

Episode Examination of the Turkmen Saga of Varka-Gülşa

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Abstract: One of the love-themed sagas in Turkmen saga tradition is the saga of ‘Varka-Gülşa’ which has been popular among the Turkmen. It is seen that the saga has gained a richer content as a result of the influence of Turkmen culture. Love-themed Turkmen sagas have bard-narration, folk-narration and written variants. The saga of ‘Varka-Gülşa’ is a good example of them. In the saga, Varka and Gülşa fall in love with each other. Later in the saga, the chain of events comes out after the death of Varka’s father. Varka and Gülşa are not allowed to marry. Varka gets away from his homeland. And Gülşa is forced to have a marriage with someone else. In the saga, the lovers finally reunite after suffering from a long-lasting pain of separation. However, they remain together for a short time. In this paper, a concise summary of the three different variants of the saga of ‘Varka-Gülşa’ will be provided and subsequently an episode analysis will be done.

Keywords: Turkmen, Saga, Variant, Varka-Gülşa.

1. Introduction

In the Turkmen saga tradition, there are works which are highly rich in content. The author of some of these works are known to us, however, some of these sagas are anonymous. The saga of "Varka-Gülşa" is an anonymous one. The saga of ‘Varka-Gülşa’ has been popular among the Turkmen. In the Turkmen saga tradition, some sagas are seemed to have three variants: a written variant, bard-narration variant, and a folk-narration variant. This is the same case for the saga of ‘Varka-Gülşa’ as well. The saga of ‘Varka-Gülşa’ has been conveyed from generation to generation and it has come up to the present day both in a written and oral form.

The saga of ‘Varka-Gülşa’ was firstly published as lithography in Tashkent in 1908 (Yazberdiyew, 2004, p. 154-155). In the Soviet era, folk-narrative compilations of the saga were collected around Sarahs in Turkmenistan and then were translated into Russian language. A variant of the saga of ‘Varka-Gülşa’ has been included in a book called ‘Sistan Tales and Sagas’. In the foreword of the book, it is mentioned that those who prepared this example of the saga in 1975 are A.L. Gryunberg and I.M. Steblin who had listened to it from Ismail Yarmemedov while they were doing scholarly studies around Sarahs (Skazki i Legendı Sistana, 1981, p. 9-11).

The Turkmen saga of 'Varka-Gülşa' has three variants. These are written, bard-narration and folk-narration versions. Written variant of the saga is presented in a symposium titled 'the Sacred Ruhnama and the Rise of the Civilization of the Eastern People' by N. Seyidow in 2003. The title of his study presented in this symposium was 'Turkmen variants of the saga of Varka-Gülşa' (Seyidow, 2003, p. 73-75). The proceeding of the symposium was published as a book in that year. Seyidow informs that the written sample of 'Varka-Gülşa' is prepared based on the variants that are kept in Turkmenistan National Institute of Manuscripts named after Turkmenbashi. The documents are filed under the numbers 978, 1025 and 1453 (Seyidow, 2005, p. 131).

The bard-narration variant of the saga is taken from the archives of B. Mammetyazov. In this variant, the poem is written in the form of a prose. Some Turkmen proverbs are mentioned there as well. Features and formats of classical poetry are used skillfully in the bard-narration variant. The trace of the Turkmen bard-narration tradition is seen in this variant of the saga.

The folk-narration variant of the saga has been taken from a document filed under the number of 2940 in Turkmenistan National Institute of Manuscripts named after Turkmenbashi. B. Mammetyazov recorded this variant from Baynazarow Hazretguli who was living in Farab region of Lebap province in 1964. Then Mammetyazov delivered it to the National Institute of Manuscripts (Seyidow, 2005, p. 131-132).

Just as in the case of 'Varka-Gülsha', many of the Turkmen sagas have several variants. One of them is the saga of 'Şasenem-Garip', which has got seven variants prepared by A. Rahmanov (Rahmanov, p. 1992). Providing different variants of a saga ensures it to be more comprehensible.

