

## **The Transformation of Cyavana: A Case Study in Narrative Evolution**

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### **Ongoing Issues in Comparative Work**

Few will argue with the proposition that stories are fluid and continuously evolving; nor are many likely to deny that a successful narrative can spread like wildfire across time and space. Yet in spite of these two well-documented truths, attempts at the identification of borrowings and parallels (though a venerable scholarly pursuit) can be tricky. Few other common scholarly undertakings generate the level of resistance that the proposal of a set of parallels can, and perhaps with some valid reasons. Shared features that make an enormous impression on one scholar will strike others as insignificant or coincidental, and most comparativists have come to accept that many of our colleagues are completely uninterested in the endeavor, particularly when engaging with a borrowed narrative requires transporting their focus beyond the boundaries of their field.

Normally at this point in an academic paper, with the introductory salvo concluded, one would begin grounding the issue within academic debate by quoting from the relevant literature. The state of the methodology for evaluating parallels is, however, such that there is scant literature on it to invoke. Tigay describes the situation facing scholars who work on literary parallels between the Hebrew Bible and other Near Eastern Literature (1993:250-51):

That we have still not reached agreement on how to distinguish borrowed from original elements is clear from two recent statements about the relationship between Biblical and Mesopotamian parallels. Theodore Gaster, Frazer's modern editor, writes in the introduction to his revision of Frazer's *Folklore in the Old Testament* that the Hebrew compiler of Genesis "had . . . a cuneiform original before him." [Gaster 1969:xxvii.] On the other hand, the Assyriologist A. R. Millard says of the flood story, which most consider the outstanding example of a borrowed story in the Bible, that ". . . it has yet to be shown that there was borrowing, even indirectly" [Millard 1967:17].

Recent years have witnessed a new interest in pursuing the study of the genetic relationships between narratives through more scientific methods (for example, Witzel 2012 and Tehrani 2013), primarily in the service of tracing tales back to a common ancestor. The current work seeks to augment those large-scale efforts with a small-scale, close examination of the sorts

of tiny incremental changes that cumulatively transformed the myths and folktales of earliest cultures into the rich diversity of traditional narratives scholars have documented across the globe.

There is no official list of tested criteria for gauging the likelihood of a relationship between a pair of proposed parallel narratives that may be appealed to as the basis for acceptance or rejection of a claim.<sup>1</sup> Instead there exists a sort of commonsensical conventional wisdom on how a set of parallels should look. The following list summarizes a number of these commonly accepted precepts (Tigay 1993):

1. The tales should have multiple shared motifs.
2. The shared motifs should occur in the same sequence.
3. The tales should have specific, peculiar, and significant shared details.
4. Similarities should be heterogeneous, unpredictable, and non-trivial.
5. The two tales should have comparable characters.
6. The two tales should have comparable settings.
7. The two tales should have comparable themes.
8. Alterations must be culturally explicable.
9. There must be a feasible path of transmission between the two tales.

Nothing about these principles is self-evidently unsound, and all of them must surely have their place in the evaluation of parallel narratives. As with all pieces of common knowledge, however, they should be employed with the understanding that they have been assembled largely by perceptions of what narrative evolution “should” look like, rather than formulated by means of systematic testing and observation. I have included them here because they are the closest thing to a starting point we have; below we shall be applying these criteria to our case (a set of tales whose genetic relationship is known), after the other elements of the project have been introduced.

For the sake of comparison, let us transport the discussion into a different arena: diachronic linguistics, for example, would be a very different field if decisions regarding the relationships between different words were simply based on scholars’ feelings about what the various reflexes of different roots “should” look like, rather than on the systematic analysis of earlier forms of a language and the comparison with its reflexes in related tongues. If one accepts the premise that the evolution of traditional narratives, like all evolutionary processes, must be

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<sup>1</sup>The very elegant Tigay (1993), “On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing,” is one of the few places I have seen these issues addressed. It was the inspiration for this piece, and for the very idea of testing a known example of literary borrowing against a set of criteria. Tigay (1993:251) further discusses the state of the discourse on the evaluation of claims of borrowing: “Not many Biblical scholars ever wrote about this question explicitly enough to formulate criteria. One who did was W. F. Albright. As a rule of thumb in evaluating individual cases, Albright (1957:67) demanded shared complexity or pattern: “Even when story motifs can be found in different contiguous lands, it is not safe to assume original relationship or borrowing except where the motif is complex, forming a pattern.” The same safeguard was advocated by Wellek and Warren (1956 [1949]:258) in their *Theory of Literature*: “[In the study of sources and influences] parallels must be exclusive parallels; that is, there must be reasonable certainty that they cannot be explained by a common source, a certainty attainable only if the investigator has a wide knowledge of literature or if the parallel is a highly intricate pattern rather than an isolated ‘motif’ or word.”

governed by principles that would be observable in an appropriate set of examples, then how would one go about identifying the means to perform the experiment to find a “fossil record” from which observations might be drawn? Lord and Parry were able to find the data repository they required to prove the oral origins of the Homeric epics by recording the songs of the Yugoslav bards; for our purposes, an excellent opportunity presents itself in the form of the literature of ancient India. Providing an abundance of texts whose compositional dates range from 900 BCE with a long tail stretching into or past the tenth century CE, post-Vedic Sanskrit literature is an enormous repository of (very roughly) time-stamped narratives whose iterations are available to be compared alongside one another.<sup>2</sup>

### Narrative in South Asian Culture

The opening of the outermost frame story of Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* epic presents us with an enduring image of narrative in an ancient South Asian context as ritual practitioners welcome a *sūta*, a traveling bard who has just arrived at the site where they are conducting an extended sacrifice:

<i>lomaharṣaṇaputra ugraśravāḥ sūtaḥ pauraṅkiko</i>	
<i>naimiṣāranyeśaunakasya kulapater dvādaśavārṣike satre</i>	1
<i>samāsīnān abhyagacchad brahmarṣīn samśitavratān</i>	
<i>vinayāvanato bhūtvā kadā cit sūtanandanah</i>	2
<i>tam āśramam anuprāptaṃ naimiṣāranyavāsinaḥ</i>	
<i>citṛāḥ śrotuṃ kathās tatra parivavrus tapasvinaḥ</i>	3
...	
<i>sūta uvāca</i>	
<i>janamejayasya rājarṣeḥ sarpasatre mahātmanaḥ</i>	
<i>samīpe pārthivendrasya samyak pārīkṣitasya ca</i>	8
<i>kṛṣṇadvaipāyana proktāḥ supuṇyā vīvidhāḥ kathāḥ</i>	
<i>kathitāś cāpi vidhivad yā vaiśampāyanena vai</i>	9
<i>śrutvāhaṃ tā vicitrārthā mahābhārata samśritāḥ</i>	
<i>bahūni samparikramya tīrthāny āyatanāni ca</i>	10
<i>samantapañcakam nāma puṇyaṃ dvijaniṣevitam</i>	
<i>gatavān asmi taṃ deśaṃ yuddhaṃ yatrābhavat purā</i>	
<i>pāṇḍavānām kurūṇām ca sarveṣām ca mahīkṣitām</i>	11
...	
<i>bhavanta āsate svasthā bravīmi kim ahaṃ dvijāḥ</i>	13
<i>purāṇasaṃśritāḥ puṇyāḥ kathā vā dharmasaṃśritāḥ</i>	
<i>itivr̥ttaṃ narendrāṇām ṛṣīṇām ca mahātmanām</i>	14

<sup>2</sup>Works such as the present endeavor are definitely not the only use to be made of this material. A secondary aim of the project is to raise awareness of this under-utilized resource, and potentially to facilitate the work of others in the wide variety of disciplines and theoretical frameworks.

Once, at the 12-year sacrificial session of the family head Śaunaka in the Naimiṣa forest,  
Lomahaṛṣana's son, the bard Ugraśravas, versed in ancient legends  
Approached the strict-vowed Brahmin-seers sitting together;  
The son of the bard bowed modestly.  
Him, having arrived at the *āśram*, the ascetics dwelling in the Naimiṣa forest  
Surrounded, to hear manifold stories there.

...

The bard said:

[I was] at the snake sacrifice of that great-souled royal sage Janamejaya,  
And in the presence of that prince in the lineage of Parikṣit.

The diverse meritorious stories told by Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana  
And which were also duly told by Vaisampāyana indeed

Having heard them, of variegated aims joined together as the *Mahābhārata*

And having visited many fords and sanctuaries 10

to holy Samantapañcaka, sought by twice-born,

I went, to that country where formerly the war was,

of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kurūs and all lords of the earth. 11

...

Your honors are seated contentedly; what shall I tell, O Twice-borns? 13

The holy stories of ancient legends concerning *dharma* or  
The events of men and great-souled seers?

Though not a depiction of an actual event, it is inconceivable that this charming snapshot describes activity inconsistent with behavior at a ritual site, and it is suggestive of the kind of *milieu* one would expect to produce the abundance of narratives that have been preserved for us. There is no space within the present work to address the sprawling and thorny questions surrounding the language (Sanskrit, or Prakrit), its usage (narrowly restricted to a tiny privileged class, or available more widely in some form or another), mode (oral, literary, or a mix of the two) of narrative in South Asia, or the ways in which all of the above varied according to time and place (and others have done so), but since it is a primary aim of this work to be useful across boundary divisions, the briefest of sketches follows.<sup>3</sup> The South Asian literary tradition has several specific features that provided us with this opportunity, and one of these is its unusually strong tendency towards retention: as Pollock (2003:43) points out in regards to literary theory, “The habit of sedimentation (rather than the will to supersession) is demonstrated in Sanskrit intellectual history across all disciplines.” Rather than discard older texts or older versions of texts, the community preserved them and simply expanded the canon as more arose. Over time, as these stories were recited, transmitted, and their different versions sometimes assembled into

<sup>3</sup>These questions form a complex conversation already well over a hundred years old just in the West. Macdonell (1900:1-39) is a readily available early contribution that gives an easily digestible overview for the non-specialist. Other excellent resources on the question include Deshpande (1993), Houben (1996, espec. section I, “Origins and Creation of the ‘Eternal Language’”), and the eponymous essay in Srinivas (1989). Pollock (2006:37-281, espec. Part One) is an in-depth look at how the situation began to change around the beginning of the first millennium CE. For the development of writing, see Hinüber (1989) and Falk (1993); Salomon (1995) provides an overview of both.

new religious texts, the tales were naturally modified to suit the needs and desires of the new redactors and audiences. Thus was created an immense collection of narratives preserved for us at a wide variety of points in their development, but with more than enough salient features maintained to indicate that the variants were (or were at least intended to be) the same story. However large or small the actual community that maintained and had access to these tales, they were retained actively enough to require periodic updating and alteration, and in a society that valued accurate textual preservation, a record of the changes was laid down and preserved for us. These texts can be mined for the evidence they provide about how narratives change over time, just as Lord and Parry made use of the performances of the Yugoslav bards.

### **Narrative Structure and Evolution**

While South Asian culture possessed unique aspects that left us a record of its collected tales, there is no reason to believe that the formulation or composition of these narratives at the most basic level was not congruent with such processes elsewhere. Although it is not clear whether a bard such as Ugraśravas (in the example above) was working from a fully-memorized text or employing some degree of composition-in-performance, nonetheless many of the same operating principles are observable in the comparisons of the variants discussed below, and suggest that these tales can serve as an acceptable proxy for other narrative traditions. The composers of these tales, like their Greek or Serbo-Croatian counterparts (along with a wide variety of storytellers from all over the world, including raconteurs and stand-up comics down to the present day), worked by means of narrative frameworks—extensive thematic checklists—which gave shape and structure to their material. Just as an epic is made up of a sequence of individual episodes, each episode is itself constructed from a sequence of events. These sequences resemble strands of DNA: not only do they provide the structure and organization of the tale, but their individual genes (those smaller units that we generally term “themes” or “motifs”) are also the *loci* of evolutionary change. As in other oral traditions, a given theme may simply mutate: a gift, for example, might change from a ring to a necklace, or even a hunting dog. Themes also serve as expansion and contraction points: in one version the giving of this gift might occupy one line of text, where a different variant might expand it to 60, with sub-themes and formulaic elements imported from elsewhere or purposefully built for that specific tale.<sup>4</sup> It is in this protean nature of motifs that we find the usefulness of a data set for providing insight into the ways stories evolve; it is not in terms of the specific details unique to each story that we seek understanding, but in whether those changes fall into types and categories that might be generalized and applied to the alterations seen in other narratives.

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<sup>4</sup>For purposes of this study, the working definition of “theme” is “an action or plot development which may be roughly but comprehensively expressed in one sentence.” Some of the texts under consideration will use one verse to express a theme for which another text may utilize 45 or 50 verses, and do so without affecting the course of the plot or adding any salient information to the narrative. The decision to stay with the traditional terminology for work on oral poetry and ancient epic (theme, motif), rather than move to the richer and more nuanced vocabulary of narratology (narrateme, event, function/index, narreme, and so on) was not made without hesitation. Ultimately, however, the simpler terminology seemed adequate to the task, more in keeping with the spirit of the topic, and less likely to generate confusion, as the narratological vocabulary still appears to be evolving.

The objection might reasonably be raised that any principles regarding the evolution of oral narratives that the project formulates may be specific to Sanskrit literature, and this must remain a consideration. Several factors working in combination, however, argue against these concerns: the first of these is that all stories must follow certain rules of cause and effect that allow their readers to feel comfortable engaging with them, and this places natural restrictions on the type of changes a story might undergo. There is also an additional widespread human resistance to stark alterations to a familiar story. While an audience might delight in a surprising twist or addition, too profound a divergence will be swiftly rejected by its hearers; any poet whose work is presented orally would be sensitive to this, and an unwelcome addition would swiftly disappear from his repertoire. There are more than enough variant manuscripts of every major Indian text to confirm for us that they underwent some revision and additions, whether deliberate or inadvertent. Finally, the human brain employs certain strategies for memorization which, though they may be more refined in some traditions, are deeply tied to the nature and structure of human memory.<sup>5</sup>

In these factors (considerations of verisimilitude, human resistance to change, and the neurological underpinnings of the storyteller's art form) we thus find a rough set of natural checks on the mutative powers of narrative. The result is that human interactions with narrative play out in much the same way throughout the world, as the remarkable consistency of types and variations of folkloric literature from around the world can attest. But while folklore gives us a rich sense of the variety and scope of narrative evolution, it lacks the clear, fixed benchmarks of evolution in which we find in the *brāhmanic*, epic and *purāṇic*, literature of ancient India. The aim of this piece is to make use of this data set in the most universal of its aspects, and offer evidence that the multi-version narratives of the Indian subcontinent display a predictable set of evolutionary changes that can be categorized and identified in other narrative traditions. Wherever applicable, comparanda have been provided, cases in which a comparativist has posited a similar change between a pair of narratives. Over time, the narratives of the subcontinent underwent change, and demonstrating **that** they did so, and that **how** they did so can be divorced from the culture of India and applied to other narrative traditions, is the aim of the comparison below; a proposal for the development of a new method for addressing a longstanding methodological issue, using a data set that has been, for some reason, completely overlooked for this purpose.

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<sup>5</sup>Another issue that must be considered if the findings of this study are to be put into practice is whether these results will be applicable when parallel narratives are the result of a cross-cultural borrowing. A number of theoretical factors could come into play; in linguistics, certainly, borrowing operates very differently than language change from within one culture. In contrast to the deployment of individual words, however, *every* new version of a tale is re-shaped to suit changing times, values, and tastes; it may well be that the narrative processes involved in cross-cultural borrowing are functionally the same as those involved in the re-telling of a story within one cultural tradition: a storyteller hears a tale, it resonates with him, he works through how he will present it, and eventually begins re-telling it in his own way. In preliminary attempts to test the usefulness of my findings at diagnosing cross-cultural borrowings, I have applied them to others' findings; for example, Larson (2005), which presents a compelling case for a shared relationship between the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* and the Neo-Sumerian *Lugalbanda* epic. I will refer throughout to examples where my findings support that paper's case for a relationship.

