

Teaching Moral Lessons to Nigerian Children at Basic Education Level Using Fulbe Folktales

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Abstract: *This paper dwells on teaching moral lessons to children at the basic education level of education in Nigeria using Fulbe folktales. Folktales are very important to the lives of the African people, especially the Fulbe. Specific tales are selected purely for the moral lessons they teach rather than for entertainment only. The tales were originally in Fulfulde and are later rendered in English. The folktales are classified into six categories, namely: human tales, animal tales, human-animal tales, dilemma tales, trickster tales and heroic tales. Each of these classes of tale teach specific morals to the school children. At the end of it all, it is hoped that if the tales are proper taught to school children, they would be guided by the morals taught in them and they would grow into healthy citizens of the country.*

Keywords: *Moral Lessons, Fulbe Folktales, Teaching, Learning*

INTRODUCTION

In Africa, *Fulfulde* is the most widely spoken African language, apart from Swahili (Blench, 1991) and is considered one of the major languages in Nigeria apart from Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Beginning as early as the 17th and 18th centuries, but mainly in the 19th century, the *Fulbe* took control of various states in West Africa. These included the *Fulani* Empire, also known as the Sokoto Caliphate, founded by Usman Dan Fodio (which itself included smaller states), Fouta Djallon, Massina and others.

In some areas such as northern Cameroon, *Fulfulde* is a local lingua franca. In West Africa, with the exception of Guinea (where the *Fulbe* make up about 40% of the population), they are minorities in every country they live in. The *Fulbe* are primarily known to be pastoralists, but they are also traders in some areas. Just like other African languages, *Fulfulde* is very rich with folktales, which are used in teaching moral lessons, especially to children.

The Concept of Folktale

Folktale has been given many definitions by many

scholars of different orientations. Its definition depends on its functions in a society and the way the narrator and the audience think of it at the time of performance. Akporobaro (2005: 51), for instance, says that folktale is: *... an imaginative narrative (story) in prose forms. The story that constitutes a folktale may have a basis in real life, but generally the story is an imaginative recreation of a memorable experience that is intended essentially to entertain rather than to record history or social experience. A folktale may be believed. Generally, however, they are considered to be untrue stories, and hence not object of serious belief.*

Abrams (1987: 66) provides a more concise and technical definition of folktale as "a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship, which has been transmitted orally". A folktale is therefore imaginative; in prose form; its authorship anonymous; and orally transmitted across ages. Quinn (2006), cited in Kehinde (2010: 42) defines folktale as:

... a story handed down orally from generation to generation that becomes part of the tradition of a group of people. Oral transmission allows for continuing development and alteration of the story. Once a folktale

assumes a written form, it remains a folktale, but its form becomes fixed. The folktale may include a wide range of types including the fable, fairy tale, legend and myth.

Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1993: 19) define folktales as narratives that stem from the lives and imaginations of persons or groups. They maintain that folktales started as an attempt to explain the temporal and the spiritual world and they originated in the oral tradition. They further provide a comprehensive and critical list of the technical features of a folktale:

It has a literary convention expressed in the scheme of formal features: the introductory statements; the body of the tale interspersed with songs; the moral or etiological conclusion; the narrator-audience interaction; the use of language characterised chiefly by repetition and resort to idiophones; the role of songs to punctuate sections of the story and to advance the plot in some cases.

According to Ebewo (2004: 50), "from the earliest to the present, every society, every culture, and every people have told stories, and these have passed from generation to another." Thus, a folktale is a story that is passed down orally from one generation to the next and becomes part of a community's tradition.

Classification of the Folktales of the *Fulbe*

Fulbe folktales are classified into five: human, animal, human-animal, dilemma, trickster and heroic tales. We are going to discuss them one after another in that order.

