this

intuition in text-critical terms, however, without delving into what it might signify

in terms of the poem's total contexts socially, politically, or aesthetically. Later

observers of the poem have not neglected these contexts, as will be discussed

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[111] Acyutarāja conflates the tradition king poet-king Harṣa (7th century C.E.) and Dhāvaka (king Harṣa's court poet or perhaps Bāṇabhaṭṭa himself [?]) mentioned in the beginning verse of Kāvyaprakāśa with the traditional details of Śrīharṣa's life:

> etan nāmā kaścit paṇḍitaḥ prāk paramadaridraś
> cintāmaṇināmakamahāmantraviśeṣopāsana-prasādena victravidyāśāly api nirdhanatvena
> bahu kliśyamānaḥ san naiṣadhīyacaritākhyaṃ vicitraṃ mahākāvyaṃ viracya
> guṇajñaśiromaṇiṃ śrīharṣanāmānaṃ rājānaṃ pradarṣya tenātituṣṭāt tataḥ prativarṣaṃ
> śatasahasrātmakarūpyamudrotpattiyogyāṃ bhūmiṃ pratigṛhya tatkāvye
> pratisargāntimaśloke tatpitromāmabhyāṃ sahitaṃ tatkartṛtvena tannāma grathitavān iti
> vṛddhair upākhyāyate. etad anugrāhakaṃ kāvyaprakāśavākyam api 'śrīharṣāder
> dhāvakādīnām iva dhanam iti.

Jāni rightly rejects the exaggerated claims of this theory while still holding that "this tradition at least proves that the *Nc* had more than 22 canto if not exactly one hundred." See Jāni 22-24 for full details.

[112] Krishnamachariar 365

below.

While not squarely joined to their efforts to determine a critical text, the commentators naturally wonder about the motivations behind a poet's choice to modify a venerated narrative tradition like the *Mahābhārata*. In the case of the *Naiṣadha*, their explanation seems to be solely framed around aesthetic concerns. Nārāyaṇa, like Vidyādhara, argues that had Śrīharṣa continued the traditional narrative of Nala and Damayantī as recorded in the *Mahābhārata*, the poet would have in effect violated his own stated purpose in writing the poem: to explore and exhibit the romantic sentiments (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) in an artful manner, as he says in *Nc* 1.145.[113] It is a hallmark of traditional Sanskrit hermeneutics to generally honor the foundational text's own intrinsic rules of selection, arrangement, and emphasis. Yet the facts that the poet self-consciously introduces *śṛṅgāra rasa* as his poem's overriding flavor and that the commentators openly defend the poet's choice against potentially hostile positions point to the possibility that perhaps some uneasiness about the choice is justified. While some readers may be tempted to dismiss the romantic ending *ipso jure*, on the grounds that Śrīharṣa simply follows the *sāhityaśāstra*'s narrative prescriptions for *mahākāvya*,[114] such facile explanations rarely satisfy modern readers. Candika Prasad Shukla, whose study

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[113] taccintāmaṇimantracintanaphale śṛṅgārabhaṅgyā mahākāvye cāruṇi naiṣadhīyacarite sargo'yamādirgataḥ. *Nc* 1.145

[114] Unlike the *Mahābhārata*, which is classed as a historical work (*itihāsa*) and essentially follows a "tragic" vision along the lines of ancient Greek dramaturgical analysis, a *mahākāvya*'s aesthetic, social, and political contexts need to be seen on their own terms.

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aims to reflect the traditional outlook on the poem, feels that the poet simply had

nothing more left to say:

> The final verse of the final canto, in which Nala speaks to Damayantī in the
> context of describing the moon, is the most important proof for the
> *Naiṣadha*'s completeness. After their sexual union, what more is left to
> tell; nothing left to examine, no real curiosity. Therefore, it becomes clear
> that the poet has nothing further to say.[115]

Whereas Nārāyaṇa happily leaves alone the question of the author's intention for

using the word "joy" (*ānanda*) at the end of every canto, culminating with their

joyous union at the end of Canto 22, Shukla provides a rather blasé reading of

"joy" as the culmination of the couple's early sexual experiences.[116]

Other modern responses are not so easily satisfied and openly wonder how

and why Śrīharṣa could write a poem with *śṛṅgāra rasa* while seated in the midst

of arguably the most volatile political setting of pre-modern South Asia at its most

tumultuous period. Dr. Bishwanath Bhattacarya, for example, reflects on the

propriety of the *Naiṣadha*'s stated mood:

> It appears strange that the last great court epic in Sanskrit, *Naiṣadhacarita*,
> composed in the proximity of Muhammad Ghor's conquest dilates the story
> of King Nala! In it or in any other poem or drama we find no reference to

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[115] naiṣadh kī svābhāvik pūrṇatā kā sab se baḍā pramāṇ svayaṃ uske antim sarg kā antim ślok hai,
[jismeṃ candra-varṇan ke prasaṅg meṃ nala damayantī se kahate haiṃ -- . . .]. sambhog-śṛṅgār ke
prasaṅg meṃ ise paḍne ke paścāt ab āge kyā kathānak hai, iske liye na koī jijñāsā hotī hai na
kautūhal aur aisā spaṣṭ ho jātā hai ki kavi ko āge kuc kahanā śeṣ nahīṃ hai.

[116] An interesting perspective on these last verses of the poem, described by Seetaram Sastry, takes
the ending to signify the culmination of the *pañcadaśī* mantra, whereby the *yogin* attains the
sahasrāracakra and enjoys the nectar from the moon (*candrasthāna*). See later discussion on the
cintāmaṇi mantra in the *Naiṣadha* tradition for further elaboration. See Chapter Four, sections 1b
and 1c.

the holocaust caused by the invaders. The Sanskrit world appears to have withdrawn itself in its own fold like the proverbial ostrich. Sanskrit by this time had lost its intellectual leadership and remained preoccupied with putting up as many barriers as possible to contain its losing identity . . . The Sanskrit intelligentsia, losing the wider sphere of its influence confined itself to the preservation of its earlier heritage, concentrating mainly on religious and philosophical texts and composition of commentaries. New treatises on useful subjects became slowly a rarity.[117]

Bhaṭṭācārya's reference to the invasions of Muhammad Ghori raises some interesting questions about the political conditions surrounding, and perhaps motivating, the *Naiṣadha*'s production. Several historians seem to corroborate Bhattacharya's thesis[118], while others remain skeptical of its usefulness.[119] The forces of Muhammad Ghori defeated King Jayantacandra (the king or the heir apparent who patronized Śrīharṣa) at his capital of Kānyakubja (Kanauj), a pivotal

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[117] This paragraph is taken from the author's draft copy of a valedictory address delivered by the retired Professor of Sanskrit (BHU, Varanasi) at a seminar at Assam University, Silchar, on March 16, 2000.

[118] Burton Stein, for example, writes: "The Muslim conquests between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries removed royal protection from brahmanical institutions, but an efflorescence of dharma texts reinforced caste norms" (148), while A.L. Basham speculates that "[w]hen the Turkish horsemen swept through the Ganga plain, Hindu culture was tending to look inwards and backwards -- inwards to the private life of the spirit and backwards to the hallowed norms of the distant past. In many respects the legacy of this period to later times was a negative one" (59).

[119] Speaking specifically about the demise of Sanskrit literary culture in Kashmir after the twelfth century, Pollock reacts to what A.K. Warder has imagined as Sanskrit literature's aim to sustain "the best ideals . . . and [inspire] struggle to expel tyrannical invaders": "Other deeper forces of change were at work. These may not be easy to specify, but one may quickly dismiss the commonest explanation, which traces the decline of Sanskrit culture to the coming of Muslim power" (101).

center of political power,[120] in 1194 C.E.[121] Even though it appears customary to

avoid explicit references to topical current events in Sanskrit literature

(particularly in the *mahākāvya*), it would be understandable to speculate that the

poem reflects or addresses its immediate political contexts, much as it certainly

engages the social realities of the times. Nevertheless, there could be many

plausible reasons for the poet's narrative and descriptive choices. With respect to

the critical documents of the poem, however, one does occasionally come across

more explicit information regarding the historical setting in which the *Naiṣadha*

was being received and transmitted. The very early commentary of Cāṇḍupaṇḍita,

for example, offers a glimpse of a turbulent social scene in which the *Naiṣadha*

was being read and taught. Dating his commentary (the *Naiṣadhadīpikā*) as

Vikram Samvat 1353 (1297 A.D.), Cāṇḍu explains in the colophon of 1.146 that

his brother had rescued some of his manuscripts from fires set by foreigners

(*mleccha*).[122] Jaydev Jani unpacks the reference in the following terms:

> He had witnessed the Muslim portent. When in the reign of King
> Karṇadeva Vaghela (Karaṇaghelo) the minister Mādhava invited Muslims

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[120] Burton Stein writes about Kanauj during this period (124): "The early medieval, commercial-,
and religious-led urbanization is one reason for skepticism regarding the notion of feudalism,
which is conceptually related to deurbanization and decommercialization, to India. Nowhere is this
clearer than in the manner in which the city of Kanauj in the western Gangetic plain became the
focus of north Indian politics for several centuries, during which competing conquerors from the
north, south, east, and west strove to seize and hold it: the city had become the emblem of the
cakravartin."

[121] The date of the poem seems to inconclusively fall anywhere between 1150 and 1190 C.E.

[122] tadātmajas tālhaṇa nāmadheyo viśāradaḥ śāradacandrakīrtiḥ / mlecchopaliṅgāj jvalitapratīkāṃ
ṭīkām imāṃ pūrayati sma samyak //

to Gujarat, the soldiers burnt down many manuscripts along with the commentary on *Rgveda* by Cāṇḍupaṇḍita in utter fanatic rage. But CP's younger brother Tālhaṇa took out the Mss. of Dīpikā and thus it was saved, as a result the specimen of Cp's *bhāṣya* on RV 10.51 (quoted fully under the NC 9.75) could be preserved for posterity.[123]

Despite the preservation of historical memories such as this, which somewhat cast a light on Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's local history, the *mahākāvya* itself seemingly remains abstracted from historical time. Usually, it appears that the commentators also do not want their works to give the impression of being historical documents. A sense of their work's ahistoricity and coevality with the foundational text gives the illusion of a direct relationship with the text and perhaps instills in their readers a deeper credibility about the validity of their comments.

While no journalistic comments enter into a Sanskrit poetic text, social and political realities may perhaps be gauged within the narrative elements of the text itself. For example, the romance of Nala and Damayantī embodies the overarching narrative trajectory of the poem (*ādhikārika-kathāvastū*) while the various subordinate narratives (*prāsaṅgika-kathāvastū*) involving the *haṃsa*, Nārada and Indra's discussion, the interchange between Nala and the gods, the conversation between Indra's female messenger and Damayantī, and the dramatic intervention of Kali after the union of the couple serve to support the main love-story. It is in several of these sub-narratives that one may witness the poet's

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[123] See Jaydev Jani ("Cāṇḍupaṇḍita on *Rgveda* X.51") pg. 43

commitment to his times.[124] Furthermore, Śrīharṣa's choice of romance narrative

may have been inspired by a historical event that Śrīharṣa might surely have

witnessed: the svayaṃvara of Samyukta, daughter of Jayacandra. A.N. Jani,

while rejecting the thesis that Śrīharṣa based his poem on the event, does relate a

Dr. Watwe's views on the matter:

> Dr. Watwe thinks that Śrīharṣa wrote this poem to commemorate the
> svayaṃvara of Saṃyukta, which was celebrated in 1185 A.D. by her father
> Jayacandra, the king of Kanauja and patron of Śrīharṣa, who might have
> not only seen this svayaṃvara with his own eyes, but also the family feud
> between Jayacandra and Pṛthvirāja Chauhāna of Delhi who kidnapped
> former's daughter from the svayaṃvara. This view is, however, not
> warranted by this text, where the poet himself seems to select this theme
> only out of his regard for Nala and Damayantī.[125]

The fact that Śrīharṣa describes with such relish in several cantos the youthful

princes of every known geographical region may lend credence Dr. Watwe's

understanding of the text.[126] Whereas the end is not so happy for any of the

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[124] The dialogue of Nārada and Indra, for example; the svayamvara cantos; the dialogue between

Damayantī and Indra's female messenger, which brings to the fore a moving "patriotic" tribute to

Bhārata (see note 46)). Genres of describing the wedding scene (pariṇaya) and geography

(deśavṛtta) are incorporated into the main narrative and given full treatment, eulogizing and

foregrounding what one may regard as the most valued aspects of an idealized traditional culture.

There are also paeans to Kāśi (perhaps the first in mahākāvya literature) and lengthy descriptions of

every corner of the known "Sanskrit cosmopolis". The seventeenth canto is perhaps the most

important sub-narrative in the poem in terms of bringing social, religious, and sectarian issues to

the forefront.

[125] Jani 258

[126] Śrīharṣa has Damayantī deliver a touching paean to the collective entity of Bhārata.

historical players involved, including Śrīharṣa,[127] the epic poem may be rewriting

the end, or as David Quint writes, in analyzing Roman romance epics, seeing the

end as a temporary setback and the romance epic genre itself as invested with

political meaning:

> [N]arrative structures approximate and may explicitly be identified with
> romance . . . but valorize the very contingency and open-endedness that the
> victors may think they have ended once and for all . . . In romance, there is
> a spatially, rather than chronologically ordered tableaux of Les Tragiques --
> in the name of a still-contingent political history whose outcome has not
> been foreclosed and in which a defeat may be a temporary setback. 11

Quint sees a shifting tension between the "long-term continuity of epic" in terms of

political meanings attached to narrative forms and "specific topical, political

circumstances to which a single epic may address itself":

> [I]n emphasizing the interplay between tradition, with its long poetic
> memory, and the individual text, I am trying to establish a political
> genealogy of the tradition itself; that is to show how the meanings of any
> one epic that originally were determined by a particular occasion become
> "universalized" and codified as the epic becomes part of a larger literary
> history -- and how that tradition, now already freighted with political
> meaning of other epics that need themselves to be brought back to their
> own original occasions. (13)

Seeing the *Naiṣadha* from the point of view of an active shaper or mediator rather

than the passive reflector of its surrounding culture recasts its role in Sanskrit

literary history, which has often been analogized to an encyclopedia or repository

of the period's cultural production. A.B. Keith makes an interesting point linking

historical consciousness with national feeling, remarkably citing the popularity of

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[127] See Chapter Four, section 1d, where stories of Śrīharṣa's demise at the hands of Jayacandra's
second wife (*bhogapatnī*) Suhāvadevī are recounted.

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the romance epic *Naiṣadha* over and above mere panegyric verse dressed up as

epic: "It has been well remarked that, while the paṇḍits have copied and

commented with eagerness on the *Naiṣadhīya* of Śrīharṣa, they have allowed to

sink into oblivion the *Navasāhasāṅkacarita*, which he [Parimalapadmagupta]

wrote to celebrate the deeds of his patron."[128] Professor Ram Karan Sharma sees

the *Naiṣadha* as a culmination of a literary milieu with roots in a larger socio-

political transition that began as early as the sixth and seventh centuries C.E.:

> It was from the 6th-7th century onwards, that the Indian mind started
> fortifying itself against something spiritual, philosophical or physical. This
> tendency reflected itself in the literary creations as well . . . [t]he main
> thrust of the Indian mind during this period, viz. the fortification against
> some intellectual or physical onslaughts or the other--what we may call
> *vijigisha* as against *jijnasa* of the various facts of Nature, the Satyam, the
> Shivam and the Sundaram of an earlier generation. This fortifying
> tendency reflects itself not only in the world of aesthetic creations but in
> every intellectual behaviour during this period. The vast literature on
> philosophy including commentaries, etc. is also impregnated with this
> fortifying *vijigisha* tendency.[129]

A metaphor of decay and chaos seems to be a common historiographical motif in

most accounts of Sanskrit culture during the first few hundred years of the second

millennium C.E.[130] Pausing over the *Naiṣadha* as a significant document of this

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[128] Keith 147. Keith seems to be drawing from Schlegel's thesis connecting epic poems and the
rekindling of national spirit: "A people are exalted in their feelings, and ennobled in their own
estimation, by the consciousness that they have been illustrious in ages that are gone by--that these
recollections have come down to them from a remote and heroic ancestry." ("On the Poetry of the
North." Schlegel, Lectures on the History of Literature, 1:15, Kritische Ausgabe, 6:16)

[129] Sharma 473

[130] Pollock, for example, openly questions "the gradual loss of vitality of Sanskrit in various
spheres" during this period, citing the disintegration of political institutions, civic ethos, and

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period one wonders if perhaps this element of decay has been somewhat overplayed by historians. The strong and vigorous continuities in both elite and popular levels of society reflected in the *Naiṣadha* -- which admittedly cross genre, geographical, gender, and class lines -- signal a new development within the popular culture (in literature, the arts, and religious practices) that, far from being decadent, actually alert one to the burgeoning synthesis of social and literary modernity in South Asia. In not parroting its sources in terms of narrative plot, theme, or sentiment, the *Naiṣadha* -- like many of the other *mahākāvya*-s that precede it -- constitutes an unwelcome fragmented text for many modern commentators, one that has to be brought back into line. Thus, its deviance from the *Mahābhārata* tale on almost all fronts does not sit well with them. The traditional commentators, whose literary education leads them to honor the integrity of the text they are commenting on, generally do not interpret or revise the motivations of their author but rather interpret in such a way as to expand the poet's genius. The poet is generally their friend and so, they have no interest to doubt his choices.

On account of information that is often coded or not directly related, the question of how a Sanskrit literary work reflects its social, political, and broadly historical contexts is fraught with problems and feels tricky to handle. Although it

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competition with vernacular cultures as contributing elements. He wonders "what factors besides newness of style or even subjectivity would have been necessary for consolidating a Sanskrit modernity and . . . whether the social and spiritual nutrients that once gave life to this literary culture could have mutated into the toxins that killed it." (395)

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seems unreasonable to demand conclusions from the available evidence, it is

perhaps appropriate to say that the formulation of *Naiṣadha* as romance -- open-

ended in its scope and reflective of the most valued elements of traditional culture

up to that time -- contributed significantly to its wide popularity and special

concern among those Indian audiences that preserved and promulgated its legacy.

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CHAPTER THREE: COMMENTARY'S ROLE IN ESTABLISHING FRAMES FOR INTERPRETING *NAIṢADHA*

I. *Shared Models, Rules, and Interpretive Strategies among Sanskrit Commentators*

While the professional pedagogues among the commentators have the task of propagating some form of institutionalized education, even those who do not appear to be professional readers[131] produce work that fulfills the authorized requirements of some sort of institutionalized system of education. As such, commentaries and sub-commentaries on a single text inserted into the same canonical register coalesce into their own discrete traditions of use and preservation.[132] Sometimes, especially when dealing with philosophical doctrines, they are written to re-establish a doctrine through a scholarly study of subjects that are unclearly grasped. More often the case with commentaries on *śāstra* (such as Abhinavagupta's *Locana* on *Dhvanyālokā*) than with poetry, this commentarial aim to bring out the embedded philosophical import of the text finds expression in Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's "Lamp on *Naiṣadha*" (*Naiṣadhadīpikā*). Other kinds of commentaries respond in light of what preceding commentaries say on the root

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[131] The Śaiva ascetic Īśānadeva, for example. See Handiqui xxvii-xxix

[132] Gary Tubb explains the phenomenon (pg. 2):

> Another striking feature of the Sanskrit tradition is the frequency with which works that may as well have been independent treatises are cast into the external form of a commentary on an earlier text. In this way many treatises of great originality have been made to depend, at least nominally, on earlier works that they leave far behind . . . In many such works the motives for writing in the form of a commentary go beyond the aim of providing exegesis, and include the desire to associate oneself with an established authority -- to present one's views as a worthy unfolding of time-honored tradition.

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text, often serving an organizational role that attempts to make all of the available opinions easily accessible. For example, Bhagīratha's "Light on the hidden meanings of *Naiṣadha*" (*Naiṣadhaguḍhārthadīpikā*) gives notes and extracts from a number of earlier commentators, besides offering his own interpretations.[133] This archival function seems largely rooted in an intellectual culture's desire to voice different interpretive attempts in order to appropriate their ideas, expand their own findings, or to criticize them. Though rarely mentioning other commentaries (or commentators) by name, a commentator often records, expands on, or diminishes another commentator's viewpoints by internalizing them into his own text. There are also commentaries that seem to largely use the root text as a pretext to articulate one's own independent ideas -- a phenomenon most often seen in the realm of philosophy (the Vedānta philosophers Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Vallabha, Madhva, etc. on *Gītā*, for example) but somewhat observable in allegorical readings of *Naiṣadha* and in Śrīdhara's commentary, which relishes in stretching the potential meanings of the text as far as it can. The majority of commentaries on *kāvya* distinguish themselves by "discovering" ever more charming, hidden, or unclear meanings in light of their poetic beauties. They

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[133] Bhagīratha quotes Narahari, Lakṣmaṇabhaṭṭa, Nārāyaṇa, Viśveśvara, Jagaddhara, Tāṇḍava, Mukuṭa, Jīvātu, and other commentators and commentaries, according to Pt. Vindhyeśvariprasād in his Sanskrit introduction to *Tārkikarakṣa*. Jani quotes an incomplete verse of Bhagīratha's: adhyāpakaṃ vinā yo naiṣadhaguḍhārthdīpikāṃ ṭīkām / paśyati rasanāgre tu vāgdevī tasya sphurati bhṛśam (?). See Jani 13.

strive to introduce to the connoisseurs *(sahṛdaya)* their own enjoyment of the diverse experience of the poet's meanings.

Common to all the commentaries is the fundamental desire to effect for the reader an adequate comprehension of the poem's literal meanings. Generally, the literal meaning of a word, phrase, or verse is shared indistinguishably among the commentators. There are, however, occasions where the literal meaning itself becomes a site of considerable contestation, usually when grammatical feasibility, ambiguous figuration or secondary senses of a word trigger alternative responses in commentators' reading. Therefore, while the act of making comprehensible the text's literal meanings may often be regarded to be the simplest of the commentator's tasks, it sometimes turns out to present the very locus for argument and interpretation. As concerns the literal meaning itself, therefore, an implicit motivation of Sanskrit commentary seems to center on assimilating the text into a fixed system of authoritative character by talking about it in a mode of discourse that it feels the culture will take as "natural." The fact of controversies arising, of course, belies its natural uniformity and inherently marks it as discursive, whether or not the commentators themselves acknowledge the fact. Generally, most commentators observe and comment on a given piece of text to establish grammatical and logical relationships, often dividing words in such a way as to construct levels of meaning, diminish ambiguity, or to implicitly endorse a certain view as the singularly correct one.

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With the Sanskrit commentary on literature, this generally means situating the text in the established norms of the lexicons (*kośa*), grammar (*vyākaraṇaśāstra*), rhetoric and customary poetic usage (*alaṃkāraśāstra* and *sāhityaśāstra*). In addition, the commentator often refers to a series of chosen texts to support or refute a point of literary, thematic or grammatical interest. Beyond these technical materials, the orthodox exegete usually assumes logical formulae (*nyāya*-s), poetic conventions (*kavisaṅketa*), and popular usage (*prasiddhi*) -- informed by culture and common sense -- that should govern the poet's creation. If the processes and "correct" usages of the composition can be identified by the commentator and made comprehensible to the student, the text slides into its role as a cultural model of meaning and coherence. Correlatively, if the text deviates from its "model" behavior, the commentator can exemplify "incorrect" usage by deconstructing the "flaws" (*doṣa*-s) in the text. It is perhaps for this reason -- the determination of what makes a poet's language effective or ineffective -- that a preponderance of hermeneutic processes present in a Sanskrit commentary revolve around sensitivity to the "rules" of traditional grammar, customary poetic usage and all available lexicographical resources. The *Naiṣadha* has exercised the commentators' eye for detail and allusion on all of these fronts in a manner unprecedented in the Sanskrit *kāvya* -- hence its stunning success in Sanskrit culture's traditional institutions of learning.

In terms of grammar, the structure of the commentaries primarily hinges around the commentator's favored method of analysis in terms of word, meaning,

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and syntax. The two types of word analysis (*vigraha*) are known as 'non-technical analysis (*laukikavigraha*), explanations of words without using technical Pāṇinian terminology, and 'technical analysis' (*alaukikavigraha*), where the Pāṇinian formation (*prakriyā*) is given.[134] Alongside the foundational science of grammar, the hermeneutic impulses of a Sanskrit commentator on *kāvya* invariably presupposes a critical investment into the fundamentals of the *sāhityaśāstra* as well which, among other things, includes: identifying the identifying the poem's "poetic-ness (*kāvyalakṣaṇa*)" in terms of its chief emotional sentiments (*rasa*), figures of speech and sense (*alaṃkāra*), diction (*vṛtti*), style (*rīti*), and poetic conventions (*kavisamaya*); discovering the dynamics of its language (*śabdavyāpara*) in connection with its denotative (*abhidhā*), connotative (*lakṣaṇā*), and suggestive (*vyañjanā*) power; delineating the hero (*nāyaka*) and heroine's (*nāyakī*) various psychological states; and deliberating on its tradition-bound poetic virtues (*guṇa*) and faults (*doṣa*) of poetic usage from the point of view of traditional taste. Technical information is often conveyed in technical language and generally deals with the grammaticality of an utterance, its meter, and the

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[134] As will be seen below, complex formations (*vṛtti*) and compounds (*samāsa*) are almost exclusively explained through non-technical analysis in Mallinātha's commentaries. For example, in *Nc* 1.1, Mallinātha glosses the first element of the compound *sitacchatrita-kīrtimaṇḍalam* "(whose) circle of fame was a white umbrella" in the following way: "white umbrella' (*sitacchatritam*) can be taken as 'forming a white umbrella' (*sitacchatraṃ kṛtam*); that is to say, forming a royal parasol (*sitātapatrīkṛtam*)."

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important figures of speech and sense.[135] Finally, the semantic dimension of the

verse is generally accounted for through the provision of synonyms, complex

rewordings, or allusions to traditional dictionaries (*kośa*).

Though they occasionally open up the text's semantic and pragmatic

potential for the reader, rarely do these commentaries move away from their

literalist mentality. In assimilating the literary text into a discursive order that

reflects organic unity and coherence with an absence of the strange or deviant, the

traditional Sanskrit exegete usually employs conventional formulae to rationally

explain, justify, or elaborate through the prism of well-defined and acceptable

methods of analysis. Taking an unassuming approach to interpretation, these

formal commentaries follow a conservative structuring. Either they conform to a

subject-centered word-by-word method (*daṇḍānvaya*) or take a verb-centered

approach that tackles syntactic units (*khaṇḍānvaya*).[136] Unlike certain Sanskrit

commentaries on philosophical texts, where one can pinpoint a specific focus that

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[135] Gary Tubb and Emery Boose explain the *kāvya* commentator's schemata for delivering

important information about grammar, meter, and *alaṅkāra*: "While most commentators place

analyses in ordinary language alongside the formations being analyzed, comments using technical

language and arguments on technical matters are treated like quotations from dictionaries: some

commentators insert them in the relevant place in the running commentary, and others bunch them

together at the end of the commentary on the verse or section of the original text. Comments on

technical matters concerning the verse or section as a whole (e.g., the explanation of the meter in

which the verse is written or of a poetic figure involving the whole verse) are nearly always at the

end, unless they are worked into the introduction (*avataraṇa*) to the comment on that verse or

section" (114)

[136] These two methods are elaborated on below.

carries throughout, the *kāvya* commentaries generally reflect an eclectic approach to the material that invites no easy characterization of the various technical idioms, logical strategies, and grammatical complexes used by commentators.[137]

In conjunction with these basic techniques, when necessary, a commentator sometimes brings to the forefront a series of relevant adjunct texts from a carefully constructed textual hierarchy to clarify or bolster his position. The Sanskrit exegetical tradition is, as Robert Goldman explains, a highly "literate intellectual culture of reference" where the commentary constitutes merely the superstructure for the multiple genres that actually construct the text. The citations of certain texts available in *Naiṣadha* commentaries reflect the ways in which the text may have been constructed in a given historical context or literary milieu. Their choice of quotation informs the texts that were being read and studied at the time, what types of knowledge were in currency, and the kinds of approaches that were accepted as legitimate in the understanding of texts.[138] Certain commentators, for example, repeatedly may reference a text popular during their time while

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[137] A detailed presentation of the Sanskrit commentator's technical usages and overall craft can be found in Gary A. Tubb and Emery Boose's *Scholastic Sanskrit: A Handbook for Students* (1999, Unpublished)

[138] Pt. Śrīnivas Rath surmises that gatherings (*sabhā*-s) of scholars must have occurred regularly where the text was discussed. Thus, he feels, every significant commentary summarizes not only an individual's sensibility but the questions and tastes of a whole period.

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discussing an issue raised by the poem.[139] Sometimes, when a commentator brings

these texts forward to either firm up his own stated position or to offer up an

alternative position of another commentator that he cites, it generally indicates a

sign of stress within the text. Perhaps it indicates the stress between the text and

the particular point of view of the commentator. Either the commentator or the

implied reader of these commentaries, i.e. the audience that shared the

commentator's worldview, is understood to have questions and doubts about the

matter at hand. In response to these doubts, the commentator does his best to

resolve them and to deflect the potential critiques that such a commentary

willingly invites. The very nature of the *Naiṣadha* in particular -- and its utility as

a social marker of learned respectability -- inspired a peculiar competition among

commentators to display their learning. This fact of the *Naiṣadha* tradition,

coupled with the obligatory reverence accorded to the poet and text, becomes clear

in some of the pre-commentary verses or stray remarks that the commentators

make. It is here that one may gauge the hermeneutic attitudes inspired by the

Naiṣadha and carried forth generationally.

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[139] Śrīdhara, for example, favors the *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa* when dealing with rhetorical issues, while Mallinātha opts to use the classic *Kāvyaprakāśa* or the *Sāhityadarpaṇa*. A more detailed look at the hierarchy of textual reference among *Naiṣadha* commentators is taken up below.

Opening remarks: *avataraṇa*-s on *Naiṣadha* 1.1

Before beginning their discussion on the first verse of the *kāvya*, most

commentators follow the tradition of providing substantial prefatory remarks

(*avataraṇa* or *avataraṇikā*) outlining the subject of the poem (*viṣaya*), the

relationship (*sambandha*) of their commentary with the subject matter, the ultimate

aim in composing a commentary (*prayojana*) and occasionally a nod to the

intended audience (*adhikārī*).[140] As will be seen in a later section, sometimes

commentators provide some of this information not in the opening remarks to the

first verse but rather in carefully crafted verses that aim to distinguish their work

from that of others. Before verses in the heart of the narration, the commentator's

pre-verse context-sensitive remarks often incorporate an implied reader's purported

questions and doubts of narrative logic and customary propriety. Often it is as

simple as providing a few transitional words to clarify the narrative situation as,

for example, when two or more verses are to be construed together (*yugma*) or

when there is some sort of ellipsis and words must be added to complete the sense.

In the beginning of the poem, however, as one sees with the *Naiṣadha*

commentators on 1.1, the commentaries -- in various forms -- generally address

the question of why the poet chose to begin his poem the way he does and whether

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[140] J.A.F Roodbergen remarks on the "intended audience" of Sanskrit commentaries (7):

> A Sanskrit commentary is not meant for the general reader, because this commodity does
> not exist on the Indian subcontinent in the field of Sanskrit literature. It is written for a
> relatively small circle of learners and of the learned (including sahṛdayas and specialists).
> Accordingly, much could be left understood or could otherwise be handled by means of
> hints or the barest of references.

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or not it conforms to tradition.

Commentaries on the first verse of the *Naiṣadha* (*Nc* 1.1), in addition to exhibiting the array of hermeneutic styles employed by the traditional Sanskrit commentator, underscore several of the major trends that define the development of the *Naiṣadha* tradition from the point of view of its reception among the Sanskrit *literati*: its noteworthy use of figures of sound and sense, its potential for semantic multiplicity, and its utilization of and intertextuality with the vast resources of Sanskrit language, literature, and culture. The introductory sections of several of the commentators also raise issues about the logic of the poem's structure, its propriety aesthetically, its textual authenticity, the kinds of effective and ineffective poetic usages (*doṣa*) it contains and in two cases at least, pointed information about the alleged historical circumstances behind the poet's composition of the text. All of these themes inevitably become a staple of *Naiṣadha* studies for later generations of readers.

The most basic of statements provides an implicit theory of interpretation around specific ways of seeing and articulating the text, usually presupposing a general assumption of the text's nature and establishing a context for the entire body of the work. Vidyādhara, for example, stresses the importance of *Naiṣadha*'s literary craft and the necessity of understanding it in order to grasp the text's elusive meaning. Regarding *Nc* 1.1, Vidyādhara writes:

> In this verse, alliteration is the poetic figure of sound. There being an analogy drawn between nectar (*sudhā*) and (Nala's) story (*kathā*), because there is demonstrated superiority of the story [here the tenor of the

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comparison] and an undervaluing of the nectar [here the vehicle of the comparison], there is also an inverted simile (*vyatireka*) here. And also, since there is a play on words (that provides) a sense of Nala in terms of the narrative context and a sense of the Sun (Surya) in an extratextual context, there is the figure of paranomasia (*śleṣa*). Because there is no difference posited with the Sun, there is (the figure of) metaphor (*rūpaka*). Therefore, according to the maxim of the sesame seed and rice, here there is (the figure of) commingling (*saṅkara*).[141]

Vidyādhara's commentary inaugurates the critical discourse on *Naiṣadha* by

emphasizing its literary merits in terms of figures of speech (*alaṃkāra*) and beauty

of expression:

> The best of scholars consider that beautiful commentary which bears the stamp of literary knowledge (*sāhityavidyādharī*) as an illuminator of all nine poetic sentiments. By virtue of its beauty, the commentary has achieved an eternal place in its relationship with the heart-purifying story of Nala.[142]

Jani writes about Vidyādhara's *Sāhityavidyādharī* ("commentary which holds the

knowledge of literature"): "[It] explains each stanza from the point of view of

Indian rhetorics and thus justifies the title."[143] K.K. Handiqui adds: "The

Sāhityavidyādharī is not a learned work, but it is the earliest known commentary

to grapple with the difficulties of Śrīharṣa's poem."[144] Others too have followed

this lead of commenting on the *Naiṣadha*'s poetic character in their comments on

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[141] atra śloke 'nuprāsaḥ śabdālaṃkāraḥ. sudhākathayor aupamye pratīte sati sudhān ādaratvena kathādhikyapratipādanād vyatireko 'rthālaṃkāro 'pi. anyac ca nalasūryavarṇanayoḥ prākaraṇikā 'prākaraṇikayoḥ śliṣṭapadopanibandhe śleṣālaṃkāro'pi. sūryeṇa sahābhedapratipādanād rūpakam. tasmāt tilataṇḍulanyāyenātra saṃkaraḥ' iti vidyādharaviracitasāhityavidyādharī.

[142] līlādyotitagūḍhabhāvasubhagālaṃkāravṛndānvitā saṃsevyā sumanovarair navarasaprollāsinī śobhanā. cittāsecanake nalasya carite baddhāspadā yā sadā ṭīkā kāntiguṇānvitā jayati sā sāhityavidyādharī..

[143] Jani 77

[144] Handiqui xxvi

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the first verse. Cāritravardhana, for example, explains in his *Tilaka* commentary

that Śrīharṣa has used *alaṅkāra* (*anuprāsa* and *śleṣa* the most, occasionally

yamaka) only to further the meaning, not to produce artificial verse in a peculiar

shape (*bandha*-s).[145]

While Vidyādhara sees the text as difficult on account of its literary

effects, his near contemporary Cāṇḍupaṇḍita conceives the text along the lines of

its philosophical rhetoric (in his opening verses).[146] In his *avataraṇa* to *Nc* 1.1,

however, he introduces elements of history, legend, and a theory of the text's

production. He then provides customary remarks about the propriety of making

the first verse of a *kāvya* an homage to a deity (*maṅgalācarana*) or indicatory of

the plot (*vastunirdeśa*):

> The poet, desirous of writing the *Khaṇḍana* to refute the views of Udayana,
> who had insulted his father, saw that his mind was perpetually perturbed by
> the four *puruṣārtha*-s. So he fulfilled them in the Muktikṣetra at Banaras
> and after having attained the tranquillity of mind . . . he wrote the work
> and refuted the arguments of his antagonist. But later on, seeing that his
> work could not satisfy the appreciative people, as it was full of dry
> arguments, the poet, to please them, wrote a poem full of different
> sentiments. And so, in the beginning of a treatise, in order to pronounce a
> benediction for the listeners so that the text may be completed without
> obstruction, homage for one's desired deity is performed in observance of
> wise custom. This is not done here. Since repeating of Nala's name is
> itself auspicious and because the pious glorification of his (name) scatters
> sin upon sin, what need is there for the eradication of obstructions? In such
> a way, therefore, there is a benediction (in the very) remembering of those
> who embody the highest auspiciousness, beginning with (figures such as)
> Nala, Bharata, Sahasrārjuna, and Pṛthu. And so, the tradition of repeating

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[145] śrīharṣair yamakamurajasarvatobhadrapramukhān bandhān arthāpuṣṭikarān
anādṛtyārthapuṣṭikaro 'nuprāsābhidhaśabdālaṅkāraḥ prāyaḥ prayuyuje.

[146] Vidyādhara and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's concern with *Naiṣadha* as a "difficult" text is dealt with below.

the holy name of Nala and Damayantī destroys (the ill-effects of) this debased age. In describing Nala first, the author thus fashions a benedictory statement.[147]

In the first half of the above passage, Cāṇḍupaṇḍita provides details of a semi-historical biography of the poet and a set of anecdotes about the composition of the *Naiṣadha* that become magnified in the work of later writers.[148] In the latter half of the opening, Cāṇḍu invokes the "wise custom" [codified in *śāstra*] of inaugurating a text with a benediction. Instead of seeing the first verse as a benediction, however, he negates this possibility by alluding to the ancient tradition of regarding the name of Nala itself as benedictory, citing other luminaries from the *purāṇa*-s similar to Nala in this regard. Nārāyaṇa, who has written the most widely used commentary on *Naiṣadha*, discloses his Vaiṣṇava perspective on the text by seeing the first verse not as a benediction to Nala but rather to Rāma:

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[147] prathamaṃ tāvat kavir vijigīṣukathāyāṃ svapituḥ paribhāvukam udayanaṃ pratyamarṣaṇatayā kaṭākṣayan tadgranthagranthīn udgrathayituṃ khaṇḍanaṃ prāripsuś caturvidhapuruṣārthair abhimānam avacīyamānam avadhārya mānasam ekatānatām ānināya. tathā ca śrīvārāṇasyāṃ muktikṣetre 'nubhūtaparabrahmasvarūpo [gaṅgādarśanādinā dharmakarmamadhyāsīnaḥ dr̥ṣṭipurahsthitasvāyattmeruśikharatulya-sauvarṇaniṣkarāśidarśanena vaśīkr̥tārthapuruṣārthaḥ ṣoḍaśavarṣābhir navayauvanavatībhir apūrvalāvaṇyasampattibhiḥ pramadābhiḥ snānodvartanabhojanādyupacāracaturābhiḥ paricaryamāṇatayā kiṅkarīkr̥takāmapuruṣārthaḥ.] evaṃ caturbhir api puruṣārthair anākṣiptahr̥dayatayā granthaṃ nirmāya tadgranthān khaṇḍanayuktibhiḥ khaṇḍaśaḥ khaṇḍitavān. tatra ca karkaśatarkodarkatvāt śr̥ṅgārādirasapradhānām aparitoṣaṃ sambhāvya tadāvarjanāya rasapradhānaṃ kāvyam idaṃ cakāra.
tataś ca śāstrārambhe nirvighnena granthasamāptaye śrotr̥ṇāṃ maṅgalācaraṇāya śiṣṭācāraparipālanāyā 'dhikr̥tābhīṣṭādidevatābhyo namaskāraḥ pratipādyaḥ. sa ca na kr̥taḥ. yato nalasya puṇyaślokatvāt tatsaṃkīrtanād aghaughavighaṭṭanāt kuto vighnanighnatā? tathā pr̥thusahasrārjunabharatanalaprabhr̥tīnāṃ smaraṇaṃ paramamaṅgalahetuḥ ato maṅgalācaraṇam apy asti. tathā ca śiṣṭācāro 'pi naladamayantīkīrtanaṃ kalināśanam iti. ato granthakāraḥ prathamaṃ nalam eva varṇayan maṅgalācaraṇam āracayati --

[148] Cāṇḍu's account here of these details are discussed later in light of his and other commentators' role in constructing a literary history.

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> One ought to perform a benediction in order to complete the desired composition without obstacles and for the continuance of tradition. [According to the poetics text "Light on Poetry" (*Kāvyaprakśasa*)], "the opening (consists of) either a blessing, a homage (to a deity), or an indication of the subject matter." The poet Śrīharṣa, the author of the composition, addresses his benediction with an embedded mantra (*sabīja*) in a veiled form of homage to his desired deity (Rāma), the lord of the Raghus. Others, however, say that the benediction is characterized by the indication of the specific subject matter (*viśiṣṭavastunirdeśa*).[149]

Nārāyaṇa's reference to an embedded mantra suggesting homage to Rāma points to a significant aspect of the *Naiṣadha* tradition that sees the poem as an unfolding of sacred sounds invoking various deities and metaphysical powers. Although the tradition of the poem's embedded *cintāmaṇi mantra* invoking Śrīvidyā (Tripurādevī) is intrinsically introduced by the text itself and reinforced by the Sanskrit commentators, a popular tradition has transformed the first verse into a devotional prayer to a host of deities including the cosmic serpent Ananta, the Earth goddess, and the Sun.[150]

On the other hand, one notices in the opening comments of Mallinātha on *Nc* 1.1 an understanding of the poem's benedictory nature rooted not in any extratextual context of deity homage but rather as grounded in the fundamentals of the *sāhityaśāstra*:

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[149] cikīrṣitasya granthasya nirvighnasamāptyarthaṃ śiṣṭācārapariprāptam 'āśīr namaskriyā vastunirdeśo vāpi tanmukham' (KP 1/2) iti maṅgalācaraṇaṃ kartavyam iti granthakṛcchrīharṣanāma kavir gūḍaṃ sabījaraghunāthābhiṣṭadevatānamaskārarūpaṃ maṅgalam ācarati. anye tu 'viśiṣṭavastunirdeśalakṣaṇaṃ maṅgalam' ity āhuḥ.

[150] The tradition of seeing the poem as an allegory for many narratives, including an extended praise-poem to various deities, is well-known. It is treated in this thesis at a later section in the context of Śrīdhara's commentary and the poem's semantic possibilities.

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Because it is a vehicle toward acquiring different kinds of prosperity rooted in the poem and because of the authority of literary scholars (*ālaṅkārika*-s) who say that "a poem (is a vehicle toward) fame, wealth, knowledge of life in the world, the eradication of the non-beneficial, instant enlightenment, and a link to the kind of advice offered by a lover," and also keeping in sight the prohibition applied to inferior poems that, "one should avoid poetry and chit-chat," the respected poet Śrīharṣa desires to compose a poem called, "The Story of Nala (*Naiṣadha*)". Because such things as a benediction to wipe away obstacles toward a desired end is one of the many ways to open a poem -- [indicated in the statement] that, "the opening (consists of) either a blessing, a homage (to a deity), or an indication of the subject matter," -- he [Śrīharṣa, in the verse beginning with the words], 'having drunk (*nipīya*),' indicates an auspicious subject in the form of King Nala, who is the hero of the story.[151]

The *Akṣaradīpikā* (A lamp on/for the words/syllables (of *Naiṣadha*) of

Śrīdharasūri reflects an impulse to anthologize all available approaches and

readings, combining an appreciation for all of the above perspectives. He first

divides his discussion in two parts, beginning in the following way:

Bhojarāja, in his [work on rhetorics] *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharana* ("Necklace on the Goddess of Speech"), explains: "According to the words of the learned masters, the opening of a poem should pay homage by either offering benediction or providing the specific subject matter of the poem. Even a hint of the poet's (artful) use of language serves as an ornament to the ear of the learned. If the hero is described, he ought to possess extraordinary qualities." Introduced during a significant narrative context in the *Mahābhārata*, which begins with, "There was a powerful king named Nala, son of Vīrasena," Nala possesses extraordinary virtues and is the very embodiment of auspiciousness. This poem has accepted him alone as its hero, having dismissed [the possibility] of there being another hero, in order to repel what is inauspicious and in order to promote the [successful completion of] all desirable purposes. With the first words, the

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[151] atha tatra bhavān śrīharṣakaviḥ 'kāvyaṃ yaśase 'rthakṛte vyavahāravide śivetarakṣataye. sadyaḥ paranirvṛtaye kāntāsammitatayopadeśayuje..' ity ālaṅkārikavacanaprāmāṇyāt kāvyasthānekaśreyaḥsādhanatvāc ca 'kāvyālāpāṃś ca varjayed' iti tanniṣedhasyāsatkāvyaviṣayatāṃ paśyan naiṣadhākhyaṃ mahākāvyaṃ cikīrṣuś cikīrṣitārthavighnaparisamāptihetoḥ 'āśīr namaskriyā vastunirdeśo vāpi tanmukham' ity āśīr ādyanyatamasya prabandhamukhalakṣaṇatvāt kathānāyakasya rajño nalasya itivṛtarūpaṃ maṅgalaṃ vastu nirdiśati -- nipīyeti

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poet utters a great benediction in the form of the subject matter itself, doing so for the sake of continuing a tradition passed down from teachers to students and to eliminate any obstacles to the poem's completion.[152]

Using what must have been the popular poetics text of the day, the

Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa, rather than the classic *Kāvyaprakāśa* that his

predecessors use,[153] Śrīdhara thus follows Cāṇḍu, Nārāyaṇa and Mallinātha in

addressing the requirements of the *sāhityaśāstra* and bookends his remarks with a

lengthy discussion of the poem's literary qualities and the nature of its ineffective

poetic usages (*doṣa*):

> (In determining) the meaning of the words, a cause for apprehension arises
> (because of the poet's fondness for) mixing figures of speech
> (*saṅkarālaṅkāra*), i.e. suggestion (*dhvani*), double meaning (*śleṣa*),
> hyperbole (*atiśayokti*), metaphor (*rūpaka*), etc. The teachers of rhetoric
> have spoken of this mixing figure of speech (*saṅkarālaṃkāra*) as, "a figure
> of speech within a figure of speech." The (rhetorics text) "Necklace on the
> Goddess of Speech" (*Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa*) speaks of forty-eight
> ineffective poetic usages (*doṣa*) in all: "there are sixteen faults of words,
> sentences, and the meanings of sentences." There are not that many *doṣa*-s
> here (in this work). The flow (emphasizes) alliteration (*varṇānuprāsa*).
> There are many effective poetic usages beginning with compactness of
> letters (*śleṣa*) that have an alliterative (*varṇānuprāsa*) flow. Alliteration
> refers to (musical) speech clusters, as is spoken of in (another rhetorics text
> called) "The Illuminator (*Pradīpikā*)" . . .[154]

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[152] atha tatra tāvad amandarasamandiram ānandaśa[bda??] sakalasañjātaṃ kāntaṃ (?)kāvyam
ārabhyamāṇaḥ kāvyānām adau -- 'āśīr namaskṛtya vastunirdeśo vā 'pi tanmukham ity
āptavacanānurodhāc ca kaver alpā 'pi vāgvṛttir vidvat karṇāvataṃsinī. nāyako yadi varṇyeta
lokottaraguṇottaraḥ' iti sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇe bhojarājena pradarśitatvāt. āsid rājā nalo nāma
vīrasenasuto balītyādinām mahābhārate mahatā sandarbhena sakalalokottaraguṇaśālitayā
puṇyaślokatayā ca nalasya satatvāt sakalaprayojanamaulibhūtaśivetarakṣataye ca nāyakāntaraṃ
vihāya tam eva kāvye kathānāyakam urarīkṛtya kāvyasya vighnaparisamāpti-
śiṣyapraśiṣyapracāraṇārthaṃ vastunirdeśam eva mahāmaṅgalam ācaraty ādyena padyena ---

[153] Mallinātha seems to favor a set of *alaṅkāra* texts, including the *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, the
Alaṅkārasarvasva, and the *Pratāparudrīya* in addition to the *Kāvyaprakāśa*.

[154] śabdārtho bhayaśaktimūlo dhvaniśleṣātiśayoktirūpakādīnām anuvṛtyā saṅkarolaṅkāraḥ yad
uktam ālaṅkārikaiḥ -- alaṅkāre 'pyalaṅkārassaṅkara ucyata iti doṣaḥ padānāṃ vākyānāṃ

The above passage continues with Śrīdhara aiming to exhaust the topic of the ways

in which the *Naiṣadha* measures up to the delineations of the *alaṃkāraśāstra*.

Some of these points will be taken up the context of discussing the *Naiṣadha*'s

reception as a "flawed" text.

The most unique opening statement among all the available *Naiṣadha*

commentators is found in Gadādhara's *ṭīkā*, called *Naiṣadhasudhāmadhu*

("Honeyed nectar of the *Naiṣadha*"). As seen earlier, in his *avataraṇikā*

(Introduction) he chooses primarily to deal with a technical textual issue that

exercised his predecessors and needed, to his mind, some sort of definitive

closure.[155] In addition, however, he (like Cāṇḍu) provides a historical gloss on the

text's composition and reiterates information about Śrīharṣa's alleged patron,

information that is corroborated and refuted elsewhere in quasi-historical

accounts[156]:

> Śrīharṣa was the best among the royal *paṇḍits* of the king Govindacandra
> of Banaras. He had dedicated himself to the philosophical studies and had
> written works like Khaṇḍana. Other jealous paṇḍits, who were thinking
> very highly of their poetic achievements, were laughing at him every day,
> when he entered the court, with the words: 'Here comes the dry desert
> incarnate, with the Śamī trees of Tarka in abundance.' Once Śrīharṣa came
> to know of this, through one of his partisans and to exhibit his poetic
> powers he wrote a Mahākāvya called Nalacarita and presented it to the

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vākyārthānāṃ ca ṣoḍaśa" iti sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇoktā aṣṭācatvāriṃśad doṣāścātra na santi
varṇānuprāsagatir iti śleṣādayo bahavo guṇās santi stabakavān nāma varṇānuprāsaḥ uktañ ca
pradīpikāyām --

[155] Cited and discussed earlier in the context of commentaries determining the critical text of the
Naiṣadha.

