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Handsome Nanda

by Ashva·ghosha



Translated by
LINDA COVILL

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CANTO 4
HIS WIFE'S REQUEST

- 4.1 **M**UNAU BRUVĀṆE 'pi tu tatra dharmam
 dharmam prati jñātiṣu c' ādrteṣu,
 prāsāda|saṁstho madan'âika|kāryaḥ
 priyā|sahāyo vijahāra Nandaḥ.
 sa cakravāky" ēva hi cakravākas
 tayā sametaḥ priyayā priy'ârhaḥ
 n' âcintayad Vaiśravaṇam na Śakraṁ
 tat|sthāna|hetoḥ kuta eva dharmam.
 lakṣmyā ca rūpeṇa ca Sundar" îti
 stambhena garveṇa ca Mānin" îti
 dīptyā ca mānena ca Bhāmin" îti
 yato babhāṣe tri|vidhena nāmnā.
 sâ hāsa|haṁsâ nayana|dvirephā
 pīna|stan'âtyunnata|padma|kośā;
 bhūyo babhāse sva|kul'|ôditena
 strī|padminī Nanda|divākareṇa.
- 4.5 rūpeṇa c' âtyanta|manohareṇa
 rūp'ânurūpeṇa ca ceṣṭitena,
 manuṣya|loke hi tadā babhūva
 sâ sundarī strīṣu nareṣu nandaḥ.
 sâ devatā Nandana|cāriṇ" îva
 kulasya nandī|jananaś ca Nandaḥ
 atītya martyān anupetya devān
 sṛṣṭāv abhūtām iva bhūta|dhātrā.
 taṁ Sundarīm cen na labheta Nandaḥ
 sâ vā niṣeveta na taṁ nata|bhrūḥ,
 dvandvaṁ dhruvaṁ tad vikalaṁ na śobhet'
 ânyonya|hīnāv iva rātri|candrau.
 Kandarpa|Ratyor iva lakṣya|bhūtam
 pramoda|nāndyor iva nīḍa|bhūtam

THOUGH THE sage was in the city teaching the *dharmā*,^{4.1} and though his near relations honored the *dharmā*, Nanda stayed in his palace with his wife, making love his only concern. For Nanda was fitted for love, and so lived united with his beloved like a *chakra-vaka* bird with its mate. In this situation he thought of neither Váishravana nor Shakra, let alone the *dharmā*. She was known by three different names: Súdari for her charm and beauty, Mánini for her stubbornness and disdain, and Bhámini for her sparkle and willfulness.

She seemed a lotus-pool in womanly form, with her laughter for swans, her eyes for bees and her swelling breasts as budding lotus calyxes; still more did she shine after the sun-like Nanda had arisen in her own family. With her^{4.5} captivating beauty and manner to match, in the world of humankind she, Súdari, was the loveliest of women and he, Nanda, the happiest of men.* The Creator had made them greater than mortals, though not yet gods—she, walking the Nándana gardens like a divinity, and Nanda, bringer of joy to his kin. If Nanda had not won her, Súdari, or if she, arch-browed, had withheld herself from him, then the pair would surely have appeared impaired, like the night and the moon without each other.

Blind with passion, the couple took their pleasure in each other, as though they were the targets of Kandárpa and Rati, as though they were a home to joy and rapture, as though

