

## Folktales Reveal the Cultural Values of the Community: A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis

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**ABSTRACT** Folktales help the community to maximize their strengths. They develop their weaknesses into strengths and threats into opportunities. As folktales are figurative in nature, their comparison with various facets of life is expressed metaphorically. They identify culture which is learned and shared by all members of the community. They conceal the deeper meaning which is unambiguous in speech or writing and are truthful. They may be as old as the hill, but they contain real issues about life in general and human nature in particular which people have observed. The way in which folktales are composed, distinguish them from other parts of oral art. Through the folktales, people gain their cultural heritage which, to a great extent, determines their further thinking, desires and attitudes. They form a project which is seen as problems from real life and studied in detail from various possible angles.

### INTRODUCTION

Every folktale, from its point of view, is a lesson. It may be of a principle of law, civilized manners as they understand them or religious dogma. They give interpretations in line with everyday life. Folktales are reflections of the minds. They show aspects of culture of the society to those who show the least awareness of it. As a result, they are part and parcel of people's life. Their value cannot be taken for granted. By ignoring their value, we are ignoring the complete expression of the feelings, ideas and ambitions of the people concerned. They are pearls of wisdom handed down from generation to generation and will continue to be traditional pillars on which the community can lean.

Individual life is integrated into a greater unit of a cultural community and into a wide range of traditional monumental pictures. The use of folktales, in researcher's view, is on the decline simply because of an increase in the scale of society which has led to the disappearance of certain practices. Folktales may differ in subject from place to place, but everywhere they minister to the same basic social and individual needs. The limitations of human life and the similarity of basic situations produced tales everywhere which are much alike in all structural respects. Hegel (2013:199) maintained that folktales are part of oral forms which direct human participation. The author goes on to say that those who

have been mis-schooled always misinterpret these folktales as rudiments of childish psychology. They are part of communication creativity. They broaden the parameters of verbal art. They are made up of the following: narrator, folktale and audience. These three components indicate the inter-subjective relationship that can be represented in the following way:

Narrator (Writer) ↔ Folktale (Text) ↔ Audience  
(Readers)

The arrows in the model above show a reciprocal message that is carried by the folktale. The close interrelation of the three components in the teaching situation is of great significance. It is the starting point of communication. In most cases, the narrators are old people while the audience is children, but the fact that the old people and the audience are partners who are not of equal status is not taken into consideration. The narrator is the mediator between the audience and the text. Although many stories that are told provide amusement, other factors should never be lost sight of. The idea is also not only concerned with the intellectual forming of the children, but also with the molding of their whole personalities.

### METHODOLOGY

This shows how the research is conducted to validate the arguments and findings. This is

regarded as a social research. It is used for the purpose of understanding social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Textual analysis is therefore, the most appropriate method of gathering data in this study. Secondary sources which have been conducted by the researcher are books, articles from journals and dissertations. The choice of a suitable method for a particular study is determined by the topic and the purpose of the study.

### RESULTS

The transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next through folktales enhances people's awareness of their shared historical knowledge systems, and places them in a stronger position to participate in decision-making and negotiations on the issues that have an impact on them. Folktales define messages that are understandable and relevant to the target audience. Even though many folktales provide amusement, they have moral lessons. The collection of values opens the eyes of the people to their immediate environment. People have the power to start a dialogue with their world, and also with the people in their world.

#### Interpretation of the Folktales

The cultural discourse of the society is shaped by the folktales which deal with their lived realities. Narratives are significant symbolic forces of shaping identities and make use of a multiplicity of discourse styles. The struggle over meaning and the transformation of identities takes place every time. Foucault (1999: 40-41) insisted that self-closure and consequent self-knowledge is a condition for access to truth and for understanding the text.

