

The Pursuit of Puruṣārthas in Śrīharṣa's Naiṣadhīyacaritam: A Philosophical and Poetic Exploration

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Abstract

Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*, a celebrated Sanskrit *mahākāvya*, is a masterful blend of poetic brilliance and philosophical depth. At its core, the text serves as a profound exploration of the four *puruṣārthas* (*dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth and statecraft), *kāma* (desire and love), and *mokṣa* (liberation)) which constitute the foundation of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). This paper examines how these *puruṣārthas* are intricately woven into the narrative of Nala and Damayantī's journey, revealing the interdependence and harmony of these human goals. Through an analysis of the characters, themes, and symbolic representations, this study unravels Śrīharṣa's nuanced portrayal of dharmic principles, emotional dimensions, and transcendental wisdom. Additionally, the paper highlights the allegorical and philosophical undertones that make the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* not only a poetic masterpiece but also a reflective treatise on human aspirations. By situating the *puruṣārthas* within the poetic and cultural fabric of the *mahākāvya*, this study offers new insights into Śrīharṣa's literary artistry and the enduring relevance of ancient Indian values in contemporary discourse.

Keywords: Puruṣārthas, Naiṣadhīyacaritam, Śrīharṣa, Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Dharma, Artha, Kāma, Mokṣa, Sanskrit Mahākāvya.

Introduction

The *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* by Śrīharṣa occupies a prominent place in the tradition of Sanskrit *Mahākāvyas*, celebrated for its intricate use of language, rich imagery, and profound philosophical insights. Narrating the romantic and heroic tale of Nala and Damayantī, the poem is often regarded as a literary masterpiece that seamlessly intertwines aesthetic beauty with ethical and metaphysical reflections. At the heart of this poetic work lies the framework of the four *puruṣārthas* (*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*) which encapsulate the essence of human existence and the guiding principles of Indian philosophy.

This research aims to uncover the multifaceted manner in which Śrīharṣa employs the *puruṣārthas* within the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* as a narrative and philosophical tool. The paper explores the poetic and symbolic representations of these human goals and their interrelation in shaping the lives of the protagonists, particularly in the trials and triumphs of Nala and Damayantī. Through a close reading of the text, it seeks to highlight how Śrīharṣa's portrayal of dharma manifests in Nala's moral dilemmas

and his commitment to righteousness; how *artha* reflects the complexities of statecraft and prosperity; how *kāma* finds expression in the tender and passionate love story of the central characters; and how *mokṣa* is subtly hinted at as a transcendental ideal amidst the worldly pursuits.

The exploration of these themes not only enriches the understanding of *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* as a poetic work but also underscores its contribution to the Indian Knowledge System. By examining the interplay of *puruṣārthas* in Śrīharṣa's magnum opus, this study aspires to situate the text within the broader philosophical and cultural milieu of ancient India, while also reflecting on its relevance in contemporary ethical and philosophical

The *Puruṣārthas* and their Significance in Indian Philosophy

The four *puruṣārthas* *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa* are integral to the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), representing a comprehensive framework for understanding human life and its ultimate goals. These concepts transcend mere theoretical formulations and permeate the lived experiences, societal structures, and spiritual aspirations of individuals. Rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, the *puruṣārthas* embody a holistic view of life, balancing the material and spiritual dimensions.

While *dharma* serves as the moral and ethical bedrock, *artha* emphasizes material prosperity and the management of worldly affairs. *Kāma* celebrates the pursuit of desires, beauty, and emotional fulfillment, while *mokṣa* signifies liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Together, these principles provide a roadmap for a balanced and meaningful existence. In the literary traditions of India, particularly Sanskrit *mahākāvyas*, the *puruṣārthas* are frequently explored through allegorical and narrative frameworks.

In Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*, this philosophical framework is vividly brought to life through the tale of Nala and Damayantī. The *mahākāvya* offers not only an aesthetically rich narrative but also profound insights into the interplay of human aspirations and the guiding principles of life.

Dharma*: The Ethical Compass in the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam

Dharma, the principle of righteousness, forms the foundation of Nala's character in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*. Nala's adherence to *dharma* is evident in his unwavering commitment to justice, truth, and duty, even amidst trials. His ethical dilemmas, particularly during his separation from Damayantī and his exile, showcase the tension between personal desires and moral obligations. For instance, Nala's decision to leave Damayantī in the forest, driven by a cursed compulsion yet executed with the hope of ensuring her safety, reflects the intricate balance between *dharma* and personal anguish.