[156] Particularly in Rājaśekharasūri's *Prabandhakośa*.

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king, who, being highly pleased with it, offered thenceforth two seats to the poet -- one among the logicians (*tarkavādin*) and the other among the poets (*sāhityavādin*). He also offered him two betel leaves and a title 'Poet-philosopher (*kavipaṇḍita*)'. In desiring to compose this poem, this poet's first (thought might have been): "What hero-king existed in this world, who was stoic and yet charming? I will make such a personality the hero of my story, which will surpass even the taste of nectar. Because he was thinking about this again and again for a long time and devotedly practicing the *Cintāmaṇi mantra*, it is said that an answer flashed forth. And having (mentally) received the first verse beginning with the phrase "having drunk" (*nipīya*), he composed the poem out loud. The point of all this is to say that in doing so, the poet is saying: "I coronate as the hero of this story a king named Nala, who in the Golden Age was adorned with virtue upon virtue." In the second verse, beginning with the words 'the story with sentiments (*rasaiḥ kathā*)', however, there is an indication of (the poem's) subject-matter (*vastunirdeśa*). This poet is reiterating the same meaning (indicated in the first verse) in a different style. Some, however, say that the first verse itself presents the story's subject matter and that the second verse is a variant reading. Others say that (this second verse) supplements the (idea) from the previous verse, but that they share a singular purpose, (having a semantic relationship) of a kisser [becoming a kisser] because of a kiss. And so, in saying that "it is just a variant reading," one means that it (the content of the second verse) attains the position of being a cause of that (idea expressed in the first verse) . . . Sensing that this idea might be misconstrued, the poet has thus in 1.2, under the guise of a variant reading, purposefully extended the expression of his desired meaning. And, therefore, in doing this, the gifted [poet] exhibits the profound maturity of his poetic efforts. Otherwise, why wouldn't this all-knowing poet embed in a single verse the primary subject matter in an uncontroversial and felicitous manner? I offer this comment based on my own learning and common sense. The secret truth of the matter only the poet knows. To merely tender an original response is the connoisseur's lot.[157]

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[157]iti ha śrūyate. vārāṇasyāṃ govindracandro nāma rājā babhūva. yathā 'stīndro 'marāvatyām. tasya sabhāyāṃ bahavaḥ paṇḍitā babhūvuḥ. maṇḍitāḥ sadguṇaughena. teṣu ca sarveṣu śrīharṣaḥ parṣanmaṇḍanam. yaḥ kila kṛtavān khaṇḍanam. sa punaḥ sarvajñaḥ khalu vimṛśya tāratamyaṃ succhāyāyasarasāṃ nikaṭataravartidharmārthakām agrām agāminīṃ sāhityasaraṇim anādṛtya vicchāyavirase dūrataravartiparamapadagāmini pramāṇamārge lagna. taṃ ca yathāvasaram anusarantaṃ nṛpasaṃsadamapare matsariṇaḥ prathamopagatāḥ sāhityarasālataruvanaṃ manyāḥ paraspará 'sya vīkṣāpuraḥsaram upahasanti sma prativāsaraṃ "samprāpto'yam tarkaśamītarupurasanniveśaḥ sākṣān marur eva deśa" iti. ekadā tu sahasopasthitena tena te liṅgair ulliṅgitāḥ svamanusandhāya dhyāyantaḥ kimapi visadṛśaṃ gūḍam. pṛṣṭaś ca kaścana tatsamīpavartī svāptaḥ "kim eteṣāṃ duṣṭādīnām īdṛśaviceṣṭitam" iti. kathitaṃ ca tena tatsarvaṃ tasmai yathāvadānupūrvyā. athā 'sau vidvān abhimānavān kilaitat kimapi śṛṅgārarasadhāma

The historical account given by Gadādhara will be assessed in a later section that deals with the commentators' role in constructing a literary history of *Naiṣadha*. Gadādhara's focus here on matters associated with the text's reception in light of other scholarly opinions hints at the lively intellectual debates that must have surrounded the poem at an early period. His specific interest to clarify the poet's intentions, as he sees them, and to recapitulate prevailing opinions on the matter distinguishes his commentary from the others. The specific arguments above have previously discussed in the context of the commentators' role in constituting a critical text of the *Naiṣadha*.

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nalacaritanāma samudravadanāvyaṃ mahākāvyaṃ vinirmāya nyavedayat tasmai nṛpāya pratyakṣadevāya. tataś ca vidvān eṣa viśeṣaviduṣas tasmāt suprasannāt tarkavediṣv ekaṃ sāhityavediṣv ekam iti sabahumānam āsanadvayaṃ labhate sma. tāmbūladvayaṃ ca "kavipaṇḍita" iti ca nāmāntaraṃ lebhe . . . prathamataś cāsya kaveḥ kāvyam idaṃ nirmātum icchataḥ -- ko'atra jagati tathāvidhaḥ khalu dhīralalitaḥ kṣitipatir abhūd yam aham iha jitasudhārasakathaṃ kathānāyakaṃ karomīti. bhūyaś ciraṃ cintayataḥ samyag upāsitasya cintāmaṇimantrasya prasādādyaḥ kilā 'rtho 'ntaḥ prāsphurat sa eva nipīyety ādāv ādimaśloke bahir upanibaddhaḥ. yo 'yam evaṃ guṇaguṇālaṅkṛtaḥ kṛtayuge nalo nāma kṣitipatir āsit tam aham iha kathāyāṃ nāyakapade 'bhiṣekṣyāmīti cātra tātparyārthaḥ. rasaiḥkathety ādau dvitīyaśloke tu vastunirdeśarūpatayā tam evārthaṃ bhaṅgyā kavir ayam anūktavān.. kecit tu prathamaślokam eva vastunirdeśyapratipādakam āhur dvitīyaṃ tu pāṭhāntaram. mukharūpasya pūrvaślokasyaikārthatvena pratimukharūpatayā cumbanāc cumbako 'yam ity apare. tac ca pāṭhāntara eva samāviśatīti tenaiva tatkāryam avāpyate. atra pakṣe ca bhūpālaparyāyasya kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ iti vidheyapadasyottarārdhe nirdeśo yuktaḥ. yasya kathāṃ nipīya budhās tathā sudhām api nādriyante sa tathāvidhaḥ khalu nalo nāma kṣitipatiḥ pūrvam āsid iti. kathāvastunirdeśo hi viśeṣaṇasya vidheyatvam . . . prathamśloke vidheyānūdyavaisadṛśyaṃ budhānāṃ sudhāyāmanādarahetor anupādānān nirhetutvaṃ ca dūṣaṇam āśaṅkamānaḥ kavir ayaṃ tasyaivārthaṃ dvitīyaśloke pāṭhāntarāpadeśena sayuktikaṃ kṛtvā pratyapīpadat. evaṃ ca śrīmatā'nena nijasya kavikarmaṇaḥ khalu prauḍhīḥ pradarśitā. anyathā kavir ayaṃ sarvajñaḥ sadvastunirdeśaparaṃ saguṇaṃ nirdoṣaṃ cātraikameva ślokaṃ kiṃ na vidadhyāt. iti mayā yathāśrutaṃ yathāmati ca vyākhyātam. nijaṃ rahasyaṃ tu kavir eva veda. vyākhyānaviśeṣaṃ tu sahṛdayā iti.

Making the Literal Meaning Clear: Cāṇḍu and Mallinātha on *Naiṣadha* 1.1

Although the opening statements initiate and direct a discourse on the text in various directions, the Sanskrit commentary's chief *raison d'etre* lies in facilitating the comprehension of the text for the intended reader. Sanskrit commentary on literature has been largely approached as a series of literal, pared-down expressions whose primary function is to facilitate basic comprehension. Often dressed in a style of a reader's terse early-response notes, the commentary's surface appearance of emphasizing the value of literal meanings understandably may influence one into thinking of them as faceless, interchangeable acts. In fact, there are at least eighteen different types of commentary-- at least nominally -- in the Sanskrit tradition, many of them overlapping in function.[158]

Certain statements from the traditional literature seem to corroborate these common conceptions with their pithy encapsulations of what exegesis does. The *Nyāyakośa*, for example, quotes the *Parāśarapurāṇa* in, "identifying the useful services offered by the Sanskrit commentaries":[159]

> The five characteristics of a commentary are the provision of word division, meaning of the words, analysis of grammatical complexes, construing of the sentences, and the answering of objections.[160]

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[158] These types of commentary are: ṭīkā, nirukta, bhāṣya, vyākhyā, kārikā, vṛtti, vārtika, pañjikā, cūrṇi, niryukti, vivaraṇa, ṭippaṇī, dīpikā, tilaka, phakkikā, samīkṣā, paddhati, saṃgraha.

[159] Tubb 10.

[160] padacchedaḥ padārthoktir vigraho vākyayojanā / ākṣepeṣu samādhānaṃ vyākhyānaṃ pañcalakṣaṇam //. Another variation of this verse is offered by Dr. Rāmamuni Pāṇḍeya, where not

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Another convenient summary of the tradition's notion of commentary's formal functions lists the five characteristics of *ṭīkā* as providing word-division, a statement of words in their order of construction, the examinations of compounds and such, the explanation of the word's meaning(s), and a statement of the author's semantic intention.[161] These very clear descriptions (or prescriptions?) of what commentary does (should do) implies an attitude that views the text as a stable resource whose semiotic code can be cracked with the tools of sound grammatical knowledge and lexicographical diligence. If this were the case, of course, then there would not be a need for more than a single, well-performed act of exegesis.

Commentators on literature may argue over whether or not a given work has many "right" interpretations or a single one, or over whether, "right" interpretations can be distinguished from "wrong" ones or, as in the case of *Naiṣadha* which could have many equally reasonable interpretations, if there is such a thing as an *identity* of the text. But identifying the syntax of the text marks it in a way that stands outside of attempts to give it semantic or literary interpretation. In other words, the commentators' identification of the syntax of the language may have little or no bearing on what they feel the text specifically refers to. The structuring of the commentaries seem to reflect a natural reading process in its dealing with the immediate contexts of word and syntax, on the one

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five, but six characteristics of ṭīkā are mentioned: padacchedaḥ padārthaśca vigraho vākyayojanā / ākṣepaśca samādhānaṃ vyākhyānaṃ ṣaḍvidhaṃ viduḥ //

[161] 'padacchedo 'nyayoktiś ca samāsādivivecanam/ padārthabodhas tātparyo vyākhyāvayavapañcakam'

hand, and the total contexts of interpretation and information about grammar, trope, and narrative on the other. The commentators generally emphasize one of two methods to explain the syntax of the text, although combinations of the two methods are apparently not rare. Commentators like Mallinātha prefer the subject-centered word-by-word method that takes each word in the order contained within the hemistichs (*daṇḍānvaya* or simply *anvayamukhī*), while some like Cāṇḍupaṇḍita and Nārāyaṇa prefer the more analytical verb-centered method that deals with syntactic units (*khaṇḍānvaya*) or the more evocative *kathambhūtinī* style, so named for question-based analysis of syntax). Both have been postulated to have roots in the oral tradition of the Vedas.[162]

The *daṇḍānvaya* (or *anvayamukhī*) provides the meaning of the verse gradually according to its syntax, explaining the case inflections (*vibhakti*) of the nouns, compounds (*samāsa*), and other grammatical formations. At the end, the commentators sometimes elaborate on the semantic sense, the emotional tenor of the passage (*rasa*), the trope (*alaṃkāra*), or the meter (*vṛtta*). Gary Tubb explains this approach in the following way: "In this approach the commentator goes

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[162] Pt. Srinivas Rath reviewed his traditional oral training in *kāvya* literature as composed of three readings. With the first reading, he explains, the student probably does not understand the verse. An unpacking of the syntax (*anvaya*) is, therefore, provided. Then the verse is read again with commentary (*vyākhyā*) interspersed with the root text (*mūla*). Then, with an inflected voice, the verse is read again to make the student understand. If the student is now unable to understand the verse merely upon hearing it (*śrutimātra*), then he has not fully understood the *śloka* and the process may begin again.

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straight through all the words of the *mūla* in one long string, merely rearranging

them so as to place them in the most easily understandable prose order."[163]

Krishnamachariar explains that this method follows the way of the logicians

(naiyāyika).[164] The most famous *kāvya* commentator Mallinātha uses the

daṇḍānvaya (or *anvayamukhi* method). For example, Mallinātha on *Nc* 1.1:

> **Having drunk** *(nipīya)* [= having fully relished *(nitarām āsvādya)*; **the**
> **story** *(kathā)* [= episode *(upākhyānam)*] **of that protector of the earth**
> *(kṣitirakṣiṇah)* [=*(kṣamāpālakasya)*], i.e, Nala, **the learned** *(budhāh)*
> [=knowers of that *(tajjñāh)* and also =deities *(surāh)*, according to
> (lexicographer) Kṣiraswāmin ("the word *budhāh* relates to a deity, to the
> moon, and to learned ones " *(jñātṛcāndrisurā budhāh)*] **do not regard**
> *(nādriyante)* **even nectar** *(sudhām api)* **in such a way** *(tathā)* [=meaning
> that it (nectar) is just like this story *(yātheyaṃ kathā tadvad ity arthah)*].
> Referring to nectar amounts to saying that they regard (the story) highly.
> (The word) **white umbrella** *(sitacchatritam)* (means that it was) made into
> a white umbrella *(sitacchatraṃ kṛtam)*; that is to say, it was made into a
> royal parasol *(sitātapatrīkṛtam)*. **He by whom a circle of fame**
> *(kīrtimaṇḍalah)* (was made into a white umbrella), **he was a mass** *(rāśih)*
> **of radiance** *(mahāsām)* [=*(tejasām)*]. The author's intention is to compare
> him (Nala) to the sun *(ravir iveti bhāvah)*. He was **brilliant** *(ujjvalah)*
> [=shining *(dīpyamānah)*] **by virtue of numerous festivities** *(mahaih)*
> [=*(utsavaih)*]. That is to say, he was resplendent because of constantly
> participating in festivities *(nityamahotsavaśālītyarthah)*; the
> (lexicographer) Amara says that the words "*mahah*," "*uddhava*," and
> "*utsava*" (are synonyms). **He was Nala** *(sa nalah āsīt)*.

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[163] Tubb 112

[164] Krishnamachariar (14) explains the connection between the *daṇḍānvaya* mode of commentary
and Nyāya methodology in the following way: "In this method, we take the subject first and then
draw the prose order of the words and the like. This method also might have existed actually in
oral teaching in ancient times as is evident from the reference to the method of teaching similiar to
this in *Suśrutasaṃhitā*..." And further on (579-580): "This method became prevalent later in
commentarial literature. It was Mallinātha who gave wide popularity to the *daṇḍānvaya* method
through his several commentaries on the famous kāvya-s."

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Here, referring to Nala as a "collection of splendors" (*mahasām rāśiḥ*) and superimposing the form of a white umbrella onto a circle of fame (*kīrtimaṇḍale*), there is a metaphor (*rūpakam*). And because of the superiority of the stories (of Nala) with regard to nectar, there is the figure of contrast (*vyatirekaḥ*). And of the (combination of the) two, there is the figure of commingling (*saṃsṛṣṭiḥ*). These are spoken of in the (rhetoric text) *Sāhityadarpaṇa* in the following way: a metaphor (comes about) from the superimposition of a form onto an object (*viṣaye*), which is then not thereby denied (*nirapahnave*); a figurative contrast (*vyatirekaḥ*) is when the vehicle (*upamānam*) is inferior to a superior tenor (*upameyam*); and the figure of commingling (*saṃsṛṣṭiḥ*) is spoken of as a condition (where) these (figures) are understood as mutually connected. In this canto, the meter is 'vaṃśastha,' whose metrical definition is '*jatau tu vaṃśasthamudīritam jarau*'.[165]

This sample of the *daṇḍānvaya* method exemplifies a pattern of exegesis based

solely on the syntax of the verse, a gradually unfolding of meaning word by word.

It unpacks the case (*vibhakti*), compounds (*samāsa*) and grammatical forms (*vṛtti*)

with an economy of expression that eschews the bringing in of external materials

that are unnecessary for the literal meaning to be expressed. Only, at the end does

he offer an explanation of the figures of speech (*alaṃkāra*) and meter (*vṛtta*) of the

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[165] atha tatra bhavān śrīharṣakaviḥ 'kāvyaṃ yaśase 'rthakṛte vyavahāravide śivetarakṣataye. sadyaḥ paranirvṛtaye kāntāsammitatayopadeśayuje..' ity ālaṅkārikavacanapramāṇyāt kāvyasthānekaśreyaḥ sādhanatvāc ca 'kāvyālāpāṃś ca varjayed' iti tanniṣedhasyāsatkāvyaviṣayatāṃ paśyan naiṣadhākhyaṃ mahākāvyaṃ cikīrṣuś cikīrṣitārthavighnaparisamāptihetoḥ 'āśīrnamaskriyā vastunirdeśo vāpi tanmukham' ity āśīrādyanyatamasya prabandhamukhalakṣaṇatvāt kathānāyakasya rajño nalasya itivṛtarūpaṃ maṅgalaṃ vastu nirdiśati -- nipīyeti. yasya kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ kṣamāpālakasya nalasya kathām upākhyānam. nipīya nitarām āsvādya pīñ svāde ktvo lyabādeśaḥ na tu pibateḥ 'na lyap' itipratiṣedhādīt tv āsambhavāt. Budhās tajjñāḥ surāś ca 'jñātṛcāndrisurā budhā' iti kṣirasvāmī. sudhām api tathā yatheyaṃ kathā tadvad ity arthaḥ, nādriyante, sudhām apekṣya bahu manyante iti yāvāt. sitacchatritaṃ sitacchatraṃ kṛtaṃ sitātapatrīkṛtam ity arthaḥ, tat kṛtāv iti ṇyantāt karmaṇi ktaḥ. kīrtimaṇḍalaṃ yena saḥ mahasāṃ tejasāṃ rāśiḥ ravir iveti bhāvaḥ. mahaiḥ utsavaiḥ ujjvalaḥ dīpyamāno nityamahotsavaśālītyarthaḥ. 'mahaḥ uddhava utsava' ity amaraḥ. sa nalaḥ āsīt. atra nale mahasāṃ rāśir iti kīrtimaṇḍale ca sitacchattratvarūpasyāropāt rūpakaṃ kathāyāś ca sudhāpekṣayā utkarṣāt vyatirekaś cety anayoḥ saṃsṛṣṭiḥ. taduktaṃ darpaṇe, rūpakaṃ rūpitāropād viṣaye nirapahnave iti. "ādhikyamupameyasyopamānānnyūnatā 'thavā. vyatireka" iti mitho 'pekṣayaiteṣāṃ sthitiḥ saṃsṛṣṭir ucyate iti ca. asmin sarge vaṃśasthaṃ vṛttam, 'jatau tu vaṃśastham udīritaṃ jarav' iti tal lakṣaṇāt.

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verse. Mallinātha is famous for this approach, which in a way anticipates a post-modern attitude toward liberating meaning from the words of a text, one that sees the text as a basically self-illuminating entity that must be interpreted according to what it itself provides the commentator, not on extraneous supplementary material that one wishes to superimpose onto it.

Techniques in this approach include leading questions that arouse curiosity for a certain kind of answer. As is customary with the *khaṇḍānvaya* approach, the commentator analyzes around a series of questions and gives the syntax at the end. He takes care of the nominative first, following with the *bahuvrīhi* qualifiers of the nominative, and then dealing with the genitive qualifiers. Finally, he gives the explanation. Krishnamachariar observes that the *khaṇḍānvaya* method follows the Mīmāṃsā tradition of verbal analysis:

> In this method, the explanation of the original work is achieved through questions and answers. According to this, the verb is taken first. Then, in respect of cases, questions are asked and thus through *ākāṅkṣā* the prose order of the words is drawn which is followed by the explanation of words and the like.[166]

Kishornath Jha elaborates on the process in the following way:

> [With the *khaṇḍānvaya* method, the] verb is taken as the main core of a sentence and the other *kāraka*-s and *viśeṣaṇa*-s connected with it in a natural way -- this arouses the sense of curiosity in the pupil, evokes a response from him and enables him to discover truths about language himself. The pupil is led step-by-step in a logical manner to arrive at the

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[166] Krishnamachariar 579

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complete syntactic unit, the *vākyārtha*. The question and answer method is analytical."[167]

Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's style of glossing follows this method. The following is the *glossa* part of his commentary on *Nc* 1.1:

(On the verse beginning with) "having drunk" (*nipīya*). **There was a king named Nala.** What was special (about him)? He was a **mass** (*rāśiḥ*) of **radiance** (*mahasām*) [=glorious valor (*pratāpānām*)] and such that because of his beauty (*kāntyā*) he (embodies Damayantī's) **great love** (*mahān ujjvalaḥ*). Or rather, he was **brilliant** (*ujjvalaḥ*) **by virtue of** (his participating in many) **festivities** (*mahair*) [=(*utsavaiḥ*)]. This is an indication of auspiciousness (*maṅgalasūcanam*). What kind? He was such by whom a **white umbrella** (*sitacchatritam*) (formed) **a circle of fame** (*kīrtimaṇḍalam*). By this (use of the word 'circle' is meant) repository (*nidhānam*) of fame (that stems from) charm (*kamanīyatā*) and blazing courage (*pratāpa*). **Having drunk up** (*nipīya*) [its usage here comes from the *dhātu pīñ* in the sense of 'drinking' **whose** (yasya) **story** (*kathā*) [=narrative episodes (*upākhyānāni*)], **the learned ones** (*budhāḥ*) [=(*vidvāṃsaḥ*)] **do not regard** (*na ādriyante*) **as such** (*tathā*) [=in such a manner (*tena prākāreṇa*)] **even nectar** (*sudhām api*) [=(*amṛtam*)] **or the Vedic hymns** (*sūktam*). (A story) of what kind? **Of a protector** (*rakṣiṇaḥ*) [=(*pālayituḥ*)] **of the earth** (*kṣiteḥ*) [=(*pṛthivyāḥ*)]. And so, the gods (*budhāḥ*) [=(*devāḥ*)] do not regard (*nādriyante*) nectar (*amṛtam*) upon hearing his story (*tatkathāśravaṇāt*). This indicates (his) universal lordship (*cakravartitvam*) among the circle (of kings) (*maṇḍale*). Or else, he was as if a mass of radiance (*mahāsāṃ rāśir iva*), i.e. he was as if the holy sun (*śrīsūrya iva*). Or he was resplendent (*ujjvalaḥ*) by virtue of festivities (*mahaiḥ*) [=(*utsavaiḥ*)]. Because of Nala's being a stoic and charming hero (*dhīralalitanāyaka*), foremost is the love sentiment (*ujjvala*) [=(*śṛṅgāra*)]. Or else, having drunk whose story the kings (*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*) [=(*nṛpāḥ*)] do not regard highly even the earth (*sudhā*) [=(*pṛthivī*)].[168]

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Gary Tubb explains the *khaṇḍānvaya* approach as the provision of a basic 'skeleton sentence' of the original text and then a gradual filling in of each of the remaining parts of the root text (*mūla*), "by asking questions that bring out the ways in which those parts fit into the construction of the original text" (111). He cites sets of variations that combine the two methods. For example, "[q]uite often a commentator will use something akin to the *kathambhūtinī* approach to break the *mūla* into two or more large parts, but will use the *anvayamukhī* method in dealing with each of these parts" (116); sometimes:

> [M]ost often in conjunction with the *anvayamukhī* approach, the commentator arranges the whole commentary in standard fashion, but omits the repetition of the words in the *mūla*. When this is done, the glosses of the omitted words appear where they would be if the words of the original text were repeated in the commentary -- to put it another way, the gloss often takes the place of the repeated word from the *mūla* in giving the basic construction of the original text.[169]

Yet another combination of the two methods involves:

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nalasya puṇyaślokatvāt tatsaṃkīrtanādaghaughavighaṭṭanāt kuto vighnanighnatā? tathā
pṛthusahasrārjunabharatanalaprabhṛtīnāṃ smaraṇaṃ paramamaṅgalahetuḥ ato
maṅgalācaraṇamapyasti. tathā ca śiṣṭācāro 'pi naladamayantīkīrtanaṃ kalināśanam iti. ato
granthakāraḥ prathamaṃ nalameva varṇayan maṅgalācaraṇam apy asti. tathā ca śiṣṭācāro 'pi
naladamayantīkīrtanaṃ kalināśanamiti. ato granthakāraḥ prathamaṃ nalam eva varṇayan
maṅgalācaraṇamāracayati --
nipīyeti. sa nalo nāma raja āsīt. kiṃviśiṣṭaḥ. mahasāṃ pratāpānāṃ rāśiḥ. tathā mahān ujjvalaś ca
kāntyā. athavā mahair utsavair ujjvalaḥ. etad eva maṅgalasūcanam. kiṃbhutaḥ? sitacchatritaṃ
kīrtimaṇḍalaṃ yena sa tathā. etena kīrtipratāpakamanīyatānāṃ nidhānam. yasya kathā
upākhyānāni nipīya. pīñ pāne'sya prayogaḥ. budhā vidvāṃsaḥ sudhām api amṛtaṃ sūktaṃ vā tathā
tena prakāreṇa na ādriyante. kiṃ bhūtasya? kṣiteḥ pṛthivyāḥ rakṣiṇaḥ pālayituḥ. atha ca budhāḥ
devā amṛtaṃ nādriyante, tatkathā-śravaṇāt. etena cakravartitvaṃ maṇḍale sūcitam. athavā
mahasāṃ rāśiriva śrīsūrya iva āsīt. mahair utsavair vā ujjvalaḥ. ujjvalaḥ śṛṅgāraḥpradhāno
dhīralalitanāyakatvāt nalasya. atha vā yasya kathā nipīya kṣitirakṣiṇo nṛpās tathā sudhāṃ pṛthivīm
api nādriyante.
[169] Tubb 117

[the commentator's giving] the bare *anvaya* of the original -- i.e., the arrangement of the words of the *mūla* in the order that forms the framework of an *anvayamukhī* commentary -- without inserting any explanatory material. Once this has been done, the commentator begins again and gives a full commentary using any of the approaches or variations mentioned above.[170]

As will be seen further on, *Naiṣadha* commentator Śrīdhara takes this latter approach. Some of the commentators provide less explanatory material, some omitting many of the words of the *mūla* altogether. Some only give the bare *anvaya* without comments and then provide a full commentary. There are other techniques of indicating features of syntax and construction within the commentary.[171]

More so than the unilinear phrase-by-phrase *daṇḍānvaya* approach, it seems that dividing the verse into manageable units through pointed questions and then providing a parallel phrase to elucidate the unit facilitates the unraveling of difficult passages while at the same time allowing for the mental construction of more complex meanings. Because this style encourages and enables semantic multiplicity, it also inspires and facilitates arguments over propriety of interpretation. The most widely used commentary on *Naiṣadha*, Nārāyaṇa's *Prakāśa*, harbors the cumulative history of *Naiṣadha* interpretation (up until his time) and employs a combination of the techniques referred to above to provide a

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[170] Tubb 117

[171] Again, the Tubb and Boose volume provide a comprehensive discussion of this topic. Tubb has explained and exemplified the various permutations of these methods by citing seven examples of commentary on the same *Kumārasambhava* passage.

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sense of how readers approached the text. His commentary, (an example of which is taken up in the next section in the context of the text's semantic possibilities), demonstrates the ways in which hosts of readers approached the text.

Other commentators, like Mallinātha (who solely employs the unilinear approach) for example, narrowly conceive of interpretation as a determination of the text's "meaning" and are less interested in the hermeneutic understandings of readers that extend the potentialities of the poem beyond the surface layer of meaning. He makes clear in his preface that this is his approach: "Nothing irrelevant and outside the text is written here. I have commented on everything with proper construing of the text as the foremost priority."[172] In Mallinātha's scheme, it appears that demonstrated linguistic competence to make the text comprehensible allows one to control the text's proliferation of meaning. Perhaps once sense is "made" out of text other operations of interpretation can be undertaken. In some ways, the *khaṇḍānvaya* method -- especially in its structuring of meaning around questions -- absorbs different readings by answering the questions with alternative answers and verbally transforms the notion of literal meaning by eliminating its primacy altogether. This will be discussed later in the context of *Naiṣadha* commentators who explore the multiplicity of meaning available in the words of the text.

As a skillful practitioner of the "text-only" *daṇḍānvaya* approach

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[172] nāmūlaṃ likhyate kiñcin nānapekṣitam ucyate. ihānvayamukhenaiva sarvaṃ vyākhyāyate mayā.

Mallinātha, who defiantly entitles his commentary on *Naiṣadha* "The Enlivener" (*Jīvātu*) to presumably label its role to restore to the text some semblance of sanity after alluring yet misguided commentaries have tried to kill it, seems to suggest the irrelevance of the initial inspiration or predispositions of a reader (other than his own) in the acts of interpretation. The nature of this traditional, text-oriented paradigm seems both epistemologically and pedagogically premised on a semiotic approach to the material, where a persevering reader is rewarded for following the text's 'rules' of selection, arrangement and emphasis. The urgent need for his students, it seems, is to acquire technical skills -- grammar and *alaṃkāraśāstra* -- and the contents will take care of themselves. Indeed, Mallinātha's own words and style of commenting confirm a view toward literary discourse as essentially mimetic and referential. The preference for commentators like him is the development of a normative piety of sorts for an "authoritative" reading that focuses solely on determining the text's significance as the poet originally intended, a proposition hampered by all sorts of philosophical and practical difficulties to be sure.[173]

Like other commentators, however, Mallinātha's aim is essentially to seek out the structure and coherence of the text, reformulate it, and express it in a language suitable for the audience's comprehension or enjoyment. It seems that he feels more strongly than most that only after one interprets a passage literally by

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[173] A traditional Sanskrit maxim reads: "the commentator knows but not the poet" (*vyākhyātā jānāti na tu kaviḥ*).

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chiefly tracing problematic linguistic details can one then compare the text's

implicit suggestions with one's own beliefs because only then are its actual

implications and complexities evident. A critique here might dispute the notion

that a methodical practice of interpretation centered on a rigorous methodology of

observing "facts" about the text necessarily leads to a "correct" reading. Similarly

a posture of aesthetic disinterestedness cannot shield a critical approach from

scrutiny and challenge. Because the tone of these commentaries is one of

elucidation and not a "literary" prose, some twentieth century Indologists have

criticized the language and methodology of commentaries. Krishnamachariar, for

example, writes:

> Their language in general bears no resemblance to the language of the
> romances. The tone of the former is serious and scientific, while that of the
> latter is levitous and recreative. Bhāṣya-s are stuffed with substance and
> technicality; they are vastu-pradhāna. Literary prose proper is the result of
> poetic art and rhetorical embellishment.[174]

Krishnamachariar, like many modern readers that use the commentary, wishes for

more of a broad perspective in the Sanskrit commentary that one finds in general

essays on literature, for example, to counterbalance the technicality of the *śastraic*

commentary. No such genre of commentary seems to exist in Sanskrit. There are

examples, however, of creative translations that produce a dual effect of

reproducing *and* simultaneously interpreting a given text's literary effects and

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[174] Krishnamachariar 442

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language.[175] Nevertheless, Krishnamachariar's appraisal of the Sanskrit

commentary style appears true -- the commentary does not aim to be as literary as

the poem on which it comments. Its aim is to elucidate, provoke interest, and

confirm popular readings.

The criticism of traditional acts of commentary so pronounced in modern

times was not completely absent in pre-modern times either. The traditional

critiques of the commentators' craft give the benefit of the doubt to the skillful

elucidator of literal meaning over and above the clever teaser of ever more hidden

suggestions. Bhaṭṭagopala, for example, in his commentary on the *Kāvyaprakāśa*

sardonically complains of the tendency of commentators to relate things on flimsy

grounds: "(One wonders) where one subject connects with another. Even the

potter's clay comes to obstruct knowledge of Brahman."[176] Similarly, *Yogasūtra*

commentator Bhoja's well-known remark stems from a critical eye toward those

who do not do a good enough job fostering comprehension but rather disrupt the

reader's ability to understand:

> Whatever is extremely difficult to understand, that they avoid by saying "It
> is clear." With respect to the clear meanings, they over-elaborate with

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[175] Among *Naisadha* commentators, for instance, there is the work of Śrīnātha who in addition to writing a Sanskrit commentary on the *Naiṣadha* (lost, alas) also performed the most elaborate pre-modern translation of the text into Telegu, whereby he essentially re-wrote a new version of Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadha* that imitated its structure and language while striving throughout to innovate. Similarly, there is the case of Kṛṣṇānanda, another lost *Naiṣadha* commentator, who wrote a Sanskrit *kāvya* called *Sahṛdayānanda* along the lines of *Naiṣadha*.

[176] prasaṅgānuprasaṅgena kutra saṃgacchate na kim. mṛttikāpi kulālasya brahmavidyāṃ vighāte.. [Reference taken from ABORI XVI, 170-171]

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useless analysis of compounds, etc. All commentaries seem to confuse issues for the readers by aimlessly prattling on unhelpfully at the wrong places.[177]

Bhoja does not undercut the primarily explanatory role of the Sanskrit commentary, but is suggesting that commentaries should do something similar to what Mallinātha claims his commentaries do: stay relevant and prove useful.

There are other traditional statements that remark on effective commentary writing. For example, when an unskillful commentator generally makes the poet's text more difficult to understand, the maxim given is *maghavā mūla viḍaujā ṭīkā* -- glossing a difficult epithet of Indra (*māghavā*) in the text with an even more difficult epithet (*viḍauja*) in the commentary. The *Dhvanyāloka* explains that a commentator must be fully versed in the operations and usages of the poet and be able to bring out the beauties of the poem and the special style of the poet, while untangling the intricacies of the text for the reader. Emphasis on competent commentary writing and arguments over legitimacy and interpretive authority seem to reinforce the importance of these documents in the institutions of court and university, where vested interests might have depended on these documents as indicators of talent.

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[177] durbodhaṃ yadatīva tadvijahāti spaṣṭārtham ity uktibhiḥ
spaṣṭārtheṣv ativistṛtiṃ vidadhati vyarthaiḥ samāsādikaiḥ / asthāne 'nupayogibhiś ca bahubhir
jalpair (śabdair) bhramaṃ tanvate śrotṝṇāmiti vastuviplavakṛtaḥ (prāyeṇa) sarve 'pi ṭikākṛtaḥ //
[From the *Rājamārtaṇḍavṛtti* on *Yogasūtra* 1.6]

**Reverence and Contestation: Hermeneutic Attitudes of *Naiṣadha*
Commentators**

It appears that by the time of Mallinātha, the *Naiṣadhīya* and other well-

known *mahākāvya*-s must have been the subject of lively debates among scholars.

The different avenues for interpretive exploration must also have yielded all sorts

of discussion about potential meanings of individual verses and the poem as a

whole. The importance of proving oneself through the writing of commentary

seems to indicate that on the one hand, among institutions, there may have been a

fear that without standards by which the actual readers themselves could assess a

work, there would be a collapse of interpretive authority. In another vein, the

informal establishment of "rules" that a commentary should abide by implies a

general acceptance of certain standards of verifying the viability and plausibility of

a reading. The tradition of granting professorial status (the title of

mahāmahopādhyāya) to one who composed commentaries on foundational texts

like *Naiṣadha* or the *Kāvyaprakāśa* points to the importance of these documents

as public records that had to withstand potentially antagonistic responses. They

also signal an internal struggle among pedagogues competing to control the

reading and use of canonical texts. Some observers of this development in

Sanskrit culture see the commentary as a "sign of alienation" (Carl Bielefeldt's

phrase in describing hermeneutics). Professor R.K. Sharma, for example, has

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observed the "age of commentaries" as reflecting a "fortifying tendency . . . against something spiritual, philosophical, or physical."[178]

Gradually, texts such as these -- so important to gain respect among colleagues and students -- inspire reverence and power contests that perhaps transcend the intrinsic value of these texts as simply texts. The fact that *Naiṣadha* commentaries, for example, from the 17th century onwards have been hand-preserved by at least two or three generations of adherents, and the ones before that time by even more, suggests that they have been absorbed by some kind of institutional structure. While most of them praise the poet, the work, and their own teachers, the commentators give different reasons for composing their commentary. The variety of discursive topics touched on by the *Naiṣadha* commentators in their opening stanzas -- in addition to the ubiquitous praise verse (*praśasti*) dedicated to poet, text, teachers, parents, or colleagues-- speaks to the inspiration, motivation, and gratitude that ostensibly compels a Sanskrit commentator to compose his work. With their opening verses or remarks, a commentator's self-assessment expresses a complex range of hermeneutic attitudes -- from the self-effacingly humble or frankly personal to the purely polemical. Whether it is in large measure a matter of personality, upbringing or strategy, one usually perceives in their preface a commentator's relationship with the text and the community for which he writes. Almost certainly, an overtly reverential attitude is taken toward the text by all commentators. In addressing each other,

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[178] Sharma, R.K. 473

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however, the tone varies. Some take a defensive posture, perhaps burdened by the anxiety of influence from their predecessors and the text itself. Others put forward a confident, occasionally defiant, face in upholding the merits of their own work and denigrating the work of others.

Those *Naiṣadha* commentators that largely express humility frequently cast their relationship to the text as a child mixing himself up with a grown-up's sphere of activity. Bhavadatta, for example, does not really give an explicit reason for his commentary, although one may infer from his respectful overtures and humble admissions that it was partly a young scholar's desire to participate in the intellectual society of his elders:

> There are today many commentaries by great scholars, who explain the text's multiple meanings with understanding and sweetness; mine cannot stand in comparison to these . . . Having not studied with several teachers, even a learned scholar is unable to say anything about it. My sophomoric effort to comment on the poem will certainly be ridiculous to the learned poets. Still, helpless as I am, I carry on here to compose a commentary on the poem on account of my youthful rashness. How does one judge an act of a child?[179]

Even though prefacing his work with these remarks, the name of his commentary "An elucidation of difficult words" *Gūḍhapadavivṛti* (alternately *Sārasarasvatī*) suggests that he was quite proud of his contribution to *Naiṣadha* scholarship. Gadādhara echoes Bhavadatta's humility and expresses the child defense in

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[179] asty eva samprati mahākavibhiḥ praṇītā nānārthabodhamadhurā vivṛtistv anekā. teṣāṃ tadatra tulanā tu samānaṃ na tathā mamaiṣā . . . vaktuṃ sudhīr api gurūnanupāsya yasya śaknoti kiñcid api naiva rahasyam asya. kāvye śramo'tra vivṛtau kavipaṇḍitasya mohāya kintu mama samprati bālakasya . . . tathāpi bālyāc capalatvam uccair atra pravṛtto'smi vidhātum etām. ṭīkāṃ yathāvad vidhuro'pi kāvye bālasya kiṃ kṛtyavidhau vicāraḥ. (Quoted from Jani, p. 37)

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stronger language: "Let those of pure and intelligent mind forgive a child's

drivel."[180] While saying that he wrote the commentary at the request of his

students,[181] he downplays his scholarly abilities:

> This poet's nature takes repose in the shadows of authoritative knowledge,
> his intelligence greater than that of Bṛhaspati, the teacher of the lord of
> heaven. Generally, the poem is beyond my scholarship. Therefore, O
> learned ones, even when I have mixed-up the facts in some places, I am not
> to be maligned.[182]

Although the humility sometimes appears obligatory, it is often very pointed and

sincere. Narahari, the first known South Indian commentator on *Naiṣadha* and a

chief disciple of the well-known Vedāntin Mādhava (also known as

Vidyāranyasvāmin), expresses his humble sentiments quite beautifully:

> I have neither the imagination born of learning from previous births, nor
> can I bear the load of books on various subjects. It is only that my heart
> quivers (in the presence of) poet (Śrīharṣa's) compendium of the world,
> which is the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* . . . . Even a fool (such as I) strives to dive
> into this poem, which is the essence of meaning and deep sentiment, (just
> as) a young child, even though toothless, eagerly grabs at candy. . . . On
> account of mistaken judgment, inability, or such other cause, sometimes
> even clearly existent meanings in this impenetrable forest of great
> profundity [the *Naiṣadha*] cannot be fixed. Therefore, I am not to be
> faulted for my inability to completely extract (these meanings). Who can
> totally scoop out the heaps of jewels found in the ocean?[183]

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[180] kṣantavyaṃ me suviśuddhasiddhamatibhir bālasya lālāyitam.

[181] "The commentary of *Naiṣadha* was composed at the insistence of my students" [naiṣadhasya
racitā ṭikā svaśiṣyāgrahāt]

[182] kaver asya svargaprabhugurugarīyastaramateḥ pramāṇacchāyāsu prakṛtir abhiviśrāmyati muhuḥ.
na me tu vyutpatteḥ paricitir iha prāyikatayā hyato vyatyāse'pi kvacid api na vācyo'smi sudhiyaḥ..

[183] na mama mativilāso vāsanābhyāsajo vā vividhabahunibandhaskandhasaṃvāhanaṃ vā.
taralayati mano me kevalaṃ naiṣadhīyaṃ caritam akhilalokaślokanīyaṃ kaveś ca. (4)
samutsahe gūḍarasārthasāraṃ vigāhituṃ kāvyam idaṃ jaḍo'pi. ajātadantā api khaṇḍagolaṃ
kutūhalād ākalayanti bālāḥ.. (5) pramādāśaktyāder iha mahati gambhīragahane satām apy arthānāṃ

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For much of Sanskrit intellectual society, the commentary appears to have been a creative act of scholarship that served as a culmination of training, a bringing to bear on a master text all the skills and information acquired through study in the arts and sciences. This includes their ability to display their imagination (*pratibhā*), their worldliness (*vyutpatti*), and their scholastic training (*abhyāsa*) -- the three factors that, according to the teachers of literature, go into the making a great poet.

Narahari implies above that he is compelled to his task by the text's influence on his aesthetic sensibilities and not because he possesses the requisite imagination, worldly learning, and scholastic aptitude to handle the task. He admits his limitations with a text like *Naiṣadha* but, according to the recent editor of his commentary Sukhdev Sharma, he seems to have been among the most learned of *Naiṣadha* commentators:

> The *Dīpikā* (on the first seven cantos) contains in all 556 quotations or references. Out of these 556, in the case of 536 quotations it mentions the source by name, from which they have been taken. It is only in the case of 20 references where it does not mention the source by name and therefore the hunt is to be made to trace them.[184]

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kvacid api nibandho'pi na bhavet. athāpyasmād etan na khalu mama doṣāya nikhilaṃ samuccetuṃ śaktaḥ ka iva jaladhau ratnanicayam.. (10)

[184] Sukhdev Sharma 7.

Sharma quotes the breadth of Narahari's citations, representing not only of the texts popular during his time but also of authors and works now lost.[185] Although a popular commentary in South India, manuscripts of Narahari's commentary have been available in Kashmir for centuries, suggesting the appeal of his work. Sukhdev Sharma attributes the commentator's popularity to the fact that he quotes extensively and provides sources for a majority of his allusions. Whereas Narahari quotes about thirty authors, Cāṇḍupaṇḍita, according to Malinee Goswami, refers to as many as one hundred twenty two works on diverse subjects. Regardless how diligent a commentary is in unearthing references to the manifold genres that construct a text, the full scope of intertextuality probably remains elusive.

Premacandra, a professor of Sanskrit College Calcutta in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, perceives his commentary as an exercise in self-understanding and self-awareness, couching his statement in a defensive posture against the judgment of other interpreters:

> When there are so many other commentaries, full of reliable interpretations, it would be fruitless to make an effort (at writing another).

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[185] Sukhdev Sharma enumerates (7): The total number of authors and works either quoted or referred to in the Dīpikā is more than 30. An alphabetical list of them is as follows: Agnipurāṇa, Amarakośa, Āgamasaṃpradāya, Uṇādisūtra, Kāvyaprakāśa, Kāśikāvṛtti, Kauśitakī-upaniṣad, Gaṇasūtra, Gaṇitaśāstra (now lost), Cāṇakyanīti, Chāndogyopaniṣad, Taittirīyopaniṣad, Daśarūpaka, Dhanuśśāstra (lost), Pāṇini, Pāṇini-vārtika, Bālabhūṣaṇakāra (lost), Madhya-kaumudi, Manusmṛti, Mahābhārata, Medinīkośa, Yādavaprakāśa, Ratirahasya, Vararuci, Varāha (lost), Vāgbhaṭālaṃkāra, Viśvaḥ, Viṣṇupurāṇa, Vaijayantīkośa, Vṛttaratnākara, Śālihotra (lost), Śāstrasaṃpradāya, Śāśvatakośa, Śvetāśvataropaniṣad, Sāhityadarpaṇa.

Still, I have raised an effort here not for the sake of the learned but rather to understand the subtle ideas (in the *Naiṣadha*) for myself.[186]

While on the one hand, Premacandra cites the well-worn motif of self-edification as the paramount motivation for his work, there is also an unmistakable sense of the reader's anxiety in these statements. One sees this anxiety in the Śaiva ascetic Īśānadeva's commentary on *Naiṣadha*. Having acknowledged the excellence of Vidyādhara's commentary, the oldest one available, he humbly situates his own offering:

> I've composed this commentary on *Naiṣadha* from a Śaiva point of view to please the good . . . Taking the method of bees gathering small gobbets of honey (or the method of ascetics accepting food from only a few households), I who am an ascetic have earned my living [i.e. composed this commentary][187]. Therefore, let the scholars of poetry not laugh at me. Everyone has derived his knowledge from the poem. I also have followed my teacher in this commentary. A scholar who for the sake of celebrity shows the world the work of another by saying that it is his -- such a scholar certainly goes to hell.[188]

The monk's parting shot here against plagiarists and pretenders paints a picture of an earnest (and slightly touchy) *sahṛdaya*. It is noteworthy that some believe Īśānadeva's commentary was produced merely fifty years after Cāṇḍupaṇḍita and

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[186] anyāsu bhāvabahulāsu sadarthikāsu ṭikāsu cediha bhaved viphalaḥ prayāsaḥ. sadbhistathāpi mṛdubodhavibodhanārtham jātodyamo'hamiha mat prati nāvabudhyai.

[187] The idea seems to be that he his method of commenting has been to use and elaborate on portions from other commentaries (i.e. Vidyādhara and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita) or that he has aimed to keep his interpretation limited to selected aspects of the poem. Jāni explains the use of mādhukarī as referring to an "eclectic method" of commenting.

[188] satām mude naiṣadhaṭippaṇam mayā viracyate śaivamatānusāriṇā . . . mādhukarīm samāśritya vṛttimetadihārjitam mayā tapasvinā tasmādalam kāvyavidām hāsaiḥ . . . sarvo'pi kāvyamupajīvya karoti śāstram vyākhyām guror api mayā'nukṛtā tadeyam. vidvān sa yāti narakam khalu yaḥ prasiddhyai svīyam vadan parakṛtim pratibhāti loke.

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only a century after the first available commentary of Vidyādhara. The fact of a Śaiva monastic composing a full commentary on a poetic text like *Naiṣadha* at this early period in the text's dissemination is itself remarkable. His suggestion that there were many other commentaries available during his time, thus making it unnecessary to laugh at his own humble offering, and his statement about plagiarists are equally striking.

Implied in these statements of humility and desire for self-understanding is that the very act of interpretation for them serves as a means of inner transformation through their own inner experience of the poem's language. They explicitly admit that their commentaries do not aim to represent the text, but rather provide for themselves a means of entering into the text (or realizing it). Unlike those who explicitly state in their openings that they are engaged in a polemical or pedagogical act, these commentators couch their efforts as clearly avocational. Perhaps one may speculate that their social backgrounds guide their hermeneutic orientations, for unlike several of the more polemic-minded scholars, a man like Narahari was a pupil of Mādhava (also known as Vidyāranya), the well-known author of *Pañcadaśi* and *Sarvadarśanasaṅgraha*, while Īśānadeva was a Śaiva ascetic. For others, this text perhaps functioned as a standard bearer for intellectual achievement, its challenging nature making it a centerpiece for power contests among some of the best intellectuals between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries (and carried on in milder forms for the subsequent centuries as well).

Another important facet of the commentary lies in its instrumentality as a tool for competitive power contests over the interpretive control of the text. While some commentaries from different lineages work in a constructive enterprise to glorify their text, many others make explicit their dissatisfaction for other people's efforts to explain the text. If we assume there might have been competition between commentators, we have to assume that the implied reader approached the text with a mixture of interest and skepticism, willing to ridicule it at the first signs of inadequacy. Readers would have to compare and see which was more convincing, a decision that would involve the establishment of criteria for the quality of a commentary. Although Jani takes the following words of Lakṣmaṇabhaṭṭa as particularly significant because it indicates that there were more than a hundred known commentaries in his day, the relevant bit here is that it indicates the commentator's belief in the uniqueness of his contribution to the *Naiṣadha* tradition:

> I have commented on the *Naiṣadha* by following a path not seen by the others. Although there may be a hundred good commentaries on the *Naiṣadha* by scholars, still some will be able to discern how special this one is.[189]

Often, the commentators clearly explain that they composed a commentary for the sake of someone specific: their students[190], their brother,[191] their grandson[192], their

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[189] karomi naiṣadhavyākhyām anyādṛṣṭapathānugām. santi yadyapi sadvyākhyā budhānāṃ naiṣadhe śatam. tathāpy amuṣyā vaidagdhīṃ kecid vijñātum īśate.

