

**WISDOM AS MOTIF IN FOLKTALES THE GOOD
PEASANT'S SON**
**(A Russian Folktale), *the Crocodile and the Hunter* (an African-
Nupe Folktale), *Breaking the Chain* (a Guatemalan Folktale),
and *Wisdom for Sale* (an Indian-Gujerati Folktale).**

Abu Fanani, S.S., M. Pd*

Abstract : In this article, the writer discusses wisdom as motif in four folktales from four different cultures which are as follows: *the Good Peasant's Son* (A Russian folktale), *the Crocodile and the Hunter* (an African-Nupe folktale), *Breaking the Chain* (a Guatemalan folktale), and *Wisdom for Sale* (an Indian-Gujerati folktale). The writer then discusses the wisdom through the actions of the main characters in the three folktales whilst the words of the main character in one folktale. Further, the writer uses formulaic theory as the aforesaid folktales have been spread through the words of mouth from generations to generations. Yet, the writer has found out the oral stories in written books. Eventually, the writer draws conclusion that wisdom has existed in the four mentioned folktales.

Key words: *wisdom, motif.*

1.Introduction

On hearing the word folktale, our mind is led to the famous story around the world such as Cinderella, Snow White, Sangkuriang, and on and so forth. It is quite appealing though people are illiterate because they pass on it from generation to generation by words of mouth (Burke, 2003:vi). They pass a story on to their children in any occasion, some of which during bed time to accompany a child to sleep. When a story is in the form of a song it is called lullaby. Yet, "a large number of these stories have never been written down. Therefore, the story we read or listen to today may be quite different from the original. Very often we have no idea who the original author was" (Burke, 2003:vi).

Such a story can be found in every country, in every side of the world where human being exists. In Arab we find *Alf Laila Wa Laila* (One thousand and one nights) that tells a mean King who kills his new bride every morning at dawn, *Ali Baba* that tells a persona (*Ali Baba*) that becomes rich out of the blue after finding a secret key to the treasure cave. In India, we find *Krishna*, a powerful man descendant from a god, who saves the country people of

* Dosen Sastra Inggris Fakultas Adab UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya

Candravan. In Indonesia, we find Kancil and Buaya that tells Kancil playing a trick to the crocodiles (Buaya) in order that he can save from the dangerous attack of a

tiger, Sangkuriang, who wants to marry his own mother and who has kicked a small boat away which becomes a mount Tangkuban Perahu. In China, we find Sun Go Kong who protects a holy monk from the devils' attack on a journey to get a Holy Book to the west. Yet, they have similarities in the way they are told from generation to generation. Sometimes, they have same moral values. Sometimes they have same symbols which dominate the tale even though the same thing in a country likely has another meaning in another country. Garry et al in his *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature* says that the meanings of the same things in various countries could be in a great disparity, i.e. snakes exist both in the mythology and folktales of many countries. Judeo-Christian people categorize it as an evil thing, whilst in India it is a holy creature that cast a main character in folklore as well as in many Buddhist, Jaina, and Hindu myth.....many people of west coast India put a snake statue in a spot of their garden around their dwelling which are "fed" milk. Whilst, in European tale, people regard dragon a wild animal which keeps guard ancient regions and the dragon needs human being for its sacrifice. On the other hand, dragon remains an animal of any help as well as of good luck in the belief of most Asian people (2005:xvii).

It turns out that the same object from different folktales is what the so called motif (Garry et al, 2005:xvii). Further, "motif is a recurrent word, phrase, situation or idea; a motif occurs in various works of literature, not just one" (Burrows et al, 1973:458). As motif contains cycle of life, its existence should not be apart from archetype which means "primordial image; an original pattern or model from which others of the same kind are derived" (Burrows et al, 1973:450). As mentioned above that folktale is told from mouth to mouth, from generation to generation, it then becomes people unconsciousness which is recognized by Jung as unscientific collective unconsciousness (Burrows et al, 1973:01).

Thus, we know tales from mouth to mouth. We accept that whether it is true or not. We pass it on to our children, to our children's children. Then people become collective unconscious. It is "that part of one's unconscious that is inherited and shared with others of the species; the countless typical experiences inherited include, for example, birth, initiation, the fall from innocence" (Burrows et al, 1973:452).