### *The Tale of Cyavana and Sukanyā*

The present study utilizes five variants of a Sanskrit story, *The Tale of Cyavana and Sukanyā*, to analyze the types of narrative variation it underwent, and to extrapolate the principles that governed the deployment of those variations. After an analysis of the tale and the alterations visible in its trajectory, we will return to the set of criteria listed above (omitting #8 and #9) and see how well those criteria perform at diagnosing the (already known) relationship between the five variants.

The earliest references to Cyavana<sup>6</sup> appear in the *Vedas*,<sup>7</sup> where his name is given as Cyavāna, and, as is characteristic of Vedic literature, we get only brief and disconnected references to parts of his story in hymns of praise to the gods without any significant portions of narrative. In its barest outlines, *The Tale of Cyavana and Sukanyā*, as we have it, is the story of an ascetic holy man whose single-minded devotion to his career has left him spiritually powerful but physically decrepit and enfeebled.<sup>8</sup> The Aśvins, a pair of seemingly minor deities with deep Indo-European roots,<sup>9</sup> rejuvenate the old man, or at least restore his good looks.<sup>10</sup> In the post-Vedic versions, this is bound up in the story of his marriage to the princess Sukanyā and her subsequent encounter with the Aśvins. A second portion of the tale then follows the Aśvins as they attempt to elevate their level of inclusion in the gods' sacrifices. Discussion and analysis of

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<sup>6</sup>Cyavana has a fairly wide presence in Sanskrit literature in general. Vedic references will be discussed in n. 11. Cyavana's pre-term birth during his mother's abduction by a *rākṣasa* (demon) is described at *Mahābhārata Mbh.* 1.5-6, and at *Mbh.* 13.141.15-30 and 14.9.31-36, he practices meditation underwater until he is entirely encrusted with marine life (discussed in Leslie 2003:140). *Mbh.* 1.60.43-46 claims he married Manu's daughter, Āruṣī, and the story of his descendant, Ruru, is told at *Mbh.* 3.122-25. He makes an appearance at *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.70.28-36, where he persuades a pregnant queen not to commit *sati*, and his name occurs twice in lists of officiating priests of sacrifices (in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 8.21.4 and at *PadmaP.* 1:34:13-17). Sanskrit literature is a vast and interconnected web; nearly every character, motif, and action has a reflex in another text, which has a reflex in another, *ad infinitum*. My objective here has been to trace the developmental stages of this tale, and space will not permit the exploration of every avenue. For those interested in further narrative or ritual ramifications of the tale, Witzel (1987) is the best starting point in the secondary literature, and for comparative purposes, Allen (2015) provides an excellent case for relating Cyavana to Prometheus.

<sup>7</sup>The *Vedas* are the oldest stratum of Sanskrit literature, dating from 1500-1000 BCE, and written in the oldest form of the language.

<sup>8</sup>The story has been treated in a variety of secondary sources, including: Brodbeck (2009:93), Doniger (1985:64-73 and 1999:134-40), and Leslie (2003:126-36). Goldman (1977:166 n.11) asserts that the tale "has every appearance of representing a socioreligious event of some significance."

<sup>9</sup>The Aśvins (or Nāsatyas) are twin gods with associations to horses, cattle, and physicians, who are related to Castor and Pollux and other Indo-European twin deities. They are treated by Dumézil (1994:34-88) who describes them as the divine representation of the Third Function.

<sup>10</sup>At *Rg Veda (RV)* 1.117.13, 1.118.6d, 5.74.5c, 7.68.6, 7.71.5a, and 10.39.4, the Aśvins are described as having restored Cyavāna's youth; in two instances, this is apparently accomplished through the removal of Cyavāna's skin: "O Nāsatyas! You removed the skin like a garment from aged Cyavāna," (*jujurīṣo nāsatyotā vavrīm prāmuñcataṃ drāpīm iva cyāvānāt, RV* 1.116.10), and "From aged Cyavāna you removed the skin like a robe," (*prā cyāvānāj jujurīṣo vavrīm ātkam ná muñcatham, RV* 5.74.5). Also relevant to the later versions of the tale that will be our focus, *RV* 1.116.10d says the Aśvins "made him a lord of maidens" (*pātim akṛṇutaṃ kanīṇām*).

the way these threads of narrative are woven and re-woven in new versions of the story is the primary focus of this paper.<sup>11</sup>

Complete renditions of the tale come to us from five different texts, each with their own genres and agendas:<sup>12</sup>

1. The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (*JB*) 3.120-29:<sup>13</sup> The *Brāhmaṇas* are elaborations and commentaries on the *Vedas*, and the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, which dates from roughly 900 BCE, is likely the oldest of the versions.<sup>14</sup> The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* uses Cyavana's story to illustrate the power of the otherwise unknown *Brāhmaṇa of Vāstupa*, presenting it as the secret to Cyavana's successful quest to get a wife, regain his youth, and perform an important sacrifice.
2. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (*ŚB*) 4.1.5.1-15:<sup>15</sup> The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* dates from roughly the eighth to sixth centuries BCE. *The Tale of Cyavana's* occurrence here is part of the text's larger concern of establishing narrative bases for the parts of the *Soma* ritual.<sup>16</sup> This version begins and ends, as do most stories in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, with the descriptions and ritual significance of sacrificial gestures and vessels related to the *Aśvins*.

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<sup>11</sup> Witzel (1987:387-91) focuses on the way the salient motifs from the Vedic versions have been combined and re-organized in the *brāhmaṇa* versions.

<sup>12</sup> As with the brief discussion on narrative in ancient India above, I hope to provide non-specialists with enough information to enjoy and appreciate *The Transformation of Cyavana*, but the article is not intended to be *about* the tale, but rather the scope of its metamorphosis. I have tried to walk a line (which will doubtless please no one) of including enough citations and background to the Indic cultural elements that come up in the story to allow interested parties to pursue them further, but not to let cultural factors dominate the exposition; in short, to diminish the particularity of the alterations and expand their universality. As far as the comparanda brought in to support the contention that the phenomena occur in other traditions as well, space does not permit much more than brief citations of where the instances may be found.

<sup>13</sup> *The Tale of Cyavana* is §186 in Caland (1970:251-53). A translation appears in MacDonald (1979:129-31). The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* is not written in verse, but rather in paragraph form. So that the text may be followed closely enough to understand the analysis, every sentence has been numbered, and it is those numbers that appear as the final digits in the citations.

<sup>14</sup> Witzel (1987) offers a complex argument based on verb tense deployment that suggests that though the *JB* is the oldest of the texts discussed here, its Cyavana sections may have been constructed by an embedding process that turned the tale into a frame narrative with inserts, and these may be much younger than the rest of the *JB* and are perhaps even coeval with the *ŚB*.

<sup>15</sup> A translation is available in Eggeling (1885).

<sup>16</sup> The *Soma* sacrifice (the ritual preparation and consumption of a now-extinct plant with intoxicating properties) was one of the most central and ubiquitous features of Vedic religiosity (and of early Iranian religion as well, under its Avestan name *Haoma*). Perhaps the most striking feature of the ceremony is that this is one of a small number of cases in which human and divine activity are mirror images: like the brahmins on earth, the gods routinely conduct their own *Soma* sacrifice, to which access is highly restricted and much sought after by the lesser and excluded deities.



3. The *Mahābhārata* (*Mbh.*) 3.121-25:<sup>17</sup> The *Mahābhārata* is one of the two major epics of India, and was composed over a period extending from roughly 500 BCE to 500 CE. The great epic gives us the first version of Cyavana's story that is more attentive to the narrative itself than to the ritual or theology associated with it. There is a marked increase in character development and description, and descriptions of ritual activity are more cursory.
4. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* (*DevībhP.*) 7.2.30-7.43: As a class of texts, the *purāṇas* began to be composed as the *Mahābhārata* was assuming its final form, and were heavily influenced by it. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* is constructed to follow the *Mahābhārata*'s version, but with far more elaboration and expansion: comparing the two side by side brings to mind Lord's account of the *guslar* Avdo expanding another bard's single theme from 176 lines to 558 (Lord 1960:78-79); in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* every motif from the *Mahābhārata* has been inflated as much as possible, and lavish description has been introduced wherever possible. The text glorifies Devī, the generalized female aspect of divine power in Hinduism, and there is a corresponding emphasis on this version's female characters: Sukanyā's character is developed with particular care and attention, and even the role of the king's wives is increased slightly.
5. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*Bh.*) 9.3.1-28: At just 28 verses, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a tightly abbreviated form of the narrative. It generally conforms to the general outlines of the *Mahābhārata*'s version, but includes one major alteration that leaves some awkward transition points, and provides a compelling example of the storyteller's instinctive conservation of received narrative elements, even when such may be difficult to reconcile with his vision of the tale.

These various versions of the tale most certainly do not represent an unbroken lineage; they are simply particular versions that happened to be committed to fixity at certain points in time, but the existence of every new "canonical" version undoubtedly contributed to the ongoing development of the story. Over the course of this progression, we see the tale transform from a cryptic and impersonal religious text concerned primarily with ritual into a touching tale of romantic love. This evolution tracks with another process as well, as a single tale that links a pair of gods and their rights to the divine *Soma* drink to a mortal girl's *svayamvara*<sup>18</sup> is slowly broken into two: the story of an unconventional *svayamvara*, followed closely by a related story about *Soma* rights. Even more striking are the transformations undergone by the main characters, particularly that of the heroine. The interaction of all these processes provides an illuminating illustration of the way one narrative evolved over time.

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<sup>17</sup> An English translation of the *Mbh.*'s story of Cyavana and Sukanyā may be found in van Buitenen (1975:458-62, vol. 2); further discussion of the episode may be found at pp.195-97 of the same volume.

<sup>18</sup> An ancient Indian ritual in which a husband is selected for an eligible young woman, often through contests or tests of skill, but sometimes simply through a selection made by the bride.

## Methodology and Notation

In order to best evaluate the divergences, all five versions of *The Tale of Cyavana and Sukanyā* are broken down below into their component themes. Themes naturally arrange themselves into small clusters, and each of the 13 clusters identified here has been given its own small table, which should allow the reader to focus on the changes occurring within each one. The tables are laid out in the order in which they occur in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (likely the oldest of the extant versions), and are formatted according to the following principles:

- ❖ Every theme shared between at least two versions is given a serial Roman numeral and letter designation (for example, “I1c”), and wherever a motif (or portion of one) occurs in an identical expression in at least three versions, it appears in **boldface type**.
- ❖ Items without comparable reflexes in at least three other tales are grouped (where possible) with motifs to which they seem to be affiliated; when they have no close relations, they receive their own line in the chart, but without a numerical designation.
- ❖ When a version includes an out-of-sequence motif, the motif is numbered and positioned along with its reflexes in the other versions, but it appears in italics; its citation, marked with a double dagger (‡), also appears at its actual place in its own sequence, along with an indicator of where it may be found (for example, “listed above at **Ia**”).
- ❖ Motifs that must have occurred in order for the plot to function, but that are not actually narrated or described, appear in SMALL CAPS.
- ❖ Where one version diverges in an extreme or lengthy fashion, the added material is included in a summary, but is listed without a numerical designator and is not treated with the same attention to detail as areas that are closely comparable among the versions.
- ❖ When a version does not contain a particular theme because that theme has not yet been introduced to the tale, the words “-not present-” appear in that theme’s place in the chart. When a version does not contain a particular theme because the theme has been dropped, the words “-omitted-” appear in the chart.
- ❖ Questions or preambles that are part of the frame around the tale have been omitted entirely.
- ❖ Paragraphs beneath each chart analyze and attempt to clarify the nature of the differences exhibited between the versions.

Finally, as part of the attempt to categorize the types of changes that occur, certain distinctive types of alteration have been assigned names to better enable their use in critical settings. The terms will be introduced as the phenomena appear, and then re-capped in a catalogue at the end.

**Cluster I: Cyavana Introduced**

Several salient phenomena present themselves in the first cluster. One is the way a theme's purpose (the isolation of Cyavana) may be accomplished in different ways in different versions. A second is the relative ease with which a new motif can be incorporated into a tale: the original distinguishing feature of the ascetic Cyavana is his ugliness, but this fades into the background when a new defining characteristic is introduced. Yet a third is that once a defining characteristic becomes well-known, it may actually be dropped from the narrative. Others are discussed below as well.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
Cyavana knows the <i>vāstupasya brāhmaṇa</i> (3.120.1-2)				
<b>Ia</b> Cyavana demands that his sons abandon him; they leave him on the bank of the Sarasvatī River. He makes wishes and sees a <i>sāman</i> , which he praises (3.120.3-11)	<b>Ia</b> The Bhṛguṣ (or the Aṅgirasas) attain the heavenly world; Cyavana is left behind (4.1.5.1)	<b>Ia</b> Cyavana performs austerities alone by the Narmadā River, using the <i>vīra</i> posture (3.122.1-2)	<b>Ia</b> ↓ Cyavana performs austerities alone by the Mānasarovara Lake using the <i>vīra</i> posture (7.2.33-43)	[Ia.CYAVANA PERFORMS AUSTERITIES]
[Ib CYAVANA IS OLD]	<b>Ib</b> Cyavana is old, “ugly and ghostlike” (4.1.5.1)	<b>Ib</b> Cyavana becomes an anthill. (3.122.3-4) ↓ <b>Cyavana is old</b> (3.122.20)	<b>Ib</b> ↓ Cyavana becomes an anthill (7.2.43-44)	[Ib CYAVANA BECOMES AN ANTHILL.] ↓ <b>Cyavana is an “old, diseased invalid with loose skin, white hair, and visible veins”</b> (9.3.14)

**Ia.** The tale's first motif is **the physical isolation of Cyavana**, and is accomplished in three different ways: in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, Cyavana instructs his sons to leave him behind in the *vāstu*.<sup>19</sup> Over their protests, the seer insists that because he knows the *vāstupasya brāhmaṇa*,<sup>20</sup> the desertion will be to all of their benefit, and that he will be given an opportunity to regain his youth. His sons then leave him on the banks of the Sarasvatī River; presumably this is in fact the *vāstu* he was referring to in his request. His sons obey him and depart, and Cyavana

<sup>19</sup> The meaning of this is not entirely clear. A *vāstu* may be a site, ground, or dwelling place; in this case it is probably a sacrificial site; cf. *ŚB vāstu*, (a site, ground, or dwelling place). Hopkins (1905:61) reads the desertion of the sons as reflecting an ancient custom of leaving the elderly alone in the wilderness to die, but I am not sure the text supports such a grisly conclusion. *ŚB* 1.7.3.1-5, for example, contains a similar story (this time about a god) who is left behind in the *vāstu* and excluded from the sacrifice, and the steps that must be taken to reintegrate him.

<sup>20</sup> The identity and significance of the *vāstupasya brāhmaṇa* (literally, “the *brāhmaṇa* of the household-guardian”) are unclear. It is a text or mantra otherwise unknown to us, along with many such others in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*; as Whitney (1885:cxliv-cxlv) says: “The *Jaiminīya* is on the whole a dull and uninteresting work, as compared with the others of its class. The most unreasonable share of its immense mass is taken up with telling on what occasion some being ‘saw’ a particular *sāmān* and ‘praised with it’” (*ibid.*:cxliv-cxlv).

uses his solitude to pray for restored youth, a young wife, and the chance to sacrifice with 1,000 cows. He sees a *sāman* (“hymn,” “chant,” or “praise-song”) and praises with it.