[190] Also, Śrīdhara states that he wrote two commentaries, one for young students and one for scholars: "I composed a commentary that explained the meanings and style appropriate to the

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teacher, etc. In the case of Lakṣmaṇabhaṭṭa and others, however, their

commentaries are meant as scholarly contributions to a body of knowledge with

which they are thoroughly familiar. Lakṣmaṇabhāṭṭa, for example, seems to have

known all of the commentaries that preceded him and, according to Jāni, quotes

from at least three well known commentators of the text, i.e. Nārahari, Mallinātha,

and Bhavadeva.

Mallinātha's general statement of commentatorial polemic, found in the

preface of all of his commentaries on *mahākāvya*, is perhaps the most famous in

Sanskrit literary culture:

> Nothing irrelevant and outside of the root text is written here. I have
> commented on everything, with proper construing of the text as the
> foremost priority.[193]

His specific salvo against inferior commentators of the *Naiṣadha* reads:

> For the sake of bringing back to life poet Śrīharṣa's true words, deadened
> by the poison of inferior commentaries, I have composed this commentary
> "Enlivener.[194]

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comprehension of young people and I also composed another one called the "Illuminator of the

(inner meaning of) words" (*akṣaradīpikā*), which is more elaborate. [tadbālabodhāya mayā

yathāvat prakāśitārthā sphuṭarītivṛttyā / vyākhyāyate cākṣaradīpikākhyā vyākhyā ca mukhyā

samalaṃkṛtā'nyā //]

[191] Paramānanda Cakravartin, for example, explains: "Even though there is a succession of

Naiṣadha commentaries by many worthy (commentators), to satisfy his brothers who would not

compose another?" [naiṣadhasya vivṛter anukramo bhūri sadbhir api vā kṛto yadi.

bhrātṛvargaparitoṣakāraṇādeśa kena punar eva tanyate.]

[192] iti śrījinarājasūriviracitāyāṃ sukhāvabodhāyāṃ pautrabhāvavijayād.

[193] nāmūlaṃ likhyate kiñcin nānapekṣitam ucyate. ihānvayamukhenaiva sarvaṃ vyākhyāyate

mayā.

[194] kṣudravyākhyāviṣārtānāṃ śrīharṣakaviṣadgirām. ujjīvanāya jīvātur jīyād eṣa mayā kṛtaḥ.

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Dvivedi, in his comparative study of Mallinātha's commentaries, feels that perhaps the "Enlivener" was his first or his last, on account of the fact that no reference is made to his other commentaries in it and because all of the opening verses to the *Jīvātu* differ from the standard verses he uses elsewhere.[195] To comment on the *Naiṣadha* in the beginning of one's career seems an interesting possibility in light of its importance for credibility in the Sanskrit intellectual circles of the past millennia.[196] In an interesting development of Mallinatha's legacy as an outspoken (some might say imperious) critic, there are a number of recorded anecdotes (*janaśruti / lokokti*) and regional linguistic uses related to Mallinātha. For example, Dvivedi cites two expressions that he has seen in Sanskrit correspondences between scholars -- "he's done a Mallinātha" (*mallināthīkaraṇam*) and "don't do a Mallinātha" (*mallināthiṃ mā kuru*) -- indicating a pejorative resonance to either Mallinātha's style or substance of

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[195] Dvivedi writes (34): kiṃtu śrīharṣ ke naiṣadhīyacarit kī 'jīvātu' meṃ bhī unkī kisī anya ṭīkā kā ullekh nahiṃ miltā. sambhav hei ki 'jīvātu' yā to sarvaprathaṃ ṭīkā ho yā unkī antiṃ ṭīkā.

[196] In all probability, it was not his last commentary if one gives credence to his traditional saying: Commenting on *Meghadūta* and *Śiśupālavadha* exhausted my lifespan (*māghe meghe vayaṃ gataḥ*). C.P. Shukla remembers that the study of *Naiṣadha* and the love of learning Sanskrit arose together when he was a student, that he and his fellow students eagerly anticipated the day that they would know enough Sanskrit to be able to enjoy the *Naiṣadha* [hṛday meṃ naiṣadh ke prati ādar evaṃ anurāg kā saṃskṛt ke adhyayan ke sāth hī utpann ho jānā svābhāvik hī thā. Sadā yahī abhilāś rahatā thā ki kab saṃskṛt bhāṣā ko samajhne kī itnī śakti ā jāyegī ki śrīharṣ kī vāṇī kā ānand le sakūṃgā (7).]

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commentary.[197] One account of a usage in Mahārāṣtra specifically turns a critical eye against the critic Mallinātha's self-righteous claims of sticking to the text:

> In Mahārāṣtra, the (phrase) "doing a Mallinātha" is very famous. When one sees that a critic becomes overtaken by the poet inside of him and offers the fancies dancing around in his own head before clarifying the poet's own ideas, leaving the poet's ideas unclear -- then, at that time, one says that he has done a Mallinātha . . . . (Gratuitously) manifesting one's own perspective becomes known as a "mallināthī."[198]

The example given by Dvivedi to demonstrate an example of a *"mallināthī"* in Mallinātha's work is Raghuvaṃśa 6.13-19, where the famous commentator is chided by traditional scholars for his curious comments (*abhiṣṭā*) that superimpose his own ideas of what king Aja and queen Indumatī are thinking. Such comments are, of course, found in the works of many Sanskrit commentators who often take something they find pregnant in the text and launch into a discourse that either clarifies the point, gives its full referential value, or allows them to expand on their own desired topic. Based on his own strict standards of exegesis, however, it is somewhat fitting that Mallinātha is singled out in the idiomatic usage. Jaydev Jani relates a similar tradition found in Gujarāti involving another famous *Naiṣadha* commentator Viśveśvara (a.k.a Gāgābhaṭṭa) -- a "*gāgābhaṭṭī*" is when someone goes on and on for too long on a relatively minor point.

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[197] Dvivedi 52

[198] Mahārāṣtra meṃ mallinātha kī mallināthī bahut prasiddh hai. Jab ve dekhte haiṃ ki kavi bhāvukatā meṃ kho gayā hei aur apne bhāvoṃ ko pūrṇ prakaṭ karne ke pahle hī dūsrī kalpanāyeṃ uske mastiṣk meṃ nṛtya kar rahī haiṃ aur isī kāraṇ vah apne hṛdaygat kā spaṣṭīkaraṇ nahīṃ kar pā rahā hai, tab us samay mallināth apnī mallināthī chāṇṭte hai . . . . svaprajñāviṣkār ko 'mallināthī' kahā jātā hai. (Dvivedi 52)

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Despite his reputation, Mallinātha is certainly not the most acidic in his rebuke of other commentators. Śrīnātha, as Jāni observes, "abuses others who have written prolific commentaries without knowing its true significance":

> Good scholars customarily honor the praise-worthy, discarding false statements and writing correct ones. Damn those prideful scholars who being ignorant of correct meaning spoil the poet's poem with their worthless expositions. If a degraded person goes to hell, his body floats on the river. What does the vessel know of its depth?[199]

Twentieth century commentator Haridāsa Siddhāntavāgiśa, in the preface to his very popular commentary Jayanti, also criticizes his predecessors' efforts in the strongest language:

> Casting aside the string of older commentaries that are lacking in poetic finery, dry of poetic sentiment, deprived of any excellence, difficult to understand, immaterial, devoid of distinctive value, and generally unexceptional, use this commentary, which is new.[200]

The need for commentators to interest and persuade the reader while also contesting all rival works seems to suggest the importance of their works as pedagogical and professional documents. As Malinee Goswami points out, commentaries reflect "the results of a sincere quest of knowledge made by the Indian intellect of different ages . . . recording the type, trend and method of academic activities of a group of scholars belonging to a particular time, place,

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[199] praṇamya maulinā vandyān sampradāyavidaḥ sataḥ. tyājyaṃ tyājyam asadvākyaṃ sadalpam api likhyate.. ye sadartham ajānanto vṛthāvacanavistaraiḥ. dūṣayanti kaveḥ kāvyaṃ dhik tān paṇḍitamāninaḥ.. yadi khaṃ karaṭo gatvā sindhor upari kāyati. tatkiṃ sa vetti gāmbhīryaṃ ca tadāśaye.. Jani ?

[200] Haridāsa Siddhāntavāgiśa 1.

belief, and order."[201] As authoritative texts, they became part of school instruction and sites of contestation over interpretive control. As will be seen in the next two sections, commentaries on *Naiṣadha* also provided opportunities to transform a passive literary pedagogy of explication into an active, creative experience of meaning-making and broad articulation of social, philosophical, religious and linguistic readings.

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[201] Goswami 20

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The Naiṣadha'*s Legacy: Difficult, Charming, and Flawed*

Without categorically reducing the full extent of *Naiṣadha*'s impact on

readers to simply a few distinguishing factors, it may be useful here to explore

several of the most commonly held and transmitted beliefs about the text: first, that

it is a difficult text on account of its intrinsic complexity of sound, sense, and

depth of cultural reference; second, that it is a text simultaneously filled with

innovative and highly effective uses of language (*guṇa*) on the one hand, and

irregular, obscure and unhappy convolution of expression on the other (*doṣa*);

third, that it is semantically fecund, either a product of an erudite genius or a poetic

unfolding of a metaphysical attainment. An irony of this text's critical history lies

in the fact that all of these factors -- including the poetic faults[202] -- were for the

Sanskrit commentators and for many (if not all) early critics favorable

developments while, excepting begrudging praise for Śrīharṣa's sound effects, all

have been converted in the words of many modern critics into a negative valuation

of the poem.

The *Naiṣadha*, in various ways, may be termed a "crossroads" text.

Suggested briefly when discussing the commentators' conflicting views on the

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[202] Lienhard, for example, echoes a widely held traditional view that while "Śrīharṣa sinned against
the most important rules of poetry, grammar, and metrics . . . we can safely assume that, being a
very learned man, he did so not out of ignorance, but rather with the mischievous waywardness of a
master." This view stands in contradiction to another later traditional apocrypha that Mammaṭa
himself saw the text as full of flaws. This story is analyzed later in this section.

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critical text of the poem, for example, were the circumstances of its production during a socially and politically transitional period. More germane to the present discussion, however, is the *Naiṣadha*'s transitional nature from the point of view of its occurrence in Sanskrit literary history. Emerging as it does during a time when Sanskrit literary and philosophical activity had come to a deep maturation (some would call it decadence), the poem's ambitions to harbor the weight of such a tradition while artistically daring to take the language to new heights has led to what one scholar calls "a twisted sort of inventive genius" (*kalpanājaṭilā*) unparalleled in the Sanskrit tradition.[203] Often perceived as inscrutable, linguistically overwrought, and distastefully obscene in places by contemporary criticism, the Sanskrit commentators seem never to approach any part of the text as a closed system. They keep pace with Śrīharṣa's experimentation with style, the wordplay, and the depiction of the complex thought of a Sanskrit intellectual. Even when Śrīharṣa's penchant for alliterative trope (*śabdālaṅkāra*) intersects with the formulation of strange complexities of meaning (occasionally down to a single phoneme), the learned commentators remain steadfast in their concentrated interpretations.

The *Naiṣadha*'s early commentaries allow one to infer not only the critical trajectory of the poem's early reception but also to begin a process of unpacking the temporal contexts under which the poem was read. The collective critical wisdom of *Naiṣadha* seems to agree that understanding Śrīharṣa's ideological

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[203] Sagrega 45

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intentions, his techniques, his allusions, his games adds a great deal to its surface

aural pleasure. The *Naiṣadha* is clearly *the* writerly text *par excellence* of the

Sanskrit tradition and yet, as a popular classic, it is also highly readerly.[204] In

other words, it must have been (and still is) both read and re-read, written and re-

written.[205] It may be the least plot-driven, most episodic and thematic of the

mahākāvya-s (the *pañcamahākāvya*-s, at least), in the sense that its lovely,

leisurely pacing, finely tuned description and emphasis on fleshing out the

physical and emotional world of scenes take on a supreme prominence throughout.

Being set adrift on a sea of language flanked melodramatically by archetypal

romantic architecture extracted from the rather tense Nala-Damayantī narrative of

itihāsa, purāṇa, and *kathā* source, Śrīhārṣa's audience is treated to cultural layer

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[204] The terms "readerly" and "writerly" to describe kinds of texts are formulated by Barthes (in S/Z) as follows: "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) [which] is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its consumer, between its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness -- he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the readerly. We call any readerly text a classic text." (4)

[205] Lienhard explains a relevant passage from *Kāvyamīmāṃsa* 4 (Gaekwad Oriental Series. p.12 f) as follows: "According to Rājaśekhara both the poet and connoisseur possess the same poetic imagination (*pratibhā*) though in one it is genuinely creative (*kārayitri*), in the other imaginatively re-creative (*bhāvayitri*). Even in the latter's case, it is not a purely receptive or passive faculty . . . but functions in the process of assimilation as an active force which is part of the existence of the poem." (41)

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upon layer of reference to as many philosophical, mythological, religious, sexual, literary, and quotidian allusions that the poet could credibly invest into his verses without losing its poetic flavor. Once he has established an overarching structure in a given scene, the poet finds himself free to expand the depths of its units to the limits of his considerable intellectual abilities and resources. To what extent he may have gone finds reflection in the lengthy passages of his professional readers, who sought layers so dense in the poem as to devote their entire careers to ferretting out the subtleties.

It is in this sense that the poem has been regarded as an "epic poem" (*mahākāvya*) by the traditional Sanskrit-speaking audience: it is not a story of loss and recovery with the consequences of the *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyaṇa* but rather a massive symphony, an entire universe of aesthetic and intellectual fulfillment on a grand scale that perhaps does not strike one immediately. Underneath the seeming chaos of reference and description, the narrative has a solid enough structure, a slow but steady movement toward the happy union of Nala and Damayantī. When one finishes hearing the poem, he or she may step back from it as if from a gigantic painted canvas to be able to better appreciate the overall design and absorb the magnitude of what exists between the front and back end of the presentation. Many modern critics have not taken this expansive view of the poem but have facilely juxtaposed it alongside the "chaste" magnificence of Kālidasa to

render it as lacking in poetic art.[206] The traditional *paṇḍita*, in many cases, has

apparently had exactly the opposite reaction.[207] As several anonymous verses

have recorded, however, the resonance of *Naiṣadha* for the traditional audience is,

though not altogether different, certainly distinct from the poems of Kālidāsa,

Bhāravi, and Māgha. By virtue of the sheer density of language, trope, and

cultural inclusiveness in *Naiṣadha*, traditional Sanskrit readers have found the

poems by these other poets to pale slightly and seem to be made of a frailer, lighter

ink.

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[206] S.K. De (345) has been particularly blunt in expressing his distaste:

> There can also be no doubt about Śrīharṣa's extraordinarily varied learning and command of the entire resources of traditional technique, even though the learning tends towards the obscure and the technique towards the artificial . . . Notwithstanding his limitations, it is clear that Śrīharṣa possesses a truly high gift, but it is a gift not of a high poetic character. The modern reader often perhaps lacks this equipment and aptitude, and therefore, finds little interest in a work which, for its cult of style, has always been so popular with scholars of the traditional type. But, however much its learning and dexterity may win over a limited class of readers, its appeal can never be wide, not so much for its solid crust of scholarship and rhetoric, but for the extremely limited power and range of its purely poetic quality. It very often happens, as in this case, that wherever there is a lack of poetic inspiration, there is a tendency to astonish us by the hard glitter of technical skill and sheer erudition.

[207] Buhler writes: "To the purely native taste, the *Naiṣadhīya* appears now, and has appeared for many centuries, preferable to all the other Mahākāvyas. Our Śāstrīs now study it more frequently and praise it more highly than even Kālidāsa's works, and it has been commented on more frequently than any other poem." JBBRAS, Vol. XI. 1875, p.282. Quoted in Jani 272.

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The Beginning of *Naiṣadha*'s Critical Culture:

If not the first published commentator of the poem, Vidyādhara at least

seems to have been the first commentator to be drawn to the linguistic dimension

of *Naiṣadha*'s appeal. As many later readers have felt, language is everything for

Śrīharṣa. It is not simply the obligatory bridge between the reader and the story.

Language *is* the story, as *Nc* 3.30 suggests:

> While devotedly engaged in his daily religious rites, the Creator's aim to
> imprison goddess Speech through silence was futile. Made inert by
> (constantly reciting) the Veda, he does not know that she who is crooked
> and contented with the poetic sentiments has (already) embraced Nala
> around the neck.[208]

Handiqui explains the verse as follows: "The silence of the Creator during

religious observances is fancied as an attempt on his part to detain his faithless

wife, the goddess of speech, who, however, secretly leaves him for Nala."[209] If

Nala and Sarasvatī are indeed lovers then the *Naiṣadhīya* would be the child of this

union, as commentator Viśveśvara (aka Gāgabhaṭṭa) suggests in the introduction of

his *Padavākyārthapañcikā*:

> She is the extraordinary daughter of the king of poets, Śrīharṣa. She is the
> ground for a playful performance, an elevated peak for the pleasure of the
> learned heart, an act of spectacular decoration, an occasion for new
> prosperity or new purpose, a friend, a visible manifestation of the poetic

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[208] alaṃ sajandharmavidhau vidhātā ruṇaddhi maunasya miṣeṇa vāṇīṃ / tatkaṇṭhamāliṅgya rasasya

tṛptāṃ na veda tāṃ vedajaḍaḥ sa vakrām.

[209] Handiqui 34

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sentiments, of virtuous speech and good character. *Naiṣadha* is himself the husband chosen (by her).[210]

The relationship between Śrīharṣa, goddess Sarasvatī, and the *Naiṣadhīyacarita* forms a significant part of the legend of the poem and will be discussed further in the context of traditional stories told about the poem. As far as the critical history of *Naiṣadha*, the twin aspects of Speech -- form and meaning -- are the first to be explored by the poem's commentators. Before the philosophical angle was taken up, it was the striking literary tone and complexity of the poem that seemingly captivated the intellectual energies of early commentators. The very first known commentator Vidyādhara perceived this characteristic of the poem and built his whole reading of it around this deeply felt impression. Although it is not the style of the Sanskrit commentator to pointedly tell the reader *how* to enjoy the poem (especially its poetic aspect), Vidyādhara obliquely draws the reader's attention to the beauty of the poem by referring to the scientific names of as many of the verbal ornaments as he can locate in the verses. One may again cite his commentary on *Nc* 1.1 to illustrate his approach:

> In this verse, alliteration is the poetic figure of sound. There being an analogy drawn between nectar (*sudhā*) and (Nala's) story (*kathā*), because there is demonstrated superiority of the story [here the tenor of the comparison] and an undervaluing of the nectar [here the vehicle of the comparison], there is also an inverted simile (*vyatirekaḥ*) here. And also, since there is a play on words (that provides) a sense of Nala in terms of the narrative context and a sense of the Sun (Sūrya) in an extratextual

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[210] śrīharṣāt kavirājataḥ kṛtirabhūt sā kāpi lokottarā yasyāḥ khelanabhūrmaṇīṣihṛdayaprāsādaśṛṅgasthalī / nepathyasya vidhir navārthaghaṭanā sakhyo rasavyaktayaḥ śīlaṃ śabdanayaḥ svayaṃvarapatiś caiṣa svayaṃ naiṣadhaḥ //

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context, there is the figure of expressing multiple meanings in a single expression (*śleṣaḥ*). Because there is no difference posited with the Sun, there is (the figure of) metaphor (*rūpakam*). Therefore, according to the maxim of the sesame seed and rice (*tilataṇḍulanyāyaḥ*), here there is (the figure of) commingling (*saṅkaraḥ*).[211]

One contemporary Sanskrit poet compares Śrīharṣa's use of words with wax in the supple hands of a master sculptor, since both can creatively express exactly what their mind's eye envisions.[212] That the first commentator Vidyādhara's emphasis should fall on trope and rhetoric (*alaṃkāraśastra*) has been noticed and imitated by many later commentators, including the Śaiva ascetic Īśānadeva who offers a humble acknowledgement of his debt to Vidyādhara's commentary[213]:

> Let those scholars who are curious about the delineation of poetic figures in Śrīharṣa's poem either employ their own aptitude for it or let them consult Vidyādhara's commentary, which thoroughly ponders (the issue) from all sides. Whatever I say on the matter is generally in deference to him alone and not the result of my own diligence.[214]

Although a subject for a wholly separate study, the profusion of literary figures in *Naiṣadha* is staggering, especially the complex integration of one figure with

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[211] atra śloke 'nuprāsaḥ śabdalaṃkāraḥ. sudhākathayor aupamye pratīte sati sudhānādaratvena kathādhikyapratipādanādvyatireko'rthālaṃkāro'pi. anyac ca nalasūryavarṇanayoḥ prākaraṇikā'prākaraṇikayoḥ śliṣṭapadopanibandhe śleṣālaṃkāro'pi. sūryeṇa sahābhedapratipādanād rūpakam. tasmāt tilataṇḍulanyāyenātra saṃkaraḥ' iti vidyādharaviracitasāhityavidyādharī.

[212] Remembered from a personal conversation with poet-scholar Śrīnivās Rath. Ujjain, 2003.

[213] See Handiqui xxviii

[214] ye 'laṃkāravivecane kutukinaḥ śrīharṣasaṃkīrtite kāvye 'smin svayam eva te vidadhatu prajñāvilāsam budhāḥ / ṭikāṃ vā bahuto vicārajaṭilāṃ paśyantu vidyādharīṃ tadvācyā na vayaṃ hi tasya karaṇe prāyo na jātodyamaḥ //

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several others in a single verse, what Lienhard describes as a characteristic of the developed *mahākāvya* tradition:

> [There was a] reconstruction and reorganization of existing material into new combinations so that the poetic or artistic element frequently consists merely of novel, unusual, or surprising juxtapositions of two or more standard components.[215]

The semantic difficulty in diction and trope that the poem presents for commentators is generally cited in terms of the poet's use of figures of sense (*arthālaṅkāra*-s) to create striking images in service of novel ideas. Śrīharṣa himself suggests the novel nature of his literary enterprise in the two penultimate *pāda*-s of his final verse in the twentieth canto: " In this poem, which speaks of subjects and sentiments unexplored by others, the twentieth canto of Nala's story concludes."[216]

Accepting this invitation of the poet to explore these poetic adventures not seen before (*adrṣtapūrva*) in other poets, Vidyādhara's pioneering discourse on *Naiṣadha* as a site for complex literary constructions spreads itself in almost every verse, being taken further and further by his successors. For example, *Nc* 1.47:

> Amazing that even to this day Grandfather Brahma, heated by the weapon (of the god of love), rests in the water-born lotus. What to say of another? It seems, however, that Nala was perhaps unable to conquer the god of love because (the god of love) was the shadow of his own body.[217]

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[215] Lienhard 22

[216] anyākṣuṇṇarasaprameyabhaṇitau viṃśastadīye mahākāvye'yaṃ vyagalan nalasya carite sargo nisargojjvalaḥ

[217] kim anyad adyāpi yadastratāpitaḥ pitāmaho vārijam āśrayaty aho / smaraṃ tanucchāyātayā tam ātmanaḥ śaśāka śaṅke sa na laṅghituṃ nalaḥ // *Nc* 1.47

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Vidyādhara defines the figure here as both an imaginative ascription based on an exaggeration (atrātiśayoktirutprekṣā) and a double-meaning expression (śleṣālaṃkāra). The former seems clear enough -- Kāmadeva being merely Nala's shadow is the exaggeration that is fancied as being the cause of Nala's inability to defeat his infatuation, i.e. to shake his own shadow. Vidyādhara remains elusive about the nature of the śleṣa here but is probably suggesting the multiple semantic possibilities of the word chāyā (shadow, reflection, beauty), which Nārāyaṇa picks up on in his comment on the verse. Mallinātha, however, reads the utprekṣālaṅkāra in more subtle terms and also delineates the other figures in the verse:

> Here the idea is that in order to defeat infatuation, on account of weakness, even Grandfather Brahma (needs refuge). What then to say of Nala (a mere mortal)? This is the first figure of speech here -- an inference to be drawn from circumstances (arthāpattiḥ). (Next) is a simile (upamā) between a shadow and the body. Then there is the figure of exaggerating (atiśayoktiḥ) the quality of non-difference between the two (types of) shadows (cast by the respective individuals). Because the imaginative ascription of a shadow's inability to overcome the body (it relies on) is built upon an ontological reason (hetu), here there is a hetūtprekṣā. And saying that "this seems to be the case" is expressed here because of the suggestive sense (of the figure).[218]

Nārāyaṇa feels that there is an elliptical utprekṣā (luptotprekṣā) here, where some element of the ascription is missing. He supplements the idea of taking refuge in the lotus on account of infatuation as conveying the sense that infatuation is an

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[218] atra smaralaṅghane pitāmaho'pyaśakteḥ kimuta nala ity arthāpattis tāvad eko'alaṅkāraḥ. tanośchāyevacchāyety upamā. chāyayorabhedādhyavasāyād atiśayoktiḥ. alaṅghyatve tanucchāyatāyā hetutvotprekṣaṇād dhetūtprekṣā. sā ca śaṅketi vyañjakaprayogād vācyā.

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established law of nature that affects all (*svabhāvasiddhaṃ kamalāsanatvaṃ*

kāmasaṃtaptatvenotprekṣitam). He also suggests that the poet's use of the word

'*vārija*' (water-born lotus) conveys "coolness" (*śitala*) suitable for "overheated

lovers" (*saṃtaptā*). Nārāyaṇa does not give any further technical information

about the *alaṃkāra* but gives alternative explanations of the nature of the *utprekṣā*

relating to Nala's body and Kāmadeva's shadow. First is that Nala and Kāmadeva

have a similarity (*sāmya*) in terms of their body (*chāyā=śarīra*) and thus one

cannot defeat the other. Or, it is that his nature (*bhāva*) is one of delicate beauty

(*tanvī=chāyā=śobhā*) and on account of this soft nature that wilts in the face of

separation anxiety (*virahavyathājanitamlānaśobhatayā*) he cannot defeat the god

of love. Or it is that the god of love's inferior beauty cannot be overcome by his

own (superior beauty) but rather it already has (by its very nature). Nārāyaṇa

concludes by saying that previously Nala's superiority over the god of love, in

terms of his steadfastness in the face of infatuation, was described. Now the

deconstruction of that steadfastness speaks to his increasing anxiety.[219] Although

one can only speculate on the knowledge of commentators of other commentaries

that preceded them -- and of "families" of commentaries that build upon each

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[219] yadvā - tanvī chāyā śobhā yasya tasya bhāvas tattā tayā virahavyathājanitamlānaśobhatayā taṃ
smaraṃ laṅghituṃ jetuṃ na śaśāka. yadvā - ātmanaḥ śakāsāt kāmasya
tanucchāyatayālpaśobhatvena jetuṃ nāśakat, api tu śaśākaiva. tasyālpakāntitvam
ātmano'dhikakāntitvam eva jaya ity arthaḥ. pūrvaṃ tasyātiśayitaṃ dhairyaṃ varṇayitvā
tannāśakathanaṃ vipralambhapoṣārtham.

other[220] -- the above example provides some idea of the ways in which a later

commentator elaborates, clarifies, corrects, or redirects in a wholly new direction

the analysis of his predecessors. One also may get an idea why, as Handiqui notes,

"the *Prakāśa* of Nārāyaṇa has practically ousted every other commentary on

Naiṣadha, [as he] does not deal with the figures of speech, but pays all his

attention to interpretation and grammar . . . explor[ing] all possible meanings [and]

. . . alternative interpretations.[221]

By sheer virtue of the volume of their references to figures, *Naiṣadha*

commentators seem to agree that their poet relies heavily on figures such as

imaginative ascription (*utprekṣā*), expressions that offer multiple semantic

possibilities (*śleṣa*), and new approaches to the ubiquitous simile (*upamā*).

Arguably, Śrīharṣa is the Sanskrit literary tradition's greatest master of *utprekṣā*

and *śleṣa*. Jani cites the comment in the preface to Pt. K.L.V. Shastri's Palghat

edition of the *Naiṣadha*: "In the imaginative construction of striking expressions,

Śrīharṣa deserves the kingship."[222] The poet himself draws the attention to his

own literary powers in *Nc*. 22.144, where Nala tells Damayantī to notice the way

in which poets who use the figure *utprekṣā* can effortlessly conjure up an image of

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[220] It is still unclear if Nārāyaṇa comes before or after Mallinātha and dates are not available. Handiqui offers that "it is possible that Nārāyaṇa was acquainted with the commentary of Mallinātha . . . but even if we regard Nārāyaṇa as later than Mallinātha, that would not conflict with the probable date of Nārāyaṇa (earlier than 1637 A.D.)" (xxxvii)

[221] Handiqui xxxviii

[222] ittham vācyārtha-vaicitrya-kalpanāyāṃ śrīharṣaḥ siṃhāsanam arhati.

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the moon as a sunstone jar (white and made of nectar) and the black space in the moon as a rabbit carrying a bowl of sapphires out of which nectar is scooped up and drunk by the attendant stars.[223] Here Śrīharṣa characteristically refers to himself in subtle ways by employing the phrase "[poetry] by poetry skilled in imaginative ascription" (utprekṣākavibhīḥ), which Nārāyaṇa glosses as "[poetry] by great poets like Śrīharṣa and others" (śrīharṣādibhirmahākavibhiḥ).[224] He similarly self-referentially highlights his activity[225] as a śleṣakavi in 14.16 when he writes of Sarasvatī's words: "Those words that communicated double meaning were truly the graceful plays of her poetic power."[226] Preceding this statement in the thirteenth canto comes perhaps the most artful use of the figure of śleṣa, in the form of the famous pañcanalīya -- thirty-two verses that simultaneously describe Nala and the four individual Vedic deities present at Damayantī's svayamvara.[227]

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[223] sapīteḥ sampṛīter ajani rajanīśaḥ pariṣadā parītas tārāṇāṃ dinamaṇimaṇigrāvamaṇikaḥ / priye paśyotprekṣākavibhir abhidhānāya suśakaḥ sudhām abhyuddhartuṃ dhṛtaśaśakanīlāśmacaṣakaḥ // 22.144

[224] Jāni (244) provides a dozen or so remarkable utprekṣa-s although, as he rightly notes, "the instances are too numerous to be quoted."

[225] Throughout the poem, Śrīharṣa alludes to the terms of the sāhityaśastra and alaṅkāraśāstra, self-conscious of his own poetic processes and also aware of their interest to alaṅkārika-s. Thus, there are references to the vaidarbhī rīti, the theories of dhvani and vakrokti, as well as overt references to various figures of speech and sense.

[226] śliṣyanti vāco yadamūramuṣyāḥ kavitvaśakteḥ khalu te vilāsāḥ.

[227] Nc 13.34 marks the culminating point of the pañcanalīya, hinging on the śleṣa inherent in the bahuvrīhi dharājagatyā and the ever-tricky play on Nala's name (nāyaṃ nala), both of which can be uniquely applied not only to the four Vedic deities but to Nala also. Damayantī is completely lost in confusion after Sarasvatī utters this last verse. Commentaries on this verse run for pages.

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According to Nārāyaṇa, the entire thirteenth canto is called the *pañcanalīya*[228] (or

pañcanalī) and various manuscript collections attest to the fact that this canto has

been widely extracted as a discrete textual entity.[229]

Beginning with Vidyādhara's observations and culminating as an integral

component of contemporary *Naiṣadha* reading, the enjoyment and careful study of

the poem's use of language appears to have had a long history. For example,

seventeenth century *Naiṣadha* commentator Viśveśvara in his commentary

Rākāgama on Jayadeva Pīyuṣavarṣa's celebrated *alaṃkāra* text *Candrāloka* uses

predominantly *Naiṣadha* verses to exemplify the figures of speech and sense that

Jaydeva newly introduces.[230] One may hastily posit a connection here between the

Naiṣadha's unprecedented tropic innovations with the burgeoning set of categories

for *alaṃkāra* found in the *Candrāloka*, a text emerging about a century after the

Naiṣadha. Viśveśvara might have observed this connection between the postulates

of the *alaṃkāraśāstra* and the *kāvya* it deals with by fashioning his *Rākāgama* as a

vehicle to expand on this relationship. Both texts come at a mature point in the

respective development of the *kāvya* and the *alaṃkāraśāstra*. In certain verses of

Naiṣadha, it appears that Śrīharṣa simply wishes to refashion the rhetoric used to

evoke conventional images that have become easily identifiable archetypes in

received *kāvya*. For example, his mastery of the figure of circumlocution

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[228] idānīm indrādipañcanalīsaṃjñaṃ trayodaśaṃ sargam ārabhate.

[229] Aufrecht CC 1, pg. 763.

[230] Pg. 24 of Dr. David Mellins unpublished *The Cool Rays of Aesthetics and Reasoning: Jayadeva's Candrāloka and its Role in the Evolution of Alaṃkāraśāstra*.

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(*paryāyoktā*) is prominently discussed in the critical tradition. Often substituting

traditional patterns of description with original formulations, he replaces

predictable expressions for common motifs such as describing a young girl as "thin

in the waist" (*kṛśodarī*) by rendering it in numerous varieties; for example, "the

existence or non-existence of whose waist comes under the scope of doubt

(*sadasatsaṃśayagocarodarī*)[231] and one whose middle is an alternate

manifestation of Śiva's supernatural ability to become miniscule

(*īśāṇimaiśvaryavivartamadhye*).[232] Professor Jani provides numerous other

examples of Śrīharṣa's use of *paryāyokti* (called *paryāyavakrokti* by Kuntaka) and

cites the notice it has received by other Sanskrit poets.[233]

Despite the intermittent appearance of complex tropes (*saṅkarālaṃkāra*) in

Śrīharṣa's verses, the traditional reader has been well aware that Śrīharṣa's unique

literary style primarily builds off of figures of sound (*śabdālaṅkara*-s), especially

alliterative rhythm (*anuprāsa*). A.N. Jani thus remarks:

> Thus the dictum '*naiṣadhe padalālityam*', that the *Naiṣadha* abounds in
> *padalālitya* or rhythmic harmony seems to be justified . . . . [Footnote
> reads:] Of course there is another reading (*daṇḍinaḥ padalālityam*) which
> will be better if the stanza aims at all at any chronological order. Still,

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[231] *Nc* 2.40

[232] *Nc* 3.64

[233] For example, Jani cites a verse from the *Rambhāmañjarī* of Nayacandrasūri, who seeks to

compare his own prowess in constructing extraordinary poetry that is simultaneously graceful in

sound and striking in image: lālityam amarasyeha śrīharṣasyeva vakrimā / nayacandrakaveḥ kāvye

dṛṣṭaṃ lokottaraṃ dvayam //

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however, the beauty of words in the *Naiṣadha* has not escaped the notice of *sahṛdaya*-s who substituted the line with *naiṣadhe padalālityam*.[234]

Sometimes this aspect is lost in modern understandings of the poem that exaggerate his occasional *tour de force* use of figures of sense (*arthālaṅkāra*-s). In fact, *Naiṣadha* commentator Caritravardhana in his *Tilaka* makes sure to emphasize the fact that unlike his predecessors Māgha and Bhāravi[235], who reveled in the puzzle poetry (*citrabandhakāvya*)[236] that some critics deride as verbal jugglery (*camatkāra*), Śrīharṣa finds no place in his poem for such feats of language:

> Śrīharṣa has generally used the poetic figure of alliteration (*anuprāsa*) to
> further the sense, neglecting the figures that further the sense by artificially
> arranging the verse in a peculiar shape (*bandha*) -- the primary figures here
> being the "good all ways" design (*sarvatobhadra*), the "drum design"
> (*muraja*) and designs built upon homonymic repetition of letters or words
> (*yamaka*).[237]

It seems clear that Śrīharṣa avoids *citrabandha*-s as much for narrative purpose as for aesthetic reasons.[238] Furthermore, Śrīharṣa seems not to abide by the

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[234] Jani 264. The famous verse alluded to here will be visited again in the context of traditional valuation of *Naiṣadha* among the commentators:upamā kālidāsasya bhāraver arthagauravam / naiṣadhe padalālityam māghe santi trayo guṇāḥ //

[235] Well-known examples of *citrabandha* can be found in Canto 15 of *Kirātārjunīya*, Canto 19 in *Śiśupālavadha*, and Canto 43 and 48 of Ratnākara's *Harivijaya*.

[236] See Kalanath Jha's *Figurative Poetry in Sanskrit Literature*.

[237] śrīharṣair yamakamurajasarvatobhadrapramukhānbandhānarthāpuṣṭikarānanādṛtyārthapuṣṭikaro 'nuprāsābhidhaśabdālaṅkāraḥ prāyaḥ prayuyuje.

[238] Jani remarks: "But the artist in Śrīharṣa knew that such wizardry of words, though bespeaking high equipments of the poet, are detrimental to the *rasa* -- the soul of poetry and hence he purposely avoided them. Such *bandhas* are consequently conspicuous by their absence in the

traditional "rules" and conventions of *mahākāvya* in terms of description and structure.[239] For example, seventeenth century commentator Rāmacandra Śeṣa is quick to point out at the end of his *Bhāvadyotanika* commentary on the first canto: "Even if he does not describe water-sports, it is not an occasion for controversy over whether or not the poem has undercut its status as a *mahākāvya*."[240] Rāmacandra then cites Daṇḍin's *Kāvyadarśa* to bolster his argument that leaving out some conventional aspect or other does not ruin a poem.[241] The fact that Sanskrit commentators have been eager to dispel controversies in their remarks on *Naiṣadha* suggests, however, the prevalent existence of hostile or potentially hostile responses to the poem's appreciation as a work of literary merit. In fact, intensive scrutiny on the poem's perceived faults (*doṣa*) becomes a long-standing appendix to any study of the *Naiṣadha* tradition and is woven into the anecdotal history of the poem's reception, a topic dealt with below. Despite the occasionally strained literary effect of verses, it appears that one of the hallmarks of this text's

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Naiṣadha. Thus was Śrīharṣa responsible for the healthy convention in ousting altogether the old custom of indulging in *bandha*-s which had reached absurd proportions." (259)

[239] Again, Jani writes: "But Śrīharṣa is not a slave of such rules and does not introduce them willy-nilly in his poem. Unlike his two predecessors, he introduces only those elements which are suitable to his narration." (260)

[240] salilakrīḍāyā avarṇane'pi na mahākāvyatvabhaṅgaprasaṅgaḥ

[241] nyūnam apy atra yaiḥ kaiścid aṅgaiḥ kāvyaṃ na duṣyati' ity uktatvāt (*Kāvyadarśa* 1.20)

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appeal is that it usually succeeds in the risks it takes to be both poetic and

learned.[242]

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[242] Lienhard explains: "The [Sanskrit] author always ran the risk of discovering that he had neglected to pay sufficient attention to the poetic side of his work or to its scientific learned aspects" (29).

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Naiṣadha as Difficult Text: Medicine for the Learned (*naiṣadham vidvadauṣadham*)

Cāṇḍupaṇḍita, while heavily borrowing from Vidyādhara's commentary[243]

suggests that the *Naiṣadha* warrants a more scholarly treatment from the point of

view of philosophical *śāstra* in order to provide clarity for the reader:

> Even though Vidyādhara has composed a helpful commentary, he is unable
> to relinquish (in his own work) the profound depth of Śrīharṣa's learned
> language. The unfathomable water of the ocean is frequently carried up by
> the clouds and penetrates the various directions -- can that water in the
> ocean be knee-deep anywhere?[244]

In other words, just as the clouds and the ocean exchange the same water and

maintain the *status quo* of the ocean's depth, similarly Vidyādhara's commentary

stays as deep as Śrīharṣa's poem for many readers. It does not clarify Śrīharṣa's

original language and ideas for a reader incapable of grappling with the original on

its own terms. Thus the commentator Vidyādhara, in Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's opinion, will

leave the reader puzzled in places about what Śrīharṣa is trying to say. Therefore,

he goes on to say, he is writing this commentary to bring out the depth

(*gambhīratā*) that saturates the *Naiṣadha* in a way that opens the text up to the

uninitiated. He hastens to add that he is expressing whatever he knows (*nijadhīyā*)

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[243] It seems that at points there is a conflation of their commentaries in the manuscript evidence.
Jaydev Jani discusses this point in the Introducton to his edition of Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's commentary
(xxxiv).

[244] ṭikāṃ yady api sopapattiracanāṃ vidyādharo nirmame śrīharṣasya tathāpi na tyajati sā
gambhīratāṃ bhāratī. dikkūlaṅkaṣatāṃ gatair jaladharair udgṛhyamāṇaṃ muhuḥ pārāvāram
apāram ambu kim iha syājj ānumātraṃ kvacit..

as specifically as he possibly can. Jaydev Jani frames the importance of Cāṇḍu's contribution to the *Naiṣadha* tradition in the following manner: "Thus Cāṇḍupaṇḍita is the first scholar who has made the *Naiṣadha* an arena to exhibit one's scholarship. It is perhaps after his commentary that the *Naiṣadha* might have been extolled as *naiṣadham vidvadauṣadham*."[245] Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's implicit critique of Vidyādhara is carefully framed in a compliment: like every useful and interesting commentator, Vidyādhara tries to makes his commentary easier or more transparent in some respects than that of the poet's expression while at the same time trying to help others feel what he himself feels in reading the master poet. The problem, as Cāṇḍu understands it, is that Vidyādhara does not quite succeed in the former task -- to make the poem easier for the reader by teasing out the depth (*gambhiratā*) locked in Śrīharṣa's references and usages. This then shall be his contribution to the study of the poem, he suggests. The pattern set in motion by Cāṇḍupaṇḍita continues for generations. Each new commentator wants to add a layer to the cake, as it were, bringing out some new angle, reinforce an established one, or anthologize received contributions.

The notion that the *Naiṣadha* is a "difficult" text has become virtually proverbial among Sanskrit readers familiar with its tradition. The fourteenth century commentator Bhavadatta, for example, explains:

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[245] Jaydev Jani xxxxix

Having not studied with several teachers, even a learned scholar is unable
to say anything about it. My sophomoric effort to comment on the poem
will certainly be ridiculous to the learned poets.[246]

Where the difficulty of reading this text lies, however, has been understood

variously in the course of its history of reception. The notion that it is difficult has

been written into nearly every formal commentary on the text, expanded in the

traditional literary histories of the poem and poet, and frequently appended to any

critical discussion of the text. Unithiri writes:

> As a vehicle for the continuation of knowledge handed down from
> successive teachers, the *ṭīkā* has a noble purpose. The commentators as a
> whole have helped to preserve many a work from total extinction or
> oblivion. But for their attempts to explain the works they would have
> hardly survived. We have so many works that live merely through the
> quotations in the commentaries. The commentators have preserved the
> literary and social traditions, the customs, manners, and idioms of their age
> through their commentarial works. This explains why the commentarial
> literature flourished in the course of centuries catering to changing
> tastes.[247]

The poem's relationship with the traditional "university" texts of pre-modern South

Asian culture has probably garnered the most visible attention from professional

readers of *Naiṣadha* -- in both positive and negative terms. Widely commented

upon has been the *Naiṣadha*'s varied and complex poetic representation of the

culture's cumulative theoretical, philosophical, literary, and scientific knowledge

(*śāstra*). From a traditional point of view, it often is spoken of as the most lavishly

executed *mahākāvya* of its kind -- the kind, that is, that combines sense and sound

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[246] vaktuṃ sudhīr api gurūn anupāsya yasya śaknoti kiñcid api naiva rahasyam asya. kāvye
śramo'tra vivṛtau kavipaṇḍitasya mohāya kintu mama samprati bālakasya.

[247] Unithiri 56

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in innovative and unusually complex ways.[248] According to Dr. Meher, within the

twenty-two cantos there are two hundred and thirty verses that refer to some aspect

of the Vaidika, Tāntrika, Bauddha, and Jaina philosophical traditions. Generally,

however, the obvious and well-known doctrines of the philosophical systems do

not find representation in the poem, but rather the important (or at least interesting)

discussions that a well-trained reader could perhaps identify and certainly

appreciate. The most ubiquitous references are to the classical six "orthodox"

systems of Indian philosophy dealing with logic (*nyāya* and *vaiśeṣika*)[249], ritual

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[248] The popular verse that eulogizes Śrīharṣa's work as superior to that of the two other celebrated
post-Kālidāsa *mahākavi*-s has become a standard quotation in traditional *Naiṣadha* studies: tāvad
bhā bhāraver bhāti yāvan māghasya nodayaḥ / udite naiṣadhe kāvye kva māgha kva ca bhāravi //

[249] Examples include: the concept of *dvyaṇuka*, the combination of two atoms which is the first
item in the process of atomic creation (*Nc* **3.125**); the Vaiśeṣika theory of darkness (*Nc* **22.36**),
which leads the commentators Nāryāyaṇa and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita to cover the whole body of Vaiśeṣika
literature (up to their times) in their glosses. Cāṇḍupaṇḍita, for example, quotes the famous
logician Śrīdhara's discussion of darkness in full); the Nyāya concept of salvation (*Nc* **17.75**); the
Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of mind as atomic (*Nc* **5.29**); the theory of rays, whereby perception is
dependent on the eyes' rays coming into contact with an object (*Nc* **8.3**); the sixteen *padārthas*
(categories) of the Nyāya school (*Nc* **10.81**) and two of the three methods of scientific discussion
recognized by that system, enumeration (*uddeśa*) and definition (*lakṣaṇa*); reference to the fallacy
known as *satpratipakṣa* (called *prakaraṇasama* by some writers) (*Nc* **17.79**), an ambiguous or
inconclusive statement being counterbalanced by a contrary proposition of equal force. [Most of
the information in this and the next few footnotes are drawn from the contributions of Drs.
Handiqui and Meher on the subject of philosophy in the *Naiṣadha*.]

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and hermeneutics (*pūrva mīmāṃsā*)[250], (*sāṅkhya-yoga*)[251], (*vedānta*)[252]. There are

also notable references to Buddhist[253] and Jain[254] traditions of philosophy.

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[250] Examples include: the Mīmāṃsā theory that the gods have no existence apart from the Mantras
with which they are invoked (*Nc* **5.39 and** *Nc* **14.73**), the theory of *svataḥprāmāṇya* (self-validity
of knowledge) (*Nc* **2.61**) [Cāṇḍu heavily quotes the Kumārila's *ślokavārrtika* here]; the Prābhākara
Mīmāṃsā theory of *akhyātivāda* (error) (*Nc* **6.51**); the atheism of the Mīmāṃsā system (*Nc* **11.64**)
and the controversy about the existence of God (*Nc* **11.64**) [Nārāyaṇa's comment on 11.64 is,
according to Handiqui, "based on a later tradition that the Mīmāṃsā system was not really
atheistic."]; the atheism of the Mīmāṃsā is contrasted with the theism of the Nyāya and the
Vedānta in NC **6.102**, where, according to Dr. Handiqui, "the controversy about Karma and Īśvara
is carried on by the followers of Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya, and Vedānta schools . . . [the poet] gives in a
nutshell the two main conclusions put forward by rival schools."

[251] Examples include: the Sāṅkhya doctrine of causation (*satkāryavāda*) in (*Nc* **5.94**); notions of
animal slaughter and impurity [According to Handiqui, Cāṇḍu finds a reference to Sāṅkhya in (*Nc*
22.76), where the slaughter of animals is represented as a blemish or an unclear feature of the
Vedic sacrifices: "Cāṇḍu quotes Sāṅkhyakārikā Verse 2 which characterizes the Vedic sacrifices
system as impure and hence ineffective as a means of averting pain."]; a reference is made to
object-reliant meditative absorption (*samprajñāta samādhi*) (*Nc* **21.119**) and devotion to God
(*īśvara-praṇidhāna*) (*Nc* **8.27**); also the various yogic powers (*siddhi*-s) are alluded to in various
verses (*Nc* **5.3-5**)

[252] Examples include: several references to the Vedānta doctrine of the realization of the Absolute
(*Nc* **3.3**, *Nc* **3.4**, and *Nc* **5.8**); characteristics of salvation and the worldly state, joy and delusion
respectively given in (*Nc* **8.15**); the Vedāntic theory of dreams is given in (*Nc* **1.40**); reference to
the subtle body (*liṅgaśarīra*) is given in **9.94**, whereby reference is made to the process by which
the subtle body departs at death, as described in the Upaniṣads; an elaborate description of the
devotion of the Upaniṣad to the Absolute (*Nc* **11.29**); a synthesis of Vaiṣṇava and Vedāntic
doctrines (*Nc* **21.108**) whereby as Handiqui writes, "the apparent diversity of the external
phenomena attributed to Maya is represented as being the mere flash of the will of Viṣṇu"; a
discussion of discursive alternatives (*koṭi*) with regard to existence and non-existence (*Nc* **13.36**).

[253] Examples include: Reference is made to the Mādhyamika doctrine of emptiness
(*śūnyātmatāvāda*) (*Nc* **10.87**, *Nc* **21.88**, *Nc* **22.23**,); the Yogācāra view that the universe is nothing

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Professor Handiqui writes that the *Naiṣadha* "refers to doctrines of all the systems including the Vedānta, and passes in review a number of characteristic theories, as if he desired his poem to serve also an introduction to the study of the philosophical systems."[255] In a significant way, the Sanskrit commentary's pioneering tendency to shape a tradition through the preservation and transmission of diffuse cultural data parallels one of the central trajectories of *Naiṣadha* itself. An especially close kinship between the poet Śrīharṣa, a philosopher and intellectual himself, and the commentators seems to emerge in time as the commentators pick up on some of the learned associations the poet embeds and communicate them to those who are familiar with them. The fact of Śrīharṣa's composition of the famous philosophical commentary *cum* personal dissertation *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* ("Sweet candies of philosophical argument")[256] and the

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but consciousness (*vijñanasāmastya*) (*Nc* **10.87**); the Sautrāntika position that knowledge is endowed with form (*sākāratāsiddhi*) (*Nc* **10.87**).