The unique interpretation of the folktales in an unusual world makes it possible for people to redefine their personal and social identities. They indicate how traditions are imbedded in everyday cultural practices of the present. Geertz (2014: 112) maintained that:

— *the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world, producing thus [an] idiosyncratic transformation in one's sense of reality.*

Folktales are regarded as reflections of real life. Although they are emblematic gestures that are used to hide the truth, because of the semantic level that stands between the mental processes and speech, they describe the experiences of the people. They are the result of observing human nature in general and animals in particular. They contain the fundamental truths about life which people have observed.

### OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

In the folktale *Mmolai wa kgolomodumo* (The monster-slayer) (Makgamatha 1994: 61-68), a poor married couple had two children, a boy and a girl. When the parents died, they left behind them only a small house and three sheep. The girl inherited the house and the boy the animals. He exchanged those animals for three marvelous dogs and set out with them into the world. On the way he met an old woman from whom, in recognition of a courtesy which he had shown, he received a magic sword. Everything that he struck with it would fall dead. He arrived at the royal city and discovered that a seven headed monster who lived on a mountain in the neighborhood demanded periodically a maiden as a sacrifice, else he would lie waste the entire country. The sacrifice had been agreed upon and the lot has fallen to the princess. The king promised that whoever saved her shall have her land and half his kingdom.

The young man went with his animals to the place where the monster lived and reached there at the same time as the princess, who had been brought by the king's coachman. He approached her, comforted her, and promised to fight the monster for her. The monster appeared with a great roar, but the young man did not let himself be frightened. He went against him and with his sword struck off all his heads. In the action, the dogs helped him by holding the monster fast. The hero cut out the tongues from the monster's heads and put them into his pockets. The rescued princess wished him to go back with her to her father to receive the promised reward, but the hero wanted to wander about for a while and to experience adventures.

The cultural value here is that a man should always show his strength. Men are regarded as people of higher status with some valuable ability. Their strength enables them to perform the roles accompanying their high status. People

should not lose hope in what they want to achieve. A family cannot always fail in life. People face many obstacles on the path of doing great things. If they face their fears, they will prevail. Many people, who kept on inspiring themselves, saw themselves scaling the highest mountains. People should start now and the ball will gather momentum. It encourages poor people, especially the unemployed, to be strong and face life's challenges.

In the related folktale *Mokgadi le ledimo lejabatho* (Mokgadi and the cannibal) (Mangokoane 1975: 40-45), a man lived with his wife (Mokgadi) and their two beautiful daughters. To their surprise, their daughters did not want to get married. Young men tried to court them, but they refused. A strange man appeared and asked to marry Mokgadi's daughter, Mmaphuti, without her knowing much about him. Her father accepted and forced her daughter to be the man's wife and to leave with him. This showed that women were taken for granted. They were not allowed to go to school. She had no right to decline. As they were walking along the road, she trod the thorns and her feet were covered with blood. The girl expected the man to wipe off the blood from her feet but was surprised when he licked it. To him, the blood was tasty. She realized that she was married to a cannibal. She then asked him to go back home to take a wooden bowl. The man accepted and the girl ran. When she arrived at home, she explained to her parents of what happened on their way. That is how she escaped from danger. Her disappointment with marriage symbolizes the death of intimate social bond. In the absence of kinship and affinal bonds, education, money and property cannot sustain the soul of an African.

In one of the recent reports, SAPA (2008: 16) indicated that:

*A man has been arrested in southern Tanzania on suspicion of attempting to sell his albino wife to Congolese traders for R29.000. The woman said she was not aware of her husband's plot. At least 27 albinos, mostly, women and children, have been killed in various parts of east African country. They have been kidnapped, killed and dismembered for witchdoctors who use their limbs and organs to make lucky charms.*

The undisputed fact is that women and children play an important part in the society. In case of gathering, women provide a regular sup-

ply for fire-wood and vegetables. Even though gathering these does not take too much of their time, it does not simply denote that they must spend a short time of collecting practically every day. In some seasons, women and children spend the whole days out gathering when certain fruits are ripe or insects appear (Mönnig 1967: 179). The empowerment of every person, particularly the poor, women and children, which has yielded fruits, is essential. Empowerment requires recognition of the right of knowledge, information and technology, freedom of choice and economic opportunity. There is nothing better in life to create one's own job and survive hunger and poverty. Unemployment in South Africa is very high, but people cannot afford to sit at home doing nothing. They can put an end to poverty by establishing initiatives. They must apply for workshops that can equip them with new techniques of fighting poverty. This will help them to form development projects and build hospices. Working together has been the cultural value of the Northern Sotho people in particular and the Africans in general. In this way, they form the strong bond which breaks the cycle of poverty. This is the strategy that has been used from all along so that poverty cannot become a trap.

