Linda Covill translates Sanskrit literature for the JJC Foundation, co-publishers (with NYU Press) of the Clay Sanskrit Library.

The Clay Sanskrit Library is a unique series that, through original text and English translation, gives an international readership access to the beauty and variety of classical Sanskrit literature.

For a full list of titles, a searchable corpus of CSL texts and translations, and further information, please visit: www.claysanskritlibrary.com

WWW.CLAYSANSKRITLIBRARY.COM

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.

WWW.CLAYSANSKRITLIBRARY.COM

However, this Clay Sanskrit Library translation of Ashva-ghosha’s Handsome Nanda.

Nanda has it all—youth, money, good looks, and a kittenish wife who fulfills his sexual and emotional needs. He also has the Buddha, a dispassionate man of immense insight and self-containment, for an older brother. When Nanda is made a reluctant recruit to the Buddha’s order of monks, he is forced to confront his all-too-human enslavement to his erotic and romantic desires.

Dating from the second century CE, Handsome Nanda portrays its hero’s spiritual makeover with compassion, psychological profundity, and great poetic skill. The Buddhist monk Ashva·ghosha’s ancient composition succeeds both as a work of poetry and as a Buddhist spiritual biography. Native of Saket, perhaps Ashva·ghosha too had been torn between his celibacy-demanding faith and a beloved woman. Nanda is not alone in being cured by the Buddha’s sugar-coated bitter pills; the famous penultimate verse identifies all who hear or read Handsome Nanda as patients on the path to liberation, because we have savored the medicine that is bottled in this honeyed poem.
HANDSOME NANDA
BY AŚVAGHOŚA

TRANSLATED BY
LINDA COVILL

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
JJC FOUNDATION
2007
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Asvaghosa
p. cm. – (The Clay Sanskrit library)
In English and Sanskrit (romanized) on facing pages; includes translation from Sanskrit.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
I. Covill, Linda, 1962- II. Title.
BQ095.N2A713 2007
294.3’4432–dc22
2007003642
CONTENTS

Sanskrit alphabetical order 7
CSL conventions 7

HANDSOME NANDA

Introduction 13
Invocation 29
Canto 1 A Description of Kāpila-vastu 33
Canto 2 A Description of the King 47
Canto 3 A Description of the Realized One 63
Canto 4 His Wife’s Request 79
Canto 5 Nanda is Made to Ordain 95
Canto 6 His Wife’s Lament 113
Canto 7 Nanda’s Lament 131
Canto 8 The Attack on Women 149
Canto 9 The Denunciation of Infatuation 173
Canto 10 A Lesson in Heaven 191
Canto 11 The Condemnation of Heaven 213
Canto 12 Comprehension 229
Canto 13 The Conquest of the Senses by Moral Self-Restraint 241
Canto 14 The Initial Point of Departure 255
| Canto 15 | Abandoning Notions | 267 |
| Canto 16 | Explanation of the Noble Truths | 283 |
| Canto 17 | The Attainment of Deathlessness | 316 |
| Canto 18 | His Instructions Revealed | 343 |

Notes | 367 |
Glossary of Common Names and Epithets | 375 |
Index | 381 |

_Sandhi_ grid | 388 |
4.1   munau bruvāṇe ’pi tu tatra dharmaṃ
dharmaṃ prati jñātiṣu c’ adṛṣṭeṣu,
prāśādajamstho madan’āīkākāryaḥ
priyāsahāyo vījahāra Nandah.
sa cakravāky” ēva hi cakravākas
tayā sametaḥ priyaya priy’ārhaḥ
n’ ācintayad Vaiśravaṇaṃ na Śakraṃ
tatisthānāḥetoḥ kuta eva dharmam.
lakṣmyā ca rūpeṇa ca Sundar” iti
stambhena garveṇa ca Mānin” iti
dīpya ca māneṇa ca Bhāmin” iti
yato babhāṣe trividhena nāmnā.
sā hāsaḥḥamsā nayanaṣadhireṇa
pīnāṣtan’ātyunnataipadmaṣaḥ;
bhūyo babhāse svakul’ōditenā
stṛīpadmini Nandaṣdvikāreṇa.