[254]An example can be found in *Nc* **9.71**, where a reference to the three Jewels (*triratna*) is made [*samyagdarśana* -- faith in the teachings of Jaina scriptures, *samyagjñāna* -- thorough knowledge of the doctrines propounded in the scriptures, and *samyakcaritra* -- cessation from all activities leading to sin, involving practice of the five Vratas or vows to renounce violence, theft, falsehood, lust, and greed.] (*Nc* **10.87**)

[255] Handiqui 509

[256] Dr. S Radhakrishnan has written about the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*: "It is the greatest work on Advaita dialectics. It is one long dissertation on the vanity of philosophy, setting forth the inability of the human mind to compass those exalted objects which its speculative ingenuity suggests as worthy of its pursuit. . . he (Shriharsha) takes the reader through a long and arduous process. . . to establish the simple truth that nothing can be conclusively proved to be either true or false. Everything is doubtful except universal consciousness. He. . . argues that the Nyāya is busy with

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self-styled legend of himself as a recipient of divine inspiration[257] embolden the

commentators to read the poem's language very carefully for philosophical ideas.

Furthermore, there are numerous instances in the epic poem where the poet

prompts a reading of philosophical ideas into the structure of his poetic imagery by

explicitly indicating a relationship of these images to certain philosophical ideas.

As noted earlier, a similar phenomenon appears with respect to literary features of

the poem, where the poet explicitly introduces technical terms of the *sāhityaśāstra*

such as *rīti, vakrokti, dhvani*, and the various *alaṅkāra*-s themselves.

This explicit self-consciousness of Śrīharṣa also takes the form of what is

often called a *bhaṇita* (or *bhaṇa*), i.e. self-descriptive, verse at the end of each

canto that gives information about his parents, the other works he has written, and

points of self-analysis about his poem and its processes.[258] It is perhaps from

Śrīharṣa that later poets (like Jayadeva in his *Gītagovinda*, for example) and

commentators (Cāṇḍupaṇḍita and Nārāyaṇa, among *Naiṣadha* commentators)

adopt this custom.[259] According to Jani, these verses do not seem to be

interpolations, as they are "found in the oldest available manuscripts of the poem."

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apparent existence and reality. The diversity of things is not ultimate, while the Absolute is, though never known." (78)

[257] See Chapter Four, section 1d.

[258] Several of these will be discussed in the context of the poet's role in guiding later readers' attempts to construct a biography of the poet and poem. See Chapter Four.

[259] Phyllis Granoff speaks in regard to these verses: "Sanskrit literature in fact provides examples of *mahākāvya* in which similar verses have been added on to the end of each canto. Cf. Arisiṃha's *Sukṛtasaṃkīrtana* to which Amaracandra added the closing verses, and the closing verses to Udayaprabhāsūri's *Dharmābhyudaya*." (254)

There are also four important "concluding" verses at the end of the poem that are

significant from the point of view of the poem's historical reception. If one

accepts the tradition of these four concluding verses found verbatim in both

Śrīharṣa's *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* and *Naiṣadhīyacarita* then it appears the poet-

philosopher had a very firm hand in guiding his own text's critical reception as a

difficult text in need of a skilled commentator. Even if one finds them spurious,[260]

clear indications from within the body of the poem amply demonstrate the poet's

tendency to himself and his poetic processes into the poem. Furthermore, it

appears that most later commentators, including Nārāyaṇa and Mallinātha,

comment on these verses. Two of these verses (*Nc* 22.150 and *Nc* 22.152) are

relevant in the context of the poem's tradition as a text designed for "advanced"

students and not for beginning students nor for prudish readers[261]:

> Even the most beautiful woman cannot captivate the heart of an infant the
> way she can the heart of a young man. In that way, my words delight the
> hearts of learned connoisseurs and become nectar. What of the disrespect
> that comes from insipid individuals?[262]

Nārāyaṇa explains that a learned connoisseur must be one who knows the esoteric

points of all the philosophical systems (*sakaladarśanarahasyavedin*). For him, by

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[260] Jani finds these verses to be "a sort of conventional self-praise of the poet [that] do not seem to
be original as they are not found in the oldest available MSS of the poem." (30)

[261] The final stanza (*Nc* 22.153) gives historical information about Śrīharṣa's place in Kanauj and
will be approached in a later section.

[262] yathā yūnas tadvat paramaramaṇīyāpi ramaṇī kumārāṇām antaḥkaraṇaharaṇaṃ naiva kurute /
maduktiś ced antarmadayati sudhībhūya sudhiyaḥ kimasyā nāma syād arasapuruṣān ādarabharaiḥ //
Nc 22.150

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listening to and dwelling on the poem, it will become nectar (*śravaṇamananādi vaśāt sudhībhuyāmṛtatvaṃ prāpya*). Nārāyaṇa then introduces the next verse by saying that in order to remove the charge that this is no poem at all because it lacks as its primary quality clarity of expression and that it is often extremely difficult to comprehend (*prasādarūpamukhyaguṇābhāvād atidurbodhatvād akāvyam iti ye vadanti tac chaṅkām apanudan*), the poet has purposefully made his poem difficult in order to tame the proud reader (*baladarpadalanārtham*) and to establish that its deep profundity cannot be understood without the aid of a learned teacher (*gurusampradāyena vinā durbodham ity atigāmbhīryapratipādanārtham*). And so, according to Nārāyaṇa, Śrīharṣa has composed the following verse:

> Here and there I have made an effort to lodge some knots in this text in order to frustrate the proud reader. Let no scoundrel play here. Only a good man who has had these challenging textual knots loosened by a properly reverenced teacher will be able to happily dive into the nectarine waves of this poem.[263]

Nārāyaṇa elucidates here that Śrīharṣa means to say that one must attend to a teacher who can provide a commentary for the reader and that, without proper guidance, not even a single verse will be rightly grasped.[264] He also clears up any misunderstanding that the poet was not capable of being crystal clear, if in fact he wanted to take that route (*na tu prasannakāvyakaraṇāśaktā*), by citing that the

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[263] granthagranthir iha kvacit kvacid api nyāsi prayatnān mayā prājñamanyamanā haṭhena paṭhiti māsminkhalaḥ khelatu / śraddhārāddhaguruślathīkṛtadṛḍhagranthiḥ samāsādayatv etatkāvyarasormimajjanasukhavyāsajjanaṃ sajjanaḥ // Nc 22.152

[264] pūjitena guruṇā pūrvam aślathā api ślathā kṛtā vyākhyayā subodhaḥ kṛtā dṛḍhā svarūpato durbodhā granthayo yasmai sa gurusampradāyāvagatārthaḥ . . . guruparamparayā vinaikasyāpi padyasyārtho boddhuṃ na śakyate.

verse only mentions the existence of difficulty here and there (*kvacit kvacit*) and not everywhere. It seems that whoever has composed these verses has aimed to distill some of the lusty spirit and cheeky bravado found in the *Naiṣadha* itself. It also indicates the critical objections that either the poet anticipated or some of early readers felt in listening to the poem. Jhala feels that "[t]hese stanzas betray the highly self-conscious vein of the author about the qualities of his poem which he asserts will appeal only to the discriminating connoisseur" and adds that the poet's deliberate "knottiness" is to "keep smatterers well away from his work". Jhala concludes:

> One thing may be borne in mind: the *Naiṣadha,* despite its difficult and scholastic nature, or perhaps because of it, has proved very popular among the Pandits, which is indicated not only by the very large number of commentaries -- nearly fifty -- written on it in course of time but also by the fact that some half a dozen commentaries were written within a hundred and fifty years of its composition.

Perhaps more than any other famous literary text in Sanskrit, the *Naiṣadhīya* has had a significant role in guiding its own hermeneutic traditions. Scholars who have written histories of Sanskrit literature generally do not like Śrīharṣa's highly self-referential attitude with respect to his personal history, artistic processes, with respect to the attitude with which his poem should be received, and in the form of a bitter acknowledgement of its being potentially misconstrued by inferior readers. In this light, it often becomes difficult to understand the complex interaction of poet, text, and reader in the formation of the *Naiṣadha* tradition that has grown, developed, and sustained itself in almost every major literary language of India for

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nearly a millennium. In surveying the internal processes of *Naiṣadha*, what V.

Nārāyana Rao has written on the phenomenon of self-referentiality in South Asian

literary history resonates with striking precision: "A mark of modernity is the

increasing reflexivity of its literature. Artists and writers think more self-

consciously about what they are doing; interpretation of form enters into writing

itself."[265] Jani cites that Śrīharṣa actually encourages readers to study his

Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya as one would a review course reader in order to become

"invincible in dialectic discussion."[266]

Before Śrīharṣa fires off this playful salvo against the novice reader, there

is the record of Bhaṭṭi's famous self-referential statement about his poem needing a

commentary for it to be comprehensible, supposedly a response to literary critic

Bhāmaha's mild critique of difficult poetry.[267] Bhāmaha has written in his 2.20 of

his *Kāvyālaṅkāra*:

> Even if these (difficult texts) are poems, understood through commentaries
> as they must be like technical treatises (*śāstra*), it can only be a grand
> entertainment for the learned -- alas, the dunces will be frustrated.[268]

Bhaṭṭi, probably in response, writes in 22.34 of his *Rāvaṇavadha*:

> This poem is to be understood with (the help of a) commentary. It will be a
> grand entertainment for the learned. Because I hold dear the learned man,
> frustrated will be the dunces with respect to this work.[269]

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[265] Rao 559

[266] See Jani 114 for citation from the *Khaṇḍana*.

[267] Krishnamachariar (143) feels that Bhaṭṭī came later than Bhāmaha because of the nature of his treatment of *alaṃkāra-s* in Canto 10 of his *kāvya*.

[268] kāvyāny āpi yadīmāni vyākhyāgamyāni śāstravat /
utsavaḥ sudhiyām eva hanta durmedhaso hatāḥ // [*Kāvyālaṅkāra* 2.20]

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Disregarding the charming quality of this faux-debate among the traditional readers, modern scholars such as S.K. De of Bhaṭṭi's verse write:

> It is not thus a boast, but rather an excuse. If a poet is to boast of his poem as being a hard nut to crack, he will boast that the learned and not the dull-witted will find it difficult. To puzzle the dull-witted is not a thing to be proud of, and this is why Bhaṭṭi gives *vidvatpriyatā* as an excuse for that.[270]

One easily notices the similarity between the concluding verses of the *Naiṣadha* (spurious or not) and Bhaṭṭi's assertion. In the case of both poems, the target audience's aptitude becomes a source of great concern in the discourse of the text. In the case of *Naiṣadha*, there emerge supernatural stories of the poet's having to acquire special powers of intelligence and then tone them down for the sake of his readers. As shall be seen in a later section, the early Sanskrit commentators felt a need to construct a literary history of the poet and poem around such conceptions. Generally, however, it was later non-commentarial works that really fleshed out the "reasons" for the poem's being recondite. The commentators generally stay close to the text and are interested in teasing out all of the learned allusions, direct references, and associations emanating from the poem's language.

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[269] vyākhyāgamyam idaṃ kāvyamutsavaḥ sudhiyāmalam /
hatā durmedhasaś cāsmin vidvat priyatayā mayā // [*Bhaṭṭikāvya* 22.34]

[270] De 50

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Commenting on Embedded Philosophical Reference in *Naiṣadha*:

Based on a systematic study of the structure or imagery of the poem, a

Sanskrit commentary by nature brings out in explicit language what is implicit in

the poem. While it is true that in certain cases, Śrīharṣa embeds his poetic contexts

with all sorts of allusions to philosophy or other kinds of literature and keeps the

door of interpretation wide open for commentators, sometimes it is the

commentator who seizes upon any slight opening in the text to occasion a lengthy

discourse on a given topic. A few cases may elucidate these processes. With

respect to the latter phenomenon of strong reading by a commentator, a close look

at Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's comment on *Nc* 6.51 may prove illuminating. Occurring during

a pivotal turn in the fortunes of the hero and heroine, where an invisible Nala

accidentally brushes up against a flustered Damayantī in the corridors of the

women's quarters, the poet describes the phantasmagoric nature of their

interaction. The dramatic irony of their chance encounter in the most intimate of

locations is intensified by the poet's charming glimpse into their psyche:

> The two actually embraced in the midst of embracing an illusion of each
> other, one seeing the other as if elsewhere even though both were fixed in
> the same place.[271]

Most readers would probably appreciate the poignant image at this point in the

narrative and pass onto the next verse. However, one commentary on this verse

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[271] anyonyam anyatravad īkṣamāṇau parasyapareṇā'dhyuṣite'pi deśe /
āliṅgitālīkaparasparāntas tathyaṃ mithas tau pariṣasvajāte // *Nc* 6.51

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demonstrates that the ubiquitous discourse of *Naiṣadha* built around identifying

philosophical reference was probably introduced by one of its earliest

commentators. In fact, if a preliminary comparative look at the few available

commentaries stands up in the court of scholarly opinion, the second known

commentator on the text Cāṇḍupaṇḍita seems to have been the most zealous

proponent of this sort of interpretation. There are places where he reads an

embedded philosophical reference that no later commentator seems to have even

picked up on (or ignored due to lack of evidence). Cāṇḍupaṇḍita, while explaining

the narrative context, suddenly sees in the verse a reference to the *Prābhākara-*

mimāṃsā theory of error (*akhyātivāda*) and proceeds to give a comprehensive

explanation. First, he sets up the situation using his standard question-and-answer

(*kathambhūtini*) approach toward defining the words and explaining the syntactical

relationships:

> **The two** (*tau*), Nala and Damayantī, **embraced** (*pariṣasvajāte*) **each other**
> (*mithaḥ*) [=(*parasparam*)] **in actuality** (*tathyam*) [=truly (*satyam eva*);
> unobjectionably (*abādhyam*)]. Where? **In the middle of her inner**
> **chambers, the two embraced the illusion of each other.** In the midst of
> the illusory embrace, a true embrace occurred. Or else, (one may take) the
> modifier "actually" (*tathyam*) as an adverb (modifying "mind" (*antaḥ*)
> whereby during the embrace, the mind illusorily embraced each other. The
> true Damayantī was embraced by Nala, whose mind grasped a false
> Damayantī. And a true Nala was embraced by Damayantī, whose mind
> had become engrossed in a false Nala. Here the distinction rests in the
> origin of the reason. What were they doing? **They are seeing** (*īkṣamānau*)
> (=(*vilokayantau*)] **each other as if they were in different places**
> (*anyonyam anyatravat*) [= as if established in some other location
> (*anyapradeśe sthitāv iva*)]. Where? **even though both of them are**
> **inhabiting the same space** (*paraspareṇa adhyuṣite'pi*) [=*āśrite'pi deśe*;

both being stationed in a single location (*ekatra sthitāv api satyāv api tau*).[272]

Having provided the narrative context (*prākaraṇikavastu*), he then frames the situation with a preliminary discussion of its philosophical implications, analogizing the subject of the verse with standard images from philosophical texts:

> Just as a delusion always accounts for experiencing an illusory embrace, in such a way these two on account of delusion thought they had embraced their many selves -- since at the time of a delusion, another delusion also arises, (and another, etc). Just as a dream that is true at the time of dreaming afterwards (finds its reality) logically objectionable, just so an illusory embrace also is true at that time (of the illusion) and is (only) afterwards logically objectionable. And just so the mother-of-pearl is truly (apprehended) as silver at the time (of apprehension) and afterwards is (found to be) logically objectionable. But here is the distinction. On account of the delusion of perceiving such things as mother-of-pearl as silver, an anxiety arises that if this spontaneous (perception of silver) will be logically objectionable then (perhaps) I will not (be able to) apprehend (real) silver (in the future). But here (in the context of this verse), even when there is an actual embrace, an experience akin to an illusory embrace arises.[273]

Next, Cāṇḍupaṇḍita strategically delineates the philosophical implications of the described situation by first framing the points of view of various philosophical schools, including the Sāṅkhya, Bauddha, Nyāya, and Vedānta. He then suggests

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[272] tau damayantīnalau mithaḥ parasparaṃ tathyaṃ satyam eva abādhyaṃ pariṣasvajāte. kva -- āliṅgitālīkaparasparāntaḥ āliṅgitaṃ yadalīkaṃ parasparaṃ tasyāntaḥ madhye. alīkāliṅganamadhye satyam āliṅganaṃ jātam. athavā āliṅgitālīkaparasparam antaścittaṃ yatpariṣvaṅge iti kriyāviśeṣaṇaṃ tathyaviṣeṣaṇaṃ vā. gṛhītālīkabhaimīcittena nalena satyabhaimī āliṅgitā. alīkanalāviṣṭacittayā bhaimyā ca satyanala āliṅgitaḥ. atra hetugarbhaṃ viśeṣaṇam. kiṃ kurvāṇau -- anyonyam anyatravat anyapradeśe sthitāv iva īkṣamāṇau vilokayantau. kva -- paraspareṇa adhyuṣite'pi āśrite'pi deśe. ekatra sthitāv api satyāv api tau.

[273] yathā nityaṃ bhrāntyā mithyāliṅganam anubhavataḥ tathaiva ātmānaṃ bhrāntyāliṅgitaṃ manyete sma. paraṃ bhrāntir api yasmāt bhrāntikāle satyeva bhavati. yathā svapnaḥ svapnavyavahārakāle satyaḥ paścāt bādhyo bhavati, tathālīkāliṅganam api tatkāle satyaṃ paścāt bādhyam. yathā ca śuktirajataṃ tatkāle satyaṃ paścāt bādhyam. paramayaṃ viśeṣaḥ. bhrāntyā dṛśyamānasya śuktirajatāder īdṛśaṃ bhayaṃ bhavati, yadidaṃ kṣaṇena yadi bādhyaṃ bhaviṣyati tadā mama rajataprāptir na bhaviṣyati. atra tu satyāliṅgane'pi bhrāntyāliṅganasadṛśī pratītir jātā.

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the poet's intention to invoke the Prabhākara-mīmāmsā and proceeds to summarize

the relevant philosophical idea:

> Here there is a discrepancy among the philosophers. The Sāṅkhya philosophers hold that the object of an erroneous cognition is real (*satkhyātivāda*); when there is an error, as when mother-of-pearl is apprehended as silver, that (apprehension) is, in some form or other, understood as actually real. The Buddhist philosophers argue that the object of an erroneous cognition is not real (*asatkhyātivāda*); it is the Middle-Path Buddhists (*mādhyāmika*) who propound the doctrine of non-existence or emptiness (*śunyavāda*). On account of delusion, unreal, i.e. empty, indeed is the apprehension of silver. The Nyāya and Bhāṭṭa Mīmāmsā philosophers speak of the object of erroneous cognition as something other (*anyathākhyāti*); because of the delusion of there being silver in front of you when something other is present, the apprehension of mother-of-pearl as silver is something other (that what is apprehended). According to this point of view, something takes on a reality even though unreal. In saying that here on the ground there is no pot, one means that there is an absence of a pot on the ground but not a complete absence (of pots everywhere). Just so is this (apprehended) silver. This objecting awareness -- with respect to the fact that when deluded there is no silver -- merely blocks the absence of something else, but not silver (in general). Just so, the Vedānta philosophers hold that the object of erroneous cognition is indefinable. Because an objection arises this silver cannot be real; because it can be ascertained, it is also not unreal. Just so because existence and non-existence mutually contradict each other, it is neither real nor unreal. Nor is it something other than the real and the unreal. Therefore, because of the inability to express it in any way at all, the silver is apprehended as something indefinable. The Prābhākara Mīmāmsa philosophers hold that the object of so-called "erroneous cognition" is not erroneous at all (*akhyātivāda*). This silver is neither apprehended erroneously nor is it illusory. Rather, it is simply true, since there are two cognitions present, one perceptually grasped and one remembered. On account of an awakening of previously experienced sense impressions -- because of the similarity of such qualities as white light, etc. in things -- perceived phenomena such as illusions are as real as the bracelets of a young woman or a market street. In that way, the silver superimposed on the mother-of-pearl is remembered. Therefore, both are real. This silver in front of us is real. (And) because it is remembered from a previous

experience, (this apprehension of silver) is also true. This verse has been prepared by the poet to reflect the Prābhākara view.[274]

Having supposedly identified Śrīharṣa's embedded reference (ādhikārikavastu),

Cāṇḍupaṇḍita then reconnects the idea with the narrative situation by integrating

alternative explanations of the words he has already glossed with his philosophical

hypothesis that this verse reflects the view of the Prābhākara Mīmāṃsakas:

> Both Damayantī and Nala embraced each other in actuality, though seeing each other as if they were in different places. Where? In the midst (=antaḥ) of their false embrace. That there is an illusory union of the two (parasparam=mithunam= alīkāliṅgitaṃ) here would ordinarily be accepted. In this case, however, it has actually (tathyam) happened. It follows that even though being in front of each other (adhyuṣite'pi=purovartini), they understood (īkṣamāṇau=jānantau) each other to be as if in a mistaken location (anyatravat= bhrāntisthalavad) on account of a superimposition of one form onto another (āropitarūpeṇa=paraspareṇa). The meaning is this -- Nala may at some point have had the experience of a true embrace somewhere. And Damayantī also experienced embraces with her friends. That (experience) alone is what is remembered in this shared space. Therefore, both are real -- the perceptual knowledge of embracing each other and the memory consciousness (of embrace). Neither are false. Therefore, the embrace of the couple (mithaḥ) is real, for the memory consciousness cannot be logically opposed. And this is the uniform stance of the Prābhākara Mīmāṃsakas. Also, there cannot be a repetition (in meaning) of the

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[274] atra vādināṃ vipratipattiḥ. satkhyātivādī sāṅkhyaḥ. bhrāntau śuktimastake yadrajataṃ khyāti pratibhāsate tat sad eva kvāpi vidyamānam eva. asatkhyātivādī bauddhaḥ. śunyavādī mādhyamikaḥ. asad eva śunyaṃ rajataṃ bhrāntyā khyāti. anyathākhyātivādī naiyāyiko bhaṭṭaś ca. anyathā vartamānaṃ rajataṃ bhrāntidoṣavaśāt purovartideśe śuktimastake anyathā khyāti. yatastasya mate abhāvo'pi bhāvātmakaḥ. iha bhūtale ghaṭo nāsti ityukte ghaṭābhāvo nāma bhūtale na tu sarvathābhāvaḥ. tathā idaṃ rajatam ity arthaḥ. bhrāntau nedaṃ rajatam ity anena bādhakajñānena anyathābhāvāmātraṃ bādhyate na tu rajatam. tathā anirvacanīyakhyātivādī vedāntī. idaṃ rajataṃ sanna bhavati bādhyatvāt. tathā asad api na bhavati pratīyamānatvāt. tathā sadasad api na bhavati bhāvabhāvayoḥ parasparaṃ virodhāt. na ca sadasadbhyām aparaḥ prakāro'sti. tasmāt kenāpi prakāreṇa nirvaktum aśakyatvāt anirvacanīyaṃ rajataṃ khyāti. akhyātivādinaḥ prābhākarāḥ. idaṃ rajataṃ na khyāti na prātibhāsikaṃ bhāti. kiṃtu satyam eva, yad ete grahaṇasmaraṇavijñāne satye. tathāhi vaṇigvīthyādau kāntākaṅkaṇādau ca gṛhītaṃ sat cākacikyādiśvetabhāskaratvādisādṛśyāt pūrvānubhavasaṃskārodbodhe sati śuktimastake tadeva rajataṃ smṛtam. tato dvayam api satyam. idaṃ purovarti satyaṃ rajatam. pūrvānubhavāt smṛtaṃ tadapi satyam. ayaṃ ca ślokaḥ prābhākarābhiprāyeṇa kavinā kṛtaḥ.

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(synonymous) words "anyonya," "paraspara," and "mithaḥ." First, "anyonya" refers to signifies the embrace experience in the past. The next word "paraspara" refers to the memory consciousness with respect to what is in front of them. The third word points to the union of the perceptual and memory consciousness with respect to so-called illusion posited by other philosophers. The fourth word "mithaḥ" designates the notion established by the Prābhākara school of thought. Therefore, in every way, the two truly embrace each other.[275]

Through a sophisticated analysis, Cāṇḍu has apparently decoded Śrīharṣa's magical fusing of idea and image in the description of a significant human experience. According to Handiqui, however, Cāṇḍupaṇḍita is the only commentator to take this approach to the verse. The other commentators may be wondering if perhaps Cāṇḍu, like the lovers, is himself not experiencing some sort of hallucination here, offering an interpretive experience of silver as it were where only mother-of-pearl is to be found. Nārāyaṇa and Mallinātha, for example, do not seem so entranced by the philosophical possibilities of this verse. They both feel that Nala and Damayantī were in the same room and in the midst of their illusory embraces, they probably had some real touches also.[276] Nārāyaṇa remarks that the

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[275] anyonyam anyatravad īkṣamāṇau tau damayantīnalau mithaḥ parasparaṃ tathyaṃ pariṣasvajāte. kva -- āliṅgitasya alīkasya parasparasya antarmadhye. yal loke sampratipannam idaṃ parasparaṃ mithunam alīkāliṅgitaṃ tasmin tathyaṃ parasparam āliṅgitaṃ babhuva. yata āropitarūpeṇa paraspareṇa adhyuṣite'pi purovartini deśe anyonyaṃ jānantau. ayam arthaḥ -- tatpūrvam anyatra deśe nalena kvāpi satyāliṅganam anubhūtaṃ gṛhītam. damayantyā ca sakhībhiḥ sahāliṅganam anubhavagṛhītam. tad evedam adhyuṣitadeśe smṛtam. ato'nyonyāliṅganagrahaṇajñānaṃ smaraṇajñānaṃ cobhayam api tathyam eva, na tu mithyā. atastathyo mithaḥpariṣvaṅgaḥ smaraṇajñānasya abādhitatvāt iti mīmāṃsakaikadeśinām prābhākaraṇām āśayaḥ. ato'nyonyaparasparamithaḥśabdānām apaunaruktyam. anyonyaśabda ekaḥ pūrvānubhūtāśleṣavācī. aparaḥ parasparaśabdaḥ purovartini deśe smaraṇajñānavācakaḥ. tṛtīyaḥ aparavādinām sampratipannām alīkatāṃ bhrāntisaṃjñām anūdya grahaṇasmaraṇajñānayor ekatra melakaḥ. caturtho mithaḥśabdaḥ prābhākarasiddhāntasiddhaṃ pratijñāṃ pratipādayati. ataḥ sarvaprakāreṇa tathyaṃ mithastau pariṣasvajāte.

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intended meaning of the verse is that in the midst of their seeing illusions of each other, they (or their hearts) grasped each other's true form also.[277] As Handiqui notes, Cāṇḍu's application of the Prābhākara theory speaks to his "great ingenuity." Indeed, to read *paraspara* as *āropitarūpa* ("superimposition") and then raise *tathyam* ("in actuality") as a shield against Nyāya, Vedānta, and Buddhist critiques of unreality in the service of hoisting the Prābhākara flag might strike some as ingenious and others as far-fetched (perhaps because they did not notice it first). Furthermore, Cāṇḍu's argument for the poet's conscious use of synonyms (*anyonya, paraspara, mithaḥ*) to convey different technical senses proves consistent with standard poetic practice to not unmindfully repeat word and sense. Notice also the subtle recognition that Nala may have actually embraced another female (or male) in the past, while Damayantī has had the experience of embrace only with her female friends. Here, however, an actual embrace between the two would be inappropriate, as Handiqui suggests, from the point of view of moral and narrative convention: "Cāṇḍu . . . rules out the possibility of any actual embrace, which would have been repulsive to both Nala and Damayantī, in view of the former's mission on behalf of the gods. Cāṇḍu's interpretation keeps up the

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[276] Mallinātha explains: pūrvavāsanayā parasparaceṣṭāṃ mithy eti manyamānav eva tathyam aceṣṭām ity arthaḥ.

[277] satyarūpeṇa paraspareṇādhyuṣite'dhiṣṭite'pi deśe anyonyaṃ parasparam anyatravad anyonyānadhyuṣitadeśavad bhrāntidṛṣṭam iva īkṣamāṇau vilokayantau tau āliṅgitaṃ yad alīkaṃ parasparaṃ tasyāntarmadhye tathyaṃ satyamapi mithaḥ parasparaṃ pariṣasvajāte āliliṅgatuḥ. alīkadṛṣṭasya parasparasya madhye satyarūpasyāpy āliṅganaṃ jātam iti bhāvaḥ. āliṅgitam alīkaṃ parasparaṃ yena evaṃbhūtam antaḥ antaḥkaraṇaṃ yayor iti vā. satyam apy alīkabuddhyaivāliliṅgatur iti bhāvaḥ.

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atmosphere of illusion better, and seems to be the right one."[278] Although Cāṇḍu

makes no mention of the propriety of reading the verse in this way, Handiqui's

sub-commentary on Cāṇḍu's interpretive move provides yet another dimension to

the reading.

Though not necessarily in the case treated above (*Nc* 6.51), it appears that

Cāṇḍupaṇḍita has a special penchant for reading philosophical thought into verses

that do not indubitably invite such a reading.[279] For example, in *Nc.* 9.75, there is

a reference to the possibility of Agni offering his own share of oblations to himself

(as sacrificial fire) in the Vedic (*sarvakāma*) sacrifice in order to win Damayantī:

> Himself offering an oblation that is his own sacrificial portion to his own
> manifestations, if the flaming Agni performs the Vedic wish-fulfilling
> sacrifice (*sārvakāmika*) how will that Vedic rite be unsuccessful?

The context is that Nala is trying to persuade Damayantī to marry one of the four

great Vedic deities, here Agni. Where the other commentators again merely

provide the syntax with few remarks, Cāṇḍu sees here a reference to the Vedic

mythology of Agni and his four brothers, launching into a marvelous explanation

that includes a lengthy passage from his lost *bhāṣya* on *Ṛgveda*. Jaydev Jani

explains the background, found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, to Cāṇḍu's comment:

> Agni's four brothers Vaiśvānara, Gṛhapati, Yaviṣṭha and Pāvaka frightened
> by Vaṣatkāra fled away from the duty of carrying oblation to gods. The
> youngest one Saucika also followed them, but he was arrested by Varuṇa

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[278] Handiqui 521

[279] For example, Cāṇḍu again goes beyond the call of duty in his comment on *Nc* 22.76 where he
sees a reference to Sānkhya that none of the other commentators seem to recognize.

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and Yama. He was presented before the gods, who persuaded him to do the allotted job. Saucika fire refused in the beginning. But when the gods offered him a prayājas and anuyājas share from the Sviṣṭakṛt ritual, the essence of herbs, and long life, he agreed to do accordingly.[280]

Whereas in the *Naiṣadha* verse, Nala seems to simply allude to the possibility that Agni could offer an oblation to himself and thus effect the desire of winning Damayantī, Cāṇḍu finds in this verse a Vedic resonance of the above story in connection to what the sacrificial share of Saucika Agni is and how it came to be so. He explains that this information is found in the fifty-seventh chapter of the *Ṛgveda* (lit. "text with the sixty-four chapters").[281] What precedes this passage is again a "normal" reading of the verse (reflected in the translation above) and what follows it are nine *sūkta*-s with commentary of the *Ṛgveda* (with a passage from the *Bṛhaddevatā* also given under the sixth verse) that comprise a discussion among Agni, Varuṇa, and Yama about Agni's role in the sacrifice. Finally, to connect his remarks with the narrative context again, Cāṇḍu concludes:

> Therefore, (Nala is saying here that) when Agni himself becomes the sacrificer and sacrifices his own share of the sacrifice to his own manifestations, then he will obtain you (Damayantī].[282]

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[280] Jaydev Jani's "Cāṇḍupaṇḍita on Rgveda X.51", pg. 43. Jani explains that Cāṇḍu's source is the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* but other Vedic commentators connect Rv 10.51 with the account from the *Taittirīyasaṃhitā* which names three elder brothers, viz. Bhūpati, Bhuvanapati, and Bhūtānāṃ pati.

[281] tathāca mantra etasminnarthe ṛgvede santi. catuḥṣaṣṭyāṃ saptapañcāśattame adhyāye devānām agneśca saṃvāde navarcaṃ sūktam.

[282] itthaṃ yadā agniḥ svayam eva hotā bhūtvā svayaṃ ca svaṃ bhāgaṃ haviḥ svāsu mūrtiṣu juhoti tadā tvāṃ prāpnoti.

Jaydev Jani has commented on the comparative significance of Cāṇḍu's

commentary on *Rgveda* 10.51 with those of Skandasvāmī, Veṅkaṭamādhava, and

Sāyaṇācārya elsewhere but the point of introducing his comment here is to

demonstrate the nature of the strong reading by *Naiṣadha* commentators,

especially when the poem hardly seems to openly invite such a reflection. Of

course, it may be of some significance to mention that Cāṇḍu himself explains in a

prefatory verse to his commentary that his expertise is in Vedic science:

> Therefore, having devotedly bowed to my teacher Śrīvaidyanātha after
> bowing to goddess of Speech, the learned scholar Cāṇḍu -- who has
> performed the Vājapeya sacrifice (*samrāṭ*), made sacrifices to Bṛhaspati
> (*sthapati*), and conducted the daily sacrifices to the sacred fire (*agnicit*)--
> sets out to add with his own thoughts a fitting commentary to some parts of
> poet Śrīharṣa's composition.[283]

As this verse indicates, in addition to his lost Rgveda *bhāṣya*, Cāṇḍupaṇḍita was

an accomplished practitioner of several *śrauta* and *gṛhya* sacrifices -- the only

kāvya commentator who, according to Handiqui, "quotes chapter and verse from

the Śrautasūtras."[284] Handiqui also cites an epilogue verse from Cāṇḍu's

commentary on the twenty-second canto[285] that confirms the commentator's

mastery of the Vedic sacrificial system and adds:

> He performed a number of important Vedic sacrifices, such as the seven
> varieties of the soma sacrifice, the Dvādaśāha and the Agnicayana. He

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[283] tasmād vāgādhidevatāṃ tadanu ca śrīvaidyanāthaṃ guruṃ natvā bhaktipuraḥsaraṃ kavivaraḥ

samrāṭ sthapaty agnicit. cāṇḍupaṇḍitasaṃjñito nijadhiyā ṭīkāṃ vyalīkāṃ kaveḥ śrīharṣasya kṛtau

viśeṣamadhikaṃ vaktuṃ vidhate kvacit..

[284] Handiqui xix

[285] yo vājapeyayajanena babhūva samrāṭ kṛtvā bṛhaspatisavasthapatitvam āpa / yo

dvādaśāhayajane'gnicid apy abhūt saḥ śrīcaṇḍupaṇḍita imāṃ vitatāna ṭīkām //

assumed the pround title of Samrāṭ by performing the Vājapeya sacrifice, and became a Sthapati by performing the Bṛhaspatisva. The religious activities of Cāṇḍupaṇḍita show that comprehensive Vedic sacrifices were still undertaken in Gujarat in the thirteenth century.

Accordingly, it appears that his frame of reference in interpreting *Naiṣadha* focuses on providing erudite notes on *śastra*, particularly *darśana* and the Vedic sciences in which he seems to have had special training.

Unlike verses like *Nc* 6.51, where Cāṇḍu alone seems to see a reference to a *mīmāṃsā* doctrine, other verses in the *Naiṣadha* seem to invite all of the commentators to apply the full scope of their scholarship to the greatest possible extent. In these verses, the *Naiṣadha* assumes the form of a foundational philosophical treatise such as the *Yogasūtra* or the *Vedāntasūtra*, in that it is instinctively assimilated into a world of commentary and sub-commentary that yields debate, conjecture, and new points of doctrine. Engaging in philosophical debate with each other, the commentators depend on their memorization of points of doctrine in terms of definitions, subtle distinctions of language and thought, relevant examples, and a host of hierarchical texts that in conjunction with their own measure of intellectual capacity gained from training and study culminate in refined arguments. Although all of the philosophical schools are amply represented in the poem's images[286], it is the *Advaitavedānta* doctrines made famous by Śrīharṣa in *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* that find the most references. The

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[286] For example, an allusion to the Vaiśeṣika theory of darkness in *Nc* 22.36 leads the commentators Nārāyaṇa and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita to cover the whole body of Vaiśeṣika literature (up to their times) in their glosses. Cāṇḍu quotes Śrīdhara's discussion of darkness in full.

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philosophical traditions of Vedānta have a very important relationship with the

Naiṣadha tradition. Although the Sanskrit commentators -- with a few notable

exceptions -- generally unpack the doctrinal import poetically implanted into the

narrative by Śrīharṣa, later audiences have elucidated the very structural core of

the poem as an allegory of the Vedānta -- a migration (or realization) of the

individual spirit (*jīvātman*) towards (or as) the collective oneness (*parabrahman*).

Phyllis Granoff writes of this tradition in her study of Śrīharṣa's

Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya:

> [*Naiṣadha* has been read as an] allegory, with Nala as the soul, or
> *paramātman*, and Damayantī as the aspirant yearning for union with
> Brahma, and thus for *mokṣa* . . . [This notion] is not entirely unfounded.
> There are several indications that Nala is not to be regarded as an ordinary
> mortal. One may divide them into two groups: (A) Verses in which it is
> directly stated that Nala is the highest God, Śiva; and (B) Verses in which
> Nala is described with words which might apply equally to Brahma, and
> those in which Damayantī's approach to Nala is portrayed in terms of the
> standard Vedānta methods of reaching oneness with the Ultimate Real.[287]

This aspect of the poem has led to a fascinating discussion of the poet and the

circumstances out of which the poet and the poem emerged and, in small measure,

also finds representation in the Sanskrit commentaries. As such, the allegorical

readings it has led to in that context will be dealt with below. At this point,

however, it may be useful to see the ways in which a technical discussion of

references to Vedānta doctrines engages the full scope of the *Naiṣadha*

commentators' intellectual energies. Perhaps the most interesting case can be

found in the commentaries to *Nc* 13.36, where the full scope of traditional

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[287] Granoff 252

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philosophical debate finds expression. The following is a translation of Nc 13.36 based on Nārāyaṇa's reading:

> Just as the world does not place faith in the fifth alternative which is the highest truth, i.e. that of non-dual reality, when confronted by four other views vying for that faith -- just so Damayantī did not place faith in the fifth one on account of her indecision about the (real) lord of Niṣadha in the presence of the set of four other Nalas who were vying to win her faith.[288]

During the svayaṃvara of Damayantī, when the four Vedic gods, i.e. Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, and Yama assume the form of Nala, it becomes difficult for the princess to recognize the real Nala. Sarasvatī devī speaks of the virtues of the four Nalas in punning language, offering descriptions that can apply both to Nala and each of the four gods. Hearing these words, Damayantī is utterly confused. At this point, Śrīharṣa compares her predicament with the predicament of people who become confused about the true nature of reality (in this case the monist view) when confronted with competing formulations. It is in this situation that Śrīharṣa illustrates the contrast between the monist view of reality (advaitatattva) and the other views on the matter. Although it is clear from the poet's words that a view of non-dual reality is the correct view, what he is sufficiently elusive in suggesting is the four incorrect views -- thus allowing the commentators to fill in the blanks.

Most of the commentators provide the basic sense of the verse in a similar way: Damayantī (sā) is shown to not put faith (śraddhāṃ na dadhe) in the fifth alternative or category (pañcamakoṭi), i.e. Nala, which is beyond the four other

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[288] sāptuṃ prayacchati na pakṣacatuṣṭaye tāṃ tal lābhaśaṃsini na pañcamakoṭimātre / śraddhāṃ dadhe niṣadharād vimatau matānām advaitatattva iva satyatare'pi lokaḥ // Nc 13.36

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alternatives (*pakṣa*), i.e. the gods, even though this fifth alternative -- i.e. faith in

Nala -- is more real (*satyatara*) than the other four pseudo-Nalas. Because the four

gods want to win Damayantī for themselves, they are trying to prevent her from

being confident in her prospects to obtain (*āptuṃ prayacchati*) the real Nala

because they want her confidence to rest in them (*tallābhaśaṃsini*). In the same

way (*iva*), in the presence of a diversity of false Nalas, i.e. doctrines,

(*niṣadharādvimatau matānām*), people (*loka*) do not believe (*śraddhāṃ na dadhe*)

in the truth of Advaita (*advaitatattva*), the fifth category, even though it is the most

true (*satyatara*) of all. These four doctrines (*pakṣacatuṣṭaya*), like the four gods,

try to win the faith of people and keep them from putting faith in a non-dual

reality. Two alternative readings -- *prāptum* for *sāptum* and *satyapare* for

satyatare -- lead to somewhat different interpretation of the simile and its context

in Vidyādhara, Cāṇḍupaṇḍita and in the second interpretation of Jinarāja. An

alternate translation of the verse based on the above commentators' reading might

read that Nala experiences doubt about whether or not he can obtain Damayantī:

> Just as the world does not place faith in the fifth alternative which is the
> highest truth, i.e. that of non-dual reality, when confronted by four other
> views vying for that faith -- just so Nala did not place faith in himself, who
> was the fifth of the set of four Nalas, on account of his indecisive
> foolishness in dealing with those four other Nalas who were vying to win
> Damayantī.[289]

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[289] prāptuṃ prayacchati na pakṣacatuṣṭaye tāṃ tal lābhaśaṃsini na pañcamakoṭimātre / śraddhāṃ
dadhe niṣadharād vimatau matānām advaitatattva iva satyapare'pi lokaḥ //

Despite the divergent orientation of the predicate in these two readings, the major point of discussion among the commentators centers on the phrases *pañcamakoṭimātre* and *pakṣacatuṣṭaye*.

The basic doctrine at the center of the controversy relates to the standard four-fold set of theoretical categories for understanding the nature of existence (*catuṣkoṭi*)[290] -- whether reality exists, whether it does not exist, whether it both exists and does not exist, or whether it neither exists nor does it non-exist. Each of the commentators then ascribes a partisan philosophical view (*pakṣa*) to each of these four modes of understanding reality (*koṭi*). Each of the commentators seem to see it differently from Śaṅkara, who feels that in respective order, the four *koṭi*-s signify those who posit the reality of the Self, those that do away with the idea of the reality of the Self (*vaināśika*-s), those who partly do away with the reality of existence (*ardha-vaināśika*-s), i.e. those who are sky-clad, and finally the ones who harbor an extreme view of categorically negating existence (*atyantaśūnyavādī*).[291] Handiqui cites Ānandagiri's subcommentary on Śaṅkara to

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[290] The whole discussion is built on the famous verses 4.83 and 4.84 of the *Māṇḍukyakārika* of Gauḍapada: asti nāstyastināstīti vā punaḥ / calasthirobhayābhāvair āvṛṇoty eva vāliśaḥ // koṭhyaś catasra tāstugrahair yāsāṃ sadāvṛtaḥ / bhagavān ābhir aspṛṣṭo yena dṛṣṭaḥ sa sarvadṛk // Professor Handiqui has provided a thorough summary of the entire philosophical tradition that stems from these *kārikas* (see pgs. 529-530). He writes, for example: "The Gauḍapādakārikā is a work which shows unmistakable traces of Buddhist influence, and the Kārikās in question seem to be based on the Mādhyamika definition of the Ultimate Reality found in Buddhist works: na sannāsanna sadasanna cāpyanubhayātmakam. catuṣkoṭivinirmuktaṃ tattvaṃ mādhyamikā viduḥ..

[291] astyātmeti vādī kaścit pratipadyate / nāstītyaparo vaināśikaḥ / astināstītyaparo'rdhavaināśika sadasadvādi digvāsāḥ / nāstināstītyatyantaśūnyavādī //

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define the respective schools as that of the Vaiśeṣika-s, the Vijñānavādin Bauddha-s, the Digambara Jaina-s, and finally the Mādhyamika Bauddha-s.[292] Handiqui ultimately eschews Śaṅkara's view and finds this reference to be to the Mādhyamika view of ultimate reality being beyond the four modes of understanding, a view held also by Advaita-vedāntins:

> In 21.88 Śrīharṣa himself describes Buddha as having discarded the four Koṭis, while the Advaitins, too, have been blamed by other schools of thought for rejecting the Koṭis. Both the Mādhyamikas and the Advaita thinkers describe the Ultimate Reality as beyond the comprehension of mind and speech, and beyond the range of world phenomena (prapañca). The Ādiśānta of the Mādhyamikas may be compared with the Upaśānta of the Vedānta. The Vedāntins, it is true, did not admit this remarkable similarity between their Brahma and the Śūnya or the Ultimate Principle of the Mādhyamikas. Saṃkara characterized the doctrine of Śūnya as contrary to all proof, and relying on the literal meaning of the word, reduced the Śūnya theory to mere nihilism. Nāgārjuna, however, contends that his doctrine is neither non-existence (nāstītva) nor non-being (abhāva); and Śūnyatā is, in fact, characterized as Tathatā (thatness), Bhūtakoṭi (true limit) and Dharmadhātu (totality of things). It may be added that the cognate theory of the non-origination and the dreamlike character of things is also common to the Vedānta and Mādhyamika systems. In view of the striking similarity between the doctrines of the two schools, Śrīharṣa's definition of the Advaitatattva, though apparently based on the Gauḍapādakārikā, looks like an adaptation of the Mādhyamika definition of the Ultimate Reality.

Although Handiqui feels that Śrīharṣa's intention was to highlight the Mādhyamika view, traditional *Naiṣadha* commentators provide a diverse set of possibilities. Nārāyaṇa, for example, begins by asserting the standard position of Advaita Vedānta (that Brahman is one and there is nothing else), contrasting it with other positions (like that of Sāṅkhya) that stress plurality and weaken people's faith in

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[292] Handiqui 530, fn. 107

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non-dualism.[293] He then renders the views of four specific philosophical schools

(*pakṣacatuṣṭaya*) -- Sāṅkhya (*satvāda*), Bauddha (*asatvāda*), Nyāya

(*sadasatvāda*), and Vedānta (*prapañcānityavāda*) -- without necessarily

suggesting their link with the *catuṣkoṭi*.[294] Next, he provides the logical basis for

Advaita-Vedānta's rejection of the four modes of understanding reality

(*catuṣkoṭi*),[295] presumably to argue for its being the fifth mode (*pañcakoṭi*).

Nārāyaṇa then offers an explanation of different views on the plurality of selves:

> The followers of Sāṅkhya regard that there are that many selves endowed
> with pure consciousness that separately exist in each and every body. The
> followers of Nyāya also accept many selves that are endowed with nine
> distinct qualities that are all-pervasive and exist separately in each body.
> The Jains accept many selves that are characterized by expansion and
> contraction and that undergo a corporal transformation in each and every
> body. And the Buddhists hold -- with respect to *ātman* -- that it takes the
> form of a chain of many consciousness moments that separately exist in
> each and every body.[296]

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[293] matānāṃ sāṅkhyādiṣaḍdarśanānāṃ madhye 'ekam evādvitīyaṃ brahma'. 'neha nānāsti kiñcana'
ity ādi śrutibhiḥ satyatare paramarthato vidyamāne 'pyadvaitarūpe tattve svarūpe brahmaikabodhe
vā viṣaye loko'vidyāvān . . . pakṣacatuṣṭaye anekātmavādisāṅkhyādidarśanacatuṣke
tāmadvaitaśraddhāṃ prāptuṃ na dadati sati . . . nānātmatvasādhakayuktisahasrair
ekātmyaniṣedhake satīti yāvat. tasya tatpadavācyasya lābhaḥ tacchaṃsinīti advaitatattvasya
viśeṣaṇam.

[294] satasat sadasat sadasadvilakṣaṇam iti pakṣacatuṣṭayam. sadvādino sāṅkhyāḥ. asadvādino

bauddhāḥ. sadasadvādino naiyāyikāḥ. prapañcānityavādino vedāntinaḥ.

[295] na sat bādhānupapatteḥ na hi sad rajataṃ gaganādikaṃ vā bādhyate. na cāsat
pratibhāsānupapatteḥ. na hi atyantāsat śaśaśṛṅgaṃ kadācid api avabhāsate. na ca sadasadātmakam
ubhayarūpaṃ parasparavirodhāt. na hi asat sad vā asadbhavitum arhati. ubhayarūpam api na
bhavatīti . . . ayuktaṃ jñātavyam

[296] sāṅkhyā hi pratiśarīraṃ bhinnān śuddhajñānasvabhāvān bahūn ātmana icchanti. naiyāyikā api
pratiśarīraṃ bhinnān sarvavyāpakān jñānādinavaviśeṣaguṇavatā ātmana icchanti. ārhatāstu
pratiśarīraṃ bhinnān dehaparimāṇān saṅkocavikāsaśīlān bahūn ātmano'ṅgīkurvanti. bauddhāś ca
pratidehaṃ bhinnān kṣaṇikajñānasantatirūpān bahūn eva ātmāna icchanti.

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Having identified *advaitatattva* with the Advaitavedānta school of philosophy that bases its doctrines on the authority of the Upaniṣad, it appears that Nārāyaṇa leaves the discussion here without further qualification.

Cāṇḍupaṇḍita specifies the nature of this *advaitatattva* as being the "indefinable (fifth) alternative" to the four philosophical schools of the Nyāya, Mīmāṃsa, Sāṅkhya, and Bauddha -- which he apparently links to the *catuṣkoṭi*.[297] Thus he presents an interpretation quite distinct from Nārāyaṇa's. Where Nārāyaṇa links the Buddhists to the view of the non-existence of ultimate reality, Cāṇḍu sees here a Mīmāṃsa perspective and where Cāṇḍu regards the (Mādhyamika) Buddhist notion of denying both its existence and non-existence, Nārāyaṇa reads a Vedānta view of the eternally illusory nature of the world (*prapañcānityavāda*). Cāṇḍu, unlike Nārāyaṇa, clearly identifies *advaitatattva* as the indefinable (*anirvacanīya*) Brahma characterized by unending joy that is consciousness and reality itself, which is the transcendent fifth understanding beyond the *catuṣkoṭi*.[298] Vidyādhara and Mallinātha also seem to convey the same sense as Cāṇḍu, identifying *advaitatattva* with Brahman.[299] The only

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[297] yathā matānāṃ naiyāyikamīmāṃsāsāṅkhyabauddhādīnāṃ madhye satyatare'pi advaitatattve brahmaṇi lokaḥ śraddhāṃ na dhatte. kiṃ bhūte? pañcamakoṭimātre pañcamapakṣasthite anirvacanīye.

