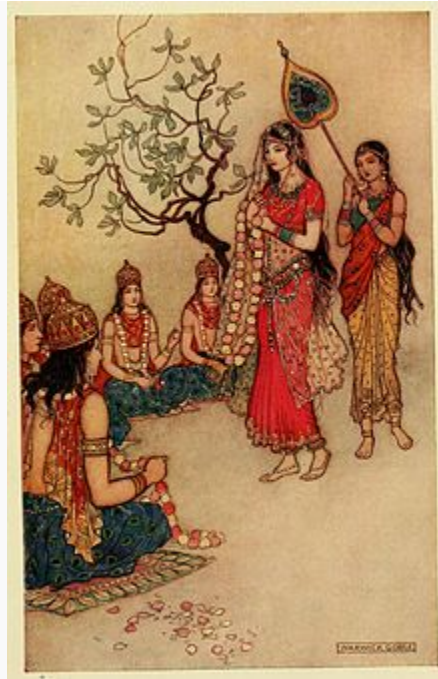


Damayanti (), a character in [Hindu](#) mythology, was the princess of [Vidarbha Kingdom](#), who married king [Nala](#), of [Nishadha Kingdom](#), and their story is told in the [Mahabharata](#).^[1]

The story



Damayanti choosing Husband

Damayanti was a princess of [Vidarbha Kingdom](#). She was of such beauty and grace that even the gods could not stop from admiring her. She fell in love with Nala simply from hearing of his virtues and accomplishments from a golden swan. When it came time for Indra to choose her husband at a [swayamvara](#), gods, princes and kings came to seek her hand. The Gods [Indra](#), [Agni](#), [Varuna](#) and [Yama](#) were on their way for attendance when they meet Nala. They order him to be their messenger and to go inform Damayanti that she must choose one of them as husband. Nala first refuses, saying he is himself interested in her, but he finally accepts the mission. On seeing him, Damayanti agrees to pay her respects to the gods, but she insists on choosing only Nala for her husband. The Gods then each disguise themselves as Nala, and ask Damayanti to choose amongst them. Damayanti sees through them each time, as she is aware that her true beloved one is a human being and cannot be perfect, which sets him apart from the gods. The demon [Kali](#), the personification of [Kali yuga](#), also wants to marry Damayanti. On his arrival, he is unaware that he is too late for the swayamvara. He runs into the gods and they tell him how she has chosen [Nala](#) in their place. [Kali](#) then angrily vows to cause the fall of Nala's kingdom through his propensity for gambling.



Nala-Damayanti. Painting by [Raja Ravi Varma](#).

Damayanti and Nala are happily married and have two children. Kali enters the palace as a servant, and for twelve long years keeps watch for any little imperfection by which he can strike against Nala. One day, Nala, in a rush to make his prayer defiles himself by not washing his feet, thereby allowing [Kali](#) to bewitch his soul. In games of dice with his brother [Pushkara](#), he loses his kingdom, forcing Nala and Damayanti to live in poverty in the forest. Birds fly away with the only garment Nala possessed. After all these misadventure, Nala starts worrying for Damayanti and, obscured by Kali, resolves to abandon her in order to protect her from his bad luck. Damayanti finds herself alone in the forest and invokes a curse on those who have caused the downfall of her husband. Nala, meanwhile, rescues the Snake King [Nāga Karkotaka](#) from a fire. As a result, [Nāga Karkotaka](#) bites him in rewards. As Nala seeks an explanation, [Nāga Karkotaka](#) says that the poison will only take effect when it is perfect. Nala survives the bite, but the venom turns him into an unrecognizable dwarf named [Bahuka](#), who serves as a charioteer to the [Ayodhya](#) King [Rituparna](#).

Damayanti takes refuge in the palace of the Princess of Chedi, offering to serve her, only not as a servant; to which the Princess of Chedi replies that she can be her host. Damayanti is finally discovered and taken back to her father's house where she is reunited with her children. They search for Nala, but cannot find him. Damayanti starts thinking that the only way Nala will come back would be for fear that she would not be his wife anymore. Thus she requests a fake second swayamvara. She is still of such irresistible beauty that many kings attend. Nala's master also wants to go to the swayamvara, and Nala accompanies him. On their journey to the swayamvara, the king instructs the dwarf in the techniques of gambling. When King Rituparna reveals to him the supreme skill of controlling the dice, finally the poison take effect and Bahuka vomits Kali from his body and imprisons him temporarily in a tree. Damayanti is persuaded that the dwarf is Nala because of the flavor of a dish that he cooked for her. The pair are reunited and Nala is transformed from a dwarf into his familiar form. He uses the knowledge of gambling he has learned to regain everything he had lost.

She forgives him for having abandoned her in the forest, and he forgives her for having organised another swayamvara.

They live happily ever after.

[Nalacharitham](#) attakatha, written by Unnayivaryar, is the structured story of Nala and Damayanti, played in the more dramatic and action-filled style of Kathakali. The story is divided into four parts as to be played in four days. The veshas of this are Nalan-pacha Damayanthi-minukk Sage Narada-minukk.