In the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*, discussions on the principles of *Dharmaśāstra* are evident in several contexts, such as the dialogue between Nala and Haṃsa, Nala's worship and rituals, the account of Nala and Damayantī's marriage, and the conversations between Nala and the gods. Across various eras, the disciplines of society education, ethics, worship, professions, governance, judicial systems, and even food habits have been guided by principles collectively termed as *śāstra*.

Dharma is that which ensures both worldly prosperity (*abhyudaya*) and the ultimate goal of life, liberation (*niḥśreyasa*). The *Vedas* define *karma* (actions) as the essence of *dharma*, while the *Manusmṛti* identifies ten characteristics of *dharma*,¹ including *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), and *asteya* (non-stealing). These attributes play a pivotal role in determining the righteousness or unrighteousness of human actions. Thus, it can be stated that the sense of incompleteness, moral discord, spiritual unrest, and despair seen in human life can be transcended through knowledge, leading to an

experience of ultimate truth, fulfillment, immortality, and supreme peace this is the essence of *parama dharma*. It is this very principle that has disciplined humanity through faith and reverence.

Scholars have delved into the analysis of *dharma*-related elements in epic poetry. Following this tradition, the poet of the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* has intricately woven the principles of *Dharmaśāstra* into this esteemed work. Declaring King Nala as a devout being,² the poet emphasizes that even a fraction of his devotion suffices to attain the four *puruṣārthas dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa*.³ Indra describes Nala as exceedingly virtuous, as dignified as the protectors of the world, the moon that brings nectar to the land of Niṣadha, the upholder of both *śrauta* and *smārta dharmas*, and the epitome of righteousness. He advises Kali not to bear enmity towards Nala and Damayantī,⁴ proclaiming that anyone who, out of ignorance, opposes Nala will soon face the consequences of their sinful tendencies.⁵ This is because Nala is a soul so pure that merely hearing his name sanctifies a journey. As the verse states:

*vainyaṃ pṛthum haihayam arjunam ca śākuntaleyaṃ bharatam nalam ca /
etān nṛṇān yaḥ smarati prayāṇe tasyārthasiddhiḥ punarāgamaś ca //*

(Whoever remembers Vainya Pṛthu, Haihaya Arjuna, Śākuntaleya Bharata, or Nala during their journey attains success in their endeavors and a fortunate return.)

Nala's piety is further affirmed in the twenty-first canto, which describes his worship of the gods. The three pillars of *dharma yajña* (sacrifice), *adhyayana* (study), and *dāna* (charity) are extensively discussed in the *Naiṣadhīya*. Sacrifices, besides fostering spiritual upliftment, are recognized as instruments of mental peace and the eradication of various sins. The poet elaborates on numerous sacrifices, including *Sarvamedha, Sarvasvāra, Sautrāmaṇī* (Indra's *yajña*), *Rājasūya, Brahmasāma, Agniṣṭoma, Paurṇamāsa, Soma, Mahāvratā, and Aśvamedha*.

Regarding education, Śrīharṣa writes that King Nala categorized learning into four stages study, comprehension, application, and dissemination. He pursued the study of the fourteen *vidyās*⁶ (branches of knowledge) such as the *Vedas* and *Vedāṅgas* under the guidance of learned Gurus.⁷ Additionally, alongside these fourteen sciences, Nala mastered the *Śūpaśāstra* (culinary science), *Āyurveda* (medicine), *Dhanurveda* (archery), *Gāndharvaveda* (music and arts), and *Arthaśāstra*⁸ (political economy), culminating in a total of eighteen disciplines that perpetually adorned the tip of his tongue. As the verse eloquently describes:

*amuṣya vidyā rasanāgranartakī trayīva nītāṅga-guṇena vistaram /
agāhatāṣṭādaśatām jigīṣayā navadvayadvīpa-pṛthag-jayaśriyām //*⁹

(Knowledge, like a dancer on his tongue's edge, gracefully expounded the *Trayī (Vedas)* with qualities of ethics and expansiveness, penetrating the depths of the eighteen fields and illuminating his triumph across the diverse realms of the ninefold earth.)

