

The Shakespearean
Linkages in
Unnayi Warriar's
Nala Charitham

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A Literary Analysis

By

Mohan Gopinath

Editor: Sabina Zacharias

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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For Chinnam and my parents and to a treasure trove of memories of the times we had, and for my aunts Padma Balachandran and Shantha Menon - MG

WHAT READERS SAY....

“There was no putting down this book once I started reading it”. Professor
—Edwin Castelino, Former Professor of Finance and Dean of St. Joseph’s
Institute of Management, Bangalore

“Intriguing and the best analysis I have seen of the story Nala Charitham”.
—Professor Dr. Ray Titus, Pro Vice Chancellor, Alliance University,
Bangalore

“A wonderful book which I enjoyed reading”.
—Kalamandalam Mohan Krishnan

“This book relating to the story Nala Charitham is one of the most detailed
analysis I have seen of any epic story. Mohan has explored many avenues
and come up with some really great insights. The book is fascinating”.
—Dr. Dolphy M. Abraham, Independent Researcher and former Professor
and Head of the Doctoral Program, Alliance University, and former Dean,
St. Joseph’s Institute of Management, Bangalore

“A superb exposition of the story of the eternally popular couple Nalan and
Damayanthi. This book is a tribute to Shri Unnayi Warriar”.
—Kalamandalam Unnikrishnan

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND EDITOR

Dr. Mohan Gopinath Ph.D.

Mohan Gopinath holds a BA (Hons.) degree and a Master's degree in English Literature from St. Stephen's College—Delhi University, where he later joined as a member of the faculty. In between, he joined the Indian Police Service which he quit after one week. After the two-year stint in the college, he joined the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, and worked as a senior-level banker for almost 21 years in India, the UK and Hong Kong, after initially completing a two-year training attachment in the London branch of the bank. Subsequently, he left the industry and worked on a doctoral degree which he obtained from Osmania University on the topic, Organizational Learning (in the banking industry). His career in HSBC also included an attachment to the all-India HR function.

After obtaining his doctoral degree, Mohan worked as a management consultant in India and the Middle East. He has also worked as a lead consultant for a World Bank-funded Institutional Development Study conducted for the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department.

He reverted to academia after working as a consultant for more than one decade and joined as the Dean of St. Joseph's Institute of Management, Bangalore. He later shifted to the Alliance University's School of Business, Bangalore, where he worked as a Professor in the Department of Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource till September 2019. His areas of interest are leadership, management of change, conflict resolution, banking, and protection of the environment. He has written and published papers and case studies across a range of subjects (Banking, Organizational Behaviour, Human Resource, Finance, the Environment, and the Performing Arts). He is also a keen tennis enthusiast.

Mohan has conducted Management Development Programs for senior managers in his areas of specialization in the organizational development area in India and the Middle East. His first book was co-authored and titled Business Drama: How Shakespearean Insights Help Leaders Manage Volatile Contexts. His interest in Kathakali (he has trained in Kathakali music and sung for many performances) led him to write (in 2015) The

Actor Who Could Connect: the Genius of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair. This book was selected by the American Library of Congress for inclusion in their database and also exhibited at the Paris World Book Fair in March 2019. The book was later completely revised and expanded and published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle in 2022 under the title, *Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, The Mozart of Kathakali*. His other theme-based book on Kathakali and Shakespeare is *Vignettes Relating to Kathakali and Shakespeare: the Thirasheela versus the Curtain*. The last book in the trilogy is *Shakespeare Meets the Indian Epics: Comparative Themes and Interpretations*. All three books are published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle. His most recent book is *The Messenger: A Study of Literary and Symbolic Significance through History*.

Dr. Sabina Zacharias Ph.D.—Editor

Sabina Zacharias has been teaching English Language and Literature, Cultural Studies and Business Communication to multicultural/multilingual groups at different levels in India and abroad for the last 20 years. She completed her doctoral degree from The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) in Hyderabad on the topic ‘Re-reading the Legends of Kerala: the politics of legend-making’ from a caste and gender perspective and also analysed its representations in film adaptations and fictional narratives. She has presented and published several research papers, and edited and co-authored in the areas of English Literature, Cultural Studies and Communication. Currently, she is engaged in online teaching and academic content writing. Her other interests include volunteering for community service and working on Education projects for social change.

