

## AN EXAMINATION OF MORAL AND VALUE MOTIFS IN IGBO FOLKTALES AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHARACTER FORMATION OF CHILDREN

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### **Abstract**

*The art of child upbringing has been in existence from the inception of the world. The secrets required in turning out balanced and well behaved individuals have been passed down through the ages (from generation to generation) through various agencies and individuals responsible. As the society evolves through stages of change, the family which is a microcosm of the society also changes. Institutions and artifacts are shaken and re-examined, discarded or if fortunate retained and most times placed at the lower rung of the ladder in the scheme of things. This has been the fate of Igbo folktales which has been thrown out of the schedule of families especially the “modern” families. This paper therefore is of the view that folktales contain values and morals which can be a handy and useful tool for protecting the mind of the young from the negative influences that abound in the society today and inculcating the right values and morals in them. The paper established that folktales are concerned with maintaining positive relationship, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, wisdom for survival, hard work, respect, etc. The data for the study is based on a sample of Igbo folktale. The paper concludes that modern parents/families should blend/build in the age old and trusted asset of folktale into their modern technique of child upbringing in order to achieve a better result and by implication a better society.*

**Keywords:** *Examination, folktales ,moral value, motif*

### **Introduction**

The process of child upbringing is becoming more daunting as the days go by. The challenges parents face in their task include pollutions and distractions engendered through the media, peer pressure, religion, etc. The authority and respect which parents hitherto enjoyed under traditional morality and custom are being challenged on a daily basis by youngsters in many homes. The new and modern way of parenting has made the training of children the prerogative of its direct parents. The only agencies which parents allow to have a say in their children’s upbringing are the school and the church, This is in contrast to the former practice whereby

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every member of the extended family is a stakeholder in ensuring that the child receives the prerequisite training that is required to turn out a wholesome person. In this wise the Igbo philosophical association (1971) observes "character formation is part and parcel of traditional education passed on by generations of the Igbo to their children. They are trained from their earliest years to be conscious of their morals". They gradually begin to recognize what is allowed and what is prohibited. In the transmission of this knowledge, the role of parents is very prominent while brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandparents and other relatives play a great role being the first contact of the child with the society. In support of the primacy of parents and indeed the family in the socialization of a child, Onwukike (2009) emphasizes that the family holds an unparalleled place of importance amongst all the institutions of the society which exert influence over individuals and determine the values they hold for their own lives.

In the pre television, cable and internet era, it was common to find children engaged in folktales where they learn the tangible and intangible components of their culture which are fundamental for their all round development. The beauty and efficacy of folktales in influencing and molding the character of the young may not be unrelated to the fact that the stories were introduced from the child's tender years when the mind is uncontaminated and continues through the period of growth and development. Ifo is very rich in content and also recommended for use in the teaching and training of children. It constitute a repository of knowledge and serves as the bearer of folk music, folk customs, beliefs, morality, religion, medicine, idea of the universe (cosmology), idea of supernatural, heroism propriety, desirability and taboos.

Folktale is an inter blend of entertainment, instruction and admonition and contain stories about the land of the living, the land of animals and the land of the dead all aimed at imparting one lesson or the other to the listener. Folktales serve two main functions in Igbo culture; as an instrument for entertainment, the modus operandi of folktales demands that children and listeners alike gather around the narrator after the night meal must have been eaten and sit quietly to listen while the story is being told. Since this involves children from different parents, children also learn practical lesson in turn taking, peaceful coexistence from such interactions. They also learn that others have needs and rights which ought to be respected.

Igbo folktale is punctuated with practical lessons at every turn through overt and covert underlying implications in the stories, societal norms, values, expectations and the right and acceptable behavior and the relevance of peaceful coexistence is inculcated in a child. Mbah and Mbah (2007) describe it as "a harmonious blend between morality and education. In essence Ifo is an instrument of teaching; it teaches lessons of obedience and the consequences of disobedience; the evil of pride and the virtue of humility; the virtue of sympathy and the woe of tyranny with other batteries of morals and ethical behavior".