Nala's scholarly disposition is evident from his joyful engagement in the company of poets and learned individuals.¹⁰ Śrīharṣa extensively discusses the theme of charity in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* across multiple instances, such as Nala's characterization, descriptions of other kings, Bhīma's actions during Nala and Damayantī's marriage, the offerings made during Nala's awakening, the praises of the bards following Patañjali's tradition, and Nala's acts of charity during his worship of the deities. The poet elevates Nala by portraying him as a greater benefactor than the mythical Kalpavṛkṣa,¹¹ and bestows upon him the title of *Dānavīra* (valiant donor).¹² This is corroborated by Nala's acts of generosity towards the bards¹³ and the Brahmins post-worship rituals.¹⁴ Furthermore, Śrīharṣa emphasizes that charity should also extend to deserving individuals during ancestral rites such as *śrāddha*. King Bhīma honored the wedding guests by

presenting them with jewels¹⁵ and gave numerous gifts to Nala after the ceremonial *kanyādāna* (gift of the bride).¹⁶

Alongside charity, Śrīharṣa delves into the topic of bathing rituals in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*. It is universally acknowledged that all religious activities are performed after completing purificatory acts such as bathing. Sage Parāśara identifies five types of bathing in the *Dharmaśāstras*: *āgneyam* (by fire), *vārūṇam* (by water), *brāhmam* (sacred chants), *vāyavyam* (by air), and *divyam* (celestial). Among these, the description of *brāhmam* bathing is found in the context of King Nala's bath. The poet also highlights the significance of pilgrimage baths in his portrayal of Damayantī's beauty, asserting that such sacred acts are possible only through accumulated virtuous deeds.¹⁷

The *Dharmaśāstras* also expound upon *nitya* (daily) and *naimittika* (occasional) duties. Śrīharṣa provides detailed accounts of these in the context of Nala's daily routine. After rising early and completing his exercises, Nala would teach royal princes the art of weaponry. Following this, he would engage in ablutions and perform *naimittika* duties, such as morning, noon, and evening *sandhyā* rituals. Nala's profound commitment to daily duties is evident in his words to Damayantī:

*Preyasā'vādi sā tanvi! tvadāliṅgana-vighnakṛt /
Samāpyatām vidhiḥ śeṣaḥ kleśaś cetasi cenna te //¹⁸*

(Beloved, this sacred rite that hinders our embrace must be completed. If it does not trouble your heart, let me proceed with the remaining rituals.)

Śrīharṣa also mentions that Nala performed *Agnihotra* rituals daily, worshiping the three sacred fires: *āhavanīya*, *gārhapatya*, and *dakṣiṇāgni*.¹⁹ He believed that attaining Damayantī was the result of his intense penance and devotion.²⁰

Moreover, Damayantī's character exemplifies dharma through her loyalty, resilience, and devotion. Her unwavering determination to reunite with Nala demonstrates her adherence to the ideals of righteousness and marital dharma. The *mahākāvya*'s portrayal of dharma extends beyond individual actions to encompass broader societal values, including the responsibilities of rulers and the moral fabric of governance. Śrīharṣa's poetic narrative underscores the significance of dharma as the cornerstone of personal and societal harmony.

Artha: Wealth and Statecraft in Nala's Journey

Artha, representing material prosperity and the management of worldly affairs, is intricately woven into Nala's journey. As a king, Nala embodies the ideal of a ruler whose pursuit of *artha* is guided by dharma. His kingdom of Niṣadha is depicted as a prosperous realm, reflecting his competence in governance and economic stewardship. However, the disruption of this prosperity due to Nala's gambling addiction highlights the vulnerabilities of *artha* when unmoored from ethical principles.

The *mahākāvya* delves into the dynamics of *artha* through Nala's exile and subsequent service to King *Rituparṣha*. Nala's mastery of equestrian skills and his role as *Rituparṣha*'s charioteer demonstrate the interplay of skill, resourcefulness, and perseverance in the pursuit of *artha*. Furthermore, the restoration of Nala's kingdom serves as a testament to the cyclical nature of fortune and the resilience required reclaiming material prosperity. Through Nala's trials and triumphs, Śrīharṣa underscores the importance of *artha* as a vital aspect of human life, tempered by dharma and aligned with higher ideals.

Kāma: Love and Emotional Fulfillment

Kāma, the pursuit of love and desire, is central to the narrative of *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*. The romantic saga

of Nala and Damayantī epitomizes the profound emotional and spiritual dimensions of *kāma*. Their union, facilitated by the divine intervention of celestial beings, celebrates the sanctity of love as a divine and transformative force.