4.5   rūpeṇa c’ ātyanta’manohareṇa
rūp’ānurūpeṇa ca ceṣṭiṭena,
manusyaśloke hi tadā babhūva
sā sundarī strīṣu nareṣu nandaḥ.
sā devatā Nandanaḥcarin” ita
kulasya nandījananaś ca Nandaḥ
atītya martyaḥ anupetya devān
ṣṛṣṭāv abhūtām iva bhūtādhaṭhārā.
tāṃ Sundarīṃ cen na labheta Nandaḥ
sā vā nīsēveta na tāṃ natabhṛūḥ,
dvandaṃ dhruvaṃ tad vikalama na śobhet’
ānyonyaḥḥināv iva rātriṣcandrau.
KandarpāḥKatyor iva lakṣyaḥbhūtaṃ
pramodāṇāndyor iva nīḍabhūtam
Though the sage was in the city teaching the dharma, and though his near relations honored the dharma, 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 Vāishravana nor Shakra, let alone the dharma. She was known by three different names: Sūndari for her charm and beauty, Mānini for her stubbornness and disdain, and Bhāmini 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 captivating beauty and manner to match, in the world of humankind she, Sūndari, 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, Sūndari, 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 Kandārpa and Rati, as though they were a home to joy and rapture, as though
praharṣaṭuṣṭyor iva pātraḥbhūtaṃ
dvandvaḥ saḥ āraṃṣta mad'āndha bhūtam.
paraspar'ādvikṣaṇatattat par'ākṣaṃ.
paraspar'āvyahṛṣajṣaktācittam
paraspar'āślesaḥṛṣ'āṅgarāgam
parasparaṃ tan mithunaṃ jahāra.

bhāv'ānuraktau girijnirjharaiṣṭhau
tau kiṃnaṃrikiṃpuruṣāv iv' ābhau,
cikriḍatatu c' ābhivirejatu ca
rūpaśriy'' ānyonyam iv' ākṣipantau.
annyonyaśaṃṛtaṃ'vividhanena tad
dvandvam anyonyam arīramac ca,
klam'āntare 'nyonya'vinojodanena
salilam anyonyam amimadac ca.
vibhūṣayām āsa tataḥ priyāṃ sa
siṣṇevīsus tāṃ na marj'āvah'ārtham;
sven' āiva rūpeṇa vibhūṣītā hi
vibhūṣaṇānām api bhūṣaṇāṃ sā.
dattv'' ātha śa darpaṇam asya haste
«mam' āgrato dhāraya tāvad enam
viśeṣakaṃ āvad ahaṃ karom' ity»
vācā kāntaṃ sa ca tāṃ babhāra.
bhartus tataḥ śmaśru nirikṣamānā
viśeṣakaṃ s' api cakāra tāḍr̥k.
niśvāśavātena ca darpaṇasya
cikitsayītvā nijaghāna Nandāḥ.
His wife’s request

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 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 vishêshaka,”* and he held it. Then, looking at her husband’s mustache, she made up her vishêshaka just like it, but Nanda blew on the mirror to remedy this.

83
sā tena ceṣṭā|lalitena bhartaḥ
śāṭhyena c’ āntar’manasaḥ jahāsa
bhavac ca ruṣṭā kila nāma tasmai
lālācāṣīṁmāṁ bhruṣṭīṁ cakāra,
cīkṣepa karaṇ’|ōpalam asya c’ āṁse
kareṇa savyena mad’jālasena.
pattṛ’āṅgulīṁ c’ ārdha’nimīlī’|ākṣe
vantre ‘yā tāṁ eva vinirdudhāva.
tataś caṇa’nūpura’yoktrītāḥbhyaṁ
nakha’prabh’|ōdhaśitar’āṅgulibhyaṁ
padbhyaṁ priyāyā nalin’|ōpamābhyāṁ
mūrdaḥ bhayaṁ nāma nānāma Nandaḥ.
sa mukta’puṣp’|ōnmisitena mūrdhṇā
tataḥ priyāyāḥ priyaṇkūṭaḥ babhāse
suvarṇajvedyām anil’|āvabhagāḥ
puṣp’|āṭibhārād iva nāga’vṛksaḥ.
sa taṁ stari|ōdvartitaḥhrāyaṇaṁ
utḥāpayāṁ āsa nipīdya dorbhyaṁ.
<kathaṃkṛto ’ś’ |ītī’> jahāsa c’ |occāir
mukhaṇa sāc’|kṛtaṇuṇḍalena.

patyus tato darpaṇa’|saktapāṇer
muhur muhur vaktram aveksamaṇṇaṁ,
tamaḷapaṭṭr’|ārdratale kapoṛ
samāpayāṁ āsa viśeṣakaṁ tat.
tasya mukhaṁ tat saṭamaḷàpattaṇaṁ
tāṁ’|ādharaḥ|āuṣṭhaṁ cikur’|āyat’|ākṣam,
rakṣ’|ādhiḥk’|āgraṇ pariśadvirepham
saṣaivaṇaṁ padmaṁ īv’ |ābabhāse.
Nandas tato darpaṇaṁ ādareṇa
bibhrat tadā manḍanaśāksśibhūtām
His Wife’s Request

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.

