

PREFACE.

S'ri Harsha's Naishadha, a poem on the life of Nala, King of Nishadha, is divided into two parts, the Púrva and Uttara Naishadha, or the first and second Naishadha, each of them containing eleven cantos; a division, for which there is no apparent reason, as the second is a mere continuation of the first-part, nor are the two separated by any remarkable turn in the narrative. The Púrva Naishadha was published in 1836, under the auspices of the General Committee of Public Instruction, by Premchander Pañdit of the Calcutta Sanscrit College, and accompanied with a Commentary of his own. The present edition of the Uttara Naishadha was undertaken at the suggestion of Professor Lassen, and concludes the last of the six Mahákávyas* of the Hindus which remained unpublished.

A Mahákávyá, or great poem, although belonging to the narrative kind, is not an epic poem, which treats of heroic characters and deeds: the Mahábhárata and Rámáyana best correspond with our idea of an heroic poem, and they are classed under the head of Itihása. The eminence denoted by the prefix "great" refers rather to the length and general excellence of a poem, and in one instance, Kálidása's Meghaduta, to its excellence alone. Tradition, resting on general consent, declares the six poems above enumerated, alone worthy of that distinguishing title.

The treatises on poetical composition give a more tangible account of this class of poetry. A Mahákávyá, according to

* They are the following, the Raghuvans'a, the Kumára Sambhava and the Meghaduta, all three ascribed to Kálidása, the Kirátárjuniya by Bhárávi, the S'is'upalabadha by Múgha, and the Naishadha by S'ri Harsha.

the definition of the *Sáhitya Darpana*, one of those treatises, is a poem of many cantos; the hero is either a god, or a khsatriya of good family, and of firm and elevated character; or the subject of the poem may be, as in *Kálidása's Raghu Vans'a*, several princes of the same race: the principal qualities illustrated are, love, heroism and meekness: the narrative itself should be taken from an *Itihása*, as the *Mahábhárata*, or from some other approved authority; it should exceed eight cantos, each of moderate length, and be interwoven with descriptions of morning, of the sun, moon, night, the heavens, the city, sacrifice, war, travelling to another country, marriage, etc.

According to this definition, the form and mode of treatment are the test for deciding, whether or not a poem be a *Mahákávyá*; consequently, the author of the *Sáhitya* excludes *Kálidása's Meghaduta*, and not only assigns the name of *Mahákávyá* to others than those above mentioned, but gives it to some of his own composition. Notwithstanding the difference in the popular and the more learned definition of a *Mahákávyá*, there is this common to both, that they are narratives of lofty or elevated style and aspire to the rank of the highest order of poetry in the language.

The *Naishadha* is one of those poems to which the name of Great is given par excellence; and certainly, as respects the subject matter of the poem, it is one of the most romantic and pathetic to be found in the literature of any language. It is the well known story of the love between *Nala*, king of *Naishadha*, and *Damayantí*, the daughter of *Bhíma*, the king of *Vidarbha*, which is briefly this: *Nala* was the most beautiful and high-minded of men, *Damayantí*, the loveliest of women—hearing everywhere of each other's virtues and accomplishments, they were reciprocally inspired with an ardent love, which they communicated to each other by the mediation of swans—the father, not aware of their mutual attachment, seeing the beauty of his daughter fading, resolved that she should marry, and, with this view invited the neighbour-

ing kings to Damayantí's Swayamvara, a festival, where, in accordance with the ancient Hindu rite, she was to choose her own husband—along with the princes came Iudra, Agni, Yama and Varuṇa, the four Lokapálas, or divine guardians of the world, in the likeness of Nala to deceive Damayantí—having invoked those deities to aid her in recognising her lover, she selected the true Nala. The story proceeds to describe their marriage and happiness, the vengeance vowed to Nala by Kali (the personified deity of the present or fourth age), his getting hold of Nala, through an omission of a ceremony by the king, Nala's addiction to gambling under the evil influence of Kali, thereby his loss of the kingdom and banishment, his separation from the faithful Damayantí (who had borne him company through his reverses of fortune, when all had abandoned him), Nala's madness, their mutual sufferings and varied miseries, the final recovery of Nala from his mental malady, and his happy reunion with Damayantí. The love of Nala and Damayantí had been first related in the Mahábhárata, containing in the third part, the Vanaparva, the episode of Nala.* Since then, it has remained a favourite theme with Hindu poets, who have adorned it, as a triumphal arch, with their poetical festoons and garlands. The most celebrated of these productions are the Nalodaya† generally ascribed to Kálidása, which, owing to its continuous play upon words, is one of the most difficult of Sanscrit poems, the Nala Champú by Vikrama Bhaṭṭa, a narrative partly prose and partly verse, and S'rí Harsha's Naishadha.