Books Written by Mohan Gopinath

The Messenger: A Study of Literary and Symbolic Significance through History.

Shakespeare Meets the Indian Epics: Comparative Themes and Interpretations, with Sabina Zacharias.

Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, the Mozart of Kathakali.

Vignettes Relating to Kathakali and Shakespeare: the Thirasheela versus the Curtain, with Vellinezhi Achuthan Kutty, Nagesh Bharadwaj and Asha Prabhakaran.

Jim Collins's Leadership Levels Spiced with Shakespeare, with Sabina Zacharias and Suprabha Bakshi.

Managing Human Foibles and Human Dilemmas.

Team Roles: through the Eyes of Shakespeare and Dr. Meredith Belbin.

The Myers Briggs Type Indicator: a Shakespearean Validation.

Why People Fail: Through the Eyes of Shakespeare and Sumantra Ghoshal.

Leadership Nuances in Shakespeare's Plays.

Fiction—Double Oh Seven (for private circulation only).

The Actor Who Could Connect: the Genius of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair.

(This book was selected by the American Library of Congress for inclusion in their database and exhibited at the Paris International Book Fair in March 2019)

A Nocturnal Interlude.

Memoir—Does the Spearmint Lose its Flavour on the Bedpost Overnight?

Business Drama: How Shakespearean insights help leaders manage volatile contexts, with Debashish Sengupta and Ray Titus.

Books Written/Edited by Sabina Zacharias

Edited a book of Essays as part of the National level Essay Contest—Vision India 2022 commemorating the 85th Birth Anniversary of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (2018). IFIM College Bangalore.

Edited a book—Business Ethics—Caselets for the Classroom, by Dr. Karanam Nagaraj Rao and CA Sindhuja Bhaskara (2019). Delhi: Bookwell.

Co-authored a book with Dr. Mohan Gopinath and Dr. Suprabha Bakshi—Jim Collins's Levels of Leadership: a Compilation of Leadership Profiles. (2021). Chennai: Notion Press.

Published a book chapter—Refiguring history, historiography and legend: the politics of subversion in Kerala legends in the book 'Marginalization in Literature'—Critical perspectives, (2021). Delhi: Authors Press.

Chief Editor for a book—*Vignettes Relating to Kathakali and Shakespeare: the Thirasheela versus the Curtain*. (2022). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, United Kingdom.

Edited a book—Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, the Mozart of Kathakali. (2022). Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Co-authored a book with Dr. Mohan Gopinath—*Shakespeare Meets the Indian Epics: Comparative Themes and Interpretations* (2023). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Edited a book—*The Messenger: A Study of Literary and Symbolic Significance through History* (2023). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

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MG

“You put together two people who have not been put together before; and sometimes the world is changed, sometimes not. They may crash and burn, or burn and crash. But sometimes, something new is made, and then the world is changed. Together, in that first exaltation, that first roaring sense of uplift, they are greater than their two separate selves. Together, they see further, and they see more clearly”.

—Julian Barnes, *Levels of Life* (2013)

“When you read a great book, you don’t escape from life, you plunge deeper into it. There may be a superficial escape—into different countries, mores, speech patterns—but what you are essentially doing is furthering your understanding of life’s subtleties, paradoxes, joys, pains and truths.

Reading and life are not separate but symbiotic”.

—Julian Barnes, *A Life with Books* (2012)

The two quotations by Julian Barnes serve a purpose as far as this book is concerned. They both are closely linked to the story Nala Charitham and the two main characters in it. But the undercurrents of these links will be different for each person and so we leave it to you the reader, to glean the meaning which will be unique to your ways of thinking.

‘It is the story which matters in the end and the way it is told’.

Ambalavasi (temple dwelling community)

Variyar/Warrier is a category of people belonging to the Ambalavasi community. There are many categories in the Ambalavasi community performing a specified role related to the temple. Ambalavasi community is an intermediate class between the Namboodiri Brahmins and Kshatriyas (Nairs) in the Kerala caste hierarchy.