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, it is briefly noted that Cyavana has been abandoned, but this time by his paternal ancestors the Bṛḡus, who have attained the heavenly world, rather than by his sons.<sup>21</sup> Neither *brāhmaṇa* specifically notes whether or not he is engaged in *tapas* (the practice of performing physical austerities in order to accrue spiritual powers) or meditation, practices that become essential to Cyavana’s character in the later texts.

The *Mahābhārata* and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* dispense with the idea of abandonment, and merely introduce Cyavana as living alone in the forest to pursue his austerities, which he does with a ferocious commitment more profound and enduring than anything suggested by the *brāhmaṇas*. The changing explanations for Cyavana’s seclusion—from involuntary abandonment, to requested abandonment, to sought-after solitude—are examples of a common phenomenon, and one that is highly illustrative of the processes of literary composition (oral and otherwise): the “aetiology,” a brief explanation of some circumstance or background in a story, often fabricated just for purposes of that tale.<sup>22</sup> For the oral poet, remembering a state or condition is easy, but recalling (or choosing to retain) the circumstances that led to it can apparently be difficult, particularly if they are sufficiently divorced from the main action of the narrative. In this case, the actual abandonment (or lack thereof) has no repercussions later in the story, and its loss is of little narrative importance. Thus Cyavana may go from abandoned, to conspiring in his own abandonment, to simply living alone in the forest with little effect on the rest of the story. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* puts this motif out of order, but the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* goes a step further and eliminates the theme altogether, along with any introduction of Cyavana.

Two versions (the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) have moved the introduction of Cyavana from the outset of the tale to its second motif cluster; a minor change in sequence, presumably motivated by the dual phenomena of the increase in Cyavana’s name-recognition as a mythological figure and by these versions’ shift in emphasis from the seer to the princess he marries. As Cyavana’s persona stabilized into a stock character, the interest in him as a protagonist decreased, and Sukanyā assumed a larger share of the narrative focus. The changes in her role are illustrated very clearly in the next motif cluster.

Note also the changing *locus*: unspecified in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, it becomes the Sarasvatī River in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, a nameless forest in the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, while the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* describes an exceptionally beautiful sacred

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<sup>21</sup> This text shows an uncharacteristic uncertainty regarding Cyavana’s lineage, calling him “either a Bhargava [descendant of the *ṛsi* Bṛḡu] or an Aṅgīrasa [descendant of the *ṛsi* Aṅgīras],” where the other texts uniformly proclaim him a Bhargava. According to Hopkins (1905:45), this “indicates synonymity” between the two *ṛsis*. For more on the Bṛḡus, see Goldman (1977).

<sup>22</sup> Ready examples of aetiologies include the *Gospel of Luke*’s explanation that Jesus’ birth took place in Bethlehem as a consequence of a census ordered by Augustus (Lk. 2.1-3), or *Iliad* 1.393-406, in which Achilles reminds Thetis of her vaunt that she aided Zeus when the rest of the gods were against him and is thus owed a favor.

grove near the shores of the Mānasarovara Lake, the first of many florid stock additions in that text.<sup>23</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion of the paper.

**Ib.** The next theme concerns **Cyavana’s physical appearance**. The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* does not bother to report on Cyavana’s age and infirmity, but we can infer Cyavana’s decrepitude from what we have already learned in Ia: he wishes to recover his youth. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* says he has become “ugly and ghostlike,” rendered so by the natural processes of age. The *Mahābhārata*, *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* all take Cyavana’s old age for granted—the primary point of the tales is that he needs rejuvenation—but the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* does not mention that Cyavana is old until 7.3.16, and the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* never make an explicit statement about it.

Instead, the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* elaborate upon Cyavana’s situation by explaining that his commitment to meditation has been so profound that he has “become” an anthill, which obscures every part of him but his eyes.<sup>24</sup> The addition of the anthill is an example of a common phenomenon I have termed an “improvement:” the substitution of a more interesting explanation or situation for an inherited one.<sup>25</sup>

Here, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* makes an even more drastic omission than the failure to mention Cyavana’s age: Cyavana’s entombment within the anthill is now apparently so well-known to the audience that no explanation for how it happened is ever given within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s narrative. Indeed, we learn that even the other characters within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are already familiar with Cyavana’s situation as well. The loss of an explicit statement regarding a characteristic that has become so well-known and central to the story that its description is eventually *omitted* from the narrative because it has become unnecessary is visible in other preserved oral tales; I term this sort of omission a “cyclops” in honor of one of the most noticeable examples of the phenomenon.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Witzel (1987:402) discusses what has been reconstructed about the geography associated with the various texts and their recensions; the current inquiry is concerned less with the specific cultural reasons for alterations, and more with the patterns observable in their deployment.

<sup>24</sup> The best known exemplar of the “sage-encased by the anthill” motif is certainly Vālmīki, mythical author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whose case is discussed extensively in Leslie (2003). Aśvaghōṣa explicitly compares the two seers at *Buddhacarita* I.48: “The voice of Vālmīki uttered poetry which the great seer Cyavana could not compose.” (Cowell, trans. 1894). In a variant of the anthill motif, Cyavana performs a similar feat of immobility at *Mbh.* 13.50-51, in which he stands immobile at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers until he becomes encrusted with mollusks and seaweed.

<sup>25</sup> Larson (2005:1) posits that just such an “improvement” took place in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*: Lugalbanda, an ill adult stranded in a cave in the *Lugalbanda Epic*, is transformed into newborn baby Hermes in the hymn.

<sup>26</sup> Nowhere within the *Odyssey* is the cyclops described as having a single eye, but the blinding, as it is carried out, would not serve the necessary function if the monster had two eyes. In another possible example from the same text, the physical appearance of the Sirens is also never described; whether or not this indicates that the composer of the *Odyssey* conceived of them as the familiar bird-women of later Greek art is unclear, but to omit completely the physical description of a significant Homeric obstacle suggests that the appearance of the Sirens was well-known to the audience. See also Gresseth (1970, espec. 210ff), who makes an exhaustive survey of the evidence and concludes that the winged form must have been Homeric.

**Cluster II: Conflict Arises**

The story advances as a king and his people encamp in Cyavana’s forest. Cyavana is subjected to maltreatment by the interlopers, and retaliates by cursing them. In this cluster we observe the first incidence of a function being taken away from one character and re-assigned to another.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
			Śaryāti is a king with 4,000 wives and Sukanyā (7.2.30-33)  [‡7.2.33-43 listed above at Ia] [‡7.2.43-44 listed above at Ib]	Śaryāti is a learned and pious king
<b>IIa. Śaryāta</b> , the Mānava King <b>comes to the forest</b> with his tribe (3.121.1)	<b>IIa. Śaryāta</b> , the Mānava King <b>comes to the forest</b> with his tribe (4.1.5.2)	<b>IIa. Śaryāti comes to the forest</b> with a retinue of 4,000 women, including Sukanyā (3.122.5-6)	<b>IIa. Śaryāti comes to the forest</b> with a retinue of 4,000 women, including Sukanyā (7.2.45-46)	<b>IIa. Śaryāti comes to the forest</b> [with his royal retinue] and Sukanyā to see Cyavana’s <i>āśrama</i> (“ashram”) (9.3.1-2)
-not present-	-not present-	<b>IIb. Sukanyā</b> , wearing only a single garment, explores the forest, finds Cyavana’s anthill  Cyavana falls in love and tries to speak  His glowing eyes catch her attention (3.122.7-12)	<b>IIb. Sukanyā</b> explores the forest, finds Cyavana’s anthill  -omitted-  His glowing eyes catch her attention. She picks up a thorn. Cyavana tries to stop her (7.2.47-53)	<b>IIb. Sukanyā</b> gathers fruit in the forest, finds Cyavana’s anthill (9.3.3)  -omitted-  -omitted-
<b>IIc. Cowherd boys</b> deliberately smear Cyavana with earth and balls of dung (3.121.2)	<b>IIc. Boys</b> deliberately taunt Cyavana and throw clods of earth at him (4.1.5.2)	<b>IIc. Sukanyā</b> impulsively and misguidedly pokes Cyavana’s eyes with a thorn (3.122.12)	<b>IIc. Sukanyā</b> playfully pokes Cyavana’s eyes with the thorn  She wonders “What have I done?” (7.2.54-55)	<b>IIc. Sukanyā</b> , impelled by fate, pokes Cyavana’s eyes with a thorn  Blood oozes out (9.3.4)
<b>IIId. Cyavana curses them</b> with discord: “mother did not know son, nor son, mother” (3.121.3-4)	<b>IIId. Cyavana curses them</b> with discord: “father did not know son, nor brother, brother” (4.1.5.3)	<b>IIId. Cyavana curses them</b> with constipation (3.122.13)	<b>IIId. Cyavana curses them</b> , including elephants, horses, and camels, with constipation (7.2.56-58)	<b>IIId. Cyavana curses them</b> with constipation (9.3.5)

The *Devībhāgavata* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas* introduce King Śaryāta at the very outset of the piece, even before introducing Cyavana. While the old ascetic was indisputably the main

character of the earliest versions, in the last two iterations Cyavana is less the focal point of the narrative and more its most arresting piece of scenery. We are introduced to him through the eyes of the princess rather than meeting him independently at the outset.

**IIa.** In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, **the king arrives** with his tribe, the Mānavas; in the *Jaiminīya* the arrival of the king and his people at the site specifically occurs while Cyavana is praising (*taṃ tuṣṭvānaṃ śaryāto mānavo grāmeṇādhyavāsyāt*). In the *Mahābhārata* and the *purāṇas* the king's name has altered slightly (from Śaryāta to Śaryāti) and, since tribal living is no longer a part of the cultural landscape, the presentation has also shifted: the king's Mānava affiliation is omitted and he is accompanied not by a tribe but by a retinue that includes a company of soldiers, 4,000 women, and his beautiful daughter, Sukanyā.

The two *brāhmaṇas* contain no reference to the heroine at this point, but the *Mahābhārata* and the *purāṇas* immediately place Sukanyā at the center of the narrative. The two *purāṇic* versions have even changed the sequence so that the story begins with the description of the king and Sukanyā rather than with Cyavana, a slight alteration that signals the major re-configuration of her role.

**IIb.** In a motif not present in the *brāhmaṇas*, the *Mahābhārata*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, have **Sukanyā walk alone in the woods**. The *Mahābhārata* immediately introduces an element of romance: as the girl wanders alone in the forest dressed only in a single garment,<sup>27</sup> the sight of her beauty distracts Cyavana out of the celestial realms in which his spirit is wandering and he falls in love with her. As he tries to speak to her she sees his eyes inside the anthill.

Though the two *purāṇas* adopt the *Mahābhārata*'s metamorphosis of the tale into a more romantic one, neither explicitly depicts Cyavana as falling in love at this point; indeed, the seer's character is initially quite irascible and unlikable. Whether this is intended to preserve his earlier persona or to heighten the romantic tension in anticipation of the couple's eventual joyous future is unclear, but when Cyavana speaks to Sukanyā in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, it is only to try to use his creaky voice to beg her to put down the thorn she has just picked up.

**IIc.** This segment introduces conflict to the tale in the form of an **assault on Cyavana's person**. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* boys in the retinue taunt the decrepit Cyavana and throw clods of earth at him because of his ugliness, and in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, cowherd boys smear him with earth and dung-balls for unspecified reasons. These are only slightly different manifestations of deliberate maltreatment; in the subsequent versions, however, we find our first profound alteration. In the *Mahābhārata*, seeing Cyavana's eyes peering out from the mound, Sukanyā pokes at the sparkly objects with a thorn. No hostility is involved; she does it only "from curiosity" and "the compulsion of a confused mind" (*kautūhalāt . . . buddhimohabalāt*, *Mbh.* 3.122.12). The *Devībhāgavata* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas* retain this innovation,

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<sup>27</sup> Prior to the ascendancy of the *sari*, women in ancient India typically dressed in a sarong skirt with a shawl around the shoulders; Sukanyā is *ekavastrām*, "one-garmented," that is, "topless." This adjective could be used to indicate that a woman was menstruating (for example, Draupadī is *ekavastrā* [*Mbh.* 2.60.15]) in the famous scene in which she is dragged into the assembly hall). It is difficult to tease out all the possible implications for the mention of her garment here, which could range from merely upping the sexiness quotient, to marking the girl as being in a liminal and vulnerable state, to conjuring a subtle association between Sukanyā and the more famous heroine in the scene in which she famously saves her five husbands, the Pāṇḍavas.

characterizing Sukanyā's actions, respectively, as “intent on play” (*krīḍāsaktā*) or merely impelled by the gods/fate (*daivacoditā*).

This is a pronounced transformation: a hostile act of cruelty is replaced by a girlish mistake, strikingly changing the nature of this part of the tale. Even leaving aside the whimsical charm this change imparts to the epic and *purāṇic* versions, the advantages of the earlier introduction of Sukanyā are very clear: it expands her role and adds substantially to her characterization while tightening the overall narrative structure. The cruel boys of the earlier versions, no longer of any use in the narrative, disappear entirely.

It is interesting to speculate as to whether the “improvement” of motif Ib (decrepitude exchanged for the anthill) inspired the increase in Sukanyā's role, or the reverse; certainly the enlargement of her role and the appearance of the anthill motif are inextricably linked. An intermediate stage in which Sukanyā's role was to intentionally taunt or abuse Cyavana seems unlikely, given the difficulties it would introduce in making her character likeable.

**IId.** Angered by the abuse, **Cyavana curses his tormentors.**<sup>28</sup> The two *brāhmaṇas*' dull and didactic curse of “discord” (*asaṃjñā*) sowed among the tribe (though with variation in the range of family members specified<sup>29</sup>) is changed to the delightful “he constipated the feces and urine of the retinue;” another “improvement.” This modification takes hold as tightly as the anthill did: both the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* retain the new motif, nearly verbatim.<sup>30</sup> Not content with inflicting the constipation on Cyavana's human victims, the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* extends it to their elephants, horses, and camels as well.

### Cluster III: Resolution of the Curse

This cluster is the most intact of the entire story: every version contains a reflex of every motif, though they are by no means identical. A closer examination reveals that the reason for this lies in the nature of the elements it contains: none of these motifs is exciting enough to warrant elaboration, yet their function is critical. Thus, they persist intact and in very similar incarnations. This is an often frustrating feature of oral narrative evolution: nuts-and-bolts “workhorse” motifs are far less likely to mutate than their flashier counterparts. While their low-key appearance and the predictability of their sequencing often leads to the charges that they are the result of coincidence rather than of shared inheritance, the evidence here suggests the opposite: that the presence of such clusters should be taken as good evidence of genetic relationship.

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<sup>28</sup> The curse of a *r̥ṣi* is a common plot-driver in Sanskrit literature; see, for example, *Mbh.* 1.109, *Mbh.* 1.208.21, and *RV* 7.104. In the *DevīP.*, Cyavana later denies being angry and claims he was merely in pain (*DevīP.* 7.3.13).

<sup>29</sup> In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, “father did not know son, nor brother, brother,” and in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, “mother did not know son, nor son, mother.”

<sup>30</sup> *Mbh.* 3.122.13: *śakṛṇ mūtraṃ samāvṛṇot*; *DevīP.* 7.2.56 and *BhagP.* 9.3.5: *śakṛṇ mūtranirodho 'bhūt*. In my taxonomy of indications, this is a “fee-fi-fo-fum:” an evocative or iconic phrase (stolen from Jacobs 1890 “Jack and the Beanstalk”), which is retained in subsequent versions of the story.