Sagas are literary works reflecting the culture of their society. They are transferred by the bards from tongue to tongue throughout generations; thus gaining a richer content. Garriyev defines "saga" as "the oral and written literary works of the past, which have a plot, and produced as a prose and poem (Garriyev, 1982, p. 82-83). Geldiyev states that events are mentioned in prose parts of the sagas, whereas feelings and thoughts of heroism are in the poetic parts of the sagas (1997, p. 33). It is seen that Turkmen sagas are usually written in the form prose and poem. Although the written and folk-narration variants of the saga of 'Varka-Gülşa' is written in the form of prose, the bard-narration variant is written in the form of both poem and prose.

Turkmen saga narrators are called 'bakhshi' (bard). The 'Bakhshi' are mentioned as they were reciting poem with a musical instrument called dutar in Arminius Vambery's book titled 'A False Darwish's Central Asian Trip' (Vambery, 2011, p. 76). Köprülü describes bakhshi as "a folk poet performing poems with a two-wired tanbura" (Köprülü, 2012, p. 147). As is seen above, Turkmen sagas are performed by bards with musical instruments.

In this paper, the text that is published in the book prepared by Nuri Seyidow is taken as the basis. At first, summaries of the characteristics of each variant of the saga will be given below. Afterwards episode analysis of the three variants will be done.

While analyzing the text by its episodes, we considered the classifications mentioned by Ali Berat Alptekin (2005) and Fikret Turkmen (1995) in their books. Both of the books have common subtitles for classification. In this paper, we decided to adopt the classification and subtitles used in Ali Berat Alptekin's work. Here are the ten subtitles to be used in the analysis of the saga: Hero's family, birth, giving a name, education, falling in love, encounter with the lover, leaving the homeland for far away, marriage of lover to someone else, returning to hometown, result.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Epic of Varka and Gulsha

2.1.1 Example of the Epic as Written

The fathers of the lovers are generous chiefs of the Tribe of Sheyban. Varka's father is Hemam, and Gulsha's father is Helal. Hemam has a son, and Helal has a daughter. They named the girl Gulsha and the boy Varka. There is a tradition in the tribe. According to this tradition, babies born on the same night are arranged to be married. Varka and Gulsha are promised to each other in this way. They are both given to a nanny. Varka and Gulsha fall in love with each other, just as Leyli and Majnun. Varka and Gulsha begin preparations for their marriage. The leader of the Tribe of Sap, Beni Amr, falls in love with Gulsha. He kidnaps Gulsha and escapes with her. Varka learns that Beni Amr has run away with Gulsha, and he goes and rescues her. Beni Amr and Varka raise their armies and go to war. Gulsha is taken hostage by the enemy. Varka's father dies in the war. Varka is also taken captive. Gulsha acts as though she loves Beni Amr. Varka falls into a trap during the war. Gulsha rescues Varka. Varka kills Beni Amr. Helal's wife comes out against Varka and Gulsha's marriage. She asks for the bride price from Varka. Varka asks for help from his uncle Selim Shah, who lives Yemen.

Varka goes to Yemen. Varka meets with the vizier and introduces himself. The vizier explains to Varka what is going on in the city. Varka fights alone against the enemy's army. Varka saves Selim Shah from the enemy's clutches. Antar Shah cannot accept being defeated by Varka. He decides to wage war. The crafty vizier prepares a plan. Before the war, he has a trench dug in the square.

Varka is captured in the war. Malik Antar hands Varka over to the executioner. He commands that Varka be killed. Just when the executioner draws his sword to kill Varka, Varka prays to Allah. He prays to be reunited with his love. His pleas are so desperate that the executioner pauses. He cannot kill Varka. They kill Malik Antar Shah.

