

**THE ESOTERIC TEACHING IN**

**NALOPAKHYANA**

**OR**

**AKSA -- HRDAYA AND ASVA-**

**HARDAYA**

It was when I was perusing the Nalopakhyana recently that I came across certain passages which gave me the cues into the understanding not indeed of the truth as such but what these figures of this great drama of life stood for. I do not consider that I shall not be contained in it by way of suggestion or *dhvani*.

The story itself is a simple one. Nala, a fine knower of horses and their ways, a strong and imperious King, blessed with a perfect body was chosen in a *svayamvara* by Damayanti, the daughter of Bhima, one in all respects matched to him, who chose him in preference to the five Gods of Heaven. They, the gods, blessed Nala in happiness with his their siddhis or occult powers. Thus lived Nala in happiness with his well – blessed wife, till due to some fault fate began to overtake him. He had a brother, Pukara, who was a knower of Aksha or display at least better than himself, thought he was not any near perfection in other respects. Challenged by Puskara, Nala took to the play of dice and played and played on till he lost all his material possessions. But the charm and the maddening sense of defeat urged him

1 *Aksina-vidya*: science of supernatural divinations : *yaj. Samhita* IV.6.8. : *caksur devanam ata maryanam* : cf. *Tiruvaymoli* : l. 8.3. *Kannanenru-- of Aksyapanisad*: that deals with the Sun and Divine Eye and

*Aksamalikopanisad*

on till he was utterly denuded of all his riches. Driven out of his own city , he with his faithful wife entered the forest. Hunger drove him to throw up his single cloth to catch two birds ; they carried away that cloth. Half the cloth of his wife he wrapped round himself and thus wrapped in one single cloth they two wandered. Overpowered with grief and unable to see the sorrow and pain that his beloved lady was going through he tore his wife's cloth into two whilst she was asleep and abandoned her hoping that she would thus deserted somehow contrive to reach her parents. She thus deserted has to pass through terrible ordeals of a boa- constrictor, rape and elephant, which by the grace of fate she escaped unscathed. Finally she entered the service of her own dear mother.

Nala in his turn wandering came across a serpent caught up in a center of fire. He rescued the serpent from the fire (through the blessing of Agni), and was bitten by it afterwards which transformed him into dwarf. This the serpent explained was not for destroying him nor even to repay kindness with misdeeds, but to help him. The poison would poison the poisoner, Kali and would never affect him. Next he asked him to go to Rtu—parna, the King of Ayodhya, who would on one occasion teach him *Akso-hrday* in exchange for his *Asva-hrdaya*. On that date he would be freed from the deformed appearance that had resulted to him, and that he would be restored to his own original radiant form. He gave him also a garment on wearing which Nala would regain his native form. Thus the serpent blessed him with knowledge of his future liberation, the teacher who would teach him the *Aksa-hrdaya* which would make him conquer the *Aksa-game*.

Nala repaired to Rtu-parna as advised by his serpent-benefactor and stayed there as his horseman charioteer and adviser for four years in *ajnata-vasa* : (X V .20) .

Bhima the father of Damayanthi , meanwhile sent his emissaries about to discover the retreat of his daughter and Nala. One such emissary discovered Damayanti and she was sent back by her Royal patron to her own place. Damayanti on reaching her home against sent emissaries about. One of them reported the behavior of Nala who tried to extenuate the conduct of Nala in deserting his wife. This was the cue which

finally decided her to send an urgent messenger to Ayodhya-court to announce that the very next day there was to be a second svayamvara for Damayanti and that the king Rtu-parna may be pleased to attend it. Rtu-parna asked Nala to take him to Bhima's court in Vidarbha so that he may be there in time. Nala agreed and selected the best horses, horses whose appearance to Rtu-Pana belied their abilities. Rtu-parna accompanied by varsneya (erstwhile charioteer of Nala himself) mounted the chariot which Nala drove with lightning speed. Rtu-parna admiring the admirable way of Nala's management of horses and his discrimination and efficiency, wished to show off his own greatness and therefore asked whether Nala would tell the number of leaves a tree that they left behind had. Nala could not as he did not know the science of Numbers. Rtu-parna told him the number of leaves and fruits. Nala despite the need for speed in going to Vidarbha, got down to count the number of leaves and found that Rtu-parna was right. Then Rtu-parna told him that he would teach him the Aksa-hrdaya, the science of Numbers and dice, which Nala knew is to be his saviour from Kali, evil-force, in exchange for the Asva-hrdaya. Gladly accepting this offer Rtu-parna taught Nala the Aksa-hrdaya in exchange for the Asva-hrdaya. But though freed from the evil-force of Kali who as it were vomited out from him instantaneously, Nala continued to wear his dwarf-form.