Ambalavasi, more properly Ampalavasi, ('temple-dwelling') is the generic name for a group of castes among Hindus in Kerala, India, who have traditionally rendered temple services.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Some of the arguments and conclusions which are there in this book have received a mention in Sabina's and my earlier books which are shown in the earlier pages. These were published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle. Their permission has been obtained to include these.

There is a subsection called The Motivation in the Preface but I would like to touch on this here also. I was fortunate that my father instilled in me a love for English Literature and the performing arts of Kerala when I was very young. As he worked for the Government of India in a transferable job, I never spent time in Kerala studying in a school. All my schooling was in the north of India and my only connection with Kerala was by imbibing what my father taught me or told me plus the occasional visit to the state. So the foundation of my love for Kerala and the performing arts was not a first-hand one. I managed to keep up the original interest and built on it and this has culminated in a few books I wrote, most of which touch on these twin interests, including this one.

I also realised when I grew up that literature and the theatre are closely linked and a dividing line is not possible in many cases between the two disciplines.

Any mention of the earlier arguments and conclusions from the earlier books are to be seen reinforcing the arguments made in this one. And I emphasise that the focus here is only on Shri Unnayi Warriar and his wonderful story Nala Charitham. That, along with comparisons of Warriar with another great writer, William Shakespeare in terms of the way they wrote and created characters. All this is from the point of view of a person who has taken a keen interest in these two forms of creativity; I do not ever claim to be a profound expert in these areas.

This is in short a very unusual book as it explores a very unusual link between two writers who had nothing in common between them but the fact that they were both gifted story tellers. And that gift is for us a precious one and one which visits very few people. Story telling—whatever the medium in which it is couched is a serious business and the Brothers Grimm had the right idea in collecting stories from different sources and putting them all

together in one book. So the stories live on even though the craftsmen who put them together are no longer with us. And in our own way, this also is our intention in writing this book.

It is most importantly, the first time a book of this type has been written which is a comparison of one of the most popular of Kathakali stories with selected plays of Shakespeare. It is a first of its kind –and is unique in that sense. No such comparisons exist between a specific story from one of the epics (which story was then converted into a Kathakali story meant for the stage) and the plays of Shakespeare.

Comparing two distinct performing art forms, such as Kathakali, a traditional dance-drama from Kerala in India, and the plays of William Shakespeare, presents inherent challenges due to their cultural, historical, and stylistic disparities. Firstly, the cultural contexts in which these art forms originated are vastly different. Kathakali, deeply rooted in Hindu mythology and the Indian classical dance tradition, often draws upon religious narratives and epics. On the other hand, Shakespearean plays, originating in 16th-century England, are steeped in Western literary traditions, exploring a wide range of themes from love and power to tragedy and comedy. The cultural nuances embedded in each art form make it challenging to evaluate them on a common scale, as the criteria for excellence are shaped by the distinct values and aesthetics of their respective societies. In short, it was a difficult exercise but well worth the effort.

Moreover, the stylistic variations between Kathakali and Shakespearean plays further complicate any direct comparison. Kathakali is characterized by elaborate costumes, intricate facial expressions, and highly stylised gestures, where every movement holds symbolic significance. In contrast, Shakespearean drama relies heavily on the power of language, employing poetic dialogue and complex character development. The criteria for assessing the quality of performance in Kathakali might emphasize the precision of physical movements and the ability to convey emotions through facial expressions, while in Shakespearean plays, the emphasis may be on the delivery of lines, interpretation of characters, the interesting plots, and the overall mastery of the English language. These differing artistic conventions make it challenging to establish a uniform standard for evaluating excellence across these diverse performing arts.

Furthermore, historical and contextual considerations play a crucial role in understanding and appreciating the complexities of Kathakali and Shakespearean plays. The evolution of these art forms has been shaped by

centuries of cultural development, societal changes, and regional influences. Attempting to compare them without acknowledging their historical trajectories can lead to oversimplified assessments. The challenges arise from the need to appreciate and contextualize the unique strengths of each art form within its historical and cultural framework. In conclusion, the general difficulties of comparing Kathakali and Shakespearean plays stem from the rich tapestry of cultural, stylistic, and historical factors that define each form, making it a nuanced and intricate task to establish a fair and objective basis for evaluation.