The text's depiction of *kāma* transcends mere physical attraction, delving into the emotional depth and mutual respect that define Nala and Damayantī's relationship. Even during their separation, their unwavering devotion to each other serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring nature of true love. Śrīharṣa's poetic imagery and lyrical expressions vividly capture the beauty and intensity of their bond, elevating *kāma* to an ideal that harmonizes with *dharma* and spiritual aspirations.

The Kāmasāstric References in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*

The foundational framework of Indian culture is the *puruṣārtha catuṣṭaya dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (desire), and *mokṣa* (liberation). Among these, the triad (*trivarga*) *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* acts as the carriers of cultural values. In *Kāmasāstra*, *kāma* is the primary *puruṣārtha* under consideration. However, just as *artha* is regulated by *dharma*, *kāma* too becomes a life value only when guided by the principles of *dharma*. The revered author of the *Kāmasūtra*, Vātsyāyana, upholds the supremacy of the *trivarga* at the very beginning of his treatise by venerating this *puruṣārthas*.²¹

In the cosmic framework, *kāma* is deemed the primordial force. Yet, much like *dharma* and *artha*, which are instrumental in maintaining societal order, *kāma* too holds immense utility as the principal means for life's sustenance and the preservation of progeny. As defined "*kāmyate iti kāmaḥ*" *kāma* is essentially the mental pleasure arising from the interaction of the senses with their objects. Vātsyāyana equates *kāma* with sustenance, comparing it to food, and identifies it as the fruition of *dharma* and *artha*. Therefore, *Kāmasāstra* plays an unparalleled role in the establishment of an ideal society.

The *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* abounds with discussions rooted in *Kāmasāstra*. The extensive references within the epic suggest that its author, Śrīharṣa, possessed a profound fascination with this discipline. He boldly proclaims that he intends to describe aspects of sensuality that even the great poets like Vyāsa and Kālidāsa did not envision, and that even courtesans had not mastered until then.²²

Indeed, the *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* appears to be a condensed form of *Kāmasāstra*. The vivid depiction of the psychological states of Nala and Damayantī indicates that Śrīharṣa might have drawn inspiration directly from *kāmasāstric* works, such as the *Kāmasūtra*. While the seeds of *Kāmasāstra's* themes can be traced back to the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Brāhmaṇas*, and *Purāṇas*, Śrīharṣa's lucid presentation makes these ideas accessible to the general public, potentially making them adept in the art of love.

In *Dharmaśāstra*, life is categorized into four stages or *āśramas*: *brahmacharya* (celibate student life), *gṛhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (forest-dweller), and *sannyāsa* (renunciation). These stages advocate the sequential pursuit of education, self-restraint, wealth acquisition, religious merit, sensual enjoyment, and ultimately, liberation. As the *Manusmṛti* states: "*parityajedarthakāmau yau syātām dharmavarjitau*" (One must renounce *artha* and *kāma* if they contradict *dharma*). Supporting this sentiment, Kālidāsa writes:

*na dharmamarthakāmāmyāṃ babādhe na ca te ca tau
nārthaṃ kāmēna kāmaṃ vā so'rthena sadṛśāstriṣu||*²³

(The pursuit of *dharma* neither obstructs *artha* nor *kāma*, nor do the latter two conflict when aligned with *dharma*.)

Śrīharṣa also emphasizes the harmonious integration of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. He underscores the dominance of *dharma* over the other two, evident in the 21st canto, where Nala is depicted engaging in

sacred rituals, including bathing, meditation, worship, and offerings to deities. Similarly, in the 14th canto, Damayantī is shown worshipping the gods to please them.²⁴ In her supplications, she likens the gods to the wish-fulfilling tree (*kalpavṛkṣa*).²⁵

Nala venerates Lord Viṣṇu, acknowledging him as the source of all four *puruṣārthas*:²⁶

1. *Dharma*, embodied by the sacred river Gaṅgā at His feet.
2. *Artha*, personified by Lakṣmī residing in His heart.
3. *Kāma*, represented by Kāmadeva (Pradyumna), His son.
4. *Mokṣa*, granted by Viṣṇu as the ultimate reality.

