

THE KUSHA-JĀTAKA: IS IT A FEMALE OR A HEROIC FAIRY TALE?

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Browsing again through Jan-Öjvind Swahn's excellent monograph on the story of Cupid and Psyche (which is always a pleasure to do, as sound scholarship done with skill and care is nowadays somewhat rare) I chanced upon his discussion of the Kusha-jātaka (Swahn 1955: 387–390). Kusha-jātaka (Cowell et al. 1895–1913, vol. V, no. 531) is in its own right a beautiful story, which Rabindranath Tagore has recreated as a delightful drama that has always appealed to me (Tagore 1914).

While rereading the story I began to have doubts regarding J.-Ö. Swahn's assigning of the story to the AaTh 425 cluster of types which belongs to the sub-genre "female fairy tale/active heroine" (see model in Jason 1984). How did it happen that so fine a scholar as J.-Ö. Swahn saw a version of the Search-for-the-Lost-Husband type in the Kusha-story, which is on the face of it a heroic fairy tale? The answer lies in the complexities of this tale type: it is built as two heroic fairy tales, but with gender inverted on various levels.

The type consists of two parts, each of which is basically a heroic fairy tale: in the first part a male preternatural ("bewitched") partner has to win a female human partner (AaTh 425, part I; AaTh 425 *Q (Jason 1965), parts I A, B, C; Swahn, parts I, II and III, point 4, pp. 24–27). This is a regular heroic fairy tale but with the gender inverted. In contrast to type AaTh 516, parts I(d) and II, which has a fairy princess who lures a human to herself, type AaTh 425 has a fairy suitor who lures the human female to himself (Swahn, part I, pp. 24–26). In the second part of AaTh 425, the female partner has to accomplish tasks in order to win (back) her male partner, thereby disenchanting him.

The second part has an "active heroine" and the tasks are of the kind found in the female fairy tale: heroine does not have to fight dragons, but, e.g., to wash black wool until it becomes white, i.e. the tasks are modeled on typical female household work. The whole composition of this part of the story is of the heroic fairy tale kind except for inverted gender roles. Therefore, it can easily be analyzed with the help of Propp's model (Propp 1928):

Propp's functions	AaTh-types	Swahn's analysis (1955: 24–36)
2 Interdiction	425, part II	part IV, points 1–8
3 Violation		
8A Villainy	425, part III	part IV, points 9–10, 12
9 Mediation	not coded	part V, points 1–3
15 Spatial transfer	425, part IV(a)	
10 Beginning of action	425, part IV(a)	part V, points 4–7
11 Departure		
12 Donor puts hero(ine) to test	425, part IV(e)	part VI, sub-type B, point 1
13 Hero(ine) passes test	425, part IV(c)(d)(f)	
14 Donor provides hero(ine) with marvelous means	425, part IV(b)	
25 Difficult tasks put to hero(ine)	425, part V	part VI, sub-types A, points 1–9; E, 1–4; F, 1–4 (=AaTh 437, AaTh 894); G, 1–2; J, 1–6; K, 1–2a; L; M, 1a; N, 1–4

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26	Hero(ine) accomplishes tasks	425, part V(a)(b)	
27	Recognition	425, part Va	part VI, sub-types B, point 2; D; E, 3 and 5; F, 7[a]; G, 3; K, 2b; L, 2a,b; N, 5; part VII, points 11–12
28	Exposure of villain	not coded	part VI, sub-type A, point 10
30	Punishment of villain	not coded	part VII, 1–10
31	Wedding	not coded	part II; part VI, sub-types D, point 3; F, 7[b]; G, 3[c], K, 2b; L, 2[c]; M -(3–4); N, 5

The first story may start in two manners: A marvelous being of the male gender somehow lures a human female to come into contact with him. The establishing of contact results in a marriage of the two, which is most often imposed by the marvelous partner on the human partner. Swahn's "Introductory motifs" (pp. 24–26) belong to this incident. In incidents nos. 4 to 10 the marvelous being lures the human to himself; in incidents nos. 11–29 the marvelous being causes a situation in which he can extort a marriage (first a promise and then its fulfillment), be it through the behavior of the girl herself (nos. 21–27) or of her father (nos. 11–19, 28).

The other manner of bringing about contact and marriage in the first part of the story is a more or less developed heroic fairy tale. A human youth of humble birth, a foreigner etc., who is marked as endowed with special marvelous qualities, woos the Fairy Land princess and thereby demarvelizes her. He succeeds either in accomplishing tasks (with the help of the marvelous world) or in defeating the Fairy Land dragon (who is a kind of rival suitor) (see Propp 1928; Jason 1977, chpt. 4.2; AaTh 425 *Q(Jason 1965), part I; Swahn, part I, points 2–3, 29).

After suitor wins and marries the princess, the second part of the type starts. In this latter part heroine has to accomplish tasks in order to win her husband and demarvelize him. Heroine is human but marked with marvelous qualities (parts II–VII in Swahn's analysis). The two stories are inversions of each other in terms of gender; the heroic fairy tale features basically a human male and a marvelous female while the second part of AaTh 425 features basically a marvelous male and a human female.

Let us now see how this apparatus works in the *Kusha-jātaka*.