The Difficulties

The difficulties of comparing two different performing art forms like Kathakali and Shakespearean plays require a writer to navigate several challenges. Firstly, the writer must possess a comprehensive understanding of both art forms, delving into their historical, cultural, and stylistic intricacies. This necessitates extensive research and familiarity with the nuanced details of Kathakali and Shakespearean plays, including their origins, development, and unique characteristics. The writer needs to be well-versed in the cultural contexts that gave rise to these art forms, recognising the diversity of influences that shaped their evolution.

Additionally, the writer must grapple with the subjective nature of artistic evaluation. Comparing two distinct performing arts involves inherently subjective judgments, as criteria for excellence are often culture-specific and vary based on individual preferences. Striking a balance between providing an objective analysis and acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of art appreciation poses a significant challenge. It requires a nuanced approach that respects the differences in cultural aesthetics and artistic goals without succumbing to relativism or oversimplification.

Furthermore, communicating these complexities in a coherent and engaging manner is another hurdle. The writer must convey intricate concepts related to dance, drama, cultural history, and aesthetics in a way that is accessible to a diverse audience. Balancing depth and accessibility requires a skillful use of language and a keen awareness of the potential knowledge gap between the writer and the readers. The writer needs to find a middle ground that allows for a thorough exploration of the topic without alienating readers unfamiliar with either Kathakali or Shakespearean plays.

The fascination which great literature can have for people is seen in our choice of subjects for our earlier books. These looked at the two Indian epics and the plays of Shakespeare, from different perspectives. This book is entirely different as it compares one story from one epic with a few plays by the Bard. As has been indicated above, this is the first time such a comparative study has been attempted, and the objective was to show that great literature and their creators have a lot in common. The creators of great works think very much in the same manner and approach i.e., write about people and themes with the same mental focus.

How did Shakespeare conjure up the lines he did and which for us are in the realms of the ethereal? How did he conjure up Hamlet and create a character which was enacted by all the greatest actors since Shakespeare's time? And a Lear? And an Othello? Why did Shri Krishnan decide to talk to his friend Arjunan and justify to him the reasons to fight in the Kurukshetra war? How did the sage Vedavyasan come up with the logic in these arguments? These are questions which we cannot answer; we are only happy that we are in a position to ask them because we have read these works; the plays, and the epics which are an integral part of India.

Another question we often ask ourselves is what were the particular features in the people in the two genres which attracted people to them over centuries and will continue to do so. Was it their intelligence, their manipulations, their nobility, their vulnerabilities, their wiles; the list is endless and we will not attempt to make an exhaustive one. Perhaps in the final analysis, readers or watchers see something of themselves in the characters in the plays and epics. Their nobility and weaknesses are transferred to the reader and in their manipulations the readers find something they may do or are planning to do. This is the best explanation which we can give.

And a final point; the Maha Bharatham appeals because it shows people as being both good and bad. It is this realistic mix that makes the epic so approachable and it shows us the difficulty of being good as Gurcharan Das has indicated. He said, "The epic's tentative world of moral haziness is closer to our experience as ordinary human beings in contrast to the certainty of the fundamentalist. Its dizzying plural perspectives are a nice antidote to narrow and rigid positions that surround us amidst the hypertrophied rhetoric of the early twenty-first century."

So the reader of this book will be surrounded by familiar people and will be comfortable reading about them. It is this relatability which is important to the context in which this book is written.

Could we have compared and used one narrative from the Ramayanam instead of the Maha Bharatham? We could, but as the story of Nalan appeared first in the latter epic, it seemed logical to have chosen the Maha Bharatham. But we can see some of the same attributes in the people in the Ramayanam as in the other epic; readers are requested to go through our book *Shakespeare Meets the Indian Epics* to see some of these attributes. As a matter of interest, we have always maintained the Ramayanam has a more straightforward storyline as opposed to the Maha Bharatham. The latter is more people centric or people oriented and hits us with the immense depth of the machinations which exist in the world. And the good attributes in some people. The complexities shown present in the minds of people are far less in the Ramayanam.

So the Maha Bharatham is the *Hamlet* and the Ramayanam is the *Othello*, if the two epics are to be described in a Shakespearean context. The first epic reveals all the mental subtleties which can exist while the latter shows the blunt and rugged approach which can be taken to resolve or not resolve issues.