Thus, all four *puruṣārthas* seamlessly reside within Viṣṇu, and devotion to Him ensures their attainment. Śrīharṣa accords primacy to *dharma* over *kāma*, as demonstrated when Nala advises Damayantī that if she harbors no mental anguish, she should undergo the penance he undertook to unite with her.²⁷ This portrayal underscores Nala and Śrīharṣa's profound understanding of both *Dharmaśāstra* and *Kāmaśāstra*.

The *kāmaśāstric* references in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* suggest Śrīharṣa's extensive study of works like Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Nāgārjuna's *Ratīśāstra*, Dhanañjaya's *Daśarūpaka*, Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Sūtras*, Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*, Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* and *Kumārasambhava*, and Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*. His masterful synthesis of these texts enriches the narrative and thematic depth of *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*.

The Kāmaśāstric Interpretation in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*

Śrīharṣa, in his magnum opus *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*, has made an earnest attempt to explore how the science of *Kāma* (erotics) can contribute to the successful conduct of married life. Across all twenty-two cantos of the epic, references to *Kāmaśāstra* are scattered in various forms, but the first, second, third, ninth, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second cantos stand out as miniature treatises on *Kāmaśāstra*. Śrīharṣa has extensively discussed the first three divisions of *Kāmasūtra* *Sādhāraṇādhyakṣaṇam* (general principles), *Sāmprayogikādhyakṣaṇam* (amorous practices), and *Kanyāsampramuktakādhyakṣaṇam* (union with maidens). He also delves into specific sections from *Bhāryādhyakṣaṇam* (dealing with wives), such as *Ekacāriṇīvr̥ttaparakaraṇa* (behavior of a solitary woman), *Pāradarikādhyakṣaṇam* (dealing with others' spouses), and discusses themes like introducing a suitor through a messenger (*dūti*), tests of emotions (*bhāvaparīkṣā*), and the messenger's role (*dūtikarmaparakaraṇa*). From *Vaiśika Adhyakṣaṇam*, he analyzes topics like deliberation on wealth (*arthādivicāraparakaraṇa*).

Śrīharṣa views the experience of all the *rasas* (emotions) as culminating in the act of union (*saṃbhoga*). Perhaps this is why he refers to *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* as a moon that showers the nectar of *śṛṅgāra* (erotic sentiment). Through this work, Śrīharṣa aims to acquaint the common man with the methods of attaining *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (desire), and *mokṣa* (liberation), as well as the appropriate and inappropriate consequences of these pursuits. A detailed reading of the text reveals that it encompasses the essence of various classical texts be it *Manusmṛti*, *Mahābhārata*, *Vedas*, *Purāṇas*, *Upaniṣads*, or *Arthaśāstra*. Śrīharṣa integrates their teachings seamlessly within the framework of *Kāmaśāstra*.

The portrayal of *Kāmaśāstra* in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* suggests that Śrīharṣa crafted the work based on his intimate familiarity with the dynamics of household life. He draws from the first section of Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*, encompassing *Śāstrasaṅgrahaparakaraṇa* (introduction), *Trivargapratipattiparakaraṇa*

(understanding the threefold aims of life), *Vidhyāsamuddesāprakarāṇa* (objective of learning), and others like *Nāgarakavṛttaprarakarāṇa* (city dwellers' behavior) and *Nāyaka-sahāyadūtīkarmavimarśaprarakarāṇa* (discussion on the protagonist's companions and messengers). While the *Śāstrasaṅgrahaprarakarāṇa*, which begins with the auspicious invocation "*dharmā-arthā-kāmebhyo namaḥ*," elaborates on the origin and evolution of *Kāmasāstra*, this specific discussion is absent in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*. However, subsequent sections find representation in Śrīharṣa's work.

Śrīharṣa emphasizes the harmonious integration of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* and underscores the supremacy of *dharma* over the other two. For instance, in the twenty-first canto, Nala's rituals of bathing, meditation, worship, offering libations, and propitiation of deities, as well as Damayantī's worship of deities in the fourteenth canto, highlight Śrīharṣa's expertise in these domains. In the episode of the *pañcanalī*, Damayantī pleases the gods with prayers to secure Nala, viewing them as wish-fulfilling entities akin to the celestial cow *Kāmadhenu*.²⁸ Vātsyāyana affirms that while *dharma* is superior to *artha* and *kāma*, one who balances all three attains longevity (*śataṃjīvī*).²⁹