*Writing on the general acceptability of folktales by children Mbah and Mbah (2007) observes "Igbo folktales are readily acceptable to children because they are told by members of their families, the care givers which includes the mothers, fathers, grannies, uncles and aunts including grown up siblings. The environment of learning is the home which children are familiar with hence they are comfortable there. The naturalness both in setting, time and rendition gives folktales acceptance among children who always clamor for the stories irrespective of the number of times the story is repeated. Rather than feeling bored, they commit every single detail in the story to memory through life.*

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The importance of folktales in the upbringing and socialization of the young and as a medium of instruction is further reinforced by Chivasa and Mutswanga (2014) who emphasizes "no area of life is beyond folktale which covers a wide range of topics such as morals, virtues, vices including socialization method on such issues as conflict, wisdom, greed, selfishness, laziness, respect among other things to youngsters". Ugwuonye (2005) is of the opinion that parents as the principal agents that mediate values to children through teaching, preaching, punishment and reward should expose the young ones to folktales starting from infancy and by adulthood the lessons from folktales enables them to be firmly rooted in the society's way of life, what it cherishes and what it abhors. The lessons learnt are in turn the guiding principle all through life. According to Ezikeojiaku (1995), folktale embraces all the traditional prose narrative and traditional poetic narratives which the audience is not expected to believe as true. Folktale can be classified into:

- Folktale pure (Ifo nkiti)
- Folk poem: Folktale with intermittent poem (Ifo na abu)
- Folk song: A folktale in a sing song form (Ifo na abu)

### **Characteristics of folktale**

Ifo possesses certain characteristic features which it shares with other forms of folk literature the world over. The following features can be identified:

1. It is not confined to prose, poetry or song form.
2. It is not confined to any particular area
3. It has antiquity
4. It is characterized by no authorship
5. It is usually short and simple in its plots and language.
6. It has regular opening and closing gambits (Ifo dii dii, Ifo chakpi woo)
7. All Igbo folktale end with stock expression..... This story teaches us that....
8. Its character includes human beings, animals and spirits. (Ezikeojiaku, 1995)

### **Usefulness of Folktale (Ifo)**

The importance of ifo (folktales) in igbo culture cannot be over emphasized. In both written and oral form, ifo serves as a means of entertainment for both the young and old. From the stories, children learn about the history of their people and the history of other people. These histories also shed light on important traditions and cultural values of the people.

In folktales light is shed on mannerism and activities of the various characters and this helps the children inculcate model behaviours on how to live meaningful life and at the same time it passes on roles in core values and character traits to the children. Positive mannerism and moralistic behaviour of folktale characters help the children develop and imbibe a sense of moral behaviour and positive character traits.

The consequences of the action of the folktale characters is not always lost on the children and this helps them to see the consequences of making poorly thought out or rash decisions thereby helping them imbibe the virtue of effective decision making especially in difficult situations.

The rewards associated with the exhibition of desirable traits such as caring, resourcefulness, courage, respect etc. encourages the development of such traits in the children and by so doing, it is woven into the fabrics of their minds. The shame, failure and harm which befall deviant characters leaves an indelible print in the minds of the children on how deviation from norms and other transgressions can lead to harm, danger or even death

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### Motif

Motifs refer to chain of events in a folktale. Each event represents a motif. Chukwukere (2001) describes motif as a picture of a character, action, setting or situation which possess some unique, distinct qualities in a narrative. The unique features of a motif are:

- i. Its tendency to be recurrent (in which case it has been identified in other similar narrative).
- ii. Arche type (whereby it has existed in the people's folkloric data from time immemorial).
- iii. Traditional (in which cases it shows a lot of the traditional features of the society where it exists).
- iv. Universality (the capacity to exists among the folklore of other societies)

