

The Motif of a Magic Staff/Club/Stick in Märchen: in a flexible numerical series of no fixed number; semi-personified; solo and semi-personified in a modern fantasy novel; possibly with one Indic source in Tantric practice; with more than one function; and in motif-clusters with various companions

SANJAY SIRCAR

The motif of a magic staff/club/stick that beats thieves in Märchen is usually found in forms of the folktale type AT 563, “The Table, the Ass and the Stick” (dating back to a sixth-century Chinese Buddhist legend). In a long list of forms of AT 563 by region, Halpert and Widdowson give twelve South Asian forms, six of which are from Eastern India (p. 360), and we are directed elsewhere for further Indic examples and analysis (Thompson and Roberts, p. 85, see Jason for seven more, and Uther, pp. 331-333).

In AT 563, “the objects themselves are the everyday kind that might normally be used to punish wrongdoers by striking, beating or whipping them”; what “makes them magical is that ... they work by themselves when properly activated by the human voice” (Halpert and Widdowson, p. 354). There is usually no personification of the objects in these tales in AT 563, though in non-Indic forms the implement can be varied into “a container with a manikin who beats on command” (p. 352). There are non-Indic analogues in black tradition with only one object which provides both desirable things and then beatings (p. 355). Halpert and Widdowson mention that the series of magic objects in AT 563 type can extend to four (p. 353). It seems that the number of objects in similar series which include the magic rod/cudgel can extend to more (at least to five). Of course, the magic rod/cudgel does not always only go with objects in a series that provide food and money, nor is it restricted to just this one tale type.

There are two stories in the *Madanakamarajankadai*, an anonymous Tamil “literary folklore” text from the seventeenth century, which have a similar magic instrument of punishment in a different sort of story. In the “Sixth Story”: The Two Princes, Episode 3: The Four Objects, a dying sage provides four objects: a bag, a cup, a cudgel, and sandals, later paralleled by four magic fruits (Sastri, 1886, pp. 129-136). In the “Seventh Story”: The Tortoise Prince, Episode Two: the Quest for the Flower, there is a magic guitar given by a woman (Sastri, 1886, pp. 149-150), then a *semi-personified speaking club*, specifically animated to punish by a mantra, which speaks respectfully and bathes to cleanse itself from pollution after doing its work (Sastri, 1886, pp. 152-153 ff.), a magic purse and magic sandals, provided by helpful sages who first give directions to the hero, then try to cheat him out of the guitar, but are finished off by the club (Sastri, 1886, pp. 151-157). In a tale from North India, “The Story of the Seven Princes”, there are five objects in the series: a rod to punish, a magic guitar, a cap of invisibility, magic balsam, and magic slippers (“Sheikh Chilli”, pp. 45-66). Here, the objects comprise a motif-cluster (60-62) that is drawn in to be part of a separate tale type from AT 563.

There also seems to be yet another modern staff, semi-personified, solo, in a fantasy novel (not a *Kunstmärchen*) which draws upon much folklore: Gaganendranath Tagore's *Bhondar Bahadur, Sir Toddy-Cat the Brave* (1926). This staff is called the *Tal-Betal-siddha lathi*, and takes its name from traditional dangerous spirits, the tal and vetal (betal), who sometimes seem to be individuals, sometimes classes of spirits. Though the names of the spirits are familiar, to an ordinary reader, child or adult, this staff is not immediately identifiable by its name as one derived from *Märchen*, folklore or the classical tradition in the same way, say, as the Lion's Uncle Bhombaldas, the jatébudi (bogywoman), the rakshasas and danava in the story. Yet the name of this modern staff might just lead us to one possible Indic source in one particular religious practice which contributed to various magic sticks/staves in Indo-European *Märchen*. If so, we here hark back to the days in folkloristics, now long gone, when the South Asian subcontinent was hailed as the fons et origo of Indo-European (previously Indo-Germanic) folktale, days of delight in finding the sources of Uncle Remus's Tar-Baby not just in Africa but beyond it in the Jatakas (that is, approximately the half-century from 1859 with Theodor Benfey's *Pantschatantra*, to 1913 and Antii Aarne's *Leitfaden der vergleichenden Märchenforschung* [Guide to Comparative Fairy Tale Research]). But just as the sun set on the solar myth in folklore studies, something like the phenomenon of the "translation of Empire" (when the centre of authority and interest shifts), has occurred in folkloristics as well.

The tal and vetal are attendants on the god Shiva (who has a monkey-faced son called Vetala, an incarnation of a vetal-follower), the goddess Kali, and the god Yama. The tal is a shadowy figure, but offended vetals attack villages, while ones who have been propitiated guard them. Vetals haunt cremation-grounds where they animate undecaying corpses. Vetals appear in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain works from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, and they reach as far as Tibet, Mongolia, Laos, and Iran. Various related cycles of tales have a frame-tale involving a vetal who tells different framed tales. A *siddha* is an ascetic who has attained *siddhi*, perfection in supernatural/spiritual power. *Tala-siddhi* is not a common term, but *vetala-siddhi* is. In this practice, first comes the raising of a vetal, *vetalotthapana*; then subduing and propitiating it, *vetalasadhana*; then obtaining the power over vetals or power from them, *vetalasiddhi*.