praharṣa|tuṣṭyor iva pātra|bhūtaṃ
 dvandvam saḥ āraṃsta mad'āndha|bhūtam.
 paraspar'ōdvīkṣaṇa|tat|par'ākṣaṃ,
 paraspara|vyāhṛta|sakta|cittam
 paraspar'āśleṣa|hṛt'āṅgarāgaṃ
 parasparaṃ tan mithunaṃ jahāra.
 4.10 bhāv'ānuraktau giri|nirjhara|sthau
 tau kiṃnarī|kiṃpuruṣāv iv' ōbhau,
 cikrīdatuś c' ābhivirejatuś ca
 rūpa|śriy" ānyonyam iv' ākṣipantau.
 anyonya|saṃrāga|vivardhanena tad
 dvandvam anyonyam arīramac ca,
 klam'āntare 'nyonya|vinodanena
 salīlam anyonyam amīmadac ca.
 vibhūṣayām āsa tataḥ priyām sa
 siṣeviṣus tāṃ na mṛj"āvah'ārtham;
 sven' āiva rūpeṇa vibhūṣitā hi
 vibhūṣaṇānām api bhūṣaṇaṃ sā.
 dattv" ātha sā darpaṇam asya haste
 «mam' āgrato dhārāya tāvad enam
 viśeṣakaṃ yāvad ahaṃ karom' ity»
 uvāca kāntaṃ sa ca taṃ babhāra.
 bhartus tataḥ śmaśru nirīkṣamāṇā
 viśeṣakaṃ s" āpi cakāra tādrk.
 niśvāsa|vātena ca darpaṇasya
 cikitsayitvā nijaghāna Nandaḥ.

they were a vessel for arousal and satiety. With eyes only for each other's eyes, they hung upon each other's words and rubbed off their cosmetics through caressing each other, so mutually absorbed was the couple. They were resplendent 4.10 in their play like a *kinnari* and a *kimpurusha* standing in a mountain waterfall intent on love, as though wishing to outdo each other in beauty and splendor. The couple gave each other pleasure by exciting passion in each other, while in languid moments they teasingly inebriated each other by way of mutual entertainment.

At one time he arranged her jewellery on her, not to make her lovelier, but to do her a service; for she was so adorned by her own beauty that it was she who lent loveliness to her jewels. She put a mirror into his hand and said to her lover, "Just hold this in front of me while I do my *vishéshaka*,"* and he held it. Then, looking at her husband's mustache, she made up her *vishéshaka* just like it, but Nanda blew on the mirror to remedy this.

4.15 sã tena ceṣṭã|lalitena bhartuḥ
 śãthyena c' ântar|manasã jahãsa
 bhavec ca ruṣṭã kila nãma tasmai
 lalãṭa|jihmãṃ bhrukuṭiṃ cakãra,
 cikṣepa karṇ'|ôtpalam asya c' âṃse
 kareṇa savyena mad'|ãlasena.
 patr'|âṅguliṃ c' ârdha|nimilit'|âkṣe
 vaktre 'sya tãm eva vinirdudhãva.
 tataś calan|nũpura|yoktritãbhyãṃ
 nakha|prabh"|"ôdbhãsitãr'|âṅgulibhyãṃ
 padbhyãṃ priyãyã nalin'|ôpamãbhyãṃ
 mũrdhnã bhayãn nãma nanãma Nandaḥ.
 sa mukta|puṣp'|ônmiṣitena mũrdhnã
 tataḥ priyãyãḥ priya|kṛd babhãse
 suvarṇa|vedyãṃ anil'|ãvabhagnaḥ
 puṣp'|ãtibhãrãd iva nãga|vrkṣaḥ.
 sã taṃ stan'|ôdvartita|hãra|yaṣṭir
 utthãpayãṃ ãsa nipĩdya dorbhyãṃ.
 «kathaṃ|kṛto 's' îti!» jahãsa c' ôccair
 mukhena sãcĩ|kṛta|kuṇḍalena.

4.20 patyus tato darpaṇa|sakta|pãṇer
 muhur muhur vaktram avekṣamãṇã,
 tamãla|patr'|ãrdra|tale kapole
 samãpayãṃ ãsa viśeṣakaṃ tat.
 tasyã mukhaṃ tat sa|tamãla|pattraṃ
 tãmr'|ãdhar'|ãuṣṭhaṃ cikur'|ãyat'|âkṣam,
 rakt'|ãdhik'|ãgraṃ patita|dvirephaṃ
 sa|saivalaṃ padmam iv' âbabhãse.
 Nandas tato darpaṇam ãdareṇa
 bibhrat tadã maṇḍana|sãkṣi|bhũtam