Human Tales

Human tales are tales that involve human characters. Below is a human tale from the folktales of the *Fulbe*:

A Hunter, a Lion, a Buffalo and a Crocodile

One day a hunter went up and down the forest to hunt but he was not successful. He returned home disappointed and unhappy as he had nothing to offer his wife for food. She saw how sad he was, so she said to him, 'Do not be sad and disappointed, my dear husband, as you do not know what chance may have in store for you. It is not the number of arrows you carry, or the potency of the poisoned arrows, or the strength of your bow that will bring you success in hunting. Luck is very important in this situation as well as tactics and cunning. A wise hunter can hunt without shooting an arrow.'

The hunter was contented and comforted by what his wife told him, and said, 'You have alerted me and opened my eyes today. Next time I go hunting I will know what to do.' He went into the forest the next day, well-

armed, and hid himself in the branches of a tree close to a pool where animals came to drink water. He made a small shade in the branches of the tree, and was completely covered by its leaves.

In the afternoon when the sun was very hot he heard a sound, followed by a buffalo bull approach the pool. He told himself that he should let it drink first, and then when it was pulling out of the water point he would shoot it. As the buffalo was drinking water, a crocodile suddenly sprang on it and caught its mouth. Wonderful! The crocodile was huge and strong and the buffalo bull was also huge and strong!

The buffalo would go wild and drag the crocodile almost out of the pool but to no avail. On the other hand, the crocodile would go wild and pull the buffalo, almost the whole of it, inside the pool but to no avail. As this drama was played, a lion which came to drink water appeared and saw how the buffalo bull struggled with the crocodile. The lion drew closer and got hold of the buffalo's waist. The lion went wild and, with one heavy heave, threw the buffalo as well as the crocodile outside the pool.

All this happened while the hunter was watching in amazement. He saw that all three animals were lying still. The three tried to stand on their feet but could not. It occurred to him that their backs were broken. So he descended from the tree and suddenly realized that he had already hunted three animals without shooting a single arrow. He then remembered what his wise wife told him, that one can hunt without shooting an arrow. He removed the lion and the crocodile's hide to sell, and for the buffalo, the hide and its meat were taken home for food.

Analysis of the Tale

In the tale above, the good consolation of a considerate wife had yielded positive results. The husband was admonished to be patient and to note that one was not destined to be lucky always. With patience and perseverance, the husband was able to hunt down three large beasts – a buffalo bull, a crocodile and a lion – without shooting an arrow or wielding any weapon. It shows that it is wise to follow the good council of a wife.

Animal Tales

Burke and Copenhaver, (2004) maintain that ours is a highly literate culture, making use of written texts to organize thought, test beliefs, convey what is valued, and attempt to influence the actions and thoughts of others. It is not surprising that for most people, early childhood memories include a favourite story. From among the many stories that we have heard or had been read to us, there is often one that spoke more directly to us than the

others, a story that touched an emotional chord, somehow reflecting a keenly felt need, concern, or set of values. This story stays fresh and whole in our minds. Hearing it revives old experiences and feelings we may have forgotten. We are able to recreate, in detail, who we were, what we were doing, the values and beliefs that we were developing, and how we were coming to relate to others and to our world.

In anthropomorphism (which is, assigning a human trait to an animal or object), people are changed into animals. This process has a long and respected history in many world cultures. Burke and Copenhaver (2004) still argue that many religions are systematic anthropomorphism – attributing human characteristics to non-human things and events. They go on to explain that people live in an ambiguous world and our survival depends on our ability to interpret it. Recognizing people, where they exist, becomes critical to our survival and to our success. Visualizing the world as humanlike becomes a good bet and we organize our predictions to increase our potential to recognize what is of most importance to us. In this way, our successes will have pay-offs and our failures will not be as costly.

Knappert (1970: 8) remarks that “animal fables are probably the most typical African forms of oral literature” and that although other continents’ traditional image does contain animal stories, “Africa has been very prolific in producing animal lore, and there are several excellent collections of animal stories, fables or fairy tales”.