<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
<b>IIIa.</b> Śaryāta asks his people what they might have seen (3.121.5)	<b>IIIa.</b> Śaryāta fears he has done wrong. He asks the cow and shepherds what they might have done (4.1.5.4-5)	<b>IIIa.</b> Śaryāti asks his soldiers, then his friends, if anyone has angered Cyavana (3.122.14-17)	<b>IIIa.</b> Śaryāti asks his soldiers, then his kinsmen, then friends, if anyone has angered Cyavana (7.2.58-3.1)	<b>IIIa.</b> Śaryāti tells the retinue that he thinks someone must have angered Cyavana (9.3.6)
<b>IIIb.</b> “They” tell Śaryāta what the cowherd boys and shepherds did (3.121.6-8)	<b>IIIb.</b> The cowherds inform on the boys (4.1.5.4-5)	<b>IIIb.</b> Sukanyā confesses to the poking (3.122.18-19)	<b>IIIb.</b> Sukanyā confesses to the poking (7.3.2-6)	<b>IIIb.</b> Sukanyā confesses to the poking (9.3.7)
<b>IIIc.</b> Śaryāta goes to Cyavana and apologizes (3.122.1-5) Sukanyā is introduced (3.122.6)	<b>IIIc.</b> Śaryāta goes to Cyavana in a chariot, taking along Sukanyā, and apologizes (4.1.5.6-7)	<b>IIIc.</b> Śaryāti goes to Cyavana and apologizes (3.122.20-21)	<b>IIIc.</b> Śaryāti goes to Cyavana and apologizes (7.3.7-11)	<b>IIIc.</b> Śaryāti goes to Cyavana and apologizes (9.3.8)

**IIIa.** Disharmony and constipation are both unpleasant conditions, and **the king’s attempt to understand the source of the common misery** remains intact as a motif and only lightly varied in its expression. In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the bewildered king must ask if any of his subjects has seen anything that could have caused the curse, but immediately knows who Cyavana is when his people describe the old man who was taunted. In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, Śaryāti assumes at the onset of the constipation that the curse must have arisen following a slight to Cyavana, and the interrogation has been inflated and elaborated on with separate inquiries for separate groups.<sup>31</sup> In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, that a slight to Cyavana must have been the cause of their discomfort is the king’s immediate conclusion. He conducts no questioning, but rather informs his people that someone’s actions have angered Cyavana.

**IIIb.** **The discovery of the wrongdoing** was streamlined between the two *brāhmaṇas*: in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, cowherd and shepherd boys (*kumārā gopālā avipālāḥ*) are the wrongdoers, and the informers are only specified by the third plural ending on the verb (*ūcur*). In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the anonymous third party has been dropped and it is boys (*kumārāḥ*) who do the taunting and cowherds and shepherds (*gopālās cāvipālāḥ*) who do the informing.

In the three epic and *purāṇic* versions, however, the unwieldy sequences in which other parties must rat out the miscreants have been replaced with Sukanyā’s willing admission to poking at something shiny in the anthill; the cowherds, shepherds, and boys disappear entirely.

**IIIc.** **The king apologetically approaches the wronged holy man** to remedy the situation. In the two earliest versions, it is at this point in the tale that Sukanyā is introduced; in the later three versions she is, of course, already well-known to us.

<sup>31</sup> It is worth pointing out here that expansion of this type (the query taken to multiple, similar groups or individuals) is a widespread phenomenon in many forms of oral and written literature, as in the serial questioning of the winds (North, South, East, and West) as it appears in Grimms Fairy Tale no. 88, “The Singing, Springing Lark,” and “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” as collected by Asbjørnsen and Moe, and in two stories written by Hans Christian Andersen, “The Four Winds” and “The Garden of Paradise.”

### Cluster IV. The King Negotiates with Cyavana, and Departs

This cluster offers two more well-preserved motifs. IVa is particularly instructive: it is an excellent illustration of the way the essential features of a given theme and its outcome may be preserved, even as its details are freely revised or rearranged.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
<b>IVa.</b> Cyavana demands <b>Sukanyā in recompense.</b> Śaryāta refuses (3.122.7)	<b>IVa.</b> Śaryāta offers <b>Sukanyā in recompense.</b> Cyavana accepts her (4.1.5.7)	<b>IVa.</b> Cyavana asks for <b>Sukanyā in recompense.</b> Śaryāti gives her to him (3.122.22-24)	<b>IVa.</b> Cyavana asks for <b>Sukanyā in recompense</b> so she can care for him in his injured state (7.3.12-22)	<b>IVa.</b> Śaryāti offers <b>Sukanyā in recompense.</b> Cyavana accepts her (9.3.9)
Śaryāta and Cyavana argue. The tribe debates the matter and decides to leave, telling Sukanyā to follow them secretly later (3.122.8-18)	-omitted-	-omitted-	Śaryāti anguishes and consults his ministers. Sukanyā volunteers to marry Cyavana, and is given to him; the constipation ends. Sukanyā dons ascetic garb; everyone weeps (7.3.23-63)	-omitted-
<b>IVb.</b> Śaryāta and the clan <b>depart.</b> Sukanyā tries to follow (3.122.19)	<b>IVb.</b> Śaryāta <b>departs</b> so as not to offend Cyavana again (4.1.5.7)	<b>IVb.</b> Śaryāti <b>departs,</b> forgiven (3.122.25)	<b>IVb.</b> Śaryāti <b>departs,</b> forgiven (7.3.64)	<b>IVb.</b> Śaryāti <b>departs,</b> forgiven (9.3.9)
Cyavana becomes aware of Sukanyā's intention to desert him. Cyavana commands a black snake to detain her and she stays (3.122.20-123.2)		<b>IVc.</b> Sukanyā is an excellent wife (3.122.26-27)	<b>IVc.</b> Sukanyā is an excellent wife. (7.4.1-25)	<b>IVc.</b> Sukanyā is an excellent wife even though Cyavana is irritable (9.3.10)

**IVa.** Every text offers a different version of **the initiation of the marriage.** The narrative's flow requires that the king apologize and Sukanyā be given to Cyavana; beyond this, as is clear from the chart, only two versions are in close agreement as to the particulars. The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* contains a complex and unusual variation with no reflex in any other versions: the seer demands the girl in recompense, ordering the rest of the tribe to depart immediately. Śaryāta refuses and tries to buy Cyavana off with treasure; Cyavana counters that he knows the *vāstupasya brāhmaṇa*. The tribe holds a conference, and they decide to attempt to trick Cyavana by leaving the girl with instructions to run away from the feeble old man and rejoin them later.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (which rarely correspond) have the king take the initiative and offer his daughter in recompense to the wronged Cyavana.<sup>32</sup> The

<sup>32</sup> One variant of the *Mahābhārata* has the king offer the girl first: after 3.122.21, D<sub>3</sub> inserts: "O you-who-are very-strict-in-your-vows, to you I will give this girl / Take her and be satisfied, O Descendant of Bhrgu!" (*imāmeva ca te kanyāṃ dadāmi sudr̥ḥavratā / bhāryārthī tvam̐ grhāṇemāṃ prasīdasva ca bhārgava*).

other three versions depict Cyavana as the initiator of the arrangement: in the *Mahābhārata*, Cyavana simply asks for Sukanyā's hand and the king agrees in order to end the constipation. In the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, the negotiations over the betrothal have been considerably expanded: more than 50 verses are devoted to Cyavana's request that the girl become his caretaker and the retinue's subsequent hand-wringing and lamentation. The king agonizes over the decision, for he particularly fears that Sukanyā will be tempted into adultery with such an old and unattractive husband, citing the story of Indra seducing the young and beautiful Ahalyā, the wife of the aged ascetic Gautama. He discusses the matter with his councilors, and is on the point of refusing when Sukanyā nobly steps forward, expressing admiration for the ascetic's powers and self-control. In a bathetic 11-verse coda to this section, Sukanyā asks for ascetic garb, abandoning her ornaments and soft garments. This is the only version that explicitly notes the ending of the constipation (*DevībhP.* 7.3.53).

This disparate assemblage of expressions of the "arrangement of the marriage" motif with no evolutionary arc represents a phenomenon we will see again below at VIIa and IXa: varied actions leading to the same outcome. At this point in the story, Sukanyā must be given to Cyavana, and as long as that outcome is generated, the specific mechanism by which it is carried out is unimportant.

**IVb. The departure of the rest of the group** is an afterthought in the other four versions, but the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*'s description of the attempt to trick Cyavana continues. The tribe's plan to have Sukanyā abandon Cyavana is foiled when Cyavana discerns the girl's intentions through his ascetic powers.<sup>33</sup> A black snake rises up before the girl, frightening her into staying. It is an evocative and enigmatic illustration of Cyavana's power, but it disappears entirely outside of this version.<sup>34</sup> Such "elisions" of entire motif-clusters are a common occurrence.<sup>35</sup>

**IVc.** The *Mahābhārata* and the *purāṇas* insert the detail that **Sukanyā proves to be a devoted and loving wife** (the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* devotes 25 verses to describing her solicitousness for Cyavana's comfort and her thoughtfulness at readying his ritual paraphernalia), whereas the earlier *brāhmaṇa* versions lack any interest in the domestic compatibility of the pair.

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<sup>33</sup> This display of his power is quite possibly a motif transplanted or duplicated from VIa below.

<sup>34</sup> Shulman (1978:122) points out an interesting affinity between the Vedic mentions of Cyavana, the *Mbh.*'s choice of the anthill motif, and the appearance of the black serpent here: in India, snakes frequently inhabit ant- and termite-mounds, and Cyavana "has certain ophidian traits himself: the Aśvins remove his sheath (*vavri*) like an old cloak [at *RV* 1.116.10 and 5.74.5], just as the serpent loses his skin; and in later myths Cyavana epitomizes the aged ascetic who is sexually rejuvenated. One early version of the myth of Cyavana actually uses the serpent to symbolize the transformation of the old sage to youthful husband."

<sup>35</sup> Larson (2005) notes a number of parts of the Lugalbanda story that were not adopted into the Hymn to Hermes: he prays, eats lifesaving plants, bakes cakes, captures a wild bull and two goats, and has a prophetic dream. The correspondence between the numerous shared motifs are clear, but not every element in *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* found its way into the *Hymn*.

### Cluster V. The Aśvins Court Sukanyā

With the marriage accomplished, the focus shifts abruptly as we learn that the Aśvins are passing through the area; it is their interest in the beautiful young princess that drives the rest of the plot in most of the versions. After the anthill, this is perhaps the most central facet of the story, yet the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* eliminates it entirely, in the most striking transformation observable in the tale.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
<b>Va.</b> The Aśvins wander about performing cures, and don't share in the <i>Soma</i> (3.123.3)	<b>Va.</b> The Aśvins wander about performing cures (4.1.5.8)	-omitted-	<b>Va.</b> The Aśvins frolic in the woods (7.4.26)	<b>Va.</b> The Aśvins come to visit Cyavana (9.3.11) They don't share in the <i>Soma</i> (9.3.12)
<b>Vb.</b> The Aśvins approach Sukanyā. (3.123.4)	<b>Vb.</b> The Aśvins see Sukanyā and “try to win her love.” (4:1:5:8)  Sukanyā refuses them (4.1.5.8)	<b>Vb.</b> The Aśvins see Sukanyā returning from her bath naked and question her (3.123.1-3)  Sukanyā gets dressed and identifies herself (3.123.4)	<b>Vb.</b> The Aśvins see Sukanyā returning from her bath and question her (7.4.27-38)  Sukanyā identifies herself (7.4.39-42)	-omitted-
<b>Vc.</b> The Aśvins denigrate Cyavana. They ask Sukanyā to marry them (3.123.4)	<b>Vc.</b> The Aśvins denigrate Cyavana. They ask Sukanyā to go with them (4.1.5.9)	<b>Vc.</b> The Aśvins praise Sukanyā's beauty and denigrate Cyavana. They ask Sukanyā to marry one of them (3.123. 5-9)	<b>Vc.</b> The Aśvins praise Sukanyā's beauty and denigrate Cyavana. They ask Sukanyā to marry one of them (7.4.43-56)	-omitted-
<b>Vd.</b> Sukanyā declares her fidelity to her husband (3.123.5-6)	<b>Vd.</b> Sukanyā declares her fidelity to her husband (4.1.5.9)	<b>Vd.</b> Sukanyā declares her fidelity to her husband (3.123.10)	<b>Vd.</b> Sukanyā declares her fidelity to her husband. She even threatens to curse the Aśvins (7.5.1-6)	-omitted-
Cyavana hears them talking (3.123.7)	Cyavana is aware of the Aśvins' attention (4.1.5.9)	-omitted-	-omitted-	-omitted-

**Va. The Aśvins Enter the Narrative.** In both *brāhmaṇas*, the Aśvins are wandering among mortals “performing cures,” foreshadowing the other gods' later objection that as physicians they are unclean and therefore ineligible to receive the *Soma*.<sup>36</sup> In the *Mahābhārata*, the Aśvins simply appear with no explanation and no introduction, and in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, they are merely frolicking in the woods. This suggests that either (as with Cyavana) their role in the tale has become better-known over time, or that as the emphasis in the tale has shifted to the romance between Cyavana and Sukanyā, there is less need to craft the story around the Aśvins and their situation.

<sup>36</sup> The status of physicians in ancient India was surprisingly low, for example (*Mbh.* 13.135.14): “He who accepts food from a physician accepts excrement.”

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, however, (as noted above) in an alteration perhaps designed to guard against a perceived impiety of depicting the Aśvins as lecherous would-be adulterers, the deities enter the narrative only to visit Cyavana. Though the gods' desire for Sukanyā is arguably the second-most fundamental aspect of the original narrative, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* entirely omits the gods' attempts to seduce the girl; they have come to the ashram only to pay their respects to her famous husband. This is arguably the starkest modification made in any of the texts.

**Vb. The Aśvins See and Approach Sukanyā.** In every text besides the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the twin gods see Sukanyā and become besotted with her, and make initial romantic advances. In the two *brāhmaṇas*, the Aśvins simply see and approach the girl, whereas in the *Mahābhārata*, a minor “improvement”—Sukanyā's nudity—makes the tale a little racier, just as her partial nudity did in motif IIb. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, with its greater emphasis on Sukanyā as the heroine of the piece takes greater pains to preserve her dignity: she is returning from her bath, but fully clothed when she encounters the gods. In the *Mahābhārata*, Sukanyā identifies herself to the gods briefly,<sup>37</sup> and in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, Sukanyā gives them a 4- *śloka précis*<sup>38</sup> of her life and circumstances that covers all the high points.

**Vc.** After their respective initial questions, the texts proceed to **the Aśvins' denigration of Cyavana**, and his unfitness to be the husband of a young and beautiful woman; the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* also include extensive praise for Sukanyā's beauty at this point.

In every version except the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the gods then make romantic overtures to the girl. While some shared motifs (especially ones central to the story) retain a consistent wording, this one is expressed differently in each: “be our wife” (*jāyaidhi*, *JB* 3.123.4); “follow us” (*āvām anuprehi*, *ŚB* 4.1.5.9), “choose one of us” (*varayasvaikam āvayoḥ*, *Mbh.* 3.123.9); “choose . . . one of [us] both” (*bhaja . . . ubhayos tvam ekam*, *DevībhP.* 7.4.54); “choose . . . one of [us] two for your happiness” (*bhajasva . . . ekam dvayos tava sukhāya*, *DevībhP.* 7.4.51). The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*'s use of two proposals is consonant with its practice of inflating and expanding the *Mahābhārata*'s version.