All through the story of the *Kusha-jātaka* the protagonist is Kusha, the suitor/husband and not his bride/wife. Not the bride but Kusha performs the main tasks. The narrator sympathizes with him and not with the wife, who failed to recognize his true nature.

Heroic fairy tale

Kusha is born preternaturally (miraculously, with the intervention of divinity Indra) (AaTh 425, part I(a); Swahn, part I, points 2 and 3, p. 24). He is, however, born in a "disguise": he is exceptionally ugly so that every prospective bride will be horrified (AaTh 314, part V(a); comp. Swahn's part II, p. 26).

When Kusha reaches marriageable age, his human parents consider finding a bride for him (Propp 1928, function 8a, Lack of bride). In order to avoid the embarrassment of his ugliness, Kusha demands that the bride should be exceptionally beautiful (of more than earthly beauty), i.e. he does not expect such a bride to be found (he himself fashions a statue which should serve as a model). With this statue in hand, he starts searching for a bride. For our analysis, an exceptionally beautiful bride is an inversion of the exceptionally ugly bridegroom.

Female fairy tale/Active heroine

The bride-to-be has to pass a test, in this case a beauty test (the tasks listed by Swahn in part VI, sub-type A, points 3–8; AaTh 425, part IV(e); Jason 1984, function 14). Unexpectedly for Kusha and his family a princess is found who passes this beauty test and she is married to Kusha (Swahn's part III, p. 26; Jason 1984, functions 25–26). Kusha and his family forbid her, however, to see him (Swan, part III, point 4; part IV, point 1, p. 27); he visits her only at night, in darkness (Jason 1984, function 20). He is an “invisible” husband (Swahn, part II, point 8, p. 26). She tries repeatedly to see him and finally succeeds (Swahn, part IV, pp. 27–28). Horrified by his ugliness, she returns to her parents (AaTh 425, part III; Propp 1928, function 8A, Villainy; Jason 1984, function 21).

Heroic fairy tale

Kusha follows his runaway wife in the hope of winning her back (Propp 1928, function 15, Transference; comp. AaTh 400, part V; AaTh 506 *C(Jason 1965), part IV; AaTh 516 *D(Jason 1965), part IV; AaTh 302 (Ârajs and Medne), part II. Kusha accomplishes tasks: he plays his special vina, he produces a special pot, fan, garland of flowers and a meal, all of which inform his wife of his presence and wooing (Propp 1928, functions 25, Difficult task, and 26, Accomplishment of task; AaTh 314, part V(b); AaTh 400, part VI(e); AaTh 554, part II). She, however, rejects him. Next, he fights and overcomes rival suitors of his wife; these function in the same way as the dragon in AaTh 300 who is also a kind of rival suitor (Propp 1928, from function 16, Struggle, to function 18, Victory; AaTh 314, part V(c)). After his victory Kusha's qualities and supremacy are recognized (Propp 1928, function 27, Recognition; AaTh 300, part VII). His wife returns to him (Propp 1928, function 31, Wedding) and he is beautified (not narrated how; Propp 1928, function 29, Transfiguration). This beautification is not a demarvelization as it occurs in the heroic fairy tale with the fairy princess.

Carnavalesque novellistic female fairy tale/Active heroine

Inserted into the heroic fairy tale is a version of AaTh 900, *King Thrushbeard/ Taming of the Shrew*, which belongs to the sub-genre of the carnivalesque novellistic female fairy tale. While in his house Kusha, in various disguises, mistreats and insults his wife; while in her house, he demands that she publicly fall to her knees and ask his forgiveness for her haughtiness in rejecting his wooing.

In conclusion, the Kusha-jātaka can be related to AaTh 425 in spite of its protagonist being male, with the provision that the story of the first part of the type (a male wooing a female) overgrew the story of the second part (a female wooing a male); Kusha's wife is not the protagonist of the whole story, but only of its female-fairy-tale parts.

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ABSTRACT

The ancient Indian story of King Kusha's wooing of a bride (found in Buddhist Pali jātaka collection) is analyzed with the help of AaTh folktale content types, Vladimir Propp's model for the heroic fairy tale, Jason's (1984) model for the female fairy tale-active heroine and J.-Ö. Swahn's analytic units for type AaTh 425. The story is found to be composed of a heroic fairy tale in which a human male has to win a fairy princess, a female fairy tale in which a human female has to win a marvelous spouse. A carnivalesque female fairy tale is embedded in the heroic fairy tale.

Thus the text demonstrates the complexity of the folktale content type AaTh 425.

RESUMO

O antigo conto indiano da procura duma noiva pelo rei Kusha (encontrado na colecção budista Pali jāataka) é analisado com a ajuda da tipologia dos contos de AaTh, do modelo para o conto de fadas heróico de Vladimir propp, do modelo para o conto de fadas feminino da heroína activa, de Jason (1984), e das unidades analíticas para o tipo AaTh 425 de J.-Ö Swahn. Verifica-se que a história é composta dum conto heróico em que um humano masculino tem que ganhar uma princesa maravilhosa, e um conto de fadas feminino, em que um humano feminino tem que ganhar um esposo maravilhoso. Um conto de fadas feminino carnivalesco está incrustado no conto de fadas heróico.

Assim, o texto demonstra a complexidade do conteúdo do conto tipo AaTh 425.