The main figure in the animal stories of the *Fulbe* of Adamawa Central is the hyena, who is regarded as ugly, stupid, and insatiable. His rival, the squirrel, is depicted as intelligent, quick-witted and very crafty. There are stories of wizards and witches who eat men. It is during the night these supernatural creatures turn into hyenas and snakes to eat men's souls.

Occasionally, spider is the cunning trickster who outwits larger animals. There are a few other animals with stock characteristics; the antelope, small, shy, very clever; the goat, also clever; the leopard, dangerous, unscrupulous, full of deceit; the squirrel, clever, who comes to help larger animals; and dogs, closely attached to human beings. Most animal stories allude to a moral or are of the explanatory type, and do not seem to be taken too seriously.

Animal stories are the most popular, and the animal hierarchy lends itself very easily to two of the most popular themes; the triumph of clever animals over stupid ones, and the discomfort of the mighty ones. The spider, hare, squirrel and jackal all appear in other African tales too, but they are each given specific qualities. For example, the spider is unscrupulous and vindictive, the hare gay and mischievous, the squirrel clever and witty and the jackal cunning and sagacious. The villain is usually the hyena who is the greediest and most stupid overbearing to inferiors, and servile to his superiors. He

, always loses in his duels with the trickster.

Below is an animal tale from the folktales of the *Fulbe*:

Strength has Broken Greed

It was late afternoon and the hyena was trotting, then it saw smoke from afar. It said, ‘I think I should branch at that house and have a bowl of water.’ When it reached the house it announced its presence, ‘People of God, can I get water to drink?’ A she-goat came out to answer the call and said, ‘Come inside.’ When the hyena saw that it was a goat, it said to itself, ‘Well, I thought I could take water, I never knew it was going to be water and dinner.’ It squatted and drunk the water.

It now set its eyes on the goat, thinking, ‘What a beautiful delicacy for dinner!’ Now it wanted to know whether the goat was alone or with somebody who might be looking after it. So it said, ‘I wonder how you stay here in this forest alone.’ The goat retorted, ‘If a woman loves her husband there is nowhere she cannot stay with him.’ The hyena asked, ‘Are you married, and if you are, where is your husband?’

‘He has gone to the farm; by now he must be getting ready to return home.’ The hyena thought, ‘Well, it is not only dinner then but dinner and breakfast. Because I know that a she-goat does not have any husband but a he-goat.’ The hyena does not trust anybody so, in order to be very sure, it asked, ‘How does your husband look like?’

The goat said, ‘How does he look like if not like all men are?’ It looked at the hyena and pointed at its testes and said, ‘He is a person who has the same thing as those things that you have.’ The hyena looked at the goat and said, ‘Have I not seen you somewhere before?’ It replied, ‘It seems to me I too have seen you somewhere before.’ Both kept quiet for a moment and suddenly the goat said, ‘Yes, yes, now I know! A long time ago, when I was a young girl and was not married, someone who looked like you came to our ranch and tried to catch one of us. We all cried and people came out and shouted, Hyena! Hyena! Then it escaped. What is your name?’

The hyena said, ‘My name is Jallo.’ As they continued to dialogue, the hyena heard the roar of a lion far away. It was frightened and looked round and asked, ‘What noise is this that my ears heard?’ The goat answered, ‘It is my husband announcing his homecoming.’ The hyena stood up and started trotting and said, ‘I am going to a far place. If your husband returns, greet him for me and tell him that it was Jallo who came to pay a courtesy call on him but could not meet him.’

Analysis of the Tale

In this tale, the hyena thought that it had got free dinner and probably with a breakfast attached. When it

noticed that the goat was actually a lion's wife waiting for the return of its husband, it quickly trotted away, leaving the goat unharmed. As the title of the tale indicates, the strength of the lion had broken the greed of the hyena for it knew the consequences of touching that which belonged to the king of the jungle. The tale also indicates that the goat was smart and unabashed because it knew that no animal in the jungle dared touch that which belonged to her husband.