* Bopp published a separate edition of the text with a Latin version under the title "Nalus Mahábhárati Episodium. Altera emendata editio. Berolini, 1832. Milman translated it into English "Nala and Damayantí, and other poems translated from the Sanscrit into English verse, by H. H. Milman." There are German versions of the poem by Kosegarten, Rückert and Bopp.

† Nalodaya, with the commentary of Prajñákaramisra, 1813, (Calcutta?). Nalodaya, una cum Pradschnakari Mithilensis scholiis ed., lat. interpretatione atque annotationibus criticis instruxit F. Benary, Berol., 1836. Nalodaya, accompanied with a metrical translation by W. Yates, Calcutta, 1844.

The treatment of this subject in the Mahábhárata and Nais̄hadha is wholly different. The Mahábhárata tells the whole story in simple, but vigorous and noble language. It is full of powerful descriptions of passion; the poet nowhere pays any undue attention to the mere form of language; his chief exertion is devoted to attract our sympathy to the qualities and passions which he represents. Refer, for example, to the deep pathos in the description of the grief of Damayantí, when abandoned by her husband in the solitude of the forest.

S'rí Harsha gives only a part of Nala's adventures and carries the story no further than the return of Nala to his capital with his bride Damayantí, and the description of their first unalloyed affection and happiness. It is poor in incident, the greater part of the long poem being occupied with descriptions of the kind mentioned before as indispensable in a Mahákávyá. It does not exhibit, as the Mahábhárata does, a comparatively simple state of manners and society, but a highly artificial one, and mirrors the terrible social corruption existing at the time when the poet flourished. Instead of ennobling the affections, or appealing to the tenderest and most sacred feelings of man, the love which the poet describes is earth-born and sensual in a degree far exceeding the lasciviousness of some of the Roman poets. Scenes such as described in the feast of Dama (Canto 16, pp. 353—401) are degrading and revolting; nor are similar extravagancies confined to an episode like that just alluded to—the absence of decent shame pervades throughout, and pollutes even the hearts of the females, as is evident, for instance, from the speech of Damayantí's companions. (Canto 16, pp. 352—59). Even the love of Nala and Damayantí, although generally tender and delicate and adorned with all the graces of the poet's exuberant fancy, approaches often to unveiled sensuality, and may, in truth, in several places, be designated a practical illustration of the Kámas'ástra. And very well has the author himself described the basis upon which rested the fabric of a large portion of Hindu society in his day, in

Preface.

the speech which he puts into the mouth of the Chárváka (Canto 17, pp. 435—74), the founder of an atheistical system, who admirably demonstrates the hollowness, absurdity, and moral turpitude of the Hindu pantheon—a speech, which, indeed, the gods attempt to refute, but their rejoinder is rather a confirmation.

With the structure or frame of the poem our delight is nearly unqualified. The language is highly elaborate, bearing the mirror's polish. It never becomes common-place, and bears throughout a sustained tone of sprightliness and elevation. Although we find a continual play upon words for many verses together, yet, not only is the sense not lost in a mere jingle of syllables, but the general effect is often much enhanced by the harmonious contrast of open and concealed meanings. The variety of metres are handled by the poet with admirable art and propriety; and the subject sparkles under his tread as gleams the ocean-track in a ship's wake, rich in imagery showered unceasingly from the cornucopia of the poet's mind. He draws upon the countless stores of Hindu mythology, weaves quaint and monstrous shapes, furnished by Heaven, Earth and Hell, into a rich string of arabesques, blending together their strange variety so that they harmonise. Yet may the whole be likened to dissolving views. Perfection of form and general effect are the poet's aim, not what we moderns consider real intrinsic excellence, that is, elevation of idea, power of invention and insight into human character, rather than skill in the mere structure of language and in the stringing together of imagery, truly a high but not the highest gift. The effort of the Sanscrit poet is brilliant—so brilliant as to blind the reader with its blaze, until he loses, or becomes unconscious of, any defined creation of the poet's fancy. Saraswati's description of the five Nalas is a ready instance of the characteristic peculiarities we have attempted to describe. The poet tells of the five Nalas: each verse has what we may term an overt and a sub-meaning or meanings, the former applying to Nala,