A Padishah named Muhsin from the city of Sham falls in love with Gulsha and marries her. Muhsin Padishah brings Gulsha to Sham. Varka stays in Yemen for a long time. He asks for permission from Selim Shah to return home. Selim Shah gives Varka money, provisions, and soldiers. Helal comes to Varka. Varka asks what has happened in the tribe. Helal tells Varka that Gulsha has died. Varka goes crazy. Gulsha's closest friend witnesses Varka's state and becomes convinced that he is still loyal to Gulsha. She approaches Varka. She tells him that Gulsha has not, in fact, died, and that he has been deceived. The girl gives Varka the ring that Gulsha had entrusted to her. Varka leaves for Sham. On the way, he runs into forty bandits. He fights with them and defeats them all. While Varka is fighting with

them, he is wounded in several places. He is weakened. He sits motionless on his horse. His horse takes him to the city of Sham. Muhsin Padishah helps Varka. Varka meets with Gulsha.

Varka asks Gulsha for permission to return home. Gulsha is very sad. Varka leaves Gulsha. As he is returning home, he dies at the place where he has paused for a rest. Gulsha hears that Varka has died. She comes to Varka's grave and commits suicide. Muhsin Padishah has a shrine built over the graves of the lovers. The lovers miraculously come back to life and are reunited with each other.

2.1.2 Example of the Epic as Told by a Bard

In the country of Arabia, the Padishah of the Tribe of Sheyban has twin sons, Helal and Hemam. Helal is a Padishah, and Hemam is the head of a district. Both sons remain childless until the age of forty. Helal has a daughter, and Hemam has a son. The two fathers arrange a marriage between their young children. The girl is named Gulsha, and the boy is named Varka. Varka and Gulsha go to school together. According to the tradition of the tribe, after the age of twelve, children are not allowed to leave the house. After this age, Gulsha's parents stop sending her to school. Varka both goes to school and learns the art of warfare.

Varka's father dies. Varka's mother appears before the Padishah. She reminds him of the arrangement between their children. Helal's wife requests the bride price. Varka's mother asks for some time to get the bride price together. Varka goes to Yemen. The journey takes him forty days and forty nights. Varka reaches Yemen. He meets with his uncle, Selim Shah. He gives him the letter that his mother had written. Selim Shah agrees to help, but he says that there is one problem. He says that enemy soldiers will soon invade the city. He asks for help from Varka in fighting against them. Varka fights alone against the enemy soldiers and defeats them all. Selim Shah gives Varka as much gold as he wants. Varka stays in Yemen for forty days. Varka asks for permission to return home from his uncle, Selim Shah. Selim Shah says that Varka can return home as long as he promises to return to Yemen with his mother after he is married. Varka reaches his home forty days and forty nights later. He sends a letter to the shah of Sham in the name of Helal Shah. In the letter, he asks for Muhsin Shah to come and take Gulsha. Muhsin Shah sends an envoy.

Helal's wife likes the idea of having the Padishah of Sham for a son-in-law. The vizier doesn't want Varka. The cunning vizier and Helal's wife influence Helal's decision. The tricky vizier tricks the people with the pretense that Varka and Gulsha are getting married. He sends Gulsha to Sham. As Gulsha is leaving the city, she gives a ring to one of her friends and entrusts her with giving it to Varka. Varka returns home. He hears that Gulsha has died. Varka's mother passes away. Varka sells everything he owns and takes to living like a dervish at the grave of Gulsha. The girl to whom Gulsha had given her ring approaches Varka and gives him the ring. She explains the truth to him. Varka leaves for Sham.

Muhsin Padishah marries Gulsha. Gulsha asks Muhsin Padishah to build her a pavilion. The Padishah has the pavilion built. In her pavilion, Gulsha hosts travelers and others who are in need. This becomes a tradition. Varka comes to the pavilion, but Gulsha doesn't recognize him. Varka is devastated. As soon as he sees Gulsha, he faints. The servants bring him back to consciousness. Varka and Gulsha talk, then

Varka leaves just as he came. Gulsha becomes depressed. Varka goes to live in a cemetery in the mountains and dies there. Messengers tell Gulsha that Varka is living in a cemetery in the mountains. Gulsha comes to Varka, but Varka has died. Gulsha embraces Varka's lifeless body, and she dies, as well. Miraculously, the two lovers come back to life and are reunited with each other. Muhsin Padishah has a house built for them in the mountains, and Varka and Gulsha live together there.