Human – Animal Tales

Human-animal tales are tales that contain human and animal characters engaged in their daily affairs. Below is a human-animal tale from the folktales of the *Fulbe*:

A Squirrel, a Teacher and Cunning

One day a squirrel went to a teacher (*Mallum*) and asked him to 'give' it or teach it cunning. The teacher thought for a while and said, 'I will give you if you bring me two things: an old woman's salt and the milk of a buffalo.' The squirrel promised to bring those things.

It went to the road leading to the market and followed a woman who went to buy salt. It tricked her on her way home by lying in the middle of the road with limbs up, as if it was dead. The old woman came by and saw it and thought it was dead but passed without saying anything. The squirrel stood up and ran ahead of the woman and lied on the road again but the woman left it there and passed by. When it did so for the third time the old woman contemplated. She stood there and looked at the squirrel and said to herself, 'Now there are three squirrels dead. If I pick all three, they would make a delicious meal.'

The woman kept her shopping bag, wherein the salt was kept, and went for the second dead squirrel she left behind but when she reached there she saw nothing. She bit her forefinger in disappointment and lamented, 'What a disappointment! Somebody was faster than me.' She went for the very first squirrel and was greeted by the same fate. She then decided to rush to the last one where she had left her bag of salt but she neither saw the squirrel nor her salt. Of course, she must have underrated the cleverness of the squirrel.

The squirrel has now got the salt of an old woman, what remained was to get the milk of a buffalo. It took a small gourd and went to the buffalo and said to it, 'You buffalo, as big as you are, you cannot do what I can do.' The buffalo was annoyed and asked, 'What on earth can you do that I cannot do?' The squirrel replied, 'You see that baobab tree over there, I can force myself through it, can you do the same?'

The buffalo said, 'Let us try and see.' The squirrel

ran very fast, bounced itself on the tree, rouse dust with its tail and fell the other side of it and said, 'You see, I have passed through the tree.' The buffalo responded, 'Wait and see wonders;' it closed its eyes and came to the tree in full force, *pab!* The consequence of this act was that its two horns got stuck in the trunk of the tree. It shook its tail and body left and right but the horns could not come out, so the squirrel said, 'Haven't I told you? You cannot do what I can do. Now you know you cannot pull out your horns till I milk you and the milk poured on the horn to soften it for easy pulling.' The buffalo allowed the squirrel to bring its gourd to milk it willingly. It then took the salt of the old woman and the milk of the buffalo to the teacher (*Mallum*), leaving the buffalo still stuck to the tree because of its foolishness.

The teacher gave the squirrel a pot and said to it, 'Go down there and insert your head inside this pot; I will soon come and give you cunning.' The squirrel collected the pot and stood there for a long time, thinking. It thought, 'You see this teacher, he does not wish me well at all or else how can he ask me to put my head inside a pot like a cap before he gives me cunning?'

The squirrel went and looked for the trunk of a tree and inserted it inside the pot and stuck it inside the ground. It hid itself close by and waited to see what the *Mallum* intended to do. Suddenly, the *Mallum* appeared, sneaking with a big stick in his hand. The squirrel held its breath to see what would follow. The *Mallum* came close to the pot and smashed it with the stick, *pam!* The squirrel came out of its hiding and laughed loud and said, '*Mallum*, you have broken your pot!' The teacher (*Mallum*) said, 'Squirrel, what cunning do you want me to give you? You are more cunning than me!'

Analysis of the Tale

The tale above is about cunning versus cunning. A squirrel, the master schemer, went to be taught lessons on cunning from a learned teacher (*Mallum*). He gave it two impossible tasks to perform which it did, but when he asked the squirrel to perform a risky assignment, it showed the *Mallum* that it was the father of all tricks, cunning personified.