They reached Vidarbha in time and from the roll and sound of the chariot Damayanti knew that Nala had come. But what she saw was a dwarf in every respect contrary to the original form of her husband. Other exploits and activities shewed that indeed he was having all the asta-siddhis bestowed on him by the Gods. Then she prayed to him and he after learning that the so-called svayamvara was to be the reunion alone which she sought and that it was a ruse alone condescending wore the magic cloak given to him by the Serpent. No sooner than he wore it, he regained his princely demeanor and stature. Rtu-parna learning of this was glad and stayed for the reunion and left the next day.

After a month Nala went back to his city to challenge his brother to the self-same game of dice and in one throw defeated him utterly. But he spited hills life and gave him lands and sent him away to his place. Thus Nala regained his sovereign-status.

The above in bare outlines is the story.

The esoteric position is that Nala is the perfect human being who has achieved perfect mastery of the Asvasa or the senses<sup>2</sup>, a knower of them so thoroughly that even the gods were regaled by his beauty Damayanti was the gift of Damanaka the rsi of controlled senses. Bhima of supreme valour and power was her father. The perfect and self-controlled lady was thus wedded to a perfect knower of the Sense. Thus he was a yogin, an energetic vital soul self-controlled, mated to an equally self-controlled spouse of yoga. On his wedding he received the presents from the gods of the asta-siddhis, the eight attainments:

*Vrte tu naisadhe bhaimya lokapala mahaujasah\*

*Prahrstamanasah sarve nalayastau varn dadu.\(V.34)*

These *Siddhis* or powers granted by Yama, Agni, Indra and Vayu were great and invaluable indeed. They made Nala full of prosperity. But as the Yoga-sastra later pointed out these siddhis are nothing, avail nothing including the asva-sastra-knowledge, if one does not possess the freedom from prakrtic illusion, the knowledge of Self (Aksa-hridaya.)For when Nala was overtaken by the love of the dice-game infuriated by defeat-(read the entire chapter on the progress of this game)-all his eight powers, occult and excellent, could not help him to victory. The immortal is not won by mere Yoga of skill in horses or in powers consequent on it, over water or fire or air or

<sup>2</sup>, *Nala I.1 Upapanno gunair istai rupavanasakovidah* Cf. R.V.X.44.7; Kanta . Up.III .9; Svet. Up.II.9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* v. 34 Damayanti chose him as against the gods

other elements. Only the Eye-Divine, divya-caksus, granted through Grace of the Divine can help. This Eye- Divine, so far as it is confined to this narrative, takes the aspect of the mathematical power of enumeration in one single sweep the many in the One even when the Change is at its highest momentum. The Divine is the permanent in the Change, the One amongst the many, or rather the One that supports the many, and highest

knowledge consists in perceiving this infinitude of diversity in the One Sweep of its Vision. This is the perfection of knowledge. Here we have expressed in the briefest compass the entire meaning of the Vision Omniscient that is to be the lot of all souls that are liberated. It is the power to know the number for in essence the height of knowledge is to know that all numbers, however vast, are finite to the intelligence, that is enumerable. Quantitative infinity is finite, that is enumerable. Quantitative infinite infant, wrote *Ranmanuja; Bhuyastvad-alpajnair-asankhyeyatve' pisvarasya savannas sankhyaya eva.* (Śrīl Bhāṣya II.i.15). when the Vedanta Sutras following the Upanishads stated that the individual becomes verily like the Brahman except in respect of Cosmic functions and fundamental attributes of *Sadgunas* the intimation means that the individual then will know the *Sankhya* of quantitative infinity.

*Aksa in Aksa-hridaya* is the important word that suggests the *sankhya*-knowledge. *Aksa* means a measure, is dice itself, is an *indriya*, and in the dual neuter means as aksini the eyes specially. Philologically there are two roots which may form the bases for the derivation. *Aksu: vyaptau* (Madhaviya-dhatu-vrtti) with 'in' pratyaya forms aksin: eye. The eye is so called because according to India psychology the eye (or rather the rays in the eye-organ) goes to the object and 'cover' it or pervades it. The Divine Knowledge is of the form of Vision that comprehends the three times and all spaces: *Aksa-hridaya* will mean the perception of the Reality take in all its manifoldness. It is in this sense that Rtu-parna (who had the wings of Truth, who was therefore a suparna) was able to perceive and enumerate at top speed. Again when he says that it was that *Aksa-hridaya* which also gives him misery in dice, it is plausible to argue that he was fully capable of perceiving which is probable at every throw. It is skill in inference and mathematical working out of the exact probability due to the capacity to enumerate and decide and draw the conclusion with lightning rapidity that makes for mastery of chance. The game of Chance rightly has been dubbed *aksa*. To the ignorant it is a disastrous game, unholy, to the knower it is *aksaya* undecaying and unperishing causal knowledge. There is another root as: *vyaptau* which with lightning rapidity that makes for mastery of chance. The game of Chance rightly has been dubbed *aksa*. To the ignorant it is a disastrous game, unholy, to the knower it is *aksaya* undecaying and unperishing causal knowledge. There is another root as : *vyaptau* which with *saran-pratyaya* omnipervasive.