She smiled to herself at her husband's cheekiness and playful little game, but furrowed her brow as though annoyed, and with her left hand, languorous with wine, she threw the lotus from behind her ear at his shoulder. Then she smeared some of her make-up on his face and half-closed eyes. 4-15

Nanda, in a pretence of fear, bent his head to his lover's lotus feet—feet encircled with swaying anklets, with toes brightened by their shimmering nails. His head blossoming with loosened flowers as he begged his lover's pardon, he resembled a *naga* plant overburdened with flowers, bending over its golden pedestal in the breeze.* She pressed him close in her arms and raised him up, making the strands of her pearl necklace lift off her breast. "What are you doing?" she cried laughingly, as her earrings were pushed sideways from her face.

While she finished applying the *vishéshaka* to her cheeks, damp with *tamála* paste,* she kept looking at her husband's face as he held the mirror in his hand. Her own face, with its *tamála* paste, lips touched with red and eyes extending to her hair, seemed a moss-bedecked, crimson-tipped lotus settled by bees. 4-20

So Nanda dutifully held the mirror which bore witness to her act of adornment, and as he squinted to watch her maquillage, he observed his lover's mischievous face. Nanda

viśeṣak'āvekṣaṇa|kekar'ākṣo
 laḍat|priyāyā vadanam dadarśa.
 tat|kuṇḍal'ādaṣṭa|viśeṣak'āntam
 kāraṇḍava|kliṣṭam iv' āravindam
 Nandaḥ priyāyā mukham īkṣamāṇo
 bhūyaḥ priy"ānanda|karo babhūva.
 vimāna|kalpe sa vimāna|garbhe
 tatas tathā c' āiva nananda Nandaḥ,
 Tathāgataś c' āgata|bhaikṣa|kālo
 bhaikṣāya tasya praviveśa veśma.

4.25 avān|mukho niṣ|praṇayaś ca tasthau
 bhrātur gṛhe 'nyasya gṛhe yath" āiva.
 tasmād atho preṣya|jana|pramādād
 bhikṣām a|labdhv" āiva punar jagāma—
 kā cit pipeṣ' āṅga|vilepanam hi,
 vāso 'ṅganā kā cid avāsayac ca,
 ayojayat snāna|vidhiṃ tath" ānyā,
 jagranthur anyāḥ surabhīḥ srajaś ca.
 tasmin gṛhe bhartur ataś carantyaḥ
 krīḍ"ānurūpaṃ laliṭam niyogam
 kāś cin na Buddhaṃ dadṛṣur yuvatyo
 Buddhasya v" āiṣā niyataṃ manīṣā.

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made his sweetheart happier than ever when he watched her face, the edge of its *vishéshaka* smudged by her earrings so that it seemed a lotus nibbled by a *karándava* bird.

While Nanda was thus enjoying himself in his palace, which was like a celestial palace, the Tathágata, the realized one, entered his home for alms, since it was the time for his alms-round. Looking downwards and without ask- 4.25
ing for anything, he stood in his brother's house as he would in the house of any other person. But he went away again without obtaining any alms because of the household's preoccupation—one woman was grinding body-unguents, another was perfuming clothes, one was preparing a bath, and others were weaving fragrant garlands. The Buddha came to the unavoidable conclusion that the housemaids were so busy carrying out frivolous tasks related to their master's dalliance that none of them noticed him.