Dilemma Tales

Bascom (1972) posits that African dilemma tales are known for their elaborate narrative schemes, leaving the listener with a challenging choice between possible alternative answers, such as which of several characters deserves a reward, or which of them has done the best. He also observes that the dilemmas in some folktales have a definite solution but most often the tales end with an unresolved question, to be debated by the audience. Even when they have standard answers, dilemma tales

generally evoke spirited discussion, thus serving as a training ground for those who participate to develop the skills of debate and argumentation. It is this function, rather than any literary merit, that makes them interesting.

Amali (2014) says that dilemma tales pose problems to the listeners who should offer solutions. This category of tales also demonstrates actions that encourage and convey acts of good behaviour. They encourage the listener to intellectually examine the issues raised. These may be questions unanswered or issues unconcluded. They also provide moral education and are didactic in nature for instilling good moral training and discipline in children. Achufusi (1986: 3), in her definition of dilemma tales, states that: "This constitutes a large, diverse and widespread group of very lively tales. African dilemma narratives are didactic in content, and form an integral part of morals and ethical training in many African societies." There are questions as to what should happen to an erring character, or what and who should be positively rewarded. Dilemma tales may involve human or animal characters that engage in adventures, competitive acts such as possessing a beautiful wife, and acquiring wealth or other material things. In this process, room is created for a dilemma to evolve, thereby gingering the listener- child into intellectual thinking to untie the riddle.

The dilemma folktales are usually narrated to provoke a debate in order to see how people argue and convince others. Dilemma folktales are used to discover who had the best persuasive and debating powers that could be applied to solve routine problems in the village. Below is a dilemma tale from the folktales of the *Fulbe*:

Who Must She Marry?

Once upon a time, in a very far away land, there lived three close friends. They were so close that nothing separated them except sleep. They grew in this cordial relationship from their childhood to their young adulthood. One day they sat under the shade of a huge baobab tree and talked all day long. When the sun was going down west, one of them said, 'Friends, we cannot continue to live life like this in the village. We must go into the world and learn about one thing or another, something spectacular that is not common or known in our village.' They all agreed to this proposal.

It happened that the *Laamiido* of the settlement or village had a very beautiful daughter whom every young man wished to marry, the three friends inclusive. Though all three would die for each other, none among them would want to give up the beautiful Princess for the other. So, one fateful day they decided to separate so that each should find his way to distant lands and should not return home till after five years. Within those years each must return home with something spectacular, and not known or seen in the land, which would warrant him to marry the Princess.

They walked through the thick forest till they arrived at a junction with three paths. They decided that each should take one path and go into the world till after five years when they would meet again at the same spot.

Each took his separate path and travelled to distant lands. For five years each of them travelled from one place to another. Each saw many wonders of the world and was more educated than he was in the village. Finally, they all returned to the same spot they left five years previously. Each one of them was carrying something that was not known in their village. After greetings and several pleasantries, each friend spoke on his experience during his travels. One of them brought out a magic carpet that could fly people to distant places in no time. The second one had a magic mirror that could show any part of the world. The third had a magical potion or medicine that could cure any disease or sickness, no matter its severity. Each one of them was proud of what he got and felt that his was most important.

After each had displayed what he got, the person with the mirror was asked to show them their home and, especially, the Princess whom each wanted to marry. He brought out his mirror and focused it towards their village. They all saw the village and its environs. When the mirror was focused on the *Laamiido's* house and especially the Princess's bedroom, all three became tense. This was because people surrounded her bed and it seemed she was about to die from a terrible unknown illness. People were running helter-skelter and many medicine men and women, and herbalists tried in vain to make her well again. In fact, a soothsayer pronounced that she was soon going to die.

This prompted the owner of the medicine to say, 'If we can reach the village in time I can rescue her from death.' The owner of the carpet said that he could take them there on his carpet in no time. So, all three sat on the magic carpet and were soon flown to the village and the *Laamiido's* palace in no time. The one with the medicine opened his bag and brought out the potion which was in a small bottle. He made her sniff it and suddenly, the Princess woke up from her long coma and sat up, as if she was never sick. She ordered for food and water to be brought to her which she ate and drank.