[298] kiṃ viśiṣṭe advaitatattve? tal lābhaśaṃsini tasyā abheda-sādhikāyā brahmavidyāyāḥ satyajñānānantānandādirūpabrahmapratipādikāyā lābhaṃ śaṃsatīti evaṃśīlaṃ tasmin.

[299] Vidyādhara writes: astināstināstyastināstināstītipakṣacatuṣṭaye tāṃ advaitalakṣaṇāṃ śraddhāṃ prāptuṃ na prayacchati sati. kīdṛśe? tal lābhaśaṃsini. tad iti brahma tasya lābhaḥ prāptis taṃ śaṃsatīti evaṃśīlaṃ tasmin. etena arthāt tasmāt pakṣacatuṣṭayāt pañcamaḥ pakṣaḥ advaitasiddhānta iti jñāpitaṃ bhavati.

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commentator to have a radically different explanation is Īśānadeva. In fact, two different manuscripts of his commentary seem to harbor two distinct interpretations.[300] One reading connects the *advaitatattva* with the reality of God (*bhagavattattve*)[301] while another reading links *advaitatattva* with the Buddhist position and explains that it is the Buddhists who hold a non-dualist perspective on the nature of reality.[302]

Although not all of them as heavily addressed as the *Nc* 13.36, there are some two hundred and fifty references to technical philosophical doctrines in *Naiṣadha* -- almost all of which are seamlessly woven into the narrative or descriptive context of the poetry.

Mallinātha adds: catuṣṭayādhyātmikaśarīrendriyādy asatiprapañcasaṃvalanāt nityāparokṣasaty abrahmatattve iva asaty analacatuṣṭaye sannidhānāt satyanale pañcame pratīyamāne'pi satyo'yam iti jano na viśvasitum aśaknot.

[300] Handiqui 451

[301] yathā loke matānāṃ darśanānāṃ vimatau virodhe sati satyatare advaitatattve bhagavattattve śraddhā naśyati na satyāṃ manyate. pakṣacatuṣṭayam ucyate. nāsanna sanna sadasan na caivāpyubhayātmakam / catuṣkoṭivinirmuktaṃ tattvam ādhyātmikā viduḥ //

[302] yadvā advaitatattve bauddhamate yathā lokaḥ śraddhāṃ na dadhāti. kīdṛśe? pañcamakoṭimātre. yad uktam. na sannāsan na sadāsan na cāpyanubhayātmakam / catuṣkoṭivinirmuktaṃ tattvaṃ mādhyamikā viduḥ // pakṣacatuṣṭaye tāṃ muktiṃ na prayacchati ityādi yojyam. advaitavādinaś ca bauddhāḥ. yad uktam advayavādī jina . . . iti.

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Unpacking All and Sundry: Technical Consciousness of the Commentarial Eye

Professor M.B. Emeneau suggests the unprecedented versatility required of a *Naiṣadha* commentator in his notes on the text:

> Śrīharṣa's work, like that of all Sanskrit poets, abounds in details drawn from the mythology, the occupations of kings, the minutiae of religious performance, the arts, the ars amatoria, the technical grammar. It is the world of the gods and the upper castes -- the Brahmaṇas and the kings -- a dignified milieu, an haut monde, that figures in the *kāvya* in general . . . Everyday, homely, less dignified aspects of life, however, are also found more or less in all *kāvya* . . . Casual reading makes it appear that the *Naiṣadhacarita* contains a higher proportion than, for instance, Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa* or Subandhu's *Vāsavadatta* or Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita* or *Kādambarī*. It seems probable, too, that Śrīharṣa in introducing more everyday material sometimes leaves behind the cliché and is original in his contents. 31

The early commentators often do not involve themselves in the technical details of some of Śrīharṣa's "homely" observations. Later commentators like Nārāyaṇa and Mallinātha, however, often do provide in their remarks the result of their researches into Śrīharṣa's references. Commentarial innovation, it seems, could only be found in ever more detailed and erudite notes on objects, occupational processes, or rare plants and beasts. M.B. Emeneau summarizes the nature of marginalia that commentators are often required to explain. He highlights several groups of passages that contain unusual references to the animal and plant world (such as the preening of birds, safeguards to ward off mosquito bites, folk beliefs about the mating habits of birds and beasts); allusions or descriptions of what he calls "the everyday activities of common men" including the process of weaving,

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the making of pots, the drawing of water from a well with rope and jars, the work of goldsmiths, hunting, extracting oil from mustard seeds, wrestling bouts, field gleaning, carpentry, the jeweler's craft, barbers, and process of dyeing cloth. An interesting reference to ancient fumigation practices found in *Nc* 1.82 may demonstrate the kind of highly technical scientific knowledge a Sanskrit commentator must possess in order to clarify a given verse for his audience. Here a lovesick Nala is described wandering a tree-filled garden that everywhere oppresses his already fragile state of mind:

> He saw the fruits on the pomegranate tree that had been fertilized with a fragrant smoke in order to attain the lofty stature of the beautifully-browed Vidarbhan lady's breasts -- pomegranates that were like upside-down pots engaged in the severe penance of inhaling smoke.[303]

This verse again reflects the special way in which Śrīharṣa combines disparate realms of phenomena into unusual, learned, and yet oddly poetic expression that hinges on the poetic fancy (*utprekṣā*) of comparing pomegranate fruits as pots hung upside down over a smoky fire like   ascetics in order to gain the reward of firmness similar to the breasts of Damayantī. The obscure technical word in question here among the commentators is "*dohadadhūpini.*" Nārāyaṇa explains the word as that "fragrant fertilizing agent by which there is a superior yield of fruits, etc." while Mallinātha provides a more elaborate response:

> The Sabdārṇava explains the activity undertaken by skilled (gardeners) in applying a fertilizing agent to trees, bushes, and creepers in order to induce their untimely growth. This fertilizing agent as a smoke fragrance is what

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[303] vidarbhasubhrūstanatuṅgatāptaye ghaṭān ivā 'paśyad alaṃ tapasyataḥ / phalāni dhūmasya dhayān adhomukhān sa dāḍime dohadadhūpini drume //

is spoken of here, a smoky water sprinkled with (a whisk made from) the real sheep hair. This would be the best means to stimulate the growth of pomegranate fruit -- with a (whisk made of) sheep's hair or leather or with an ointment made from three fragrant fruits (nutmeg, arecanut or cloves),[304] clarified butter, or fish. The pomegranate, like the palm-tree, is fumigated during its flowering stage. Fumigated with a decoction that promotes its well-being (*avikvātha*) by means of a heated hair-whisk, many pomegranate fruits are produced.[305]

It is unclear what exactly Mallinātha is referring to above. While not referring to Mallinātha's comment, M.B. Emeneau also cites this example in an attempt to document folk practices alluded to in the *Naiṣadha* and feels that "this reference is still obscure [and] [t]he practice mentioned is probably a magical one; no reference to such a practice at the present day has thus far been found." He adds: "A footnote in the edition used by me gives directions for a magical anointing and fumigation which are supposed to produce this effect."[306] Although he does not provide the details of this "magical anointing and fumigation," a note by Nārāyaṇa in *Nc*. 17.220 alludes to some of the scientific and folk-literary motifs of the traditional culture on the artificial fertilization of trees:

> For the timely yield of flowers and fruits, the traditional science of tree husbandry (*vṛkṣāyurveda*) recommends applying fertilizing agents, such as fragrances, to trees. Just as (one recommends) the throwing of fragrant waters, such as that of incense, onto Campaka trees and mouthfuls of water

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[304] Or, according to Apte, *triphalā* could mean three sweet fruits (grape, pomegranate, and dates).

[305] tarugulmalatādīnāmakāle kuśalaiḥ kṛtam puṣpādy utpāditam dravyaṃ dohadaṃ syāttu tatkriyā iti śabdārṇave. dohadaś cāsau dhūpaś ca tad uktaṃ meṣāmiṣāmbusaṃsekas tatkeśām iṣad dhūpanam. śreyānayaṃ prayogaḥ syād dāḍimīphalavṛddhaye.
matsyājyatriphalālepairmāṃsairājāvikodbhavaiḥ. lepitā dhūpitā sūte phalan tālīva dāḍimī. avikvāthena saṃsiktā dhūpitā taptaromabhiḥ. phalāni dāḍimī sute subahūni pṛthūni ceti.

[306] Emeneau 34.

or wine from a beautiful woman onto Bakula trees or the kick of a young girl on a red Aśoka tree (to induce the flowering of that tree).[307]

On account of the numerous technical expressions and allusions to obscure practices, the vast researches of *Naiṣadha* commentators become evident in many places. Scholars and artists who approached *Naiṣadha* (as well as other *mahākāvya*-s) were bound together by the common texts, motifs, and broadly cultural phenomena that the text distilled for them. The communal interchange that the scholarly commentaries represent serve as an intermediary in the process of bringing this cultural phenomena to academic readers of Sanskrit and the regional languages. This sense of reading the *Naiṣadha* as a communal act among the scholars spread throughout the numerous sites of Sanskrit literary culture serves as a useful model for considering the nature of reading itself as a performative event and shared cultural practice in pre-modern India.

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[307] puṣpaphalānām ākālikasamṛddhaye vṛkṣeṣu vṛkṣāyurvedokto dhūpādir dohaḥ kriyate. yathā -- campake piṇyākādijalakṣepo bakule sundarīgaṇḍūjalamadirāseko raktāśoke ca taruṇīcaraṇapratāḍanam ity ādiḥ.

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Naiṣadha as a Fault-ridden Text:

As the anecdotal and commentarial receptive tradition reflects, the

Naiṣadha has become famous almost as much for its "poetic faults" (*dośa*) as it

has for its highly effective uses of language (*guṇa*). A famous anachronistic

anecdote indicating a relationship between Mamaṭṭa and Śrīharṣa emblematizes the

critical discourse. Jani speaks to the source of this anecdote, citing a Dr. Chatterji:

> According to an account current amongst the Kāśmīrī paṇḍits, which is
> recorded by Dr. Buhler, Mammaṭa was a maternal uncle of SH. A
> subsequent part of the story, which is not recorded by Dr. Buhler, is that
> "SH, having composed his master poem, showed it to his maternal uncle
> Mammaṭa, the great rhetorician. Mammaṭa liked the work very much and
> expressed his deep regret that he had not seen it earlier. When the young
> poet was glowing with pride and self-complacency, the great critic
> explained that, to him the work was invaluable, not for its merits, but for its
> defects and that he would have been saved from a lot of trouble in hunting
> out defects from a large number of literary works for the chapter on flaws
> (*doṣa*-s) in his *Kāvyaprakāśa*, had he only come across the book before
> writing that chapter as the NC bristled with mistakes of every variety.
> Being challenged by the irate author, to point out a single defect, Mammaṭa
> is said to have mentioned the stanza 'tava vartmani vartām śivam' (2.62),
> which is addressed by Nala to the swan going to Damayantī and which is
> intended to mean "may your path be propitious," but which may also be
> construed 'tava vartma nivartatām śivam' and gave rise to the meaning
> exactly the reverse of that intended by the speaker."[308]

Jāni questions the historical veracity of this story on the grounds that Mammaṭa

and Śrīharṣa were separated by at least a century but feels that the anecdote

indicates a critical attitude that must have become attached to the text from a very

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[308] Jani (92) cites Dr. Chatterji's note from the Calcutta Oriental Journal, Vol.3, No.7, pp. 153-154
and also provides a misconstrued explanation of Nc 2.62 from an anonymous Sanskrit
commentary.

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early time.[309] According to Chatterji's note on the Mammaṭa story, it appears that the nature of the "faults" in *Naiṣadha* is situated in the poem's transgression of various traditional literary practices of composition and not, as has been the frequent ascription of modern critics and translators, in the perceived vulgarity or indecency of the poem. There are other similar anecdotes that connect stylistic flaws with receptive histories.[310]

One needs only to observe the critical split evident in the ideology and the rhetoric found in the expression of "faults" of composition observed by traditional commentators and those "sins" against morality alleged by several influential modern readers to glean the core of this important aspect of the critical discourse on much of Sanskrit literature. Traditional commentators work from a position of piety, in insistent yet respectful service to taming the troublesome text.[311] Although there may be an implicit aggression in their comments, it is not expressed in the overt expression found in much of modern critical attitudes. The

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[309] The efflorescence of commentaries on *Kāvyaprakāśa* and *Naiṣadha* occur simultaneously in the chronologies. One may speculate that stories anachronistically linking Mammaṭa and Śrīharṣa in the anecdotal histories have something to with this, in addition to their possible Kaśmiri connection and the fact that Śrīharṣa seems to not conservatively adhere Mammaṭa's view that "real poetry is that which is free from poetic faults and adorned with poetic virtues" [*tadadoṣau śabdārthau saguṇāvanalṃkṛtī punaḥ kvāpi*]. This topic will be taken up in detail in the section that deals with anecdotes about Śrīharṣa.

[310] See section entitled "Anecdotes of text transmission: from Kanauj to Kashmir"

[311] R.P. Goldman writes about traditional commentators in *Translating Texts Translating Texts* (see Bibliography): "[I]t appears evident, the interpretative energies of the commentators are employed on behalf of an agenda that is outside the text itself, that is the effort to do away with a reading that, to their way of thinking, violates one of the stylistic rules of classical poetic composition" (98).

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main concern of the Sanskrit commentators is to respect their poet certainly but to honor, above all, the received wisdom of a science of poetics (*alaṅkāraśāstra*) that often claims to have correctly examined the mechanics and usages of a well-done literary effort. The writers on poetics seem to universally speak of the "best poetry" (*uttamakāvya*) as consisting of, on the one hand, a preponderant use of language and trope that is conducive to a conventionally established standard of artistry that effectively induces and produces within the audience aesthetic pleasure (*rasa*) and, conversely, minimizes its use of language and trope that deflates the production of such pleasure. In other words, more *guṇa* (poetic virtues) and less *doṣa* (poetic faults) make for a better poem. The *Naiṣadha* has, in no small measure, garnered praise for its virtues. However, equally popular has become a frequent axiom (as the Mammaṭa story recounted above demonstrates) that it is a locus for technical demerits that mar its becoming an unequivocally excellent poem. Universally in Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra*, *doṣa*-s are of three kinds: in words (*śabda*), in meanings (*artha*), or in the overall emotional flavor of an utterance (*rasa*). A further sub-division of poetic faults in words (*śabdadoṣa*) cites faults in the individual word (*padadoṣa*), a fault in an element of a word (*padāṃśadoṣa*), or a fault in a sentence or phrase (*vākyadoṣa*). For example, twentieth century Sanskrit commentator Haridāsa Siddhāntavāgīśa cites Nc 9.90[312] as containing an example of a *vākyadoṣa*:

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In this verse, the fault is that of an inappropriate use of syllables that serves to obstruct the main emotional flavor, especially the harshness in sound of the phrase "Go away quickly" (*druva drutam*). The reading "You hang on still, O life. Go away, quickly" (*vilambase jīva kimāśuniḥ sara*) would have been more satisfactory.[313]

The suggestion made by Haridāsa here is that the tenor of this verse is one of love-in-separation (*vipralambhaśṛṅgāra*) and, accordingly, the sound quality ought to be soft and somber, according to poetry teachers such as Mamaṭṭa and Viśvanātha. The consonantal harshness in the words (using letters such as 'ra' or 'ṭa'), however, acts contrary to this requirement and is thus a fault. The commentator here chooses to scrutinize the point. One of the hallmarks of traditional Sanskrit literary criticism is precisely this brand of microscopic analysis of linguistic usage, a kind of criticism that one perhaps does not find in literary criticism of other South Asian languages. The Sanskrit poet must be consistently logical in his ideas and his language or else face the weight of an appreciative, yet unstintingly conservative critical tradition that has given so much attention to a text that they are intimately aware of all of its effects. Even in the verses of a poet famous for stretching the patience of conservative critics, for example, one rarely sees a loose simile. For example, in Nc 2.19, Śrīharṣa compares Damayantī to goddess Lakṣmī. Such a conventional comparison would be a throwaway idea in most South Asian literatures, but in Sanskrit the poet usually justifies his usages in a

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[312] vilambase jīvata kiṃ dravadrutaṃ jvalatyadaste hṛdayaṃ niketanam. jahāsi nādyāpi mṛṣā sukhāsikāmapūrvam ālasyam idaṃ tav edṛśam..

[313] atra śloke drava drutam iti karkaśaśravaṇena prakṛtarasaparipanthitvāt pratikūlavarṇātā doṣaḥ. sa ca vilambase jīva kimāśuniḥ sara iti pāṭhena samādheyaḥ.

self-conscious and alert manner. This need to be logical in his conceits also affords the Sanskrit poet an opportunity to infuse some charming notion or the other into his comparisons, a practice that apparently registers as a certain kind of pedantry to many modern readers. In the case of Nc 2.19, the metaphor suggests that the two excellent females are indeed the same except for the fact that while goddess Lakṣmī arose from the ocean, Damayantī was produced from an ocean of virtues (*guṇasindhu*), i.e. her noble father Bhīmasena.

In addition to consonantal harshness, there are numerous other faults of composition that traditionally detract from a poem's achieving its maximum effectiveness. The following is a partial list of ineffective poetic usages cited by the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* ("A Mirror To Literature"), the popular fifteenth century Sanskrit textbook on literary analysis: sound quality that is not easy on the ear, an inappropriate or vulgar implication, ineffective execution of trope, unintelligibility, ambiguity, vagueness, using obsolete words or meanings whose context suggests other meanings, inexpressiveness, obscurity, distasteful suggestion, and indecency in terms of provoking shame or inauspiciousness. Those faults of composition not couched in some kind of technical failing of grammatical prescriptions or linguistic effect are usually expressed either in terms of being detrimental to the meaning (*artha*) and emotional tenor (*rasa*) or, as in several cases with the *Naiṣadha*, on account of their being some violation of poetic clichés (*kavisaṅketa*) or popular notions (*prasiddhi*). The commentator, however, rarely points out any of these faults. In fact, he usually defends the poet's usages so that one may not

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think the poet to be insensitive to "correct" usages. For example, Nārāyaṇa

defends the poet from the charge of committing an *arthadoṣa* in Nc 1.94 -- where

Nala is observing a round and firm Bilva fruit scratched by the leaf-tips blowing in

the wind, a fruit that resembles the breast of a prostitute. The fact that Śrīharṣa

qualifies the comparison between the fruit and a female breast by using the term

vāranārī (prostitute) and not simply *nārī* (woman) prompts Nārāyaṇa to explain

his poet's conscientious choice of words:

> The word meaning "common (woman)" [*vāra*] was used because it would
> be indecent (*anaucitya*) to insinuate that a married woman's breast
> [*kulastrīkuca*] is scratched by nails, etc.[314]

In other moments, vigilant of not falsifying Śrīharṣa's usages, commentators

choose to interpret with trepidation rather than passing over or boldly emending

the text following, as Jani points out, the ancient maxim of determining meaning

as best as one can according to context (*sthitasya gatiś cintanīyā*). Thus, for

example, commentators sometimes make remarks when they sense that the reader

might get the impression that the poet is misunderstanding a poetic cliché.

In Nc 1.86, Śrīharṣa metaphorically describes black bees settling on the

buds of a Campaka tree as lampblack. These buds, in turn, are likened to an array

of tea-lights honoring Kāmadeva; the accretion of lampblack (i.e. the bees) is then

related to sinful acts accrued by the fragrant Campaka buds, which (according to

convention) kill lonely lovers passing by and also kill moths.[315] A reader with

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[314] kulastrīkuce nakhakṣatādiprākaṭhyokter anaucityam iti 'vāra' iti padam

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technical knowledge of natural phenomena, however, may object to the botanical

validity of the poet's image, something that obviously concerns Nārāyaṇa:

> Some say that the bee does not alight on the Campaka bud. (Botanical) authorities say bees (may) settle (on the tree) but that they (would then) die.[316]

Although hardly a concern for poets writing in languages other than Sanskrit, one

might think, it happens to be a remarkable incident when a Sanskrit poet trumps

accuracy in favor of poetic effect, whether it be to say that pythons sweat (as

Bhavabhūti does in *Uttararāmacarita*) or that bees approach the Campaka tree and

die.[317] Vidyādhara thus explains Śrīharṣa's botanically-challenged usage as a

complicated figure of speech whereby there is an implied simile between the death

of the bees (or moths) and the pining lovers through a metaphorical attribution of a

quality onto the lovers that naturally occurs with the insects, i.e. death upon

contact with the Campaka buds (*rūpakāpahnutirupamālaṅkāra*).[318] The needs for

justification notwithstanding, it probably seems clear to most sensitive readers that

the poet is trying to connect the death of lovers-in-separation approaching the

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[315] vicinvatīḥ pānthapataṅgahiṃsnair apuṇyakarmāṇyalikaj jalacchalāt / vyalokayac campakakorakāvalīḥ sa śambarārer balidīpikā iva // 1.86

[316] campakopari bhramaro na tiṣṭhatīti kaścit. Tatra tiṣṭhati parantu mriyate iti prāmāṇikāḥ

[317] Mallinātha comments on the relationship of the bee with the Campaka tree in Nc 1.91 while refuting those that say that the bee does not go near the tree. Mallinātha argues that the bee does indeed approach the Campaka buds but die upon touching them. [nanv ayuktam idam na ṣatpado gandhaphalīm ajighrat ity ādāvalīna campakasparśābhāvaprasiddher iti cenna spṛśanty eva kintu spṛṣṭā mriyante tāvataiva sparśābhāvaprasiddhir iti kvacit kīrtitaḥ parihāraḥ.]

[318] See the third example of *apahnuti alaṅkāra* given by Gerow (p. 110).

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Campaka tree to moths entering the flame of a lamp. The lampblack formed by

the flame needs to be compared to something dark, i.e. the bees, which are then

further associated with the accumulation of sinful acts (also black).

When not taking note of perceived violations of poetic cliché or

convention, an area where scrupulous commentators often take issue with the poet

generally concerns non-standard grammatical usage. Jani lists a series of

grammatical mistakes in Śrīharṣa's poem, ranging from unaccounted for forms to

irregular compounds to incorrect declensions.[319] But once again, as is

characteristic of the poet in many contexts, Śrīharṣa includes a verse (22.82) that

chides fussy critics, demonstrating that sometimes what popular custom (or

perhaps, as Nārāyaṇa suggests, what this poet himself[320]) says overrules the

presumptuous rules of grammar:

> There exists popular custom (*loka*) [or this poet] to break the pride of
> grammar's hold on the (proper) uses of words. Since it is the case that the
> word "moon" [*śaśin*] is derived from its possessing a rabbit (*śaśa*) but (the
> moon) is not called an antelope[321] [*mrgin*] even though it possesses an
> antelope [*mrga*].[322]

Nārāyaṇa explicates the idea further by saying that it is improper to hold that "on

account of the likelihood of fallacies such as over-pervasion, etc., there should be

the rule that popular usage follow the rules of grammar" because definition follows

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[319] See Jani 270 for a complete list.

[320] eṣaḥ kavir (lokaḥ) . . . prabhuḥ

[321] According to Apte 1254, the spots of the moon are said to resemble an antelope.

[322] bhaṅktuṃ prabhur vyākaraṇasya darpaṃ padaprayogādhvani loka eṣaḥ /
śaśo yad asyāsti śaśī tato 'yam evaṃ mrgo 'syāsti mrgīti noktaḥ //

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usage and not the other way around. Therefore, grammar should have as its root popular usage, which is stronger than prescriptions of grammar.[323] Nevertheless, the grammarian in the commentator will often feel compelled to direct his reader in the direction of conventional usage.

Most of the poetic "flaws" in *Naiṣadha* seem not to be unique to it but can be found in other Sanskrit literary texts. In fact, the well-respected poets are often given the license to err on the side of poetic freshness even if it entails the transgression of grammar and custom: "poets," reads a famous saying in Sanskrit, "ought not to be goaded (into conformity)."[324] In defense of such a position, Jani cites an article by a Pandit Parameśvarānandaji Śāstri[325] entitled "Commission of Faults is the *Naiṣadha*'s Sixth Poetic Virtue." Although unclear what *alaṅkāraśāstra* tradition this scholar is referring to as having five traditional poetic virtues, the title at least underscores that there were some modern readers of the poem who considered that there was, as Jani says, "special merit [for a] poem that is flowing with such mistakes."[326] Just as Śrīharṣa is poised to employ the massive resources of a developed poetic and linguistic tradition, so too does he inherit the

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[323] tasmād ativyāptyādidoṣād vyākaraṇamūla eva lokaprayoga iti niyamo na yuktaḥ . . . lakṣyam uddiśya lakṣaṇapravṛttiḥ natu lakṣaṇam uddiśya lakṣyapravṛttir iti. tasmāt prayogamūlaṃ vyākaraṇam iti vyākaraṇāl loka eva prayoge balīyān iti bhāvaḥ.

[324] niraṅkuśāḥ kavayaḥ

[325] The Sanskrit title of the article by the Sāhityācārya is "Doṣākaratvaṃ Naiṣadhasya Saṣṭo Guṇaḥ." I was unable to locate this work. The author, according to Jani, was a scholar at the Oriental College in Jalandhar (Eastern Panjab).

[326] Jani 271

burdens of convention and tired metaphor, some of which he naturally and self-consciously transgresses, renovates, or completely re-imagines. In a way, perhaps, Śrīharṣa may be seen as returning to convention rather than transgressing it, reinvigorating a moribund form of personal and cultural expression into something closer to the relevant literary genre that *mahākāvya* might once have been.

Perhaps the very discourse about the poem's "faults" indicates an end of a literary age for some of the conservative members of the traditional literary audience for whom the *Naiṣadha*'s boldness represents something of a subversion of the *mahākāvya* tradition. Its appeal, however, seems strong for a traditionally trained audience of younger men with ears hungry for fresher tones and themes. One can see in the commentators an attempt to deal with this tension in the way they highlight certain usages of the poet. Commentator Rāmacandra Śeṣa, for example, seems to defend Śrīharṣa's choice to not add stock descriptions prescribed by the *alaṅkāraśastra* (introduction of the seasons, mountains, flower-plucking, water-sports, wine-drinking, amorous games, etc.) irrespective of their propriety in the text: "Even though there is no delineation of water sports, etc., it is not appropriate to say that this is not a *mahākāvya*."[327] Although one cannot firmly attribute such a point of view to the commentators, perhaps there is an awareness in their work that Śrīharṣa is at once formalist in his mechanically bringing to the fore aesthetic formulas that are slowly losing their vitality and, at

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[327] salilakrīḍāyā avarṇane'pi na mahākāvyatvabhaṅgaprasaṅgaḥ

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the same time, at the forefront of promoting a new, vital model of aesthetic consciousness. Jani seems to want to assign this phenomenon of the poem to historical causality in his citing N.C. Mehta's forward to the R.N. Bhatt's Hindi translation of the poem:

> Other defects such as elaboration, lack of proportion, excessive penchant for double entendre and erudition making his verses abstruse at several places, etc. are the defects, not of the poet, but of his age . . . [As N.C. Mehta expresses:] 'When the development of Sanskrit literature had passed its meridian and the poets were apt to lose themselves in wizardry of arts, in the display of their knowledge and their command of the language by frequent uses of puns and rhetoric.'[328]

One may see in the above passage a code that sees the *Naiṣadha* as excessive, inaccessible, and fundamentally self-absorbed. Unlike other critical perspectives, the voice here seems to want to absolve the poet of poetic misconduct and project the blame onto the age itself. It may well be, however, that the personal and intellectual extremity of the poet and his poem -- his tendency, for example, to be repetitive, obsessive, and impolite -- seeks to resound a complex historical and intellectual experience that a "sane voice" following the *alaṅkāra* code could not. Alaṅkāraśāstra itself is based on engaging with what makes language and literary usage effective. Texts like the *Naiṣadha*, which grow out of their collective womb and are not outside of its traditions, seem to throw open to question the constancy of the *śastra*'s literary verdicts for all periods of history and for all audiences.

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[328] Jani 273

Naiṣadha and the Charge of Erotic and Aesthetic Indecency:

As evident from the above examples of what Sanskrit commentators are comfortable in pointing out, the bulk of "faults" they see are either technical lapses in the poet's style or his usage. They, however, only rarely (and usually in a technical manner) make critical evaluations of the poet's larger choices of theme or image -- especially in matters of perceived indecency (*aślīltā*). The preponderance of the *Naiṣadha's* legacy on this front has resulted from the attention given to "indecency" by post-nineteenth century traditional and modern critics. It is certain that traditional Sanskrit commentators and modern critics often presuppose a discrepancy between the famous text they have received and the perceived demands of the readers or students for whom they are writing in a contemporary setting. With the passage of time and taste, something about the text seems to have become objectionable to them and the need to resolve the situation imperative. However, whereas the trend among traditional Sanskrit critics tends toward conservation of the text through rewriting its significance -- often, as is the case with the *Naiṣadha*, by attributing to it an allegorical intelligibility that supposedly discloses its "true" meaning or by situating the poem in some hagiographical context that involves the apotheosis of the poet and text in the hearts of later readers -- Indology has overwhelmingly treated *Naiṣadha* with a firm, repudiating hand. For example, the influential literary history of De and

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Dasgupta devote inordinately lengthy passages in service of stripping the

Naiṣadha of its long-held prestige among pre-modern Indian audiences:

> The only Mahākāvya which need detain us is the *Naiṣadhīyacarita* of
> Śrīharṣa, not so much for its intrinsic poetic merit as for the interesting
> evidence it affords of the type of enormously laboured metrical
> composition which was widely and enthusiastically favoured. The work is
> regarded as one of the five great Mahākāvyas in Sanskrit; it is undoubtedly
> the last masterpiece of industry and ingenuity that the Mahākāvya can
> show, but to class it with the masterpieces of Kālidāsa, Bhāravi and even
> Māgha is to betray an ignorance of the difference between poetry and its
> counterfeit . . . Without any avowed grammatical, rhetorical or
> lexicographical object, his diction is deliberately difficult, his fancy is
> abundant but often fantastic, and *feux d'artifice* of metaphor, simile,
> antithesis, and other tricks of expression are more brilliant than
> illuminating, They are not so much means of beautiful and limpid
> expression as of ingenious straining of words and ideas. Śrīharṣa's
> descriptive power, which has been so much praised, is astonishing in its
> profusion and cleverness; but his extreme partiality for romantic
> commonplaces and the fatiguing ornateness of his overworked diction
> make it phantasmagoric and devoid of visualization.[329]

Here, the two literary critics speak of the common notion that the *Naiṣadha*'s style

is "decadent" and more artful than artistic.[330] They begrudgingly admit its

popularity among "scholars of the traditional type" but stubbornly insist on its

"lack of poetic inspiration" and dismiss entire generations of readers as fools for

favoring the poem:

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[329] De 325

[330] G.C. Jhala summarizes the established position of post-nineteenth century, Western-educated critics: --"Not only chronologically but technically also, it deserves to be placed last in the traditional list because it marks the highwater mark of 'decadence' which gives primacy to art over inspiration in creative literature." (157).

[N]o sound-hearted, sound-minded reader will ever include him in the small class of great poets . . . Even if a modern critic has the inclination to share the enthusiasm of Śrīharṣa's admirers, the poet's impossible and incessant affectations rise up in witness against such an attitude. If the reputed Mahākāvya writers of the period deserve such measured praise, what shall be said of the legion of lesser authors who weakly imitate them? If in their own day they enjoyed some popularity, they did so because they supplied, not the right kind of poetry, but the kind which was readily favoured.[331]

When they refer to specific aspects of the poem, however, such as the head-to-toe

description of Damayantī in Nala's mind, their dislike becomes most revealing:

One whole canto (xvii) of more than a hundred stanzas impedes the progress of the narrative by a minute and frankly sensuous inventory of Damayantī's beauty of limbs, commencing from the hair of the head and ending with the toe-nails of her feet; but what is indicative of a singular lack of taste is that the description comes from Nala himself who views her from an invisible distance![332]

And again, De and Dasgupta's comments on the wedding reception of Damayantī,

along the lines of what Winternitz describes as a passage of "sultry erotics

bordering on obscenity"[333]:

[T]he poet does not hesitate to introduce vulgar innuendos in what is supposed to be witty repartee of a more or less cultured society. It is not wonder, therefore, that, judging by modern standards, an impatient Western critic should stigmatize the work as a perfect masterpiece of bad taste and bad style!

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[331] De. The opinions of scholars such as De have not been unanimously adopted. Buhler, for example, remarks: "To the purely native taste, the Naiṣadhīya appears now, and has appeared for many centuries, preferable to all the other mahākāvyas. Our śāstrīs now study it more frequently and praise it more highly than even Kālidāsa's works, and it has been commented on more frequently than any other poem." [JBBRAS, Vol. XI, 1875, p.282].

[332] De 234

[333] Winternitz 64

The prudishness of these critics so firmly entrenched in the desire to please the

"impatient Western critics" speak to the extent to which the literary tastes of early-

modern Sanskrit scholars have occasionally forced traditional arts into the service

of a particular moral tendency attached to the prevailing European tastes of the

time. In fact, Jani feels that De may have been reiterating the words of another

European scholar when purportedly offering his own reflections. Jani wonders out

loud about De's particular enmity toward *Naiṣadha*:

> As regards the final conclusion of Dr. De, he perhaps seems to reiterate the
> words of W. Yates, who after quoting a sentence, "This poet, with a degree
> of licentiousness, which is but too well accommodated to the taste of his
> countrymen, indulges in glowing descriptions of sensual love" from Mr.
> Colebrooke, remarks, 'This renders many parts of the poem disgusting to
> persons of refined taste or religious sentiments.' One wonders as to why
> Dr. De avoids glorious tribute to Śrīharṣa by the same critic, who,
> comparing Śrīharṣa with Latin poets, says -- 'glowing descriptions of the
> passions and particularly the passion of Love, he resembles Ovid; in the
> easy flow of his language he is Virgil's equal or perhaps superior; in the
> variety of his metres and moral reflections, he competes with Horace;
> while in pomp of expression, diversity of imagery and minuteness of
> delineation he far exceeds them all.' [quoted from 'Review of the
> *Naiṣadhacarita*,' Asiatic Researches, Vol. XX, pg. 324].[334]

Very little in Yates, Colebrooke, and De's response to the text reflects the

traditional Indian reader's point of view, at least not from the evidence available.

Sanskrit commentators, poetics theoreticians (*alaṅkāraśāstri*-s) and traditional

paṇḍits who taught or referenced *Naiṣadha* seem to have left no evidence of the

text's "distastefulness" from a moral point of view. And yet, a reactionary,

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[334] Jani 267

impertinent, and decidedly stifling assimilation of Sanskrit literature into patterns

of understanding not its own has become a significant technique in the

interpretation of Sanskrit texts, exemplified in full measure by the history of the

Naiṣadha's modern reception.

This reactionary brand of prudishness has left a striking imprint on the

modern translation history of the *Naiṣadha*. Perhaps if the *Naiṣadha* had been

translated into English in the nineteenth century, whole passages deemed indecent

might have been rendered into Latin, as was the custom with other Sanskrit texts.

As it stands, unlike the "translations" of Śrīharṣa's verses provided by traditional

commentators, modern translators into South Asian and European languages

choose in many instances to leave certain objectionable passages either partially

translated or to avoid translating them altogether. They instead forego their

responsibility to elucidate the meaning for the reader and instead stamp labels such

as "obscene" or "vulgar" or "indelicate" in place of translation. There are, for

example, more than a dozen examples of such refusals to translate in Professor

K.K. Handiqui's English translation of the poem and numerous more in the modern

Hindi versions. On the latter, A.S. Mishra writes about his own translation efforts:

> In some cases regarding sexual subjects, the verses in the original Sanskrit
> do not invite objection. Such is not the case with the Hindi translation,
> where it is not possible to hide the objectionable material. Therefore, some
> verses have not been provided here nor their intended meanings. The
> curious reader is directed to the original text with its commentaries.[335]

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[335] kām-viṣay ke ślokoṃ ko mūl saṃskṛt meṃ paḍne se aślīltā prāyaḥ dṛṣṭigocar nahīṃ hotī kiṃtu
unkā hindī rupāntar karne meṃ aślīltā ko chipānā sambhav nahīṃ. ataḥ unmeṃ se koī ślok na to

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Mishra's frankness about the differences inherent in what one accepts in Sanskrit
(as perhaps what English translators accepted in Latin) and cannot accept in Hindi
reveal the particular circumstances in which many Sanskrit texts have come down
to the non-Sanskrit reading public. When the translator does choose to render the
objectionable passage (usually something sexual or scatological) into the modern
language, he sometimes purposefully misleads the reader in order to avoid any
inappropriate reference. For example, in Nc 17.203, in translating the Sanskrit
word *bhaṇḍa,* Handiqui renders the marked item with the rather innocuous word
"hypocrite":

> Seeing in the Mahāvrata sacrifice the dalliance of a religious student and a
> courtesan, the fool concluded sacrificial rites to be a haphazard wild dance
> of hypocrites.[336]

While Apte offers "buffoon, jester, and mime" to explain the word *bhaṇḍa,* to
which Handiqui adds "hypocrite," the commentator Nārāyaṇa provides a detailed
and far more interesting definition:

> Just as *bhaṇḍa*-s expose their privates in front of a crowd, so too is this
> sacrifice similar to the activities of *bhaṇḍa*-s on account of its indecent
> nature in broad daylight in front of many people.[337]

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yahāṃ uddhṛt kiyā jātā hai aur na hī uskā hindī meṃ bhāvārth dene kā prayatna. jijñāsu pāṭhak
unheṃ bhāṣā-ṭīkā sahit mūl granth meṃ dekh leṃ.

[336] Handiqui's translation (265) of Nc 17.203: kratau mahāvrate paśyan brahmacārītvarīratam / jajñe
yajñakriyām ajñaḥ sa bhaṇḍākāṇḍatāṇḍavam //

[337] bhaṇḍā yathā bahujanasamakṣaṃ guhyādi prakāśayanti tathā divaiva bahujanasamakṣam
aślīlavyāpārakaraṇād yāgakarma bhaṇḍavyāpāratulyam iti . . . (Nārāyaṇa on 17.203)

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The word "hypocrite" seems not to convey what Nārāyaṇa sees here as a

suggestion of indecent public exposure, not unlike antics associated with the *hijra*

community in modern India. The word is obviously unclear as Mallinātha renders

it as someone who simply utters obscenities (*bhaṇḍānām aślīlabhāṣiṇām*).

There are several other instances, especially in the sixteenth canto, where

Śrīharṣa's flair for comic edginess (so far as Sanskrit *kāvya* is concerned) is on

display. A.N. Jani writes about the poet:

> His poem surpasses other poems as far as humor is concerned. . . [He] is
> tempermentally a buoyant person with an eye for the odd and the ludicrous,
> and a natural gift for both with and humor having their own ring and verve.

When Jani generally speaks of the "buoyant" Śrīharṣa's "eye for the off and the

ludicrous," he generally means the poet's satire on manners in the sixteenth canto.

Perhaps most maddening for rationalist critics, such as De and Dasgupta, is

Śrīharṣa's disconcerting tendency to treat a solemn theme in the spirit of

buffoonery and to uplift erotic impulses to lofty regions of consciousness. Śrīharṣa

seems to be constantly playing against the text -- treating what is serious and

formal as absurd, wild, and comic.

The *Naiṣadha*'s traditional commentators do not interpret with a mind to

free a poet, his works, or themselves from tradition. In fact, however awkwardly,

most are consciously trying to find a way to include the unfamiliar into their own

highly ordered sense of the world. Throughout their line-by-line commentary,

however, they do not take the text as anything other than what it is. In other

words, even if it makes them uncomfortable, they will grapple with it on terms

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with which they are comfortable. While not actively transforming their world through interpretation, they do not seem interested in reducing the poem to something or the other and then expressing their disappointment about it. The contemporary critical record of the *Naiṣadha* -- while also not interested in utilizing the act of interpretation as a vehicle toward addressing difficult historical questions about morality and aesthetics -- seems more engaged in a discontented wish to deconstruct the poem's legacy toward the end of fulfilling its own thesis that Śrīharṣa's was an age of literary and moral "decadence." More significantly, virtually no part of the exegetical record seems to see the poem itself as a creative mechanism for interpreting its own tradition.

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Irrelevant Episode, Cultural index, and Social satire: the Seventeenth Canto of the *Naiṣadha*

Although some elements of the *Naiṣadha*'s readership are rankled by

Śrīharṣa's crass humor in the sixteenth canto, his biting social satire of

conventional Vaidika notions of duty, righteousness, and religious practice in the

seventeenth canto has largely been ignored as a morally objectionable insertion by

prim traditionalists. Rather, critics like De have objected to it on aesthetic

grounds; that it has been "irrelevantly introduced" into the narrative and, therefore,

impedes the progress of the storytelling. While not objecting to its existence,

traditional commentators tend not to unpack the satiric significance of Śrīharṣa's

rather brutal criticism, outside of translating the verse details for the reader.

Instead, they seem to understand the episode as an opportunity for Śrīharṣa to

show his deep cultural erudition.

Were it only on account of the philosophical technicalities that makes the

Naiṣadha difficult for even highly educated readers to effortlessly appreciate,

perhaps it would not have acquired its reputation as a knotty text, summarized in

the traditional idiom as a "medicine for the learned" (*vidvadauṣadha*).[338] The

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[338] Jani 176: "On account of the preponderance of all these characteristics in the NC, it has been
rightly called a *śāstrakāvya* and the poet rightly deserves the title of *kavipaṇḍita*. It is in this sense
that the Sanskrit scholars describe the *Naiṣadha* as *vidvadauṣadham*, which is true in both the
senses. Viz. 'a bitter dose even to the learned' or a 'brain-tonic to the learned' as even a well-trained
scholar in Sanskrit finds his way difficult through the poem and when once acquainted with it, feels

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erudition (*vyutpatti*) of the poem extends beyond the traditional sources that

Rājaśekhara enumerates in his *kāvyamīmāṃsā*[339] to include topics from the various

technical texts on the arts and sciences,[340] exhaustive geographical and political

data,[341] a range of occupations and livelihoods,[342] social and economic realities of

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his height being raised to some extent." V.Narayana Rao informed me of a Sanskrit saying in Andhra Pradesh that links the *Kāśī-khaṇḍa* of the *Skandhapurāṇa* and the *Naiṣadha*: "The Kāśikhaṇḍa is an iron ball and the *Naiṣadha* is medicine for the learned" (*kāśikhaṇḍam ayaḥ piṇḍam / naiṣadham vidvad-auṣadham*).

[339] According to chapter 8 of the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, the twelve recognized sources of poetry (*kāvyārthānāṃ dvādaśa yonayaḥ*) include Vedic literature (*śruti*), traditional non-scriptural legal texts (*smṛti*), historical accounts (*itihāsa*), ancient lore (*purāṇa*), logic (*pramāṇavidyā*), astrology (*samayavidyā*), three different kinds of political texts (*rājasiddhāntatrayī*), knowledge of common practices (*loka*), literary compositions (*viracanā*), and miscellany of different kinds (*prakīrṇaka*).

[340] Including: medicine (*āyurveda*), military science (*dhanurveda*), law (*dharmaśāstra/smṛti*), political science (*arthaśāstra/nītiśāstra*), erotics (*kāmaśāstra*), mystico-ritual science (*tantraśāstra*), musical science (*saṅgītaśāstra*), mathematics (*gaṇitaśāstra*), science of horses (*aśvaśāstra*), science of jewels (*ratnaśāstra*), lexicons (*kośa*), science of poetics and rhetoric (*alaṃkāraśāstra*), dramaturgy (*nāṭyaśāstra*). Also, the ancillary Vedic sciences (*vedāṅga*): phonetics (*śikṣā*); etymology (*nirukta*); prosody (*chandas*); grammar (*vyākaraṇa*); astronomy (*jyotiṣa*); astrology (*mauhūrtikavidyā*), palmistry (*sāmudrikaśāstra*); domestic rituals (*kalpa*).

[341] Information, for example, on rivers, mountains, regional kingdoms, position of the king and his feudatories, construction of public works, espionage.

[342] References are made to the occupational work of weavers, painters, musicians, architects, craftsmen, potters, gardeners, usurers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, oil sellers, dancers, sailors, maids, magicians, snake charmers, carpenters, cooks, pearl cutters, bards, barbers, shell cutters, millers, hunters, wrestlers, fruit pickers, cloth dyers, sweepers, clowns, bankers, panegyrists, astrologers, arrow makers, judges, washermen, and jesters (known as *bhaṇḍas*, who make a living, as Jani explains, "by demonstration of their organ and such other indecent means").

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the twelfth-century,[343] and popular beliefs and cultural practices of the time.[344] In

the seventeenth canto, the *Naiṣadha* truly earns its reputation as a unique

encyclopedia of the textbook knowledge and social realities current in Śrīharṣa's

time. Here, the poet introduces an episode that pits a villainous Kali --

symbolizing a skeptical and hyper-worldly attitude of the materialist (*cārvāka*) --

against the four primary Vedic deities, who attempt a robust refutation of Kali's

scathing critique of the various social, ethical, metaphysical, and broadly cultural

formulations idealized in traditional texts and practiced in ordinary life. Thus,

Śrīharṣa deals with such topics as the consistency and validity of scripture, caste

purity, practical understandings of karma, the need for ritual, ideas of heaven and

rebirth, the case for hedonism, and adultery. The seventeenth canto also tackles

some of the most controversial statements and practices found in the traditional

culture, including the Aśvamedha sacrificial ritual, referred to in Nc 17.204.[345]

From the traditional angle of Sanskrit commentary, this canto has become famous

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[343] Examples include: marriage preparations and rites, caste practices, the joint family, fashion,
clothing, and decorations; economic practices such as coining; criminal activities such as fraud and
money counterfeiting; practical elements of jurisprudence; diverse folk customs.

[344] Some of these include: methods of warding off planetary effects, the application of vermillion
powder in the part of the hair, the notion that a girl should resemble her father, astronomical
reasons why certain activities should be avoided on certain dates, belief in omens, mystical
association in the uttering of names, popular ideas about dreams, reincarnation, superstitions,
ghosts, curses, black magic, popular gestures of approval and disapproval, sports, word jokes,
vulgar jokes, pranks, types of food and drinks enjoyed.

[345] Handiqui refuses to translate this verse on grounds of "indecency." (265)

primarily for its creative introduction of virtually every significant philosophical

premise of the Sanskrit tradition.

Pointed comments made by commentators at the end of their commentaries

on the seventeenth canto suggest the substantial amount of academic knowledge

required for the job. For example, Vidyādhara writes:

> With this canto, king of poets Śrīharṣa manifest his own omniscience.
> Hence, only someone else of his ilk can reach the other shore of this canto's
> ocean of meanings. He must know the eight texts on grammar, logic,
> literature, polity, Veda, *purāṇa* and also other *śāstra*-s. A learned
> researcher may be able to suitably comment on it but I have commented on
> it using my own native intelligence. The canto should be properly
> understood by using a special commentary prepared by erudite
> intellectuals.[346]

In a similar vein, the Jain commentator Jinarāja also feels compelled to add a

comment on the difficulty of this canto for a commentator:

> My work has been prepared with the assistance of many researchers who
> are aware of the numerous recent (philosophical) texts connected to the
> poem *Naiṣadhīya*. These researchers, who are expounders of the Jain point
> of view, are learned men in all the various *śāstra*-s, including literature, the
> dictionaries, poetics, metrics, grammar, logic, etc.[347]

Again, in a slightly different tone and context, Śrīdhara also flashes his pride in

being able to comment on such a canto:

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[346] anena sargena śrīharṣakavirājenātmasarvajñatābhivyañjitā itas tatsadṛśenānyenāpyasya
sargasyārtharatnākarasya pāraṃ prāptuṃ śakyate / aṣṭau vyākaraṇāni tarkanivahaḥ sāhityasāro
nayo vedārthāvagatiḥ purāṇapaṭhitir yasyānyaśāstrāṇy api. nityaṃ syuḥ
sphuritārthadīpavihatājñānāndhakārāṇy asau vyākhyātuṃ prabhavaty amuṃ suviṣamaṃ prāyaḥ
sudhīḥ kovidaḥ.. mayā tu nijamaty anusāreṇāyaṃ sargo vyākhyāto vicakṣaṇaiḥ viśeṣavyākhyayā
bodhavyaḥ //

[347] evamvidhāḥ jinamatonnatikārakāḥ
samastatarkavyākaraṇcchando'laṅkārakośakāvyādivividhaśāstrapāriṇo naiṣadhīyakāvyasambandhī
jinarājivṛttyādyanekanavīnagranthavidhāyakāḥ /

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In connection with Śrīmarkibhaṭṭā, Paṇḍit Vidyāśrīdhara is victorious, he who is an oceanic repository (of knowledge in) poetry, Vedānta, logic, smṛti, metrics, poetics, drama, purāṇa, Veda, and Śaiva doctrine, a sibling of (knowledge of) the medical, yogic, economic, political, mystical, ritual, and astrological sciences.[348]

Although not alone in his critical posture, De finds this canto to be "irrelevantly introduced," a superfluous demonstration of the poet's philosophical interests. While the Sanskrit commentators generally approach this canto with a sort of "research journal" approach, seeing it as a document to be dealt with in terms of its academic ideas, one may view this ostensibly odd episode in the poem as a fluid intersection of the philosophical realms of ancient India with the poet's own narrative and social vision. For example, it may be insightful to receive this canto in the tradition of satire that, as literary critic Northrop Frye observes, sees social diseases not as evil but "diseases of the intellect, a maddened pedantry":

> The Menippean satirist, dealing with intellectual themes and attitudes, shows his exuberance in intellectual ways, by piling up an enormous mass of erudition about his theme or in overwhelming his pedantic targets with an avalanche of their own jargon.[349]

Though a respected philosopher himself, Śrīharṣa constantly ridicules philosophers and pedantic social critics in this canto -- a captious rhetorical attitude (vitaṇḍa) that relies on the logical process of reductio ad absurdum, which he also incidentally adopts in his Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya. There is a sense that Śrīharṣa

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[348] vedavyākaraṇāśrayaḥ
sukavitāvedāntatarkasmṛticchando'laṃkṛtikāvyanāṭakapurāṇāmnāyaśaivāṃbudhiḥ /
jyotistantrasumantranītibharataśrīyogavaidyāṃgabhūḥ vidyāśrīdharapaṇḍito vijayate
śrīmarkibhaṭṭānvaye //

[349] Frye 230

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is making his own commentators aware of their own folly. Indeed, in many verses of this canto, commentators seem uncomfortable in providing more than the requisite syntactical and semantic information for their readers. One may again cite Frye's summary of the satirical spirit, which one rarely sees in the lofty *mahākāvya* genre:

> The satiric attitude is neither philosophical nor anti-philosophical, but an expression of the hypothetical form of art. Satire on ideas is only the special kind of art that defends its own creative detachment . . . Satire on systems of reasoning, especially on the social effects of such systems, is art's first line of defense against all such invasions.[350]

In this vein, Śrīharṣa's move to upset all of the conventions of the traditional Nala-Damayantī narrative in terms of its plot, context, and especially its emotional tenor naturally leads to some level of confusion among traditional and modern commentators. The poet's sudden turn away from the familiar aesthetic considerations of a deeply reverenced -- and emotionally and morally complicated -- narrative of tragic romance into a more joyful romance -- with equally deep infusions of muddled, subversive, and often prickly commentary on ethics and apparently outmoded social mores -- has drawn considerable comment from traditional and modern audiences of the poem.