In the folktale *Mapula le makgema* (Mapula and the cannibals), Makgamatha (1994: 117-121) showed the resistance of the oppressed people. They wanted to be free. The author wanted to reassure the oppressed that oppression will come to an end one day. The oppressed do not always yield to the demands of the oppressors. The bird in the folktale stands for the rescuer, people stand for the oppressed whereas the cannibals represent the haughty and vituperative oppressors. People celebrated to welcome Mapula and her friends back home. They did not surrender. The oppressors usually threaten their victims who do not give up the search for freedom. Their burden of oppressing the people is threatened. The folktale shows that the oppressed people cannot be free if they do not challenge the actions of the oppressors. By referring to the suffering and violence inflicted on the people in the folktale, the author implies that Black South Africans shared a common experience. The value in this folktale is that of political organization. People support each other, understand and know the world in which they leave better. The unrelated groups attach themselves

to the homogeneous core through negotiations to fight a common enemy and this works positively towards their existence.

In the folktale *Kgoši ya go lwala* (The sick chief) (Makgamatha 1990: 9-13), the young people brought headache for the community over the state of health of the chief. The chief was very ill and wanted help. All the men gathered at the meeting place (*kgorong*) to discuss how they could help the chief. Their problem was that if he died, no one would lead them. They then called all the members of the community to help them to forge a way of helping him. In the meeting, they agreed to find a very strong traditional doctor who would come to the chief's kraal and give him medication that would heal him. That doctor was living in the bush. He was living in a hole. At the gathering, the community decided to send the old men to go and call the doctor.

When the old men were about to leave, the young people refused. They told the old men and other community members that they would go and call the doctor. The old men became angry with them and were supported by community members. The young people became violent and nearly made the village ungovernable. They were then told to go and call the doctor in the bush. When they arrived where he lived, they never greeted him. They became aggressive when they called him. The doctor came out of the hole with an unhappy face. He became angry and chased them away. They became so frightened and disappeared like a lightning. While they were running, they got injured. Without shoes, they trod thorns and stones along the way. They were passing through the thorn trees in the bush. Their bodies were full of scratches and their clothes were also torn. Their relationship with children of other races made them to lack respect to other people. The most important facet of their social structure is that of age-grading, and the proper attitude of deference and respect to elders is of the utmost importance in the conduct of every individual. The young people got punished because they were emotional, un-business like and inefficient. Today, many young people think that the old people are very slow in doing things. They forget that a rash decision has seriously negative consequences. This is confirmed by Ziervogel and Mokgokong (1975: 863) when they use the following proverb:

*Nonyana hlapahlapa go senya meetse ke ga yona*

'Hasty decisions cause negative outcomes.'

This is an indication that the young people at some point will face very serious problems if they do not behave in a proper manner. The ones in the folktale had no self-discipline and had not developed independent cultural habits.

The old men then went to call a doctor. They addressed him with respect. Traditional doctors are greatly respected. A lack of respect towards them implies a lack of respect to the ancestors. The doctor responded positively, asked his ancestors to give him power to heal the chief and went with them. When they arrived at the chief's kraal, the doctor just licked him, and the chief became completely healed. The old men brought him back and the nation became excited. The old men never acted like boys. In the African culture, anyone who does not respect the ancestors during his/her lifetime, he/she will never respect them even after death. Such a person is not fit to join them after his/her death.