Reinterpretation

We have mentioned two plays which are reinterpretations of a play and a real life event which occurred a long while ago; these refer to *Hamlet* and the story of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the composer. Details of these are there in the Preface but a brief mention will not be out of place here. Reinterpretations can reveal unsettling and new perspectives to the earlier version of a play/ story or a sequence of events which actually happened. This book you are now reading is not exactly a reinterpretation of Nala Charitham but it comes close and looks at the story from mainly a present day perspective in many places. It does not however rearrange the original and/ or tamper with what really happened in history. We are of course referring to Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*.

Lastly, the writer must navigate the potential biases or preconceptions that may influence their analysis. Personal preferences, cultural background, and artistic inclinations can inadvertently shape the writer's perspective. Remaining conscious of these biases and striving for an objective and impartial assessment adds another layer of complexity to the task.

In summary, tackling the topic of comparing Kathakali and Shakespearean plays requires a writer to overcome challenges related to research depth,

subjectivity in artistic evaluation, effective communication of complex concepts, and awareness of personal biases. It demands a nuanced and informed approach to do justice to the richness and diversity inherent in these two distinct performing art forms.

But I must admit that we enjoyed the entire exercise in spite of all these hurdles. We would not have missed it for anything. To end this Note I will only say that we are happy we got this opportunity to write this book. And happier still that you are reading it.

Dr. Mohan Gopinath

FOREWORD

PROFESSOR Z.K. PETER

FORMER PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH KOLLAM, KERALA, INDIA

It is a matter of delight for me to write this Foreword. When Mohan and Sabina (the author and editor of this book) first asked me to do so, I did not hesitate for a minute as I have known Mohan for a long time and knew that he was interested in writing on esoteric subjects such as the theme of this book. He and Sabina have collaborated in the writing of many books and all of them have an unusual theme which raises the curiosity of the reader right from the beginning. As far as this book is concerned the comparison is between the beautiful story Nala Charitham written by Unnayi Warriar and a few of Shakespeare's plays. The main thrust of the book is to identify the points of comparison and convergence where the two great writers come together in the delineation of their thoughts. The objective of the book is to show that there is a lot more common in great writers than perhaps one realises.

The book is correctly positioned as an academic book and is targeted mainly at the student of Comparative Literature and/or Performing Arts. It is a very unusual book insofar as it is an exercise in detailing the fascination which people have for the two star crossed lovers in Nala Charitham and how they go through their lives facing many challenges. At the same time, it also looks at specific plays from Shakespeare which reflect these themes. It then gives the reasons for this fascination and the similarities in thinking of the two writers which is the leitmotif which runs throughout the book. The story Warriar wrote is meant to be performed as a Kathakali dance drama.

Warriar wrote three notable works which were *Girija Kalyanam*, *Sreerama Panchasathy* and his ambitious undertaking, the writing of Nala Charitham. Apart from this, there is nothing available of any importance relating to Warriar as documentation was not a strong point in his time. In spite of these limitations, the book has pulled out many interesting facts and I found the chapter dealing with the daily routine of a Warriar (who are people who live near temples and perform a lot of work for them), particularly interesting. The book has then compared this routine to the daily life of Shakespeare.

I asked Mohan about his liking for comparing different genres and coming up with unusual findings; most of the earlier books he wrote have this streak of comparison running through them. He told me that this was probably an inherited trait as his father also used to write in a similar way. Whatever the reason for this liking, I am happy with the outcome which is this book.

A look at the Contents of this book will reveal the range of topics covered which is very necessary if a meaningful study is being conducted. A comparative study such as this requires this wide range in order to take the form of a useful academic book. The technique used is known as syncretism and is a difficult process for any out of the way comparisons. I am happy to note that this has been done smoothly.

Mohan has written what I feel is a book which addresses and fills a wide gap in the literature on the subject of comparative studies between Eastern and Western theatre. Much has been written about the theatre in India, and these papers and books have also looked at Kathakali, the dance drama of Kerala, a Southern state in the subcontinent. But very little material seems to be there comparing and critically evaluating the dance drama with the theatre of the West, especially the plays of Shakespeare. The superficial resemblances are many:

- They are both peopled with larger than life characters.
- They are colorful to watch on stage.
- They tell the stories of the lives of Kings and Queens, which are of interest to a wide range of people. A classic example is the interest many people have in the lives of British royals which will always be there.
- Both genres borrow stories from ancient sources and convert them to suit the audience of their times.

