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TALE OF A POOR GIRL IN NEED OF A LONG LASTING MARRIAGE: AN ANALYSIS OF HAUSA FOLKTALE

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Abstract

This paper analyses the tale of a poor girl in search of a long-lasting marriage. The study evaluates the Hausa oral repertory thereby examining the cultural and artistic relevance of folktales. Among the functions of folktales in Hausa society is to guide and instruct children on how best they could live with their partners. A poor girl in need of a long lasting marriage is a typical folktale that younger and growing up Hausa children should be told by their parents to make them aware of the challenges of being a 'deviant' woman and the benefits of being an 'abiding' woman. The study adopts functional theory as its theoretical thrust which comments on the significances of folktales in Hausa community, thereby unveiling the roles performed by folktales in the evolution and growth of every human society.

Key words: Tale, Marriage, Hausa, Folktale, Poor Girl

Introduction

Hausa folktale is an essential and special heritage of the Hausa's materialistic and spiritual culture. Telling a tale that thematically focuses on different affairs of human lives guides the people on how to go about things in the society. As such, folktales are moral and instructional stories told by elders to their children for the purpose of making them become effective people in their communities. At the heart of every culture and language lies a folktale. They are the invaluable resources and the paths that guide the unguided, instruct the uninstructed, correct the uncorrected and set the unset. The Hausa people find folktale as a proper means of guiding their children on how to conduct themselves in the material world.

Folktales serve different and divergent functions and they are structured or told to serve as the precautionary measures to people to which these narratives are narrated to. The first function that folktale always serves is education; folktales educate the children, people and humanity as a whole. As part of the narration, the purpose is to change the bad behavior within the society or to correct, mold something to last longer, which serve as a passport to which Hausa parents

tell their children to make them aware of cosmic challenges while growing up.

The value of folktales in traditional society cannot be overemphasized. This very important genre of traditional oral literature plays a significant role in imparting educational, traditional, cultural, religious and social ideologies of the society to the upcoming generation (Amali, 2014).

Amali (2014) in her paper titled *The Function of Folktales as a Process of Educating Children in the 21st Century: A Case Study of Idoma Folktales* examines that folktales are the sources to which upcoming children are inspired and they serve as the fountain in creating awareness among children. Folktales similarly portray the values and virtues of each particular society that produces it. The motif of every folktale relates to the prevailing socio-economic activities that produce that folktale. However, there is antiquity to the Hausa folktale as documented in Yahaya (1979:32) who notes that:

The large collection of Hausa oral traditions made by Charlton, Edgar, Eletcher, Harris, Landanoin, Lippart, Merrick, Prietze, Ratray, Schon, Tremearne

and Hitting who were mainly travelers, missionaries, anthropologists, linguists or British, colonial officers at different periods between the middle of the nineteenth and early twentieth century add up to 1220 prose narratives (tales and legends), 3215 aphorisms (proverbial expressions), 182 riddles and 603 other items of oral traditions. All these point to an undisputable proof of both Hausa verbal creativity and their interest in oral art. The major defects of these collections were lack of informant data and content analysis. The Hausa folktales are meant to reflect cultural norms, local history and the realities of the environment. To adults, tales are basically false stories which are not meant to be believed but among children, a tale is as true as life itself.

Folktales are characterised by both social and moral developments which leave much lessons in the minds of the listeners and tellers. The pleasure derived from these folktales make an ever-lasting effects in the generation yet unborn. It is believed that a folktale changes the perception and conception of the people. As the product of orality, folktales led to the emergence of many more written forms of literature. The formal and written literatures are birthed out from the oral literature which shows that orality predates writing.

Nevertheless, the art of telling stories is part of the Hausa culture and is well known and believed by the Hausa people. It is looked

upon as a pastime for amusement of women and children. Folktales equally serve as a handy tool for mothers whenever they are faced with difficult questions by the children. Traditionally, women are the subordinates within the family and were the ones telling stories as they have interest in promoting change within the existing framework of society. According to Usman (2013:19), the most respected women of each community must assume the responsibility of passing on the culture of the tribe by telling stories to the younger children in the evening time. This shows that old women and the brides are usually regarded as the best tellers of stories.

Hausa tales are full of events that explain and present life in its entire social sphere. Some narrations educate us to be good and be respectable in the society, and forbid us from behaving negatively, while others make a clarion call to the rulers to treat their subjects equally and with justice. Some tales lament about how people are being ruled indirectly and in an artistic manner. The revolution of human civilisation kicked up through the use of language based on social interactions. This can be seen in the Hausa socio-cultural development of the child, the prize of being obedient, well-mannered and humble in society.

This research seeks to establish the nature of Hausa folktale with a focus on women in order to improve the morals of children. This is done to appreciate folktales against the backdrop of the decline in folk narration due to Western education, the advent of the internet, computer games, globalization, and printed cartoons. In the absence of recent and current studies on the changes affecting folktales and folk telling in Hausa society, the study throws light principally and focusing on a tale of a poor girl in need of a long lasting marriage.