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 vishešaka to her cheeks, damp with tamāla paste, she kept looking at her husband’s face as he held the mirror in his hand. Her own face, with its tamāla paste, lips touched with red and eyes extending to her hair, seemed a moss-bedecked, crimson-tipped lotus settled by bees.

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
viśēṣakāvekṣaṇajkekar'ākṣo
dādaṭpriyāyā vadaṇaṁ dadarśa.
taṭkunḍalādaṭaśviśēṣakāṇṭaṁ
kāraṇḍavaśkliṣṭam iv' āravindam
Nandaḥ priyāya mukham ikṣamāno
bhūyāḥ priy"jānandaśkarāh babhūva.
vimāṇakalpe sa vimānaigarbhe
tatas tathā c' āiva nananda Nandaḥ,
Tathāgataś c' āgatabhāikṣaṅkalo
bhaikṣāya tasya praviveśā veśma.
4.25  avāṅmukho niśprāṇayaś ca tasthau
bhrātṛur grhe 'nyasya grhe yath" āiva.
tasmād artho presyaśaṇāpraṃmādād
bhiṣām alabdhv" āiva punar jagāma—
kā cit pipeś' āṅgavilepanaṁ hi,
vāso 'ṅgānā kā cid avāsyaḥ ca,
ayojaṭa snāṇaśidhiṁ tath" āṅyā,
jagrathur anyaṁ surabhīḥ srajaś ca.
tasmin grhe bhātṛur atāś carantyāḥ
kriḍ'jānurūpaṁ laṭiṇaṁ niyogam
kāś cin na Buddhāṃ dadśur yuvatyo
Buddhasya v" āśa niyataṁ maniṣā.
made his sweetheart happier than ever when he watched her face, the edge of its *vishēhaka* smudged by her earrings so that it seemed a lotus nibbled by a *kārāndava* bird.

While Nanda was thus enjoying himself in his palace, which was like a celestial palace, the Tathāgata, the realized one, entered his home for alms, since it was the time for his alms-round. Looking downwards and without asking 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 cīt sthitā tatra tu harmyajñe
gavāksaipakṣa praniḥāya cakṣuḥ
vinispatantaḥ Śugataṁ dadarśa
payodāgarbhād īva diptam ārkam.
sā gauravaṁ tatra vicārya bhartuḥ
svāy ca bhaktyā ṛhatayā ṛhatas ca,
Nandasya tathau puruṣo vivaksus
tadājaṭayā c' ēti tād' ācacaṅke:

4.30 «anugrahāyā' āsyā janasya śaṅke
gurur graṁ no bhagavān praviṣṭaḥ,
bhiṇḍām alabdhhā giram āsanaṁ vā
śunyād aranyād īva yāti bhūyaḥ.»

śrutvā mahaṁśeṣaḥ sa graṁpraveṣaṁ
saktarāḥnaṁ ca punāḥ prayāṇam,
cacāla cītraḥbharaṁ 'āmbaraśtrak kalpa
kalpadrumo dḥūtā īvā anilena.

kṛtvā 'ānjaṁ mūrdhani padmaṅkalpaṁ
tataḥ sa kāntām gamanaṁ yayāce.

«kartuṁ gamisyaṁi gurau praṇāmaṁ,
mām abhyanujñātum ih' ārhaṁ itī?»
sā vepamānā parīsavaje tāṁ
śālaṁ latā vātāṣaṁīrītā' eva.
dadarśa c' āśruplutaṁlojanetra
dirghaṁ ca niśvasya vaco 'bhuvāca:
«n' āhaṁ yiṣyos gurudarsanāṁārthaṁ
arhaṁ kartuṁ tava dharmāpiḍām.
gacchā, āyapyutṛ, āhī ca śighram eva
viśeṣako yāvad āyaṁ na śuṣkaḥ.»

4.35 saced bhave svām khalu dirghaṁśūtro
daṅḍaṁ mahāntaṁ svayi pātyeyam;

88
His Wife’s Request

However, one woman at the top of the palace had glanced at a side-window, and she had seen the Sūgata 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.”