The author condemns the younger generation for giving itself up to unhealthy habits which do not actually originate in their culture. The author warns the African people to emulate customs that they are familiar with, as it is very dangerous to join a competition for the assimilation of values which have no roots in their culture. The author again decries the moral depravity of the young people who are the softest targets of the negative aspects of social change. Parents in this case must be good role models. They are the people children depend on for their upbringing. The children's future starts with their parents. From birth, a child learns to trust his or her parents. Children look up to their parents to steer them in the right direction.

It is so disappointing to realize that some parents are misleading their kids. They drive them into the dark side of life. Some parents are even jealous of the better life their children have built for themselves. Children trust their parents, but it is about time they also trust their own instincts. The main reason why children become softest targets of the negative aspects of social change is because they are not mentally and physically motivated. When a person is not mentally mature, someone can easily control him/her. He/she can end up doing something he/she will regret later. Young people are not aware of peer pressure and they depend on their friends. They lack the strength to stand up for themselves.

The folktale *Mošemane wa dišo* (The boy with sores) (Makgamatha 1994: 76-80) shows the immoral behavior of some people in life. In a certain village, a boy and his sister were left alone. All the people who lived there died and the two remained. They had herds and herds of cattle. The boy had big sores. Other people very far from their village heard about the story of that village and wanted to seize the two and their herds of cattle. They did that and when they came back, they forced the boy to have intercourse with his sister. The seizers slaughtered and ate one beast, but the meat came out of their stomachs and it became a complete beast. The other day the boy and his sister drove their herds of cattle to another village while seizers were still asleep. They arrived in that village and were welcomed by the chief. There was a severe drought at that chief's land, but the boy brought a new lease of life to his nation. The boy performed rainmaking rituals and sang traditional songs which made a lot of rain to fall. This rainmaking issue is also supported by Rafapa (2009: 80) when said that:

... hymns had to be an integral part of communicating with the ancestors and Supreme Being during rainmaking rituals, in order for rain to fall.

The same observation was made by Nkadi-meng (1973) in the case of Bapedi as well as by Shai (2006) in the case of Balobedu.

The chief became so happy and took the boy and his sister to his place. He instructed his few servants to grind the red ochre and smear him all over his body. He had many blisters caused by scratching the sores. This is proved by Musehane (2009: 89) when he stated that scratching the sores may open the blisters and cause infection, which may eventually cause scars. The red ochre cured him. The chief gave the boy his daughter to be his wife. The boy was very excited to marry from the royal family. Those who seized the boy, his sister and herds of cattle also experienced a severe drought in their village, but could not get help from the boy. They realized about his rainmaking ability after they have disappeared with their herds of cattle. Those people suffered because of their immorality. Had it not been their unacceptable behavior, the boy would have given them rain.

The social value in the folktale is that in African culture, a man must not marry his sister.

This is regarded as a taboo. Mönnig (1967: 194) maintained that:

*A man may not marry or have intercourse with his mother, his sister or his daughter. Marriage is also prohibited between a man and his parent's sisters, the daughters of his brothers and sisters as well as of his half-brothers and half-sisters. A man also may not marry his step-daughter, his step-sister or their daughters, or his parent's step-sisters. Finally, a man may not marry the daughter of his mother's sister or of his mother's step-sister.*

This clearly indicates that the African people have some rules regarding the choice of a partner in marriage. Some marriages are not allowed because of universal restrictions of sexual relations between certain notable categories of relatives. Mönnig (1967: 63) used the following Northern Sotho proverb to proof his point:

*Modimo o rile: bana ba mosadi ba se ke ba tšeana* — God said: children of one mother may not marry one another.

Hartin (1998: 236) also mentioned that at some stage two people have been living together as married, as man and wife, but after some time they discovered that there was some impediment which actually made their marriage null and void from the beginning simply because they were brother and sister. Those two were then forced to separate.

Folktales appear to be among the most powerful of the numerous forms of traditional artistic expressions in African culture which serves the people with values. It is assumed throughout that folktales, irrespective of their sources, are a true reflection of aspects of the life, culture and history of the society in which they flourish. Each folktale is conceived, not only as a study of power relations as reflected in oral literature, but of the power oral literature to sustain, through the dynamic of oral process of mythic filtering, a particular type of social ideology against the claims of rival or contending ideologies.