The *Laamiido* was now in a dilemma as to who, among the three friends was to marry his daughter: the one who gave her the magic medicine that brought her back to life, the one who brought them to the village on his magic carpet in no time, or the one who used his magic mirror and first discovered she was sick? Each of the three friends claimed that the Princess was his. That was the dilemma the *Laamiido* found himself in.

Analysis of the Tale

As said earlier, dilemma tales are usually narrated to provoke a debate in order to see how people argue and

convince others. They pose problems to the listeners who should offer solutions, leaving the listener with a challenging choice between possible alternative answers, such as which of the several characters deserves a reward, or which of them has done the best as it is the case in this narrative.

This tale is a typical example of a dilemma tale as each youth would claim to be the right person to marry the Princess based on his contribution towards the revival of her life. The youth with the magic mirror would say he deserved her because he was the first person to bring the idea of seeing what was happening at home, and it was his mirror that was used to see the Princess's critical condition. The youth with the magic carpet would say if he did not fly them on his carpet in time they would have met her dead, so he deserved the hand of the Princess. The youth with the magical potion would say that without his medicine, nothing would have kept her alive. To whom then should the *Laamiido* give his daughter? That is the dilemma.

Trickster Tales

Trickster tales are very useful in teaching Nigerian youths some morals. In the main, the trickster figure is a central character (hero) in African storytelling. According to Obiechina (1967: 154), he is "a stock character that is often something of a rogue. He manages to extricate himself from intriguing and sometimes dangerous situations by a display of mental ability". He is represented by a willing and tricky animal that cheats and outdoes the bigger and more powerful ones. Hagan (1988) and Lynn (1999) give the variants of the trickster hero in African folktales as including: Ananse - spider of Ghana; Akan-Asante - trickster of Ghana; the Ijapa (Tortoise) of Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Ibibio, Edo, Itshekiri and Kalabari people of Nigeria; the Gizo of Hausa land, Hlakayana of the Zululand and the Calabar Rat (who bites with a soothing breeze).

Adeoti (1999: 55) asserts that: "Trickster tales are almost a universal element in African thought system. They are borne out of some perceived socialization needs, judging from their encapsulation of societal norms and values, which the child is brought up to uphold". It should be reiterated that Nigerian trickster folktales teach and fortify; they are moralistic and didactic. Hence, in trickster tales, the trickster figures play vital roles in the beliefs and customs of cultures throughout the world. In the main, the trickster character is an allegorical figure used to condemn the vices of selfishness, libidinous, powerful appetites and bodily functions. Trickster figures deceive others, but overreach what they can realistically attain and often become the victims of their own schemes.

The trickster figures always trick the larger ones in a pretended tug of war and cheat them in a race. At times, the smaller trickster figures deceive the bigger ones into

killing themselves or their own relation. In most Yoruba folktales, according to Adeoti (1999), the trickster figure is an extremely cunning animal which regularly outwits stronger, faster, bigger animals. Adeoti (1999) further says that the Yoruba trickster figure is an archetypal figure who demonstrates the realities of human existence. For Okpewho (1992) the trickster figures signify trickery and breach of faith. It should be affirmed, however, that no African folktale endorses the vices of the trickster figures; rather, their virtues are esteemed, while their vices are condemned, and their follies ridiculed.

Animal-trickster tales are probably the most popular in Africa. There is always a small animal of high intelligence and cunning, quite unscrupulous, with great cupidity and gross appetite. He victimizes a series of fellow creatures, generally one animal that is his particular prey. This prey is inevitably larger and stronger than the trickster, always dull-witted, often earnest and hard working. People respond easily to trickster's suave arguments and alluring promises. Herskovits and Frances (1958: 450) believe there is an element of psychological and sociological significance to be found in the size of a trickster who must employ his ingenuity to outwit his more powerful adversary. This may be regarded as a "reflection of African thinking in approaching the day to day situations a human being must meet and resolve." The trickster figure is found all over the world because almost all traditional cultures tell stories featuring specific tricksters.

