

# Applicability of Archetypes and the Folkloric Panacea on Societal Ills and Degradation of Morality

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**Abstract---** Technological advancement in this contemporary age has, obviously, turned the world into a global village. The art of news gathering and dissemination has become phenomenal. All one needs do is punch the right buttons on the computer or mobile phone and the world is, as it were, at your feet! This has brought to fore an endless stream of disturbing news of chaos, violence, brutality and absurdity across the nations of the world – all of which are, surreptitiously, pushing the human society towards the precipice of self-annihilation. Over the ages value system in most societies seem to be changing at an amazing rapidity, resulting in a gradual but alarming erosion of societal morality. In this respect therefore sociologists, social crusaders, educational psychologists, guidance counselors, opinion leaders, and significant others must put hands on deck to arrest a worsening scenario. The foregoing background forms the premise of this paper which seeks to examine the nature of archetypes as embedded in African folklore in particular, and as obtained in cultures of the world in general. The paper submits that, by reason of its universality, archetypes can be employed through the use of folklore (which is essentially didactic) to bring about a reawakening of sensibilities, self-awareness and re-embrace of all that is noble, virtuous and humanistic, towards the much needed sanitization of our society in these unsettling times.

**Keywords---** Archetype, Folklore, Folktale, Panacea.

## I. INTRODUCTION

CULTURES across the world, attach unequivocal value to societal morality and each society has ways of ensuring and upholding high moral standards. Looking back over time, there is no gainsaying that mankind has come a long way from Stone Age civilization. There is no stopping contemporary homo sapiens in ground-breaking, breathtaking and awe-inspiring scientific and technological inventions and discoveries at a regular momentum. Rather ironically however, the resultant 'eye opening' civilization and modernization would appear to have led to a gradual but steady erosion of every imaginable modicum of societal morality and sanity.

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Today, there is a profound debasement of values of old, such that mankind, as intelligent as earlier explained, could still descend so low into absolute beastly inclinations that tend to portray man as worse than beast. What a paradox!

Using the Yoruba race of Nigeria as fulcrum for the study, the paper examines the universality and didactic significance of archetypes in African folklore (with particular reference to folktales). The authors contend that African folklore, by virtue of its highly moralizing and didactic elements made possible by an embedded commonality of instructive archetypes, offers a life line that sociologists, counselors and psychologists can use in combating the moral decay in Nigeria in particular, and by extension in other societies of the world since the world has become ipso facto, a global village.

## II. SAMPLES OF THE PROBLEM

Commendable as man's efforts at taming harsh and hostile environments including wild animals are, he seems to have, in the process developed predatory instincts which have turned man against himself. For example, among diverse atrocities committed by man on daily basis, taking of another man's life (even when not in war situation) has become as ordinary and common-place as taking a walk in the park. Consider this excerpt from a Nigeria Daily:

*It was a bloody weekend in Yobe state (of Nigeria) where the fundamentalist Islamist Sect, Boko Haram, killed at least 54 students of colleges of Agriculture, Gujiba. Investigations revealed that the Boko Haram members attacked the college with knives, guns, and swords while the students were already sleeping, and slaughtered them like animals.*

Source, The Punch (Ng) Ltd.

The above account happened on the eve of Nigeria's 53<sup>rd</sup> independence anniversary, and as at the last count, the figure had risen to 90! What could possibly be their offence, we may well ask? Ostensibly, for availing themselves western education!! What is more, Rambo-like kidnapping, assassinations and sophisticated armed banditry have become the order of the day.

On another note, the approval of gay marriage by legislative houses of several countries across the globe is no longer news. In another development seventy-two-year-old grandma, Pearl Carter from Indiana astonished everyone when she disclosed her plans of having a baby not with anyone else but her own 20 years old grandson, Phil Bailey. The granny stated that she had never felt happier following

her love connection with Bailey. The New Idea magazine of New Zealand stated that the granny used her pension amounting to 54,000 U.S. dollars to pay a surrogate mother who would give birth to her grandchild's baby! In a bizarre report from Ohio Development of Rehabilitation and Correction carried in Sunday Tribune of 13<sup>th</sup> October erotic suffocation is becoming deadly sexual practice. The report went on to say that auto erotic asphyxiation is making headlines, whereby individuals achieve sexual satisfaction while choking themselves into near unconsciousness!