Chapter (*patala*) 6 of the Kulachudamani Tantra (see Vedantatirtha, Magee, Finn), tentatively ascribed to between the ninth and tenth centuries, and apparently the most unclear and confused of the corpus of these ritual-focussed texts, says that by reciting the secret Mahisha-mardini "root syllable" of the Buffalo-Destroyer goddess Durga, one gains six *siddhis* (v. 17: Finn, p. 128): *vetala-siddhi*, *paduka-siddhi* (hundred-league sandals), *khadga-siddhi* (an invincible sword that returns to its owner), *anjana-siddhi* (eye-black ointment that averts the evil eye, or gives deep and far sight?), *tilaka-siddhi* (forehead-mark powder that makes one all-conquering), and *gupti-siddhi* (power of concealment – apparently of two-kinds, for the text is unclear to me in this regard – constructing a tunnel to bring a woman from a distance, and the power to diminish oneself? or render oneself insubstantial enough? – to go through a hole, window, or cavity).

After instructions to worship at various sacred places (allegorical names for various organs of the female body) with mantras to the goddess under various names (vv. 1-12: Finn, pp. 126-127), the practitioner is given the alternative to sacrifice to Mahisha-mardini in all these places, or to become “lord of all siddhas” (vv. 13-15), when he puts into effect the root syllable of Mahisha-mardini (vv. 16-18: Finn, p. 128). Apart from this root-syllable formula itself, much repeating of mantras specified and unspecified and of other specific root-syllable formulae is required, and the final sentence of the chapter stresses that no siddhis are attained without Durga and Kali mantras.

Here, the Vetala-siddhi ritual (vv. 19-27: Finn, pp. 128-129) involves sitting on a corpse inscribed with symbols and mantras in a cremation-ground on a Tuesday night. The practitioner is to bring (and bury) there a stick of neem tree wood inscribed with drawings of a staff and a foot, repeating a mantra (vv. 19-21). On a separate night, he is to dig up the stick, place the corpse face down on top of it, worship the corpse, repeat the mantra, make offerings to “the Mothers” (v. 22), and bless the stick with the mantra “Sphem, sphem, oh most fortunate staff, dear to the heart of the Yogini!//Oh lord, you who are in my hand! Fulfil my commands!” (vv. 23-24) – it appears that he addresses stick and vetal simultaneously. Then, whenever it is sent forth, *the stick returns again after crushing its victim* (v. 25.1). From this it appears that at least in this particular vetal-subjugating ritual, *the vetala-siddhi is itself the empowerment of the stick/staff, and to be identified with it*. It seems that the stick and sandal rituals are performed in sequence on the same occasion, with separate invocations to each. Then come instructions on the rituals for the other four siddhis. If something like this Tantric siddhi is part of the Indic cultural context of the magic stick/staff/cudgel of Märchen, when the gift givers in Indic Märchen are sages, as in two examples above, it would probably be somewhat more than a coincidence.

I do not know whether, in its curious position, Tantrism is to be regarded as “mainstream” or as “marginal”, as Great or as Little Tradition, or as “classical” or as in some sense “folk”. Nor do I know the nature or degree of Gaganendranath's acquaintance with it. Nevertheless, something like the Tantric ritual detailed in the Kulachudamani Tantra might underpin one comical feature in Gaganendranath's modern jeu d'esprit fantasy narrative for children. Brother Bhondar's Tal-Betal-siddha Staff, is solo, semi-personified (it is addressed as “brother”, its master whispers into its “ears”, it “swells out its chest” in pride, flames emanate from its “head”, it limps, it is called “poor thing”, and its “feet” get entangled), responsive to orders, proceeding from and returning to its master, and hyper-energetic.

In this context, *vetalarasa* means “panic” and “(discordant, disquieting?) mixture”, indicating the sense of the confusion that goes with uncanny things, and this confusion accords with a colloquial Bengali wordplay on *tal-betal*, where “*tal*” means rhythmic “beat”, and so “*be-tal*” can be made to mean “out of (rhythmic) time”, so that the compound word thus means “disordered, haphazard”. In the fantasy fiction, we are tantalised by the untold story of how Brother Bhondar came by his Staff, a story to be told another time. We have met staves like it before, so could it have come from yet another ascetic sage, either kindly or kindly/cruel? We will never hear that story, and the name and the nature of that Staff might of course both have much simpler and less convoluted explanations for their origins in ordinary

spontaneous invention. There might also be other rituals like that of the Kulachudamani Tantra detailed elsewhere. In default of accounts of these, we may hazard that we know something like an actual practice, its materials, the relevant mantra, and the two part ritual related to Gaganendranath's Staff.

We can indeed say (i) that the magic staves of Indic Märchen do go at least three times with magic sandals; (ii) that these magic Staves include at least one semi-personified one that resembles that Gaganendranath's Tal-Vetal-siddha Staff; (iii) that there is indeed at least one tantra describing a Vetala-siddhi ritual to be undertaken by a Tantric practitioner resulting in the possession of such a staff and sandals; so that (iv) this ritual might be connected with both Gaganendranath's Staff and the staves/ sandals in Indic Märchen (particularly when given by ascetic sages), which might thus in turn be related to each other; and so that (v) this or similar rituals might constitute one possible Indic source for (or at any rate an analogue of) the Magic Cudgel motif in Indo-European Märchen.

Two of the other siddhis in the Kulachdamani Tantra, the eye-black and the forehead mark substances, involve decapitating a black cat instead of using a corpse, burying it, disinterring it, immersing the bones in a river, burning them, and using them as the base of these substances (vv. 34-39, 40: Finn, pp. 131-132). Is then the juxtaposition of Brother Bhondar's Staff trying to attack a magical Black Cat (a rakshasa-demon in disguise) only a coincidence, or does it carry with it something like a trace-memory of these two related siddhis as well? If not, does the association of two magical/uncanny things nevertheless carry some cultural significance?