It is interesting that this canto has been largely praised or criticized on aesthetic grounds -- and not for the social or moral topics it concerns itself with -- by traditional and modern scholars. One exception (referred to earlier in this section) has been the famous toes-to-head description of Damayantī from the point

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[350] Frye 231

of view of Nala in the seventh canto. Although part of a tradition of voyeurism

established much earlier in Sanskrit literature, this passage's moral content has

come under scrutiny by critics such as De and Dasgupta. More troublesome for

them than its obscenity, however, is the fact that it "impedes the progress of the

narrative." Their true concern seems to rest with moral impropriety but they couch

their criticism in aesthetic terms. When Jani comes to Śrīharṣa's defense, he

counters the charge of the passage's moral offensiveness by re-imagining its

aesthetic "failing" in terms that actually justifies its existence by envisioning a

moral context altogether different than the one De and Dasgupta are operating

under:

> The next charge viz., the lack of taste in Damayantī's description, is also
> unbecoming. Though impeding the progress of the narration, it, on the one
> hand, fulfils the characteristic of the mahākāvya, while, on the other, it
> enhances the character of Nala, who though in the presence of a
> sarvāṅgasundarī like Damayantī, as observed and described by him, does
> not flinch even an inch from his task of a messenger of gods.[351]

Notice that here Jani sees Nala's engagement (or non-engagement) with his visual

object in the tradition of another famous voyeuristic event from the *Rāmāyaṇa*,

namely Hanumān's colorful description of Rāvaṇa's harem. Just as Hanumān's

character is unsullied by the experience, so too Nala's remains pure, Jani seems to

suggest. It is revealing that Jani, in this passage, chooses to Sanskritically express

Damayantī's presence as a sexual being (*sarvāṅgasundarī*) rather than using an

English equivalent. Regardless of his apologetic statements, he inevitably ends

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[351] Jani 272

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with an obligatory distancing from the act of voyeurism on ostensibly moral grounds found in a past no longer accepted as correct:

> Regarding the obscenity, we can say only this much that it reflects only the age, the true picture of which is found in our poem and one should not make a capital out of it to belittle the greatness of the poet.[352]

The ambivalence expressed by Jani in these statements reflects a crucial psychic reality that underlies the act of interpretation for some modern critics of the *Naiṣadha* (and perhaps of Sanskrit literature): on the one hand, they are bound to take moral issue with some of the poem's sensual or bawdy passages that they find not in line with contemporary attitudes; on the other hand, they are drawn to defend the literary tradition. Rather than directly take on the issues the poem raises, a common approach seems to be to deflect the moral discourse onto an aesthetic one.

A similar phenomenon occurs with the traditional and modern approach taken to the seventeenth canto. It seems that both the traditional and modern critic is perplexed by its inclusion in the narrative. Typically, for the Sanskrit commentator, it is praised for exercising the intellect and drawing attention to the abstruse elements of traditionalist education. None of the available commentaries, however, seriously engage the question of why the poet might have included this section or how it might reflect on the other elements of the poem. For the few contemporary opinions on this canto, it appears that the section's apparent

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[352] Jāni 272

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irrelevance to the main plot becomes the central issue. Here, too, the urge is to deflect the primary question for exploration: why is the poet adding this very long canto --completely out of character for the *mahākāvya* genre -- to his otherwise carefully constructed poem? To dismiss the poet's choice as simply a mark of an age where poets desire to demonstrate intellectual powers seems rather weak, although not wholly different from the traditionalist view that in this canto Śrīharṣa has shown himself to be, as Vidyādhara glows, "omniscient."

To simply understand the canto as a superficial aesthetic choice -- one that succeeds for many Sanskrit commentators and fails for critics like De and Dasgupta -- seems to miss the significance. Aesthetic, narrative, and moral concerns cannot be mutually exclusive components of the poet's act. Similarly, the *Naiṣadha*'s audience need not harbor a distinction between their approaches to the poem: either it is aesthetically satisfying or morally satisfying. The whole interpretive approach seems out of touch with the modes in which a reader experiences the passages. Perhaps one may simply understand that they either satisfy or they fail to satisfy the reader's consciousness – as a composite entity that subsumes the moral and the aesthetic. At least in these few passages, including the entire eighteenth canto which draws from the *kāmaśastra*, the *Naiṣadha*'s "mixed signals" for traditional and modern interpreters has become part of its critical discourse.

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CHAPTER FOUR:
COMMENTARY AND THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF TEXT AND AUTHOR

I. Naiṣadha *in Context: Semantic Multiplicity, Esoteric Readings, and Constructions of Textual and Authorial Biography*

A study of commentaries on Sanskrit literature -- as perhaps of any literature --invariably presents an intriguing nexus between conscious acts of interpretation and the internal clues in the text that guide interpretation or serve as a sort of an auto-commentary on itself. In other words, in reflecting on any given piece of exegesis, one may wonder whether derived meanings reflect prefigured approaches to the text or, as many commentators would probably argue, are already existent in the text and thus manifest on their own. Perhaps more than most works of Sanskrit literature, the *Naiṣadha* and its commentaries offer a ripe field for studying this phenomenon. The self-conscious nature of the poem seems, on the one hand, to direct its own exegesis by overtly stating or slyly suggesting ways that one should approach its reading; on the other hand, while the poem's commentators generally seem to fashion themselves as merely mediums for conveying what is already in the text, one is often tempted to see them as engaged in a sort of tussle with the poet to not only make his "literal" meanings apparent but also to add their own occasionally creative interpretations. One may legitimately ask: does the text invite the responses it receives, do the commentators conceive responses unwarranted or under-warranted from the text, or does text and commentary share some special, tacit relationship? To begin to answer any of

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these questions, of course, requires more information: about the text, about the commentators, or about the hermeneutic process that connects text and commentary.

One of the arguments of this thesis (argued earlier) has been that the poem became a vibrant site of intellectual expression because of its role in an institutionalized structure of pedagogical professionalism that encouraged and promoted a culture of one-upmanship and demonstration of one's scholastic maturity. Commentaries on *Naiṣadha* proliferated, by this logic, on account of their being a vehicle for professional distinction. This argument is, in part, borne out in some of the prefatory comments made by the commentators themselves. Sometimes, as is the case with a commentator like Mallinātha, for instance, these "professional" commentaries reflect a teacher's attempt to ground the student in a rigorous philological practice that seeks to derive clear significance from unproblematic "factual" evidence supposedly inherent in the "accepted" meanings of words in context. Mallinātha encourages his reader to follow problematic language details, in the process illuminating points of grammar, lexicon, and trope. The playfulness of textual production that leads to an expression of multiple meanings does not strike a chord with this approach. This philological approach reads a text disembodied from its reader or interpretive communities. Others encourage digging just deep enough to pull out superficially buried gems; Cāṇḍupaṇḍita, for example, seeks primarily to unearth the philosophical references in the *Naiṣadha*. These commentaries demonstrate that the massive production of

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commentaries on *mahākāvya* from a very early period probably had a lot to do with the pedagogical role of *mahākāvya* in traditional Sanskrit education.

In the case of the *Naiṣadha* especially, however, there exist examples of commentary that, while not wholly counter-philological, perform interpretive operations to "rewrite" the text in ways that open up the discourse of the text to more and complex significance. Even though they take a largely philological/text-critical approach, commentaries like Nārāyaṇa's and Śrīdhara's, for example, seem not to be so interested in controlling the unmanageable explosion of semantic significance (as Mallinātha) but rather seek to bring out more than one meaning. They look for the less visible and less apparent -- what critics would call far-fetched or overly clever -- readings that have their own theoretical and conceptual frameworks centered on expanding the poet's "genius." These non-literal readings share several characteristics. While balancing the need for some kind of interpretive closure, they do not regard the text as merely linguistic codes that need to be explained and elaborated upon (*glossa*) but rather see the text as inviting diverse responses. They work in a dialogic context that often renegotiates the "obvious," "intended," or "implied" readings according to a given readers' needs. If not providing original readings, they at least reflect the range of ideas that might have been current at the time. There is a sense in Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdhara, for example, of what Jauss has described as the aesthetic taste of one reading community inheriting and transforming the reception of a previous one. Two readings seem to be at work simultaneously, a superficial one that focuses on

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explanation and then a kind of reconstructive reading that is based in some sort of

critical choice aimed at reconfiguring the significance of the reading according to

some other frame or reference or theoretical approach.

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Semantic Multiplicity: Revisiting Verse 1.1 through the commentaries of Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdhara

In describing the scholastic practices of traditional hermeneutics (cross-culturally), Paul Griffiths explains that, for most traditional readers, the text is "a treasure-house, an ocean, a mine":

> [T]he deeper religious readers dig, the more ardently they fish, the more single-mindedly they seek gold, the greater will be their reward. The basic metaphors here are those of discovery, uncovering, retrieval, opening up: religious readers read what is there to be read, and what is there to be read always precedes, exceeds, and in the end supersedes its readers. There can, according to these metaphors, be no final act of reading in which everything is uncovered, in which the mine of gold has yielded all its treasure or the fish pool has been emptied of fish. Reading, for religious readers, ends only with death, and perhaps not then: it is a continuous, ever-repeated act.[353]

Important points about the nature of the traditional reading practices are raised in this passage and can perhaps fruitfully be applied to our study of Sanskrit literary commentaries. First, and this is especially true of the *Naiṣadha*, often one finds in commentaries on Sanskrit literature an eclectic approach that so-called "religious readers" had long before adopted in commentaries on *śastra* or philosophy. These approaches read their texts as "mines" or "oceans" of semantic possibility. Each new commentary seeks to draw or attribute ever more potency to their text by either elaborating on a previously existent model or pioneering a new one. Thus, we have already seen the way in which Vidyādhara and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita exploited

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[353] Griffiths 41

the text's capacity to yield insight into poetics and philosophical discourse respectively. Both of these early commentators made each respective approach a cornerstone of their interpretive acts. Neither of them, however, (nor the others that follow) appears interested in arguing for a singular way of reading a given verse. They approach interpretation not as a search for *a correct* meaning, nor as simply a recounting of alternative meanings in order to highlight a correct meaning, but rather as a kind of pleasure that can be "ever-repeated."

It seems that neither are traditional commentators concerned with what Griffiths sees as the modern goal of education of "maximizing the individual's knowledge of alternatives and capacity to choose among them." (68). If these are not the underlying principles that govern the hermeneutic desire for semantic multiplicity, then to what can we attribute this feature? One possibility perhaps lies in a sort of hermeneutic aesthetic that is peculiar to the traditional Sanskrit exegete, as Robert Goldman observes:

> For a number of reasons, some having to do with the language itself, some having to do with specific aspects of the intellectual history of India, and some having to do with exogenous constructions of the Indian tradition, Sanskrit texts and terms frequently lend themselves to an extraordinary variety of readings. In many cases such multiple reading may be unrelated to one another and even mutually contradictory; and yet, in specific contexts, highly pronounced degrees of polysemy are clearly intrinsic to an author's and/or commentator's intention. Then too, modern scholars of South Asian society and culture -- in the East and in the West -- often "mine" the Sanskrit lexicon for sets of terms and conceptual categories that, they argue, inform and even define the ways in which South Asians regard themselves, each other, their environment, and the universe.[354]

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[354] Goldman ("Translating Texts") 94

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The "polysemy" that the Sanskrit language may encourage by its very structure

seems to have heavily influenced a commentarial consciousness that -- apparently

for a type of intellectual pleasure -- seeks to bypass the easy reading or break up

words and analyze compounds in such a way as to milk or "mine" ever more subtle

meanings that are either desired or found to be charming.[355] Another tactic is to

consult many different kinds of lexicons (*kośa*) to bring out semantic usages that

fit the commentator's agenda. The record bears out that several commentators of

Naiṣadha, for example, themselves composed original lexicographical works to

bring out subtle meanings of even single consonants or phonemes. For example,

the seventeenth century *Naiṣadha* commentator Bharatasena (or Bharata Mallika)

composed "A collection of meanings drawn from a single letter"

(*Ekavarṇārthsaṃgraha*) and "A collection of suggestive (meanings) of words that

take two forms" (*Dvirūpadhvanisaṃgraha*).[356] The poet Śrīharṣa himself is said to

have composed a similar set of (now lost) works: "The lexicon of homonyms"

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[355] In their Introduction to the English translation of the Sundarakāṇḍa, Robert and Sally Goldman
elaborate upon a recurring feature of Sanskrit commentaries on the Rāmāyaṇa that seek to expand
the semantic significance of a given passage: "Sometimes the commentaries are dazzling in their
displays of cultural knowledge and scholastic ingenuity. Thus, [Satyatīrtha] continually provides
clever, if forced, methods of breaking up words to provide levels of possible interpretation
overlooked by the others while in one particularly stunning piece of exegetic virtuosity, [Ātreta
Ahobala] provides no fewer than nine different and actually interesting alternative explanations of
Sītā's gesture of placing a straw on the ground between herself and Rāvaṇa before she speaks to
him." (93)
[356] Jani 34-35

(*Dvirūpakośa*), "A guide to breaking up words" (*Śabdabhedanirdeśa*), and "A collection of meanings derived from pun" (*Śleṣārthapadasaṃgraha*). It is unclear if all of these are, in fact, not the same work or attributable to Śrīharṣa at all.[357] Regardless, the fact of their being directly or indirectly attributed to him by others reflects the close connection between the literary history of *Naiṣadha* and the outstanding hermeneutic feature of semantic multiplicity.

We need only look at the way the first verse of the poem has been dealt with by commentators Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdhara to understand the significance *Naiṣadha* acquired in terms of being a storehouse of potential meanings. Nārāyaṇa, whose commentary has apparently been the most widely read and used by students and teachers, systematically deconstructs 1.1:

> With the intention to banish obstacles to the completion of the text by indicating the specific subject matter in the form of Nala, the repeating of whose name is itself auspicious, (the poet) says: **That Nala was** (*sa nala āsīt*). . . Even the recalling of (noble personages such as) Pṛthu becomes the cause for attaining all desired ends -- what to say of singing their praises? What was special about this Nala? He was **a mass** (*rāśi*) **of radiance** (*mahasām*) [=a seat of glorious valor (*pratāpānām āśraya*)].
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> Or else, he was, as it were, a radiant sun [(*mahasām=tejasām*) (*rāśi=surya*)]. (The figure of speech here) is a simile (*upamā*) or an imagined identification with a superior item (*utprekṣā*), where the common characteristic or a word expressive of identification, such as "like" (*iva*) has been dropped (*lupta*). According to this (interpretation), the suggestive meaning is that he (Nala) *is* the possessor of brilliance, like the Sun, and none other. Who is he? **He is one whose** collection of (*goṣṭi*) **stories** (*yasya kathāḥ*) [=which relate to the protection of beings (*prajāpālanarūpāḥ*)] **the learned ones** (*budhāḥ*) [=(*sumatayaḥ*)] **have drunk in** (*nipīya*) [=have respectfully listened to (*sādaraṃ śrutvā*)] **in such a way** (*tathā*) **that they do not regard even nectar** (*sudhām api*)

[357] See Jani 117-120

[=(*amṛtam api*)] (as highly). Just as nectar was previously the respected objective of things such Vedic sacrifices, in such a way hearing of Nala stories subsequently (held that position). The inner meaning is that no, actually, Nala's stories were superior to them (Vedic sacrifices, etc.). The reading "story" (*kathām*) (for "stories" [*kathāḥ*]) is okay. Another meaning is that their regard for nectar (*sudhā*) (was greater) than that for a sweet thing (*madhuradravyam*) such as sugar (*śarkaraḥ*). According to this (interpretation), the propriety of Damayantī's love for Nala is connected with the relinquishing of sensual desires.[358]

Nārāyaṇa establishes that the verse is about Nala. He then gives a series of explanations of the epithet ascribed to him (that he was "a mass of radiance"), describing the potential logical processes behind the poet's figurative usage. He then goes on to relate who was enjoying Nala's stories in such a way that they shunned even "nectar" (*sudhā*), detailing how one may associate stories with nectar. The rather striking conclusion of this passage demonstrates the ways in which a creative Sanskrit commentator can link different realms of experience in accordance with the structure of the text's language; here, by associating "nectar" with the fruit of Vedic sacrifices and final release from *saṃsāra*, Nārāyaṇa associates the effect of nectar on "the learned ones" (*budhāḥ*) with the "relinquishing of sensual desires," a pre-requisite for attaining *mokṣa* for the Vedāntin.

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[358] atra puṇyaślokanalarūpaviśiṣṭavastunirdeśena nirvighnagranthasamāptir ity abhiprāyeṇāha -- sa nala āsīt iti. pṛthvādīnāṃ smaraṇam api sakalābhiṣṭahetuḥ kiṃ punaḥ kīrtanam iti. kiṃ viśiṣṭo nalaḥ? mahasāṃ rāśiḥ pratāpānāmāśrayaḥ. yadvā -- mahasāṃ tejasāṃ rāśiḥ sūrya iva sthitaḥ. luptopamā luptotprekṣā vā. etena sa eva tejasvī sūryavat nānya iti vyaṅgyam. sa kaḥ? budhāḥ sumatayo yasya prajāpālanarūpāḥ kathā goṣṭīr nipīya sādaraṃ śrutvā sudhām apy amṛtam api tathā nādriyante. yathā pūrvam amṛte yāgādisādhye sādārā āsaṃs tathā nalakathāśravaṇānantaraṃ neti tato'pyadhikā nalakatheti bhāvaḥ. 'kathām' iti pāṭhaḥ sādhīyān. śarkarādimadhuradravyād api sudhāyām ādara ity apare'rthaḥ. etena indrādīnāṃ tyāgena nale damayantyanurāgasyaucitī yuktā.

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Unsatisfied with leaving the reader with only that interpretation , he examines who else might be enjoying Nala's stories by skillfully redistributing the semantic weight of the relevant term *kṣitirakṣiṇa* (which in this case would either carry the genitive meaning "of the protector of the earth" [Nala] or the multiple possibilities of its plural nominative "protectors of the earth" [gods, learned ones, kings, divine serpents]. Accordingly, Nārāyaṇa then distributes the meaning of "nectar" in each of their contexts:

> Or else, on account of producing rain, etc., **the protectors of earth**
> (*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*) [=gods (*budhāḥ*)=(*devāḥ*)] **having heard whose stories**
> (*yat kathām ākarṇya*), **protect** (*rakṣati*) [=*pāti*] **the captivating beauty**
> (*sudhā*) [(*suṣṭhu dhāma*=(*manohāraṃ kāntim*)], **no longer regarding**
> **water** (*sudhā*) [=(*āpaḥ*)] **or the moon** (*sudhā*) [=(*candraḥ*)] **in the way**
> **(they now) regard Nala's stories.**
>
> Or else, **the learned ones** (*budhāḥ*)=(jñātāraḥ)] **or other kings**
> [(*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*)=(*anye rājānaḥ*)] **do not regard (as highly) even**
> **immortality** (*amṛtam api*) **(which comes from performing) sacrifices**
> **and the like** [*yajñādinā*].
>
> Or else, **the divine serpents** (Śeṣa, Takṣaka, etc.) [they who protect
> the earth (*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*) with the circular orbs of their hoods
> [(*phaṇāmaṇḍaladhāraṇādinā kṣitiṃ rakṣanti*)=(*śeṣatakṣakādayaḥ*)
> =(*nāgāḥ*)], **disregard even nectar** (*sudhā*) [=(*amṛtam*)], said to be the food
> of serpents (*sudhā bhujagabhojana*) offered to them by Indra for the sake
> of protection, because the gods, who are ??? undertake the protection of the
> earth through fellowship with the cosmic serpent Śeṣa. According to these
> three interpretations, the fact that Nala's fame is spread among the three
> worlds is made clear.[359]

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[359] yadvā -- vṛṣṭyādinā kṣitirakṣiṇo budhā devā yat kathām ākarṇya suṣṭhu dhāma manoharāṃ
kāntiṃ pāti rakṣatīti sudhām apāścandras tasmin nalakathāvat pūrvavad vā nādriyante. yadvā --
budhā jñātāraḥ kṣitirakṣiṇo 'nye rājāno yajñādinā'mṛtam api nādriyante iti. yadvā --
phaṇāmaṇḍaladhāraṇādinā kṣitiṃ rakṣanti te kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ śeṣatakṣakādayo nāgāḥ 'sudhā
bhujagabhojanam' ity abhidhānāt svīyaṃ bhojanam amṛtam apīndreṇa rakṣaṇārtham arpitam
amṛtaṃ nādriyante. yato budhās tāratamyavijñātāraḥ kṣitirakṣitvaṃ takṣakādiṣu śeṣasāhacaryād
upacaryate. etena vyākhyānatrayeṇa nalakīrter
lokatrayavyāpitvaṃ dyotyate.

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Or, *kṣitirakṣiṇa* can be broken into two words, thus yielding an alternate meaning:

> Or else, *kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ* (yields) two words here: *kṣitiḥ* and *akṣiṇaḥ*. The
> dwelling-place of the representative of the debased age (*kali*) [=(*akṣī*)] is
> the gambling dice (*akṣas*) which are made from the *vibhītaka* tree. **Having
> drunk in the stories** of **that** steadfast **man** (*yasya sthitasya puruṣasya*)
> **who brings about the destruction** (*kṣitiḥ*) [=(*nāśaḥ*)] **of Kali** (*akṣinaḥ*)
> [=(*kaleḥ*)]. The verbal root is *kṣi* in the sense of "destruction" (*kṣaye*). As
> it is said (in the *MhB* 2.79.11): "Singing the fame of Karkoṭaka the snake,
> King Rtuparṇa, and of Nala with Damayantī (effects) the destruction of
> Kali." **In such a way** (*tathā*), **having drunk in whose stories, the learned
> do not regard** (as highly) **even nectar.** The word "*tathā*" ("in such a
> way") is to be interpreted in the sense of joining two independent things
> together (*samuccayārtha*). Or else, the dice (*akṣāḥ*) [(=*pāśāḥ*)]
> Surprisingly, even in this form (his) kingliness (is manifested). Here also
> the word "*tathā*" ("in such a way") is to be interpreted in the sense of
> joining two independent things together (*samuccayārtha*).[360]

With the major semantic components of the verse now delineated, Nārāyaṇa

attaches the appropriate significance of each modifier with its correspondent

modificand. In detecting a reference to the destruction (*kṣitiḥ*) of the dice

(*akṣinaḥ*), Nārāyaṇa cleverly alludes to one of the most enduring associations of

the telling of Nala's story, made famous by the oft-cited verse from the

Mahābhārata:

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[360] yadvā -- 'kṣitiḥ, akṣinaḥ' iti padadvayam. akṣo vibhītako nivāso 'syāstītyakṣī kaliḥ. yasya kathā
nipīya sthitasya puruṣasyākṣinaḥ kaleḥ kṣitir nāśo bhavati. 'kṣi kṣaye' iti dhātu. tathā coktam --
'karkoṭakasya nāgasya damayantyā nalasya ca. ṛtuparṇasya rājarṣeḥ kīrtanaṃ kalināśanam..' (MB,
VanaParvan 79.11) iti tathā yasya kathā nipīya budhāḥ sudhām api nādriyante iti. 'tathā' śabdaḥ
samuccayārtho vyākhyeyaḥ. yadvā -- akṣāḥ pāśāste krīḍārtham yasya vidyante so'kṣī, tasya
dyutavyasanino 'pi nalasya kṣitiḥ pṛthivī, rājyam ity arthaḥ. evaṃvidhasyāpi bhūpatitvam ity
āścaryam. 'tathā' śabdo 'trāpi samuccayārthaḥ.

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Singing the fame of Karkoṭaka the snake, King Ṛtuparṇa, and of Nala with Damayantī (effects) the destruction of Kali.[361]

The frequent citation above that the act of repeating the Nala episode has the effect of nullifying the evil effects of this debased Kali age is reiterated in slightly different terms by another traditional verse:

Auspicious is Nala, auspicious is Yuddhiṣṭhira, auspicious is Sītā, auspicious is Kṛṣṇa.[362]

Jani suggests that the tradition inaugurated in the *Mahābhārata* may have some reason for Śrīharṣa's choice of this theme or, depending on one's view, for certain audiences' particular emphasis in reading the *Naiṣadha*: "The reason for its popularity lies possibly in a tradition which has accorded to it a religious sanctity by declaring that its recitation destroys sin and ill-luck,"[363] while Krishnamachariar adds that "the story is very popular in India and there is not a household where its narration does not serve as a real solace in many a grievous calamity."[364]

Nārāyaṇa then introduces the Sun as yet another referent in the verse:

Since he is of such quality, therefore, **he is one whose circle of fame (*kīrtimaṇḍalaḥ*) [(*yaśomaṇḍalaḥ*)] acts like or takes the form of a white umbrella (*sitacchatram*) [=(*śvetātapatram*)]**, a circle of fame that is

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[361] karkoṭakasya nāgasya damayantyā nalasya ca / ṛtuparṇasya rājarṣeḥ kīrtanaṃ kalināśanam // (*MhB* 2.79.11)

[362] puṇyaśloko nalo raja puṇyaśloko yudhiṣṭhiraḥ // puṇyaśloko ca vaidehī puṇyaśloko janārdanaḥ //

[363] Jani 48

[364] Krishnamachariar 980

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capable of pervading the three worlds. Again, what was special about him? **He was shining with numerous festivities** (*mahojjvalaḥ*) [=(*mahair utsavair ujjvalo dīpyamānaḥ*); this (qualification demonstrates) his energetic nature. Or, that he is one **who possesses the sentiment of love** (*ujjvalaḥ*) [=(*śṛṅgāraḥ*)] **in great measure** (*mahān*) [=attains the supreme limit (*paramakāṣṭhāpannaḥ*)]. Or else, **he shines** (*jvalati*) **by virtue of his brilliance** (*mahasā*) [=(*tejasā*)=glorious valor (*pratāpena*)].

Applied to the sun also (it means that): **having drunk in the stories of the Sun** (Lord Surya), **who is a protector of beings** by virtue of his providing rain (as it is explained in the scripture, "From the sun comes rain."), **the learned do not regard as highly even nectar**, whose domain is the moon, because of its inadequacy. What kind of Sun? **One whose orb** (*maṇḍalam*) **forms a white parasol** (*śvetātapatram*) **on account of its fame** (*kīrtiyuktam*), on account of the singing of its praises, or on account of its breadth. Eulogists sing about the sun's orb as taking the form of a white umbrella. And, **it shines with brilliance** (*mahojjvalaḥ*) [=*mahasā=tejasā jvalati*). (The lexicographer) Viśva says that the word "*kīrti*"can be taken in the sense of "valor" (*pratāpaḥ*) or "enduring fame" (*yaśas*) and in the sense of "breadth" (*vistāre*) and also in the sense of "mud" (*kardame*). (The lexicographer Amara) says that the word *mahas* can be taken in the sense of "brilliant splendor" (*tejas*) or "festivities" (*utsavaḥ*), while *ujjvala* can be taken to mean "bright, clean and clear" (*śuciḥ*) and "the sentiment of love" (*śṛṅgāraḥ*). (The lexicographer) Kṣiraswāmin says the word *budhā* can be understood as relating to a "deity," to "the moon," and to "learned ones" (*jñātṛcāndrisurā budhāḥ*).[365]

One may notice at the end of this passage the Sanskrit commentator's compulsive habit of citing lexicons (or, elsewhere, other relevant texts) to substantiate or to defend his claims. He ends his commentary (not translated above) with the customary explanations of grammar. He also frames the poem's overarching

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[365] yata evaṃvidho 'ta eva kīrter maṇḍalaṃ yaśomaṇḍalam, sitaṃ ca tacchatraṃ ca sitacchatraṃ śvetātapatram ivācarantaṃ kṛtaṃ vā lokatrayavyāptisamarthaṃ kīrtimaṇḍalaṃ yasya yena vā. punaḥ kimviśiṣṭaḥ? mahojjvalaḥ. mahair utsavair ujjvalo dīpyamānaḥ. etenotsāhayuktatvaṃ tasya, mahānparamakāṣṭhāpanna ujjvalaḥ śṛṅgāro yasyeti vā. yadvā -- mahasā tejasā pratāpena jvalatīti mahojjvalaḥ. sūryapakṣe 'pi -- 'ādityāj jāyate vṛṣṭiḥ' iti vṛṣṭipradatvena kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ sūryasya kathā nipīya budhāḥ sudhām api candre viṣaye tathā nādriyante. tasya tatrāsāmarthyāt. kiṃbhūtaḥ sūryaḥ? śvetātapatrīkṛtaṃ kīrtiyuktaṃ stutiyuktaṃ vistārayuktaṃ vā maṇḍalaṃ yasya. stotā śvetacchatrākāraṃ maṇḍalam stauti. mahasā tejasā jvalatīti mahojjvalaḥ. 'kīrtiḥ pratāpayaśasor vistāre kardame 'pi ca' iti viśvaḥ. 'mahastūtsavatejasoḥ', 'śṛṅgāraḥ śucirujjvalaḥ' ity amaraḥ. 'jñātṛcāndrisurā budhāḥ' iti kṣirasvāmī.

sentiment (*śṛṅgārarasa*), the nature of the hero (*dhīralalita*), and the meter of the

verse (*vaṃśastha*). It bears repeating that Nārāyaṇa's understanding of *Naiṣadha*

had become the most widely influential one among many reading communities

that followed him. In fact, the most popular types of commentary on the

Naiṣadha, as suggested earlier, distinguish themselves by "discovering" ever more

charming or hidden meanings, by introducing to the connoisseurs (*sahṛdaya*) their

own enjoyment of the diverse experience of the poet's meanings. These

commentaries may also reflect a diversity of perspectives current at the time and

available to them. It may also be that the urge for more and complex meaning is

simply one of intellectual pleasure; the commentator loves language, loves his text,

and derives a special pleasure from the exercise of teasing out more and more

subtle meanings.

The most exhilarating example of this urge to recontextualize apparent

literal meanings in *Naiṣadha* into new semantic realms can be found in the

commentary of Śrīdhara. It is uncertain when Śrīdhara wrote but he appears to

have been after Nārāyaṇa. His commentary on 1.1 truly exemplifies an exegetical

tradition intent on researching latent meaning rather than restoring some kind of

"correct" one. While Nārāyaṇa's unearthing of the "hidden" meanings may appear

to be exhaustive, one can see an even greater effort to dig in the commentary of

Śrīdhara. Like Nārāyaṇa, Śrīdhara begins his comment with the most obvious

subjects of the verse, Nala's stories and the learned ones' reception these stories:

(The verse beginning with) "Having drunk" (*nipīyeti*): The words **"That**

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Nala was" (*sa nala āsīt*) (indicate) a grammatical relationship of action and doer because of the necessary and inseparable connection between the relative pronoun "which/who" (*yat*) and the correlative " that one [he, she, or it]" (*tat*). Thus the word "that [Nala]" (*sa*) points to the correlative word "that" (*tat*) and the word "whose" (*yasya*) refers to the relative word "which/that" (*yat*), occurring in "**They regard** (*ādriyante*) **the stories** (*kathā*) **of that protector of the earth** (*yasya kṣitirakṣinaḥ*) [=*bhūpālasya*] **in such a way** (*tathā*) that **they do not regard nectar** (*sudhām nādriyante*), meaning that the **learned ones** (*budhāḥ*) [=knowers who can discriminate between the essential and the inessential (*sārāsāraṃ vijānantas*)] **also** (*api*) singularly respect the story of Nala, thinking that nectar confers to one the status of becoming divine but the story of Nala bequeaths one permanent bliss. Praising the superiority of the story of Nala, the learned do not even regard nectar in such (an exalted) way.[366]

Similar to Nārāyaṇa, though not in as overt a manner, Śrīdhara finds the verse to suggest that listening to Nala's stories "bequeaths one permanent bliss." While consistent intratextually (saying that gods who are already divine do not seek the immortality that nectar brings but rather the freedom from *saṃsāra* that hearing Nala's stories brings), this connection might also reflect an extratextual association of the Nala story with the extraordinary efficacy to purify worldly existence, a notion discussed above in light of Nārāyaṇa's reading and below in light of religious readings of the poem:

An objection may be raised here about whether they do not then think much of the many stories of kings spread throughout the Purāna literature like drops of nectar. With respect to (this notion's) being logically consistent or fallacious, what can one say? Its significance rests in its being a qualifying statement. What it qualifies is the following. Beginning

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[366] nipīyeti sa nala āsīd iti kriyākārakayojanā yattador nityasambandhāt
sa iti tac cabdena nirdiṣṭaṃ yac chabdena parāmṛśati. yasyeti yasya kṣitirakṣiṇo bhūpālasya kathām ādriyante tathā sudhāṃ nādriyante ity arthaḥ sārāsāraṃ vijānantas te budhā api sudhā amaratvadāyinī nalakathātvānandaghanatvādāyinīti nalakathām eva ādara (??) tastuva(n)tīti nalakathādhikya kathanaṃ budhās sudhām api tathā nādriyante.

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with the word "white umbrella" (*sitacchatritam*), (Nala is described as one) whose **circle of fame** (*kīrtimaṇḍalam*) is a **white umbrella** (*sitacchatritam*) [=acting as a white umbrella (i.e., the royal parasol) (*sitacchatravad ācaran*)], in such a way that he is a **mass** (*rāśiḥ*) [=a repository of glorious valor (*pratāpanidhiḥ*)] **of radiance** (*mahasām*) [=(*tejasām*)], such a **one who greatly possesses the sentiment of love** (*mahojvalaḥ*) [=(*mahān ujvalaḥ śṛṅgāro yasya sa tathā*)]. Or else, this Nala was such that he was **brilliant by virtue of numerous festivities** (*mahojvalaḥ*) [=*mahair utsavair ujvalaḥ*]. It is to be understood that because of his lustrous purity and his lordship among the circle of kings in all the directions, his fame behaved like a white umbrella -- a single parasol that only Nala possessed and not anybody else.[367]

Having allayed one objection to the fitness of Nala's stories as a noble theme,

Śrīdhara then explores other semantic possibilities that further emphasize Nala's

greatness. Rather than reading the learned ones (*budhāḥ*) as no longer respecting

nectar, i.e. immortality, so highly after hearing of Nala, he speculates that these

same "discriminating intellects" no longer regard the world, i.e. worldly life, as

any more special than Nala's stories:

> Alternatively, we can speak of other meanings (to the ones already provided): **The kings** (*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*) [=*bhūpālāḥ*] **who possess a discriminating intellect** (*budāḥ*) [=(*vivekinaḥ*)] **having heard whose stories** (*yasya kathān nipīya*) **do not in such a way regard even the earth** (*vasudhām api tathā nādriyante*). Here the word *vasudhā* can be derived by (repositioning) the elided letter *va* (onto the word *sudhā*), according to the grammatical maxim of "dropping of a letter" (*varṇacyutinyāya*). And it has been stated in the *Cuḍāmaṇī*: "Let us worship that calm one who sleeps on the snake Ananta in the middle of the ocean of milk, that lord who holds the conch, the discus, the club, and the lotus." Here in this verse, there is an elision of the word *śrī* (Lakṣmī) before the word *patiḥ*

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[367] kila purāṇeṣu vitāyamānām(ṛ)ita[?] nṛpakathā na bahumanyanta iti kimu vaktavyaṃ sambhave vyabhicāre ca syād viśeṣaṇam arthavad iti tad viśeṣaṇam āha --
sitacchatritetyādi sitacchatritaṃ sitacchatravad ācaran kīrtimaṇḍalaṃ yasya sa tathā mahāsāṃ tejasāṃ rāśiḥ pratāpanidhiḥ mahojvalaḥ mahān ujvalaḥ śṛṅgāro yasya sa tathā
yadvā mahair utsavair ujvalaḥ evaṃ bhūtas sa nalaḥ āsīt. nalasyaivaikaṃ sitātapatraṃ nānyeśām iti kīrtes svacchatvāt sakaladikcakravāle vartitatvāc ca cchatravad ācaraṇad iti mantavyam

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(lord or husband). [It should read *śrīpatiḥ* (the husband of goddess Śrī)].
Just as in this verse, (there is an elision of letters), so too is the case here,
so that having heard his (Nala's) story the kings who, though aware of the
virtues of (enjoying) the earth (*vasudhām*), do not think highly of it and
willingly give up the protection of it. This reading illuminates his (Nala's)
state of being a supreme man (*mahāpuruṣatva*)[368]

Here, he employs first a very popular technique of appealing to the quasi-logical

maxim (*nyāya*) of supply or elimination of a phoneme (*varṇacyutinyāya*) in order

to explain a given linguistic usage. Thus the word "nectar" (*sudhā*) is converted

into "earth" (*vasudhā*) by the logic that the phoneme "*va*" must be supplied. As is

customary in the Sanskrit commentary, an example is cited from elsewhere to

demonstrate the phenomena; in this case, a reference to Lord Viṣṇu manifests if

one supplies "of Lakṣmī" (*śrī*) to the lone word "husband" (*pati*) in the verse. The

implied logic of this act seems to be that the missing word should be there by

either linguistic or cultural logic. Maxims like this one raise interesting socio-

textual questions about how meaning is generated among the users of literary texts

in any given context. Here, Śrīdhara's aim seems to be to connect up Nala with the

two most famous men in the Indian tradition given the title of "supreme man"

(*mahāpuruṣa*), warrior-kings who give up ruling to pursue spiritual pursuits, i.e.

the Buddha and Mahāvīra.

Not content to leave the meaning unshaken any further, Śrīdhara then

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[368] yadvā arthāntarāṇi brūmaḥ budhā vivekinaḥ kṣitirakṣiṇo bhūpālāḥ yasya kathān nipīya sudhāṃ
vasudhām api tathā nādriyante atra vasudhāśabdena varṇacyutinyāyena vakāralopo dṛṣṭavyaḥ.
uktañ ca cūḍāmaṇau -- "anantaśayanaśśāntaḥ kṣīrāmbhonidhimadhyagaḥ.
śaṅkhacakragadāpadmadhārīpathir ūpāsyatām." iti atra strīvarṇalopaḥ strīpatīr iti padaṃ tathātrāpīti
asya kathāṃ śrutvā rājānaḥ bhuvo guṇaṃ jānantā'pi vasudhām avamatya svayaṃ vasudhārakṣitvaṃ
tyajantītyanenāsya mahāpuruṣatvaṃ dyotitam.

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suggest that the word "*sudhā*" (thus far "nectar" and "earth") be taken to mean

"lofty position" through a process of clever etymologizing. Under this scenario,

the genitive epithet of Nala as "the protector of the earth" (*kṣitirakṣin*) is converted

into a nominative referring to "mountains" or "elephants." These creatures are

conventionally regarded in Sanskrit poetry as "protectors" or "upholders" of the

earth:

> Or else, "*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*" (in the sense of) **mountains or the celestial elephants** of the various directions who by holding up the earth (*kṣitim*), protect (*rakṣanti*) it. They (mountains and elephants) **do not regard in such a way** (*nādriyante tathā*) **their high posts (of holding up the earth)** (*sudhām*) [lofty position (*suṣṭhu dhānam=dhāraṇam*) because Nala bears the earth without any effort (*anāyāsena*) while their own bearing of the earth requires the most strenuous labor. By taking the word *kṣitirakṣiṇah* (in this sense), it conveys that they (elephants and mountains) scorn (their duty in comparison). The virtues (of Nala) are related here, beginning with steadfastness and courage.[369]

Again, though reformulating the semantic codes to make new meanings, Śrīdhara's

larger purpose remains the same: to glorify Nala. Thus, here the virtues of

"steadfastness and courage," often associated with mountains and elephants

respectively, are applied to Nala. A similar association is now made between Nala

and Lord Śiva by understanding "protectors of the earth" to refer to serpents

(*nāgaḥ*):

> Or: (because) the word *kṣitirakṣiṇah* (upholding the earth) also refers to snakes (*nāgāḥ*), from the application of the logical rule of being able to connect the specific entity with the class, (the celestial serpent) Ananta (on

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[369] athavā kṣitin dhāraṇena rakṣantīti kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ kulaparvatā diggajendraś ca gṛhyante te'pi sudhām suṣṭhu dhānaṃ dhāraṇaṃ tām api tathā nādriyante nalas tv anāyāsena bhuvaṃ bibharti parantu paramāyāsā ity ātmano dhāraṇaṃ nindantītyarthaḥ anena śauryadhairyādayo guṇāvarṇitāḥ

whom Viṣṇu sleeps) can also be understood (as the subject) here. They **(snakes) do not highly regard milk** (*sudhām*). The *Abhidhānaratna* dictionary defines *sudhā* as meaning "nectar" or "milk." Upon hearing of the nectar in his (Nala's) stories, they (the snakes) lose their desire to eat and drink. By this we can also gather that since snakes form a component part (*amśatvam*) [=(*aṅkuritam*)]) of Lord Śiva (*īśvaraḥ*), their going without food is dear to Lord Śiva and demonstrates that they are worshipping him.[370]

There are several hermeneutic processes at work here. First is the rather strained interpretation of "*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*" as "snakes" by the logic that the individual element (the great cosmic serpent Ananta who does, according to convention, uphold the universe) necessarily indicates the broader class (*jāti*). Second is the appeal to the lexicons to derive the less-common meaning of "milk" instead of "nectar" for the word "*sudhā*." This then links the two realms of snakes and milk since again, according to convention, snakes traditionally like milk (a fact celebrated in such Hindu festivals as *nāg pañcamī*, for example), which they now eschew in favor of Nala's stories. Finally, and this is perhaps the most daring semantic leap in the passage, Śrīdhara suggests the verse might actually be a homage to Lord Śiva, who wears snakes around his neck and is often worshipped by the pouring of milk onto his symbolic essence (the *śiva-liṅga*). As the opening verse of *kāvya* is often tagged as a verse of homage (*maṅgalācaraṇa*), Śrīdhara's suggests it is appropriate that this meaning be available. Having introduced the *maṅgalācaraṇa* theme to the interpretation of the verse, Śrīdhara now aims to

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[370] kṣitirakṣiśabdena ananto vāpi gṛhyante talliṅgasamavāyan kṣitirakṣiṇo nāgāḥ te sudhāṃ kṣīram api tathā nādriyante. "pīyūṣakṣīrayos sudhā ity abhidhānaratnakośaḥ"
asya kathārasaśravaṇāt teṣām āhārecchāpi na bhavatītyanenāsya īśvarāṃśatvam aṅkuritaṃ nāgāṃ īśvarapriyahārec chārahitās tam eveśvaraṃ sevanta iti prasiddheḥ

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connect up Nala with the Supreme Being in the universe (*paramātman*),

comparable to Viṣṇu:

> Or else, **having drunk that protector of the earth's stories** (*yasya kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ kathān nipīya*), **the gods** (*budhāḥ*) [=*vibudhāḥ=devāḥ*] **do not regard even nectar in such a way** [*sudhām api tathā nādriyante*] Here (again) the grammatical maxim of "dropping letters" (*varṇacyutinyāya*) (applies, in the prefixing of *vi* to *budhā* to arrive at the meaning of "gods"). The gods also, upon hearing of that story, think: "What use is nectar?" and abandon it. This is shown to be the case because of its possessing great auspiciousness, among other things. **He is the Supreme Self** (*mahojvalaḥ*) [=shines in his own greatness (*mahasi svamahimnijvalati*) (*jvalati* = *prakāśate*), which describes the Supreme Self (*paramātmā*)]. On what is this notion founded? He is a **mass** (*rāśiḥ*) [=like a thousand suns (*koṭisūryasaṅkāśaḥ*)] **of radiance** (*mahāsām*) [=(*tejasām*)] because of his possessing the radiance of the sun. As such, Nala was the Supreme Self, his true nature unbreakable (*acyutaḥ*) and comparable to Viṣṇu, (an idea) made clear on account of the utterance (describing him as) the lord of the earth (*pṛthivīpatiḥ*), **protectors of the earth** (*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*) qualified by his earthly descents in the forms beginning with the fish, the tortoise, and the boar. "Stories" (*kathāḥ*) (thus refers to Lord Viṣṇu's) **stories of earthly descents** (*avatārakathāḥ*). The rest (of the verse is to be understood) the same (as above).[371]

This passage configures the gods (*vibudhāḥ* through *varṇacyutinyāya*) as the

subject of the hearing of Nala's story. Reflecting a very popular religious reading

of the text (to be taken up in detail below), Śrīdhara sees the particular epithets of

Nala (*mahojvala* and *rāśi*) as indicating his association with the Supreme Self and

Viṣṇu by extension. He then very astutely links Nala's stories with Viṣṇu's

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[371] athavā yasya kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ kathānipīya budhāvibudhāḥdevāḥ sudhām api tathā nādriyante atra varṇacyutinyāyaḥ devā api yat kathām ākarṇya sudhayāpi kim iti tām avadhīrayantītyanenāsya mahābhāgyatvādayo darśitāḥ mahasi svamahimnijvalati prakāśata iti mahojvalaḥ paramātmā sa kasmin pratiṣṭhitaḥ mahasāṃ tejasāṃ rāśiḥ koṭisūryasaṅkāśam ravitejomayatvāt evaṃbhūtas sa paramātmanā nalo 'bhūt abhaṅgurasvarūpasya tatvaṃ yuktānāṃ viṣṇuḥ pṛthivīpatir iti vacanāc ca siddham matsyakūrmavarāhādyavatāraviśeṣeṇa kṣitirakṣiṇo yasya kathām avatārakathām iti anyat samānam.

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"stories", i.e. *avatāra-s*. He again returns to the clever etymology by offering up

yet another possibility of reading Nala as being synonymous with Sūrya:

> Or else: **Nala refers to the Sun** (*mahojvalaḥ*) [=collection of luster
> (*mahasārāśiḥ*)=the Sun (*suryaḥ*)]. The name of Nala (can be
> etymologically derived) in the sense of 'that which melts' (*nilīyate*). **He
> was brilliant** [(*jvalati*)=(*bhāsate*)] **with radiance** (*mahojvalaḥ*) because of
> his having a million rays of light. [Quotation from Manusmṛti 3.76]:
> "From the sun, rain arises. From the rain arises food. From food living
> beings are born." (The sense of *kṣitirakṣinaḥ* here is of) **a protector**
> (*rakṣin*) **of the hosts of living beings** (*prāṇivṛndāḥ*) [=inhabitants of the
> earth (*bhulokasthāḥ*)]. Just as in the expression "the podiums are yelling"
> (*mañcāḥ krośanti*), the implication is of people stand at the podium
> (yelling). The idea is the same here (i.e. that the Sun protects beings, not
> the earth on which they live). Taking the (derivation) offered in the Veda,
> (where) "The Sun (*ādityaḥ*) is that orb (*maṇḍalam*) . . ." here, the breaking
> of the compound [*kīrtimaṇḍalam*] is as follows: he whose orb (*maṇḍalam*)
> is duly famous (*kīrtiyuktam*) because of its acting as a white parasol
> (*sitacchatravad ācarat*). Through this analogy with the Sun, an auspicious
> meaning is related.[372]

In much the say way as seen above, Śrīdhara here cites a verse from the

Manusmṛti and another logical maxim (*nyāya*) to argue for interpreting Nala as the

Sun. He returns to make more explicit Nala relationship with Śiva:

> Or else: **Nala refers to Lord Śiva** (*mahojvalaḥ*) [=the great Lord
> (*maheśaḥ*)], **of his being a protector of the earth** (*jagadrakṣinaḥ*) because
> of such acts as swallowing the Kālakuṭa poison, etc. The sense of the word
> umbrella (*chatram*) has (already been) established; **he by whom a mass of
> fame** (*maṇḍalam*) [=(*samuhaḥ*)] **was made as an umbrella** (*chatritam
> maṇḍalīkṛtam*) **with a white color** (*sitena guṇena*).[373]

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[372] yadvā nalo nāma mahasārāśiḥ sūrya āsīt nilīyata iti nalaḥ mahobhis tejobhir jvalati bhāsata iti
mahojvalaḥ sahasrakiraṇatvāt "ādityāj jāyate vṛṣṭer annaṃ tataḥ prajāḥ" ity etad vā rākṣiter
bhūlokasthasya prāṇivṛndasya rakṣiṇaḥ mañcāḥ krośantītyukte yathā mañcasthāḥ puruṣālakṣyante
tathā atra apīti. "adityo vā eṣa etanmaṇḍalam (??)(anta)tapat(ir?)ity ādinā vedo vāgīyamāṇād iti
sitacchatravad ācarat kīrtiyuktaṃ maṇḍalaṃ yasyeti vigrahaḥ anena sūryarūpakacchalena
māṅgaliko 'rtho'bhihitaḥ.