Nala's act of satisfying the amorous Damayantī, followed by his ascetic practices and devotion to deities before partaking of food, demonstrates the primacy of *dharma*.³⁰ Śrīharṣa suggests that both Nala and Damayantī adhered to the prescribed path of classical texts, achieving a balanced integration of the *puruṣārthas*. Vātsyāyana too states that a person striving for the fulfillment of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* enjoys happiness in both this world and the next.³¹

Śrīharṣa aligns with Vātsyāyana's view that alongside the study of texts like *Dharmaśāstra* and its auxiliary sciences, individuals should also learn the auxiliary sciences of *Kāmasāstra* through works like *Kāmasūtra* and practical lessons from worldly-wise citizens.³² In the twentieth canto, it is mentioned that Damayantī was educated in the science of love by her close friend *Kāla*. *Kāla* reminds her, "While teaching you *Kāmasāstra*, I explained the reverse roles in conjugal love (*dāmpatyavyatyaya*), yet you kept it a secret from me."³³ This indicates that Damayantī acquired her knowledge of *Kāmasāstra* from her confidante.

Vātsyāyana further asserts that a maiden should be proficient in the sixty-four arts (*catuṣṣaṣṭi-kalā*).³⁴ Śrīharṣa establishes that Damayantī mastered these arts. In the seventh canto, Nala praises Damayantī, saying, "This beauty, who bears four moons in the form of her fame, the nails of her toes, and her face, must certainly be adorned with all sixty-four arts."³⁵ Since each full moon represents sixteen phases (*kalā*), Damayantī, endowed with four such moons, is depicted as proficient in all these arts, as described in *Kāmasūtra*.³⁶ Similarly, Nala is also depicted as an adept in the sixty-four arts, as evidenced in various episodes in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*.³⁷

Mokṣa: Transcendence and Liberation

While *mokṣa* is not explicitly foregrounded in the narrative, its philosophical underpinnings permeate the text. The trials faced by Nala and Damayantī, including exile, suffering, and separation, serve as allegories for the human journey toward liberation. Nala's eventual restoration to his kingdom and reunion with Damayantī can be interpreted as symbolic of the soul's journey toward *mokṣa*, characterized by purification, self-realization, and divine grace.

The *mahākāvya* also reflects on the impermanence of worldly pursuits, subtly pointing toward the ultimate goal of spiritual liberation. Through the lens of *mokṣa*, Śrīharṣa invites readers to contemplate the transcendental dimensions of human existence, suggesting that the *puruṣārthas* are not isolated but interconnected, with *mokṣa* serving as the culmination of life's journey.

Literary and Philosophical Synthesis in *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*

One of the remarkable aspects of Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* is its seamless integration of poetic artistry with philosophical depth. The *mahākāvya* employs rich metaphors, intricate wordplay, and vivid imagery to convey the *puruṣārthas* in a manner that is both aesthetically captivating and intellectually stimulating. Śrīharṣa's mastery of language enables him to delve into complex philosophical concepts without compromising the narrative's emotional resonance.

The text's exploration of the *puruṣārthas* reflects the broader cultural and philosophical milieu of classical India, where literature served as a medium for both entertainment and ethical education. By presenting the *puruṣārthas* through the lived experiences of Nala and Damayantī, Śrīharṣa bridges the gap between abstract philosophy and practical life, offering timeless lessons on the art of living.

Conclusion

Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* stands as a testament to the enduring relevance and profound depth of the *puruṣārthas* *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa* in Indian philosophy and literature. By weaving these four aims of human life into the rich fabric of Nala and Damayantī's narrative, Śrīharṣa creates a *mahākāvya* that is not only a poetic masterpiece but also a reflective exploration of human aspirations and ethical dilemmas. The portrayal of *dharma* in Nala's moral steadfastness and commitment to righteousness underscores the universal significance of ethical living. *Artha*, explored through the challenges of governance, wealth, and statecraft, highlights the pragmatic aspects of human endeavor while remaining tethered to moral principles. The tender and deeply human story of Nala and Damayantī's love elevates *kāma* from mere desire to a sacred expression of devotion, fidelity, and emotional fulfillment. Subtly interwoven throughout the narrative is the ideal of *mokṣa*, reminding readers of the transcendence that lies beyond worldly pursuits and the ultimate liberation that is the goal of life.