The oral stories from offspring to offspring which contain good people/bad people, wise people/unwise people etc (archetype) and which have the same object from various stories (motif) are going to be discussed in this article with the title *Wisdom as Motif in Folktales the Good Peasant's Son* (A Russian folktale), *the Crocodile and the Hunter* (an African-Nupe folktale), *Breaking the Chain* (a Guatemalan folktale), and *Wisdom for Sale* (an Indian-Gujerati folktale). Yet, I prefer to analyze from the character point of view (intrinsic) to extrinsic aspect regardless i.e. their culture since we can analyze literary works through characterization (Little, 1966).

Of the four folktales, the first three ones, I will analyze the wisdom in the form of actions by main character/characters. As to the last one, I will analyze the wisdom in the form of wise words to other people by main character.

2. Theoretical Approach

Since folktale is passed on to generation to generation through the words of mouth as elaborated above, I then use an oral formulaic theory which is according to Parry et al "an expression regularly used, under the same metrical conditions, to express an essential idea" (Dundes, 2003;17).

I then find it impossible to analyze the originally oral tales of the four different cultures. Rather, I analyze the ones which have been written in a book.

3. Discussion

3.1. Wisdom in a Russian folktale's *the Good Peasant's Son*

Martin, the main character in this folktale, has acted wisely towards other 'people.' He prefers other's joy to his own though he has to disobey his mother by buying a seemingly useless dog because the dog experiences a torture from the owner instead of food for their survival.

"Oh, but I'm sure he was only hungry, and he looks so sad. Listen I could use a dog. Why don't I buy him from you? I'll give you 100 roubles for your dog" (02).

Such a wise action appears anew when Martin feels compassion to see a pitiful cat tortured by the owner. Martin spends the remaining inherited 100 roubles just for the seemingly useless animal.

"Don't do that," said Martin. "I've been thinking that I would very much like cat. I'll buy her from you for 100 roubles" (03).

A wise person can see the 'future.' It is what people say. It means that he/she is not blinded by the things in front of him/her. It happens to Martin. He likes choosing a bag of sand better than a bag of gold for his salary after a couple years of work.

"This must be some kind of test," thought Martin. "And in this simple test I think there is some kind of deeper meaning" (04).

Martin's favor for other people is truly humanly. He doesn't care for what sort of a return he gets after giving a hand to other. He merely thinks of the safety.

"Martin didn't care about the good fortune she promised. He only wanted to help the poor girl, so he quickly took his bag of sand and threw it on the fire to put it out" (05).

Not only is Martin's wise action for others but for his blood and flesh as well, his own mother. Though being dismissed from home for some years

by his mother, he gives her his forgiveness instead of scolding her remembering that he is a rich young person.

"There's nothing to forgive, dear mother!" cried Martin. "And our life is going to be wonderful now!" (06).

To keep leading his happy family, Martin has to keep his secret of being able to do anything from his wife. Otherwise, he will be in sorrow.

"But nothing worked. Martin never forgot what the Snake Czar's daughter had told him and he never gave away his secret" (09).

Still, Martin keeps maintaining his happy family. He never takes revenge to his wife, the czarevna, after her bad conduct towards him. He forgives her, instead.

"He couldn't have the czarevna killed, so he agreed to take her back" (13).

3.2. Wisdom in an African-Nupe folktale's *the Crocodile and the Hunter*

The hunter is a wise man. He never takes care for himself. He takes care for others, instead. It is shown when he shares food with other unfamiliar living creature, a wild cat, Boaji.

"The hunter shared his meat with Boaji" (15)

Another wisdom is shown when he takes a glimpse of a lost and pitiful crocodile. He leads the crocodile homeward.

"The hunter was happy to help. He tied a rope around the crocodile's foot and led him to the Niger River" (15).

In this story, another character shows wisdom towards other. It is Boaji, the wild cat that acts wisely when seeing the unapologetic crocodile towards the helper, the hunter. The crocodile will eat him, instead. Boaji will judge fairly if she knows the chronological events. Shortly, she wants the crocodile to be put back where the hunter found him.

Boaji told the crocodile, "Good. You punished the hunter for hurting you by dragging him into the river. So now this argument is finished. To avoid more quarrels of this kind, the hunter must untie the rope and leave you here in the tall grass. This is my decision" (20).

3.3. Wisdom in a Guatemalan folktale's *Breaking the Chain*

This tale is about a man, Juanantes, who has been in jail for ten years after killing somebody. He kills a person because he is possessed by evil spirit through a written mandate. After being released from jail, he consults a

wise old man who then orders him to write a mandate not to kill a person which runs as follows:

You must light the fire of evil and write your own mandate to put into the metal box by the fire" (27).

Following the wise old man's order, Martin writes a mandate that make the evil spirit give up killing other person. The following conversation shows such wisdom:

"That one thing I can't tell you. It's my secret."