These presenters submit that these are graphic illustrations of the extent of societal rot and that morality, across the cultures of the world, has been thrown to the dogs. The total picture therefore, not only in Africa but across the world is that of a human society that is on the brink of moral bankruptcy and systemic collapse and something just has to be done to arrest a worsening scenario.

### III. ARCHETYPAL THEORY

At this point, a brief examination of archetypal theory is necessary for the purpose of a more insightful understanding of its significance and relevance to this presentation.

“An archetype is a universally recognizable element that recurs across all literature and life.” (Latrobe et al 2002). In the words of Davis (1997), an archetype is a recurring pattern of character, symbol or situation found in the mythology, religion and stories of all culture. Archetypes can be thought of as the precursor to conscious thought, existing in the unconscious mind as expressions of psychic happenings, but without a basis in the physical world. To put it another way, there are very few basic archetypes or patterns which exist at the unconscious level, but there are an infinite variety of specific images which point back to those few patterns. Since these potentials for significance are not under conscious content, we may tend to fear them and deny their existence through repression. This has been a marked tendency in modern man, the man who seeks to lead a life that is totally rational and under conscious content.

Any serious discourse on archetypal theory/criticism cannot be complete without a mention of notable personalities such as Carl Gustave Jung and Joseph Campbell. Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell are two of the most prominent explorers of the psychoanalytic and mythological origins for human and social behavior. However, time and space may not permit an elaborate discussion of these personalities and their works

### IV. CONSTITUENTS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

#### (1) The English

The English have often confessed a certain reluctance to say good-bye to childhood. This curious national trait, baffling to their continent neighbours, may lie at the root of their supremacy in children's literature. Yet, it remains a mystery. But, if it cannot be accounted for, it can be summed up. From the critic's vantage point, the English (as well as the Scots and Welsh) must be credited with having originated or triumphed in more children's genres than any other country. They have excelled in the school story, two solid centuries of

it, from Sarah Fielding's *Little Female Academy* (1745), to C. Day Lewis. *Otterbury Incident* (1948).

Other milestones include Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), Robert Ballantyne's *Coral Island*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, and the unbeatable world masterpiece, Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883). The social historian would point out that the English were the first people in history to develop not only a self-conscious, independent children's literature but also, the commercial institutions capable of supporting and furthering it. He would note the striking creative swing between didacticism and delight, and the highly compelling and imaginative literary style. The 20<sup>th</sup> century ushered in more modern writers like Enid Blyton who has written volumes of Enid Blyton's series of children's stories, all of which have been found to be not only highly pleasurable but also immensely moralizing.

#### (2) African Folktales and Its Contribution to Child Education

In Africa the folktale was, and still is, a primary means people have of communicating to one another. Folktales can reflect and explain the hopes and fears of a culture as well as its spiritual and religious beliefs. They are devices we all use to explain our relationship with the natural world and why things are the way they are. The characters in folktales can be gods, spirits, animals, or even insects that take on human qualities, or humans that acquire godlike or animalistic qualities. Folktales can make you laugh and they can make you cry. They can make you think, and they can teach you about the world we live in, lending explanations that are sure to delight our imaginations. But above all, they have proven to be morally didactic. As from the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century folktales, or the oral literature of Africa, have begun to be collected and written down.

In Nigeria, child education places considerable emphasis on the inculcation of moral values and character development. In Yoruba traditional society, the child is taught moral religious education as a foundation to the attainment of excellent character which is necessary for effective nation building. The desire to teach the child good habits starts immediately the child develops basic skills like recognition of letters of the alphabet, recognition of colours, simple reading, rhymes and counting. Because of the moral, cultural and entertainment value inherent in them, children are exposed to Yoruba traditional folktale and tales to mould their character right from youth, thereby laying solid foundation for their future. In Yoruba land, the principles of good character in all its ramifications have their basis in Yoruba traditional education. Traditional education embraces Yoruba maxims that are needed for the building of children's moral and spiritual being. Some moralistic songs, recitations and reactions which feature in the corpus of Yoruba children's folktale have found a permanent place in schools. Perhaps this is understandably so since formal school is only an extension of education, which begins at home and is consolidated in school.