2.1.3 Example of the Epic as Told Amongst the People

A long time ago, in the city of Yemen, there were two friends. One of their names was Helal, and the other was Hemam. Helal Han was the vizier of Hemam. Until the age of forty, they remain childless. The two of them leave the city and travel out into the desert. They lie down in a graveyard. They promise that if they have children, they will arrange a marriage between them. They prepare the official documents to this end. Helal has a daughter, and Hemam has a son. The boy is named Varka, and the girl is named Gulsha. The two lovers go to school together. This continues until the time when Gulsha's father won't give his daughter to Varka.

Love blossoms between Varka and Gulsha. Varka's father passes away. Helal doesn't want to give his daughter to Varka. Gulsha and Varka remain apart. Gulsha cannot stand the separation and becomes ill. Gulsha sends the official document proclaiming her engagement to Varka, along with a letter, with her servant to give to Varka. Gulsha's father breaks his word. He doesn't give his daughter to Varka. He asks Varka for the bride price. Varka sees his uncle Kasim, who is in the city of Kiyam, in his dream. Kasim asks for help from Varka. Varka writes a letter to Gulsha and sends it to her, along with a ring. Varka arrives at his uncle's side after a journey of forty days and forty nights. Kasim explains that Mahmud Shah has come to invade the city of Sham. Varka wages war against the enemies of Kasim Shah and kills them. Forty days of celebration take place. Varka returns to his home with the money and provisions given to him by Kasim Shah. Varka's mother had asked Helal for three months, but Varka returned six months later. Helal tricks his daughter and tells her that Varka has died. He wants to distance his daughter from Varka.

The vizier of the city of Kenan used to travel between cities. He arrives in Helal's city. The vizier sees Gulsha. He writes a letter telling of Gulsha's beauty and sends it to his Padishah, Sengan. Sengan Padishah comes to ask Gulsha's father for her hand in marriage. Helal does not consent. Sengan Padishah is very disappointed. An old, cunning woman comes to Sengan Padishah. She tells him she will help him in exchange for gold. The old woman gives Gulsha to Sengan Padishah through the use of trickery. Gulsha entrusts her servant Dohvlet with the ring on her finger and instructs her to give it to Varka.

Sengan Padishah goes to the city of Kenan with Gulsha. Gulsha says that she will not be together with Sengan Padishah. She tells him that she is in love with someone else. The Padishah respects Gulsha's wishes and accepts her as a friend. Varka reaches his home. Gulsha's mother and father tell him that Gulsha has died of an illness. Varka is very sad. Gulsha's servant gives the ring to Varka. She explains the truth to him. Varka takes Gulsha's mother and father with him to Gulsha's grave. He digs up the grave and finds a dead sheep inside. It becomes clear that Gulsha's parents have lied to him.

In order to be reunited with Gulsha, Varka travels to the city of Kenan in the guise of a dervish. He fights with forty bandits on the way and kills them all. Varka is severely wounded. His horse carries him to Sengan Padishah's garden. The Padishah has Varka treated. Varka meets with Gulsha. Varka asks for three months to go to Kasim Shah's city. Gulsha opposes Varka's proposition. She doesn't give him permission to go. Later, Gulsha gives Varka three days' permission. Varka begins his journey. On the way, he commits suicide at the place where he is taking a rest. When Gulsha hears that Varka has died, she also kills herself. The Padishah lives next to the lovers' graves. A hizir comes to that place and prays for the lovers to come back to life in order to be reunited with each other. The lovers are reunited, and they live for forty years.