An example of one folktale that captures these paradigmatic contrasts is found in the folktale called *Phetšomaatla kgošing ya sehlogo* (The taming of the cruel king) (Mashilo et al. 2005: 12-18). An ideal king was loved by everybody. That king was succeeded by a cruel king who was either ignorant of, or chose to ignore, the democratic values of his people. He marginalized the traditional council of chiefs and elders and the

entire populace and imposed mindlessly cruel laws on the people. In the face of resistance spearheaded by a pauper who gained the support of the elders and the entire populace, the cruel king got lost while riding in a forest and in the course of his wanderings was enslaved and put through worse sufferings than those imposed by his sadistic rule on the people. In the end, he returned to his kingdom, wise, more humane, and more attentive to the rule of law and the voice of the people. Through the taming of the cruel king, the democratic ideal is reasserted against the autocratic claims of deviant monarchical power.

Some people get their kingship or chieftaincy titles not because of the royal blood, but through their professionalism, heroism or money. Basden (2012: 256) says:

*In modern times the dignity of the chieftainship has been degraded and the tendency is to bring the whole system into disrepute, owing to the indiscriminate sale of titles to any youth who can produce the stipulated fees.*

The organization of the political unit is consistent with its social organization. It is a well-known fact that the succession to all political office in the tribe, including that of the king, is hereditary in the male line according to the normal principles of the kinship system. The main sanction that enforces the king's authority is his command of the regiment system, and this should not be seen as the oppressive rule. The king's rule should be used in the public interest for the defense of the community and for the maintenance of the order which is beneficial to the majority of the community. The change circumstances have altered the supreme position held by the king or tribal chief. It is very important to note that the king today is required to maintain some sort of balance between the requirements of the European administration and the wishes of his people and this is one of the principal features of a good ruler. Succession to the kingship lies within a royal family descent group.

### **Relevance of the Folktales**

Folktales have been servicing the communities in the past and will continue to do so as long as the communities exist. People can look down upon the folktales, but their catchy expressions put them in a hypnotic state and lead

them in the right direction. If people use them to adjust to the present circumstances, their chances of success are better than ever. The folktales are big whistle-blowers which keep people under control when they go out. They also uplift their confidence. They know that their safety is the most important thing. Even if folktales have been handed down through the ages from one generation to the other, they still fully satisfy the demands of the modern society. It is clear that, through them, the intellect of the Africans is not inherently inferior to that of any other race. They possess the same potential possibilities as the members of any other racial group. Their problem may be to achieve a gradual transition from those old African forms of culture to a modern African culture. Africans still acknowledge the great importance of folktales in the early stages of children's lives and their significance in the further development of their growing process. They serve as building material to correct thinking.

The studies of folktales, as part of culture, gives African people awareness of themselves in a way no other subject can (Canham 2014: 53). They provide them with the power to start and continue, in a more efficient and differentiated way, a dialogue with their world, and also with the people in their world. The manner in which they use them indicate the kind and the level of their culture. As soon as spiritual contact is made between adults and children, the children gradually and quite unconsciously start to take over from adults their systems of thoughts and habits of thinking and speaking. This is an ongoing process. Folktales, as the researcher has tried to indicate, have a central place in the contemporary society in South Africa and in Africa as a whole. Okumu (1994: 344) goes on to say that folk narratives are the gadflies that societies cannot get rid of. Thus, no matter what their stage of "whiteness" or "Westernism" is, their feelings, attitudes and political aspirations will continue to be transmitted from one generation to the next through folk narratives.

People who do not care about them will always have problems in life. Old mistakes keep returning to haunt them. Folktales always remind people of the mistakes of the past and how they can deal with them. Through folktales, people can recognize the dangers and respond to them appropriately. Some people who do not

consider folktales as referees are ruined by juvenile delinquency.