Methodology

This section explains the process and procedure of data collection, analysis and

discussion. The study aims to analyse the tales of a girl in search of long-lasting marriage by employing the use qualitative methodology. The study uses this form of methodology for its appropriateness and suitability in achieving the overall objectives of the research. Qualitative research is the study of the nature of phenomena, which include their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear, or the perspectives from which they can be perceived. However, qualitative research does not concern itself with numeral analysis of data, in the areas of range, frequency, and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effects (Chinyere U.N and Val Eze H.U, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

At its theoretical consideration, this study adopts the Functional Theory. Commenting on the nature of African oral performance Afolabi (2004) argues that oral literature is an important artistic expression that pre-dates literature in all societies in the world. If indeed literature is the portrayal in writing of human perceptions, experiences and sensibilities, it becomes obvious then that man did not wait for literacy to develop before the seeds of artistic perceptions and creativity were sown. Oral literature is one of the most effective means of expressing intellectual, physical and spiritual experiences of man in their most natural forms.

Because of its social significance to folktales, this theory was adopted. The functional approach to the study of oral literature is summarised by Dorson (1972) insisting on "the sociological investigation of the circumstances of narration and the role of the transmitters of oral traditions without whom the tradition would die out. Its method was more or less on function." The functions of tales eschew meanings and interpretations among the folklorists and scholars. As highlighted above, folktales serve the primary functions of instructing the people. As a means of instructions and corrections, the

folktales used in the study are proven to be of moral qualities guiding the young girls who want to be in the long lasting marriages.

A predominant view of the functional theory, therefore, is that tales are meaningful only when related to the people's mode of living and from the society they originated. In this context, the Hausa tales preserve certain aspects of culture such as teaching moral lessons to children (Baba, 2018).

Review of Related Literature

Rabiu and Saminu I (2022) in their paper entitled: *Hausa Folktale: A Veritable Tool for Linguistic and Moral Development* examine the practice and the narrations of folktales in relations to the place, time, historical configurations and linguistic configurations that made up those tales. As stated by these researchers, in every Hausa community, folktales are created over time to morally correct, educationally teach, and socially enlighten the people. They set children's path to success by cautioning them from partaking in material damnation.

Folktales are verbal stories that can give people of a given society a way to communicate with one another about their society, their hopes, and how the world around them should be understood and appreciated. They also provide the audience the opportunity to think critically in assessing every situation. Morally, folktales guide a generation of people with virtuous lessons so as to behave well, learn how to protect themselves and their environment, as well as how to equip themselves with economic information in order to be self-reliant. Folktales, therefore, serve as vehicles for the capacity building of a society. It is not only a means to express stories leisurely, but they always moderate the way people behave and think (Rabiu and Saminu 2022).

Tiwari and Kour (2018) investigate the universality and timelessness of folktales. They identify folktales as a strong pillar that

brings people of different race together and therefore erases the geographical and political boundaries. There are values which folktales teach which are universal in nature and have the power to erase all manmade boundaries. Human imaginations know no bound. Since folktales are imaginary stories told to people for consumption, this necessitate people to often create them in order to enrich them and through them empower the young children in the society.

Bello et al (2018), in their paper titled *Folktale in Nigeria: The Moral Values in Guddiri Oral Literature* postulate that every community and society has norms and values through which the younger generation acquires socialisation and knowledge. In the paper, they highlight the fact that Guddiri literature performs functions such as entertainment, security, encouragement of self-reliance and provision of wisdom. The function of entertainment is the principal significance of folktales. Folktales make people laugh and enjoy themselves. However, folktales have a lot of functions which are beyond entertainment.

A Synopsis of Tale of a Poor Girl in Need of a Long Lasting Marriage

In Hausa society, marriage is central to the people live so much so that it makes themes of numerous folktales, songs and proverbs. Marriage remains the bond that ties up family unit. It receives so much attention that families spend months and years preparing for its ceremony. So much is spent where there is so much and so much is borrowed where there is a chance to borrow. So much are collected on loan to actualise the assumed financial strength of the two families. Folktales are designed to guide, educate and instruct audience on how best to handle issues related to subject matter in focus. *Tatsuniyar 'Yar Talaka Mai Son Aure* (Tale of a poor girl in need of marriage) warns against the desire to imitate, assume fake life and take unconscious decision. The story is summarised under the headings below:

Parental Responsibility

Tasalla, the protagonist, understands that her parents give more priority to impressing guests while short sighted on the married life. The mother, Innan Tasalla, was busy accumulating items for room decoration and was eager to earn more money for such purposes. This makes Tasalla always getting sent to the street to sell one item or the other. This was her daily routine. Tasalla had no time to visit her relative to learn varieties of dishes. Her mother could not also seat her to learn the basics of marriage keeping.