Now here is one more story – this time in high classical Indic literature – in which a magic stick and sandals go together, but where *the staff has a different non-chastising function*: “The Founding of the City of Pāṭaliputra” in the *Katha Sarit Sagara* has the hero tricking the simpleton sons of Asura Maya out of a vessel providing whatever food a man wishes to have, shoes which give the power of flying through the air, and a “stick”/“staff” with which whatever is written turns out true (so what is its size?) (Tawney and Penzer, Vol I, Book I, Chapter ii, Story 1b, p. 22). Though folklorists regard folktales “retold for children” with much contumely, and such work is rarely cited, just this motif-pair, not the hero or the city, is foregrounded in the title of the story retold in quite a lively manner for children in secondary schools, with morally pointed questions appended: “The Magic Shoes and Staff” in Mitra and Bell, p. 56.

Mitra and Bell in turn alert us to the possibility that sometimes what appears at first glance to be a traditional “folktale” magic staff (whether it punishes or otherwise) might turn out not to be one. Another story in their volume, from the same classical source, seems to be a salutary reminder of the ever-present possibility of modern independent genesis of a folktale-motif-like item in non-“folk” “retelling-for-children”, and thus a caution against over-hasty assigning of origin and age. They have another incidental magic staff in the hands of a magician – again not a staff that punishes – in “The Jewelled Arrow”. Here, an evil magician (specified as a translation of a *raksha* demon) takes the form of a big crane and is identified as such by a travelling mendicant. Prince Srīngā-Bhuja wounds the crane with an arrow. “As Srīngā-Bhuja sped along after the crane, the beggar made some *strange signs in*

the air with the staff he used to help him along; *and such clouds of dust arose* that no one could see in which direction the young prince had gone” (Mitra and Bell, p. 76). I thought that thus here was yet another traditional function for a magic staff in the *Katha Sarit Sagara*, and I was wrong.

Though *Hindu Tales* says it is translated by Mitra and adapted by Bell, *unless Mitra used some other Sanskrit source*, regardless of all the plot adaptations in the retelling,¹ this story seems to me to be directly taken from the “Story of Śringabhujā and the Daughter of the Rakshasa” in Tawney and Penzer’s translation of the *Katha Sarit Sagara*. But there, in the corresponding section on “The Golden Arrow” there is a specifically Buddhist mendicant *and no such staff* at all (Tawney and Penzer, Vol. III, Book VII, Chapter xxxix, Story 53, p. 222). This putative independent genesis of this detail raises in turn the larger matters of whether adaptation of folktales from print sources “retold for children” in print is or is not different in degree or kind from folk mutation in migration and oikotypification; of how far similar objects (staves) with different magical functions (beating or doing other magical things) are related; of how far similar objects are related (staves and magic wands); of how far some distant memory of folk material unconsciously influences such modern independent genesis (and how we are to regard such things as Prospero’s magic staff).

A Mongolian form – or analogue – of this tale in Mitra/Bell and Tawney is “The Turbulent Subject” (Anon/Busk, 1873), where the magic objects, all stolen, start with the familiar food-and-drink goblet (not activated by the voice) and the voice-activated “thick” chastising-stick (i.e. a “staff”) that both beats to death and *also* carries back property, which are now joined by two less familiar non-voice activated objects, a high-iron-tower-raising hammer and a rain-producing bag in series of four, the last two of which are used by the rebellious hero to overcome his royal oppressor.

The genuinely classical Indic magic staff in “The Founding of the City of Pāṭaliputra” in the *Katha Sarit Sagara* also leads us to a valuable compendium-list from the scholarly past of the sort that we sometimes overlook, the “Notes on the ‘Magical Articles Motif’ in Folklore”, an assemblage of motif-clusters of Magic Gifts in Märchen (Tawney and Penzer, Vol. I, pp. 26-29), made from a huge number of tales from Northern Europe, through the Middle East, to South Asia (though not the particular Indic examples given above at the start). These motif-clusters overlap, with their “multiply arranged” motifs, any one of which can be taken as a starting point. This assemblage potentially points us to the various tale types over which the magic-article motif-clusters and their component motifs are found, how the tale-types in which they appear overlap in other ways (plot-wise and thematically), and to the possible formal and thematic relations between the groups of magic items.

Another hand must take up that mammoth task. Here, suffice it to say that Tawney and Penzer’s motif-clusters are as follows (with stick or equivalent underlined): transporting-hat, purse+cup+slippers, boots+cloak, tablecloth+purse+ (dancing)pipe, purse+boots+cloak, purse+mantle+(magic)horn, ring+brooch+cloth, flying carpet, magic tablecloth, magic pot, magic table, magic chest, wishing-table+gold-providing-ass+cudgel, two gifts+mace, hat+purse+manikin-summoning horn-(+ magic figs), swiftness-shoes, darkness-hat, hat+cloak+boots, boots+purse+cloak, transporting-cloak+hat+gaiters-of-swiftness, cap+

boots, cap+coats, food-producing stone, djinn-reigning-rod+invisibility-cap, invisibility-sword, magic-pocketed-wallet+life-restoring-staff+food-providing-brass pot+sandals, food-providing-pot+rakshasa-summoning pot (cf. chastising manikin), food-chattee-pot+chastising-stick+binding-ropes, decapitating-at-a-distance-sword+food-providing-cup+money-providing-carpet+transporting-throne; without going into the “numerous tales” of only a single magical article. We may provisionally add to Tawney and Penzer’s list of Magical Articles motif-clusters the magic, telescope /spyglass+carpet+all-healing-fruit of AT 653a and AT 654 tale types (e.g. the Talmud, “Prince Achmed and the Fairy Peribanou” and an Italian fairy tale).