Table 1: Episode analysis of Turkmen "Varka-Gülşa" saga

Written variant	narrative variant of bard	Folk narrative variant
1. Family of hero		
Gülşa's and Varka's fathers were commanders of tribe Sheyban	Sultan of the Sheyban tribe had twin sons. One of them was Helal the other one was Hemam. Gülşa's father was Sultan Helal, Hemam was a vizier.	There were two friends in Yemen city. Helal was Han, Hemam was vizier. Gülşa's father was Han, Varka's father was a vizier.
2. Birth of heroes		
There was nothing extraordinary on both Gülşa's and Varka's birth.	Helal and Hemam did not have a child until the age of forty. There was not any extraordinary situation about the birth of lovers.	Helal and Hemam's did not have a child until the age of forty. There was not any extraordinary situation about the birth of lovers.
3. Giving a name to heroes		
Sultan's daughter and vizier's son were born. The name Gülşa was given to Helal's daughter and Varka was given to Hemam's son. According to tribal tradition if a boy and girl were born in same night there would be an indentation of crib.	Helal's daughter and Hemam's son were born. The name Gülşa was given to daughter and Varka was given to son. Before their children's birth Helal and Hemam did an indentation of crib.	Sultan Helal's daughter and Hemam's son were born. The name Gülşa was given to daughter and Varka was given name to son. After the birth of their children Helal and Hemam did an indentation of crib, when they were in cemetery.
4. Education of heroes		
Varka and Gülşa studied at the same school. Both of them go to school that teaches the art of war	Varka and Gülşa go to school together. According to the traditions of the tribe children are	Lovers go to school together. This situation continued until they learn that they Gülşa will not be given to

	not allowed to go out. So, Gülşa is not allowed to school. Varka goes to school and take the education of the art of war.	Varka.
5. Love of heroes		
Varka and Gülşa go the same school. They love each other since their childhood.	Varka and Gülşa go to the same school. They love each other since their childhood.	Varka and Gülşa go the same school. They love each other since their childhood.
6. Hero's meeting with darling		
Because of Varka and Gülşa do not fall in love in an extraordinary way, there is no meeting scene in the saga.	Because of Varka and Gülşa do not fall in love in an extraordinary way, there is no meeting scene in the saga.	Because of Varka and Gülşa do not fall in love an extraordinary way, there is no meeting scene in the saga.
7. Hero goes abroad		
After the death of Varka's father in war, Gülşa's mother wants money from Varka. Varka goes to Yemen to supply the money.	Varka's father died because of his sickness. Gülşa's mother wants money from Varka. Varka's mother wants three months. Varka's mother sends her son to Yemen to supply the money.	Sultan Helal wants money from Varka to marry his daughter. Based on the meaning of dream that Varka saw, he goes to his uncle who lives in Kiyan city.
8. Marriage with someone else		
While Gülşa is going to marry to Varka, Gülşa is kidnapped by the Sultan of sap tribe. Varka recues Gülşa. After Varka goes to Yemen, Gülşa is forcibly married to Sultan of the Sham.	Varka goes to Yemen to take the money. But the given time was ended up. Varka could not return back in three months. Gülşa's mother gives her daughter to the Sultan of Sham.	After Varka goes to Kiyan city, Gülşa married in the deception way to Sultan of the Kenan city.
9. Hero returning back to hometown		

<p>Varka fought with Andor Shah who was coming to invade the city Yemen and was held captive by him. Then got rid of. Selim eliminated Shah's enemies. Varka stayed in Yemen for a long time. Varka got money and returned to his country.</p>	<p>Varka went to Yemen for only three months but he returned after six months. He recieved the news that his mother and Gülşa died. Varka lived in cemetery between Gülşa's and his mother's graves. After a while he learnt that Gülşa didn't die, but she married with Sham's sultan.</p>	<p>Varka returned to his hometown after a long time. Helal and his wife told Varka that Gülşa died from disease. Varka learnt trues. He dug a grave which Gülşa was buried. He found a dead sheep in the grave. He got news that Gülşa married with Kenan's sultan and he went to Kenan city.</p>
<p>10. Result</p>		
<p>Varka stayed in Yemen for a long time. When he returned his hometown, he got news that Gülşa died. Normally Gülşa didn't die. The trick is performed. Varka learnt that Gülşa was given to Sham's sultan. Gülşa expected that Varka would come. He met Gülşa. Shortly he stayed with Gülşa then left. Varka died on the way. After Varka died, Gülşa killed herself. Miraculously two both lovers resurrected, and reunited to each other.</p>	<p>When he returned his hometown, he got news that Gülşa and his mother died. Varka lived in cemetery between Gülşa's and his mother's graves. After a while he learnt that Gülşa didn't die, just she married with Sham's sultan. He went to Sham and saw Gülşa. But Gülşa didn't remember Varka. Varka lived at the top of a mountain and died there. Gülşa learnt the location of Varka and went there. Gülşa hugged into wrapped body of Varka and died. Lovers miraculously resurrected and reunited to each other.</p>	<p>Varka customed as a dervish ang came to Kena city to saw Gülşa. He met with Gülşa. After a while he left and closed his eyes to his own life. After Gülşa learnt news that Varka died, she killed herself. Lovers miraculosly came again to life, after Hizir's praya and resumed each other.</p>