Taking all these into account, I feel the book will be of interest to a wide range of people- both academics and non- academics. Dr. Sabina Zacharias is the Editor of this book and she is extremely well qualified to take on this job. She too is a student of English Literature and has a keen interest in the performing arts. Her doctoral degree in literature is from the English and Foreign Languages University in Hyderabad, and this is one of the best institutions for teaching the subject. In addition to her editorial functions, she has contributed to the contents based on her formal study of English Literature and work related to her doctoral dissertation.

So the two of them complement each other as they have done so often in the past. The section on Methodology reveals the systematic way the book has been organised and the range of enquiries made and which were taken into consideration while writing the book.

To compare disparate disciplines is not easy; to compare them and produce a very readable book is really difficult. Mohan has done this and I recommend this book without any reservation. The significant point in the book is that Unnayi Warriar and Shakespeare thought along the same lines and in Nala Charitham we can find many of the themes and emotions which are there in Shakespeare's play. This is only a generalization and the Reader will have to go through the book to see the similarities between the two great writers.

Comparative studies are complex and there are many instances where authors can go wrong in their comparisons. Two common mistakes I have seen over the years in my line of expertise are when the author does not make the comparison clear and so the reader is left guessing as to what was meant and also as a bonus gets confused. The second is when incomparables are compared as they had some link in the writer's mind which he or she could not transcribe with clarity into written words. I am happy that these are not present in this book. Usually, the comparisons are between plays or stories in the same genre but here the writers have moved up the value chain and compared the seemingly incomparable and also succeeded in doing this well.

I am particularly pleased with the comments in the Preface about Kathakali not being too well known in the West. This is a big negative for the dance drama and I fully agree with the related comments made. The write up about Professor Phillip Zarrilli in Chapter 2 is also very important and I am glad that this remarkable person has found an admirer in Mohan.

To go on a voyage of digression, comparative studies relating to formal music are equally fascinating and can reveal a lot about the feelings which are there in the minds of the composers. I am pleased that this book has references to the beautiful play *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer. And I found the chapter relating to reinterpretations of original works very interesting and erudite. The book also contains detailed references to Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* which is another great play dealing with reinterpretations.

One of the very pertinent facts which emerge from the book (and this is a recurrent theme in their books) relates to the oneness which people have and this oneness transcends time and distance. As the author says in the book, Shakespeare and Warriar lived and wrote while they were based in two different continents and there was more than a century separating their works. Yet what binds them together the most is the belief that we are in the end all together in our travels and differences which exist are really to be bridged rather than exacerbated. It is perceptions such as these which make the book interesting and readable.

I also liked the comparisons they made between specific characters and felt this brought out the commonalities sharply. The sections on Hamlet and Nalan, are very perceptive and reveal the fact that the authors are comfortable wandering through lanes which may have held a mystique for many people. These lanes when they are logically and systematically explored can reveal many new perspectives on life. But then they are both well versed in English Literature and the world of the dancedrama; so these lanes are friendly and familiar to them and hold no difficulties.

I will make one more point about this book. Comparative studies are useful when the comparisons are valid and not forced. This is a pitfall writers can fall into and I am happy that the comparisons in this book are logical and appear to flow easily. Mohan has also been careful in this regard.

Many people do not realise the close mental proximity which great writers have and so it is not surprising that Shakespeare and Unnayi Warriar thought along the same lines in terms of themes and characters. The book also looks at the similar ways in which the two writers use technical aspects such as soliloquies, disguise, etc. in their works. These comparisons round off the book very well and also bring out a few interesting similarities.

The five appendices are of relevance to the subject matter of this book and have been carefully selected. The concluding chapter on the lighter moments in Kathakali stories is very revealing and shows the wide range of emotions and feelings which are there in these stories which are based mainly on the two Indian epics. Here again, the comparisons with Shakespeare's plays show the affinities which the two forms have.