### Igba nri na ofe

Okoo akuko: Ifo chakpii

Ogee: woo

okoo akuko: Agu bata ohia

Ogee: mgbada awara oso

Okoo akuko: o ruru otu mgbe

Ogee:otu mgbe eru e e

Okoo akuko: oke unwu dara n'ala umu anumanu, nke mere na ha ahughi ihe ha ga-eri, oke unwu a mere ka otutu umu anumanu nwuo n'ih i oke aguu. Otu Eze aha ya bu Eze Atako na-aga n'uzo wee hu otu onu, O chere na ya ga ahu nte n'onu ahu nke mere ka o Kpaghee ya. Oge o kpaghere ya, o nwetara onwe ya n'ala ndi mmuo. Dika onye Eze o bu, ha nyere ya otutu oru na-ekwesighi ya ka o ruo. O weturu onwe ya ala na-agbanyeghi oche Eze ya na okpu Eze ya, wee ruo ya bu oru n'udi o turu umu mmuo ndi ahu n'anya. N'ih i nwetu n'ala ya niile, umu mmuo bunyere ya igba abuo yiri onwe ha ka o horo nke o choro. Eze kpokuru chi ya ka o tuziere ya aka na igba nke ya ga a horo, chi ya mere o wee bute igba ihe oma.

Ha gwara Eze na igba ahu, bu igba ihe oma mana nso ya bu igba bu na adighi asa ya mmiri, nke ozo bu na onye na-aku ya adighi enefe okporo nkwa. Eze buru igba ya lawa. Oge o rutere n'ulo, o kuru igba ahu dika umu mmuo si gwa ya, nri wee buru aturu tawa. Onye o bula no n'ezi na ulo ya rijuchara afo nke ukwu. Mgbe ezi na ulo ya rijuchara afo, O kuru ekwe oha obodo wee gbako. O kuuru ha igba nri na ofe onye obula erie otu o choro. Nri a Eze nyere mmadu dum di ufodu mmadu mma ebe o na-adighi ufodu mmadu mma, mana Eze gara n'ihu na-enye oha obodo nri kwa ubochi nke mere ka aguu belata n'obodo ha.

Otu ubochi, nwunye Eze na nwa ya nwaanyi gara mmiri isa akwa. Ka Ugoeze na-asa akwa, o maghi mgbe nwa ya nwaanyi ji tuturu mkpuru akwu wee tawa. Mgbe Ugoeze matara na agwo no na akirika bu mgbe mbe si n' elu nkwa rituo wee tiwe mkpu si na o bu onye ohi. Na mkpuru nkwa a o zuru nye nwa ya bu mkpuru nkwa ya na ezi na ulo ya ga atasi a wee chere onwu. Ugoeze rioro mbe ihe niile o maara ka o mechie onu, ka ha ga hu Eze ma koro ya ka ha na ije si aga.

Mgbe mbe na Ugoeze rutere n'ulo Eze, mbe turu asi tugide Ugoeze ma gakwaa n'ihu igwa Eze na o buru na o kpeghe ikpe a nke oma, ya ga-agwa oha obodo otu Ugoeze si wee buru onye ohi.

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Eze gwara ya ka o mechilata onu ya ma kwuo ihe a ga eji kwuo ya ugwo, ebe o si na o bu mkpuru nkwo ya na ezi na ulo ya ga ata wee cherezie onwu. Mbe mere ka o na-eche echiche, ebe obi ya toro bu n'igba nri na ofe ahu. O wee gwa Eze ka e bunye ya igba nri na ofe. N' atufughi mgbe, Eze nyere iwu ka ebunye mbe igba ahu. Mana Eze ekweghi agwa ya nso igba ahu nwere. Onu juputara mbe obi ka o bu igba ahu na-ala. Ka o laruru, mbe kuru igba ahu iji nwalee ma Eze oghoriala ya, nri gboro kasaa ebe o bula. Onye o bula rijuru afo otu o choro. Ihe a wee ju ezi na ulo mbe anya ebe o di ukwu.