The note in Tawney and Penzer is a good starting point not just for a magic stick/staff, but on the general matter of who obtains the magical articles, how they are obtained and from whom, and to what use they are put. The stories (and hence tale types) in which they appear seem on the whole to involve gifts and thefts. Writing at the height of the historical-geographical method, Penzer remarks that “It seems very probable that the incident of the fight over the magical articles was directly derived from the East, while the idea of the magical articles themselves was, in some form or other, already established in Western Märchen”, which in this matter “may have been improved or enriched from the East”. Further noted is that these “magical articles” appear in two distinct varieties of tale: (1) the Eastern stories where the articles are stolen by the hero, who usually meets two or more people fighting and *tricks* them out of the objects (with only one exception in absent-mindedness), and (2) the Western tales where the hero *honestly* inherits or earns the articles, he is tricked into telling their secrets, they are stolen from him, and he recovers them by the help of the original donor (Tawney and Penzer, p. 29).

Of course a magical object need not always be a gift or a direct theft. The Indic Muslim “The Rose of Bakawali”, in W. A. Clouston’s 1889 *A Group of Eastern Romances*, is a “literary folktale” in the sense that, without being a selfconscious Kunstmärchen, it is composed of folktale motifs, motif clusters and tale types which are known as folktale-related and/or folktale-derived from other sources. In it, we have more than one variation on our basic motif of the magic staff. Here, the hero overhears a mynah bird telling her young that across a lake, guarded by an invincible dragon (cf. the inaccessibility often associated with Motif E 765, “Life dependent on external object or event”, so that the hero must immerse himself in the lake to transform himself into a raven and fly over the dragon: cf. D 615, the “Transformation Combat” also often associated with the external life motif), there is a huge tree, the bark of which renders one invisible, the red fruits restore one to one’s original form, the green fruits render one invulnerable *and* when placed in the girdle allow flight, the leaves heal wounds, and the wood opens “the strongest locks and break[s] the most solid bodies” (Clouston, p. 298). Hence though not a gift nor a direct theft (while involving a fantasy/magic ability) the components of one single natural source provide three natural things with magical properties and two out of which the hero himself constructs magical objects: a cap of invisibility from the bark and a stick/staff from the wood. Here too, we see that one natural thing can have more than one magical property (both the green fruits and the wood do more than one thing). Further, while the cap is traditionally magical, unlike most magic staves, one

of the twofold magical properties of this one is not suggested by its form and ordinary use, when its mere touch looses a fairy princess's chains (Clouston, p. 305), and the other, drubbing an adversary, is not magically voice-activated, and the hero wields it himself in overcoming a *div*, here the supernatural captor of a princess (Clouston, p. 307).

One thing that struck me that Penzer probably thought too obvious to mention: that just as the magic stick does not always serve what might seem to be its natural function (it beats, and can be doubled in chastising function with a binding rope, but it also can engage in magic writing, authority over djinns, and restoring life), the nature of the other magic objects does not always automatically imply their magic function either. Despite Hermes, a hat or a throne does not automatically suggest transport, an ass or a carpet money, a stone food, a sword invisibility, or a pot rakshasas (though it might be said that, whatever it contains, a pot is indeed a container; nevertheless, rings and lamps do not automatically suggest genies).

Food does not always come from pots, and pots do not always provide food. Nevertheless, the range of functions served by these magical articles seems to comprise a large but not unlimited pool, shared among the varied objects listed; and though varied, the objects themselves also form a limited group.

To counterpoint a standard magic drubbing/chastising staff, there seems to be at least one the supernatural powers of which work not to inflict but to stop violence. In the story of the sages (rishis) Vashistha and Vishwamitra (Anon./Busk, 1873), found in the epics, Rishi Vashistha's deity-given *vadshra/brahmadanda*, sceptre/wooden staff/cudgel, does not thwack anything, but consumes his adversary Rishi Vishwamitra's arrows, similarly deity-given. Of course, it could be said that this violence-stopping staff is only an imaginative extension of a violence-inflicting one, but for all that corporal punishment would seem to be the natural attribute of a magical staff, this need not necessarily be the case, nor need such a staff have only one magical power. In one tale in Edward Rehatsek's 1871 translation of a portion of the Persian collection of moral tales and anecdotes, *Mahbub ul-Kalub (The Delight of Hearts)*, in another "literary folktale", a hermit (again) gives the prince a cane/staff "made from the cocoa-nut [sic] tree of Ceylon, one of whose numerous properties is that it conveys its owner safely through all dangers to the place of its destination", this property possibly suggested by the ordinary use of a staff as an aid to walking; the hermit also teaches the prince a prayer to cure the son of the king of the fairies of lunacy so that he will reward the prince with the gems which are the object of the prince's quest, though inimical genii and sorcerers will try to trick the prince out of the staff along the way (Rehatsek, p. 100). And in 1889, in his *A Group of Eastern Romances*, W. A. Clouston seemed specifically to point to the need to consider this "cane", which he changed to "staff", in the context of other similar magical articles. Clouston noted that this staff/cane is a "kind of witch's broomstick, apparently. It is to be regretted that our author (or the holy hermit) did not specify the other properties of this wonderful staff! Doubtless it also provided the possessor with 'meat, drink, and clothing,' in common with similar magical articles which figure in the fairy tales of all peoples" (Clouston, p. 156, fn. 1). This context to which Clouston gestures suggests the potential in motif/tale mutation of the ascribing of many magical properties (from a limited common

pool?) to one magic object, and it also suggests the potential interchangeability of such magic objects in that mutation.²

