

On Kṣemendra's Version of the Nalopākhyāna

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Kṣemendra, a prolific and erudite poet who flourished in Kashmir in the 11th century A.D., not only composed a set of works: didactic, poetical, and Buddhist narrative, but also wrote the abridgements of the great epics *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*: the *Bhāratamañjarī* and the *Rāmāyaṇamañjarī*. Although a great deal of effort has been made on his Buddhist narrative and didactic works, little is known about the *Bhāratamañjarī*. Since Sylvain Lévi referred to it in the 19th century, this work has been considered to be a mere abridgement of the *Mahābhārata* and to merit no scrutiny. Prof. John Brockington, a specialist in the great epics, also says the following:

“The Kāśmīri polymath Kṣemendra in the middle of the 11th century composed summaries of both epics, the *Bhāratamañjarī* and the *Rāmāyaṇamañjarī*; **these are of little literary merit** but have sufficient importance for the history of the text to have been consulted by the editors of both Critical Editions.” (*The Sanskrit Epics*, p. 490; emphasis mine)

We should draw attention, however, to the fact that in his *Bhāratamañjarī* Kṣemendra displays considerable ability as a poet. In order to show this point, I shall consider the Nalopākhyāna told by Kṣemendra there. It is to be noted in passing that the Nalopākhyāna in the *Bhāratamañjarī* is comprised of 230 verses, while this story in the *Mahābhārata* of 899 verses.

It will be shown that by means of effectively using figures of speech, didactic phrases, and the Āryā meter (though in one stanza), Kṣemendra tries to express the humanity of Nala and Damayantī vividly. This tendency, too, manifests itself in his Buddhist narrative work *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* where he deftly depicts Nanda and Sundarī. Thus we must say that in his *Bhāratamañjarī* Kṣemendra is not contented merely to abridge the Nalopākhyāna in the *Mahābhārata* but aims at creating his own version of the story of Nala by exerting his skill as a poet.