**Vd.** In all versions, **Sukanyā rejects the Aśvins' advances.** The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* takes the extra step of having Sukanyā threaten to curse the gods if they do not leave (*gacchatam devau śāpam dāsyāmi vā*, “Go, Gods, or I will you give you a curse!” *DevībhP.* 7.5.6.), and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* doubles the motif, adding an additional rejection of the gods' overtures between Vb and Vc.

In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* Cyavana overhears the Aśvins' advances, while in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* Cyavana was aware of (*ājajñau*) the Aśvins' interaction with his wife and her response.

<sup>37</sup> Some manuscripts expand this slightly with a rather striking statement: G<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>2</sub>, T<sub>1</sub>, and S all insert some variation of “I am Sukanyā by name; dwelling in this world of men / I am she who is eternally serving my husband with my whole soul.” (*nāmnā cāham sukanyeti nṛloke'smin pratiṣṭhitā / sāham sarvātmanā nityam bhartaram anuvartinī*).

<sup>38</sup> A *śloka* is the basic verse unit in Sanskrit, equivalent to a sentence, and the heroine here is allotted four of them (a noteworthy and substantial speaking role for a female character) to narrate a condensed version of her life and marriage to the gods.

### Cluster VI: Cyavana's Plan

The next major event in the evolution of the tale is the three later versions' elimination of Cyavana's machinations to exploit the Aśvins' interest in his wife for his own gain. This is consistent with the alterations in Cyavana's character we observed over the course of the evolution of the negotiations with the Mānavas in Cluster III: Cyavana changes from the aggressive schemer of the *Śatapatha* and *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, to the grumpy-but-honorable holy man of the later tales. Similarly profound changes occur in Sukanyā's character as well.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
The Aśvins depart (3.123.8)	THE AŚVINS DEPART	-omitted-	-omitted-	-omitted-
<b>VIa.</b> Cyavana demands to hear all that was said, and Sukanyā reports it (3.123.9-14)	<b>VIa.</b> Cyavana demands to hear all that was said, and Sukanyā reports it (4.1.5.10)	<b>VIa.</b> The Aśvins order Sukanyā to tell Cyavana about the plan they have devised; she does so (↓3.123.12-13)	<b>VIa.</b> Sukanyā goes to Cyavana to tell him about the plan the Aśvins have suggested (↓7.5.7-11)	-omitted-
<b>VIb.</b> Cyavana tells Sukanyā that when the Aśvins return, she is to respond to them that her husband shares in the <i>Soma</i> while they do not, but that he could include them (3.124.1-8)	<b>VIb.</b> Cyavana tells Sukanyā that if the Aśvins return, she is to respond to them with a riddle that she will not answer until they agree to rejuvenate him (4.1.5.10-11)	<b>VIb.</b> Cyavana consents to be rejuvenated. Sukanyā herself consents (↓3.123.13-14)	<b>VIb.</b> Cyavana consents to the plan to rejuvenate him. Sukanyā conveys their acceptance to the Aśvins (↓7.5.12-20)	-omitted-
<b>VIc.</b> The Aśvins return. Sukanyā responds as ordered. The Aśvins are enticed by the prospect of <i>Soma</i> rights (3.124.9-125.1)	<b>VIc.</b> The Aśvins return. Sukanyā responds as ordered. The Aśvins are anxious to learn what their imperfection is (4.1.5.10-11)	-omitted-	-omitted-	-omitted-

In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* the Aśvins depart, creating the opportunity for a conversation between the couple (in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the departure may be presumed, but is not explicitly stated). In the later versions, the attempted seduction goes on uninterrupted, resulting in a shift in the autonomy of Sukanyā's character and an accompanying sequence change. In the later version, the conversation merely secures Cyavana's consent to the plan the gods have made with his wife, whereas as we will see below, in the earlier narratives it allows Cyavana to actively steer events.

**VIa. Sukanyā Reports to Cyavana.** In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Cyavana uses the private conversation with his wife to assume control of the situation. He demands to hear a recounting of the Aśvins' visit, and Sukanyā tells him everything that happened, setting the stage for Cyavana's demand (which will be described at VIIa) that the Aśvins rejuvenate him.

In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, with no departure by the Aśvins, this motif occurs out of sequence (as indicated by italics).

**Vib. Cyavana responds.** In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Cyavana coaches Sukanyā with a response for the Aśvins. The texts diverge slightly in the execution of the motif: in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, the aged seer dangles the possibility of *Soma* rights before the twin gods to induce them to rejuvenate him, while the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* sets up a story of manipulation via riddle. In the *Śatapatha*, Sukanyā is told, “you should say, ‘indeed, you are not entirely whole or perfect, but you blame my husband thusly?’” (*sā tvāṃ brūtān ná vai súsarvāv iva stho ná súsamṛddhāv ivātha me pátiṃ nindatha íti*). Then she is to refuse to explain their imperfection until they have transformed Cyavana into a young man.

In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, motif VIb, like VIa, has been inverted from the *brāhmaṇas*’ version: Cyavana is not preparing Sukanyā’s response for the Aśvins, but consenting to the plan that she and the gods have formulated together.

**VIc.** In the two *brāhmaṇas*, **the Aśvins return** to continue their persuasion:<sup>39</sup> in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, Sukanyā tempts the Aśvins with the information that her husband could include them in the *Soma*; they immediately ask him for this, the earliest mention of the *Soma*-rights issue in any of the texts. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Sukanyā responds to the Aśvins with the riddle concerning their imperfection. Their interest is piqued, and they ask her for the answer. In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, the Aśvins never left, so do not need to return.

Sukanyā conducts all the negotiations at VIIa and VIIb without receiving instructions from her husband, another instance (as in IIc) where a function is stripped from a male character and given to a female. The motif of the conference between Cyavana and Sukanyā is thereby inverted: in the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, the Aśvins tell Sukanyā to consult Cyavana after they have formulated the plan to rejuvenate him and hold a *svayamvara*; he merely agrees to the arrangement. Coming as it does *after* the making of the arrangements, rather than before, this conference can no longer occur at the original place in the sequence. That the motif of the conference was re-located seems more likely than that the original was abandoned and a new one created, though there can be no certain proof of this. As in IIc, the effect of the changes is a tightening of the structure of the story and an expansion of the size and dimensionality of Sukanyā’s role.

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<sup>39</sup> This presents a very nice example of mild variation in the expression of a motif, akin to the phenomenon Lord describes of bards frequently using different verbal expressions of the same themes yet claiming they are “exactly alike,” (see, for example, Lord 1960:27-29). Both *brāhmaṇas* essentially say “they returned and said the same thing,” but using different wording: “*tāṃ púnar úpeyatus tāṃ haitád évocatuh*” (*SBr.* 4.1.5.10); “*tau haināṃ śvo bhūta etyaitad evocatuh*” (*JB* 3.124.9).

### Cluster VII: An Agreement is Reached

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
<b>VIIa.</b> Cyavana demands that <b>the Aśvins transform him into a young man</b> (3.125.2-3)	<b>VIIa.</b> Sukanyā tells the <b>Aśvins that if they transform Cyavana into a young man</b> she will reveal their imperfection (4.1.5.11)	<b>VIIa.</b> <b>The Aśvins offer to transform Cyavana into a young man . . .</b> (3.123.11-12)	<b>VIIa.</b> <b>The Aśvins offer to transform Cyavana into a young man . . .</b> (7.5.7-10)	<b>VIIa.</b> Cyavana asks the <b>Aśvins to transform him into a young man</b> (9.3.11-12)
The Aśvins take Cyavana to the <i>śaiśava</i> of the Sarasvatī (3.125.4)	-omitted-	-omitted-	-omitted-	-omitted-
<b>VIIb.</b> Cyavana warns Sukanyā that he and the Aśvins will be identical, and tells her how to recognize him (3.125.5)	-omitted-	<b>VIIb.</b> . . . as handsome as they are, so that Sukanyā may choose a husband from the three (3.123.12-13)  [‡ 3. 123.13-14 listed at VIa-b]	<b>VIIb.</b> . . . as handsome as they are, so that Sukanyā may choose a husband from the three (7.5.8-10)  [‡ 7.5.11-20 listed at VIa-b]	-omitted-

This cluster provides an excellent illustration of narrative fluidity. Three critical elements of the story are in play here: the idea of Cyavana’s transformation, the identity of Cyavana and the Aśvins, and the arrangement of the impromptu *svayamvara*. All are critical hallmarks of the tale, but there is surprisingly little accord on the sequence of their deployment, or on who suggests the transformation and who drives the bargaining.

**VIIa.** This motif—the **rejuvenation proposal**—remains intact in every re-telling, but the directionality and intent of the proposition vary widely. In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, Cyavana himself demands the transformation as a response to the request for *Soma* rights made by the Aśvins’ in motif Vc, while in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Sukanyā repeats Cyavana’s demand to the gods in accordance with Cyavana’s coaching. The *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, in keeping with their less self-seeking Cyavana, have the Aśvins suggest the transformation. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, since the Aśvins’ romantic interest in Sukanyā is absent, Cyavana simply proposes the idea as a friendly trade to which the gods eagerly agree: youth for him and *Soma* for them.

The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* includes a unique element here: the Aśvins take Cyavana to the *śaiśava* (lit. “childish” or “relating to the child”) of the Sarasvatī, presumably a site on the river with youth-restoring capabilities.<sup>40</sup>

**VIIb.** **Cyavana’s transformation into a young man** identical to the Aśvins and the concomitant need for Sukanyā to identify her husband occurs in every variant except the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Within the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, the motif is nascent and its expression is

<sup>40</sup> Hopkins (1905) is particularly concerned with this section, and see Witzel (1987:382 n.10) for a more detailed analysis of the place and the term.



abrupt: as he is ordered to enter the river, Cyavana warns Sukanyā that he and the Aśvins will be identical after the rejuvenation, and instructs her in how to identify him.

In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, the identity device has become central to the storyline: the Aśvins' suggestion that they transform Cyavana into a young man as handsome as they are so that Sukanyā may choose a husband from the three is allowed to arise organically within the wooing scene, where the gods employ it as a device to counter the girl's declarations of fidelity. By transforming Cyavana, the Aśvins' argument goes, they will have leveled the playing field, thus creating a legitimate opportunity for a *svayamvara*.<sup>41</sup> In the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, they do so in a panicked response to Sukanyā's threat of a curse as well as a counter to her protestations regarding her fidelity.

In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, the Aśvins order Sukanyā to consult Cyavana about the plan, and she does so; as was discussed above under VIa, this appears to be a transplantation of the earlier conference between Cyavana and Sukanyā.

### Cluster VIII: The Transformation and *Svayamvara*

This cluster's highlight is "the indistinguishable divinities at the *svayamvara*." This bears some similarity to the *svayamvara* in the tale of Nala and Damayanti (*Mbh.* 3.54), though in reverse: in the tale of Nala and Damayanti, the gods have all made themselves resemble Nala in the hopes of winning Damayanti's hand, whereas here Cyavana is made to resemble the gods.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
<b>VIIIa.</b> THE AŚVINS AND CYAVANA GO INTO THE SARASVATĪ RIVER	<b>VIIIa.</b> The Aśvins order Sukanyā to take Cyavana into a lake; she does so (4.1.5.12)	<b>VIIIa.</b> The Aśvins order Cyavana into a lake on the Narmada River, and enter it themselves (3.123.15-16)	<b>VIII.</b> The Aśvins and Cyavana go into the Mānasarovara Lake (7.5.20-22)	<b>VIII.</b> The Aśvins take Cyavana with them into a lake (9.3.13-14)
<b>VIIIb.</b> Cyavana and Aśvins <b>emerge young and identical</b> (3.125.6)	<b>VIIIb.</b> Cyavana <b>emerges young.</b> (4.1.5.12)	<b>VIIIb.</b> Cyavana and Aśvins <b>emerge young and identical.</b> (3.123.17-18)	<b>VIIIb.</b> Cyavana and Aśvins <b>emerge young and identical</b> (7.5.22-24)	<b>VIIIb.</b> Cyavana and Aśvins <b>emerge young and identical</b> (9.3.15)
<b>VIIIc.</b> Sukanyā recognizes Cyavana. (3.125.7)	[Sukanyā does not need to make a choice]	<b>VIIIc.</b> Sukanyā chooses Cyavana, using mind and intellect (3.123.19)	<b>VIIIc.</b> Sukanyā cannot recognize Cyavana; she calls on the goddess, who reveals him. (7.5.26-41) The Aśvins reward her fidelity and prepare to leave (7.5.41-42)	<b>VIIIc.</b> Sukanyā cannot recognize Cyavana, so she throws herself under the protection of the Aśvins. (9.3.16) They reward her fidelity and reveal the true Cyavana (9.3.17)

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed and accessible discussion of the nuances of Indic marriage types and rituals, see Jamison (1994).

**VIIIa. The rejuvenation is carried out by immersion in water.** The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* omits any mention of the entry of the three into the water, but that they did so may be assumed from the description of their emergence. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* forgoes the gods' entry into the water and Sukanyā's *svayamvara*; their romantic interest in Sukanyā forgotten, the Aśvins are interested only in learning about their "imperfection." The other versions send the three male characters into the water together: the Sarasvatī River in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, a lake on the Narmadā River in the *Mahābhārata*, the Mānasarovara Lake in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, nameless lakes in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.<sup>42</sup>

**VIIIb. Cyavana and the Aśvins emerge from the water identical in appearance.** This is a hallmark of the tale, but as this cluster demonstrates, sometimes even a hallmark is not present in every version: it does not occur in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Mystifyingly, it does, however, appear in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, where the omission of the Aśvins' romantic interest in Sukanyā renders it manifestly anachronistic. That version, alone among those containing a *svayamvara*, gives us no forewarning about the fact that Sukanyā will be required to identify her husband; indeed, nothing in the earlier part of the tale renders it comprehensible. The persistence of a feature or element, when the reason for its inclusion is no longer there, surely deserves study; there are unquestionably other examples of this phenomenon in literature, both recognized and unrecognized.<sup>43</sup>

Another intriguing feature of this motif is the fact that it represents a reversal of one of the Vedic references to Cyavana: as noted above, *RV* 1.116.10d indicates that the Aśvins "made him a lord of maidens" (*pātim akṛṇutaṃ kanīṅām*).<sup>44</sup> Is the presentation of three suitors for Sukanyā an inversion of an earlier plot element that gave Cyavana three wives?

**VIIIc. In every version that contains a *svayamvara*, Sukanyā chooses Cyavana.** The particulars, however, play out differently in each, and with vastly different consequences to the construction of the narrative and of Sukanyā's character. In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, Sukanyā recognizes Cyavana without fanfare, having been coached in advance about the signs for which she must look. There is little indication in the presentation of the theme (beyond the Aśvins' earlier romantic interest in her) that the occasion is intended to be read as a *svayamvara*; the Aśvins appear to consider the rejuvenation to have been performed only to convince Cyavana to give them information about being included in the *Soma* ritual. In the *Mahābhārata*, confronted with a set of radiantly handsome and identical (*tulyarūpadhāras*, literally "bearing equivalent forms") young men, Sukanyā gladly remains faithful to Cyavana, choosing him "with her mind

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<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that all three versions stand in sharp contrast to the Vedic allusions to the story, where, as noted above, references to the transformation at *RV* 1.116.10 and *RV* 5.74.5 indicate that it involved the removal of Cyavana's skin.

<sup>43</sup> The famous duals of the "Embassy Scene" in *Iliad* IX are often presumed to reflect an earlier version in which the embassy had only two members. Roessel (1989) speculates, for example, that Odysseus' killing of the monstrous stag on Circe's island may be a similar vestige of an abandoned plot point involving inadvertent cannibalism by Odysseus and his companions.