Similar motif clusters in different tale types (for sets of other magic objects within the tale types with which they are associated, see Christine Goldberg's 1989 essay "Antii Aarne's Tales with Magic Objects") might also serve as a reminder that the map is not the territory, that tales are not tale-types, that motifs are not tales (Aarne himself reminded scholars to distinguish between tale and motif), that motif is not function and that motifs and motif clusters can blur into each other. Our concepts, indeed empirically based, indispensable as tools, should become neither beds overly Procrustean nor blinkers that narrow a field of vision overmuch. So in looking at motifs and motif-clusters, we should not ignore motifs which are in some way "of a similar sort". For example, in the story "Of a Merchant who lost his Daughter" from the twelfth century *Suka-Saptati/Tuti Nameh/Suka Bahattari/Tota Kahini* and then the *Tot Itihas* in Bengali (and probably also elsewhere) in Sir Duncan Forbes's collection, we have three suitors respectively versed in the science of astrology, skilful in mechanics, and very expert at archery; the second constructs a flying horse to take the third to the rescue of a fairy-abducted maiden ("The Tales of a Parrot": Tale VII, in Forbes, pp. 97-99). That horse constructed by the second suitor is not a Magical Article within the terms of this story of skills and relative merits itself, but for us, it is so close to being something *like* a magic object as to make the distinction between Skill and a Magical Article relatively unimportant. Similarly, in another tale in the same collection (Tale X: "Of a Merchant and a Barber, who beat some Brahmans with a Staff", pp. 105-106), a charitable man's personified Destiny tells him in a dream that the next day Destiny will appear as a Brahman, is to be beaten to death with a staff, and the corpse will turn to gold. The man's barber sees this occur, is sworn to secrecy, does likewise, kills Brahmans, is condemned as crazy, and driven away. The staff is not magic, but the first situation is magical, the second a comic parody of it, and we have a drubbing staff linked with, and the magical supernatural acquisition of, money, though not food. Does this non-magic staff too, then, also have a place in a consideration of magical staves in Märchen? From Clouston's *A Group of Eastern Romances* we learn regarding this non-magic "cudgel" story that "In the *Hitopadesa* (Friendly [or Good/Welfare] Counsel), a Sanskrit collection of apologues and tales, Book iii, fab. 10, a pious soldier is directed in a vision by Kuvera, the god of wealth, to stand in the morning behind his door, club in hand, and the beggar who should come into the court knock down with his club, when he will instantly become a pot full of gold. A similar story is found in the Persian *Tuti Nama* (Parrot Book) of Nakhshabi, where a merchant is thus rewarded who had given away all his wealth to the poor" (Clouston, p. 446, fn.1). In obviously related tales the stick-equivalent is only fake-magic; for example, a trickster-farmer pretends that beating his wife turns her into a young girl after she leaves the room, and her daughter then comes in impersonating her, so that his neighbours buy the bullock-goad, and each in turn beats his wife to death, concealing what has happened from the next one (Damant, 11); the same story, except that it is a pretty young girl rather than a daughter, the "club" being stolen by one person, and the thief beating his wife rather than killing her (Bompas and Bodding, 242). This fake-magic bullock-goad/club becomes a pestle when a dissolute Brahmin seventh/youngest son dupes for the second time a trio, each member of which he has previously duped

separately, this time by disguising his wife as an old woman who then removes her disguise to look young, the pestle is lent, and in succession two of the three dupes beat their female relatives to death (Sastri, 1889, 122-123). While the bullock-goad is a stick, the similarly functioning pestle in the trickster tale becomes a (similarly shaped?) rice-pounder in another separate tale, “The Devoted Wife”, which is obviously related to this whole set by its contrast between the morally pure-hearted and corrupt and their use of heavy implements. As this devoted wife pounds rice (to husk it), her husband asks for water, she lets go of the pounder mid-stroke, and her wifely virtue and divine blessing keep it suspended in the air, as she explains to a watching neighbour. The neighbour seeks to prove her own devotion by instructing her own husband to make the same request, but her pounder falls and breaks his skull, and a verse contrasts the – non-magic – karmic virtue/power of a truly faithful wife and her rice-pounder with the lack of it in a pretender to that status (Sengupta, 398).

Another Mongolian tale, “The Gold-Spitting Prince” (Anon./Busk, 1873) even more clearly raises the question of whether an ordinary staff (specifically a “mere staff”, non-voice-activated) that does a magical thing is itself magical, and is any relation to a magic staff (be it voice- or otherwise-activated). The prince and his companion hear the two man-eating serpents say that they cannot be killed by swords, but only by staves, so the heroes cut non-magical ordinary ones from the trees, and that is what happens. The story also raises the question of whether there is any meaningful difference between an organic object that does magical things – a fruit, a piece of untampered-with wood – and a crafted artefact that works similarly, i.e. a staff/cane, which would usually be “worked on”. Here, the prince and his companion also hear that if they eat the heads of the magic serpents, one head confers the power to spit gold, the other emeralds, and the pair do just that. The following invisibility-cap and transporting-boots, obtained by exchange-and-take-back trickery from two sources (as in the retelling) climax with a direct theft from a third source, a sheet of paper on which is painted an image of a donkey, with which a procedure of circling and stepping on and off the paper transforms and untransforms humans into donkeys.