Overall, this is a book which has tackled the complex theme of comparisons and I wish the book all success. I also look forward to seeing more such books on unusual subjects which open the doors to a hidden world of excitement and romance and magic. This is a magic which is always there

and only needs to be unlocked so that more people understand the intricacies which are present in it.

In short, I am indeed very happy to have written this Foreword.

Professor Z.K. Peter
Bangalore

PREFACE

MOHAN GOPINATH

This book is slightly off the beaten track as it is designed with only one aim. It looks at the structure, complexities and characters (among other things) of the gripping and multi faceted story of Nala Charitham written by Unnayi Warriar who lived in Kerala more than three centuries ago. It analyses all these perspectives and others and shows how it is as complex in its plot and range of characters as any story which can be found in the literature of other states in India and other countries. In particular, the story has been compared with some of the plays of Shakespeare in terms of its construction, characters and use of language and other parameters to show the similarities (and differences).

The story Nala Charitham captures the essence of human emotions, moral dilemmas, and the intricacies of destiny. This book gets into the multifaceted layers of this classical Indian tale, exploring its psychological nuances, character complexities, and thematic richness. A comparative exploration of the works of Shakespeare is also undertaken, revealing striking parallels and unique cultural variations between the two writers.

Unnayi Warriar's *magnum opus*, the Nala Charitham, has an intense psychological depth, portraying the human mind's enigmatic facets. This analysis embarks on an exploration of the characters' psychological landscapes, dissecting their motives, desires, and conflicts. Nalan and Damayanathi and other central figures are scrutinized through a psychological lens, unraveling the profound intricacies of their decisions, internal struggles, and emotional turmoil. The examination of their inner worlds sheds light on universal human experiences, making this ancient narrative startlingly relevant to contemporary psychological understanding.

We are making a subjective statement here and this is that many people familiar with the dance drama will be able to name the author of Nala Charitham but not the authors of other popular and frequently acted stories.

Iyer (1981) wrote about the story that,

“One distinctive feature of Nala Charitham Attakatha centers round its superb characterization which extends from the hero and heroine down to the meanest characters. How does the poet reveal the nature of his characters? Unlike as in regular dramas where the author has to address the audience solely through the *dramatis personae*, the shlokas (four line verses which summarise the coming scene) in Attakatha (a Kathakali performance) are the words of the poet. Varier uses crisp suggestive words to describe the nature of the characters in the shlokas that introduce them; but it is in shaping their dialogue that he reveals his mastery of the functioning of the human mind. They are live human beings—including the Swan and karkota, the snake but without losing their basic nature—who sometimes develop independent thinking. Kali in the scene between him and the Devas (celestial beings) speaking out of turn—Part II, Scene 3—and Nala threatening the immortal Kali with death in Part III, Scene 13, and getting away with it, are examples. Soliloquy is one effective means used by great dramatists for delineation of character. It is significant that this form is never seen used in any Attakathas except Nala Charitham in which this technique is used profusely. In Part III, Scene 2, the soliloquy of Nala reminds one of Jacques in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Again the one in Part III, Scene 11, his soliloquy about Damayanti can well stand near Hamlet’s famous one. There are many other eloquent soliloquies of Damayanti and of Nala which reveal their innate noble nature. When new characters appear, in their opening scene itself the poet takes particular care to introduce subtle hints and suggestive words in their conversation which make their future role not only plausible but inevitable. Thus the motivations become convincing.

The thematic tapestry of the Nala Charitham is intricate and multifaceted. This book navigates through the threads woven by Unnayi Warriar, focusing on elements such as love, betrayal, honor, and the omnipotence of destiny. By scrutinizing these themes, the intention is to draw parallels to the recurring motifs found in for example in Shakespeare’s plays and other stories from literature outside India. This comparative analysis aims not only to highlight the universality of these themes but also to accentuate the cultural disparities and unique contextual manifestations in both Eastern and Western literary traditions.

To compare and analyze stories belonging to one particular genre is a very interesting exercise especially if the story is as gripping as Warriar’s creation. The book also simultaneously probes into the (for example) themes and undercurrents present in it and shows how the story is a microcosm of many aspects of our daily lives. It is on the fundamental level, an analysis of the story of a good but weak man who, after a happy start in his life found himself plunged into problems and distress because of the nature of his character. The actions he took stemmed from this weakness in his character until the powers that be who also guard good men finally came to his rescue and restored him via a happy reunion with his wife. So in the end we see him

on the throne of the kingdom of Nishadha with his wife Damayanthi by his side. No doubt in the fullness of time they would have had more children and 'lived happily ever after'.