<sup>44</sup> Sanskrit *pati* in compounds can mean either "spouse" or "lord," and because Sanskrit contains dual forms as well as singulars and plurals, use of the plural *kanīṅām* indicates there were at least three maidens involved.

and intellect” (*niścītya manasā buddhyā*), giving Sukanyā’s character an agency and centrality far beyond anything seen in the earlier versions.<sup>45</sup>

The *Devībhāgavata* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas* retain the increased authority and importance of Sukanyā’s character, but they introduce a new element: although Sukanyā has every intention of choosing Cyavana, she is initially unable to ascertain which one of the three he is. In the *Devī Purāṇa*, Sukanyā expresses her doubts and resolves to place her trust in the Devī. She sings a hymn of praise, and is rewarded with the ability to discern her legitimate spouse. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* adopts the innovation, but has Sukanyā instead place her trust in the Aśvins themselves, thus (somewhat awkwardly) re-casting the *svayamvara* as a spontaneous test of her piety and chastity.

### Cluster IX: The Aśvins Pursue *Soma* Rights

With the *svayamvara* concluded, the tale turns to the Aśvins and their *Soma* rights. As with motif IVa (Sukanyā’s betrothal to Cyavana), a motif may assume many different forms while still accomplishing the same narrative outcome. This cluster is also the site of a struggle between the oldest and the later versions over the inclusion of the mysterious figure of Dadhyañc. Called in as an outside consultant on the workings of the sacrifice in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, his role in advancing the twin gods’ quest for *Soma* rights is first relocated to the end of the tale in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and then taken over by Cyavana in the last three variants.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
<b>IXa.</b> The Aśvins demand to know how to be included in the <i>Soma</i> sacrifice (3.125.8-9)  Cyavana tells the Aśvins that the gods are trying to sacrifice, but failing. He directs them to Dadhyañc (3.126.1-8)	<b>IXa.</b> The Aśvins ask Sukanyā why they are not perfect (4.1.5.13)  Cyavana tells the Aśvins that they are excluded from the <i>Soma</i> sacrifice, and therefore incomplete (4.1.5.13)	<b>IXa.</b> Cyavana promises <i>Soma</i> rights to the Aśvins, who return to the heavens. Cyavana and Sukanyā disport themselves in the forest (3.123.20-24)	<b>IXa.</b> Cyavana offers the Aśvins a boon. The Aśvins ask for rights to the <i>Soma</i> . Overjoyed about his transformation, Cyavana begins to truly enjoy life with his wife (7.5.43-6.5)	<b>IXa.</b> ↑ Cyavana offers to include the Aśvins in the <i>Soma</i> in return for his rejuvenation; they accept (9.3.11-13)

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, two MS (K<sub>4</sub> and D<sub>2</sub>) go so far as to insert an additional line: “Since I, with my mind, wish for no other husband except my own / by this truth may the two gods give me my husband” (*yadyahaṃ manasā nānyam patimicche svakaṃ vinā / tena satyena me devau prayacchetām patiṃ mama*), a verse that powerfully recalls the words of other heroines of the *Mahābhārata*, most notably Damayantī (in the other famous *svayamvara*-by-recognition scene at *Mbh.* 3.54.17-19) who declares that she has never strayed in thought (*manasā*) and thrice repeats the *tena satyena* formula known as the *satyakriyā* or “Act of Truth” (see also, Lüders 1959:486-509 or Brown 1972). The venerable heroine Kuntī also invokes the *satyakriyā* in her speech to Kṛṣṇa at 5.88.60 regarding the rights of her sons. Additionally, the *manasā* employed here by Sukanyā calls to mind *Mbh.* 3.278.27 where the heroine Savitrī defends her choice of husband with the words, “The decision was made with my mind . . .” (*manasā niścayaṃ kṛtvā*).

<p><b>IXb.</b> They go to Dadhyañc, who has been threatened by Indra with decapitation if he shares his knowledge, but he teaches the Aśvins after they temporarily replace his head with a horse's head (3.126.8-21)</p> <p><b>[‡ 3.127.1-3 listed below at XIa]</b></p>	<p><b>IXb.</b> Dadhyañc has been threatened by Indra with decapitation if he shares his knowledge, but he teaches the Aśvins after they temporarily replace his head with a horse's head (14.1.1.18-24)</p>			
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**IXa. The Issue of *Soma* Rights.** The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* has the Aśvins point out that they have granted Cyavana's wish and he must now tell them how to be included in the *Soma* ritual. Cyavana tells them that the other gods are currently performing a "headless" sacrifice at Kurukṣetra, but that it is failing because "the head of the sacrifice was cut off, and that which Dadhyañc the Atharvan saw, you two go to him for that" (*tad yajñasya śiro 'chidyata. tad yad dadhyañ ātharvaṇo 'nvapaśyat tam tad gacchatam*, JB 3.126.3-4).<sup>46</sup>

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the disgruntled Aśvins ask Sukanyā why they are not perfect, but it is Cyavana who replies, telling them that it is because they are excluded from the *Soma* ritual in which the other gods take part; upon receipt of this information they go to join the other gods at the sacrifice.

The three post-*brāhmaṇic* versions omit Dadhyañc entirely.<sup>47</sup> In the *Mahābhārata*, the grateful Cyavana simply gives the Aśvins the *Soma* boon himself, unsolicited. In the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, Cyavana offers the Aśvins a boon to thank them for the restoration of his health, which accompanied the transformation. Though the question of their access to the *Soma* has not been previously mentioned in the text, they ask for the right to consume it at the sacrifice. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, of course, the offer of *Soma* rights was extended simultaneously with the Cyavana's request to be rejuvenated, so no motif intrudes between the Aśvins' revealing of Cyavana to Sukanyā and the return of her father in motif IXb.

<sup>46</sup> The background to this is given at *ŚB* 14.1.1-25. In brief: the "head of the sacrifice" is Viṣṇu's head, and it was cut off (by termites who chew his bow-string and make it snap) during a divine sacrifice in Kurukṣetra. Indra somehow merges with the glory of the headless body of Viṣṇu, and does not wish this state of affairs to be discontinued. Dadhyañc knows how to restore the head, so Indra threatens him in an attempt to ensure his silence. Dadhyañc is sometimes conflated with the better-known Dādhīci (as at *RV* 1.117.22), and the *Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa* of the *Sāma Veda*, 14.6.10, claims Cyavana is the son of Dadhīci: *Cyavano vāi Dādhīco 'śvinoḥ priya āsīt, so 'jīryat; tam etena sāmṇā 'psu vyaiṅkayatām, tam punar yuvānam akurutām* ("Cyavana, the son of Dādhīci, was dear to the Aśvins. He grew old, with this *Vīṅka* chant they threw him in the water, they made him young again," discussed at Hopkins 1905:45).

<sup>47</sup> It is not surprising to see one seer substituted for another; though many have defining characteristics, they are a relatively homogeneous class of being. The phenomenon of one character being replaced by or conflated with another of the same type is noted by Lord (1960:121) in the context of heroes: "The fact that the same song occurs attached to different heroes would seem to indicate that the story is more important than the historical hero to which it is attached. There is a close relationship between hero and tale, but with some tales at least the *type* of hero is more significant than the *specific* hero."

**IXb. The Aśvins go to Dadhyañc** and ask him to teach them, but he protests that he has been threatened by Indra with decapitation if he shares his knowledge. The Aśvins suggest that he allow them to replace his own head temporarily with that of a horse, and then teach them with this surrogate head; he agrees to this and teaches them.<sup>48</sup>

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, though Dadhyañc does not appear in the narration of *The tale of Cyavana* in *kāṇḍa* 3, ten *kāṇḍas* (“chapters”) later, at 14.1.1.18-24, we find a scene of Dadhyañc teaching the Aśvins how to remedy the headlessness of the sacrifice while wearing the head of a horse. The scene is in no way presented as having an association with Cyavana or his story. Whether this may suggest that the *Jaiminīya* combined two stories that usually existed separately, or the *Śatapatha* split the *Jaiminīya*’s tale, is unclear.

### Cluster X: The King Re-enters the Narrative

All five narratives now begin to set the stage for a sacrifice at which the twin gods will exercise their rights to *Soma*. In the first two versions, the Aśvins’ first consumption of *Soma* takes place without Cyavana’s participation, but as the narrative evolves from an explication of ritual practice into a fully-realized story, its structure is altered to tighten the focus by expanding Cyavana’s role and eliminating extraneous elements. This requires that in the three later versions Śaryāti must return to the ashram and collaborate with Cyavana to stage the sacrifice, and this addition gives us the chance to see a new theme created and then embroidered on and expanded by the poet.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
(↓)Xa. Cyavana goes to Śaryāta (3.128.1)	-omitted-	Xa. Hearing that Cyavana’s youth was restored, Śaryāti returns (1.124.1-3)	Xa. Śaryāti returns at the request of his wife (7.6.6-13)	Xa. Śaryāti returns in order to sacrifice (9.3.18)
-not present-	-not present-	Xb. Śaryāti is delighted at the couple’s happiness (1.124.1-3)	Xb. Seeing Sukanyā with the rejuvenated Cyavana, Śaryāti berates her for infidelity, but she reveals Cyavana is her husband (7.6.14-45)	Xb. Seeing Sukanyā with the rejuvenated Cyavana, Śaryāti berates her for infidelity, but she reveals Cyavana is her husband (9.3.18-23)

**Xa. The King and Cyavana Re-unite.** In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, at a much later point in the narrative Cyavana pays a visit to Śaryāta after the conclusion of his dealings with the Aśvins, a surprising thing for him to do, given that Śaryāta tried to trick him by having Sukanyā flee. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, King Śaryāta and his tribe make no re-appearance, but in the epic and post-epic versions Śaryāti returns to Cyavana’s ashram. The *Mahābhārata* has Śaryāti return when he hears about the rejuvenation, while the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* explains that he

<sup>48</sup> This part of the tale is alluded to in hymns to the Aśvins at *Rg Veda* 1.116.12 and 1.117.22.

has come back at the request of his wife to check on Sukanyā. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* takes a more direct route and has Śaryāti return in order to request that Cyavana perform a sacrifice for him.

**Xb.** Upon the king's return, the *Mahābhārata* merely records his delight upon seeing the happy couple, but the *Bhāgavata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇas* introduce a twist: **Śaryāti mistakes the rejuvenated Cyavana for Sukanyā's illicit lover**. The king flies into a rage at his daughter's apparent unchastity, an addition that ties in nicely with the concerns he expressed at *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 3.23-31, regarding the risk of adultery inherent in a physically mismatched marriage. Eventually, of course, the situation is sorted out, and Śaryāti is delighted to discover the change in his daughter's marital fortunes.

## XI. The Sacrifice

At Cluster XI in the *Brāhmaṇa* versions, the Aśvins attend the gods' sacrifice, where they attempt to receive access to *Soma*. The *Jaiminīya* then goes on to include a second sacrifice, this one officiated by Cyavana on Śaryāta's behalf. As the tale evolves, however, the divine and royal sacrifices are consolidated, tidying up the narrative structure, and allowing the royal sacrifice to become the site of the tale's climax, an attack by the god Indra.

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
<b>XIa.</b> The Aśvins arrive at the gods' sacrifice (3.127.4)	<b>XIa.</b> The Aśvins arrive at the gods' sacrifice and ask to be admitted (4.1.5.13-14)	-omitted-	-omitted-	-omitted-
<b>XIb.</b> (↓) Cyavana holds a sacrifice on Śaryāta's behalf (3.128.2-4)  <b>XIb.</b> (↓) The seers hold a sacrifice on Śaryāta's behalf; this is the last time gods and men drink <i>Soma</i> together (3.159.2-3)	-omitted-	<b>XIb.</b> Cyavana and Śaryāti assemble a sacrifice (1.124.4-7)	<b>XIb.</b> Cyavana and Śaryāti assemble a sacrifice (7.6.46-50) Indra becomes agitated (7.6.51-52)	<b>XIb.</b> Cyavana caused Śaryāti to perform a sacrifice (9.3.24)
<b>XIc.</b> (↓) Cyavana prepares to offer <i>Soma</i> to the Aśvins (3.159.4)	-not present-	<b>XIc.</b> Cyavana offers the <i>Soma</i> cup to the Aśvins (1.124.8)	<b>XIc.</b> Cyavana begins to offer the <i>Soma</i> cup to the Aśvins (7.6.53)	<b>XIc.</b> Cyavana offers the <i>Soma</i> cup to the Aśvins (9.3.24)
<b>XId.</b> (↓) Indra seizes the cup (3.159.5)	<b>XId.</b> The gods refuse to let the Aśvins in because they are physicians (4.1.5.14)	<b>XId.</b> Indra expresses doubts about the Aśvins' fitness for <i>Soma</i> , and argues with Cyavana (1.124.9-13)	<b>XId.</b> Indra expresses doubts about the Aśvins' fitness for <i>Soma</i> , and argues with Cyavana (7.6.53)	-omitted-
		Cyavana again offers the <i>Soma</i> cup to the Aśvins (1.124.8)	Cyavana argues with Indra, and again offers <i>Soma</i> to the Aśvins (7.6.54-7.1)	

**XIa. The Divine Sacrifice.** In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the events that transpire at the first (divine) sacrifice are unconnected to Cyavana: the Aśvins go to join the sacrificing gods, leaving the seer and his wife behind.

**XIb. The Royal Sacrifice is Assembled.** As noted above, the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* contains two descriptions of additional sacrifices held by Śaryāta. The first of these appears at the end of the main Cyavana story at 3.128.2-4, and ties up the remaining loose end in the tale: it allows Cyavana to fulfill the third of the wishes he made at motif Ia in the *Jaiminīya* (to sacrifice with 1,000 cows), proving the effectiveness of the *sāman* to which that version is a testimony.<sup>49</sup> At *JB* 3.159.2-3, the text, however, contains yet a third sacrifice, this one conducted by the *ṛṣis*<sup>50</sup> on Śaryāta's behalf; this was, the text claims, the last time gods and men drink *Soma* together (*JB* 3.159.3), and the tale is intended to explain the origin of the three Vāidanvata chants, whose eponymous *ṛṣi*, Vidanvat, plays a significant role in this version.<sup>51</sup>

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* does not include either version of Śaryāta's sacrifice, but it is Śaryāta's sacrifice that the three later texts pick up and expand while the divine sacrifice vanishes.

Though it is the climax of the tale, the overall treatment of Śaryāti's sacrifice (aside from the upcoming conflict) is surprisingly minimal. There are none of the florid descriptions that some of the versions have used so heavily elsewhere: the most elaboration given is that "on a good auspicious day he, possessed of enormous wealth and prosperity, prepared an excellent place for the performance of a sacrifice" (*DevībhP.* 7.6.51) or "the king built a splendid sacrificial platform built and filled it with every kind of desirable object" (*Mbh.* 3.124.6).

The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* foreshadows the upcoming scene of conflict by noting that Indra becomes nervous upon catching sight of the Aśvins, and asks the other gods what the twin gods are doing at the sacrifice (*DevībhP.* 7.6.48).

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<sup>49</sup> The *Jaiminīya* is not the only *brahmaṇa* to include a sacrifice performed by Cyavana for Śaryāta; the *Aitareya* 8.4:21 reports that Cyavana conducts an *aindreṇa mahābhiṣeka* (a special coronation ritual sacred to Indra) for the king.

<sup>50</sup> The *ṛṣis* are the "sages" or "seers," a select class of mortals of a near-divine status, which they generally acquire through lineage, the composition of hymns to the gods, ascetic practices, or some combination of the three. The theme of the *ṛṣi* who accrues so much power that he is able to combat or impose his will on gods or other immortal beings is a frequent centerpiece of Sanskrit tales.