With its number of objects, “The Gold-Spitting Prince” also raises the formal/aesthetic matter of patterns and sets, and the place of any particular magic object in a tale. For a start, the hero and companion (who does not betray him) involve characteristic folktale doubling when there is a hierarchical value-based division of serpents’ heads in the non-thieving adventure, and when they take one each of the pair of boots in the middle episode of the three thieving adventures. One wearing the cap and holding hands with the other confers invisibility on both heroes: quite elegantly, the prince is primary in some adventures, the companion (later minister) in others. If we exclude the ordinary staff especially needed to kill supernatural serpents as a magic object, we have a set of six magic adventures. If we accept it as a magic object, then there is a progression of such objects from simple to complex/crafted, wood, flesh, cloth, leather, painted-paper (the cap is used with the boots, not with the paper). If we exclude the staff-pair but instead substitute the ability to follow animal speech (which is not an object, but an ability), we are back to a set of six magical adventures, but lose the sense of progression from simple to complex. We could, however, then see a tale of complex magic framing – starting and finishing – more simple magic, with prince at start and minister

at end. Are all these possible patterns in the eye/ear of the beholder/auditor, then, rather than “in” the tale as it is told? If not, where do we start to see patterns – be they motif-patterns or other – in a tale, and what criteria of inclusion/exclusion are we to use?

The function of these Magical Articles in their various overlapping motif-clusters is to fulfil the ordinary human desires writ large, those of the senses (sight, sound, taste, in particular) and will (power over spirits, enemies, size, speed, distance, money), fulfilled with the use of exaggerated forms of everyday objects and implements now with the extra magic able to fulfil those desires, either in accordance with the everyday functions of these objects or at variance with them. The fruits of our six siddhis in the Kulachudamani Tantra seem to work similarly with fast and far-travelling sandals, far-sightedness ointment, power to diminish and conceal oneself (much like growing invisible) in relation to the senses; the demon-raising, enemy-cudgelling staff, enemy-chopping sword, enemy-conquering mark, and power to accomplish irresistible sexual conquest in relation to the will. But these siddhis do not bring the food, money, and healing which rank high among the functions of the magical articles in Märchen (be they in accordance or at variance with their form): were food, money, and healing, then, beneath the notice or dignity of an Indic Tantric spiritual adept between the ninth and tenth centuries?

Regardless, the ritual and the various fruits of the siddhis in the Kulachudamani Tantra seem to hold out at least a potential adventure-plot and invitation to construct a romance-adventure narrative, whether or not such a narrative exists. When we list them again – raising the corpse by investing it with a spirit/ demon/vampire/goblin vetala, investing (so it seems) the staff involved in that raising with supernatural power, obtaining hundred-league paduka-sandals, then an invincible khadga-sword that boomerangs back to its owner, eye-black anjana-ointment which averts the evil eye and probably also gives other ocular powers, a tilaka forehead-mark that makes one all-conquering, and finally the power of gupti-concealment to construct a secret tunnel to bring a woman, to diminish oneself and render oneself insubstantial enough to go through an aperture – these acts and their siddhi-results imply a hero, a supernatural “helper” or slave, magic gifts, an adversary or adversaries and the nature of the various threats or obstacles they hold out, all of which are to be overcome by the use of those gifts, together with a female love interest, and some sort of palace or castle to enter and rescue or abduct her.

I have looked at the Indic Magic Staff in series in Märchen, solo in a modern fantasy novel, its putative relation with Vetala-siddha practice, a putative further relation with kindly/dangerous ascetic sages in Indic Märchen, other functions that a Märchen Staff can have which are at variance with what seems to be its natural function, the necessity for caution in assuming Märchen origin when modern independent genesis is the probable case instead, and considered the Magic Staff in the context of Tawney and Penzer’s Magical Articles motif-clusters. My suggestions are only tentative, and based on incomplete data; others must decide whether they have any merit.

Notes

1. Mitra and Bell also add an opening in a large tree, hidden by its branches with internal steps leading down to a wide space underground: is this detail newly invented, or influenced by the tree-door in *Alice*? They have the bowdlerisations thought necessary for children (omission of an adultery accusation, a drunken co-wife/stepmother revealing a secret, parallel punishments to that meted out to an accused lover inflicted on wicked half-brothers; but curiously, perhaps out of squeamishness, also omission of pregnancy occurring by eating a particular food common in Indian folktale), such transferences of function as a stepmother rather than half-brothers committing the crime of stealing the father's arrow, substitutions of a jewelled arrow for a golden arrow, and additions such as an archery competition for archery practice etc.

2. One magic object can carry out more than one magic function. Thus, though we might not notice it, the chastising-staff can in certain cases also carry back property. Indeed, one magic object can provide everything wished for. Thus we hear in two tales, "What Became of the Red-Coloured Dog" (only as a reference) and "Vikramâditja's Youth" (Anon./Busk, 1873) of an "All-desire-supplying talisman, Tschin-tâmani" i.e. *chintâ-mani*, thought-jewel, a jewel which fulfils desires thought of, and thus not voice-activated (and in "Vikramâditja's Youth" both theft obtained *and* ultimately through comprehension of animals' speech). However, though the jewel provides everything thought of, "Vikramâditja's Youth" specifies the desire for kingship over the four parts of the earth, and it is possible that in any actual tale all such all-providing things are restricted to a limited number of them (from a common pool?), *sometimes including what a magic table and stick usually provide*. Thus, we hear too, in notes on the context of the *chintâmani*, of a Hindu myth (told with variations) of the rishis Vashistha and Vishvamitra in which Rishi Vashistha's cow Sabala (elsewhere Nandini, calf of the divine cow Kamadhenu/Surabhi), also gives all things sought, but in the story notably food and drink to start with, *and then*, armies of various groups, which do seem at least to parallel the things the magic table and the stick usually provide. Sabala returns to her master, but of her own volition, when an attempt to abduct her is made; and she specifically speaks with her master, requesting him to obtain armies from her (Anon./Busk, 1873). Do we count Sabala as supernatural magic object herself, a sole one (for the food and drink and armies are not themselves magical), or as an animal helper? That in turn leads to the question: when do we turn from motifs (magic objects, magic/extraordinary abilities, helpful animals) to functions?