O dighi onye ogaranya adighi agu, mbe kpokoro umu anumanu wee kuoro ha igba ahu. Onye o bula riri ihe o choro, wee keele ma gozikwa mbe. Site n'ubochi ahu gawa n'ihu, ugwu mbe gbalitekwuru ebe o di ukwu. Mbe gara n'ihu wee gwa umu anumanu na ezi na ulo ya si, ya natara oke mmuo Ajakaja igba a n'ihhi mmeri ya meriri ya. Nke a mere ka umu ya na nwunye ya tuwa ya ujo dika onye bu a kwaa akwuru. Otu ubochi, mbe puwara, nwunye ya gwara nwa ya ka o ga na umere nne ya ga kpoo umunna ya ka ha bia rie ihe. Nwa ya mere otu nne ya gwara ya. Ndi ogo mbe dara mkpuru adighi n'ihhi ha anulari ihe ogo ha na-eme. Nwanne ha nwaanyi bu Anim kuru ha igba a, onye obula rijuru afo nke ukwu wee laa n'obi oma na onu. Oge nwunye mbe nyechara umu nna ya nri, o buru igba ahu saa ya mmiri na-amaghi na ya emeruola ya bu igba.

Mbe n'aka nke ozo gara na nke enyi ya nwoke wee nuo mmanya gwoogwoo. O hapuru uzo kpuru ohia, hapu ala riwa elu. O maghi mgbe o jiri nefee ikporo nkwo dara ada. O wee meruo nso igba ahu namaghi ama. Mgbe o batara, o butere igba ahu kuo ya. Ihe ya na ezi na ulo ya huru ka mma ihu n'anya karia iko na onu, maka na anu, akpi, anasi, agbasi na ihe otita ndi ozo gworo ha iba ma chie ha iwa. Mbe jiri iwe buru igba ahu, bughachiri ya eze.

### **The drum of foo-foo and soup**

Narrator: When the lion enters the bush

Audience: Antelopes disappear

Narrator: Once upon a time

Audience: Time, time

Narrator: There was famine in the animal kingdom. Many animals died as a result of hunger. One day, the king known as Eze Atako was passing, he saw a hole. He opened the hole in search of a cricket only for him to see himself in the land of the spirits. The spirits knowing that he was a king decided to humiliate him by asking him to do menial jobs. To avoid been killed, the king did not remember his throne or staff rather he did the whole work perfectly well. Because they were satisfied with the way he did the work, they gave him two drums to choose from when it was time for him to go back to the land of the living. The drums were similar but with different content. Faced with such situation, the king prayed to his 'chi' so as to guide him accordingly, in his choice. His chi answered him well and he got the drum of fortune. They told him the rules guiding the use of the drum which include; it should not be washed, and anybody who beats it does cross the trunk of a palm tree.

On arrival he beat the drum for his family and they all ate to their satisfaction. Being a king who has the interest of his subjects at heart, he summoned his people with the traditional ikoro drum. When they gathered, he beat the drum and everybody ate to their satisfaction. They were very happy and full of thanks to the Eze. The beating of the drum was now on daily basis, and it drastically reduced hunger in the whole community.