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And then, the moon:

> Or else: **Nala refers to the Moon** (*mahojvalaḥ*), (where) **he is the embodiment of all love sentiments** (*śṛṅgārasarvasvabhūtaḥ*) [=(*ujvalaḥ*)] **in the erotic play of lovers** (*kānānāṃ krīḍotsave*) [=(*mahe*)]. It is thus said by the great poet Kālidāsa (in *Raghuvaṃśa* 1.12): "Dilipa was the Moon among the 'moon' of kings in the ocean of milk." In a Durgātantra, (a verse reads that) in all the utterances that speak of the essence of moon, the manifestation of light is understood as the true form of splendor. **He is a mass** (*rāśi*) [=(*nidhi*)] **of pure light** (*mahasām*) [=(*prakāśanām*)], because of his all-encompassing lordliness. Because it is the fragments (*kalāḥ*) of the world-protector (*kṣitirakṣiṇaḥ*) ["of the one who produces joy in the world" (*jagadānandakarasya*)] that they desire to drink, **the gods in truth** (*tathā*) [=(*satyam*)] **reject** (*avadhīrayati*) **even nectar** (*sudhā*). The word "thus" (*tathā*) is here taken in the sense of "truly" (*satya*). **Fame** (*kīrtiḥ*) **is a circular orb** (*maṇḍalam*), **acting as a white umbrella**, for this composition's nectarine love sentiment.[374]

Śrīdhara, in referring Nala to the moon, evokes another meaning of the epithet

"*mahojvala*," which in the most common sense would mean something like

"radiant (*ujvala*) on account of festivities." Here, the commentator adopts a

secondary sense of *ujvala* (found in many traditional lexicons) to mean either the

erotic sentiment *(śṛñgāra rasa)* or the marks and dress associated with love-play.

Both of these meanings have association with the moon, which is often the

exemplary agent for stimulating the emotion of love in lovers (*uddīpana-vibhāva*

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[373] athavā mahojvalo maheśaḥ nalo nāma maheśo 'bhūt kālakūṭagrahaṇādinā jagadrakṣiṇaḥ chatraśabdāt tatkarotītyādīnānantā(?). niṣṭhā ---- sitena guṇena chatritaṃ maṇḍalīkṛtaṃ kīrtīnāṃ maṇḍalaṃ samuho yena.

[374] athavā mahe kāntānāṃ krīḍotsave ujvalaḥ śṛṅgārasarvasvabhūtaḥ candro lakṣyante nalo nāma candro 'bhūt yaduktaṃ mahākavinā kālidāsena -- "dilīpa iti rājendur induḥ kṣiranidhāṣiva (??)" iti "mahaḥ prakāśaḥ sadrūpantejaḥ sarvātmasūktiṣu" iti durgātantre (?)'bhihitatvāt mahasāṃ prakāśanāṃ sadrūpasya vā rāśiḥ nidhiḥ tasya sakalena adhīṣatvāc ca kṣitirakṣiṇo jagadānandakarasya kalā tathā vṛttirūpā tatpānecchayā devāḥ sudhām api tathā satyam avadhīrayati tatheti satyārdhe sitacchatravad ācarantīti kīrtir eva maṇḍalaṃ evam asya śṛṅgārāmṛtam yasya prabandhasyābhimato 'bhihitaḥ

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in *rasa* theoretical language). As before, Śrīdhara cites intertexts to explain his

logic; in this case, he cites not only Kālidāsa but also (rather oddly) a text he calls

Durgātantra to relate the association of royal splendor, light, and the erotic with

the moon. Linking the gods with the moon seems to recall the sense that the moon

is actually made up of nectar or *soma*. The gods desire to, and actually do, drink

up on a cyclic basis this nectar, accounting for the waxing and waning of the

moon. There is also the connection of the moon as the "Lord of medicinal herbs"

(*auṣadhipati*), responsible for protecting the forests and healing herbs.

Finally, acknowledging the text's potencies, Śrīdhara comments that there

are even more meanings to be found in the *Naiṣadha*. However, he will refrain

from any further interpretive *jouissance* on account of his respect for the reader's

limited energies:

> Because of its suppleness like woven silk (*kṣomakṣamatvād*), many other
> meanings are possible in this verse. But concerned about making the text
> too weighty, they (these possible meanings) are not expressed.[375]

Summarizing Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdhara's readings, we find nearly a dozen different

possibilities to read the verse. The receivers of Nala's stories are imagined to be

learned people, kings, gods, mountains, elephants, and snakes. His stories are

respectively compared to the end of worldly suffering, as valuable as the earth,

equivalent to immortality-granting nectar, and superior to lofty positions of power.

Nala himself is shown in the verse to be a great king, a great lover, the destroyer of

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[375] asya kāvyasya kṣomakṣamatvād atraiva śloke anye'pi bahavo 'rthas sambhavanti te
granthagauravabhayān na kathyante.

Kali, the Supreme Soul, Viṣṇu, Śiva, the Sun, and the Moon. In a personal

interview, *Naiṣadha* scholar Trinath Sharma[376] -- who had studied the text as a

student in Varanasi -- related in a personal interview that another meaning often

ascribed by *Naiṣadha* readers to Nala is Rāma (substituting the word *nala* with

nara), where the killing of Rāvaṇa qualifies his being the "protector of the earth."

Nārāyaṇa also suggests this by relating Nala to Viṣṇu in the commentary on the

verse and directly to Rāma in his opening:

> One ought to perform a benediction in order to complete the desired
> composition without obstacles and for the continuance of tradition.
> (According to the poetics text "Light on Poetry" [*Kāvyaprakṣasa*]), "the
> opening (consists of) either a blessing, a homage (to a deity), or an
> indication of the subject matter." The poet, known to be one who finds joy
> in (composing) difficult texts, addresses his benediction with an embedded
> mantra (*sabīja*) in a veiled form of homage to his desired deity of Rāma,
> the lord of the Raghus. Others, however, say that the benediction is
> characterized by the indication of the specific subject matter
> (*viśiṣṭavastunirdeśa*).[377]

Perhaps the most intriguing element of this passage -- Nārāyaṇa's implication that

the poem is not so much a poem at all as it is an unfolding of a mantra (*bīja*) -- is

one of the most understudied aspects of *Naiṣadha*'s receptive history and will be

dealt with in more detail below.

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[376] His dissertation on the sociological information found in *Naisadha* is available in the archives of
Benaras Hindu University. See Bibliography.

[377] cikīrṣitasya granthasya nirvighnasamāpty arthaṃ śiṣṭācārapariprāptam 'āśīr namaskriyā
vastunirdeśo vāpi tanmukham' (*Kāvyaprakāśa* 1.2) iti maṅgalācaraṇaṃ kartavyam iti
granthakṛcchrīharṣaṇāma kavir gūḍaṃ sabījaraghunāthābhīṣṭadevatānamaskārarūpaṃ maṅgalam
ācarati. anye tu 'viśiṣṭavastunirdeśalakṣaṇaṃ maṅgalam' ity āhuḥ..

Commentators such as Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdhara often contextualize the elements of the verse in terms that are sensible to the reader but they rarely explain in full detail the propriety of their reading in the overall context of the poem. They seem to assume that the poet either intends all of these meanings simultaneously or that the power of the poet's words harbors all of these semantic potentialities. Of course, the fact that this is the first verse of the poem makes it a bit easier for the commentators to give so many meanings; after all, as a *maṅgala* verse, many subjects may serve the purpose: Nala, Viṣṇu, Rāma, the Sun, snakes, mountains, virtually any phenomena that bears divine power worthy of praise. This verse does not really beg for explication in terms of its suggestive force, since it fulfills one of the two requirements of first verse: create an aura of auspiciousness (*maṅgalācaraṇa*) or introduce the subject matter (*vastunirdeśa*). It concerns the commentators (and presumably the audience) very little that the meaning of the verse remains underdetermined, only emerging when certain elements of the verse (such as determining who the "protectors of the earth") are emphasized over others (such as whose "stories are more valuable than nectar"). It is left to the literary theorists to debate what leads to the determination of meaning or if the delimitation of meaning is even possible.[378] Nevertheless, from the first verse onwards, it appears that an absence of any semantic definitiveness leads an already

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[378] The theories of denotation (*abhidhā*), implication (*lakṣaṇa*), and suggestion (*dhvani*), for example.

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voracious commentarial appetite for *Naiṣadha* to supply as many meanings as

linguistically and culturally possible.

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Esoteric Clues and Mystical Readings: *Naiṣadha* as Advaita and Tāntrik Allegory

While the above commentaries on 1.1 suggest scattered polysemic

tendencies popular among *Naiṣadha* readers (and among many other works of

Sanskrit literature), they do not clearly demonstrate the most salient feature of the

poem's receptive history as a numinous text of hidden meaning and source of

supernatural knowledge. According to this premise, then, the commentator's task

becomes to decipher the text's hidden matrix by reading for hidden clues and

coded language. This significant aspect of the text's literary history is suggested

by Nārāyaṇa's prefatory comment about their being in Śrīharṣa's poem "an

embedded mantra (*sabīja*) in a veiled form of homage to his desired deity of

Rāma, the lord of the Raghus."[379] However, while Nārāyaṇa reads a mantric

homage to Rāma into the poem, others have seen it as not a poem at all but an

unfolding of the mystical knowledge conveyed in the Tāntrik *cintāmaṇi* mantra,

which the poet himself cites in the fourteenth canto, or as a narrative allegory of

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[379] Perhaps the most famous hermeneutic tradition of reading religious meanings into generally
literary texts is that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. At various points in their translation, Robert and Sally
Goldman provide examples of such readings by the Sanskrit commentators. For example, they
explain in a note on *Sundarakāṇḍa* 36.28 that commentator Govindarāja reads the crow episode "as
a parable of the soul's flight to Rāma as the ultimate source of salvation" (457). They cite a number
of instances where events and characters in the epic are translated into Śrīvaiṣṇava parables. One
also sees such readings of the *Mahābhārata* in Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary.

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Vedāntic truths and practices (*sādhana*).[380] Again, one may ask: are these clues

really hidden in the text or do they merely reflect a complex interaction between

text and reader whereby a reading (and its significance) is generated from the act

of reading itself? The rhetoric of most of these readers, of course, is that the clues

are actually hidden in the text and not a product of the social contexts in which

these readings are taking place. One sees then that the *Naiṣadha* is not blithely

referred to by these readers as "religious" or "mystical"; rather they claim to

perform a "close" reading of what is actually in the text to conclude that the poem

is really a statement of Advaita Vedānta or, by the Tāntrik interpretation, the

unfoldi ng product of goddess Bhuvaneśvarī's grace.

Perhaps the most obvious reason to associate *Naiṣadha* with Advaita lies in

the fact that Śrīharṣa composed the "Sweet candies of philosophical argument"

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[380] There are numerous example of this kind of reading for "hidden meanings" in Sanskrit literature
and poetics. Krishnamachariar (pgs. 487) cites several important examples of commentaries that
expand on the foundational texts in ways that bring out its esoteric significance. He cites
commentaries on the *Gītagovinda*: "the sexual ideas, apparent in the verses, have received at the
hands of Indian commentators, an allegorical explanation of divine philosophy, as the longing and
union of the supreme and the individual souls." He also mentions Jñānānanda Kalādharasena's
commentary on *Amaruśataka*, where the verses are dually explained "in the senses of love and
renunciation." Furthermore, he mentions *Naiṣadha* commentator Ānanda Rājānaka's 'Nidarśana'
commentary on the *Kāvyaprakāśa*, which deciphers its "inner meaning to refer to Śiva." Then
there is mention of Somaprabhācārya who, according to Krishnamachariar, interpreted a single
verse in a hundred ways: to mean the twenty four Jain *tīrthaṅkara*-s, Vedic deities, references to his
contemporary scholars and political figures, his teachers, and himself. Krishnamachariar also
refers to Rāghavabhaṭṭa's famous reading of *Śākuntala* and Pūrṇasarasvatī's 'Rasamañjarī'
commentary on Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava*.

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(*Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*), a seminal philosophical statement defending Advaita

against challenges from Naiyāyikas and Bauddhas. Radhakrishnan says the

following about the text:

> It is the greatest work on Advaita dialectics. It is one long dissertation on
> the vanity of philosophy, setting forth the inability of the human mind to
> compass those exalted objects which its speculative ingenuity suggests as
> worthy of its pursuit. . . he (Shriharsha) takes the reader through a long and
> arduous process. . . to establish the simple truth that nothing can be
> conclusively proved to be either true or false. Everything is doubtful
> except universal consciousness. He. . . argues that the Nyāya is busy with
> apparent existence and reality. The diversity of things is not ultimate,
> while the Absolute is, though never known.[381]

The semantic fecundity and range of the *Naiṣadha* may indeed be tied up with

Śrīharṣa's *advaita* position: that the diversity of opinions possible in the poem

nevertheless reflects the One; that the poet (who is also construed as spiritual

adept) has intended to point the reader to Meaning that lies beyond the cognizable

semantics clothed in the narrative. This view is itself supported by the famous

verse of introducing Advaita in a critical moment of the story, where Damayantī

must choose the "correct" Nala (the Advaita view) when faced with the diversity

of gods (false philosophical positions).[382] Denying the logical bases for true

knowledge, only an elusive, indefinable, and ultimately transcendent meaning is

available once one has exhausted the possibility and plausibility of all others.

Phyllis Granoff sees a very strong thematic connection between Śrīharṣa's two

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[381] Radhakrishnan 178

[382] *Nc* 13.36

famous works, citing verse 6.51 where the illusory selves of Nala and Damayantī

embrace each other (discussed earlier in the context of Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's Prābhākara-

mīmāṃsā reading of it):

> In verse 6.51, Damayanti reaches out to hold Nala. Unable to distinguish
> his real form from his imagined aspects, she searches for him everywhere,
> though he stands immediately before her. This is but a rephrasal of the
> standard Vedānta description of man's search for his soul. Like the woman
> who forgets the ornament around her neck and looks for it elsewhere, so
> do people, unaware of the soul as their innermost reality, look for the truth
> in distant places (kaṇṭhacāmīkaranyāya) . . . I suspect that if such a reading
> of the Naiṣadhīya as an allegory of the devotee's union with the soul is
> correct, then the allegory must go far deeper than these selected
> examples.[383]

Indeed, the allegory goes very far for Naiṣadha readers. A living receptive

tradition in Andhra Pradesh appears to have had a long engagement with this

aspect of the poem. For example, while recalling his early initiation into the

Naiṣadha tradition in the preface of his book The Elements of Darsanas of

Shriharsha's Naisadha, Dr. Jayaseetaram Sastry writes:

> As a student, I had an opportunity to read the Śṛṅgāra Naiṣadha, a Telegu
> translation of Śrīnātha. My father used to say -- "Naiṣadha is full of
> references to various Śāstrās. But Śrīnātha did not pay much attention to
> those Śāstric points; he has translated this Kāvya mainly as a Śṛṅgāra
> Kāvya . . . . When I was going through N.C. in search of various points
> connected with different Darśanās, I found Vedānta Darśana was
> maintained by the poet throughout the work as a prabandha dhvani and I
> started to struggle with the text to prove my thesis. I felt that I might get
> some light thrown on the subject, if I met "Brahmarṣi" Sri
> Rāghavanārāyaṇa Śāstri Gāru, an erudite scholar, reputed poet and a great
> Tapasvin in the Andhra Pradesh. Encouraged by my parents, I went to Śri
> Sāstri Gāru and requested him to clear my doubts regarding the subject and
> show a path to proceed. Śri Sāstri Gāru had gracefully conceded to my

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[383] Granoff 254

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humble request saying -- "Ever since I was 19 years of age, I had a desire to write a commentary on N.C. with Vedāntic Interpretation. It remained a desire only. When I mentioned it to your father, he said that he would write "*Uttaranaiṣadham*." He also could not write. It is interesting that you also should get similar idea, let us study *Naiṣadham*.[384]

Sastry's memoir of his guru's reading the poem as possessed of a unified and coherent Vedāntic core is also reflected by another student of Sri Rāghavanārāyaṇa Śāstri Gāru. Cited in the introduction of Jayaseetaram Sastry's book is the recollection of a retired judge of the high court of Hyderabad, a man named Gollaudi Venkata Rama Sastry. G.V.R. Sastry's account makes clear the tradition of reading Vedanta and Tantra into Sanskrit *kāvya*, especially the *Naiṣadha*:

My Guruji [Brahma Sri Tadepalli Raghava Narayana Sastry garu of Chandolu village in Guntur District in Andhra Pradesh] is a Vedantin in theory as well as practice. He adopts what he preaches. He is a true Karmayogi always immersed in prayers to God and attaining Samadhi state very often. In view of his multifarious scholarly achievements and Vedantic approach he could dive deep into the latent meaning of many kavyas and expound the inner meaning therein. One of the kavyas in which he evinced such keen interest is Shriharsha's *Naiṣadhiyacarita*, which is often described as *naiṣadham vidvadaushadham*. Even in his 19th year he could bring out the real meaning of the said Kavya, its Vedantic aspect and its close affinity with Srividya, on account of his profound knowledge and practice of Sri Vidyopasana. Sree Harsha has himself indicated that the real meaning and purpose of his Kavya is not patent but latent and none should approach to arrive at it except through the assistance of proper Master (guru) . . . This kavya deals indirectly (vyangya) with words imparting Sahasrara in the beginning and at the end of the kavya. Hence the real meaning is what the poet intended to imbed into it by using words capable of different interpretations. My knowledge of Sanskrit is very limited and the above gist of the kavya's vyāṅgyartha is what I could gather from what little I learned about it. Even this learning I feel proud of a Mahakavi like Sree Harsha and am obliged to my Guruji for expounding

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[384] Sastry xvii

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its real meaning, its Vedantic aspect and its close inter-relationship with Sree Vidya.[385]

This passage highlights the fundamental premises of this particular teacher's reading of the *Naiṣadha* and directs our attention to the legacy of the Sanskrit commentators in this respect. First is the importance of Vedānta in constructing the interpretation of the poem's central themes and characters. Second is the close connection with the *tāntrika* tradition of Śrīvidya.

Jayaseetarama Sastry's basic thesis, in paraphrasing the teachings of his guru, focuses on imbuing the poem's characters and events with Vedāntic significance. Thus, the *haṃsa* comes to represent the Supreme Being (*paramātman*) in some places and the life-breaths (*prāṇa* or *jīva*) in others; Nala and Damayantī's apprehending the bird then comes to be allegorically rendered in terms of the individual seeker's realizing Brahman. For example, in *Nc* 1.117, where the *haṃsa* first appears, commentators past and present have read esoteric significance in Nala's initial apprehension of the *haṃsa*:

> Near a pleasant pool, which had appropriated some of the ocean's loveliness, Nala awakened to the presence of a spectacular golden *haṃsa* bird stirring nearby, intent on (seeking out) the indistinct cooing of a female *haṃsa* desirous for love-play.[386]

In this verse, Nārāyaṇa comments that in seeing the golden *haṃsa*, Nala is like a yogi perceiving the Supreme Self (*paramātman*) described in the Upaniṣads.

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[385] Sastry lxiii-lxvii

[386] payodhilakṣmīmuṣi kelipalvale riraṃsuhaṃsīkalanādasādaram /
sa tatra citraṃ vicaratam antike hiraṇmayaṃ haṃsam abodhi naiṣadhaḥ // 1.117

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Furthermore, the pleasant pool that the bird swims in is actually the body, while

the female *haṃsa* is rendered as illusory energy (*śakti*) of *māyā*.[387] Seshendra

Sharma, a contemporary author of a Tantrik commentary on *Naiṣadha* called "The

Golden Haṃsa" (*Svarṇahaṃsa*)[388] asserts that the Śrīharṣa must have consciously

intended this meaning and cites the aorist usage of the root *budh* (*abodhi*) in the

sense of "seeing" as evidence.[389] Literally, *abodhi* would have a sense of

"realizing" or "awakening to" rather than merely seeing with the eyes. Nārāyaṇa,

Sastry, and Sharma continue their Vedantic reading in several other verses,

including two from the third *sarga*:

> The eyes of Damayantī's friends abandoned their attention to various
> objects and went to that one [the *haṃsa*] of unutterable beauty, just as the
> minds of vow-observing ascetics go to Brahman. (3.3)[390]
>
> Persevering to grab hold with a timid hand the *haṃsa* stirring near her
> body, she [Damayantī] froze, as does the mental fluctuation of a silent
> sage. (3.4)[391]

Both of these verses demonstrate the poet's suggestive impulse. Śrīharṣa directly

connects the action of the narrative with a reference to Vedānta. It appears that

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[387] Atha ca vistaratvāt samudratulye vināśitvāt palvalatulye śarīre vicarantaṃ haṃsaṃ paramātmānaṃ kaścidyogī paśyati. riraṃsur haṃsī śaktiḥ tasyāḥ kalanāde sādaraṃ. hiraṇmayatvaṃ 'hiraṇmayaḥ puruṣaḥ' (Chāndogya 6.6) iti śruteḥ.

[388] Originally in Telegu but available to me in a Hindi translation by Jagdish Sharma (Kalidas Akademi, Ujjain). See Bibliography.

[389] Sheshendra Sharma 68

[390] netrāṇi vaidarbhasutāsakhīnāṃ vimuktatattadviṣayagrahāṇi /
prāpus tam ekaṃ nirupākhyarūpaṃ brahmeva cetāṃsi yatavratānām // 3.3

[391] haṃsaṃ tanau sannihitaṃ carantaṃ muner manovṛttir iva svikāyām /
grahītukāmādariṇā śayena yatnād asau niścalatāṃ jagāhe // 3.4

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Sastry picks up on commentator Nārāyaṇa's analysis of 3.3, which makes explicit that the words 'haṃsa', 'eka' (the one), and 'nirupākhyarūpa' (unutterable beauty) refer to both the bird and to Brahman. Meher, in discussing this verse, elaborates:

> In the present verse, the words 'haṃsa.' 'eka' and 'nirupākhyarūpa' are applicable for both the swan and Brahman. But the nature of the twos must not be identical. The sages devoted to yogic austerities and having renounced terrestrial temptations, reach the close proximity of Brahman. Though realization of Brahman cannot be seen through human eyes, yet it is compared with the act of observing the swan from empirical point of view. In Vedānta system, Brahman is known as indescribable Supreme Self.[392]

While, the connection between the bird and Brahman is introduced in 3.3, the next verse (3.4) connects the relationship of Damayantī and the bird with that of the spiritual seeker and Brahman respectively. Nārāyaṇa provides the correspondences through a couple of clever etymologies. First, he converts the past participle *sannihitam,* usually understood as frozen form meaning "near" by dividing it up into three components, as if it were a compound word. He takes the first prefix *sam* to nominally mean "by the virtuous ones," (*sadbhis*) such as Manu; the prefix *ni-* to mean "fully" (*nitarām*); and the past passive participle *hitam* in the sense of "meditated upon" (*dhyātam*). Thus, Nārāyaṇa offers a sense of *yogī*-s fully meditating on the activities of mind that proliferate within or of the Brahman which resides inside or near the body.[393] Alternatively, he understands the compound as signifying that "for the virtuous ones" (*sadbhyas*), the exceedingly

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[392] Meher 296

[393] yathā muner yogino mānaso vṛttir vyāpāraḥ svikāyāṃ tanau carantaṃ sadbhir manvādibhir nitarāṃ hitaṃ dhyātam

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(*nitarām*) good thing (*hitam*) is that which is desired (*iṣṭam*), which for them is the Supreme Self (*paramātman*); and it is that which they desire to understand.[394] Cāṇḍupaṇḍita offers virtually the same interpretation.[395]

The extent to which this kind of allegorical reading is taken in the commentaries is extensive. In important ways, Śrīharṣa's conscious blending of philosophical and real-world discourse with the imaginative universe of Sanskrit poetry often erases any fundamental distinction between them, a feature undoubtedly inspired by the Vedic and Vedantic notion of the oneness of all creation. Commentators, many of them being monists themselves, seem to have from very early on understood the interpretive possibilities of this approach. It apparently became the most popular interpretation among some modern readers of *Naiṣadha*. Thus, Sastry explains his guru's reading of the very first verse as signifying Nala to be a *sādhaka* and a *jñānī* who has not only realized the *paramātman* but is himself the Supreme Self. Sastry explains that the names Nala and Nara being synonymous, even the gods spurn nectar upon hearing Nala's stories. He then explains the various terms in the first verse (1.1) according to Vedānta:

> If Nala were to be an ordinary *kṣatriya* king this description is to be taken as a mere super hyperbole. But this verse contains a special hidden

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[394] sadbhyo vā tebhya eva nitarāṃ hitam iṣṭaṃ haṃsaṃ paramātmānam ādarayuktena atiśayena abhiprāyeṇa grahītukāmā sati niścalatāṃ prāpnoti.

[395] yathā manaso vṛttir manovyāpāraḥ svakīyatanau śarīre sannihitam antaś carantaṃ haṃsam ātmānam ādarayuktena āśayena antaḥkaraṇena grahītukāmā jñātum icchur niścalatāṃ dhyānaparatā jagāhe.

meaning. As per the etymological explanation, the word "kṣiti" (kṣiyate, naśyatīti kṣitiḥ) means 'the body.' The protector of the body (kṣitibhṛt) is the Ātman only which has entered into it as the Jīvātman. His story is the compilation of the Vedānta (Upaniṣadic) sentences. Nectar may give devatva (godhood) but amṛtatva (salvation, permanent freedom from birth and death) can be obtained only through the Upaniṣadic Vidyā. If Nala is identical with the Supreme Being, then only his story can be sudhāvadhīriṇī, surpassing the Nectar.[396]

In the tradition of the previously discussed Sanskrit commentaries on this first verse, Sastry presents Śrīharṣa's words as a conscious attempt to infuse the poem with Vedantic meaning. Whereas Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdhara understood terms such as *kṣitirakṣin* as the kings, Nāgas, or as the destruction of Kali, the esoteric reading of Sastry's guru sees it as the *ātman* itself, i.e. the "protector (*rakṣin*) of the body (*kṣiti*). He goes on to present numerous other examples that reorient the figure of Nala as the *parabrahman*. Similarly, Damayantī's father Bhīma becomes a "fierce" enemy of vice and an embodiment of renunciation, while the gods represent the various schools of philosophy (*darśana*). Damayantī is, for Sastry, the *vidyāśakti* herself; for Sharma's Tantrik interpretation, she is the *suṣumnanāḍī* that proceeds from *mūlādhāracakra* to the *sahasrāracakra* in search of bliss (*ānanda*) and the Absolute (*paramātman*).[397] Even the events of the epic take on deep Vedantic associations. Thus, the famous invisibility of Nala in the seventh canto comes to be seen by Sastry as a representation of Nala's acquisition of the *tiraskariṇi vidyā*, one of the powers of an accomplished yogi.

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[396] Sastry xv

[397] Sharma 74

Damayantī, Sarasvatī, Pañcadaśī, and the Cintāmaṇi Mantra: the Discourse of *Naiṣadha* as Religious Text

Perhaps the most interesting esoteric reading in the *Naiṣadha* hermeneutic tradition revolves around the central female characters in the poem -- Damayantī and Sarasvatī -- and their association with the potent mantras of the Tāntrik Śrīvidyā tradition, the *cintāmaṇi* mantra or the *pañcadaśī*. These components of the text's literary history loom large in the "religious readings" of *Naiṣadha*. At this point, one may ask: do the early Sanskrit commentators imagine *Naiṣadha* as a religious text? If so, in what ways have their efforts to show the text as such guide later, more developed, formulations of the theme? The receptive history of *Naiṣadha* proves that readings and interpretations are overtly or covertly intertextual. Śrīharṣa himself often moves between any given narrative focus and Vedāntic or Tāntrik doctrines. Commentators, at every turn, pick up on the clues. As persevering readers closely following the text's arrangements, emphases, and explicit markers, the commentators are rewarded for "deciphering" meaningful clues. If they discover the embedded mantra, the logic seems to be, then perhaps they can "unpack" its potency. In succeeding, they may truly become a *sahṛdaya* of the poet.

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The Sanskrit commentators' techniques resemble the reading strategies made famous by literary theoreticians in the twentieth century.[398] In searching for the revelatory signs in the text, these commentators convert the hermeneutic code of the text into more complex cultural codes, moving from superficial first readings to more significantly productive second readings. This is accomplished through identifying and reconfiguring the various semiotic matrices of the text in order to transform a self-contained, mimetic reading into a more structured and intellectually (or religiously) satisfying one that connects the elements of the verses to broader cultural contexts. Among *Naiṣadha* commentators, we have already seen this approach above with Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdhara's reading of 1.1. In the case of both of these commentators, however, it appears for the most part that they are working independent of the explicit direction of the poet in formulating their exegesis. For example, with the case of the so-called "religious readings" of the poem, it is the poet's critical mention of the *cintāmaṇi* mantra that provokes commentators. Unlike many of Sanskrit plays and poems that are given a clearly extra-textual religious reading by commentators, the *Naiṣadha* explicitly begs a religious reading. In fact, one may argue that a religious reading of *Naiṣadha* is warranted by the *internal* features of the poem, that it is not "suggested" nor that it is hidden.

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[398] I am specifically thinking about pioneering literary critics of semiotics such as Roland Barthes and Michael Riffaterre.

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According to the final verse of the first canto of the *Naiṣadha* (1.145), the

poet himself claims that the poem is the result of his meditation on the "thought-

jewel" (*cintāmaṇi*) mantra:

> This (concludes) the first canto of the epic poem *Naiṣadhīyacarita*, lovely
> on account of its literary presentation of the erotic *rasa*, it being the fruit of
> meditation on the *cintāmaṇi* mantra.[399]

The word *cintāmaṇi* signifies, according to Apte, "a fabulous gem supposed to

yield to its possessor all desires, the philosopher's stone."[400] The mantra

associated with this jewel is thought to be particularly sacred to Sarasvatī and

connected with the Śrīvidyā tradition of Tāntrik Hinduism, as well as to the female

bodhisattva Tārā in Buddhist tantra. The Śrīvidyā regards as supremely

efficacious the complex fifteen-syllabled [401] mantra (*pañcadaśī*) that represents the

transcendent form of goddess Lalita or Bhuvaneśvarī. Douglass Brooks describes

this tradition:

> The śrīvidyā's silent repetition (*japa*) in the context of internal
> contemplative worship (*upāsana*) of the śrīcakra is the centerpiece of
> śrīvidyā practice. When the mantra is repeated as part of śrīcakra worship,
> the adept is assured both worldly prosperity (*śrī*) and the knowledge
> (*vidyā*) that effects liberation (*mokṣa*) . . . It is a series of individual seed-
> syllables (*bījākṣara*) grouped in three sections or "peaks" (*kuṭa*). Taken
> individually, these seed syllables are understood as specific aspects of the
> goddess, each with their own identities and associations. When grouped
> together, these seeds manifest her complete subtle form (*sūkṣmarūpa*).[402]

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[399] tac cintāmaṇimantracintanaphale śṛṅgārabhaṅgyā mahākāvye cāruṇi naiṣadhīyacarite sargo
'yam ādir gataḥ. 1.145
[400] Apte 710

[401] Sometimes, the mantra is spoken of as having sixteen syllables, corresponding to the sixteen
digits of the moon. See Brooks 120.

[402] Brooks 119

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Brooks cites Bhāskarāya's interpretation of the *śrīvidyā* mantra as "not mere

mundane speech (*vaikharī*) but a deeply secret (*atirahasya*), subtle manifestation

of the goddess."[403] The verse in Śrīharṣa that commentators cite as revealing the

poet's own familiarity with the mantra comes in the famous words of goddess

Sarasvatī herself in the eighty-eighth and eighty-ninth verses of the fourteenth

canto, appearing near the end of a lengthy blessing she confers to the now-united

Nala and Damayantī. Although the verse can be translated differently, according

to the perspective from which one chooses to divide and understand the words, one

basic meaning describes Lord Śiva and, according to Nārāyaṇa (along with several

other commentators, including Mallinātha) it explains the mantra as *auṃ* (ॐ) *hrīṃ*

(ह्रीं) *auṃ* (ॐ):

> Remember (*smara*) and repeatedly chant (*japa*), O King (*narapate*), that
> hidden (*antar*) mantra of mine. This mantra has no form (*nirākāra*),
> represents the form of the Lord (*bhagavān*) called Śiva (*haramaya*), the
> pure (*amala*) and moon-endowed (*sendu*), who is Whole (*sakala*) but two-
> fold (*dvidhā*) on account of being joined (*ghaṭanāt*) by two aspects
> (*ubhayākāra*). Let this (mantra) prove successful (*sidhyatu*) for you (*te*).[404]

According to Nārāyaṇa, here the embedded mantra *hrīṃ* contains in itself Śiva's

name *hara* minus the vowels. The moon refers to the moon on Śiva's head as well

as the *anusvāra* in the mantra.[405] Here, the commentator provides several ways

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[403] Brooks 119

[404] avāmāvāmārdhe sakalam ubhayākāraghaṭanād dvidhābhūtaṃ rūpaṃ bhagavad abhidheyaṃ bhavati yat / tad antarmantraṃ me smaraharamayaṃ sendum amalaṃ nirākāraṃ śaśvaj japa narapate sidhyatu sate // 14.88

[405] hakārarephayor uccāraṇārthaṃ yad akāradvyaṃ tadrahitaṃ 'hra" iti vyañjanamātrahakārarephamayam ityarthaḥ. tathā senduṃ ī ca induś ca tābhyāṃ saha vartamānam.

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to understand the components of the verse. For example, the word

smaraharamayam, rendered above as "Remember (*smara*) . . . Śiva (*haramaya*),"

is broken up differently by Nārāyaṇa. First, he offers that Sarasvatī's own true

form (*svarūpa*) is mentioned in the epithet, whereby her form is desire (*smara*)

itself, not apprehended either in thought or action; that is to say, as *smara*, it is the

reality of worldly desire while as *hara*, it is Śiva. This form bestows in the pure

heart worldly and otherworldly happiness (*bhuktimuktidāyi*). And so, let this

mantra prove successful to you as it is my grace (*prasāda*), i.e. may you realize it

in the state of deep absorptive meditation (*samādhidaśāyāṃ sākṣād bhavatu*). Or,

Nārāyaṇa contends, the epithet refers to Śiva and Śakti. Since women are

foremost in terms of desire (*strīṇāṃ kāmapradhānatvāt*), the first part of the word

(*smara*) refers to Śakti, and the latter to Śiva. Thus, the commentator explains,

the imperative should be taken as "may the Lord satisfy your innermost being

(*tavāntaḥ sidhyatu*). Or, "may you remember (*smara*) Hara (Śiva)."

Before revealing the hidden mantra in the verse, as he sees it, Nārāyaṇa

then turns his attention to the word "Lord," rendered as *bhagavat* in the compound

form. The word *bhagavat* potentially signifies both the male and female aspect of

God, both *bhagavatī* and *bhagavān*, Pārvatī and Parameśvara.[406] It also could

refer to Ardhanārīśvara, the form of the lord that is both male and female in form

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ikāreṇa ardhacandreṇa ca yuktam. tathā -- sakalaṃ kalā anusvāras tat sahitam hrīṃkārarūpam
ityarthaḥ.

[406] yadrūpaṃ śabdarūpatvād bhagavatī ca bhagavāṃś ca bhagavantau pārvatīparameśvarāv
abhidheyaṃ yasya.

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(*yadvā bhagavacchabdavācyam ardhanārīśvaram*). Nārāyaṇa seems to prefer this
reading and proceeds to unpack the rest of the terms to elaborate the reference to
Ardhanārīśvara. First he takes the compound *avāmāvāmārdhe*, which refers to the
"not-left" portion (*avāmā*) of God, i.e. the right side (*dakṣiṇa*) of the body, which
also means "not a woman" (*avāmā*) and, therefore, masculine (*puruṣa*). Put
together, they are one complete form (*sampūrṇaikarūpa*). It is a form of Pārvatī
and Maheśa. Or, the *avāma* stands for either Viṣṇu alone or for Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu
(*lakṣminārāyaṇātmaka*) if one renders *a* as Viṣṇu, *vā* as meaning "and" and *mā* in
the sense of Lakṣmī. By this semantic formula, the moon (*sendu*) refers to the left
eye (*vāmā*) of Viṣṇu. Or, the words refer to a form half of which is Śiva (the right
side) and half of which is Viṣṇu (*hariharātmaka*). Finally, in summarizing his
views, Nārāyaṇa and most other commentators who offer substantive notes on the
verse conclude that the verse speaks of the mantra dedicated to the Goddess of the
Earth (*jaganmātṛ*), visualized in a mysterious bi-gendered form. Thus, the formula
yielding *hrīm*,[407] according to Nārāyaṇa, is flanked by two forms of *auṃ*
(*praṇavadvayasaṃpuṭika*), which together embody the syllabic form of goddess
Bhuvaneśvarī. Nārāyaṇa cites an *āgama* as evidence of this mantra's power to
accomplish all desired aims (*sarvārthasādhaka*).[408] Nārāyaṇa explains that there
may be other meanings associated with various gods -- such as Śiva and Viṣṇu --

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[407] haś ca raś ca maś ca īś ca tādṛśaṃ hakārarepham akārekārasamāhārarūpam yadyapīkāraḥ paścān nirdiṣṭas tathāpi makārāt pūrvam eva jñātavyaḥ.

[408] bhagavatī bhuvaneśvarī abhidheyā tasya tādṛśam iti vā. "śivāntyo vahnisaṃyukto brahmadvitayam antarā / turīyasvaraśītāṃśurekhātārāsamanvitaḥ // eṣa cintāmaṇir nāma mantraḥ sarvārthasādhakaḥ / jaganmātuḥ sarasvatyāḥ rahasyaṃ paramaṃ matam //" iti āgamāt.

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hidden in this verse but for fear of prolixity, he will desist from further elaboration.[409]

Before recounting the ways in which this particular discourse of the *cintāmaṇi* mantra has been used as an explanation for the very production of the *Naiṣadhīyacarita* -- both by later readers and the poet himself -- one may gather from Handiqui's informative note the pervasive history of some form of this mantra in significant Tāntrik religious traditions in South Asia:

> The *cintāmaṇi* mantra mentioned above is to be distinguished from various other mantras of the same name. There is a Buddhist formula named *cintāmaṇiratna mantra* mentioned in *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. The *sādhana* or the ritual text laying down the worship of the white *ekajaṭā* form of the Buddhist goddess Tārā describes a formula which is very similar to the *cintāmaṇi* mantra mentioned by Śrīharṣa. The formula is *hrīṃ* described as *ekākṣaro'yaṃ mantrarājaścintāmaṇikalpaḥ*, and like the *cintāmaṇi* formula of our poem, claims to make a man a great poet, scholar and orator . . . The definition of the formula may be compared with that of the *cintāmaṇi* mantra quoted above -- *saptam asya caturthaṃ vahnisaṃyuktaṃ īkārabheditaṃ ardhendubindubhūṣitaṃ itthaṃ japet*. *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhita* 23.96ff describes a *cintāmaṇi* formula which figures in *pañcarātra* ritual in connection with the *sahasrāramātṛkācakra*. The *Prapañcasāra Tantra* (chap. 28) also deals with a *cintāmaṇi* mantra, of which the deity is the Ardhanārīśvara form of Śiva; but it is a *vaśīkaraṇamantra* and has nothing to do with Sarasvatī and the acquisition of poetic power. *Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati*, a comprehensive Śaiva work, describes in detail the ritual connected with another *cintāmaṇi* formula, of which the deity is Mahārudra. A Vaiṣṇava formula called the *mantra-cintāmaṇi*, sacred to Kṛṣṇa, is explained in *Padmapurāṇa* (in the *Pātālakhaṇḍa*), chap. 50. We may refer also to a *cintāmaṇi* hymn quoted by Bhāskararāya in his commentary on *Lalitāsahasranāma* (verse 87).[410]

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[409] asmiñ śloke ṭīkāntarakṛto bahūnāṃ śaivavaiṣṇavādi mantrāṇām uddharo vijñeyaḥ. atra granthavistarabhiyā kaṣṭakalpanayā ca noktaḥ.

[410] Handiqui 580

Handiqui's lengthy comment marks the wide reverence for some form of the

cintāmaṇi mantra in Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Bauddha, and Śākta traditions. It also

suggests the diverse kinds of power it claims to harbor and yield to the devotee

who can visualize and realize the mantra through constant repetition. While

Handiqui merely alludes to the various religious traditions associated with the

cintāmaṇi mantra, the practice of connecting up the mantra's power with such

goals as the "acquisition of poetic power" or the activation of the *kuṇḍalinī* energy

for it to rise through the spiritual nerve centers (*cakra*) of the body becomes the

primary prism through which certain readers of the *Naiṣadha* interpret its verbal

and structural codes. Of course, the poem itself guides these readers to conduct

such readings. In verses 14.89 and 14.90, the *Naiṣadha* offers its own idea of what

kinds of results one may expect from realizing the mantra (*mantraphala*), again

presented in the words of Sarasvatī herself:

> The good man who fixes in his heart this *cintāmaṇi* mantra of mine
> becomes a lord of Speech by possessing speech that is moistened with the
> nectar of every poetic flavor (*rasa*). Acting as the god of Love, he brings
> under his control the doe-eyed damsels of heaven. With this (mantra),
> whatever that man desires to come to fruition, that very thing he gets.
> What more is there to say (about this mantra's power)?[411]

> If one were to offer worship to me with things like sweet-smelling flowers
> and perfumed incense, while I move about on the *haṃsa*, and chant with
> his mind fixed on me in the form of mantra, he would be my devotee. At
> the end of the year he would realize that mantra and whoever's head he

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[411] sarvāṅgiṇarasāmṛtastimitayā vācā sa vācaspatiḥ sa svargīyamṛgīdṛśām api vaśīkārāya mārāyate /
yasmai yaḥ spṛhayatyanena sa tad evāpnoti kiṃ bhūyasā yenāyaṃ hṛdaye sthitaḥ sukṛtinā
manmantracintāmaṇiḥ // 14.89

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were to place his hand on, that person also could -- all of a sudden -- compose beautiful verses. A wonder to behold is this (power).[412]

If one recalls, the *bhaṇita* verse that ends the first canto (cited above) cites the *Naiṣadha* itself as "being the fruit of meditation on the *cintāmaṇi* mantra." According to verses 14.89 and 14.90 the secret mantra, if correctly and devotedly recited for one full year, confers not only poetic genius but also grants control of the physical world and ultimately the satisfaction of having all of one's desires fulfilled.

Indeed, the words of Sarasvatī seem to speak directly to the circumstances that produced the *Naiṣadhīya* and, by extension, the poetic genius behind it. If one were to accept the view that the *bhaṇita* verse at the end of the first canto (as well as all other final verses at the end of every canto) are interpolated, then these two verses from the fourteenth canto would perhaps be the only explicit signposts that point to an extraordinary origin for the poem's existence. As it stands, the intriguing possibility that these verses hold a sort of key to unlock the secret meanings interwoven through every word, if not syllable, in the poem becomes a serious interpretive outlook. Though no sustained esoteric reading is found among the Sanskrit commentators of the text -- outside the few comments made by Nārāyaṇa and Śrīdhara discussed earlier -- one finds contemporary reading communities attempting to imbue every element of the text with mystical

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[412] puṣpair abhyarcya gandhādibhir api subhagaiścāruhaṃsena māṃ cen niryāntīṃ mantramūrtiṃ japati mayi matiṃ nyasya mayyeva bhaktaḥ / tat prāpte vatsarānte śirasi karam asau yasya kasyāpi dhatte so'pi ślokān akāṇḍe racayati rucirān kautukaṃ dṛśyam asyāḥ // 14.90

significance, particularly as it relates to the Śrīvidyā tradition. Thus, for example,

while Nala is presented as a seeker of *brahman* or the *parabrahman* itself,

Damayantī is posited as Vidyāśaktī; when Śrīharṣa compares Damayantī to

Lakṣmī and likens her to the crescent moon resting on the head of Śiva in verse

2.19, Sastry (representing the view of his guru's tradition) detects a direct reference

to the *pañcadaśīmantra*, whereby the rather odd connection of the *nāyikā*

Damayantī with both *devī* Lakṣmī and the lunar digit on Śiva's head becomes

clarified:

> The *pañcadaśīmantra* is in three parts (*khaṇḍa*): vahni, sūrya, and soma.
> By adding the mystic syllable (*bījākṣara*) *śrīṃ* as the fourth *khaṇḍa*, it is
> called *śrīvidyā*. This fourth *khaṇḍa* is known by the name "*candra-kalā
> khaṇḍa*." Yogins who worship the first three *khaṇḍās* in the *mūlādhāra*,
> *anāhata*, and *ājñācakra* respectively worship the fourth *khaṇḍa* in the
> *sahasrāra*. The puzzle contained in the above verse can be solved only by
> taking the help of this tradition.[413]

Finding in the text references to the *śrīvidyā* mantra that details the *kuṇḍalinī*

energy's movement through the six *cakra*-s in the body, Sastry and other

commentators who share his views[414] organize the interpretation of the entire

poem on this principle. They see the last canto of the poem -- Nala's lengthy

description of the rising and "setting" moon -- as especially significant. The

twenty-second canto opens with a statement that Nala -- longing to kiss his

beloved's red lips upon seeing the setting sun -- arrived (*avāptavān*) to the

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[413] Sastry xi-xii

[414] Seshendra Sharma's *Svarnahaṃsi*, cited earlier, also echoes this point of view.

"seventh floor" (*saptamabhūmibhāga*) of the palace (*saudha*) to see Damayantī.[415]

Sastry sees special significance in the rather odd mention of the "seventh floor," in addition to Śrīharṣa's pregnant choice of diction:

> The description of the moon has connections with the *candrakalā khaṇḍa*. The *bijākṣara śrīṃ* is meditated upon in *sahasrāra*. There are six *cakrās* beginning with *mūlādhāra* (*mulādhāra, svādhiṣṭhāna, maṇipūra, anāhata, viśuddhā*, and *ājñā*). *Sahasrāra* [is] the seventh one. The twenty-second canto [employs words such as] "*avāptavān*" . . . '[*s*]*audha*' [which] means "the place of *sudhā*, i.e., *amṛta*. That is the *saudhā* where lives Bhaimī. That is on the seventh floor; which was reached by Nala. Examine how significant is each of the words here. The phrase "*bhaimīdhara*" means literally "that which bears Bhaimī." How awkward this meaning is! In such places, one is forced to go up to the suggested meaning.[416]

Although no available Sanskrit commentary seems to make much of any of these marked words -- such as *saudhā* for "palace," *avāptavān* for "arrived at" -- one may observe the logic of connecting the particular usages with an esoteric reading of the passage. Opening up otherwise straightforward passages to religious readings is a peculiarity of Śrīharṣa's writing that one sees throughout the poem. For example, in verse 1.117, which captures Nala's first sight of the haṃsa, Śrīharṣa uses an aorist form in an unusual sense:

> Near a pleasant pool, which had appropriated some of the ocean's loveliness, Nala awakened to the presence of a spectacular golden *haṃsa* bird stirring nearby, intent on (seeking out) the indistinct cooing of a female *haṃsa* desirous for love-play.[417]

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[415] upāsya sāṃdhyaṃ vidhimantim āśārāgeṇa kāntādharacumbicetāḥ / avāptavān saptamabhūmibhāge bhaimīdharaṃ saudham asau dharendraḥ // 22.1

[416] Sastry xx

[417] payodhilakṣmīmuṣi kelipalvale riraṃsuhaṃsīkalanādasādaram / sa tatra citraṃ vicarantam antike hiraṇmayaṃ haṃsam abodhi naiṣadhaḥ // Nc 1.117

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Seemingly wishing to convey the basic sense that Nala *saw* the haṃsa stirring

nearby, Śrīharṣa uses the odd verb *abodhi*, which literally means "awakened to" or

"realized." Picking up on the notion that the *haṃsa* really represents the

paramātman, one may easily surmise the kind of reading such a passage will invite

from certain commentators. Indeed, Seshendra Sharma points to this very example

in his analysis of the poem as an unfolding of the *cintāmaṇi* mantra.[418] One sees in

later adaptations of Śrīharṣa's poem interesting continuities and changes in the use

of words. For example, the influence of Śrīharṣa is seen in fourteenth century poet

Kṛṣṇānanda's telling of the Nala story in his Sanskrit poem *Sahṛdayānanda*. This

same scene of Nala's seeing the *haṃsa* is rendered as follows:

> Nala saw a golden *haṃsa* bird sitting on the leaf of a lotus lovingly
> offering newly sprouted lotus fibers to the mouth of his beloved.[419]

Particular attention should be drawn to the final phrase in both texts. Śrīharṣa

writes *hiraṇmayaṃ haṃsam abodhi naiṣadhaḥ* (Nala awakened to the golden

haṃsa), whereas Kṛṣṇānanda expresses the same ideas as *hiraṇmayaṃ haṃsaṃ*

asau dadarśa (He saw the golden haṃsa). It appears that Kṛṣṇānanda was

drawing from Śrīharṣa's phrasing (as it occurs in the same meter with the same

kind of resonance) with the clear exception of the verb employed: the perfect

dadarśa for the aorist *abodhi*. There are a couple of points worth making here.