And more than one function can be served by a magic pair of objects, which do not "naturally" go together. In "The Avaricious Brother" (Anon./Busk, 1873), the hero steals the sack and the hammer it contains, which belong to a group of cavorting *dakini*-witches; hammering the sack produces food and drink, golden and other ornaments (only?, or everything desired?) when one wishes (aloud? or only mentally?). Contrariwise, a magic pair of objects can serve one function. Thus in "The White-Serpent King" (Anon./Busk, 1873), a brightly painted talisman (glossed as approximately "fat-maker", "pregnancy-causing"? "[penis?]", "giver-of-abundance" (Anon./Busk, 1873, p. 385), a reward, not a theft, and not voice-activated, brings forth food when touched with a mother-o'-pearl wand. And sometimes it seems the function of a magic object in a tale has to be assumed: for example, it seems that not all the forms of the "Kusa Jataka" (said to be the source of "Beauty and the Beast"), actually specify that the "magic gem" Verochana, gift of the god Sakra/Sakka to the ugly hero Prince Kusa, is responsible for rendering him handsome (see Francis, pp. 163-164; Chopra, 1966).

As to the blurred distinction between an Extraordinary Skill and a Magical Article, is astrological calculation (e.g. to find an abducted maiden, rather than using a magic telescope), the use of magic, or the use of an extraordinary skill? And by extension, what do

we make of a shape-transforming “magic pill” that is neither a supernatural gift nor a theft (nor just “taken” as the result of overhearing animals speak), but simply part of the repertoire of a hero himself excelling in all the “arts” and “sciences”, and on a par with skill in massage, as seems to be the case with the hero of the “novella”, “Muladeva” (unlike similar magic pills in other stories in the same collection), in Meyer, 1909 (for other such pills and objects see p. 197, fn. 2; for a staff which will bring “kingship” commented upon by two ascetics in a cremation-ground and overheard by the hero and a Brahmin, including a narratorial list of “the signs of sticks” and the (natural? magical?) implications of the number of joints from one to ten in a “staff” and the disfigurements in a stick to be avoided, see “Karakandu”, pp. 128-130, in this collection).

References

FOLKTALE SCHOLARSHIP

- Aarne, Antti, *Leitfaden der vergleichenden Märchenforschung* [Guide to Comparative Fairy Tale Research], Hamina, Suomalaisen Tiedakatemia/Kustantama, 1913.
- Chopra, Tilak Raj, *The Kuśa-Jātaka: a Critical and Comparative Study*, Hamburg, Cram, de Gruyter, 1966.
- Halpert, Herbert, and J. D. A. Widdowson, *Folktales of Newfoundland: The Resilience of the Oral Tradition*, New York and London, Garland Publishing, 1996, rpt Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2015.
- Thompson, Stith, and Warren Roberts, *Types of Indic Oral Tales: India, Pakistan, and Ceylon*, Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedakatemia/Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1960, rpt Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedakatemia/Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1991.
- Jason, Heda, comp., *Types of Indic Oral Tales: Supplement*, Folklore Fellows Communications, No. 242, Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedakatemia/Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1987, rpt Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedakatemia/Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1989.
- Uther, Hans-Jörg, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson: Vol. I*, Folklore Fellows Communications, No. 284-286, Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004.

KULACHUDAMANI TANTRA

- Finn, Louise M., trans., *The Kulacūdāmani Tantra and the Vāmakesvara Tantra with the Jayaratha Commentary*, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1986.
- Vedantatirtha, Girisha Chandra, ed., *Kulachudamani Tantra* (in Sanskrit), introduction by Akshay Kumar Maitra (“Arthur Avalon” [Sir John George Woodroffe], ed., *Tantrik texts, Vol. IV*), Calcutta, Sanskrit Press Depository/London, Luzac, 1915 (useful introductory material in English).
- Magee, Mike, “Kulachudamani Tantra” (*Azoth* magazine, “early 1980s”) at <<http://www.shivashakti.com/kulachu.htm>> (partial translation, somewhat different from Finn, mentions smearing staff and sandals with ash, a different number of siddhis, etc.).