Below is a trickster tale from the folktales of the *Fulbe*:

An Old Cow and a Hyena

One day when cattle were returning home from grazing, an old cow trailed behind with great effort. A hyena came close and asked the old cow, 'I wonder in which position you do sleep in the ranch, old cow.' The cow said, 'My dear hyena, as I am now an old cow, all the cows have neglected me. When we set for grazing in the morning, I am always left behind. When we return from grazing, I am always left behind. And when it comes to finally retiring for the night, I cannot sleep in the middle because my bones might be broken into pieces by the others.'

The hyena said, 'Do you mean that you sleep aside, away from the other cows?' The cow answered, 'If you see a cow in the ranch sleeping alone, isolated from the rest, it is me.' The hyena was happy to hear this because, deep in its mind, it intended to come and eat the cow up late in the night. It did not know that the cow was lying; in fact, the cow used to sleep in the middle of the cows, while the bulls sleep by the sides.

The hyena came late in the night and stood by the side of the ranch. It observed the shadowy figure of a cow sleeping alone in isolation and thought it was the old cow.

It therefore went a little backwards, adjusted itself, and came with full force towards the shadowy figure that it saw. To its utter surprise, it saw a big, healthy bull which stood up, picked it in between its two horns and threw it on a nearby tree with a heavy crash, *baaam!* The hyena gave a loud roar and ran home with pains and an empty stomach.

The following day when the cattle were returning home from grazing, the hyena came close to the old cow and said, 'Old cow, yesterday when I asked you where you slept you said you slept away from the other cows. Was it not so?' The old cow replied, 'Yes! This is because you were a fool to believe me. As old as I am, how do you expect me to sleep isolated? If something came to take me away, how would I know?'

Analysis of the Tale

We said trickster tales feature a small, devious animal or character that employs its cunning to protect itself against much larger and more powerful animals and whose pranks usually cause trouble for another character. This tale, however, involved a hyena and an old cow, where the cow outwitted the stupid hyena. This indicates that some larger animals do also have wisdom but the hyena is an all-round stupid animal.

Heroic Tales

Heroic tales deal with spectacular feats performed by human or animal characters that accord them special honour or respect in their communities. These characters become worthy of emulation and their unusual performances are sometimes done through special magical powers or protective measures that cannot be done by anyone except them.

Below is a heroic tale from the folktales of the *Fulbe*:

Doylo

Once upon a time there was a pool full of water but a huge serpent prevented people and animals from using it. Any stubborn herder who tried to water his animals at the pool would regret. One particular year the dry season was long and all other pools and grasses dried up. Cattle and other animals were mere hide and skeleton. There was nowhere water and grass could be found except at that particular dreaded pool.

One day, a herder called Doylo told people that he would take his animals to the dreaded pool. News went around the villages about his intention. People from all over the villages came to Doylo's father to warn his son against his daring intention. His father told them, 'Doylo is a master of himself. He is a matured (grown-up) person and so he can do what he wants to do. This is why he is a free born.'

So, on the day Doylo set for his journey, he milked his cows and drunk the milk; he took a battle dress and put them on; he took the trousers of gift (*caahu*) and wore them on; he took the hat of patience (*munyal*) and put it on; he took the shoes of wisdom (*basiiira*) and put them on; and he took the stick of care (*endam*) and held it in his hand, and then he shouted, '*Huy! Huy! Huy!*' His cattle sprung up; he took the lead and they followed, the cows breathing hard and fast on his head as if they would trample on him. A heavy cloud of dust filled the air; Doylo had set for his journey without saying bye to anyone, least they would say he wanted to seek for their assistance.