This term denotes the Supreme Being, the jiva as also prakrti as students of Vedanta will be aware. Men may be interested in the Aksha only at the peril of material possessions; so is it with the aksara. If one will not go to the desert in search of it the desert will indeed go on such a one. The love of Spirit (aksapriya) is the quality of the Fate that moves men away from material possessions : it was the first quality enumerated of Nala, as it was of that saintly one Yudhishthira : mastery senses both had, but only love for the *Aksara* or \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>4</sup>Cf Krsna was playing Aksha with Rukmini at the time of Draupadi's hour of peril and throws the dice with the words 'Skdaya'. This story was discounted late Dr. V.S. Sukthankar

*Aksha*. It was Rtu- Parna the king of the unconquerable City. Ayodhya, the one having the Wings of Truth , who was the master of the science of numbers and of the dice and *ingitajna* , Nala was the practical soul seeking verification of Rtu-parna's knowledge never one prepared to take another's word. His words read magnificently the scientific mind.

*Paroksamiva me rajan kathyase satrukarsanal*

*Pratyaksametad kartasmi ..... (X X.12)*

Having found that the enumeration made by Rtu- parna was correct he sought the knowledge of the Sankhya. But Rtu-parna answered that because of Numbers:

*Viddhyaksahradayajnam mam samkhyane ca*

*Visaradam / (ibid.26)*

Nala having offered to teach him his science of Asva Rtu- Parna taught him the *Aksha-hridaya*—

*Yathoktam tram grharedam aksanam, drdayam param / Niksepo me' asvahrdayam tvayi bahuka // (ibid.29)*

Thus both Rtu- parna the knower of Aksa became also the knower of the Asva, the knower of Thought and counting became also the yogin skilled in sense – driving . whilst Nala the profound master of the horse became now open-minded with his knowledge eyes open to the Infinite. Nothing thereafter was beyond him. He had become a perfect being.

Aksa- hrdaya thus is Sankhya, whereas Asvahrdaya is Yoga. Yoga is skill in action., in driving the senses, a practical man seeking actual verification perception-dependent being. The Aksa knower is one who knows the invisible, the imponderable , the manifestations and discriminates and enumerates accurately. Time or Kala and Change cannot torture one who has achieved the Kundalinisakti, but it is knowledge of Sankhya and Aksa-divine seeing in one sense that releases and liberates the soul (nara-nala?) from the bondage to Kali. Yoga may cause it distress when it is sanctified by Serpent Grace-Kundalini-but it is Sankhya that makes distress impossible.

*Sandhyayogau prthagbala pravadanti na panditah /*

*Ekamapyasthah samyagubhayorvindate phalam / /*

B.G.V.4

*Yatsankhyaih prapyata sthanam tadogairapi gamyate/*

*Ekam sankhyam ca yogam ca yah pasyati sa pasyati / /*

I bid. V. 5

The first point that is to be seen here is that Sankhya and Yoga are identical in their results and that the results of both are identical. But the next verse points out that Renunciation is difficult to attain without Yoga (that is, control of the senses).

Sankhya is essentially, as earlier pointed out in the Gita , the intelligent knowledge of things and will as they are in essential nature. The Bhagavad- Gita 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter: verses 11-38 detail the essential vidya of Sankhya. Yoga must be only with this as basis. Thus says the Lord-

*Esa te'bhihita snkhye buddhiryoga tvimam srnu /*

*Buddhya yukto yaya partha karmabandham prahasyasi // ibid. 33*

*Nehabhikramanaso'sti pratyavayo na vidyate /*

*Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat //*

*Ibid :40*

Yoga as then described denotes the complete subjugation of the senses.

Thus we find that the Sankhya and Yoga relationship enunciated as necessary just as the Aksara is necessary to the Ksara, the Ksara is necessary to the Aksara: for work that has to be done, if not for oneself, it is at least for Lokasangraha. Nala and Rtu-parna are the typifications of Yoga and Sankhya and the story of Nala's exquisite horsemanship and Rtu-parna's splendid ability of enumerating the number of leaves and fruits in a huge tree when he had but seen it as the chariot was racing at tremendous speed are the twin representatives of the power of regenerate Soul discrimination and control in the terrific processes of Nature.

Rtu-parna is the supreme Godhead in one sense as Rtu, Rta, is Season, is Law is Truth, whilst parna means the Winged one, the Knower Jna as against the Ajna of the Upanisads.

The story of Nala, Damayanti and Rtu-parna reveals the Mythic conception of the Yogic life being exalted and lifted up to perfection.