TEXTS

- Anon. [Rachel Harriette Busk], trans., *Sagas from the Far East; or, Kalmouk and Mongolian traditional tales With Historical Preface and Explanatory Notes*, London, Griffith and Farran, 1873, (translation of Bernhard Jülg, *Kalmückische Märchen. Die Märchen des Siddhi-Kur oder Erzählungen eines verzauberten Toten ...*, 1866, and Jülg, Bernhard, *Mongolische Märchen-Sammlung. Die neun Märchen des Siddhi-Kur nach der ausführlichen Redaction und die Geschichte des Ardschi-Bordschi Chan ...*, 1868; Busk draws upon three other earlier translations for the first “saga”, “Adventures of the Well-and-wise-walking Khan”, a combination of Kalmyk and Mongolian texts, and two others for the second, “The Saga of Ardschi-Bordschi and Vikramâditja's Throne” from Mongolia; certainly the frame-tales and probably much of the material in the frame tales of both sagas are from Indian sources, recensions of two “Vikramaditya cycles”: Saga 1 from *The Twenty-Five [Tales] of a Vetala*, and Saga 2 from *The Thirty-Two [Steps to the] Throne*). “The Gold-Spitting Prince”: Saga 1, Story 2, pp. 17-35; “The Turbulent Subject”: Saga 1, Story 6, pp. 82-88; “The Avaricious Brother”: Saga 1, Story 14, pp. 147-156; “The White-Serpent-King”: Saga 1, Story 22, pp. 213-220; “What Became of the Red-Coloured Dog”: Saga 1, Story 23, pp. 222-228; “...Vikramâditja's Youth: Schalû the Wolf-Boy”: Saga 2. Section 6.2, pp. 277-284; one form of an episode in the story of Rishis Vashistha and Vishvamitra in Note 8 to “Schalû”, pp. 402-403; see also note 4 to “The False Friend”: Saga 2, Section 2, p. 397 on the *pantarba*/[*pantarbe*] jewel that attracts other jewels; Busk as annotator, citing an earlier source, appears to imply that this is an Indian word, though it seems to be European, and the jewel elsewhere said to also attract gold, resist fire, confer wisdom etc., but I do not know of a folktale in which it appears). N.B. Whatever the sources, times and processes of mutation (literary or oral or both), and whatever their exact relation to each other, the tales in the collections of Sastri and “Sheikh Chilli” seem to bear a family resemblance to “The Turbulent Subject”, “The Gold-Spitting Prince”, and “The Avaricious Brother”.
- Benfey, Theodor, *Pantschatantra: fünf Bücher indischer Fabeln, Märchen und Erzählungen*, Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1859.
- Bompas, Cecil Henry, and Rev. P. O. Bodding, “Seven-Tricks and Single-Trick”, the first incident, in *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*, London, David Nutt, 1909.
- Clouston, W. A., ed., *A Group of Eastern Romances and Stories from the Persian, Tamil, and Urdu, with Introduction, Notes, and Appendix*, [Glasgow], privately printed [W. Hodge], 1889.
- Damant, G. H., “Bengali Folklore – Folklore from Dinajpur: The Farmer who Outwitted the Six Men”, one incident, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. III (January, 1874).
- Forbes, Sir Duncan, *The Bengali Reader: Consisting of Easy Selections from the Best Authors...* (1862?, revision of Haughton, Sir Graves Champney, *Bengali Selections with Translations and a Vocabulary*, 1822), London, W. H. Allen, 1874.
- Francis, H. T., trans., Edward B. Cowell, ed., *The Jataka, Vol. V*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1905.
- Goldberg, Christine, “Antii Aarne’s Tales with Magic Objects”, in Robert E. Walls, and George H. Schoemaker, eds, *The Old Traditional Way of Life: Essays in Honor of Warren E. Roberts*, Bloomington, Indiana, Trickster Press (Indiana University Folklore Institute), 1989, pp. 322-337.
- Meyer, John Jacob, trans, *Hindu Tales: an English Translation of Jacobi's Ausgewählte Erzählungen in Māhārāshṭrī* [1886], London, Luzac, 1909.

- Mitra, S. M., trans., and Mrs. Arthur Bell [Nancy D'Anvers], adapter, *Hindu Tales from the Sanskrit*, London, Macmillan, 1919.
- Rehatsek, Edward, trans., "Part Second" (the story of Farrahrúz [sic]) in *Fortune and misfortune: Two Tales translated from the Persian* ("from the Shamsah-va-Quhquhah of Mirza Berkhardár Turkmán"), Bombay, Janárdan Rámchandraji, 1870, pp. 94-120. (With some re-transliteration, emendation, and additional chapter divisions as "History of Farrukhrúz", in W. A. Clouston, ed., *A Group of Eastern Romances*, pp. 147-182, here said to be one of the two stories in "On Equanimity in Prosperity and Adversity, and Resignation to the will of God in all things" which is the "third báb, or chapter, of ... *Mahbúb ul-Kalúb*, ... by Barkurdár bin Mahmúd Turkman Faráhi, surnamed Mumtaz": Clouston, "Introduction", pp. xxiv, xxii; author also rendered elsewhere as "Barkhvurdár ibn Mahmúd Farāhī, called Mumtaz Farahi Barkhvurdar Ibn Mahmud".)
- Sastri, Pandit S. M. Natesa, *The Dravidian Nights Entertainments*, Madras, Excelsior Press, 1886.
- Sastri, Pandit Natesa, "Folklore in Southern India: The Arch-Impostor", the fourth incident, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XVIII (April, 1889), 122-123.
- Sengupta (Sen Gupta), Sankar, "The Devoted Wife", "Women in Ancient Literature and Folklore: 2", *Folklore (India)*, Vol. 10, No. 11 (November, 1969), 394-422. Original tale recorded in *North Indian Notes and Queries*, Vol. V (July, 1895), 68.
- "Sheikh Chilli" (pseud. Srisa Chandra Vasu [Basu]), *Folk-Tales of Hindustan* (1886?, collected in magazine form under the aegis of Ramananda Chatterjee in *The Modern Review*, 1907, volume form 1908), Allahabad, Panini Office, 1913, pp. 45-66 (translated into Bengali as *Hindusthani Upakatha* by the Santa Debi-Sīta Debi duo, Calcutta, Prabashi Karjyalay, 1912).
- Tawney, C. H., and N. M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story*, Vols. I, III, London, Chas. J. Sawyer, 1924, 1925.
- Tagore, Gaganendranath, *Bhondar Bahadur* ("composed 1926", at any rate published in a Bengali annual that year), Calcutta, Signet Press, 1956 (Shravan, 1363). Online at Digital Library of India. Cover illustration by Satyajit Ray, twenty illustrations by Birath Datta.

Independent scholar
SSircar1@yahoo.com.au