<sup>51</sup> The duplication of a section of narrative framework so that new twists may be added to it is a phenomenon observable in numerous other Sanskrit narratives. I term this phenomenon the "Paper Doll," after the child's game in which a string of figures is cut from the same template and then each one is decorated individually. The phenomenon is certainly not confined to Indic examples, however. A straightforward Homeric example is the parallel assaults by suitors in the *Odyssey* (Eurymachus at 18.494ff and Ctesippus at 19.370ff): words are exchanged / the suitor grabs and throws an item (stool, hoof) / Odysseus ducks / the item hits someone/thing else / Telemachus admonishes them / the suitors are stunned / one man (Agelaus/Amphinomus) speaks up in support of Telemachus. In Book 18, everyone feasts happily then goes home to bed, where in 20, Athena sends a madness upon them. Another example may be found in the events on Pharos and Thrinacia at *Od.* 4.360-70 and 12.325-28: The men are trapped on an island, and the winds won't blow; they fruitlessly attempt to fish, the hero wanders off alone, and a divine intervention takes place. On a slightly larger scale, Wilamowitz (1884:116-21) felt that Circe and Calypso were "folk" and "epic" versions of the same tale.

**XIc. *Soma* Proffered.** In the *Jaiminīya*'s third sacrifice, and in the epic and *purāṇic* versions, Cyavana, in accordance with his vow, offers the *Soma* cup to the Aśvins in the presence of the other deities, including Indra.

**XId. Rejection of the Aśvins rights to *Soma*.** The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* contains neither an explanation of the Aśvins' prior exclusion nor any attempt to prevent them from joining in the *Soma* at the first two sacrifices. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, however, the gods at the divine sacrifice say they will not let the Aśvins in because of their inherent uncleanness as physicians. Their objection is mild, however, and as we shall see at motif XIIc, the Aśvins are quite easily able to talk them out of it by means of the same verbal ploys Cyavana used upon them.

In the *Mahābhārata* and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, while it is only Indra who intervenes as the cup is offered, his objections are far more strenuous and profound. He expresses his concerns to the other gods, and argues with Cyavana; Cyavana, undeterred, offers the cup a second time. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* does not include Indra's initial objections, jumping instead straight to Indra's attack on Cyavana, the subject of the next cluster.

## XII. The Fight

Here we see the culmination of the story's evolutionary arc. What began as a disorganized and rambling paean to a particular *sāman* in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, and turned into an elliptical narrative explication of a part of the *Soma* ritual in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, becomes, in the epic and *purāṇic* versions, a tale that essentially uses characters with the same names and the same general narrative events to tell a rather different story. Clusters IV through VIII saw the emergence of a love story between Cyavana and Sukanyā, and in Cluster XII the tale assimilates itself to another widespread Indic story pattern, namely: the god Indra's numerous conflicts with ascetics.<sup>52</sup>

Cluster XII is also particularly valuable to us for the opportunity it gives to observe a particular issue: when one scene disappears and a similar one takes its place, how should we understand the relationship between the two and the nature of the changes that led to one replacing the other? In the first two versions, Indra attacks the seer Dadhyañc, but in the latter three, his hostilities shift to Cyavana.

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<sup>52</sup> In the *Vedas*, Indra stands among the most important of the gods, presiding as king and war-leader over the rest, but over time his importance dwindles. While Vedic allusions to the god largely concern his victories and feats of daring, by the period of the *Mahābhārata*'s composition, his power has been eclipsed by the rise of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva. By the epics, and most dramatically in the *Purāṇas*, Indra has become the silliest and most fallible of the deities, desperately jealous of his powers and obsessed with disrupting the *tejas*-building (*tejas* is a form of accrued spiritual capital which gives its possessor what are essentially magical powers) meditative work of powerful ascetics. Winternitz (1972:392) states: "The characteristic of this later brahmanical poetry, however, is exaggeration, lack of moderation in general, and especially immoderate exaltation of the saints—Brahmins and ascetics—over the gods. Even in the actual *Indra-myths* connected with the Vedic legends of the gods, Indra is no longer the mighty champion and conqueror of demons."



<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
<b>XIIa.</b> Indra attacks Dadhyañc and cuts the horse's head from Dadhyañc's shoulders. The Aśvins re-attach Dadyanc's real head (3.127.1-3)↑	<b>XIIa.</b> Indra attacks Dadhyañc and cuts the horse's head from Dadhyañc's shoulders. The Aśvins re-attach Dadhyañc's real head (14.1.1.24)↓	<b>XIIa.</b> Indra attacks Cyavana with his thunderbolt; Cyavana paralyzes Indra's arm (1.124.14-16)	<b>XIIa.</b> Indra attacks Cyavana with his thunderbolt; Cyavana paralyzes Indra's thunderbolt (7.7.1-11)	<b>XIIa.</b> Indra attacks Cyavana with his thunderbolt; Cyavana paralyzes Indra's arm (9.3.25)
Vidanvat attacks Indra and a fight ensues between gods and <i>ṛṣis</i> (3.159.6-160.2)  <b>XIIb.</b> (↓) Together, the <i>ṛṣis</i> create an <i>asura</i> who charges at Indra (3.160.3-5)  The gods decide to flee; their absence saddens the <i>ṛṣis</i> ; Vidanvat performs the <i>Vaidanvata</i> chants and repairs the situation (3.60.6-19)		<b>XIIb.</b> Cyavana creates an <i>asura</i> who charges at Indra (1.124.18-24)	<b>XIIb.</b> Cyavana creates a pair of <i>asuras</i> who intimidate Indra and menace the other devas (7.7.12-24) Indra thinks of Br̥haspati, who comes and advises him not to fight Cyavana (7.7.24-29)	
<b>XIIc.</b> The gods ask for someone to put the head of the sacrifice in its place; the Aśvins do so. The gods give the Aśvins the right to be included in the <i>Soma</i> ritual and make them priests (3.127.5-15)	<b>XIIc.</b> The Aśvins tell the other gods that the sacrifice is headless, and that if they are invited in they will explain it. The gods give the Aśvins the right to be included in the <i>Soma</i> ritual and make them priests (4.1.5.14-16)	<b>XIIc.</b> Indra surrenders and grants the Aśvins <i>Soma</i> (1.125.1-3)	<b>XIIc.</b> Indra surrenders and grants the Aśvins <i>Soma</i> (7.7.30-34)  (↓) Cyavana orders the Aśvins to drink the <i>Soma</i> (7.7.40-41)	<b>XIIc.</b> The gods give the Aśvins the right to be included in the <i>Soma</i> ritual (9.3.26)

**XIIa. Indra attacks.** In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, when Indra sees Dadhyañc teaching the Aśvins, he carries out his threat to decapitate him for sharing the arcane knowledge. Thanks to the forethought of the Aśvins, Indra cuts off only the surrogate head and the Aśvins easily reattach Dadhyañc's own head. Indra takes no further action, and the Aśvins are free to move on to the divine sacrifice. In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*'s later *Vāidanvata* scene (3.159-60), it is Vidanvat who attacks Indra and a fight ensues between gods and *ṛṣis*.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* does contain Dadhyañc's teaching of the Aśvins and his decapitation, but not as a part of *The Tale of Cyavana*. Rather, Dadhyañc's instruction of the twin gods occurs as a freestanding episode in *Kāṇḍa* 14, and in a more simplified form than that in which it appears in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*.

In the epic and the *purāṇas*, however, Dadhyañc's character has vanished and Indra's attack is made instead upon Cyavana himself. When Indra's verbal attempt to dissuade Cyavana from sharing *Soma* with the Aśvins fails at XIc, Indra attacks Cyavana with his *vajra*

(“thunderbolt”). Cyavana responds to the assault by paralyzing Indra’s arm in the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, he paralyzes the thunderbolt.<sup>53</sup>

At issue here is whether the Indra-Cyavana version of the fight should be conceptualized as a re-located and re-worked variation of the Indra-Dadhyañc hostilities (as I have done here), or if the loss of Dadhyañc and the creation of the fight between Cyavana should be seen as separate developments. As we have seen with other motifs in the tale, such as IIIc (The harassment of Cyavana), or VIc (The negotiations with the Aśvins), it is quite common for a story to retain an action but re-assign it to another character. Also supporting the conclusion that the Indra-Cyavana feud is, in fact, the genetic descendant of the Indra-Dadhyañc feud, at 7.7.5 in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* Indra threatens to sever Cyavana’s head (as he does to Dadhyañc in the *brāhmaṇas*).

**XIIb. Cyavana Fights back.** In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, Dadhyañc (content to escape with his life) offers no resistance to Indra, but in the *Vaidanvata* scene the *ṛṣis* join together to create an *asura* who charges at Indra. The gods flee *en masse*, and the fear of their permanent loss saddens the *ṛṣis*; Vidanvat performs the *Vaidanvata* chants and repairs the situation, ending that version of the tale.

In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, it is Cyavana who fights back against the overbearing god. In the *Mahābhārata* it is he who conjures up an *asura*, Mada<sup>54</sup> the demon of “Intoxication,” from the sacrificial fire, and Mada attacks Indra on Cyavana’s behalf. The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* tracks the *Mahābhārata*’s version, but in its typical fashion it expands the motif: Cyavana first creates a female *asura*, Krityā, who then brings forth Mada from her own body. Both texts’ descriptions of Mada focus on his gaping mouth as the demon rushes at Indra to swallow him.

In the *Mahābhārata*, faced with such a foe, the already-paralyzed Indra admits defeat, but in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, Indra first mentally summons Bṛhaspati, the teacher of the gods. When Bṛhaspati informs him that the situation is hopeless, Indra relents and surrenders. Winternitz (1981:392 n.1) notes the striking difference in the way this conflict is expressed at *JB* 3.159-60 (the Cyavana-less account of the gods’ sacrifice) and in the *Mahābhārata*:

In the *Jaim. Br.* however it results already in a test of strength between the *Ṛṣis* and the gods, and the *Ṛṣis* create Mada to help them. But as Indra and the gods flee from the monster, the sacrifice threatens to become an Indra-less and a god-less one, and the *Ṛṣi* requests Indra with prayers and invocations very politely to come back. Only in the description of the *Mahābhārata* is the god Indra totally humiliated by the holy man.

**XIIc. The Aśvins Take Part in the Soma.** In the *brāhmaṇas*, no hostilities take place at the sacrifice. In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, the Aśvins join the rest of the gods at their sacrifice in

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<sup>53</sup> *Mahābhārata* 13.141-42 contains a second, and much abbreviated, version of this part of the tale whose only significant deviation is that Indra attacks Cyavana with both his *vajra* and a mountain; Cyavana must therefore paralyze the mountain as well.

<sup>54</sup> Dumézil (1948:101-05) compares Mada to the Germanic Kvasir.

Kurukṣetra and the gods ask whether anyone can put the head of the sacrifice in its place. The Aśvins step up to do so, and are rewarded with inclusion in the *Soma* ritual.

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, to counter the gods’ objections that as physicians they are unfit for *Soma*, the Aśvins come in to explain and remedy the headlessness of the sacrifice<sup>55</sup> and are given the *Soma* cup by the other gods. They become the *adhvaryu* priests of the ritual and restore the “head” of the sacrifice.<sup>56</sup> In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, the official awarding of the *Soma* rights is done by the defeated Indra as part of his surrender to Cyavana; the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* reverts to the motif as it occurred in the *brāhmaṇas*, and the Aśvins are awarded *Soma* rights by all the gods.

### XIII. Resolution

<i>Jaiminīya Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Br.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>	<i>Devībhāgavata P.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata P.</i>
		<b>XIIIa.</b> Indra tells Cyavana he only resisted to allow Cyavana and Sukanyā to achieve glory and renown (3.125.4-6)	<b>XIIIa.</b> Indra tells Cyavana he only resisted so he could test Cyavana’s powerful <i>tapas</i> and begs him to take back Mada (7.7.34-36)	
<b>XIIIb.</b> (↓) Mada begs to be made useful and is incorporated into alcohol (3.160.20-23)		<b>XIIIb.</b> Indra is freed, and Mada is incorporated into women, drinking, gambling and hunting (3.125.7-9)	<b>XIIIb.</b> Mada is decommissioned and incorporated into women, drinking, gambling and hunting. This calms the devas (7.7.37-39)	
[‡3.128.1-4 listed at IXc]  The virtues of the <i>sāman</i> Cyavana meditated with at the onset of the tale are extolled (3.128.5-11)	The text continues with an explanation of the various parts and accoutrements of the Vedic <i>Soma</i> ritual and how story relates to them. (4.1.5.16-18ff)	Having accomplished these things, Cyavana disports himself in the forest with Sukanyā (3.125.10)	[‡7.7.40-41 listed at XIIc]  The site of the story becomes famous. Śaryāti is happy and returns to his city; the tale turns to his descendant’ deeds (7.7.42-52)	Śaryāti’s descendants and their deeds are listed (9.3.27-28)

<sup>55</sup> *ŚB* 4.1.5.15 informs us that the process by which they do so is described elsewhere in the text, *divākīrtyānām brāhmaṇe* (“in the section on the verses to be sung in the day”). Eggeling (1885:276 n.1) suggests that this refers to *ŚB* 14.1.1.8.

<sup>56</sup> Versions of this motif crop up in a number of places: for example, the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (*Taitt. S.*) 6.4.9.1 gives a similar version of this story, though unconnected to a tale of Cyavana: the other gods seek help from the Aśvins after the head of the sacrifice is cut off. The Aśvins agree to replace it, but only if they are included in the *Soma* rite. Because the Aśvins are physicians, the other gods must first purify them, but after that the twin gods are allowed to participate.

**XIIIa.** In the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, **Indra makes face-saving excuses for his behavior**: he claims that he resisted in order to give Cyavana a chance to achieve glory (*Mahābhārata* 3.125.4-6), or as a test of Cyavana’s spiritual might (*Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.7.34-36).

**XIIIb.** The *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* must dispense with the savage Mada once his purpose has been served: he is incorporated into women, drinking, gambling and hunting.<sup>57</sup>

The **Final Resolutions** of each story are listed in the last line of the chart. Each version ends in a different way as the text segues to its next tale:<sup>58</sup>

- ❖ The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* gives an explanation of how variant elements in the story relate to the various parts of the Vedic *Soma* ritual.
- ❖ The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* extols the virtues of the *saman* with which Cyavana prayed at the beginning of the text after making his wishes in the *vastu*.
- ❖ Always the most romantic, the *Mahābhārata* returns to the hero and heroine and reports that Cyavana and Sukanyā disport themselves happily in the forest.
- ❖ The *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, though also generally romantic in its approach, ends with Cyavana definitively forcing the Aśvins and Indra to drink the *Soma* together, before turning to Śaryāti’s return to his city, and a description of his descendants and their deeds. No further mention of Cyavana and Sukanyā arises.
- ❖ The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* segues into a discussion of Śaryāti and his descendants; this text never offers a specific conclusion to Cyavana and Sukanyā’s story either.

## Evaluation of the Diagnostic Criteria

Though all five versions are certainly intended to be “faithful” re-tellings of the tale, nearly all of our criteria for evaluating parallels have, to varying degrees, been challenged. How substantial are these changes in a larger context? The following paragraphs analyze each criterion’s performance individually:

**1. The tales should have multiple shared motifs:** Out of the roughly 35 elements shared widely enough to receive a Roman numeral designation above, not even a simple majority is shared intact by all five. In fact we can identify even near-identical occurrences of only 12

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<sup>57</sup> The “divided and distributed sin” motif occurs in other situations, for example, a *puranic* version of the story of Indra and Vṛtra at *BhāgP.* 6.9.1-19, in which Indra commits the sin of Brahmin murder and distributes the guilt equally among earth, water, trees, and women.