- kā cit sthitā tatra tu harmya|pṛṣṭhe
 gavākṣa|pakṣe praṇidhāya cakṣuḥ
 viniṣpatantaṃ Sugataṃ dadarśa
 payoda|garbhād iva dīptam arkam.
 sā gauravaṃ tatra vicārya bhartuḥ
 svayā ca bhakty” ârhatay” ârhatas ca,
 Nandasya tasthau purato vivakṣus
 tad|ājñayā c’ êti tad” âcacakṣe:
- 4.30 «anugrahāy’ âsya janasya śaṅke
 gurur gṛhaṃ no bhagavān praviṣṭaḥ,
 bhikṣām a|labdhvā giram āsanaṃ vā
 sūnyād araṇyād iva yāti bhūyaḥ.»
 śrutvā maha”|rṣeḥ sa gṛha|praveśaṃ
 satkāra|hīnaṃ ca punaḥ prayāṇam,
 cacāla citr’|ābharaṇ’|āmbara|srak
 kalpa|drumo dhūta iv’ ânilena.
 kṛtv” âñjaliṃ mūrdhani padma|kalpaṃ
 tataḥ sa kāntāṃ gamanaṃ yayāce.
 «kartuṃ gamiṣyāmi gurau praṇāmaṃ.
 mām abhyanu|jñātum ih’ ârhas’ îti?»
 sā vepamānā parisasvaje taṃ
 śālaṃ latā vāta|samīrit” êva.
 dadarśa c’ âśru|pluta|lola|netrā
 dīrghaṃ ca niśvasya vaco ’bhyuvāca:
 «n’ âhaṃ yiyāsor guru|darśan’|ârtham
 arhāmi kartuṃ tava dharma|pīḍām.
 gacch’, ârya|putr’, âihi ca śīghram eva
 viśeṣako yāvad ayaṃ na śuṣkaḥ.
- 4.35 saced* bhaves tvam khalu dīrgha|sūtro
 daṇḍam mahāntaṃ tvayi pātayeyam;

However, one woman at the top of the palace had glanced at a side-window, and she had seen the Sógata emerging like the radiant sun from a cloud. Taking into consideration her master's deep respect for the enlightened one as well as his worthiness and her own devotion to him, she approached Nanda to tell him, and spoke at his permission: "The Blessed One, the guru, entered our house, presumably as a favor to you. He received no alms, no conversation, and no seat, and so he is going away as though from an empty forest." 4.30

When he heard that the great seer had come to his house, found no hospitality and left again, he trembled, seeming, with his bright decorations, garments and garlands, like a tree of Paradise swaying in the wind. Putting his hands together in the shape of a lotus, he raised them to his forehead and asked his wife if he might leave. "I would like to go and pay my respects to the guru. Will you let me?" She held him close and shivered like a wind-stirred creeper encircling a *shala* tree. Looking at him with her rolling eyes filled with tears, she sighed deeply and replied:

"You wish to leave in order to see the guru, and I ought not to hinder you in your duty. Go, my dear husband, but come back quickly before my *vishéshaka* dries. If you are late, I will punish you severely; as you lie sleeping, I will keep waking you up by brushing against you with my breasts, but then refuse to talk to you. But if you hurry back to me before my *vishéshaka* is dry, I will hold you in my arms, bare of ornaments and still damp with unguents." Her voice shook 4.35

muhur muhus tvām śayitaṃ kucābhyāṃ
 vibodhayeyaṃ ca na c' ālapeyam.
 ath' āpy an|āśyāna|viśeṣakāyāṃ
 mayy eṣyasi tvaṃ tvaritaṃ tatas tvām
 nipīdayiṣyāmi bhujā|dvayena
 nir|bhūṣaṇen' ārdra|vilepanena.»
 ity evam uktaś ca nipīḍitaś ca
 tay" ā|sa|varṇa|svanayā jagāda.
 «evam kariṣyāmi. vimuñca, caṇḍi,
 yāvad gurur dūra|gato na me saḥ.»
 tataḥ stan'|ôdvartita|candanābhyāṃ
 mukto bhujābhyāṃ na tu mānasena.
 vihāya veṣaṃ madan'|ānurūpaṃ
 satkāra|yogyaṃ sa vapur babhāra.
 sā taṃ prayāntaṃ ramaṇaṃ pradadhyau
 pradhyāna|śūnya|sthita|nīscal'|ākṣī,
 sthit" ôcca|karṇā vyapaviddha|śaṣpā
 bhrāntaṃ mṛgaṃ bhrānta|mukhī mṛg" īva.
 4.40 didr̥kṣay" ākṣipta|manā munes tu
 Nandaḥ prayāṇaṃ prati tatvare ca,
 vivṛtta|dr̥ṣṭiś ca śanair yayau tāṃ
 kar" īva paśyan sa laḍat|kareṇum.
 chāt'|ôdarīm pīna|payodhar'|ōruṃ
 sa Sundarīm rukma|darīm iv' ādreḥ
 kākṣeṇa paśyan na tatarpa Nandaḥ
 pibann iv' āikena jalaṃ kareṇa.
 taṃ gauravaṃ Buddha|gataṃ cakarṣa
 bhāry"ānurāgaḥ punar ācakarṣa.
 so 'nīscayān n' āpi yayau na tasthau
 turaṃs taraṅgeṣv īva rāja|hamsaḥ.