The juxtaposition of Unnayi Warriar's Nala Charitham with plays from other genres in places in the book is an exploration of cultural diversities and common human experiences. This comparative analysis seeks to elucidate the resonances and disparities between these classical narratives, emphasizing their shared explorations of human nature, fate, and societal norms. Through this interdisciplinary approach, what emerges is a deeper understanding of the complexities of human existence and storytelling.

The narrative of Nala Charitham is part of the Vana Parva (also called the 'Book of the Forest'), one of the 18 books or parvas of the Maha Bharatham. The tale of Nalan and Damayanthi is recounted in the Vana Parva while the Pandavas are living in exile in the forest. The story is narrated in the Maha Bharatham by the sage Brihadaswa to the exiled Pandavas. The sage Brihadaswa recounts the tragic yet ultimately redemptive story of Nalan, a noble and skilled king of Nishadha, and Damayanthi, a princess known for her extraordinary beauty and virtues. The sage recounts the trials and tribulations faced by Nalan due to the influence of fate, his struggle with inner demons, and the eventual triumph of love and virtue. It is said that the sage did this to assuage the depression into which the eldest brother Dharma Puthran had fallen, to show him that others had suffered equally, if not more, with what he was going through.

By telling the eldest Pandava brother about the travails of Nalan, the sage Brihadaswa hoped that the mind of Dharma Puthran would get a modicum of peace or at least give him some courage to accept the problems which fate had slapped him with so cruelly. The question which is purely academic can be asked as to whether Nalan or Dharma Puthran had more problems. The latter was responsible for looking after his brothers and their wife and was also looking at a 12 year stay in the forest followed by one year in disguise. If discovered in the 13th year, the cycle would repeat itself. And above all would be the thought in Dharma Puthran's mind that it was because of his own weakness in accepting the challenge to play a game of dice that all of them were now suffering.

As opposed to this Nalan and Damayanthi had no time limit to stay in the forest and could go where they wanted and Nalan could also try and win back the kingdom from his brother Pushkaran. So perhaps while Brihadaswa meant well, it was an unfortunate choice of a story which he had chosen to tell to comfort Dharma Puthran. Perhaps if the focus in the

telling had been on the all pervading presence of the bad and the good in everyone's lives, the story may have made a greater impact on Dharma Puthran; but we have no means of knowing the kind of emphasis which was given by Brihadaswa. And to how Dharma Puthran reacted when he heard the story.

This narration in the Maha Bharatham would appear to be the origin of the story. Warrior in all likelihood picked it up from this source, isolated it and created the Nala Charitham in four parts.

Shakespeare's Sources

This adapting of stories from the original sources is not unique as Shakespeare also did this—and this is a well known fact. With a few exceptions, Shakespeare did not invent the plots of his plays. Sometimes he used old stories. Sometimes he worked from the stories of comparatively recent Italian writers, such as Giovanni Boccaccio—using both well-known stories (for *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*) and little-known ones (for *Othello*). He used the popular prose fiction of his contemporaries in *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale*. In writing his historical plays, he drew largely from Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* for the Roman plays and the chronicles of Edward Hall and Holinshed for the plays based upon English history. Some plays deal with rather remote and legendary history. Earlier dramatists had occasionally used the same material (there were, for example, the earlier plays called *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and *King Leir*). But, because many plays of Shakespeare's time have been lost, it is impossible to be sure of the relation between an earlier, lost play and Shakespeare's surviving one: in the case of *Hamlet*, it has been plausibly argued that an 'old play', known to have existed, was merely an early version of Shakespeare's own.

Jamieson in the website, ThoughtCo (2019) says,

Holinshed's *Chronicles* records the history of England, Scotland, and Ireland and became Shakespeare's primary source for his historical plays. However, it should be noted that Shakespeare did not set out to create historically accurate accounts—he reshaped history for dramatic purposes and to play into the prejudices of his audience. This was the source for *Henry IV (both parts)*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI (all three parts)*, *Henry VIII*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*.