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 visheshaka 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 visheshaka is dry, I will hold you in my arms, bare of ornaments and still damp with unguents.” Her voice shook
HANDSOME NANDA

muhur muhus tvāṃ śayitaṃ kucābhyaṃ
vibodhayeyam ca na c' alapeyam.
ath’ āpy anāśyānaśīsesakāyaṃ
mayy ēṣyasi tvam tvaritaṃ tatas tvāṃ
nipidānayāmi bhujādvayena
nirbhūṣanam ardrāvilepanena.»
ity evam uktaṃ ca nipīṭitaś ca
tay” āśayārṇaśvanayā jagāda.
«evaṃ karisyāmi. vimuñca, caṇḍi,
yāvad guru ṛaṅgato na me saḥ.»
tataḥ stan’ odvartitajandanābhyaṃ
mukto bhujābhyām na tu mānasena.
viḥāya veṣam madan’ānurūpaṃ
satkāryaṣyaṃ sa vapur babhāra.
sa taṃ prayāntaṃ ramaṇaṃ pradadhyau
pradhyānaśātyasthitajñiścal’ākṣi,
sthit” ōccaṅkarāṇā vyapavidhāhaspā
bhrāntaṃ mṛgaṃ bhṛnta’mukhi mṛga” iva.

didṛksaṃ” ākṣiptamāna munes tu
Nandah prayāṇaṃ pratī tvatvare ca,
vivṛṣṭaḍṛṣṭi ca śaṅair yayau tāṃ
kar” iva paśyan sa ladaṭkaṛenum.
chāṭ’ōdāraṃ pinaṭpayodhar’ōraṃ
sa Śundaṛaṃ rukmaḍaṛaṃ iv’ ādreh
kāksena paśyan na tatapa Nandah
pibann iv’ āikena jalaṃ kareṇa.
taṃ gauravaṃ Buddhaṅgaṭaṃ cakaraṃ
bhāry” ānuraṅghaḥ punar cakaraṃ.
sa ’niścayān n’ āpi yayau na rasthau
tuṛaṃs taraṅgasyaḥ iva rājaḥmaṇṣah.
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 Sûndari, 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.

Reverence for the Buddha drew him on, love for his wife
drew him back again. He hesitated, neither going nor stay-
ing, like a king-goose 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
aḍarāṇaṁ t’ ūpagaṁtaś ca tasyā
harmanyā tataś c’ āvatātā rūṇam,
śrūtvā tato nūpuraṁśvānaṁ sa
punar lalambe hṛdaye gṛhitaḥ.
sa kāmaṛāgena nigṛhyamāṇo
dharm’ānurāgena ca kṛṣyamāṇaḥ,
jagāma duhkhena nivṛtyamāṇaḥ
plavaḥ pratisrota iv’ āpāgaẏāḥ.

4-45

tataḥ kramair dirghatamaṁ pracakrame
«kathāṁ nu yāto na gurur bhaved» iti
«svajeyā tāṁ c’ āiva viśeṣaṁpriyāṁ
kathāṁ priyāṁ ārdraṁviśeṣaṁ» iti.
atha sa pathi dadarśa muktāṁnāṁ
pitṛṇagare ‘pi tathāgateḥbhimāṇam
daśābalaṁ abhito vilambamāṇaṁ
dhvaṁjan anuyāna iv’ āindram arcyāṇām.

Saundaranande mahaṁkavye Bhārīyāvyācitaṁ nāma
caturthaṁ sargaḥ.
contracting, at the sound of her anklets. Kept back by his passion for love, and drawn forward by his attachment to dhārma, 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 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 vishēshaka 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.
Handsome Nanda

by Ashva·ghosha

Translated by
LINDA COVILL

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS & JJC FOUNDATION

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.

The Clay Sanskrit Library is a unique series that, through original text and English translation, gives an international readership access to the beauty and variety of classical Sanskrit literature.

For a full list of titles, a searchable corpus of CSL texts and translations, and further information, please visit: www.claysanskritlibrary.com

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
Washington Square
New York, NY 10003
www.nyupress.org

ISBN 978-0-8147-1683-0

jjc

Nanda has all—youth, money, good looks, and a kittenish wife who fulfills his sexual and emotional needs. He also has the Buddha, a dispassionate man of immense insight and self-containment, for an older brother. When Nanda is made a reluctant recruit to the Buddha’s order of monks, he is forced to confront his all-too-human enslavement to his erotic and romantic desires.

Dating from the second century CE, Handsome Nanda portrays its hero’s spiritual makeover with compassion, psychological profundity, and great poetic skill. The Buddhist monk Ashva·ghosha’s ancient composition succeeds both as a work of poetry and as a Buddhist spiritual biography. Native of Saket, perhaps Ashva·ghosha too had been torn between his celibacy-demanding faith and a beloved woman.

Nanda is not alone in being cured by the Buddha’s sugar-coated bitter pills; the famous penultimate verse identifies all who hear or read Handsome Nanda as patients on the path to liberation, because we have savored the medicine that is bottled in this honeyed poem.