Through his intricate poetic style, philosophical undertones, and allegorical depth, Śrīharṣa not only captures the essence of the *puruṣārthas* but also reflects the holistic worldview of ancient Indian culture, where individual aspirations align with cosmic order. The *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* thus offers timeless insights into the harmony of material and spiritual pursuits, presenting a balanced vision of life that resonates across generations. As a work of literary brilliance and philosophical profundity, *Naiṣadhīyacaritam* continues to inspire scholars, poets, and thinkers, reminding us of the delicate interplay between human desires and higher ideals. It serves as a beacon of the Indian Knowledge System, urging readers to seek not only the fulfillment of worldly goals but also the higher truths that unite humanity with the divine.

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2. padaīscaturbhiḥ sukṛte sthīrīkṛte kṛte'munā kena tapaḥ prapedire bhuvam yadekāṅghikaniṣṭhayā spr̥śan dadhāvadharmo'pi kṛśastapasvitām // Naiṣadhīyacaritam, 1.7
3. phalasīmām caturvargaṃ yacchatāmśo'pi yacchati / nalasyāsmadupaghnā sā bhaktirbhūtāvakeśinī // Ibid, 17.142
5. bhavyo na vyavasāyaste nale sādhumatau kale / lokapālaviśāloyam niṣadhānām sudhākaraḥ // Ibid, 17.143

4. na paśyāmaḥ kalestasminnavakāśaṃ kṣamābhṛti / nicitākhilladharme ca dvāparasyodayaṃ vyaṃ // Ibid, 17.144
5. taṃ nāsatyayugaṃ tām vā tretā spardhiturmati / eka prakāśadharmāṇaṃ na kalidvāparau yuvām // Ibid, 17.146
6. sā vinītatamā bhaimī vyarthānarthagrahairaho / katham bhavidvadhairbādhyā pramitirvibhramairiva // Ibid, 17.145
6. drohaṃ mohena yastasminnācaredacireṇa saḥ / tatpāpasambhavaṃ tāpamāpnuyādanayāntataḥ // Ibid, 17.148
7. yugaśeṣatava dveṣastasminneṣa na sāmpratam / bhavitā na hitāyaitadvairam te vairaseninā // Ibid, 17.149
7. purāṇanyāyamīmāṃsādharmasāstrāṅgamiśritāḥ / vedā: sthānāni vidyānām dharmasya ca caturdaśā // Yājñavalkyasmṛti, 1.3
8. śikṣā kalpo vyākaraṇaṃ niruktaṃ chandasām citiḥ / jyotiyāmayanañcaiva vedāṃgāni vadanti ṣaṭ //
9. aṃgāni vedāscatvāro mīmāṃsā nyāyavistarāḥ / dharmasāstraṃ purāṇaṃ ca vidyāstvetāścaturdaśā // Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 3.6.28–29 adhītibodhācāraṇapracāraṇairdaśāscatasraḥ praṇayannupādhibhiḥ /
10. caturdaśatvaṃ kṛtvānkutaḥ svayaṃ na vedmi vidyāsu caturdaśasvayaṃ // Naiśadhīyacaritam, 1.42 āyurvedo dhanurvedo gāndharvaśceti te trayāḥ /
11. arthasāstraṃ caturthantu vidyā hyaṣṭādaśa smṛtāḥ // Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 3.6.30 Naiśadhīyacaritam, 1.5 ajasramabhyāsamupeyuṣā samaṃ mudeva devaḥ kavinaḥ budhena ca /
12. dadhau paṭiyāsamayaṃ nayannayaṃ dīneśvaraśrīrudayaṃ dīne dīne // Ibid, 1.17 ayaṃ daridrobhaviteti vaidhasīm lipim lālate'rthijanasya jāgratīm /
13. mṛṣāṃ na cakre'lpitakalpapādapāḥ praṇīya dāridrya daridratāṃ nalaḥ // Ibid, 1.15 vibhajya merurna yadarthisātkṛto na sindhurutsargajalavyayairmarāḥ /
14. amāni tattena nijāyaśoyugaṃ dviphālabaddhāścikurāḥ śiraḥ sthitam // Ibid, 1.16 athopakāryāṃ niśadhāvanīpatirnijāmayāśīdvāraṇasrjāñcitaḥ /
15. vasūni varṣansubahūni bandinām viśiṣya bhaimīguṇakīrtanākṛtam // Ibid, 15.1
16. tathā pathiyāgamayaṃ vitīrṇavānyathātībhārādhigamena māgadhaiḥ / tṛṇīkṛtaṃ ratnanikāyamuccakāiścikāya lokaścīramuñchamutsukaḥ // Ibid, 15/2, and 19.65
8. viprapāṇiṣu bhṛṣāṃ vasuvarṣī pātrasātkṛtapitṛkratukavyaḥ / śreyasā hariharaṃ paripūjya prahṛṣa śaraṇaṃ praviveśa // Ibid, 21.119 Ibid, 16.111 Ibid, 16.16, 3 and
17. na tena vāheṣu vivāhadakṣiṇīkṛteṣu saṃkhyānubhave'bhavatkaṣamaḥ / na śātakumbheṣu na mattakumbhiṣu prayatnavānko'pi na ratnarāśiṣu // Ibid, 16.34
9. viśeṣatīrthairiva jahnunandinī guṇairivājānikarāgabhūmitā / jagāma bhāgyairiva nītirujjalairvibhūṣaṇaistatsuṣamā mahārghatām // Ibid, 15.54 Ibid, 20/6
18. mamāsāvapi mā saṃbhūtkalidvāparavatparaḥ / itīva nityasatre tām sa tretām paryatūtuṣat // Ibid, 20.10
10. tvām prāpa yatprasādēna priye ! tannādriyate tapaḥ // Ibid, 20.14
19. niśi dāsyam gato'pitvām snātvā yannābhyaivīdam / taṃ pravṛttāsi mantu cenmantuṃ tadvada vandyase // Ibid, 20.15.
20. dhamārthakāmebhyonamaḥ / Kāmasūtra 1.1.1 tatra saudhasurabhūdhare yayorāvīrasuratha kāmakelayaḥ / ye mahākavirapyavīkṣitā: pāṃsulābhirapi ye na śikṣitāḥ // Naiśadhīyacaritam, 18.29
11. Raghuvamśa, 17.57