<sup>58</sup> As Lord (1960:119) notes (regarding examples given on pp.114, 117, and 118), endings are particularly susceptible to alteration: “the endings of songs are less stable, more open to variation than their beginnings.”

elements (35%) in every version, and even most of those require some manipulation and vague wording to accommodate the variation in their expression in the tales:

- Ia. The King and his people come to Cyavana's area
- IId. Cyavana curses them (though the nature of the curse varies)
- IIIa. The King questions his people (though the groups specified vary)
- IIIc. The King goes to Cyavana and apologizes
- IVa. Sukanyā is given to Cyavana (though the nature of the arrangement varies)
- IVb. The king and his people depart (in one instance they intend for Sukanyā to follow)
- VIIa. The request/offer/decision to transform Cyavana.
- VIIIa. Cyavana enters the water (sometimes with the Aśvins)
- VIIIb. Cyavana emerges young and handsome
- XIa. A sacrifice is held, whether divine, human, or mixed.
- XIIa. Indra attacks someone
- XIIc. The Aśvins receive inclusion in the *Soma* ritual

The skeleton of motifs shared in all five versions reduces the story to four interwoven basic components: a wronged ascetic's curse upon a king and his people, a young woman dealing with unwanted divine attention, the restoration of an old man's lost youth, and an aetiological myth about a pair of gods' participation in a divine ritual. All four of these occur in numerous other Indic tales, and are not even expressed identically here.

**2. The shared motifs should occur in the same sequence:** Though the sequence could have been altered by a number of the substantive changes observed, sequence is by far the most durable of the criteria. There were only five places where major elements changed sequence:

- Ia, Ib.** Cyavana is introduced after the King and his retinue in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*.
- Ib.** The description of Cyavana's age is moved to slightly later in the text in the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.
- VIa, VIb.** The conference between Cyavana and Sukanyā occurs after she has negotiated with the Aśvins in the *Mahābhārata* and *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*.
- IXb, XIIa.** In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* the Dadhyañc episode is in a different story that occurs 14 books later.
- Xa, XIa.** Cyavana goes to Śaryāta to hold a sacrifice at the end of the tale in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, as well as later in the same text, but the *Mahābhārata*, *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* have Śaryāti come back to Cyavana as soon as Cyavana has been rejuvenated, and the sacrifice is held shortly after that.

The conclusion drawn from the evaluation of this set of narratives is that the shared sequence of a set of similar motifs may well be more important than their number in making a determination of genetic relationship. This issue will be discussed further under Criterion #4.

**3. The tales should have specific, peculiar, and significant shared details:** Many, if not all, of the most specific and peculiar details are among the following:

- a. Cyavana's requested abandonment by his sons
- b. Sukanyā's toplessness
- c. Cyavana falling in love with Sukanyā
- d. The black snake that prevents Sukanyā's departure
- e. The tribe's attempt to trick Cyavana
- f. Sukanyā's assumption of ascetic garb
- g. Sukanyā's nudity when she is first seen by the Aśvins
- h. Cyavana's riddle for the Aśvins
- i. The Devī's intervention when Sukanyā cannot discern the real Cyavana
- j. The creation of Kṛtyā
- k. Indra attacks Cyavana with a mountain, as well as with his *vajra*
- l. The summoning of Bṛhaspati

All of these, however, occur in only one version, and are thus not shared. Other distinctive motifs are shared only by two or three versions:

- a. The anthill (3 versions)
- b. The pelting with dung balls (2 versions)
- c. Dadhyañc and his temporary head (2 versions)
- d. The creation of the demon Mada (3 versions)
- e. Cyavana's glowing eyes (3 versions)
- f. The constipation of the tribe (3 versions)
- g. The piercing of Cyavana's eye (3 versions)

In fact, the anthill, one of the most striking details of the whole story, is not even peculiar to this tale: the same motif occurs with the sage Vālmīki (see Note 24); one tale may have borrowed from the other, or both may have taken the motif from some common source.<sup>59</sup> The *svayamvara* with three identical bridegrooms is problematic in the same way, since a similar scene occurs in the *Tale of Nala and Damayanti* (*Mbh.* 3.54).

Several other striking features (the *svayamvara* with three identical suitors, the Aśvins' love for Sukanyā, the denigration of Cyavana by the Aśvins, and Sukanyā's declaration of fidelity to her husband) are absent from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; if all versions but that one and the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* were to be lost, the similarities between the tales would be little more than the character's names and the highly predictable "workhorse" motifs laid out above.

The conclusion here must be that peculiar details are eye-catching, but (at least according to the evidence of this tale) they have a strong propensity to be innovations.

**4. Similarities should be heterogeneous, unpredictable, and non-trivial:** Reviewing again the list of shared motifs, we see immediately that most are clearly vulnerable to charges of being homogeneous, predictable, and/or trivial. So many sequences with a straightforward and

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<sup>59</sup> See Goldman (1976:97-101).

predictably logical progression were retained that it should probably be assumed that predictability in sequence is a contributing factor to retention.<sup>60</sup>

- Ila. The King and his people come to Cyavana's area
- IId. Cyavana curses them (though the curse varies)
- IIIa. The King questions his people
- IIIc. The King goes to Cyavana and apologizes
- IVa. Sukanyā is given to Cyavana
- IVb. The King and his people depart
- VIIa. The request/offer to transform Cyavana
- VIIIa. Cyavana enters the water
- VIIIb. Cyavana emerges young
- XIa. A sacrifice is held
- XIIa. Indra attacks [someone]
- XIIc. The Aśvins receive inclusion in the *Soma* ritual

The only elements in the narrative that are both truly distinctive and shared across all versions are the rejuvenation of Cyavana and the Aśvins' claiming of rights to the *Soma*. In this case the conclusion must be that sequences of predictable, functional motifs are actually more likely to be retained throughout the evolutionary process than are flashier ones. This finding is therefore actually quite problematic: if the sharing of homogenous and predictable portions of narrative is a good indicator of shared heritage, how are we to distinguish similarities that are the product of shared lineage from similarities that are the product of chance?<sup>61</sup>

**5. The two tales should have comparable characters:** The primary characters may retain their names, but they present very different incarnations: the greedy, repulsive, and irascible Cyavana of the *brāhmaṇas* bears little resemblance to the single-minded but uxorious Cyavana of the *Mahābhārata* who dares to take on Indra single-handedly, or to the powerful, but oddly querulous Cyavana of the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, or the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s well-known seer who receives respectful visits from gods.

Sukanyā, too, is transformed: a passive cipher in the *brāhmaṇas*, she becomes the clever, curious, and loyal young woman who brings such good fortune to her unconventional husband in the *Mahābhārata*; in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* she essentially eclipses the importance of her husband.

The secondary characters change even more radically, with the transference of the hostile act from the boys to the otherwise benign Sukanyā, rendering them superfluous to the narrative,

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<sup>60</sup> Perhaps even in cases of borrowing, per the evidence of Larson (2005); see note 61 below.

<sup>61</sup> Larson (2005:13), for example, notes that *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* and the *Hymn to Hermes* share a number of features that are more or less in the same order, but at a certain point the sequence is directly shared: "The banquet scenes in the *Hymn* and LB I are by no means identical, but they share a sequence of details that I have been unable to find in other Greek descriptions of animal slaughter: (1) the action takes place at a pit; (2) the animal is subdued without a weapon; (3) the meat is cut up; (4) parts of the carcass are roasted; (5) a meal is served; (6) the savor of the meat is mentioned." This is exactly the sort of predictable sequence *The Tale of Cyavana*'s evidence indicates is likely to be preserved.

along with the cowherds whose job it was to expose the boys' crime. Not only do these minor male characters completely disappear, but even Cyavana's active role is reduced to allow Sukanyā to carry out the negotiations with the Aśvins in cluster VII. Indra's role changes from a hit-and-run decapitation to a fully-realized speaking part and actor in the story (in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* he even summons his guru Br̥haspati to ask a question at one point), while Dadhyañc vanishes completely. From the evidence of this story, a character's repertoire of basic actions is more persistent than persona, and those actions may be re-cast, re-interpreted, or given back-stories as new composers pull new meanings out of inherited texts.<sup>62</sup>

**6. The tales should have comparable settings:** The settings are certainly comparable, given the narrative's requirement of adjacency to a water source, but the versions do not share an identical *locus*. The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* places the scene on the Sarasvatī River, the *Mahābhārata* utilizes the Narmadā River, the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* locates Cyavana's ashram on the Mānasarovara Lake, and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* offer no name or location whatsoever. By far the most famous and important of these locations is the Sarasvatī (and the one provided by the oldest version), but even the prestige and profound mythological underpinnings of the Sarasvatī were not enough to guarantee its retention in subsequent generations of the tale. For this story, at least, the criterion is accurate when phrased that the setting must be "comparable," as long as that does not include sharing the same exact geographic location.<sup>63</sup>

**7. The tales should have comparable themes:** This is probably the most unsuccessful of the criteria, for the larger themes are not even easily compared. With each version we see a particular agenda shaping the tale: the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* is deeply tied to extolling the power of the *vāstupasya brāhmaṇa*, and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is an explication of the ritual (though direct mention of ritual objects and gestures is confined to the verses on the beginning and end of the story proper). The *Mahābhārata* turns the tale into a lively heroine-focused story (one of several in the epic), and then shifts into equally familiar territory in the second half of the tale as it describes Cyavana's defeat of Indra. The two *purāṇic* versions go on to adopt the *Mahābhārata*'s basic outline, but the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* embellishes and expands the tale as it shapes it into a hymn to the goddess, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a short and targeted effort to remove the Aśvins' divine misbehavior. Theme, like Persona, has a high degree of fluidity. If a poet or bard wanted to convey the same theme with the same story, they would simply tell the original version of the story rather than re-write it. A poet is far more likely to create a new

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<sup>62</sup> To return again to Larson's (2005) comparison of *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* and the *Hymn to Hermes*, for example, both Hermes and Lugalbanda are youngest children struggling to gain the respect of their elders, both create fire, both perform a sacrifice, both possess the power of swift travel, and both act as messengers for the gods, but in terms of character development/personality, there can be no real comparison between the two; their personalities are utterly dissimilar.

<sup>63</sup> This result has significance for other studies: Larson (2005:6) found that the *Hymn to Hermes* almost certainly adopted the cave *locus* from *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, but the Greek tradition changed it to a Greek cave. Numerous scholars have posited a connection between the Homeric epics and the *Mahābhārata*; the easy changing of the *locus* here supports the idea that tales about the happenings related to a great war could have easily accommodated the shifting of the location of that war from an unknown Indo-European location to Troy and to Kurukṣetra, respectively (see, for example, Garbutt 2006 and West 2006).



version of a tale when he sees an “opening” in a text that will allow him do it, inspired by the belief that he can refine and reinterpret it in ways that will please his audience.<sup>64</sup>

### Catalogue of the Types of Changes Seen in the Narrative

Though each of the shifts between the five versions of *The Tale of Cyavana* may only be baby steps in narrative terms, they provide evidence that the process of change is not chaotic, but methodical and programmatic. When these changes are evaluated according to the criteria, it becomes clear that simple common sense and conventional wisdom are not adequate tools for evaluating the likelihood that two tales share a common ancestor.

The value of the criteria, however, is only one part of the value of this undertaking; even more valuable, perhaps, is the chance to see some of the processes of narrative evolution in action. As these phenomena appeared above, they were noted, along with possible comparanda, and assigned terminology where necessary:

- ❖ **Elision:** The simple removal of an element. The Aśvins’ desire for Sukanyā is dropped from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, for example. At Ia, Cyavana went from being abandoned to simply living alone in the forest. After IVb in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, the tribe tries to avoid giving Sukanyā to Cyavana, Sukanyā attempts to run away, Cyavana calls upon a black snake to intervene; all of these are dropped by later versions.
- ❖ **“Improvement”:** The substitution of a more interesting explanation or situation for a less-striking inherited one. Cyavana’s initial condition went from being old and ugly to being covered by an anthill, “Discord” among the retinue was changed to “Constipation,” and Sukanyā went from being seen by the Aśvins, to being seen *naked* by the Aśvins.
- ❖ **“Cyclops”:** a salient feature that becomes so well-known that its description ceases to be included in the narrative: Cyavana’s entombment in the anthill became so well known that the narrator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* did not need to introduce or explain it, and the Aśvins receive less and less introduction upon their arrival in the story as time goes by.
- ❖ **Role Transference:** Roles or actions are taken away from one character and given to another character, dramatically increasing the second character’s importance, and resulting in the loss of the first character. The boys’ attack on Cyavana is transferred to Sukanyā, expanding her role, and then Cyavana’s negotiations with the gods are transferred completely to Sukanya, giving her more authority in the narrative. Dadhyañc’s function as the victim of Indra’s attack is transferred to Cyavana, making Cyavana a hero when he successfully fights back.

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<sup>64</sup> As noted above, the final two criteria, “There must be a feasible path of transmission between the two tales,” and “Alterations must be culturally explicable,” may be taken as given since the relationship between these tales is known.

- ❖ **“Fee-fi-fo-fum”**: an evocative phrase that is retained intact in subsequent versions of a story, named in honor of the chant of the Giant in “Jack and the Beanstalk.”<sup>65</sup> In the “Tale of Cyavana,” the phrase “the feces and urine of the retinue were constipated” from the *Mahābhārata* is repeated nearly verbatim in the *Bhāgavata* and *Devībhāgavata purāṇas*.
- ❖ **Duplication**: the expansion of a motif through the duplication of its existing elements. At IIIa-b, the King’s inquiry has been inflated and elaborated on, with separate inquiries for separate groups. In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, Śaryāta asks “people” about what might have happened; in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, he asks cow-herds and shepherds; in the *Mahābhārata*, it is soldiers, then friends; in the *Devībhāgavata purāṇa*, it is soldiers, then kin, and then friends.
- ❖ **Functional Persistence**: Purely functional motifs are less likely to be lost or to change their sequence; however, when a certain result is required but the specific mechanism by which it is carried out is unimportant, poets may employ different paths to achieve the same outcome. IVa, for example, requires only that Sukanyā be given to Cyavana, and the poet is free to elaborate on the circumstances, directionality, and tone of the betrothal. At VIIa, the decision to transform Cyavana also takes many different forms, though all lead to the same result.<sup>66</sup>
- ❖ **Element Persistence**: A feature or element may be retained even when the reason for its inclusion has been changed, as when the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* retains the Aśvins’ immersion into the lake along with Sukanyā’s task of choosing her husband from the three identical men on the shore, even though the text has eliminated the gods’ romantic interest in her entirely.
- ❖ **“Paper Dolls”**: a framework that is duplicated and re-fitted with a new twist, resulting in the creation of a new section of narrative. The older version may be left intact alongside it, or abandoned. The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* has a divine sacrifice, and then a sacrifice performed by mortals, where all the later episodes drop one of the two sacrifices. As Lord (1960:119) observes: “The substitution of one multiform of a theme for another, one kind of recognition scene for another, one kind of disguise for another, is not uncommon.”

Conclusions based on the example of one narrative can be little more than the start of a new line of conversation, but Sanskrit literature is a nigh-inexhaustible reserve of such sets. Perhaps, someday, a comprehensive, data-based exposition of the principles that govern the evolution of narrative will provide us all with more accurate diagnostic tools.

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<sup>65</sup> This first appears as part of the tale as collected in Jacobs (1890); the earliest print of the phrase is in a quotation that forms the last line of Act III, Scene IV of *King Lear*.

<sup>66</sup> Lord (1960:121) notes this phenomenon in at least one context: “. . . there is a group of songs beginning with a tale of capture and shouting that does *not* lead to release and return, but to refusal of release and to rescue of the hero by someone else. In other words, songs beginning with the first two elements can lead in two directions, either to release or to rescue.”

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