"But you didn't order anyone to be killed?"

"No. I told you, I couldn't. I have no enemies."

"Then what was your order?"

"I repeat, Tata, that's my secret."

"All right. I respect that."

"Please forgive me, Tata" (28).

3.4. Wisdom in an Indian-Gujerati folktale's *Wisdom for Sale*

Unlike the first three discussed folktales above which show wisdom in the action of the characters, this last folktale shows written wisdom from the main character to others.

It is a story about a poor young boy whose father died without leaving him anything to live. He just sells written wisdom and oral one. First wisdom is bought by a young boy. It works. The boy disobeys the wisdom and then he has a trouble of being a witness in the King's palace. Such wisdom runs as follows:

"It is not wise to stand and watch two people fighting" (37).

In a state of considerable sadness, the boy's father ask the orphan boy for wisdom in order that his son will not become a witness of two fighting people, namely, the two king's servants. The father then pays 500 rupees for it. It works. The boy is not becoming a witness. The wisdom runs as follows:

"When they call you to the palace, pretend to be crazy. Pretend that you don't understand anything" (40)

No sooner do they walk homeward in a state of considerable happiness than the father feels sorrow of the next finding. He is quite disquietude of the king's future awareness that his son feigns madness. He asks the orphan boy for other wisdom which is also worth 500 rupees. It works anew. The king doesn't put them in detention. The wisdom runs as follows:

If you approach him at the right time, when he's relaxed and in a good mood, he'll think it's funny and forgive you. But choose your time well. Make sure he's in a good mood" (40).

Remembering that the orphan's wisdom saves the life of a boy from punishment, the king himself now resolves to buy wisdom from the kid. It is worth 100,000 rupees. It works. The king takes a second guess when he will drink a poisonous medicine in his golden cup with the inscription of the boy's wisdom which the king writes in it, just in case. It is the deed of his jealous queens who wish him death. The wisdom runs as follows: "Think deeply before you do anything" (41).

4. Conclusion

We know from the discussion above that every tale has discussed the same object, that is to say, wisdom; Martin with his wise action for others in *the Good Peasant's Son*, the hunter and Boaji in *the Crocodile and the Hunter*, Juanenta and Tata in *Breaking the Chain*, and the orphan boy with his wise words that save others in *Wisdom for sale*. All in all, these folktales contain what the so called motif.

5. References

Burke, Kathy, *World Folktales*, Penguin Books, Edinburg, 2003.
Dundes, Alan, *Fables of the Ancients? Folklore in the Qur'an*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, 2003.

Garry, Jane and Hasan El-Shamy, *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature*, M.E. Sharp, Inc., New York, 2005.

Little, Graham, *Approach to Literature: An Introduction to Critical Study on Content and Method in Writing*, Science Press, Sydney, 1966.

Synopsis of *the Good Peasant's Son*

The story is about a peasant who has died and left his wife and only son, Martin, 200 roubles for the meals for the rest of their life. The mother gives the son 100 roubles and tells him to buy supplies for one season in the market. On the way to the market, he finds a piteous dog which has been beaten by the owner, the butcher. He then spends all 100 roubles just for the piteous dog. His mother is quite indignant to him. She gives the remaining 100 roubles to him to buy meals. On the way to the market again, he sees a piteous cat whose neck has been tied and dragged to be drowned in the river. Martin feels compassion and buys the cat instead of the meals ordered by his mother. The mother is then very angry and tells him to go away.

On his wandering life he meets a priest and is employed for three years without salary. At the end of the three years of employment the priest offers him three things for payment: a bag of gold, a bag of silver, and a bag of sand. Martin chooses a bag of sand instead.

Martin leaves for another journey with the dog and the cat. He travels even through the dense forest in which he finds a pitiful, almost burnt and tied girl. The girl no sooner cries for help than he pours the bag of sand to the fire surrounding her. The girl gives him a magic ring in return. After the girl turns into a snake and is gone, Martin tries the magic ring by taking it off and threw it from hand to hand. The twelve young men appear from the ring and tell Martin to ask for anything what he wants.

Martin and the two animals walk homeward in a state of considerable happiness. Through his magic ring, he gives his mother anything to make ends meet. Time comes when Martin is becoming an adult to get married. He is looking forward to marrying a czar's daughter (a kind of king). The czar demands marvelous presents for Martin as conditions to marry his daughter. Through his magic ring, Martin can meet the demand. Still, the czar gives another difficult requirement, that is, to build a beautiful palace and church in a night. Surprisingly, Martin can meet the requirements.