21. Cf. anena dharmah saviśesamadya me trivargasārah pratibhāti bhāmini / tvayā manonirviṣayārthakāmayā yadeka eva pratigṛhya sevyate // Kumārasambhavam 5.38
22. athādhigantum niśadheśvaram sā prasāda nāmādriyatāmarāṇām yataḥ surāṇaṃ surabhinṛṇām tu sā vedhasā'srjyata kāmadhenuḥ // Naiśadhīyacaritam, 14.1
23. pradakṣiṇāprakamaṇāvalālavilepadhūpāvaraṇāmbusekaiḥ / iṣṭaṅca mṛṣṭaṅca phalaṃ suvānā devāhi kalpadrumakānanam naḥ // Ibid, 14.2
24. dharmabija salilā saridaṅghravarthamūlamurasi sphurati śrīḥ / kāmadaivatamapi prasavaste brahma bhuktidamasi svayameva // Ibid, 21.110
25. iti vyājākrṭvāliṣu calitacittam saharim / svayam so'yaṃ sāyamtanavidhividhitsuḥbahirabhūt // Ibid, 21.162
26. sāvādi sutanustena kopaste nāyamaucitī / tvām prāpaṃ yatprasādēna priye! tannadriye tapaḥ // Ibid, 20.14
27. athādhigantum niśadheśvaram sā prasādanāmādriyatāmarāṇām / yataḥ surāṇaṃ surabhinṛṇām tu sā vedhasā'srjyata kāmadhenuḥ //
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12. eṣāṃ samavāye pūrvāḥ pūrvō garīyān / Kāmasūtra 1.2.14
29. śatāyurvai puruṣo vibhajya kalamanyonyānubaddham parasparasyānupaghātakam sevet / Ibid, 1.2.1
13. Naiśadhīyacaritam, 21.7, 19, 162 also 20.6, 14, 158 Kāmasūtra, 1.2.39, 40
14. tam kāmasūtrānnāgarika janasamuvāyācca pratipadyet / Ibid, 1.2.13
15. smaraśāstramadhīyānā śikṣitāsi mayaiva yam / agopi so'pi kṛtvā kim dāmpatyavyatyayastvayā // Naiśadhīyacaritam, 20.64 Kāmasūtra, 1.3.13
30. yaśaḥ padāṅguṣṭhanakhau mukham ca vibharti pūrṇendu catuṣṭayam yā / kalā catuṣṣaṣṭirūpaiti vāsam tasyām katham subhruvi nāma nāsyām // Naiśadhīyacaritam, 7.107 36 Kāmasūtra, 1.3.15
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