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One day, the queen went to the stream to wash clothes with her daughter. As she was washing, she didn't know when her little daughter picked palm fruit and started chewing it. Unknown to her, the tortoise was on top of one of the palm trees near the stream and the palm fruit fell from his hand. When the tortoise came down from the palm tree, he threatened that he will tell the villagers that the queen and her daughter stole his palm fruit if nothing is done to remedy the situation. The queen pleaded with tortoise to be patient first until they meet her husband. On getting to the palace, the tortoise lied against the queen. He lamented that, the palm fruit which the king's daughter ate was all that his family had to eat before they wait for death. The king asked him what he wanted, the tortoise pretended to be deep in thought, finally he said that, since the king's daughter ate the only palm fruit which he hoped to share with his family, the king should give him the drum of foo-foo and soup in exchange, if not he will scandalize the queen's name and tell the whole community that the queen and the daughter stole his palm nut. Stealing is a serious offence in the community, anyone caught stealing will be banished. Having heard tortoise's threats, the king gave orders that the drum be given to tortoise which was done immediately without any delay. But the king did not tell the tortoise the dos and don'ts of the drum. The tortoise was so happy and he went home rejoicing. On getting home he beat the drum to confirm whether he was deceived by the king, there was an abundance of food of every kind and his household ate to their satisfaction. Everybody wants to be affluent, so the tortoise gathered all the animals and beat the drum and they ate to their satisfaction. Because of this singular act, the tortoise became revered by all other animals as a great man. Since the king did not tell the tortoise the rules guiding the use of the drum, he had none to tell his wife Anim. The tortoise told his household and all other animals that he won the drum in a contest he had with the much dreaded Ajakaja spirit. This false defeat of the Ajakaja spirit made his household and all animals to fear and respect him as he had the prowess to defeat the much dreaded spirit.

One day, when the tortoise went out, the wife asked one of her children to go to his maternal home to invite her relations to come and have a share of the food that never finishes. The tortoise's in-laws came in great numbers having heard about his prowess and magic with the food drum. When they have had their fill, Anim washed the drum. This was to prevent the husband who went out from finding out that she had tampered with the drum. The tortoise on the other hand, went to visit his friend. He drank the palm wine given to him by his friend and became intoxicated. Under the influence of alcohol, he left the road and entered the bush and in his search for a way out of the bush, he crossed over a fallen palm tree trunk. Both the tortoise and the wife violated the rules of the drum on the same day. On arrival at home, he brought out the drum and beat it when every member of his family has gathered to have a fair share. Immediately he beat the drum, instead of producing different delicacies, different kinds of insects like ants, scorpion, bees, snakes and harmful ants descended on tortoise and his family. In his frustration tortoise carried the drum and sent it back to the king.

### **Motifs in the story of The Drums of Foo-Foo and soup**

**Humility:-** The king was humble, that was why he accepted to do all the menial jobs he was asked to do, irrespective of his position in the society as a king:

**Craftiness and Greediness:-** The tortoise in Igbo folktale is full of all manner of tricks. That is why he thought that with his tricks he could collect and keep the drum of foo-foo and soup. Due to greed, he lied that the king's child stole his palm fruit to enable him collect the drum of foo-foo and soup. His greed was punished through the stinging and the bites he and his family received from the ants and insects.

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Here, the tortoise represents all those who tell lies to get what they want, they don't care who they lie against or have to step on so as to achieve their selfish goals. **Punishment for Wickedness:-** His lies and greed backfired because he did not know the laws guiding the use of the drum and this made him and his family to nearly lose their lives.

### Conclusion

Many years ago, families in Igbo Society put a lot of premium on morality, honor and character. They took time to bequeath same to their wards during their formative years using folktale as an instrument. There were penalties including spanking and periodic denial of basic necessities for doing things that would impugn the family name. Vices like stealing, promiscuity, laziness were frowned at by parents who paid attention to what their children are doing at all times; providing guidance on how to behave, what to do and what not to do. Parents were thus able to stem the tide of misbehavior in their children not because they talked or shouted more rather they employed the machinery of folktales which naturally appeal to the conscience rather than the senses. During the process of growth and development, children imbibe the family values, mannerism, speaking patterns, etc of those around them like parents and siblings. Equally they are quick to imbibe any lesson taught through stories such as folktales. Also sociologists advice that during the formative period, parents should not only stay close to their children but in addition dispense advice on how to deal with the vicissitudes of life, molding character, teaching good behavior and countering negative influences. It is worthy of note that all these and more are encapsulated in folktale which appeal to children in no small measure and can effectively be used to inculcate right values and morals in a child.

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