Folktales are, like other genres of oral tradition, regarded as public property accessible to all. Although this genre entertains, it can also be a medium that helps humans rise from the secular to the sacred realm. Through it, African people are able to retain their identity and their history. People, more especially children, learn to be trustworthy and to love other people. Folktales teach them to help others, to be sociable and live well with others. They also increase their knowledge (Hodza 1987: 8-9). This research is, therefore, ideal for teaching various aspects of African culture in that it provokes thought and stimulates discussion about the richness and wisdom of traditional African values. These “primitive” expressions reflect the emotions, dreams and desires of every human being. However, high or low, exaggerated or outlandish, the emotions and experiences of folktales’ characters have their real-life counterparts.

### **Folktales and the Future**

Even though the use of folktales is on the decline, they will continue to serve the people with cultural values. Life may change because of technology, but innate things like love, hatred, emotions, dreams, desires and other related aspects cannot change. As folktales are regarded as features of the folklore study of literature, some modern writers like Mohlala and Thobakgale (2003), Tautsoala (2006) and Mphasha (2012), just to mention a few, also used them in their works and indicated that they will still be relevant in future. Folktales will continue to express the fundamental truth that has bearing on life. The coming generations are still going to face the world and will learn what life is all about as they grow up. Mtumane (2009: 37) explains this by saying that:

*These people are still going to face much of what is happening in life, as there is not much that they have experienced throughout yet.*

Folktales will continue to make sure that all components of cultural life are addressed in a systematic and integrated manner. Each folktale has a particular function in the community as Finnegan (1976:377) says:

*This is the likelihood that within a culture, stories are likely to have many functions.*

They will promote “common culture” of human beings and cultural products like clothes, music, etc. that are traditionally linked with their creative arts of the people. The cultural products play a significant role in the economy of the country. As always, their creative expression of values emphasize the community engagement and ambitions of the people they serve. Although folk narratives take a long process to be embedded in the cultural stream of the people, they integrate and identify the boundaries of the society (Schudson 1994: 65). This is also echoed by Jordan (1973), Makopo (1995), Schmidt (2001) and Stewart (2014), just to mention a few. It is true that culture plays a significant role in shaping the personality of an individual in the community.

Folktales remain a relevant and competitive genre that will continue to build the communities’ knowledge. They cultivate, build and maintain positive relationships, internally and externally. They make people think differently from animals and try to be responsible in the way they live. Even if they are constantly confronted with the perception that they are of a lesser value than other disciplines, they will continue to address very important diverse issues. Western culture, according to Shepherd (1945:66), was judged to be infinitely superior even though African folktales and other related genres like songs, proverbs, idioms, riddles, praise poems and others would leave their mark on world literature.

### **CONCLUSION**

Story-telling has been playing an important part in the African communities. The stories which differ in content and tone involve various elements such as entertainment, education, humanity, results of actions, poverty, unemployment and other issues. In this way, folktales give people a collection of values, beliefs and attitudes plus certain already set patterns of behavior. Their cultural values open the minds of the people to their immediate surroundings in particular and the world in general. Many things which have been overlooked get new meaning and new dimensions.

Folktales help the communities at all levels, and increase loyalty and a feeling of nostalgia. Folklorists do not only contribute to the economy of the country like selling their folklore books

which include folktales and journal write ups by means of recognized publishers, but also through their talent and skills, create community network and a body of ambassadors that transmits its patterns of living. This has an impact in the field of higher education. People learn to tolerate each other, think quickly and find a way to get out of problematic situations. Overcoming challenges is exciting and gives people confidence to take on other challenges in life.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Folklore, including folktales, should be taught in schools from lower grades. Programs must be tailored to the cultural specificities of a community to be most relevant and effective. Parents should be involved by supporting their children to learn folktales as they form part of local cultural heritage. Stories should lie within the comprehension of the target group. In this case, vulgar language as well as complicated sentence constructions should be avoided. Story-tellers in children's radio programs should be trained in the art, and normally their technique, in broad outline, is worthy of imitation.

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