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[418] Sharma 7

[419] mukhe priyāyāḥ praṇayānubandhād bālaṃ mṛṇālāṅkutam arpayantam / sarojinīpatryaniṣaṇṇam ekaṃ hiraṇmayaṃ haṃsaṃ asau dadarśa // 1.60

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First, recognizing that Kṛṣṇānanda had composed a Sanskrit commentary on the *Naiṣadha* -- which is unfortunately lost -- a preliminary reading of the *Sahṛdayānanda* directs one to the sonic and semantic intersection of the commentarial consciousness with the poetic consciousness; more precisely, studying this poem affords us an opportunity to discuss the nexus of a parent text (*Naiṣadhīya*), a commentary on the text (Kṛṣṇānanda was a commentator of *Naiṣadha*), the nature of intertextuality among diverse Sanskrit compositions, and the creative scope available to a "regional" poet writing in Sanskrit. Second, and more relevant to the purpose in this section, one sees the special kind of diction in Śrīharṣa that marks it as "mystical" or "religious" or, at the least, welcoming to esoteric readings. Thus, just as in Nc 1.117's use of *abodhi*, the use of th past active participle *avāptavān* in 22.1 seems a bit much for a pedestrian meaning of "arrived at." Seeing this entire canto (and the poem) as the attaining of bliss in Tāntrik terms, this same tradition of reading Śrīvidyā implication into the poem carries over into other passages in the text that trouble or disturb certain readers.

For example, the same Śrīvidyā interpretive tradition finds the famous head-to-toe description (*nakhaśikhavarṇana*) of Damayantī's body as embodying an embedded meaning of the princess as Vidyāśakti in the form of *kuṭatrayātmikā*, "she who consists of the three peaks (*kuṭa*)." These three "peaks," connected with the power of speech (*vāgbhavakūṭa*), desire (*madhyakuṭa* or the *kāmarājakuṭa*), and power (*śaktikuṭa*) are mapped onto the three sectors of Damayantī's body: from her hair to her chin; from the neck to downy line above her navel; and the

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rest of the lower body. Reading Nala's voyeurism in this way also has the effect of

eliminating the troubling impropriety (*anaucitya*) of the action described in the

seventh canto of the poem. About verse 7.96, where Nala notes that Bhṛgu takes

refuge in her breasts, while Nārada her face and Vyāsa her thighs, Sastry thus

writes:

> [D]oubts of mine was cleared after Śrī Śāstri Gāru explained the hidden
> meaning of verse 7.96. Here, Bhṛgu is the seeker of *aiśvarya*, worshipping
> the *madhyakuṭa*, Nārada who is interested in praising *paramātman*,
> worships *vāgbhavakuṭa*. Vyāsa, the seeker of *jñāna* worships *śaktikuṭa*.
> He is the author of the Brahma Sūtra and has brought out in it the essence
> of the Upaniṣads. However great they may be, each one of them is
> connected with one *kuṭa* only where as Vidyāśakti is the combination of all
> the three *kuṭas*. That is the reason why they are bewildered regarding her
> complete form. Many *upāsakas* are interested in *aiśvarya*, some of them
> are interested in learning (*vāk siddhi*) and only a few of them are interested
> in salvation. While changing the order of the three *kuṭas*, Śrīharṣa wanted
> to suggest this point.[420]

One notices in both of the above examples -- reading Śrīharṣa's text in light of the

pañcadaśī mantra -- that textual items marked by their oddness of image or

reference are seen as esoteric (*gopya* or *rahasyabhūta* are common citations) and,

therefore, almost invite the religious-minded reader to seek out deeper

significance. Ultimately, this approach finds its strongest support in the purported

words of the author himself. In verse 22.151, Śrīharṣa explains the special

qualities of the poem and its poet:

> From the mountain rocks (or, from blockheaded speech of inferior poets) in
> this direction and that Sarasvatī (the river and Speech) flows. Let the
> suggestive sounds rising and falling be compared with each other. It is

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[420] Sastry xii-xiii

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only the milky ocean of nectar that gives relief to the gods in the form of nectar that gladdens and delights.[421]

The implication here is that it is only Śrīharṣa's poem that is the milky ocean of speech, nectar-like and giver of worldly and otherworldly bliss. Other poets' speech, by contrast, trickles down like water from a mountain. The connection of the poem as a fruit of deep meditation and as a result of divine grace is taken up in another verse that follows this one at the end of the twenty-second canto. These verses taken together have led to centuries of commentary and speculation about the composer and composition of the *Naiṣadhīyacarita*.

Although the final four verses of the poem, serving as a sort of epilogue, are not universally accepted by scholars as authentically Śrīharṣa's, nevertheless they have become an important part of the tradition of the text.[422] Just as 22.151

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[421] diśi diśi girigrāvāṇaḥ svāṃ vamantu sarasvatīṃ tulayatu mithastāmāpātasphuraddhvaniḍambarām / sa paramparaḥ kṣīrodanvān yadīyamudīyate mathituramṛtaṃ khedacchedi pramodanamodanam // 22.151

[422] Two of these verses were cited earlier: "Even the most beautiful woman cannot captivate the heart of an infant the way she can the heart of a young man. In that way, my words delight the hearts of learned connoisseurs and become nectar. What of the disrespect that comes from insipid individuals?"

[yathā yūnastadvatparamaramaṇīyāpi ramaṇī kumārāṇāmantaḥkaraṇaharaṇaṃ naiva kurute / maduktiścedantarmadayati sudhībhūya sudhiyaḥ kimasyā nāma syādarasapuruṣānādarabharaiḥ // *Nc* 22.150]

and, "Here and there I have made an effort to lodge some knots in this text in order to frustrate the proud reader. Let no scoundrel play here. Only a good man who has had these challenging textual knots loosened by a properly reverenced teacher will be able to happily dive into the nectarine waves of this poem."

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explains the uniqueness of the *Naiṣadhīya*, 22.153 provides information about the special role of the historical poet in producing an extraordinary poem. In this verse, Śrīharṣa explains how he received two *pāan*, or betel-leaf rolls, (*tāmbūla*) and a seat (*āsana*) from the king of Kānyakubja as reward for his talents -- which include writing sweet poetry and overwhelming the logical arguments of others (probably a reference to his *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*). He also claims that he has realized the supreme *brahman* (*param brahma*) that is an ocean of delight and, therefore, his poem augments the delight of others.[423] Nārāyaṇa explicates the poet's statement by clarifying that it was in meditation that the poet realized the poem (or, more technically, while in the state of *samādhi* as understood by the *aṣṭāṅgayoga*). It was in this condition that he saw the otherwise inexpressible supreme *brahman*, whose true form is supreme bliss. On account of the sweetness of this experience, his poem provides the kind of sweet nectar available only to knowers of *brahman*.[424] The historical information in this verse -- that the king of Kānyakubja (modern Kanauj) honored him-- will be dealt with below.

[granthagranthir iha kvacitkvacidapi nyāsi prayatnān mayā prājñamanyamanā haṭhena paṭhiti māsmin khalaḥ khelatu / śraddhārāddhaguruślathīkṛtadṛḍhagranthiḥ samāsādayatv etatkāvyarasormimajjanasukhavyāsajjanaṃ sajjanaḥ // Nc 22.152]

[423] tāmbūladvayamāsanaṃ ca labhate yaḥ kānyakubjeśvarādyaḥ sākṣātkurute samādhiṣu paraṃ brahma pramodārṇavam /
yatkāvyaṃ madhuvarṣi dharṣitaparāstarkeṣu yasyoktayaḥ śrīśrīharṣakaveḥ kṛtiḥ kṛtimude tasyābhyudīyādiyam // 22.153

[424] yaḥ samādhiṣu aṣṭāṅgayogeṣu dhyāneṣu vā viṣaye pramodārṇavaṃ paramānandasvarūpaṃ paraṃ vāgādyagocaraṃ brahma sākṣāt kurute. na paraṃ pūrvoktaguṇaviṣiṣṭo brahmavideva kiṃtu yadīyaṃ kāvyaṃ madhuvarṣi atisarasatvād amṛtavarṣi.

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The significance, however, of conflating the temporal history of the poem with its metaphysical nature is a common enough motif in Sanskrit literary history. In fact, theorization on the subject of the extraordinary poet and poetic creation in traditional Indian texts is not wholly lacking. For example, Rājaśekhara, in his *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, introduces a topic that deals with the poet's skill as something beyond natural talent. He calls it *aupaniṣadikam*. In the introduction to the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, he mentions a power he calls *upaniṣaccakti*, which he defines as a power drawn from some sort of initiation into a mantra or tantra (*mantratantrādy upadeśaprabhāvā śaktiḥ*). Śrīharṣa appears to be ideally suited to this paradigm. After all, there is evidence internal and external to the *Naiṣadha* that points to his relationship to supernatural powers. The external evidence is admittedly more substantial. It is well accepted that Śrīharṣa composed the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, the great work on Advaita; his pedigree as a first-class philosopher, therefore, is well established. The natural question that seems to have arisen among early readers wonders how a philosopher could have composed such a rich literary masterpiece.

As indicated earlier, readings of literary texts as products of religious experience or conducive to religious experience seem to have become popular during the early part of the second millennium. Rather than simply observing overtly religious content in the course of commenting on a given poem, commentators seem to often read a religious significance into the overall structure of the poem. Reading Sanskrit literary texts "religiously" has a well-developed

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history in South Asia. Frames for understanding aesthetic and emotional experience in soteriological terms have been famously theorized within the Sanskrit tradition most notably by the great tenth or eleventh century scholar Abhinavagupta, who argues that the emotional experience one participates in through viewing drama is homologous to the religious experience associated with transcendence of self and world. His work, in turn, has become exceedingly popular among modern scholars of traditional South Asian literature and religion. Among many traditional reading communities, an emphasis on seeing the experience of literature as modeling a kind of religious experience seems to have become a popular way of reading literary texts during the early part of the second millennium. Rather than simply observing overtly religious content in the course of commenting on a given poem, the hermeneutic practice of reading religious significance into the overall structure of superficiality non-religious art has been actively pursued by generations of commentators on the great epics of pre-modern India, as well as on important lyric poem (*Amaruśataka* and *Gītagovinda*, for example), and celebrated dramas like the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* and *Mālatīmādhava*. Even texts on poetics like the well-known *Kāvyaprakāśa* have been read from a "religious" point of view. Indeed, effacing literal meaning in favor of attributing a religious integrity, or an "original" unity, to poetic texts has been in evidence since the early commentaries on Vedic literature and a religious goal of all succeeding hermeneutic traditions in South Asia.

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Unlike, however, texts such as the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* which, on

account of their being situated squarely in the religious traditions of South Asia,

have been read and revered for their esoteric content, some of the *Naiṣadha*'s

critical discourse in this regard seems to simply serve as explanations for the

poem's (and the poet's) shadowy history. Even though the most recent of the

"great five" (*pañcamahākāvya*), a firm understanding of the poem's origins and

mercurial spread throughout South Asia remains elusive.

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Conflating the Historical Poet with the Spiritual Adept: *Naiṣadha* Commentary on Śrīharṣa

One well-documented aspect of the poem's literary history concerns the time and place of Śrīharṣa and his compositions. Although a topic that seems to inordinately dominate the discourse of the poem among contemporary scholarship, it has deep precedent in the earliest strata of Sanskrit commentary on the poem, as well as in popular semi-historical works that relate anecdotes of famous historical figures.[425] The Sanskrit commentarial tradition yields a substantial nucleus of oral and written historical, semi-historical, and legendary information about the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*'s poet, text-transmission, aesthetic value, place of importance among other works of Sanskrit literature, place of importance in the Sanskrit academe, and influence on the artistic cultures of all regions of India. The forms that this information takes are *praśasti*-s (verses of praise for author and text), anecdotes (often anachronistic or unverifiable but revelatory of the traditional Sanskrit mind's manner of reconstructing a hazy knowledge of the past), and allusions to it in other texts and traditions (particularly the anthologies and semi-historical *prabhanda* literature). Most of the information comes from the Sanskrit commentators of the *Naiṣadha* itself, while the other information comes from other named and anonymous Sanskrit sources.

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[425] Perhaps the *Bhojaprabandha*, which contains a famous narrative about Kālidāsa, and the *Prabandhakośa* of Rājaśekharasūri, from which the account of Śrīharṣa is cited in this thesis, are the most well known from this tradition of writing in South Asia.

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Perhaps unique among the literary traditions in Sanskrit, suggestive --

though, by no means, conclusive -- information about the *Naiṣadha*'s author and

transmission is provided not only by later readers and critics but also by the poet

himself. Theories abound about the identity of this poet and the region from which

Śrīharṣa comes. The poet himself contributes to the speculation. For example, in

verse 22.153, seen above, he mentions that he received a reward from the king of

Kanauj. This reference has led some contemporary scholars of the *Naiṣadha*,

including M.B Emeneau, to conclude that Kanauj was Śrīharṣa's native place.[426]

Other internal evidence from the poem suggests that perhaps Kashmir was

Śrīharṣa's home, especially the reference from the *bhaṇita* verse to the sixteenth

canto (16.131) mentioning the appreciation of the *Naiṣadha* by the scholars of

Kashmir.[427] Some have also found the name of Śrīharṣa's mother Māmalladevī,

whom he mentions at the end of every canto along with his father Śrīhīra, as

sounding Kashmiri. The most compelling evidence that Śrīharṣa was Kashmiri,

however, lies in the anachronistic anecdote involving his supposed maternal uncle

-- the writer on poetics Mamaṭṭa.[428] Many point out that this association may

simply reflect a tradition that erudite poems in traditional India were often sent to

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[426] Jhala 159

[427] kāśmīrair mahite caturdaśatayīṃ vidyāṃ vidadbhir mahākāvye tadbhuvi naiṣadhīyavarite
sargo'gamat ṣoḍaśaḥ / 16.131

[428] See pgs. 150 onwards, including footnotes 323 and 324.

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Kashmir to receive final critical approval. In fact, in the late fourteenth century[429]

Prabandhakośa of Rājaśekharasūri, this idea is given some currency, which will

become apparent below. Essentially, however, the text offers the most basic

information: the name of Śrīharṣa's parents, his authorship of the

Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya, the fact that he was an *upāsaka* of the *cintāmaṇi* mantra,

and that he was given a special award by the king of Kanauj and his poem

approved by the scholars of Kashmir. It needs to be reiterated that all of this

information comes in the *bhaṇita* verses at the end of each canto and the four

verses that comprise the epilogue to the poem, both of which are considered

interpolated by many.

Around these few textual details, a very complex hagiographical narrative

develops around the poet and the impetus behind the composition of the poem.

Perhaps the earliest comes from the thirteenth century commentator Cāṇḍupaṇḍita:

> Unable to bear (pitying) glances, the poet (Śrīharṣa) desired to compose the
> impenetrable *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* as a response to (the philosopher)
> Udayana, who had defeated his father (Śrīhīra) during the course of logical
> debate. He was reduced to having this single thought, overwhelmed by the
> four goals of human life (*puruṣārtha*). And this being so, upon first seeing
> the Gaṅga in Vārāṇasī, the land where ultimate freedom is won
> (*muktikṣetra*), he achieved a balance between action (*karma*) and duty
> (*dharma*) and experienced the supreme *brahman*. By seeing in front of
> him a treasure of golden coins resembling Meru mountain, he fulfilled the
> aims of life.[430]

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[429] Jani (86) gives the date of this text as 1384 C.E. The following passages are all excerpted from
the *Prabhandhakośa* , story11 entitled "*Harṣakaviprabandha.*"

[430] prathamaṃ tāvat kavir vijigīṣu kathāyāṃ svapitṛparibhāvukam udayanam atyamarṣaṇatayā
kaṭākṣayaṃs tadgranthagranthīn udgrathithayituṃ khaṇḍanaṃ prāripsuś caturvidhapuruṣārthair

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Cāṇḍu's text then goes on to say that he spent sixteen years satisfying the four aims of life. For example, he made sensual pleasure his servant (*kiṅkarīkṛtakāmapuruṣārtha*), spending time with young, beautiful women. In satisfying the call of worldly life, he then composed a text on logic to cut to pieces (*khaṇḍaśaḥ khaṇḍitavān*) the arguments of his father's antagonist Udayana.[431] However, as Cāṇḍu goes on to relate, the difficulty of the text led him to write a poem, infused with the erotic sentiment, that would please connoisseurs.[432]

This early attempt to explain the history of the poem seems to underscore the nature of historical consciousness among the commentators. It is rather unlikely that Śrīharṣa's father and Udayana were actual contemporaries -- and rivals at court -- but it is arguable that Śrīharṣa's defense of Advaita logic in his *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* against the views expressed in the famous Naiyāyika's *Lakṣaṇāvalī* compels later readers to conflate their historical proximity. Rājaśekharasūri's account (translated below) corroborates the story with extensive elaboration without mentioning Udayaya by name. Another interesting detail in Cāṇḍu's note here is the mention of Śrīharṣa's spiritual career in Vārāṇasī. The

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abhimānam anavadhīyamānam avadhīrya mānasam ekatānatām ānināya. tathā ca śrīvārāṇasyāṃ muktikṣetre'nubhūtaparabrahmasvarūpe gaṅgādarśanādinā dharmakarmamadhyamadhyāsīno dṛṣṭipuraḥsthitāyatameruśikharasamasauvarṇaniṣkarāśidarśanena vaśīkṛtārthapuruṣārthaḥ kṛtārthaḥ.

[431] ṣoḍaśavarṣābhiryauvanavatībhirapūrvalāvaṇyasampattibhiḥ snānodvartanabhojanādyupacāracaturābhiḥ pramadābhiḥ paricaryamāṇatayā kiṅkarīkṛtakāmapuruṣārthaḥ. evaṃ caturbhirapi puruṣārthairanākṣiptahṛdayatayā granthaṃ nirmāya tadgranthān khaṇḍayan yuktibhiḥ khaṇḍaśaḥ khaṇḍitavān.

[432] tatra ca karkaśatarkodarkatvāc chṛṅgārādirasapradhānānām aparitoṣāṃ sambhāvya tadāvarjanāya rasapradhānaṃ kāvyam idaṃ cakāra.

theory is that Śrīharṣa undertook spiritual practice to avenge his father's insult and

having done so, with the composition of a philosophical work, turned his attention

to satisfying an audience of literary connoisseurs with the *Naiṣadha*. Cāṇḍu's urge

to historically situate the poet's versatility to compose both philosophy and poetry

equally well might have been a response to early readers' astonishment that the

same author could have composed both works. The implication is picked up on

and developed further by commentator Gadādhara and prose anecdote writer

Rājaśekharasūri. Gadādhara offers this account:

> There was a king named Govidacandra in Vārāṇasī, who was like Indra in
> his capital city of Amarāvatī. There were many scholars in his court, all of
> them decked with virtue. Among them all, Śrīharṣa was the most highly
> decorated among the assembly. It is reported that he composed the
> *Khaṇḍakhaṇḍakhādya* . . . When the occasion of Śrīharṣa's entering the
> king's assembly occurred some of jealous scholars, who thought of
> themselves as a forest of (juicy) mango trees when it came to literary
> composition, sneered to each other every time, "Oh, the (dry) Śamī tree of
> logic has arrived; it's like the desert stands before us." One day, while
> Śrīharṣa was present, he saw signs of an unbecoming and secretive
> atmosphere and attempted to piece it together for himself. Someone close
> to him related to him what some of the petty scholars were saying. In order
> to silence these learned men, he announced his intention to compose a
> *mahākāvya* called *Nalacarita*, which would be like an ocean that cannot be
> crossed with a simple boat, and directly offer it as a gift to the king. And
> so, being a distinguished scholar, the pleased king honored him with two
> seats and corresponding betel-leaf rolls: one for his mastery of logic and
> one for literature. He earned the name "poet-scholar" (*kavipaṇḍita*).[433]

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[433] vārāṇasyāṃ govindracandro nāma rājā babhūva. yathā'stīndro'marāvatyām. tasya sabhāyāṃ
bahavaḥ paṇḍitā babhūvuḥ. maṇḍitāḥ sadguṇaughena. teṣu ca sarveṣu śrīharṣaḥ parṣanmaṇḍanam.
yaḥ kila kṛtavān khaṇḍanam . . . taṃ ca yathāvasaramanusarantaṃ nṛpasaṃsadamapare matsariṇaḥ
prathamopagatāḥ sāhityarasālataruvanammanyāḥ parasparā"syavīkṣāpurahsaramupahasanti sma
prativāsaraṃ "samprāpto'yam tarkaśamītarupurasanniveśaḥ sākṣānmarureva deśa" iti. ekadā tu
sahasopasthitena tena te liṅgairulliṅgitāḥ svamanusandhāya dhyāyantaḥ kimapi visadṛśaṃ gūḍam.
pṛṣṭaśca kaścana tatsamīpavartī svāptaḥ "kimeteṣāṃ duṣṭādīnāmīdṛśaviceṣṭitam" iti. kathitaṃ ca
tena tatsarvaṃ tasmai yathāvadānupūrvyā. athā 'sau vidvānabhimānavān kilaitat kimapi
śṛṅgārarasadhāma nalacaritanāma samudravadanāvyaṃ mahākāvyaṃ vinirmāya nyavedayat tasmai
nṛpāya pratyakṣadevāya. tataśca vidvāneṣa viśeṣaviduṣastasmāt suprasannāt tarkavediṣv ekaṃ

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According to Gadādhara, Śrīharṣa was the court poet of Govindacandra, from

whom he received not simply two *paan* but also two seats (*āsana*). Gadādhara

seems to collate Cāṇḍu's mention of Vārāṇasī with the poem's internal evidence

about the king of Kanauj, by explicitly citing Govindacandra, the grandfather of

Jayantacandra. Since he received the rewards from the "king of Kānyakubja," as

cited by the poet (or the interpolator) at the end of the twenty-second canto of

Naiṣadha, Śrīharṣa must have been, by implication, the court poet of

Govindacandra. Following Cāṇḍu, Gadādhāra repeats the notion that Śrīharṣa

wrote the *Naiṣadha* to challenge the claim that he was merely a dry philosopher.

The two betel-leaf rolls then certify his status as master philosopher and poet.

Gadādhara also cites the significance of Śrīharṣa's spiritual practice:

> In desiring to compose this poem, this poet's first (thought might have
> been): "What hero-king existed in this world, who was brave and stoic and
> yet emotionally sensitive and playfully reckless? I will make such a
> personality the hero of my story, which will surpass even the taste of
> nectar. Because he was thinking about this again and again for a long time
> and devotedly practicing the *cintāmaṇi* mantra, it is said that an answer
> flashed forth. And having (mentally) received the first verse beginning
> with the word 'nipīya (Having drunk)', he composed the poem out loud.
> The point of all this is to say that in doing so, the poet is saying: "I coronate
> as the hero of this story a king named Nala, who in the Golden Age was
> adorned with virtues upon virtues.[434]

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sāhityavediṣvekamiti sabahumānamāsanadvayaṃ labhate sma. tāmbūladvayaṃ ca "kavipaṇḍita" iti
ca nāmāntaraṃ lebhe.

[434] prathamataś cāsya kaveḥ kāvyam idaṃ nirmātum icchataḥ -- ko'atra jagati tathāvidhaḥ khalu
dhīralalitaḥ kṣitipatir abhūd yam aham iha jitasudhārasakathaṃ kathānāyakaṃ karomīti.
bhūyaściraṃ cintayataḥ samyag upāsitasya cintāmaṇimantrasya prasādādyaḥ kilā'rtho'ntaḥ
prāsphurat sa eva nipīyety ādāv ādimaśloke bahir upanibaddhaḥ. yo'yam evaṃ guṇaguṇālaṅkṛtaḥ
kṛtayuge nalo nāma kṣitipatir āsit tam aham iha kathāyāṃ nāyakapade'bhiṣekṣyāmīti cātra
tātparyārthaḥ.

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Both Gadādhara and Cāṇḍupaṇḍita recount the popular tradition of Śrīharṣa's

having attained supernatural aid to write the *Naiṣadhīyacarita*. Neither, however,

gives any further details.

Presumably having both Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's and Gadādhara's account before

him, among others, Rājaśekharasūri provides a comprehensive narrative (called the

Harṣakaviprabandha) that has become the standard understanding of most

contemporary readers aware of the *Naiṣadha* tradition. He first expands on the

story told by Gadādhara. It may very well be that Gadādhara was actually

summarizing Rājaśekharasūri's account, with the very important difference that

whereas Gadādhara identifies Govindacandra as the king of Kanauj that patronized

Śrīharṣa, Rājaśekharasūri explicitly names his son Jayantacandra as the official

patron of the poet. He also follows Cāṇḍupaṇḍita's suggestion that Śrīharṣa

belonged to Vārāṇasī, though he does not give Udayana's name as Śrīhīra's rival:

> Previously, there lived in Vārāṇasī a king named Govindacandra, perfumed
> by the young ladies of the harem. His son was Jayantacandra. Giving over
> the kingdom to him, the father went into meditation and set out for the next
> world . . . [In the court of Jayantacandra,] there were many scholars. There
> was one scholar named Hīra. His son was the learned Śrīharṣa. While still
> a boy, Hīra was defeated in debate by one of the king's scholars. He was
> sunk in shame. At the time of his death, he addressed Śrīharṣa: "I was
> defeated in the presence of the king by a certain scholar. This is my
> sorrow. If you are a good son, then you will defeat him at court. Śrīharṣa
> spoke: "So be it." Hīra died and Śrīharṣa gave over his familial duties to
> his relatives and went abroad to study. In a short time, he became learned
> in various sciences including: logic, poetics, music, mathematics,
> astronomy, gemology, mantra, and grammar. For one full year on the
> banks of the Gaṅgā, he attentively meditated upon the *cintāmaṇi* mantra,

which he had received through the grace of a special guru. The Goddess Tripurā manifested and granted a boon of unfailing command (*ādeśatva*) [of speech]. Then he wandered around the royal conferences, making abstruse allusions to subjects that no one could understand. Therefore, even though highly learned, he was frustrated with being unintelligible to other people. And so, he invoked the goddess of Speech again and addressed her: "Mother, my immense learning has proved a curse. Make my speech comprehensible. The Goddess addressed him: "In the middle of the night, wet your head and drink yogurt. Then, go to sleep. On account of the descending cough, may your intellect be slightly blunted. Just so, it was. He became intelligible. He composed hundreds of texts, including the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*. Fulfilling his aims, he lived on the edge of the city and met with the king and his father's rival.[435]

The remedy recommended to "blunt" his intellect has become famous.[436] As the story continues in the *Prabandhakośa*, Śrīharṣa praises the king in a poetic way[437]

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[435] pūrvasyāṃ vārāṇasyāṃ puri govindacandro nāma rājā. antaḥpurīyauvanarasaparimalagrāhī. tatputro jayantacandraḥ. tasmai rājyaṃ dattvā pitā yogaṃ prapadya paralokam asādhayat . . . tasya rājño bahavo vidvāṃsaḥ. tatraiko hīranāmā vipraḥ. tasya nandanaḥ prājñacakravartī śrīharṣaḥ. so'dyāpi bālāvasthaḥ. sabhāyāṃ rājakīyenaikena paṇḍitena vādinā hīro rājasam akṣaṃ jitvā mudritavadanaḥ kṛtaḥ. lajjāpaṅke magnaḥ. vairaṃ babhāra dhārālam. mṛtyukāle harṣaṃ sa babhāṣe. vatsa amukena paṇḍitenāham āhatya rājadṛṣṭau jitaḥ. tanme duḥkham. yadi satputro'si tadā taṃ jayeḥ kṣmāpasadasi. śrīharṣeṇoktam om iti. hīro dyāṃ gataḥ. śrīharṣas tu kuṭumbhāram āptadāyādeṣv āropya videśaṃ gatvā vividhācāryapārśve'cirāt tarkālaṅkāragītagaṇitajyotiṣacūḍāmaṇimantravyākaraṇādīḥ sarvā vidyāḥ sasphurāḥ prajagrāha. gaṅgātīre sugurudattaṃ cintāmaṇimantraṃ varṣam apramattaḥ sādhayāmāsa. pratyakṣā tripurā'bhūt. amoghādeśatvādivarāptiḥ. tadādi rājagoṣṭhiṣu bhramati. alaukikollekhaśikharitaṃ jalpaṃ karoti yaṃ ko'pi na budhyate. tato'tividyayā'pi lokāgocarabhūtayā khinnaḥ punar bhāratīṃ pratyakṣīkṛtyābhaṇat. mātaḥ atiprajñā'pi doṣāya me jātā. budhyamānavacanaṃ māṃ kuru. tato devyoktam. tarhi madhyarātre'mbhaḥkllinne śirasi dadhi piba. paścāt svapihi. kaphāṃśāvatārāj jaḍatāleśam āpnuhi. tathaiva kṛtam. bodhyavāg āsīt. khaṇḍanādigranthān parahśatāñ jagranthaḥ. kṛtakṛtyībhūya kāsīm āyāsīt. nagarataṭe sthitaḥ. jayantacandram ajijñapat. aham adhītyāgato'smi. rājā'pi guṇasnehalo hīrajetṛpaṇḍitena saha sacāturvarṇyaḥ purīparisaram asarata. śrīharṣo namaskṛtaḥ. tenāpi yathārham ucitaṃ lokāya kṛtam

[436] In fact, another story cites the eating of beans as the means undertaken by Śrīharṣa to dull the intellect. C.S. Sundaram, who has written on Śrīharṣa's relationship with the Tamil literary tradition (see Bibliography), informed me of another account he had heard to explain the poet's supernatural creative power. According to this tradition, Śrīharṣa's mother taught her infant son the *cintāmaṇi* mantra and then strangled herself while the child was reciting the mantra on her corpse. Undoubtedly, this story reflects a Tāntrik tradition that cites the meditation of a powerful mantra on

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and then challenges the rivals who accuse him of being a mere dry scholar with the following verse:

> Whether it be the delicate matter of literature or the difficult knots of logic, with me the goddess of Speech plays the same. Whether it's a mattress wrapped with soft coverings or a floor strewn with thorny bristles, if the lover is agreeable, women enjoy the same either way.[438]

This famous verse, cited often by traditional Sanskrit scholars, is often mistakenly attributed to the *Naiṣadhīya* itself. It again reflects Śrīharṣa's own flair for the dramatic image and sharp retort. In Rājaśekharasūri's account, the rival scholar admits defeat while Śrīharṣa is honored with a title.

An account of Śrīharṣa's emergence as preeminent poet-philosopher somewhat different from the one provided by Cāṇḍu, Gadādhara, and Rājaśekharasūri comes from section 2.10.1-2.11.2 of Vidyāpati's fifteenth century *Purūṣaparīkṣā*, a collection of fascinating vignettes and tales of famous figures and events.[439] In this text, Śrīharṣa, though connected with Vārāṇasī, is thought to have originally been from the Gauḍa region: "There was a poet-scholar from the Gauḍa (area). And he composed a poem called the *Nalacarita*, which he took to

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a corpse as an efficacious way to realize the potency within the mantra. I am thankful to C.S. Sundaram of the Kuppuswami Sastri Institute (Chennai) for this detail.

[437] govindanandanatayā ca vapuḥśriyā ca mā'smin nṛpe kuruta kāmadhiyaṃ taruṇyaḥ / astrīkaroti jagatāṃ vijaye smaraḥ strīr astrījanaḥ punar anena vidhīyate strī //

[438] sāhitye sukumāravastuni dṛḍhanyāyagrahagranthile tarke vā mayi saṃvidhātari samaṃ līlāyate bhāratī / śayyā vāstu mṛduttaracchadavatī darbhāṅkurair āstṛtā bhūmir vā hṛdayaṃgamo yadi patistulyā ratiryoṣitām//

[439] *Puruṣaparīkṣā* 34

Vārāṇasī to present to a conference of scholars."[440] In Vidyāpati's account of

Śrīharṣa's life (called here "The story of the learned man" [medhāvi-kathā]), the

story begins after the poet has already written the poem. Vidyāpati imagines him

to have self doubts about the legitimacy of his creation:

> [Composing] a poem that captivates on account of its poetic effects and
> possession of rasa -- that alone confers fame on the poets; otherwise, it's a
> laughing matter. Gold is tested in fire, a poem in the assembly of the
> learned. What's a poet to do with his poem if the connoisseurs do not
> approve? [441]

Beset with this nagging concern, Śrīharṣa goes to Vārāṇasī to have his poem tested

by the authorities there. In Vārāṇāsi, he apparently met upon a learned scholar-

renunciant named Koka who, Vidyāpati informs, was "turned away from the

pleasures of the world and fixed in meditation constantly." Śrīharṣa, the account

goes on to say, followed Koka as he went to perform his ritual baths at the

Maṇikarṇika ghāṭ. While tracking the scholar, Śrīharṣa recites the Naiṣadha to

him. As day after day of this ritual passes with nary a comment from Koka,

Śrīharṣa's frustration mounts and he exclaims:

> Sir, I've worked very hard on this ornate poem. I've come a long way to
> have this poem examined by someone as great as you, my own
> countryman. I keep reading this poem as you go on the road, hoping to
> hear whether it sounds right or not to you. But you don't criticize it or
> praise it. It seems you haven't even been listening.[442]

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[440] babhūva gauḍaviṣaye śrīharṣo nāma kavipaṇḍitaḥ. sa ca nalacaritābhidhānaṃ kāvyaṃ kṛtvā . . .
tatkāvyaṃ darśayituṃ paṇḍitamaṇḍalīmuddiśya vāraṇasiṃ jagāma. [Puruṣaparikṣā 2.10.3]

[441] rasavanmānasaṃgrāhi guṇālaṃkārasaṃyutam / kavīnāṃ yaśase kāvyaṃ hāsyāyānyac ca jāyate
// agnau parīkṣyate svarṇaṃ kāvyaṃ sadasi tadvidi / kiṃ kaves tena kāvyena sadbhir
yannānugamyate // [1.10.2-3]

Koka, who interestingly is identified as a fellow countryman of Śrīharṣa's (*svadeśīya*), finally responds:

> Oh, how could I have not listened? I recognize the clarity of the poetic conceits with the judicious use of word and meaning. I will only respond in detail, however, once I have heard the whole thing. There was no other reason for my not responding. I've not only heard the poem but I have fixed it in my mind. If you don't believe me then listen.[443]

He then goes on, according to the story, to recite all of what he had heard for the past month (*māsamākarṇitāni padyāni sarvāṇi papāṭha*). Śrīharṣa is delighted and praises Koka for the power of his memory (thus the title of the piece, *medhāvi-kathā*). Koka then points out the virtues (*guṇa*) and demerits (*doṣa*) of Śrīharṣa's poem and then sends him home (*gṛhaṃ prasthāpayāmāsa*).

There are several features of this account that are intriguing. First is the fact that the story is only peripherally about Śrīharṣa. It is stated to be about Koka, who is the *medhāvin* about whom the piece speaks. Yet, the "biographical" details about Koka and Śrīharṣa are actually narrative expressions of some of the more well known "facts" of the *Naiṣadha* tradition: that Śrīharṣa (as adduced from his poem and early commentaries) spent time in Vārāṇasi, sought spiritual help (or holy men, as in this story), that he had a somewhat petulant swagger about him (as

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[442] tatra ca kokanāmānaṃ paṇḍitaṃ śrāvayāmāsa. . . . śrīharṣastu tamanugacchan paṭhati pratyaham tad uttaraṃ kimapi nāpnoti. ekadā śrīharṣeṇoktam -- ārya! mahākāvye kṛtaśramo'ham. tatparīkṣārthaṃ tvāmuddiśya buddhyā svadeśīyavātsalyena ca mahato dūrādāgato'smi. . . . . bhavānna nindati na cābhinandati. tanmanye karṇam eva nārpayati iti.

[443] koka uvāca -- āhaḥ katham ahaṃ karṇam nārpayāmi. kintu sampūrṇaṃ śrutvā śabdārthayorūhāpohena sandarbhaśuddhiṃ jñātvā viśeṣaṃ vakṣyāmi. anayā vāsanayā na kimapi vacmi. kāvyaṃ tu mayā karṇe kṛtaṃ manasi dhāritaṃ ceti. yadi bhavān na pratyeti tadā śṛṇotu.

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seen in the *bhaṇita* and epilogue verses in the poem), and that his poem was filled

with traditionally effective (*guṇa*) and ineffective (*doṣa*) poetic usages. The quasi-

historiographical practices reflected in the *Naiṣadha*'s receptive history serve to

remind us of the ways in which communal memories of outstanding literary

figures and their cultural production are constructed. These "reconstructions" of

history also draw attention to the ways in which a tradition performs literary

criticism or explains the social element in the history of ideas. For example, the

above account of Vidyāpati's, as also Rājaśekharasūri's seemingly reflect the

particular discourses built around the *Naiṣadha* in terms of taste, propriety, and

aesthetic effect. These accounts probably represent a distillation of even older

opinions and have, in turn, been internalized by almost all later readers of

Naiṣadha trained in the traditional style. Furthermore, these quasi-historical

accounts aim to resolve what apparently were causes for anxiety at some point in

the history of the text. For instance, Śrīharṣa himself acknowledges at the end of

the sixteenth canto that the scholars of Kashmir approved of his poem. Yet, there

is another popular story, built on anachronism, that the Kashmiri poetics master

Mamaṭṭa was his maternal uncle and he disapproved of the fault-ridden poem.

To perhaps fill out the narrative, or to address the contradictory aspects of

the perceived history, Rājaśekharasūri provides an account of how the *Naiṣadha*

gained approval among the scholars of Kashmir, after first passing the judgment of

Sarasvatī herself:

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His anxiety alleviated, one day the poet was asked by the king, "Lord of poets and speech, write some jewel of a composition." Thus emerged the extraordinary poem *Naiṣadha*, full of *rasa* suggestive and profound. The king saw it and responded: "This is a superior work. Go to Kashmir. There, show it to the scholars. Hand it over to the goddess of Speech, who herself lives there. If it's no good, she will throw the composition away; if it is good, it will be put at the forefront and praised. Śrīharṣa accepted the king's reward and set out for Kashmir. He placed the text in Sarasvatī's hand. She threw it far away.[444]

According to Rājaśekharasūri, the goddess explains her displeasure by citing verse sixty-six from the eleventh canto of the *Naiṣadha* that offensively describes her as a wife of Viṣṇu (*pavitritacaturbhujavāmbhāgā vāg*). Śrīharṣa then cites an obscure passage from the Purāṇa literature that corroborates his allusion to assuage her anger (*tvam purāṇeṣvapi viṣṇurpatnīti paṭhyase*). The goddess of Speech accepts his explanation. However, when Śrīharṣa asks the scholars for the king's audience, their jealousy manifests. They tell him that he must wait to see the king. Śrīharṣa, therefore, spends months waiting at his own expense. He bides his time near a well of a temple along a river chanting the *rudramantra*, again following a tradition that links up the poet with the Tāntrik tradition.[445] While there, according to the story, he witnesses a dispute between two housemaids about drawing water from the well (*jalaprathamapaścādgrahaṇaghaṭabharaṇaviṣaye vāde*). The police

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[444] niścintīkṛtyaikadā mudā nṛpeṇoktaḥ -- kaviśa vādīndra kiñcit prabandharatnaṃ kuru. tato naiṣadhaṃ mahākāvyaṃ baddhaṃ divyarasaṃ mahāgūḍhavyañgyabhārasāram. rājñe darśitam. rājñoce -- susṭhutamam idam. paraṃ kāśmīraṃ vraja. tatratyapaṇḍitebhyo darśaya. bhāratīhaste ca muñca. bhāratī ca tatra pīṭhe svayaṃ sākṣād vasati. asatyaṃ prabandhaṃ haste nyastam avakaranikaram iva dūre kṣipati. satyaṃ tu mūrdhadhūnanapūrvaṃ susṭhu ity ūrīkaroti. uparitaḥ puṣpāṇi patanti. śrīharṣo rājadattārthaniṣpannavipulasāmagrīkaḥ kāśmīrān agamat. sarasvatīhaste pustakaṃ nyāsthat. sarasvatyā dūre kṣiptaṃ tat.

[445] ekadā nadyāsannadeśe kūpataṭāsannatame devakule rudrajapaṃ rahaḥ karoti.

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come and cart both women away to the magistrate (*rājakula*). They eventually

learn of Śrīharṣa having witnessed the event and the king subpoenas him to court

also. Here interesting details emerge that later readers cite to demonstrate that

Śrīharṣa was not a Kashmiri:

> I am a foreigner. I have no idea what language these two women were
> speaking. I only remember the words. The king demands, "Speak to
> them." Sequentially, Śrīharṣa relates the dialogue of the women. The
> astonished king responds: "What genius! What a memory! ... Who are
> you, crown jewel of learned men?[446]

Śrīharṣa then tells him the whole story, recounts the indignities heaped on him by

the jealous scholars, and castigates them. Śrīharṣa himself utters the verse found at

the end of the twenty-second canto, cited earlier:

> Even the most beautiful woman cannot captivate the heart of an infant the
> way she can the heart of a young man. In that way, my words delight the
> hearts of learned connoisseurs and become nectar. What of the disrespect
> that comes from insipid individuals?[447]

Thus shamed, the scholars now give Śrīharṣa his due. And so, the text becomes

available to the people (*praśrtaṃ naiṣadhaṃ loke*). Having initiated the

dissemination of his own poem, Śrīharṣa returns to Jayantacandra's court at

Vārāṇasi. There is another story told by Rājaśekharasūri in the

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[446] vaideśiko'ham. na vedmi kimapyete prākṛtavādinyau brūtaḥ. kevalaṃ tān śabdān vedmi.
rājñoktam -- brūhi. tatkramastham eva tadbhāṣitapratibhāṣitaśatam abhihitam anena. rājā
camatkṛtaḥ -- aho prajñā aho avadhāraṇā . . . kas tvam evaṃ medhiraśiromaṇiḥ

[447] yathā yūnas tadvat paramaramaṇīyāpi ramaṇī kumārāṇāmantaḥkaraṇaharaṇaṃ naiva kurute /
maduktiścedantarmadayati sudhībhūya sudhiyaḥ kimasyā nāma syād arasapuruṣānādarabharaiḥ //
Nc 22.150]

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Hariharaprabandha that recounts how the poem was then transmitted to Gujarat by Śrīharṣa's descendant Harihara and copied down by a minister of Vastupāla.[448]

The above account demonstrates a process of traditional biography that aims to clothe a narrative around some significant critical perspective. It is well established that Śrīharṣa's poem exhibited a boldness (*prāgalbhya*) that some traditional lovers of poetry found objectionable. This perspective finds voice in the anachronistic tale of Mamaṭa as Śrīharṣa's disapproving uncle. Similarly, Rājaśekharasūri's story seems to counter this perspective and offer a counter-narrative that explains how the poem was finally accepted by Kashmiri critics and praised. It is interesting that a specific *doṣa* in the text, in this case a perceived violation of popular usage (*aprasiddhadoṣa*) by misrepresenting Sarasvatī, serves as the lightning rod to spark a discourse about the acceptance or rejection of the poem on both aesthetic and moral grounds. The *kathā* also draws our attention to the actual historicity of the *Naiṣadha*. Rājaśekharasūri, as many of the Naiṣadha's commentators, are only a century or two removed from the poet.[449] Although the contradictory details in all of their accounts suggest a unverifiable historicity, nevertheless theories about the origin, composition, appreciation, transmission, and dissemination of the poem become integrated into the overall discourse of the text and, sometimes, it appears the tradition itself is unable or unwilling to

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[448] See Rājaśekharasūri's *Hariharaprabandha* (1.12), pg. 58-61.

[449] Cāṇḍupaṇḍita, for example, refers to the poem as a new composition (*navyam kāvyam*) when he comments on it.

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critically separate fact from fiction. The conflation of historical and textual details with wishful notions related to their presence may not be so much on account of commentators' genuine confusion about their existence. One may imagine the creation of a composite account that ties in desirable historical details in a culturally entertaining form as an eschewal of some kind of factual "integrity" of individual author, text, or even history. Whatever contributes to a sensible, wholesome, and generally desired outlook, the logic seems to go, should be accepted and promoted as true.

Bringing the actual figure of Śrīharṣa into historical time in most of the commentarial accounts seems to be a secondary consideration. Rājaśekharsūri, having already provided details to explain the poet's skill and the text's popularity, provides a coda to the traditional narrative by recounting the demise of the poet in the same dramatic fashion applied to explaining his rise to greatness. Jani provides a good summary of the passage:

> While Śrīharṣa was away, Padmākara, the minister of the king went to Anahillapura in Gujarat and brought from there a widow Padmini, Sūhādevī by name, with the permission of Kumārapāla, for the king Jayantacandra, who married her. This Sūhādevī was very proud and asked people to address her as Kalābhāratī on account of her proficiency in the various arts. Śrīharṣa, on account of his learning, was also popular as Narabhāratī. Being jealous of Śrīharṣa's achievements, she called him once and asked him: 'Who are you?' The poet replied, 'I am kalāsarvajña.' The treacherous queen, thereupon, ordered the poet to prepare a pair of shoes for her and to exhibit, thereby, his art. Her intention, in asking him thus, was to satisfy her vanity. She knew the result both ways. If Śrīharṣa denies, his ignorance will be exposed and he shall have to give up his title. If, on the other hand, he accepts the proposal, he will be defiled by the impurity attached to this act and will be degraded from his caste. But Śrīharṣa, who was more than a match for her, consented and prepared, from

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birch-bark, a pair of shoes and put it on her feet, in a manner befitting a cobbler. However, disgusted with such ill treatment, Śrīharṣa after having informed the king about this sad and degrading event, took sannyāsa and passed the rest of his life on the banks of the Gaṅgā.[450]

Rājaśekharasūri's detail about Śrīharṣa fading from Jayanta's court bears the stamp of authentic historical detail. It is still unclear if Śrīharṣa can be traced to Jayantacandra's reign in Kanauj. On the other hand, the humbling of a proud Śrīharṣa by a shameless queen seems oddly contrived to fit the portrait of the poet. Furthermore, spending his final days as a renunciant in Vārāṇasi (presumably) along the Gaṅgā -- a place where his reputation as the author of the *Khaṇḍana* and *Naiṣadha* continues to evoke the most cherished values of traditional Sanskrit intellectual culture -- also seem to fit an archetype rather than imply historical reality.[451]

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[450] Jani 91

[451] Other Sanskrit poets, such as Jagannātha, are also believed to have spent their last moments in a similar way.

Concluding thoughts:

Rājaśekharasūri's account of Śrīharṣa's life and work seems essentially to be a patchwork of oral traditions current during his time combined with details provided by Cāṇḍupaṇḍita, Gadādhara, and perhaps other Sanskrit commentators whose work is no longer extant. His reworking of stray details into a coherent narrative becomes for later readers the definitive understanding of the poet and his poem. In fact, many contemporary anthologies used in modern universities in India often include information from the commentaries (and from such works as the *Prabandhakośa*) as standard background information of the *Naiṣadha* and Śrīharṣa. Not surprisingly, many serious readers who have studied the poem, either traditionally or in the modern university setting, have internalized a uniform narrative concerning the poem's history. This becomes clear when professors and pandits alike are asked to relate their attitudes about the poem. The particular details they give -- usually variously configured combinations of the information provided in this thesis -- not only inform their own reading and comprehension practices but reveal, in a very important way, the ways in which receieved accounts dominate their overall impression of the poem. In other words, very rarely do they speak about the *Naiṣadha* as an isolated, independent literary phenomenon. Rather than simply a text, the *Naiṣadha* (as other seminal works of literary, religous, or philosophical significance in South Asia) manifests as a tradition primarily built on an edifice of reading and re-reading, an account of accretion and transformation.

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While this dissertation has attempted to identify the various stitches that tie together over time to form a coherent sense of some kind of *Naiṣadha* tradition, it is very rare that such consciousness exists among most readers. In fact, given the diversity of ideas held about the poem historically, one may even doubt if one can speak of a singular *Naiṣadha* tradition, though it is taken as such by some contemporary readers. Little awareness exists of the early Sanskrit commentaries or the ways in which the poem interacted with the various regional cultures of South Asia from the very beginning of its inception. Many do not realize the pioneering or transitional significance that this poem (and others like it during the turn of the second millennium) holds not only for the Sanskrit *mahākāvya* tradition but also for the introduction of new styles and themes suitable for literature in South Asia. Innovations such as *bhaṇita* verses at the end of each canto that give personal information about the poet have become commonplace but were first introduced during this period, as far as I can tell, in poems like the *Naiṣadha* and the *Gītagovinda*. The *Naiṣadha* also marks a watershed for the established traditions that precede it and the monumental changes in the social, political, linguistic, and broadly cultural makeup of South Asia that follow its appearance.

If one can trace the impact of the *Naiṣadha* (and other poems like it at different points in time) on all of the regional language traditions and vice versa, one would discover, I suspect, many fertile avenues for exploring the social and aesthetic codes of cultural production in South Asia. This study has focused on the cultures of reading practice that have made a textual tradition possible and

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available for communities of readers. The interplay of concern with those elements that constitute the early receptive tradition of the poem has been the center of attention here: the traditional reader's employment of tools of textual scholarship to form a critical text; his fixation with the establishment or reinforcement of aesthetic canons and inherited models; his guidance in forming frames for interpretation to orient himself or to clarify for others his point of view; his engagement with performing expert exegesis to prove competence or excellence in institutional settings; his concern with tackling significant *aporia* in the tradition, especially with unanswered questions about the text's author, its emergence and transmission, and finally its critical appreciation. In doing so, the commentators have (perhaps unwittingly) interposed themselves between text and reader in a way that is fundamental to the reading experience. They have not only preserved communal memories but have become integral parts of them; in turn, they have also made it possible for others to become part of them.

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