the latter to the god who had assumed Nala's form; and, in conclusion, the same collocation of words has a reference to the character and manifold attributes of the five Nallas. (Canto 13, pp. 146—148.) Among the best parts of the poem, I would name the whole 17th Canto, especially the powerful description of the personified deities of the chief vices, and the twenty-second, in which the description of the moon by Damayantí and Nala is in exquisite taste and sometimes pathetic, each verse containing a complete picture in itself, in which the rich and melodious flow of the language is in perfect harmony with the subject.

To sum up; in structure, force and elegance of diction, in propriety and graceful ease of vythou metre, in power of description and felicitous use of imagery—the Naishadha ranks high, and may enter the lists with any work of Sanscrit literature; but, to fit it for a place among the poems of the first order, it wants incident, action and dignity. The hero does not rouse our higher sympathies; he revels constantly in the gardens of Armida—not as a Rinaldo who lays by his armour for a while, but as one native to the place, whose soul never soars beyond its delusive pleasures.

The MSS. of the text and commentary which I have collated for the present edition, are the following,—

Of the Text.

A. No. 655, complete, belonging to the Calcutta Sanscrit College. It bears the date of 1711, and the name of the writer is Ananda Parivrájaka. It is very correct.

B. Complete, it is the property of my Paṇḍit, S'rí Sakháráma S'ástrí, who, about 50 years ago, received it from his father. It is also a good copy, as may be expected, having been so long in the possession of Paṇḍits.

Of the Commentary.

C. No. 655, belonging to the Asiatic Society, procured from Benares. It is a commentary both on the Púrva and the Ut-tara Naishadha. It is, however, not complete, containing only

Cantos 12, 14 to 17 and 21, more or less complete. It has the date of Samvat 1815, and is tolerably correct.

D. No. 131, belonging to the Calcutta Sanscrit College. It contains parts of the 14 to 17 Cantos; the 18 to 20 Cantos are complete.

Text and Commentary.

E. This belongs to the Asiatic Society, and is copied from a MS. in the Library of the Sanscrit College at Benares. It is incomplete, containing Cantos 13 to 17 and 20 to 22. It is dated 1807, and is not very correct.

F. Nos. 128-130, belonging to the Calcutta Sanscrit College. It is without date, contains Cantos 12 to 16, 18 and 21, and is tolerably correct.

An edition of the text was urgently required; for even in S'ri Náráyana's commentary, which according to a traditional account was written about 500 years ago, a great number of various readings are enumerated. The commentary itself is very good. S'ri Náráyana has a thorough appreciation of the beauties of his author, and is fully able to follow him into the labyrinthine windings whether of fancy or expression. He explains with accuracy and nicety all those passages which, from the double meanings of words or their rare use, from the elaborate structure of the sentence or the obscurity of allusion or circumstance, would otherwise remain unintelligible. Nor is he prolix, as is frequently the case with such commentators. The MSS. of the commentary would seem to have become very rare. I have not seen one that was complete; and those which have been at my disposal are very incorrect, evidently owing to the carelessness and misapprehension of the copyists, so that I have, in many instances, found it very difficult to restore the text of the commentary. I considered it, however, unnecessary to notice all the discrepancies among the MSS.; the greater part of them are palpable mistakes, and to enumerate or give an account of them would be to furnish, not various readings, but a list of mere clerical errata.

The text has been given in accordance with the reading approved of by the commentary; and although I have been frequently disposed to adopt a reading not favourably considered by the commentary, I have foreborne to do so, that I might maintain the uniformity of relation between the text and commentary.