The foregoing is insightful in appreciating the fact that African folktales in which profoundly significant archetypes are embedded, serve important social and ethical purposes. The same can be said of the moralizing stories of English

children literature. More importantly, the element of universality of archetypes as reflected in African folktales in particular, lends credence to the thrust of this paper.

#### V. SUGGESTIONS FOR A REBIRTH

This paper no matter how exhaustive, (which is hardly likely in a presentation that is constrained by time) would remain largely hollow or incomplete if the presenters do not offer an ameliorative panacea for the problem in focus, as hereby enumerated.

(i) One of the several ways by which the problems can be addressed is through good governance, as proffered by American President Barrack Obama on a recent visit to parts of Africa. Indeed, good governance means responsive and responsible leadership. In this regard, it is the opinion of the presenters that if various governments would provide care and basic amenities (including food) for their citizenry then there would be less reasons for antisocial, negative and satanic preoccupations and inclinations. African leaders in particular, some of who are the best examples of irresponsible and corrupt leadership, would do well to note.

(ii) Leadership across the world would do well to bring back, as a matter of urgency, societal values of old to the front burner of governmental discourse and considerations; values of diligence, ethics, honesty, morality etc. They should find avenues to revive, disseminate and promote same in their various societies while antisocial, unproductive and violent tendencies should be denounced, discouraged and treated with the greatest contempt and societal disapproval.

(iii) Social institutions (including churches, mosques and Non Governmental Association, N.G.Os.) should preach and promote peace, love and prosocial behaviours. Prosocial behaviours comprise values such as helping, sharing, giving cooperating, sympathizing, encouraging, sacrificing, aiding, rescuing, defending, reassuring and comforting. These, according to Stein and Soderman (1998) are the opposite of antisocial conduct such as selfishness and aggression, and represent positive values of society.

(iv) William Wordsworth had poetically opined, "The child is the father of the man." Maillumo (2001) would put this more explicitly when he described today's juveniles as tomorrow's adult society. As such it becomes obligatory on parents, educationists, guidance counselors, sociologists and significant others to constantly guide and channel juvenile dispositions and value judgment into the development of wholesome personalities. In this respect therefore, the presenters hereby recommend a back-to-the-roots panacea, i.e. employing the use of folklore (in which significant paper) in instructing the younger generation thereby molding their impressionable minds and channeling their cognitive/affective inclinations constructively. The African society in particular, with an age-long tradition of storytelling on moon-lit nights, would seem to provide a fertile ground for the exploration of this method.

Okeowo (2006) had prepared a treatment package titled Indigenous Nigerian Folktales Therapy (I.N.F.T). The package (which is both preventive and ameliorative) contains carefully selected folktales designed and developed to help in combating delinquent traits such as excessive greed, cheating, stealing,

indolence, disobedience/stubbornness and bullying/aggressiveness in children. The package was used on some identified delinquents in a doctoral research through group counseling and was found to be efficacious, as the identified delinquent traits dropped significantly after a period of counseling sessions. This lends credibility to this last suggestion that the use of folktales by parents and community elders should be revived and employed in reconstructing the minds of our children, thereby helping them to develop wholesome personalities. Other ways by which this can be effectively done is introducing "Folktales Hour" into subjects like Social Studies and Religious Studies in the primary school curriculum. Resource persons (other than class teachers) could then be invited from the community to tell children didactic stories which would not only keep them morally sensitive but also help them to recognize and appreciate the values of the society. This could also be done on television through children's programmes or put in print, e.g. storybooks and comics.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, among the tripartite agents of socialization, i.e. the home, the school and the society, the home has the earliest and most significant impact on the life of the growing child. It follows that, even though solutions to the problem of discourse are diverse and require a concerted effort, parents have onerous responsibilities in the training of their children. Let us go back to the roots to find possible answers to the present "madness".

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