Abban Tasalla could not pay attention on his daughter's life long matrimonial journey. His concern was how best to accumulate the items a father is traditionally expected to provide. In doing that, he was always travelling from one market to the other. He paid no attention to Tasalla's education.

Friends' Responsibility

Tasalla informed her friends that she understands that her parents care only to buy the properties that will be taken to her matrimonial home. They do not care about her human relation and capacity building. One of her friends advised her to take a break on *Jaura* (daily traditional trading) and go in search of human virtues. The two (Tasalla and Azumi) agreed to travel far to Garin Maza (the land of men) so as to understand what men needs. They both informed their parents of their friend's (Tabawa) wedding which was scheduled to take place in two months' time. Tabawa was to be taken to her husband's house in a faraway land. Their parents accepted their request to participate fully in their friend's wedding and conveyance. The two had a preconceived mission of travelling to the land of men.

Tabawa's wedding

Tabawa is among the lucky girls whose parents have enough to spend. Her wedding was spectacular. Relatives from far and near were in attendance. The wedding ceremony

lasted seven days and on the eighth day Tasalla and Azumi followed the bride's conveyance team of strong men and elderly women. They arrived at Gidan Miji where Tabawa assumed a new life with in—laws.

Garin Maza (The Land of Men)

After sleeping two nights at Gidan Miji, Tasalla and Azumi headed for Garin Maza (the land of men). They arrived at night when all men were asleep. They hide where no man can suspect their presence. Garin Maza is a settlement where all the inhabitants are men who divorced their wives and opted to live without wives for the rest of their lives. The men have no topic of discussion other than their previous married lives. Tasalla and Azumi had enough *hoce* (a variety of food mostly prepared in Zamfara) and water to last them eight days. In the early morning of their first day, the first set of men arrived and sits on logs of wood, within a hearing distance from where they hid. They listened to the men's conversation.

Yi Na Yi Bari Na Bari (Do as Directed)

The first man said, after our wedding, the first thing my wife was advised to do was for her to do as I directed her. But to my surprise, she did as she liked and the worst was she was doing what I disliked. This became the dictate. She made me a second class citizen in my own house. With the arrival of her friends and sisters, I became the third class citizen. She cared less about my presence in the house. She only remembered me when she needs my financial or related services. I understood that marriage was an interesting financial problem.

The second man laughed and said that marriage was also time consuming. Prior to my married life, time passed by speedily when I was with the woman I was to marry but after she packed as a wife, life became confusing. I keep imagining what was wrong until one day when she confessed to me that she thought I was extra rich. She married me

on assumption that I was wealthy and now could not face the reality.

The third man laughed and said marriage for me was good until the day I exposed her to the public. We attended a public gathering and someone more handsome and richer spotted her. That was the beginning of the end of my marriage. She changed and demanded for divorce. Seeking for divorce became the daily song on her lips. Her actions and reactions complemented her utterances. The house became boring and the marriage tasteless. I had no option but to grant her wish. Ironically, that handsome and rich did not marry her. The two of us have remained divorce till date.

The fourth man changed the topic with a single sentence 'I hate to come home and find my wife away'. All the men agreed with him. He added 'even if she is away with my permission'.

Tasalla and Asabe's Mission

While hiding, Tasalla and Asabe listened attentively to the men's conversation. Their mission was to understand the psyche of men to enable them run a successful marital home. From the utterances of these four men, they concluded that they have learned enough to go home and face a marital life. They learned two important things that are essentials for a successful married life. These are doing as directed by the family head, the husband, and stay at home while observing the first one. They waited for the night to leave. Their mission was successful and timely as they had not spent a full day. They arrived at night and by early morning, they had achieved their target. In the night, they sneaked out of Garin Maza and headed for Gidan Miji. They shared their experience with Tabawa and headed home.

Tasallah and Asabe returned home after escorting their friend, Tabawa to her matrimonial home. They kept their secret to themselves and swore to make their

marriages exemplary. Asabe got married before Tasalla and Tasala got married three moons after Asabe's marriage. They always do as directed by their husbands. They also ask for guidance and permission from their husbands before embarking on any task. Whenever they are constrained to go out, they do so with their husbands' permission and they always return home earlier than their husbands. Tasalla and Asabe lived happily ever after in marriage.

Conclusion

This study examines carefully and analyses substantially *the tale of a girl in search of a long-lasting marriage* via the functional theory. The culture of the Hausa people is impressive in its own way. Their lives are spectacular and different from other set of cultures or people. The study analyses the character of "Tasalla", a young lady growing up to show that Hausa people have the ambitions to have a very long lasting marriage and adhere to the rules and regulations imposed to them by their husbands. The cultural evaluation and appreciations of the Hausa people reveal that women, who law are abiding are the ones living with their marital partners in peace, while those who are at loggerheads with their husbands are the ones living with their husbands in problems. For a wife to be successful in the Hausa socio-cultural setting, she must follow the good instructions of her husband which are in line with the teaching and practice of the culture and religion.

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