as she spoke, and she embraced him. "I will," he replied. "Now let me go, my little vixen, before the guru has gone too far."

So she let him go from her arms which were scented with sandal from her breast, but she did not let him go in her mind. He set aside the clothes suited to love-making, and made himself presentable for paying his respects. She contemplated her departing lover, her face troubled and her eyes empty and unmoving in her preoccupation, like a doe standing with ears pricked up and chewed grass falling from her mouth as she watches the stag wander off. With his thoughts taken up by his wish to see the sage, Nanda hurried his departure, then lingered with a backward glance at her, like an elephant watching a playful she-elephant. But a glance at Súdari, her waist compact between her swelling breasts and thighs like a golden fissure in a mountain, could no more satisfy Nanda than drinking water with one hand. 4.40

Reverence for the Buddha drew him on, love for his wife drew him back again. He hesitated, neither going nor staying, like a king-geese pushing forwards against the waves. However, once she was no longer in his sight, he came briskly out of the palace, only to hang back again, his heart

a|darśanaṃ t' ūpagataś ca tasyā
 harmyāt tataś c' âvatatāra tūrṇam,
 śrutvā tato nūpura|nisvanaṃ sa
 punar lalambe hṛdaye grhītaḥ.
 sa kāma|rāgeṇa niḡrhyamāṇo
 dharm'ânurāgeṇa ca kṛṣyamāṇaḥ,
 jagāma duḥkhena nivartyamāṇaḥ
 plavaḥ pratisrota iv' âpagāyāḥ.
 4.45 tataḥ kramair dīrghatamaiḥ pracakrame
 «kathaṃ nu yāto na gurur bhaved» iti
 «svajeya tām c' âiva viśeṣaka|priyām
 kathaṃ priyām ārdra|viśeṣakām» iti.
 atha sa pathi dadarśa mukta|mānaṃ
 piṭṛ|nagare 'pi tathā|gat'âbhimānam
 daśa|balam abhito vilambamānaṃ
 dhvajam anuyāna iv' āindram arcyamānam.

Saundaranande mahā|kāvye Bhāryā|yācitako nāma
 caturthaḥ sargaḥ.

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contracting, at the sound of her anklets. Kept back by his passion for love, and drawn forward by his attachment to *dharma*, he proceeded with difficulty, being turned about like a boat going upstream on a river.

Then setting out with long strides, he thought “The guru 4.45
can't possibly not be gone by now!” and “Perhaps I'll be able to hug my darling girl, whose love is so special, while her *vishéshaka* is still wet.”

Then on the road he saw him of the ten powers,* free from pride even in his father's city, and with all arrogance similarly gone, stopping everywhere and being worshipped like Indra's banner in a procession.

End of Canto 4: His Wife's Request.



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In Ashva-ghosha's drama of spiritual re-orientation, handsome Nanda is transformed from libertine to liberated man. The Buddha's strong-arm and seductive tactics risk the imputation of a forced and dishonest conversion. But the suffering of each pleasure's end is succeeded by a more enticing prospect, until Nanda attains the total bliss of enlightenment.

क्रे

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