Common features between written Varka-Gülşa saga and poet, folk narratives variants:

1. Varka and Gülşa are heroes and lovers of three different variants.
2. In different variants, Varka and Gülşa are not common people, Gülşa is daughter of a sultan and Varka is son of a vizier.
3. In three variants, Gülşa is beloved.

4. Sheyban tribe of Sultan Helal and Sham Sultan Muhsin appear in two variants.
5. Varka and Gülşa got engaged while in cradle but they couldn't marry. Obstacles encountered.
6. Both Gülşa's and Varka's most important helpers are their maids.
7. In three variants Gülşa married by trick and force. In written and poet variants the deceiver is an old woman, in folk variant the deceiver is Gülşa's mother and vizier.
8. When Varka returned his hometown, he got news that Gülşa died. When he learnt that it was not true, he went to her.
9. Varka and Gülşa met for a short time and then separated.
10. Varka died of Gülşa's love and so did Gülşa.
11. Lovers again resurrected after death.

Differences between written Varka-Gülşa saga and poet, folk narratives variants:

1. In written version of saga Varka's and Gülşa's fathers are commanders. In poet variant, Gülşa's and Varka's fathers are twin brothers. Gülşa's father is a Sultan, Varka's father is a leader. In folk narrative variant, Gülşa's father is a king, and Varka's father is vizier.
2. In the written version of saga, Varka has a competitor called Beni Amr, who loves Gülşa. However in folk narrative variant of saga this competition does not appear.
3. Written and Folk narrative variants took place in Mecca. But folk variant took place in Yemen.
4. In different variants there are large cadres with different names.
5. In written and poet variant Varka went to Yemen to get money. But in folk variant, after his dream Varka went to Kiyani city.
6. Written and poet variants ended in Sham, but folk narrative variant ended in Kiyani city.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, episodes of three variants of Turkmen epic 'Varka-Gülşa' were analysed. Common characteristics between written variant, bard variant and folk narratives variant are almost similar. It is pointed out that the three different variants are having the qualities of a saga in terms of episodes, however, the names of places and people are different in each variant. The course of the saga suddenly changes with the death of Varka's father. The chain of events comes out sequentially. The reunion of the lovers is not allowed by the girl's mother. Varka abandons his land. Although she refuses to do so, Gülşa is forced to marry someone else. Varka meets an obstacle to unite to Gülşa. After a long and tiring journey he finally gets to his loved one, but when he finds out that she is married, Varka prefers to live alone. Indeed Gülşa has not given her heart to anyone else but Varka. Both of the lovers die without living a happy life together. At the end of the saga the lovers fantastically resurrect and get together. The three variants have similar characteristics in terms of common narration and content; but they are different in terms of people and places. Written and folk-narrative variants are similar in terms of shape. But the barda-narrative variant is formed of both prose and verse. Influenced by the other two variants, the bard-narrative variant of the saga is said to be composed by a skillful bard. The poems in the saga-narrative variant proves that this variant has been penned by a bard. In this variant are the saga forms of both classical versification and folk versification. In the bard-narrative variant the features and forms of classical poetry are used skillfully. The written and folk-narrative variants of the saga are under the

influence of folk culture. In the bard-narrative variant of the saga, the poetic forms of classical literature are used. Therefore, it is understood that bard-narrative tradition is quite influential in Turkmen sagas.

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