At mid-day Doylo started seeing the signs of the pool from afar – tall grasses, shrubs and several species of birds such as hawks, cattle egrets and many others, patching on them. When Doylo reached there, his cattle scattered all over; some cows started eating grass straight ahead while others went into the pool to drink water first. Meanwhile, Doylo balanced himself on his herding stick, his right foot wedged on his left knee, and blew his flute without any fear.

Doylo realized that the serpent was not at home; it was only its children that played around his leg. He asked the children: 'Where are your parents?' They answered, 'They have gone hunting and would not be back till late afternoon.' 'When they return,' Doylo went on, 'tell them that I Doylo, the owner of the bull with golden horns, came and watered and grazed my cattle at this pool. The name of my village is so and so.' The children promised to tell their parents.

Doylo's cattle were well fed, their legs covered with mud, as if it was henna that was applied on them, and their bodies were covered with leech. He withdrew for his homeward journey, without any incidences or drama. This made him to be the most famous amongst his people.

The serpents returned home to find out that the pool had been visited and most of the grasses were eaten and trampled upon. The serpents were terribly annoyed, their venom boiling in them. The prohibited pool had been visited and divulged, the surrounding trampled upon! The father asked the children, 'Who grazed his animals at this pool?' The children answered, 'Doylo the owner of the bull with golden horns.'

Their father slept with the anger and fury of a wounded lion. Early the next morning the serpent followed the foot prints of Doylo's cattle. Whenever it reached a village it will ask 'Who is Doylo the owner of the bull with golden horns?' and it will be directed to move farther, till it reached the village it was looking for. It called upon Doylo loudly; he heard the voice of the serpent and so while coming out he took his sword and wound it round his waist and went to the outskirts of the village where they met. They held each other in a deadly dual; they continued fighting till mid-day. The serpent then said, 'Doylo, raise your face up and see how far the sun has gone.' He replied, 'We do not know how to do that in our village, why can't you do that?' The serpent raised up its

head and looked up. Doylo used this opportunity to chop off the python's head and it collapsed. The pool that was prohibited to be visited had now been made free for all because of the bravery of Doylo.

Analysis of the Tale

In this tale, Doylo proved himself to be a courageous and brave hero by killing the serpent that prevented herders from using the only pool that had water all year round. He was the only person in the whole villages who could do this feat. He was brave and courageous because he refused to be weakened by his father's and friends' appeal not to visit the pool. Not only that, he also refused to seek the assistance of any one, that was why he set out early without bidding any one goodbye. Children among the *Fulbe* are taught from their childhood to be strong, brave, fearless and courageous in life. This is to prepare them for the tough life of herding that involved meeting several challenges in the forest in the process of herding, challenges such as hunger, thirst, long trekking, rain, the heat of the sun, wild animals, variety of snakes and encounter with jinn. Beside the courage and bravery that Doylo displayed, he also showed that he was clever as he tricked the serpent into looking towards the direction of the sun, thereby giving him the chance to cut it into two.

The story shows that an individual is part and parcel of his community, and he is important only in so far as he recognizes his responsibilities toward his community. The individual is expected to be committed towards his community to the extent of being ready to sacrifice his life for the good of the community. This is manifested in the daring fit of Doylo.

Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated that *Fulbe* folktales abound with morals which are relevant in teaching children at the basic education level. If well taught, children will be brought up healthily and within the ambit of the norms of their society. The human tales speak about human shortcomings and how they can be overcome. The animal tales teach that there are a replica of human characteristics in animal live. The human-animal tales indicate that both humans and animals coexist, and the life of man can never be devoid of that of animals, domestic or wild. The dilemma tales, which seem to be puzzling to the children, teach them that sometimes people are confronted by dilemmas which are very difficult to choose from, but which must be necessary to choose from. The trickster tales are the most interesting to children because they are fully represented as they see smaller characters (just like themselves) easily outwit the bigger ones just as small children often outwit the bullies.

Similarly, the heroic tales appeal to the children as they all want to be heroes when they grow up. The tales are interesting and entertaining but more importantly, they teach moral lesson.

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