Eventually, Martin gets married to the czar's daughter. However, the czar's daughter is not content with such a marriage. She wonders how Martin could make it to fulfill her father's prerequisites. Through strong liquor given by the wife, Martin is drunk. Unconsciously he tells everything about the magic ring.

The wife manages to take away the magic ring from Martin's finger. The czar is quite in a state of considerable indignation to know that his daughter is gone. Martin can do nothing without the magic ring. He is put in a jail on the top of a tower. Jourka and Vaska, the dog and the cat, take a great pain to bring the magic ring back to Martin. At last, Martin convinces the czar that he brings back anew the happiness to his family. Martin forgives his wife. They live happily ever after.

Synopsis of the Crocodile and the Hunter

It is a story about a hunter who hunts animals for food. One day, Boaji, a wild cat, is desperate to get one and asks the hunter for some food. He no sooner gives the wild cat some than the cat promises him to return his kindness.

The next day, the hunter goes out for food anew. He comes to the grassy place. He doesn't manage to see things because the wild grass is quite tall. No sooner is he in the middle of nowhere than he catches a sight of a pitiful crocodile. The crocodile indeed is getting lost. He has gone away from the river and cannot be back. He asks the hunter for help and promises the hunter five loads of fish.

The hunter manages to bring the crocodile back to the river safely. The crocodile keeps his words by giving the hunter five loads of fish. However, at the last load of fish, the fifth load, the crocodile plays tiredness. He plays a trick by asking the hunter to come down to the river. No sooner does the hunter come

down to the bank of the river than the crocodile catches him and drags him to the other crocodiles.

The hunter is powerless and asks for mercy to the things floating past him. Nothing wishes to help him. The crocodile will release him on a condition that something else gives them a fair justice. Eventually, Boaji, the wild cat appears. He learns everything. He asks them to go back to the place in which the crocodile got lost. Firstly, the crocodile should be tied like when the hunter led him to the river. Lastly, after the wild cat plays a wise trick, he and the hunter bid a good bye to the crocodile and leave him alone like he was before the hunter found him. What goes around comes around.

Synopsis of *Breaking the Chain*

Juanantes Dios Rodrigues is a poor peasant who never drinks liquor just for fun. Once he tastes it, an evil light tells him to go to the Hill of Sand and get something and do what the thing orders him to do.

On the appointed night, he goes there with his wife, Cardenala. He gets the bag, opens it and reads a mandate to kill a man named Prudencio Salvatierra. He is put in jail for the murder for ten years.

When he gets out of the jail, he goes to an old wise man, Tata Guamarachito, to get rid of the evil light. The old man advises him to go back to the Hill of Sand and puts the mandate there in order that the other man takes it away with another mandate. He makes it. He then tells the old wise man that the mandate is to tear up the picture of the one he hates so much.

Synopsis of *Wisdom for Sale*

In India lives a poor Brahman boy whose parents have passed away. He inherits nothing for a living from his parents. Yet, he is smart. He hires a small place in the marketplace and opens a store. He will sell something, namely, "Wisdom for Sale."

Everyday he cries out "Wisdom for Sale" for the people walking passing his store. No one pays attention to him. Until one day, a rich merchant's stupid son living around his neighborhood buys a "Wisdom" from him which says, "It's not wise to stand and watch two people fighting." The stupid boy's father feels indignant for such a silly sale. He wishes to get back the money his son gave him. The father gets back the money after fulfilling the document that says that his son will never use the boy's advice and always stand and watch two people fighting.

It turns out that the country has a king with two queens who always arouse jealousy to each other. Each queen has a servant who, like the queens,

is always in quarrel with each other. The two servants run into each other in the marketplace and develop a fight for one thing to buy. The merchant's stupid son watches it and becomes a witness of such a fight.

To get rid of the testimony, the merchant asks the Brahman boy how to go away from the king's demand for his witness. The Brahman boy advises the merchant's boy to play madness. Then, the king no longer needs his testimony.

The merchant cannot stand looking at his son to play madness. He asks again to the boy and he says that his son should admit everything to the king on the right time. It works well and the king knows everything about the Brahman boy. Arousing curiosity, the king buys "Wisdom" to the boy. The "Wisdom" says that the king should think deeply before he does anything.

Through the wisdom, no sooner is the king saved by a trial murder by his two queens and minister who put poison in his drink than he appoints the Brahman boy to be his new minister. The Brahman boy lives happily ever after.

